



Worship Celebration

February 26, 2023

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, 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!

OPENING HYMN – “I Will Call Upon The Lord” TFWS #2002
Listen [here](#) for a gift featuring Lucca, Anne, Rod, Brian, and those in the building.

OPENING PRAYER - Listen [here](#) for the Opening Prayer led by Shirley.
Let us join our hearts and spirits in prayer.

God, open our hearts and minds to receive your word. Thank you for your faithful servants who have handed down to us sound instruction and a trustworthy witness to your Son Jesus Christ. As the scriptures are read and your word proclaimed, grow within our hearts a love for your Son and a willingness to follow him. Fill us with your Holy Spirit and give us confidence in what you teach us today. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READING – John 13:34 and Luke 1:52 (NIV) led by Rod.

John 13:34: ³⁴“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

Luke 1:52: ⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

LISTEN – Sermon– *You can listen to the sermon from Pastor Akesa [here](#).*

As I mentioned earlier, today is the first Sunday of Lent and it is the season in the church calendar leading up to Easter which started this past Wednesday with Ash Wednesday, the 40-day period of spiritual preparation which can be a time of eye-opening to transformative change because we can use this time to evaluate where we are in our own spiritual journey and be honest about what can be next if we would be open to let the Holy Spirit lead us in an opportunity of self-reflection and renewal by deepening our journey with Christ.

If you would be willing to be curious this Lenten season by allowing yourself to learn more about Jesus in some ways which you may find uncomfortable, I think you will be surprised because it is in this time of Lent that we have an opportunity to seek to know Jesus more, know his messages, his life, and his resurrection. This is our season to grow our understanding of Christ and grow and strengthen our relationship with Christ!

I would also invite you to take part in the 40-day reading plan using the Gospel of Luke which I've left copies for you at the welcome table. I will continue to include the link to the 40-day reading plan in the e-mail communications that are sent out mid-week.

In this season of Lent where you are invited to be in prayer, reflection and fasting by “giving up” something, I would ask that you consider instead or in addition to, “taking up” something new as part of your Lenten practice. There are Lenten Commitment cards also on the welcome table that you are welcome to take with you, fill out, and use in your daily time of reflection and prayer.

As I mentioned last week, for Lent, all of my messages will be rooted and inspired by the Gospel of Luke. This is also consistent with the book study that starts tomorrow that I would invite you to register and join which Deacon Judith is facilitating via Zoom at 6:30 p.m. each Monday. Also, beginning on the World Day of Prayer, this coming Friday, 3/3, I will be available for a time of prayer in the afternoon via Zoom. Then the following week will move to Wednesday prayer time beginning 8/3/23 which will be open to anyone to drop in via Zoom which you can access on your phone or computer during 12:15 – 12:45 p.m. Look out for the details.

Before we get to this morning's scripture, I wanted to give you some background as introduction to the Gospel of Luke. Most mainline scholars believe that the Gospel of Luke was written toward the end of the first century, between AD 75 and 90. While the Gospel does not identify its author, Christian tradition has Luke, a physician and companion of Paul, as the author of both Luke and Acts. The Book of Acts is written as a sequel to Luke. Luke addressed his Gospel to a man named Theophilus who is said to may have commissioned the Gospel. In the introduction, Luke indicates that his goal was to write a “carefully ordered account”¹ of the life of Jesus, having “investigated everything carefully,”² so that hearers would “have confidence in the soundness of the instruction you have received.”³

Some of the most loved and popular stories and parables are found only in the Gospel of Luke. These include the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10); the parable of the rich man

¹ Luke 1:3

² Luke 1:3

³ Luke 1:4

and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31); the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37); the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32); and Jesus's resurrection appearance on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). It also includes the angel's appearance to Zechariah and to Mary (Luke 1:5-38), as well as the Nativity story most of us tell at Christmas (Luke 2:1-20).

If we look closely at Luke's stories—those not found in any other of the Gospels—and the way Luke tells the stories found in other Gospels, we will see a common theme and prominence on Jesus's appeal to outsiders, outcasts, and outlaws—that is, the marginalized, the broken, those who felt unseen, alone, or society would call second-class. Immediately at the beginning of the Luke's Gospel we hear the story of Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth whom were “very old”—you may remember them from our Advent series; they are the parents of John the Baptist who had been unable to have children for decades and scholars think they were between their 60's and 80's when God chose them to be John the Baptist's parents.

