



LENT

A SEASON OF REFLECTION,
RENEWAL, AND PREPARATION

Worship Celebration **March 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 – “The Summons”

TFWS #2130

Due to technical difficulties, a recording of this song from this past Sunday is not available.

Listen [here](#) for a gift featuring Lucca, Anne, and those in the building from November 6.

OPENING PRAYER - Listen [here](#) for the Opening Prayer, led by Deacon Mike.

Let us join our hearts and spirits in prayer.

God of grace, we are hungry for your presence and thirsty for your Word. Yet you are present with us always, and speaking to us in the silence. Open our hearts to you now, that we may behold you, that we may hear you, that we may know your life-giving grace. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

SCRIPTURE READING – Luke 18:18-30 & Luke 18:35-42 (NRSV), led by Deacon Mike.

¹⁸ A certain ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁹ Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ²⁰ You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery. You shall not murder. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother.’ ” ²¹ He replied, “I have kept all these since my youth.” ²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” ²³ But when he heard this, he became sad, for he was very rich. ²⁴ Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁶ Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” ²⁷ He replied, “What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.” ²⁸ Then Peter said, “Look, we have left our homes and followed you.” ²⁹ And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God ³⁰ who will not get back very much more in this age and in the age to come eternal life.”

³⁵ As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. ³⁶ When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening. ³⁷ They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” ³⁸ Then he shouted, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ³⁹ Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he shouted even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁰ Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him, and when he came near, he asked him, ⁴¹ “What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, let me see again.” ⁴² Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.”

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

We continue on our Lenten journey this fifth Sunday of Lent as we prepare for Jesus’ entry to Jerusalem next Sunday which is Palm Sunday. Lent as we have journeyed is the 40-day period of spiritual preparation season in the church calendar leading up to Easter. We are invited to use this time to evaluate where we are in our own spiritual journey and be open to let the Holy Spirit lead us in an opportunity of self-reflection and deepening our journey with Christ. It is a time of fasting and abstaining from something to repent and focus our hearts and minds on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Or it can also be a time of feasting on something that you take on during this Lenten season as a way to go deeper in your understanding of Jesus, his life, death, and resurrection.

Lent can help families in the same way Advent helps parents prepare their children for Christmas. The season of Lent provides families an opportunity to strengthen spiritual discipline together. The invitation has been to use this time to seek to know Jesus more and to grow your understanding of Christ to strengthen your relationship with Christ. Don’t get me wrong as I am not insinuating that your spiritual life needs strengthening; what I am saying is that this is an opportunity to evaluate how God may be inviting you to something new. It is a time for retreat to rest, pray, listen for what God may be inviting you to consider but yet may be hard to hear because of the noisiness of our busy lives filled so many distractions.

In this season of Lent here at Twin Towers we have been looking at the Gospel of Luke in depth with a Monday book study, a 40-day reading plan using the Gospel of Luke, mid-week time of prayer during a lunch hour, and Sunday messages from the Gospel Luke as an invitation for you to engage in one of these areas of conversation and reading. I hope you have tried something new this year during this 40-day Lenten season.

I have been inviting you to participate in different ways of fasting and feasting because Sunday mornings are not enough. This because I remember what it was like to be in the pews; some Sundays the sermon resonates and other Sundays our thoughts are wandering to what needs to be done to prepare for this afternoon’s game, tonight’s dinner, what is coming the next week that requires your attention, and the list continues.

As a result of different ways to meet and engage the love of God through Jesus, you may have the desire to get to know Jesus more; that is my prayer for each of you and why I invited

you to participate in different and new ways through this season of Lent. Please send me a note or tell me what worked for you or what did not work and if there is a why to both questions. That would be very helpful for me to know especially because I want to know what resonates or can work better.

Last week we looked at a couple of parables told by Jesus. The reminder that parables are stories that Jesus told with the intent to teach his hearers about the meaning of life and faith. More often, the parables Jesus used were stories that ordinary people like you and me could relate because they came from everyday life experiences. I also mentioned that some parables are hard to understand, while other are straightforward.

Since the start of Lent, we have been following Jesus' journey on his way to Jerusalem where we know what awaits him. We are getting close to his entry to Jerusalem next Sunday when we experience Palm Sunday for this first time this year. Yes, we have been repeating this experience each year but it is indeed the first time this year.

But first, today we will explore two stories of experiences and conversations with Jesus from Luke's Gospel which are not parables. They are stories of Jesus speaking to a prominent man referred to as a "ruler" in response to a question this man asks him, as well as Jesus healing a blind beggar.

