



August 29th, 2021

Twin Towers United Methodist Church
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WORSHIP GUIDE

Before you begin your time of worship, find a comfortable place to be and gather whatever you might need: your Bible, candles, something to write on and with, your computer/connected device (if you intend to listen to music online), etc. Feel free to adapt this worship guide in any way that makes best sense to you and those you might be gathered with. (Consider inviting someone – a friend, a family member – to worship with you.) Commit to spending the next hour with God.

PRELUDE - Listen and sing along to a song or hymn that blesses and centers your spirit!

WELCOME – (<http://presbyterian.ca/>)

As we gather in this sacred moment for a sacred purpose,
let us make the most of our time together.

We have come to worship the Lord our God.

As we sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
let us make the most of our time together.

We have come to worship the Lord our God.

As we respond to the melody in our hearts,
let us make the most of our time together.

We have come to worship the Lord our God.

OPENING PRAYER - (*from <http://www.myredeemerlives.com/prayers.html>*)

O God from whom every gift derives,
we gather to worship You this day.
You are an awesome God,
greater than our comprehension or our imagination.
You are beyond any word we could ever use to describe You.
And yet, through Jesus, we know the intimacy of Your vast love.

We have come to You in thanksgiving and praise,
to know that You are God
and to place our lives anew into Your perspective.
Enlarge our vision this hour with Your Word.
Instill in us, again,
Your hope in place of our despair,
Your peace where our hatred threatens,
Your joy amidst our depression,

Your love overwhelming our apathy.

May Your Holy Spirit surround and indwell this congregation now, and forevermore.
In Jesus we pray. Amen.

OPENING HYMN - Now Thank We All Our God, UMH 102

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3jTYwPm6GQ>

Now thank we all our God,
with hearts and hands and voices,
who wondrous things has done,
in whom this world rejoices,
who from our mothers' arms
has blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.

2. O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us,
and keep us still in grace,

and guide us when perplexed;
and free us from all ills,
in this world and the next.

3. All praise and thanks to God
the Father now be given;
the Son, and him who reigns
with them in highest heaven;
the one eternal God,
whom earth and heaven adore,
for thus it was, is now,
and shall be evermore.

SCRIPTURE - James 1:17-27 (NRSV)

¹⁷ Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

¹⁹ You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. ²¹ Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

²² But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. ²³ For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; ²⁴ for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. ²⁵ But those

who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

²⁶ If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

This is the Word of God for the People of God. **Thanks be to God!**

LISTEN - “You must understand this, my beloved,” James writes to Christian communities everywhere, “Let everyone be quick to listen!” Easier said than done, don’t you think? Especially when it is coupled with the counsel to be “slow to speak, and slow to anger.” Perhaps James is well aware of our human penchant to be slow to listen, but quick to speak, and quicker to anger. We can’t disagree with James when he points out how our anger too often gets in the way, blocks us from, and, in fact, fails to produce God’s righteousness. It’s true, isn’t it, our anger too often fails indeed in producing God’s grace, God’s justice, and God’s love in our relationships and our world, but produces instead splinters and brokenness, messes to clean up, and sometimes mass destruction. I could list out at least one example, if not five, from every single day of this past week when I lost it...with Steven, or with Milo, or with my Dad, or with Steven...because I was slow to listen, but lightning fast to speak, and even quicker to anger. Can you? “You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen.” James, thought to be Jesus’ half-brother, and a pillar and leader of the church in Jerusalem, has written here a letter - not to any specific community or even for a specific reason - but seemingly to pass on his faith-filled wisdom and to challenge us, the followers of Jesus, in how we live. He doesn’t throw any softballs! It is in this letter that we hear the strong admonition to be “doers of the word, not merely hearers” (1:22), are told in no uncertain terms that “mercy triumphs over judgment” (2:13) and are challenged with questions like, “What good is it if you say you have faith but do not have works?” (2:14). James is serious about faithful living in the same vein that Jesus was, and while he talks quite a bit about our tongues (“The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell...no one can tame the tongue - a restless evil, full of deadly poison (3:6,8), I invite us to focus on our ears today.

“Let everyone be quick to listen.” What might that look like for us? What shifts of habit - of heart and being - would need to take place to be at the ready to listen, not just hear, but really listen? How might growing as listeners change us, change our relationships, change the way we

show up in the world, with God? How might listening be a key to being a conduit of God's healing in the world?

As I sat with James' call to be quick to listen, I began thinking of all the great listeners in our midst. And it occurred to me that it would make most sense to hear from great listeners about listening and so I invited a few of them to join me in conversation today. I am thankful to the 3 Steve's and the 1 Jen who agreed to this experiment! (Below are some of the questions we touched on and talked about together. You are invited to meditate and reflect on these questions yourself. I'd love to hear what comes up for you!)

