



**We are Each Other's Keepers I**  
**August 9th, 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** – “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Do you know where that question comes from? It is the question Cain, first son of Adam and Eve, asks God when God questions him about his brother Abel’s whereabouts. Instead of confessing to the crime of killing his brother, Cain dares to respond to God, almost flippantly, by asking, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” While God doesn’t answer Cain’s question directly, the whole unfolding of our holy scripture seems to answer it again and again and again with a thundering, “Yes!” Yes! We are each other’s keepers. Yes! We are responsible to and for one another.

Or are we? While scripture might be glaringly clear, our world is all kinds of murky about this question. Take the whole debate about masks. We are told by the epidemiological community that wearing masks definitively slows the virus, definitively prevents the virus’ spread, that wearing a mask protects others...yet we’ve made it a question of personal choice and preference. If we were each other’s keepers, responsible for one another, wouldn’t we don a mask without question?

“Am I my brother’s keeper?” Today, we begin a new worship series holding this very question at the center. Over the coming weeks, I want to unpack the question with you, to prod it and examine it, so that we might discover anew what it looks like to live scripture’s emphatic “Yes!” in our lives and through our relationships. We will be digging in, week after week, to the image that Paul offers us in I Corinthians 12, the image of our being a body. It is my prayer that holding this question will help us gain insight, wisdom, and courage for living in and through these challenging times.

**OPENING HYMN - "Welcome", W&S 3152**

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

1. Let's walk together for a while  
and ask where we begin  
to build a world where love can grow  
and hope can enter in,  
to be the hands of healing  
and to plant the seed of peace,

*Refrain:* singing welcome,  
welcome to this place.  
You're invited to come and know God's  
grace.  
All are welcome the love of God to share  
'cause all of us are welcome here;  
all are welcome in this place.

2. Let's talk together of a time  
when we will share a feast,  
where pride and power  
kneel to serve the lonely and the least,  
and joy will set the table  
as we join our hands to pray,  
*refrain*

3. Let's dream together of the day  
when earth and heaven are one,  
a city built of love and light,  
the new Jerusalem,  
where our mourning turns to dancing,  
every creature lifts its voice,  
*refrain*

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

Your welcome, O God, is extravagant and unconditional.  
It invites us in to your tender grace,  
and urges us to make our home in your love.  
We gather now in your welcome  
with the hope and yearning  
of building a world where love can indeed grow,  
and the seeds of peace flourish;  
of practicing - in community - how we can kneel  
in service to the lonely and the least,  
and of ensuring that your welcome extends far, far beyond us,  
to your beloved and hurting world.  
May your welcome, your grace, and your love  
mend us, strengthen us, and challenge us  
as we seek to be faithful keepers,  
one to another. Amen.

**SCRIPTURE -** Genesis 4:1-10a (NRSV)

Now the man (Adam) knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have produced a man with the help of the Lord.”<sup>2</sup> Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground.<sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground,<sup>4</sup> and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering,<sup>5</sup> but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.<sup>6</sup> The Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen?<sup>7</sup> If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

<sup>8</sup> Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let us go out to the field.” And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.<sup>9</sup> Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?”<sup>10</sup> And the Lord said, “What have you done?”

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

**LISTEN-** “Am I my brother’s keeper?” This question, placed so early in the story of our faith, seems to imply that it has been relevant and significant since the beginning of time. It is a question that arises with the emergence of relationship. Cain is, after all, only the 3rd human being according to the Biblical creation story. He is, as mentioned, the first born of Adam and Eve. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” he retorts to God after committing humanity’s first act of violence and murder, simultaneously jabbing at God as the true keeper of humanity, *and* washing his own hands of any responsibility for Abel and what he has done. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” begs the question of our fundamental responsibility in relationship, one to another.

Some years ago, my father was living in London. During our weekly phone call, he recounted an experience that, frankly, still hurts my heart. It was the weekend and he was out exploring. As he exited the underground tube station, he missed a step on the escalator, fell, and ended up with a cut on his forehead. As you know, wounds to the face, even small ones, can result in lots of blood and so it was for my father. He described how he tried to get up, find a handkerchief, and apply pressure to the wound, unsure how bad it was, as people passed him by on all sides. This was, after all, the London underground. People were everywhere. But through the whole ordeal, not a single person stopped. Not a single person paused to check on him, blood dripping

down his face, if he was ok or needed help. Not a single person offered a hand or concrete help. What is our responsibility in relationship - not just to our “brothers”, those we are connected to by blood or choice, but other human beings purely grounded in our shared humanity? While it may be obvious to all of us that violence, murder, and willful harm to another is unacceptable, is obliviousness and disregard similarly objectionable? And what about everything in between? “Are we each other’s keeper?”