These stores took place as Jesus was approaching Jericho on his way to Jerusalem which is Jesus' final destination. There is a map that should be coming up [on the screen]; it does not indicate the length of the 18 approximate miles or over 3,000 feet elevation to get to Jerusalem, but it does show us that Jesus is getting closer to Jerusalem. From verse 14 of Chapter 18 of Luke's Gospel right before this morning's first scripture, we hear that Jesus "went on from there..." Which tells us he was leaving where he was on his way to Jericho when he is approached by this ruler who is not named. Perhaps this was this ruler's last chance to meet Jesus face-to-face and have a chance to ask his question.

We hear from the scripture that Deacon Mike read from the Gospel of Luke Chapter 18, verse 18 that "a certain ruler asked him, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"¹⁹ Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone."²⁰ You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"²¹ "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said.²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."²³ When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy.

This is a tough passage and was troubling for the ruler as it was troubling for the disciples with Jesus at the time and for us today because the words are radical perhaps too extreme and

abrupt for our ears. But consider where Jesus is on the journey—he knows what awaits him at Jerusalem and he is approaching Jericho, so he is one city away. It makes sense that at this point on his journey, Jesus’ message is stronger and to the point because parables worked to tell a story that more people can relate to; however, here we see Jesus being more direct. This was intentional by Jesus, and I think inviting us to struggle with these words.

Some background of this ruler is:

1. Luke tells us in verse 23 that he was “very wealthy.”
2. The Gospel of Matthew 19:20 tells us that this rich ruler is a young man.

A lot of the wealthy, religious people that asked Jesus public questions were trying to trick him; however, this man’s question was no trick. It was the sincere question of an earnest young wealthy man about how to “inherit eternal life.” His question reveals that perhaps he was not feeling adequate in his own spiritual preparation and that he believes that eternal life can be earned by what he does. The idea that we can go to heaven only if we do good. Jesus’ response was hard to hear by this young rich ruler who Jesus knows is seeking spiritual guidance.

What is interesting to explore is why Jesus’ words in verse 22 can be upsetting in response to the young rich ruler’s response that he has been following the law since he was a boy. Here again Jesus’ words from verse 22 of Luke 18 that says: ²²When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” And we hear in verse 23, this young rich ruler’s response after he heard this, ²³.....he became very sad, because he was very wealthy.”

Jesus would often speak in exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally—the reminder was shared by Pastor Bob with some of us in yesterday’s small group meeting; that Jesus often spoke in hyperbole which are exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally.

We hear this in the Gospel of Matthew 5:29-30 when Jesus was teaching about lust and said, “if your right eye causes you to fall into sin, pluck it out and throw it away.....and if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.” The reminder that if we followed these words to the letter, most of us would be blind and missing right hands. So why did the young rich ruler become very sad at Jesus words? Or for you and me, what causes us to pause with these words from Jesus saying we should sell everything, give it away and follow him? Are we concerned (or dare I say do we fear) that Jesus requires us to do something that would cost us too much? How are we to take these words?

Rev. Adam Hamilton author of the book being used at the Monday book study thinks that perhaps Jesus is saying in today's terms, that we "simplify." That we do not need to be motivated or driven by the need to acquire more. But that we are careful so that our lives are not based on the abundance of possessions because "we cannot serve both God and money" so choose God instead of money. [1] Specifically, that we are called to be generous; something that Twin Towers knows a thing or two about.

That when we are generous to others or moved out of compassion for the benefit of others, that is when we are the conduits that God works to lift up those that need it most, help those who are hungry, help those who are unhoused, or advocate for those in need of our voice for equal justice. Hamilton notes how these words of Jesus changed his relationship with money and how he spends it. That through these words of Jesus, Hamilton considers, "how much is enough" for himself (87).[2] Makes me think of a saying that we have heard many times about John D. Rockefeller the founder of Standard Oil and one point was the richest man and first ever American billionaire in the early 1900's. The story goes that when he was asked by reporter, "how much money is enough?" Rockefeller's response was "just a little bit more."

The other story we heard from today's scripture is as Jesus approached Jericho, there was a blind man sitting by the roadside begging. Beggars would often be found at the city gate where there is a lot of people passing through. While the man begging is not named in the Gospel of Luke, in the Gospel of Mark 10:46, we are told his name is Bartimaeus.

Bartimaeus being someone who has lost one of his senses must have developed other senses because he realizes in hearing the crowd that the number of people is much larger than usual. So Bartimaeus asks what is going on and verse 37 tells us that someone in the crowd tells him that "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." Once Bartimaeus hears this, he starts yelling at the top of his lungs, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me" and in spite of those that led the way telling him to be quiet, scripture says Bartimaeus shouted louder.

While our translation this morning says Bartimaeus "called out," the Greek word for "called out," is "βοάω" which is translated to shout or cry out. That meant that this blind man named Bartimaeus kept shouting for Jesus even with the crowd telling him to stop. Some people with a handicap may be intimidated and may give up; however not Bartimaeus. His faith motivated him to keep shouting and not give up. But his words are also very intentional.

