



**September 12th, 2021**  
**Gifts of the Pandemic (II): New Things!**

*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** – (from Rev. Thom Shuman, <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com/>)

We come to this place  
because we want to know God,  
**who helps us set aside the past,  
to walk the path to new life.**  
We come in these moments  
because we want to know Jesus,  
**who anoints us with the resurrection,  
who shares our lives with us.**  
We come with these people  
because we want to know the Spirit,  
**who shapes us for life with God,  
so we may praise God forever!**

**OPENING PRAYER** - (Rev. Thom Shuman, <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com/>)

*Let us join our hearts and spirits in prayer:*

You have done great things  
*for us, God of steadfast love.*  
You make a way through our brokenness,  
so hope might be restored;  
you loosen our grip on fear,  
so we might take hold of the One  
who cradles us in the palms of grace.

You are doing great things  
*through us, Brother of the poor.*  
You make a way through our doubt,

so we may have the faith to follow,  
as well as to serve by your side;  
you gather up our tears,  
turning them into fountains of joy.

**OPENING HYMN** - Standing on the Promises, UMH 374, vs. 1, 2, 4

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZ8AfGfYq98>

Standing on the promises of Christ my King,  
through eternal ages let his praises ring;  
glory in the highest, I will shout and sing,  
standing on the promises of God

*Refrain:*

Standing standing,  
standing on the promises  
of God my Savior;  
standing, standing,  
I'm standing on the promises of God.

2. Standing on the promises that cannot fail,  
when the howling storms of doubt and fear  
assail,  
by the living Word of God I shall prevail,  
standing on the promises of God.
4. Standing on the promises I cannot fall,  
listening every moment to the Spirit's call,  
resting in my Savior as my all in all,  
standing on the promises of God.

**SCRIPTURE** - Isaiah 43:18-19 (Combination of NRSV, The Message, NIV, CEV, The Voice)

Forget the former things;  
Do not remember them.  
Do not dwell on the past  
or spend all your time recounting *the victories of* days gone by.  
Don't keep going over old history.  
Behold! Be alert! Be present! Watch closely.  
I am about to do a new thing.  
Something brand new.  
Now it springs forth.  
There it is!  
It's bursting out!  
Do you not perceive it?  
Don't you see it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness  
and rivers, streams in the desert, in thirsty lands.

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

**LISTEN** - “We’ve never done it that way before.” Have you ever said those seven words in response to some idea, suggestion, or possibility? Maybe your kids or grandkids had a new idea for how to celebrate Thanksgiving or Christmas, something steeped in family tradition. Or perhaps your partner or spouse brought up a new possibility to implement in a long-standing family routine. Maybe you were sitting in a work meeting or a church committee and someone (a young person, a new person, a person you didn’t particularly like) threw out what felt like an outlandish or zany suggestion to consider or try.

“But we’ve never done it that way before!”

At best, these seven little words seek to honor the past: what’s worked, what’s brought results, and what’s been meaningful and life-giving *in the past*. That’s an important impulse and practice. The past has its place in our lives and can be a rich place for reflection, learning, and gratitude. But at worst, these seven little words keep us holding on *to the past* (onto what the prophet Isaiah called “the former things” or “the things of old”), facing backward even, idealizing something that may or may not exist any longer, may or may not work any longer, and preventing us from seeing clearly. Seeing clearly the present moment and how God might be at work around us, right now. And seeing clearly God’s hope for our future - a hope that is grounded in transformation and life, life abundant and full, a hope that promises radical healing and grows out of resurrection.

“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old,” says God through the prophet Isaiah. This is, interestingly, immediately after God reminds the people of a most wonderful, spectacular, and extraordinary moment from their past: their escape from Egypt and slavery, when God literally made “a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters” and brought them to safety and liberation. Was there a more important, anchoring, and formational moment, one more worthy to be remembered and held dear by God’s people? “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old” - not even that most spectacular moment, says God. Why? “I am about to do a new thing...do you not perceive it, can you not see it?” Let’s pray.

When the pandemic erupted into our world in early 2020, every aspect of our lives was disrupted. The disruption was small in some arenas and enormous in others. Each of us experienced the disruptions a little bit differently. Our schools, our work, our medical appointments, our gyms, our pastimes, our worship services, everything that could move into our homes, moved into our homes (that is, if we had the means and wherewithal to do so). Some of us suddenly had too much time on our hands, while others of us felt like our time evaporated before our very eyes. Some of us felt like we had adequate tools to deal with the disruptions and some of us were left overwhelmed, bewildered, and lost. Activities, practices, and habits of ours that we had never given a thought to: going grocery shopping, eating in a restaurant, getting together with family,

singing in worship, playing at the park, became fraught with danger and doubt. What was safe and what was not? Who was safe and who was not?

And as disruptions are what we want to do, choices that we had long ago made and set aside as done deals, arose for us to reconsider and make again. The great disruption of the pandemic gave us the opportunity to reconsider: What *are* our priorities and how do we honor them? What is our purpose? How will we spend our time - on what, on who, on why? How would we make, maintain, and nourish our relationships? Who do I want to be with, need to be with, and who should I let go of? Where might we put and how might we utilize our resources? What is our faith and who is our God? Where is God anyways? And who is our neighbor and how in the world, this world, do we love them as we love ourselves?