- Why might it be important for us, as disciples and as Christian community, to practice good listening (to be quick to listen)? Why might listening be important to us as individual disciples, as community relating to each other, and as community connecting with and witnessing to the world?
- What makes for "good" listening (listening that makes a difference, listening that is helpful, loving, transformative, self-aware)?
- What makes for "difficult" listening (being "slow" to listen)?
- How did you learn to be a "good listener"?
- How might "listening" be an anchor practice to our faith?
- How can being "quick to listen" strengthen our ability to be conduits of God's healing? Another side: what difference might it make in the world if we, the church, learned to be "quick to listen"?
 - Where have we failed to listen as a church? Where have we excelled?
- Random insights into the skill and practice of listening you've come to over the years?

Several years ago, I happened upon a radio program airing on KPFA called Talk It Out Radio. The program invited people to call in and share real situations and experiences of conflict and struggle that the hosts would then address using the principles and practices of Nonviolent Communication. (You might remember hearing me talk about this a few weeks back.) I can't remember what the situations and experiences were any more but I do remember this: the people who called in were always upset and agitated, angry about this, that, or the other. I remember some of the things shared were truly difficult and hard situations. But listening in to the conversations was like witnessing a miracle. The hosts brought such deep, skillful, empathic listening to each person and their situation, asking completely non-judgmental questions that

clarified the issues, feelings, and needs. By the end of every conversation I could hear the difference. It was like the spirit of peace had breathed on each person. I remember being completely captivated by what was happening and so moved that I couldn't stop crying. It was then that I became convinced: listening - good, powerful, empathic listening - can change lives, can transform relationships, can heal conflict. "You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger." Amen.

SONG OF RESPONSE/MEDITATION - Less Like Me / Zach Williams

Listen and watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2tb5deEBmY>

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE – *Spend time in prayer. What did you hear for yourself through today's scripture and reflection? Talk to God about it. Then lift up the joys and concerns that are in your heart. You might write them down, speak them aloud, or pray for them in silence.*

We would be honored to pray with you and for you.

Please send a note via text, mail, or email or give a call to our Healing Prayer Team.

SHARING OUR GIFTS– *How might you offer yourself and all that you have to God this week? How are you being invited to practice generosity? Spend a moment listening for God's direction.*

You are invited to contribute financially towards the purpose and ministry of TTUMC. We are a congregation committed to being conduits of God's healing in our neighborhood and beyond, and in so doing, impact the last and the least. You can contribute by mailing in a check, dropping off cash, or giving online (visit www.twintowersumc.org). Take a moment and do that now.

CLOSING HYMN - Make Me a Channel of Your Peace, TFWS 2171

Listen & watch here: <https://vimeo.com/464405460>

Make me a channel of your peace.

Where there is hatred,
let me bring your love.

Where there is injury,
your pardon, Lord,
and where there's doubt,
true faith in you.

2. Make me a channel of your peace.

Where there's despair in life,
let me bring hope.

Where there is darkness, only light,
and where there's sadness, ever joy.

3. Oh, Master, grant that I may never seek so much to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love with all my soul.

4. Make me a channel of your peace. It is in pardoning that we are pardoned, in giving of ourselves that we receive, and in dying that we're born to eternal life.

BENEDICTION -

May we go into this new week nourished by the enormous love and grace of God, that enables us to be slow to speak and quick to listen, to extend healing by our presence, and sow peace through our intentional actions. May we go, supported at all times and in all places, by the God who has gone before us, walks beside us, and comes up behind us. Amen.

NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST'S PEACE!

NEXT WEEK'S SCRIPTURE: Genesis 37:12-28

As we look forward to our time of worship, please note:

- **A Bring-Your-Own-Picnic Fellowship Picnic** - We have not yet relaunched in-person worship but we know how important it is to nourish the fellowship. If you are ready and comfortable to do so, let's gather for a BYOP Picnic **next Sunday, Sept. 5th, between 3:00 - 5:00 p.m. at Krusi Park** (900 Mound St). Masks will be required, safe-distancing encouraged, and lots of hand-sanitizer provided. Please RSVP by calling P. Emily or the church office.
- For those bewildered by what is happening in **Afghanistan** and would like to respond in faith, Church World Service urges two concrete actions:
 - Urge the administration to expand refugee protections for Afghans fleeing the violence here.
 - Donate towards "welcome backpacks" to be handed out to Afghan families newly arriving in the U.S. here.
 - If you have a great resource for understanding what's been happening and how we've gotten to this point, send it my way so that it can be shared.
- For those moved to faithful action in response to the recent devastating earthquake in Haiti, our sister church, Buena Vista UMC has commended to us the Haiti Emergency Relief Fund

Peace,

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