



September 19th, 2021
Gifts of the Pandemic (III): Stillness

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 <http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocC/C51sun22.htm>)

We are here
to worship a remarkable God.
**The love of God welcomes us,
the grace of Christ awaits us,
the joy of the Spirit enfolds us.**

Don't come as slaves, come as the truly free.
Don't come as petitioners, come as those who are already heard.
Don't come as interlopers, come as invited guests.
Don't come as the outsiders, come as much-wanted children.
**The love of God emboldens us.
The grace of Christ redeems us.
The joy of the Spirit uplifts us**

Come as the joyful, come as the eager, come as the thankful,
come as the recipients of amazing grace.
**The love of God overflows our hearts,
The grace of Christ liberates our spirits,
The joy of the Spirit sings in our minds.**

OPENING PRAYER - (<http://mrn.sa.uca.org.au/resources/prayers-and-liturgies/373-robs-prayers-.html>)

Let us join our hearts and spirits in prayer:

In the stillness, in the silence, we attend to your presence, our God.

And we feel you filling us from within
illuminating our minds, warming our hearts, stirring our spirits,

strengthening our hands outstretched, transforming our lives, energising our lives

Until every fibre of our being is filled with your presence and we leap up crying,

Blessed are you, God of all life!

Blessed are you who rejoices in our worship

Blessed are you who attends to the cry of the poor

Blessed are you who offers hope in the hard times

Blessed are you, our God, whose name is love, whose presence is light, whose heart is justice,
whose gift is grace, whose life is hope.

Let our whole being resonate in praise to you.

Let every aspect of our lives show that we live for you.

Praise be to you, our God, for ever and ever. Amen.

OPENING HYMN - This is God's Wondrous World, UMH 144

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0PG6wt6fjI>

This is God's wondrous world,
and to my listening ears,
All nature sings, and round me rings
the music of the spheres.

This is God's wondrous world,
I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas,
God's hand the wonders wrought.

2. This is God's wondrous world,
the birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white,
declare their maker's praise.
This is God's wondrous world.

God shines in all that's fair,
In the rustling grass or mountain pass,
God's voice speaks everywhere.

3. This is God's wondrous world.
O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong
seems oft so strong.
God is the ruler yet.
This is God's wondrous world:
why should my heart be sad?
Let voices sing,
O let the heavens ring!
God reigns, let the earth be glad.

SCRIPTURE - Psalm 46 [NRSV]

- ¹ God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
- ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
- ³ though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.*Selah*
- ⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
- ⁵ God is in the midst of the city;[b] it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.
- ⁶ The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
- ⁷ The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.[c]*Selah*
- ⁸ Come, behold the works of the Lord;
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.
- ⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.
- ¹⁰ “Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth.”
- ¹¹ The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

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

LISTEN -

My grandmother was one of those people that could never sit still.

She was born, raised, and spent her entire life in the beautiful Kishacoquillas Valley of central Pennsylvania, a largely rural farming area populated by down-to-earth Mennonite and Amish people. From the time, she woke up, she was up to something: out tending her garden, picking wild blackberries, canning/freezing/baking (she was an incredible baker, I might add), doing laundry, cleaning, chopping wood, preparing for the next meal, sewing/quilting. It never seemed to end. I rarely saw her *sitting*, except, perhaps, during meals. And I rarely saw her still.

And, truth be told, she really didn't like it when anybody else seemed to be sitting...or still.

As kids, we spent just a few summers here and there with her, traveling to this strange new world from Taiwan. These were summers filled with endless chores, but also endless fun and discovery. By the time I came to the US for college, Grandma had turned 80, and while she was noticeably slower, she was nevertheless always on the go.

I think it would be fair to say that “stillness” was not in Grandma Yoder’s nature.

I wonder if it’s in yours? I wonder if stillness comes easily to you?

Do you find it easy to pause - even for just a breath or two - and detach from all the “doing”, the “striving”, the “next thing” - long enough to become aware of your own heart beating, whether your shoulders feel tight or not, what emotion you are holding right now, or what the sunshine streaming through your window feels like on your skin?