It would be tempting and it is tempting in the face of disruptions, danger, and big questions to retreat, to turn back, to rely on what was, to “remember (only) the former things” and “consider (only) the things of old”. The past is, after all, what we know and what we’re familiar with. But disruptions, danger, and big questions are also fertile ground for God to do “new things” - new things in us, through us, and all around us. Have we been willing, able, and ready to see it? We might pause and wonder: what - if any - are the “new things” we’ve sensed God doing in our individual and collective lives in and through this strange and difficult season?

I would imagine that looking backwards, remembering former things, was one of the abiding comforts God’s people had as they lived in exile under the Babylonian empire. Here they were, living in a place not of their choosing, set apart as exiles, not much better than prisoners of war. Why wouldn’t they spend their days looking back?! What was the point of hope when they had witnessed the utter destruction of their homes and communities, their holy temple, burned to the ground? It is into this sense of despair, this sense of hopelessness, that God declares through Isaiah, “Don’t look back, look forward! I am about to do a new thing!” Despite the grimness of everything around you, keep your eyes open! It is a stunning and profound reminder that our God is a God of “new things”, that our God is unstoppable, that our God is ultimately creative, and that all of life is useable in and through God to bring about life and wholeness. Do you not perceive it?

Allow me to lift up just one “new thing” that God has gifted us with through this season. It is an obvious but really important one:

Friends, if it weren’t for the pandemic and the closure of our church buildings, I’m not sure if and when we would have ever moved online! Prior to the pandemic, I’m not sure you or I felt the need to be a presence in this virtual world. In fact, when I arrived in July 2018, I discovered Twin Towers didn’t even have an active website! In other words, anyone searching for a church in

Alameda - United Methodist or otherwise - would be hard pressed to find anything of note about us online. We were happy to be confined to the physical plant of 1411 Oak Street. There was, after all, a rich identity and history tied to our location. We had very few conversations about the mission field that existed beyond our neighborhood. But in and through the pandemic, we stepped into a whole new world - the world online - and (re)discovered that “the church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is a people.” And while worship online is different than it is in-person, we have experienced so much richness and grace through this mode, haven’t we? We’ve remained connected...and expanded our connections (I am forever grateful that moving online meant that I got to worship with my mom every week for a year!). For many of us, we’ve deepened our mutual connections...sharing joys and concerns with others we’ve sat in pews with but barely ever got to know. And, importantly, I sense our discipleship culture has shifted. There is more engagement, more participation, and more - according to your own reporting - more growth. This is a gift that has forever transformed our way of worship, ministry, and discipleship...for the better. We will move forward into whatever is yet unfolding with this gift firmly with us.

“Behold! Be alert! Be present! Watch closely.

I am about to do a new thing.

Something brand new.

Now it springs forth.

There it is!

It’s bursting out!

Do you not perceive it?

Don’t you see it?

I will make a way in the wilderness

and rivers, streams in the desert, in thirsty lands.”

For all the “new things” God has done and is doing now, we give thanks and commit to keeping our eyes open and our hearts alert so that we may continue to look forward with hope and excitement. Amen.

**SONG OF RESPONSE/MEDITATION** - How Can I Keep From Singing, TFWS 2212

*Listen and watch here:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Li2hddmy63U>

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

**CLOSING HYMN - Spirit, Working in Creation**, Upper Room Worshipbook #150

Listen & watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0YVyDY9N6c>

Spirit, working in creation,  
bringing order out of strife;  
Come among God's gathered people,  
giving harmony and life.  
Spirit, speaking through the prophets  
so the voice of God was heard,  
come, inspire, alert your people  
to this day's prophetic word.

2. Spirit, overshadowing Mary  
As the Christ-child in her grew:  
Come, so that the Christ within us  
may today be born anew.

Spirit, coming from the heavens  
as a dove upon our Lord:  
Come, upon your gathered people,  
And your blessings be out-poured.

3. Spirit, driving to the desert  
Even God's Anointed One:  
Come to us in trial and testing  
That God's will in us be done.  
Spirit, breathed on the disciples,  
Giving peace where there was fear:  
Come among us, touch us, send us  
Making Jesus' presence near.

**BENEDICTION** - Behold! Be alert! Be present! Our God is doing a new thing - in us, through us, for us, and all around us. So let us enter this new week with eyes wide open, perceiving the wonder of God at work, and ready to join in with ready hearts.

**NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST'S PEACE!**

**NEXT WEEK'S SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 18:1-6

Please take note of this news and notes:

- **Would you like to grow roots in and through the Twin Towers community?** Are you feeling called to make an intentional commitment to participate, grow, and give in and through this faith community? Do you want to explore what that might look like? If you answered “Yes!” to any of the above, please connect! I’d love to start a conversation with you.
- **An Invite from our Sister Circuit Church, Lake Merritt UMC** - We are inviting you to join the email list for East Bay United Methodists for Racial Justice (EMRJ), a group of United Methodists in the East Bay rooted in faith and committed to addressing racism in our communities, churches and beyond. We formed in 2021 to put our faith into action to address systemic racism, police brutality, housing discrimination, and much more. Periodically we will send emails with timely simple actions you can take to help us together make a difference. Signup for our emails at <http://eepurl.com/hEz0rX> and become part of a growing faith community striving for racial justice.

Peace,

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