



We are Each Other's Keepers (VI)
September 13th, 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 – Today, we are wrapping up our worship series, “Each Other’s Keepers”. We have held at our center, week after week, Cain’s ancient question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” And we have sought to make real and concrete our response by grappling with Paul’s words to the Corinthian church, calling them to live as a united, interconnected, and interdependent body. Like that ancient community, we have been called to look outwards, to decenter ourselves and our own perspectives, to value and honor one another, to make space for one another, and to help hold, help heal the wounds and pain that our collective body experiences.

Today, we take seriously that this work - this deep and hard work, this work that requires our entire lives and all of ourselves - can only be done through love. Love is the “still more excellent way” that Paul points us to. Not a soft and squishy love that is here today and gone tomorrow, but a radical, relentless, and transformative love, the very love of God.

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:*

Holy God, You call us “beloved”
And you love us with a fierceness
that is at once unsettling and comforting.
May your Divine love dwell within us
and be enacted through us so that
No matter what language we speak
Love will dance within each word we say;
When you call us to stand up for justice,
Love will be the power that drives our actions;
When we seek knowledge,
Love will compel us beyond idle curiosity all the way to truth;
When we offer our prayers in faith,
Love for you will fill our hearts with peace;
When we give of ourselves and our possessions,
Love for you and your people will shine above love for worldly things.
Thank you, God, for the gift of love,
And empower us to walk the path love opens before us. Amen.
[Rev. Joanna Harader, Spacious Faith]

SCRIPTURE - I Corinthian 12:27, 31, 13:1-13 (CEV)

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ³¹ [So] strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

¹ What if I could speak
all languages of humans
and of angels?
If I did not love others,
I would be nothing more
than a noisy gong
or a clanging cymbal.
² What if I could prophesy
and understand all secrets
and all knowledge?
And what if I had faith

that moved mountains?
I would be nothing,
unless I loved others.
³ What if I gave away all
that I owned
and let myself be burned alive?
I would gain nothing,
unless I loved others.
⁴ Love is kind and patient,
never jealous, boastful,
proud, or ⁵ rude.

Love isn't selfish or quick tempered.

It doesn't keep a record
of wrongs that others do.

⁶ Love rejoices in the truth,
but not in evil.

⁷ Love is always supportive,
loyal, hopeful, and trusting.

⁸ Love never fails!

Everyone who prophesies
will stop,
and unknown languages
will no longer be spoken.

All that we know
will be forgotten.

⁹ We don't know everything,
and our prophecies
are not complete.

¹⁰ But what is perfect
will someday appear,
and what isn't perfect

will then disappear.

¹¹ When we were children,
we thought and reasoned
as children do.

But when we grew up,
we quit our childish ways.

¹² Now all we can see of God
is like a cloudy picture in a mirror.

Later we will see him
face to face.

We don't know everything,
but then we will,
just as God completely
understands us.

¹³ For now there are faith,
hope, and love.

But of these three,
the greatest is love.

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

REFLECT - At the beginning of summer, a small team of leaders had gotten together to discern our way towards re-opening our buildings and re-launching in-person worship and ministry. It was in talking our way through all the details - so many details - of planning for in-person worship that this worship series, "Each Other's Keepers", was conceived. If I remember correctly, it all began with the masks. Every single protocol - from the CDC's to the County's to our own Bishop's - required masks to be worn at all times. As we wondered aloud about how different folks might feel about that, and what we'd do if someone arrived without a mask or refused to wear one altogether, we began to talk about how we might best root ourselves in our Christian call to care for one another, to love one another, to be responsible to and for one another - not just in word, but in concrete action. It was then that we started talking about being each other's keepers. But as this series has unfolded, it has become clear - at least

to me - that this call to love and care for one another, to be each other's keeper, goes so much deeper than masks, and extends so much further than Twin Towers, doesn't it?

The question of being each other's keepers seems relevant and crucial to us as the national reckoning around racial justice happens. Pastor Myrna of Buena Vista, our sister church just down the street, commented in our weekly district clergy call this past Tuesday that this moment is a moment like none other in her lifetime, that she who came to this country some 40 odd years ago as a refugee from Haiti has never seen anything like it, that our conversation has never been this urgent, this poignant, this direct, this hopeful. How, she wondered aloud, do we keep our feet, the church's feet, to the fire and participate actively, participate faith-fully in this moment, in this reckoning? How do we exercise our keeperhood as we witness people being brutalized, and whole systems that we participate in and benefit from being called into question? How does being each other's keeper help us to listen to or show up differently, perhaps as conduits of God's healing, in this moment...if at all?