There are other examples of people having children much older in life like Abraham and Sarah who were 100 and 90 years old, respectively, when they had their son, Isaac. Even Moses was 80 when God called him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. The reminder that older adults are a tremendous gift to the church and that God calls and equip them to serve as they often have incredible gifts of wisdom, experience, and leadership. We may think they may not relate to how things are done now or not tech savvy; however, we are reminded by these stories how we never retire from the work of God as God calls us to and in whatever stage of life we find ourselves.

Then we further hear in Chapter 1 of Luke how God has a purpose and calls young adults too just like older adults when we hear how God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth to Mary who was likely the age of 13 or 14 and already engaged to be married to Joseph as it was common for women to marry at that age. The angel appeared to let her know she would bear a baby boy, would need to name him Jesus and told her how special he would be and the impact he would have on the world.

We likely would not take someone that young seriously as they could easily be considered naïve or inexperienced. People could consider them as having little to contribute and dismiss them; however, along with Mary we see in 1 Timothy how Timothy is encouraged to set a positive example for others by his speech, behavior, love, and faith. This because the writer understands that some people may look down on Timothy because of his youth; thinking he may be immature or inexperienced. We see this in the story of David when he was young and fought and defeated Goliath the giant. This is a consistent theme of how

God's call can include all ages so we cannot limit others by our own frame of reference or thoughts as that is not how God sees us or calls us.

I remember within my first week here, Jim McGrogan made a trip out to the church office to come and meet me personally and welcome me. Doug McIntosh introduced himself as the Church Historian and told me he would like to introduce me to Twin Tower's History Room filled with everything I would need to know about the history of this church, along with pictures of previous pastors. Doug knew exactly what was in each corner of this room and proceeded to share with me the written documentation of the history of Twin Towers. While it was hard for Doug to walk up those stairs, he had his assistant come with him and take me upstairs himself to the History Room even when I said he did not have to. The love for God's work through this church was more important than the physical limitations to get up to the History Room or to make the journey to come into the office. The love and care by these men were priceless gifts of wisdom imparted to me which I gratefully receive with great responsibility.

I also see Ysrael Quezon, a young adult who could be spending his free time when he is not working, traveling or doing a lot of other things that people his age want to do; hang out with friends, etc. But, instead he decided to say "yes" to God's call to dip his toe into church leadership in spite of challenges. He studies, takes trainings, and on bended knee in discernment for the leading of the Holy Spirit and he brings so much joy, love and wisdom and courage for someone his age.

God has a purpose for each of us no matter our age, no matter our difference. We can be better for it by not putting up barriers for what we think can work—that my friends are God's work to determine as God looks at the heart of the woman and/or a man.

In this morning's scripture from Luke 1:52 we hear in the New Revised Standard Version that says, "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly" reflects a key theme in Luke's Gospel that in Jesus, God is lifting up those of low status—those whom may be called outsiders, outcasts and outlaws; ordinary people whom society considers unexpected people. Many of them struggling and some did not have their acts together.

In first century Judaism, there was a term called, "*Am Ha-Arez*" which meant "the people of the land" and during that time it was used as a derogatory term used to describe those who were uneducated or ignorant. Devout and educated religious leaders sometimes used the term "*Am Ha-Arez*" to describe the uncivilized. It was a condescending term meant to name someone as ignorant or unsophisticated. But yet we see Jesus in the Gospels but especially in Luke, seeking out, ministering to, and lifting up the "*Am Ha-Arez*." He appealed to them and saw them as beloved children of God. We see Jesus' mother, Mary,

and her fiancé, Joseph, may have been considered “*Am Ha-Arez*” because they were from Nazareth which was considered a small town or village of no significance. Jesus himself was considered among the lowly which we see in the story of his birth where he is laid in a manger. Even of some Jesus’ disciples, like Peter, were likely considered “*Am Ha-Arez*” as well. And yet we hear how Jesus sought them out, taught them, empowered them, ministered to them and through them.

Today is the 1st Sunday of Lent but also the last Sunday of our Black History Month where our theme was “Seeing and Caring for the Other” inspired by Gospel of John 13:34 where we hear the words of Jesus when he says to his disciples, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” We spent the last 3 Sundays telling stories about how caring for the other came about as a result of seeing the other; getting to know the differences in each other and embracing and appreciating those differences even when they were mucky, yucky and didn’t smell well. So, it is no coincidence that we now start our journey through the next 40 days of Lent through Luke’s Gospel reminding us how Jesus came to lift up the lowly starting with the opening stories of how God chooses and calls the “very old” and young people to bring about God’s purposes.