Is it a part of your practice - even if it’s not in your nature - to be still, to open up space (clear space, quiet space, grounded space) amidst the chaos, hecticness, and the myriad sources of anxiety or distraction that can be our lives, and connect to something greater, something deeper, something rock solid?

If you have found it in any way difficult, awkward, or foreign, you should know that you are in good company. Apparently, our restlessness, our constant bustle, our love of “doing” is a part of our national DNA.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the 19th century French philosopher and historian, visited the United States in the early 1830’s and ended up writing about his observations and travels in the well-known book, *Democracy in America*. Chapter 8 of that book is interestingly titled, “Why the Americans are so Restless in the Midst of Their Prosperity”. This particular observation struck me: “It is strange” he writes,” to see with what feverish ardor the Americans pursue their own welfare, and to watch the vague dread that constantly torments them lest they should not have chosen the shortest path which may lead to it.”

Have you ever experienced that “feverish ardor” in your own life? I think of the pace of life that so many of us live, even in retirement. I remember clearly Mom telling me some years into retirement, “I’m busier now than I ever was!” Feverish is not an inaccurate description. How about the “vague dread”? I confess I’m quite familiar with a sense of “vague dread”, rooted not in having failed to choose the shortest path to my welfare, but for a whole bunch of other reasons. “Vague dread” in the form of stress and anxiety in our society is well documented.

But why this talk of stillness? Does it matter if we know how to be still or to practice stillness?

When the pandemic hit in early 2020, so much about life came to a standstill, didn't it? The eternal lines of traffic disappeared off roadways. Airplanes were grounded in record numbers. All sorts of workers were given leave to work from home, if they were lucky, and many more lost their jobs altogether. Schools closed their campus' and moved to virtual classrooms. Our social calendars - all that getting together with friends, with family, with acquaintances, planned travel and vacations - it all disappeared. Suddenly, our worlds shrank to the footprint of our home, our time (as Jen has shared) showed up differently, and the pandemic offered yet another gift: an invitation to stillness. With so much cleared off our schedules, our "to do" list, the pandemic beckoned us to "be still", to cease striving, to stop fighting (alternative translations!), and to know, to sense it in our very bones and in our very being, that God is God. "Be still and know that I am God!" invites God. Let's pray.

There is disagreement among the scholars, Friends, about whether this psalm was written out of a specific context (When the Assyrian army, an enormous and powerful army that had already crushed their northern neighbor, Israel, was now surrounding the city of Jerusalem and laying siege to it. An event of the early 7th century BCE.) or a more general context (Whenever the world is in upheaval, be it due to natural disasters, political catastrophe, or war). Whether specific or general, it is a powerful and grounding song and prayer, isn't it?! It is certainly dotted with needed affirmations, affirmations of faith especially important in the face of chaos, uncertainty, and danger:

God is our refuge and strength, the source of our protection and courage, a very present help in trouble.

God is in the midst of the city, it shall not be moved. God is at work amongst us, here and now. The Lord of hosts is with us.

We are reminded that God is our anchor, holding us steady, in the most turbulent times. We are reminded that God is our safe sanctuary, a bulwark of protection from all that might be threatening us. We are given permission to give over our fears - we will not fear!

But nestled in these affirmations is an invitation and it comes in the form of one little word: *selah*. Scholars have had a hard time defining and translating this Hebrew word. It appears 74 times in total in the Bible, 71 of those are found in the psalms and associated with psalms titled "to the choirmaster." Most would agree that it is some sort of musical notation and indicates the need for a pause. One commentator went so far as to invite us to replace "selah" with the words, "Pause and reflect." In other words, be still.

¹*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*

²*Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;*

³*though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. Selah*

Pause and reflect. Be still and listen. Savor these words. Rest in them. Allow them to speak comfort, speak peace, speak assurance to you. Rest in God's presence.