And then there's the election that is just 49 days away. While our country is impossibly divided and dangerously polarized, everyone on every side agrees: the election on Nov. 3rd is an important one. Everyone must vote! There is too much at stake not to do so. Yet, I've been curious and troubled about the question of how we as people of faith discern and decide how to vote. What's our criteria for evaluating ballot measures and assessing candidates up and down the line? Is it through a disciplined lens of being keepers, one to another? Do we vote keeping our interconnected and interdependent body in mind, committed to the principle of "if one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it"? I confess that voting feels like a strange and taboo topic to broach but I truly don't understand why. Shouldn't our faith inform and guide all of our decisions, including, importantly, how we vote? And if so, shouldn't there be room for meaningful engagement and conversation among our faith community about these decisions that surely impact not just us, but our collective body?

We are each other's keepers.

Over the last six weeks the weight and gravity of these words have grown in me, especially as more devastation and trauma unfolds in the world around us, but so has their life-giving possibility. Paul's words today are a powerful reminder that being each other's keepers was never meant to be a heavy, burdensome, impossible task, but rather the truest expression of who we are and what we're called to. Being each other's keeper gifts us with purpose and

fulfillment because being each other's keeper is finally about love. It always comes back to love, doesn't it?

But it's not really about our love, but about God's love. If we were to try to live into Paul's description of love, we'd be right back at that heavy, burdensome, impossible task.

I know that this passage from I Corinthians is most familiar to all of us as one we lift up and read at weddings. It almost feels unnatural to remove it from that context and pry it away from romantic love. But this is not a passage primarily about the love between two people pledging allegiance to each other, but about the force that animates and sustains community, that ensures health and wellness in the body. The love described here is not a feeling but a choice expressed in action. Paul isn't seeking to describe what love is so much, but what love does. And through that description we are reminded of God's love for us, a generous, giving, persistent, hope-filled love that is always carving out a deeper and wider path in and through us so that it might flow beyond us and be shared with others. Paul writes,

⁴ Love is patient; love is kind. Love isn't envious, doesn't boast, brag, or strut about. There's no arrogance in love; ⁵ it's never rude, crude, or indecent—it's not self-absorbed. Love isn't easily upset. Love doesn't tally wrongs ⁶ or celebrate injustice; but truth—yes, truth—is love's delight! ⁷ Love puts up with anything and everything that comes along; it trusts, hopes, and endures no matter what. ⁸ Love will never become obsolete.

Imagine that love flowing through you, through us, guiding our every move, spilling out of us as we move through the world. Isn't that the very vision of God's eternal kingdom come alive in our hurting world? We can be each other's keepers, Friends, not because we know how to love, nor because we love well, but because we open ourselves to the mighty and all-encompassing love of God that is always available and always at work. May we go into the days and weeks ahead renewed in our commitment to pursue God, to pursue love, to being each other's keepers. And may we trust that in doing so we can throw off the outrage and fear, the meanness and greed that our culture seeks to bury us in, but instead come alive in the strength and beauty of our God.

SONG OF MEDITATION - "Cantate" / Men's Anthem

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

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. Thank you!

CLOSING HYMN - “Love, Love, Love Everybody”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYlkcoAflU4>

Love, love, love one another
And be kind, be kind to each other (x2)
Jesus told us to love him
and to love everyone. (x2)
So let your light shine *Repeat*
You can say hello and shake a hand
Share your toys and help out a friend
All with a great big smile and two thumbs up

When there’s a job to do you can get it all
done, just remember to
Love, love love one another
and be kind to your sister and your brother
and be kind to your mother and your father
and be kind to your friends and your neighbor
And be kind, be kind to each other. Love.

BENEDICTION - [Christine Longhurst]

Go now into the world, inspired by the extravagant love of God.

Live generously, with open hands, loving one another as if your lives depended on it.

Be good stewards of the gifts you have received, so that God may be glorified in all that you say and do.

And may the abundant love of God surround you,
may the extravagant grace of Jesus Christ sustain you,
and may the constant presence of the Holy Spirit
inspire and encourage you in every good deed and word.

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, Sept. 20th - Romans 8:18-28, 31, 35-39

We will be gathering for a time of reflection and sharing on the six month mark of Sheltering in Place. Please use these questions for your reflection this week and come ready to share:

1. How has God "been working for your good" in and through this time of Sheltering in Place? [Alt. Where have you most experienced God's presence and grace?]
2. What has this season taught you, shown you, prompted in you that you might otherwise never have come to?
3. What about this strange and challenging time do you want to be sure to take into whatever season unfolds next? What do you most want to leave behind?

This week, please hold in God's light:

- The wildfires - the firefighters, their families, all those who have lost homes and businesses, all those struggling with the air quality.
- The upcoming elections
- **Phillip Taddei** healing and recovery journey.
- **Norah Gratz-Lazarus**, Milo & Imani's classmate, and her health and resilience.