



We are Each Other's Keepers (IV)
August 30th, 2020

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, some paper or a notebook, something to write 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 your spirit!

WELCOME – On Tuesday morning, the family of Jacob Blake held a press conference in the aftermath of his shooting by a Kenosha, Wisconsin police officer. Despite being shot 7 times in the back at close range, Mr. Blake, thankfully, did not die, but is paralyzed from the waist down. The full details around his encounter with the police have not yet been made public though many on all sides have already rushed to fill in the blanks. What is indisputable, however, is that Jacob Blake was a black man who had a violent encounter with the police, one that nearly took his life. His sister, Letetra Wideman, speaking to the press began her statement, interestingly, with the words we’ve been attempting to en flesh. She said, “I am my brother’s keeper.” She then went on to urge those listening to take seriously that Jacob, in addition to being a brother, son, father, uncle, cousin, was a human being. She seemed convinced that the world had somehow missed that point, had forgotten or erased that fact, had turned away from Jacob’s humanity. How else, she seemed to be asking, could this have happened...not just to her brother, but to countless others that look like her? How else could this be acceptable, go unaddressed, not create disturbance? Letetra’s statement prompts us to ask: does our shared humanity define the boundary of our “keeperhood”?

Friends, over the last 4 weeks, we have been trying to unpack what it means to be each other’s keeper. We have done so with Paul as our conversation partner, particularly by wrestling with the image, the metaphor he gives to the Corinthian church: that of them as a unified, interconnected, and interdependent body. One body, many members. Some would argue that I have misused Paul’s image, extending it at times a little too far. They would contend that he was speaking to and about the church, and that the image addressed the diversity of spiritual

gifts and how we might best relate to this diversity within the church. They would be right, but incomplete in their perspective in my view.

Paul borrowed this image of the body from Greco-Roman political thought but turned it on its head, attempting to address not just the misunderstanding of spiritual gifts in the Corinthian church, but the problematic worldview that undergirded that and every other misunderstanding and conflict they were embroiled in. It was a worldview that thrived on division, that ranked human beings, that sought out personal gain, status, and preferences, that resisted mutuality and accountability, and that had little room for love. Through the whole of his letter, Paul argues against this worldview as everything about it points away from the God known in Jesus, from the way of love. Yes, he's talking to the church, but the church was fundamentally to be a witness to the world that pointed clearly and boldly to God. Paul writes in chapter 10: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God. Just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved (healed!). Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." (I Cor. 10: 31-11:1)

Heeding Paul's words, we gather then seeking to be imitators of Christ, who declared the boundary of our "keeperhood" when he said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its savior." (John 3:16-17) Let us take Paul's image of the body then, practice it deeply with one another as the church, then live it in all our relations with and in the world.

OPENING HYMN - "The Bond of Love"

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zo6TKRofdLE>

1. We are one in the bond of love, (x2)
We have joined our spirit
with the Spirit of God;
We are one in the bond of love.
2. Let us sing now ev'ry one;
Let us feel His love begun.
Let us join our hands,
so the world will know
We are one in the bond of love.

OPENING PRAYER – *You are invited to take a deep breath as you pray:*

It seems a great act of faith this morning, O God,
to sing of and celebrate our bond of love.

It is a bond that we both rely on,
and that we pull mightily against.

It is a bond whose strength and sweetness we cherish,
and yet also resist and reject.

We confess that we do not always honor this bond,
not in our families, not in our churches or communities,
and definitely not with strangers and enemies.

Forgive us.

Use this time, O God,
to touch and heal our hearts,

to renew and sustain our spirits,

and to convict and transform our minds.

We want to join our spirits to Yours, to join our hands with one another,
and together, point always, to your great love and hope.

We pray this in the powerful name and reconciling way of Jesus. Amen.