Selah comes at the end of verse 3, again at verse 7, and then at the end of verse 11. It creates a rhythm for us, of reading then meditating, of reading then praying, of reading and savoring. If we heed the invitation to pause and reflect, it slows us down.

It effectively invites us to be still...and know that God is God.

Because when God is God, then we remember we are not.

When God is God, then we remember that whatever calamity and awfulness we face - individually or collectively - no matter how big, is still not God.

When God is God, then we remember that whatever we are busy at, whatever we are striving after, whatever occupies our time, effort, and focus...is not God.

God is God.

Not always, but often, it takes stillness to know this, to remember this.

It takes us pausing - pausing from our incessant drive forward, our constant busyness, our feverish ardor and our vague dread - to know this, to recognize that not only is God, God, but that this is God's world, God's wondrous world at that. It takes pausing and reflecting, pausing and listening, pausing and breathing to come more deeply into God's presence, to be aware of it, to realign with it. "Be still and know that I am God."

The pandemic, I think, has effectively acted as an enormous "selah"!

On so many levels and in so many ways, we have been given the opportunity, the gift to "pause and reflect", to be still. We've seen the impact of this in deeply personal ways. Record numbers of people are not just changing jobs, coming out of the pandemic, but changing entire career paths. Others have made significant lifestyle shifts that center relationships over tasks, health and wellness over wealth and accumulation. We have also seen the impact of this in our collective body as we seek to acknowledge and rectify the unsustainability, the harm, and the injustice that has been embedded in so much of our collective choices and ways of being. In the midst of so much turbulence, there have been amazing movements for change and for healing.

This gift can be fleeting. We know that. We know that it takes discipline and practice to hold on to this gift, to ensure it doesn't get placed at the back of our closet where we'll forget all about it until the next time we are desperate and broken. This, Friends, is a gift we must treasure anew each day, for it is surely the gift that leads to all other gifts. "Be still...and know that I am God." 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). Take a moment and do that now.

CLOSING HYMN - We Are God's People, TFWS 2220

Listen & watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOfCN0v7gtc>

We are God's people,
the chosen of the Lord,
born of the Spirit,
established by the Word.
Our cornerstone is Christ alone,
and strong in Christ we stand;
O let us live transparently
and walk heart to heart
and hand in hand.

2. We are God's loved ones,
the Salt and Light are we,
for we have known it,
the love of God outpoured.
Now let us learn how
to return the gift of love once given;
O let us share each joy and care
and live with a zeal
that pleases heaven.

3. We are the body
of which the Lord is Head,
called to obey Christ,
now risen from the dead.
God wills us be a family
diverse, yet truly one.
O let us give our gifts to God
and so shall God's work
on earth be done.

4. We are a temple,
the Spirit's dwelling place,
formed in great weakness,
a cup to hold God's grace.
We die alone, for on its own
each ember loses fire;
yet joined in one
the flame burns on
to give warmth and light
and to inspire.

BENEDICTION - Go forth with the words of a beloved hymn ringing in your heart: "On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand; all other ground is sinking sand." May the wondrous gift of being rooted - today, yesterday, and tomorrow - in Christ, our solid rock, bless you with confidence, with courage, and with hope that "our bad things turn out for good, our good things can never be lost, and the best things are yet to come"! Amen.

NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST'S PEACE!

NEXT WEEK'S SCRIPTURE: I Corinthians 12:12-27

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.
- **Do you love singing? Have you enjoyed the different virtual choir offerings?** Come join in the fun! Our choir will gather online this Wednesday, Sept. 22nd, at 6:00 p.m. for a time of fellowship and music prep. All are welcome! Send a note to Lucca for the link!
- **World Communion Sunday Joint Worship Celebration** - Please mark your calendars to celebrate World Communion Sunday on **Oct. 3rd** with our siblings at Chinese Community, Lake Merritt, and Lake Park UMC's. You are invited to attend in person at Lake Merritt UMC OR online (link to follow). Worship will begin at **10:30 a.m.**

Peace,
Emily