Bartimaeus' use of the words, "Son of David" is similar to calling someone "messiah" because to a Jewish person, they understand that a descendant of David will sit up on the throne of Israel as has been foretold. By asking the "Son of David" for mercy, Bartimaeus is expecting more than money and he is confident he will receive what he is requesting. Bartimaeus' confidence is his faith in action! It is an example of unstoppable faith, a faith that won't accept "no" for an answer.

People tell him to be quiet and I think they were embarrassed by or for him; but Bartimaeus did not care. The intensity of his efforts go beyond embarrassment and it worked because Jesus stops and Jesus responds. Jesus sees this man, not as a beggar like the crowd sees him, but as a child of God. And because of Bartimaeus' faith, Jesus heals him. Bartimaeus receives his sight and began to follow Jesus and praising God; he inspired the crowd who then also praised God.

Consistently Jesus sees and seeks out those that society does not see or want to avoid being in contact with. Even Christians have become like the Pharisees at times too quick to judge others, quick to exclude others, quick to leave people feeling unloved and feeling hurt; or make others feel like outsiders. Yes, this can be true in life of the church.

Jesus' actions remind us that is not what he is about. Jesus came for those on the margins, those who are not perfect, those with issues or treated as outcasts. Those are the people that Jesus wanted to spend time with, eat with, and came to lift up. Even as he comes into Jericho, I imagine with a heart heavy knowing the suffering that was to come; still his priority was seeing those that society does not want to see like Bartimaeus.

Jesus did not come only for the "good" people or the people with high morals; Jesus came for all people and specially to give hope, extend love and forgiveness for those of us that have made mistakes and keep missing the mark.

This should be our mission as well. Following Jesus means doing our part to reach those that need to know the love of Jesus by being in a community like Twin Towers. Doing our part to welcome the outsider so that we can be used by God to seek and welcome those that are not part of our journey by sharing the love of God in Jesus' name. May it be so, Lord, may it be so. Amen.

[1] Adam Hamilton, *Luke Jesus and Outsiders, Outcasts, and Outlaws*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2022), 86.

[2] Hamilton, *Luke*, 87.

HYMN of RESPONSE – “Jesus, Remember Me”

UMH #488

Listen [here](#) for a gift featuring Lucca, Anne, Rod, 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 – “There's a Song of Love”

TFWS #2141

Listen [here](#) for a gift featuring Lucca, Anne, Rod and those in the building.

BENEDICTION

NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST'S PEACE!

Please make note of the following updates and invitations:

“Healing the Sick” Book Study Begins 3/30 – You are invited to join the Healing Prayer Team on a book study of the book *Healing the Sick* by Alex and Hannah Absalom that will begin Thursday, March 30, at 6:30 p.m. and held every third Thursday via Zoom facilitated by Jen Tellier and Deacon Judith Pruess-Mellow. The book will introduce not only how to pray for healing in real-life situations, but also how to respond with love and wisdom when there is both success and disappointment. Please register by clicking [here](#) to receive the Zoom details and order your book.

Board of Trustees Meeting, 4/2 @11:30 a.m. – In-person meeting by our Board of Trustees happening this Sunday, 4/2/2023 at 11:30 a.m. in the Cunningham Room. All are welcome.

Dine & Connect on Monday, 4/3 – Volunteers needed on Monday, 4/3/23, 12p.m.-3pm Cooking & Plating; 4p.m.-5:30p.m. Serving & Cleaning Up. We serve the first Monday of each month, where we will be preparing and serving 150 dinners. If you can help on 4/3/2023, please click [here](#) for more information and please sign up.

Last of Lenten Time of Prayer on 4/5 @12:15 p.m. – Thank you to all who have joined in our mid-week Lenten time of prayer during Lent. The last session will be available on Wednesday, 4/5/23, 12:15-12:45 p.m. Join us 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

Good Friday Service, 4/7 @7:30 p.m. – You are invited to join us for a combined service with Embrace Church which will also be available on Zoom by clicking [here](#). If you have challenges with the above link, here are the Zoom log-in details:

Meeting ID: 834 7293 1162

Passcode: goodfriday

Easter Sunday, 4/9 @9:30 a.m. – We will celebrate Jesus Christ’s resurrection and Holy Communion to be followed by a potluck celebration after church. Please sign up [here](#) to bring a dish for our celebration.

Sign-up for Refreshments After Sunday Morning Worship – Those of you who attend worship service in person are invited to please stop by for a cup of coffee and fellowship in the Wesley Room after Sunday services around 10:30ish. Brian has prepared and posted a sign-up sheet if you’d like to bring a favorite refreshment to share with others during our time of fellowship. Please click [here](#) to see where the sign-up sheet is posted in the Wesley Room. Thank you!

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.