I want to suggest, Friends, that what might appear to be an obvious and simple question with an obvious and simple answer, is anything but. The truth of the matter is that this question can keep me up at night, can cause tension to climb up my back, can weigh my heart and spirit down. Does it you? This is so because while everything I understand about God and the scripture point to a resounding, “Yes!” to the question, trying to live out that “Yes!” with any degree of faithfulness, intention, openness, and joy turns out to be anything but clear, anything but easy. Because once we say, “Yes, we are each other’s keeper”, it seems that we must begin to unpack not only what being a keeper means, but who exactly our “brother” is, and just *how* responsible we are to and for them. Once we say, “Yes, we are each other’s keeper” we are faced with a sea of responsibilities that tug on us in every which way.

I imagine some of you are shaking your head right now, thinking, “Emily! You’re making it too complicated! You’re getting way too far in the weeds.” But, Friends, I want to suggest that it is precisely in getting our hands dirty with these secondary questions, that our faith, our witness, our very lives have power and integrity. It is in engaging these secondary questions, the details so to speak, that we move - as the letter of James calls us to - into becoming doers of the word. The beautiful ideas and values of our faith move beyond mere words, but take on flesh. Moreover, as God warned Cain, saying, “If you are doing what is good, shouldn’t you hold your head high? And if you don’t do what is good, sin is crouching at the door — it wants you, but you can rule over it.” It is getting into the details, Friends, that we can clearly discern what it is to do good, keep our heads high, and keep sin outside our collective door.

I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that our world is dying at the moment because we are, frankly, unclear, imprecise, and hesitant about the details of living out our “Yes!” as one another’s keepers. We have seemingly opened our door wide to the sin that is crouching right outside. We are collectively feeling the impact of it: on the coronavirus pandemic front, the racism front, and the climate crisis front, to name just three. I raise these issues not to blame or

shame anyone, but to invite us into the urgency of the question. Again, I do not think it is an exaggeration to consider this a life or death question. Are we each other's keeper?

Friends, God is on a mission to save and heal this world. As lovers of God and disciples of Jesus, we have been called into that same mission. There are a million ways we participate. Deepening, strengthening, enfleshing our "keeperhood" is, I believe, at the center of it. And so I want to invite you to not only take hold of the question, but to open yourselves to how the Holy Spirit might move and speak to you, to us, over the coming weeks. Will you repeat this simple prayer after me?

Loving God,  
You are our great keeper.  
In your care we have the fullness of life.  
Teach us to be keepers like you,  
gracious and generous,  
steadfast and loving. Amen.

**SONG OF MEDITATION** - He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtD1WUkqOLY>

**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 – Let's celebrate the people and places through which we've witnessed the goodness of being one another's keepers

Concerns – Let's name the people and places that call us into deeper "keeper-hood"

*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](http://www.twintowersumc.org)). Take a moment and do that now.*

**CLOSING HYMN - "Bring Forth the Kingdom", TFWS 2190**

Listen here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HaO\\_Afa9hDo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HaO_Afa9hDo)

You are salt for the earth, O people:  
Salt for the Kingdom of God!  
Share the flavor of life, O people:  
Life in the Kingdom of God!

*Refrain:*

Bring forth the Kingdom of mercy,  
bring forth the Kingdom of peace;  
bring forth the Kingdom of justice,  
bring forth the City of God!

2. You are a light on the hill, O people:  
Light for the City of God!  
Shine so holy and bright, O people:  
Shine for the Kingdom of God!

*Refrain*

3. You are a Seed of the Word, O  
people:  
Bring forth the Kingdom of God!  
Seeds of mercy and seeds of justice,  
grow in the Kingdom of God!

*Refrain*

**BENEDICTION -**

*Friends, let us go forth from this place with renewed inspiration to be each other's keeper. Let us be so filled with God's love and welcome that it spills out and over.*

*Let us be attentive to the wondrous, mysterious ways we are bound, one to another, knit by God's Spirit into one body.*

*Let us be always faithful to the God who has created each, beautiful and whole.*

**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/ttumcAlameda/>

Scripture for Sunday, August 16th - **1 Corinthian 12:12-31**

This week, please pray for:

- **Leigh Miller** and family in their grief at the sudden death of her son in law, Mike.
- **Clara Sigmon** in her transition to her new home in Washington.
- **Dale Price** for healing and relief from fractured leg due to fall.
- **Alan & Pam Tucker** as Alan rehabs from a successful back surgery.
- **Children, families, and teachers** all preparing for the new (and very challenging) school year.
- Those struggling as federal unemployment benefits expire.