SCRIPTURE - I Corinthian 12:12-27, 31 (The Voice)

¹² Just as a body is one whole made up of many different parts, and all the different parts comprise the one body, so it is with the Anointed One. ¹³ We were all ceremonially washed through baptism together into one body by one Spirit. *No matter our heritage*—Jew or Greek, insider or outsider—*no matter our status*—oppressed or free—we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ *Here’s what I mean:* the body is not made of one large part but of many *different parts*. ¹⁵ Would it seem right for the foot to cry, “I am not a hand, so I couldn’t be part of this body”? Even if it did, it wouldn’t be any less joined to the body. ¹⁶ And what about an ear? If an ear started to whine, “I am not an eye; I shouldn’t be attached to this body,” in all its pouting, it is still part of the body. ¹⁷ Imagine the entire body as an eye. How would a giant eye be able to hear? And if the entire body were an ear, how would an ear be able to smell? ¹⁸ *This is where God comes in.* God has meticulously put this body together; He placed each part in the exact place to perform the exact function He wanted. ¹⁹ If all members were a single part, where would the body be? ²⁰ So now, many members *function* within the one body. ²¹ The eye cannot

wail at the hand, “I have no need for you,” nor could the head bellow at the feet, “I won’t go one more step with you.”²² It’s actually the opposite. The members who seem to have the weaker functions are necessary to keep the body moving;²³ the body parts that seem less important we treat as some of the most valuable; and those unfit, untamed, unpresentable members we treat with an even greater modesty.²⁴ That’s something the more presentable members don’t need. But God designed the body in such a way that greater significance is given to the *seemingly* insignificant part.²⁵ That way there should be no division in the body; instead, all the parts mutually depend on and care for one another.²⁶ If one part is suffering, then all the members suffer alongside it. If one member is honored, then all the members celebrate alongside it.²⁷ You are the body of the Anointed, *the Liberating King*; each and every one of you is a *vital* member.³¹ Pursue the greater gifts, and let me tell you of a more excellent way—*love*.

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

REFLECT -

Over the last few weeks, we have grappled, as each other’s keepers, with being one body, with being a diverse body, and today, with being an interdependent body. It continues to be my prayer that you are finding nourishment, challenge, and hope for the living of these confusing, heartbreaking, and often infuriating days. I urge you to connect with me and with each other to deepen and strengthen this conversation, and with God as we seek, finally, to be faithful and obedient.

Not unlike the ancient Greco-Roman world that Paul lived in, the very air that we breathe seems to be filled with messages that pit us, one against the other; that urge us to erect barriers, be it out of fear or greed or ignorance; and that give permission to us to ignore, or worse, to eliminate each other. We want nothing of each other’s suffering, only each other’s honor. Paul will not accept this and repeatedly calls for unity and mutuality, knowing that it looks like utter foolishness, even weakness to the world. “I appeal to you,” Paul writes in chapter 1, “...that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.” He knows this call rubs against reality and grates against the status quo, that it is not an obvious, easy, or comfortable call to follow. This was true then and it’s true now.

It’s much easier to *say* we need each other, that everyone belongs, that we’re in this together - all words bandied about these days - but much harder to follow through with our actions. We have, quite often, wrested the controls from God’s hands, sometimes without even being

conscious of doing so, and taken over the task of “arranging the members in the body”. And in doing so, we have often engineered bodies that look like, smell like, and think just like us. We have made clear that there are some folks that we have “no need of”; that we are fully ready and willing to “dispense of” the weaker, the less honorable, the less respectable ones, however those terms come to be defined. We live in a world that is more than willing to claim connection when another is honored and celebrated, and equally quick to cut out and cut off any that are suffering rather than suffer together. We have somehow become convinced that “needing” others, “needing” each other is shameful, embarrassing, and so resist it with all our might. We have been taught that to need others is to be a “burden”. Tragically, this turns into judgment of others who need us, need a helping hand, need the community. We neither want to be burdens nor to be burdened.

It is into this milieu, both ancient and present, that Paul points us again as a community to the truth found in the human body. “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ Paul’s use of the human body clarifies a few things in our communal body: 1. It’s absurd to deem any one person or group as “not needed”, 2. We need each other, perhaps most especially those we most resist, 3. When we accept our mutual connection and need as God’s doing, a new possibility emerges for us, for all of us: life-giving interdependence founded on mutual care.