The reminder that if we can see others through the loving eyes of Jesus, God in the flesh, we can show others our differences are areas of honor and worthy of celebration. God sees us all with beautiful reflections of his love and we should not separate each other by what we think or what we know. As this morning’s other scripture from Luke 1:52 from Mary’s Magnificat, her song of praise after she finds out she will be the mother of Jesus knowing her state in society, Mary says that God “has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.”

This to remind us that God’s love in the name of Jesus is the same for each of us; none more worthy or important than the other and God’s call is also true for each of us. What is God calling you to that you either may not have felt was for you? Perhaps this is a good time to be in prayer, more reflection, and discernment. May you experience a Holy Lent and return to God. Amen.

HYMN of RESPONSE – “I Need Thee Every Hour” UMH #397
Listen [here](#) for a gift featuring Lucca, Anne, Rod, Brian, Ysrael, and those in the building.

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).

CLOSING HYMN – “Walking in the Light of God” Worship & Song #3163
Listen [here](#) for a gift featuring Lucca, Anne, Rod, Brian, Ysrael and those in the building.

BENEDICTION

NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST'S PEACE!

Please make note of the following updates and invitations:

Lent Book Study on the Gospel of Luke Beginning Monday, 2/27/23 – You are invited to join Deacon Judith for a six-week book study on Mondays at 6:30 p.m. via Zoom (2/27 – 4/3/23). Please register at the link available by clicking [here](#). The book is "*LUKE: Jesus and the Outsiders, Outcasts, and Outlaws*" by Adam Hamilton. Please order your book and join us.

Lenten 40-Day Reading Plan on the Gospel of Luke – You are invited to join in reading the Gospel of Luke as part of your Lenten practice this year which each Sunday's message will be based, as well as the book study. The 40-day Gospel of Luke reading plan is available [here](#).

World Day of Prayer on Friday, 3/3/23 – you are invited to join P. Akesa in a time to connect and pray via Zoom on Friday, 3/3 at 5:00 p.m. by clicking [here](#). If you have challenges with the above link, here are the Zoom log-in details:

Meeting ID: 890 5078 5085

Passcode: 374759

Dine & Connect on Monday, 3/6/23 – Volunteers needed on Monday, 3/6/23, 12pm-3pm Cooking & Plating; 4pm-5:30pm Serving & Cleaning Up. We serve the first Monday of

each month, where we will be preparing and serving 145 dinners. If you can help on 3/6/2023, please click [here](#) for more information and please sign up.

Lenten Time of Prayer Beginning Wednesday, 3/8/23 – during Lent you're invited to join P. Akesa on Wednesdays between 12:15 and 12:45 p.m. to connect and pray via Zoom by clicking [here](#). If you have challenges with the above link, here are the Zoom log-in details:

Meeting ID: 827 9929 9325

Passcode: Prayer

Celebration of Gary Brown's Life, Saturday, 3/11/23 – Gary's Memorial Service will be at 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. on Saturday, March 11. You are invited to please come and support his family in honoring his life and service. The Memorial Service will also be available via Zoom by clicking [here](#). If you have challenges with the above link, here are the Zoom log-in details:

Meeting ID: 876 4332 8347

Passcode: Brown

Midway Shelter Needs Our Help – We support Midway Shelter, the only women and children shelter operating in Alameda, by providing 30 meals twice a month (2nd Tuesday and 4th Wednesday of each month). Donors can participate as financial donors or as meal preparers. To participate, please complete the information by clicking [here](#) and we will contact you. We can really use more help with this critical ministry. Thank you!

Alameda Warming Shelter – The shelter is currently open 7 nights—and days—a week through April 2023 and need volunteers in two areas. First, to staff days in two shifts: 8 am – 12 pm and 12 – 4 pm; with 2 people per shift. There is coverage for evenings and nights (by paid staff from the Housing Coalition of the East Bay and the Village of Love). Second area where help is needed is by providing dinners and breakfasts. If you are able to volunteer for either of the shifts available through the end of March 2023, please sign-up by clicking [here](#). If you would like to provide dinners or breakfasts, please sign-up by clicking [here](#). The Warming Shelter is hosted at Christ Episcopal, 1700 Santa Clara Ave., Alameda., entering via the parking lot on Grand Street. To learn more, contact 510-832-1382 x123, warmingcenter@hceb.org, or Christ Church at stephen@christchurchalameda.org.

Need help with groceries – If you or you know of anyone who needs help with groceries once a week or once a month, the Alameda Food Bank has a Community Market available for individuals who live or work in the City of Alameda. Please click [here](#) for the QR code and for more information.