You see, holding fast to being one body, one diverse body, one diverse and interdependent body helps us to live into our full humanity, the truth of our need as well as our strength. God made us for relationship! It gives us opportunities to stretch so far beyond our comfort zone that we discover there is never a place where God is not, and it invites us to taste and see the depths and breadth of God’s love. Isn’t that what we come to experience in community? Holding fast to being one body, one diverse body, one diverse and interdependent body opens us in new ways to God’s intention and dream of a world made whole, and roots us in the divine work of healing, of salvation - ours and the worlds. I suspect that God “arranged” the human community just so as an invitation, an opening to pursue the more excellent way, the way of love. What will we do with that invitation, with that opening?

I want to suggest that in this present moment, the best way I can think of for us - individually and collectively - to take hold of God’s invitation, is by opening our hearts to the pain, trauma, and suffering of our black and brown siblings. Somehow, Friends, we must figure out how to help carry that pain and heal that suffering together. Our District Superintendent, Staci Current, posted on Facebook Friday night 4 simple words, “This is too much.” It took me back to the

note she had written to all of us on the eve of Pentecost which took place just a week after George Floyd's murder. I want to close with her words: *As a black woman, wife and mother I have experienced the wide range of emotions from anger to grief to deep gratitude for the blessing of my husband and son still being able to breathe.*

...I do not have any words to add to my sermon in light of George Floyd's murder. I only have tears and wailing to contribute. I have a righteous indignation that wants to yell and scream at the top of my lungs and turn the tables over...like Jesus did when he cleaned the temple. I only have the weariness that I have carried every day for the past 48 years that I've lived in this brown body. I only have lament that right now that feels too raw to put out for public consumption. To be honest, I am tired of explaining and trying to interpret this particular pain.

I will say this much. The main point of my Pentecost sermon was that God gives us "Power for the Purpose." Now more than ever, we need the power of God to pour into us to empower us to change a world that seems impossible to change. George Floyd, and Eric Garner before him, gasped and said "I can't breathe!" Racism and white supremacy are choking the air out of our country. We desperately need the Holy Spirit to breathe on us this day and give us strength, power, and grace that we might be able to live the abundant life Jesus died to give us all. May it be so.

Please, Friends, let's not waste any more time, let's not be silent for one more minute, let's please find a way we can concretely be a part of the healing in our body that is so desperately needed right now. Amen.

SONG OF MEDITATION - "Sing a Song for Peace & Justice" (TTUMC Choir)

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 them in silence.*

Joys – places in our communal body that are healthy, connected, and strong

Concerns – the places in our communal body that are suffering and in pain

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

Please send a note via text, mail, or email or give me a call if I can do so.

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 via PayPal (visit www.twintowersumc.org). Take a moment and do that now.

Please consider sending in a special donation for wildfire disaster relief and recovery through our Annual Conference. Thank you!

CLOSING HYMN - "They'll Know We are Christians by Our Love", TFWS 2223

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7zq3KFSCVI>

We are one in the Spirit,
we are one in the Lord; (2x)
And we pray that all unity will one day be
restored.

Chorus: And they'll know we are Christians
by our love, by our love,
yes, they'll know we are Christians by our
love.

We will walk with each other,
we will walk hand in hand; (2x)
And together we'll spread the news that God
is in our land.

BENEDICTION -

You are the hands and feet of God
You are called to soothe suffering, to live with compassion, to build up God's loving peace.

So as you go from this time of worship share the gifts you have been given,

and build up the Body of Christ.

As you go from this holy space carry the Holy to the world around us.

Go in love, go in peace, go with God. Amen.

NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST'S PEACE!

You are invited to spend the next stretch reaching out. Pick up our directory and consider calling someone you don't yet know well or someone who might not know others. It doesn't need to be complicated. Perhaps something as simple as, "Hi! I'm calling to say 'hello'. How have you been?"



If you are on Facebook, please like and follow our page:

<https://www.facebook.com/ttuncAlameda/>

Scripture for Sunday, August 30th - *we continue with* **1 Corinthian 12:12-31**

This week, please hold in God's light:

- The deep divisions in our country, and particularly the ongoing pain and trauma of our Black siblings.
- Gary Brown's health
- Dine & Connect ministry on Monday, Sept. 7th