



Let us run with
perseverance
the race that is
before us.
Hebrews 12:12

Worship Celebration

August 14, 2022

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 PRAYER

Lord of the vineyard, we ask for your presence and your guidance. In your holy wisdom, tend the vines of our hearts.

Teach us your righteousness, that our lives may flower with justice. We come as wild grapes, yearning to grow fruitful in your love. Show us the way, through Jesus your Son, to discern your will, hear your word, and grow in your ways, as we deepen the roots of our faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.

OPENING HYMN – “Guide My Feet”

TFWS #2208

Listen [*here*](#) for a gift featuring our worship team of Lucca & Anne, Barack on the trumpet, and all within the building.

SCRIPTURE READING – Hebrews 11:29 – 12:2 NSRV

²⁹ By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. ³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. ³¹ By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

³² And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented— ³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

³⁹ Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

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

We continue our journey into the Letter to the Hebrews continuing with Chapter 11 looking at verses 29 through Chapter 12 verse 2. I find it always helpful when sitting down with scripture to look at what happened before and after. We won't have to go back much as last week we were in the earlier verses of Chapter 11 where we heard of Abraham who is known as the father of faith and how he left a home and country that was familiar and enough for him for a promise that was not tied to a date. Abraham did not know when the promise would be realized.

That may seem unreal to us because we live in a time where we expect instant gratification—don't let the Internet blink when we log onto our tablets, laptops, streaming services—hold it, wait a minute, right? Asking how long can already be too long.

But last week we heard how Abraham's faith and trust in God was so great that he and two more of his generations did not live to experience and see the promised land nor see how large his descendants would become as God has promised. That his descendants would be like the stars in the sky and as many as the sand in the seashore and they would enter a land that would be theirs as God had promised Abraham. And yes, the promised was realized but not within Abraham's time.

A couple of verses before this week's scripture in verse 23-28 of Hebrews 11, we hear the story of Moses. How by faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born because they were afraid of the king's order at that time that all male babies would be killed. Moses' parents trusted God enough to take the chance to save Moses' life because they had faith that God would care for him. I'd invite you to read the full story of Moses starting from Exodus 2.¹ Moses is one of Israel's greatest leaders, a prophet and what some have call a "lawgiver" because he received the Ten Commandments from God.

When we get to this morning's scripture beginning with verse 29, we hear the retelling to

¹ Exodus Chapters 1-14.

the Hebrews of three key stories of faith that were known to the people who received this letter. This was an intentional reminder to them that theirs is a history of persevering faith in God through life threatening adversity and challenges that spans a long time and across many people of faith. And it was not just a quick sense of faith but what had been deep abiding faith through trust and perseverance in God especially when the journey was not easy or when there would be realization of a promise or a dream. Some of us understand that as most of us have stories of our family history where sacrifices were made by us, our parents, grandparents, great-grandparents for a chance at a better life for us; dreams long ago for a future with hope in God as we are told in Jeremiah 29:11.

Some of us can relate that it is all good when things go our way, but most times what we remember most is when things do not go our way and when things were not good. Today's scripture is reminding the Hebrews to not lose hope and faith because they were feeling discouraged and questioning their faith. Questioning because they felt excluded from most of their society and felt political pressure from the religious establishment of their time.

Today's scripture was a letter impressing upon the Hebrews of this time that they come from a history of a people with strong faith through trusting God. Stories were being used to remind them of faith and perseverance despite overwhelming challenges. Stories like the story of Moses. Another is the story about the collapse of walls of Jericho because of Joshua and the soldiers marching around the wall for seven days and at their shout the walls came down—imagine the faith to know that the raising of their voices would bring down walls.

Part of the faith story of the wall of Jericho included the story of Rahab. This was a woman who had two strikes against her in her society's eyes, but she had made a big difference in helping the Israelites.

This because when Joshua planned the invasion of Jericho, he sent out spies to investigate the fortification of the city and when the spies met Rahab, she welcomed them and hid them in her home to protect them. You see Rahab was considered unworthy in her society because she was a Gentile and a prostitute.

But Rahab's faith in God prompted her actions despite what I imagine was great fear and reservation, but her actions spared her life along with the lives of her family. Her entire household were the only people of Jericho that were spared when the city of Jericho was destroyed by the Israelites led by Joshua.²

Then we hear in verses 32-40 of the lives of other great women and men who experienced great victories even through threats of harm including death. Today's scripture is the

² Joshua 6:25-27.

reminder that having a strong faith in God does not guarantee a happy or easy life. The truth that prosperity and blessings do not automatically come to those who are good and who believe.

But as we grow in our faith as seen through the life of Jesus and we lean into journeying with Jesus as experienced in community and in connection with other believers we are encouraged, and we develop the strength to keep moving forward when faced with life's challenges. We know this based on our own faith story that is filled with highs and lows but through perseverance that is strengthened by our faith in God, we can choose to be persistent. We choose to keep trying and not give up. But it takes a lot of intentional work.

Verse 40 of Chapter 11 offers us another orientation to consider as it says, "since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect." That there is solidarity among believers. That the New and Old Testament will be celebrated together. That we are not just one body with Jesus but that we are one with all those that ever lived and together all of us are to be made in perfect in him. And that the "great cloud of witnesses" mentioned in Chapter 12:1-2 is not just those we reference who have persevered and gone before us that we hear mentioned at funerals but perhaps mentioned here is the reminder that they are the people who are cheering for us to continue the good work they did: extend love, work for healing and justice, to "run with perseverance the race that is set before us."³ That in addition to being the one in whom we have our faith, Jesus is also the pioneer of our faith, the one in whom we courageously follow in faith, joining in his ministry of love, justice, healing through not giving up when things are difficult or we are told we cannot.

Faith in God gives us a confidence to see beyond what we are dealing with in times of challenge. We heard that last week that faith is "confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."⁴ That when we trust in God, there is confidence in knowing that our faith equips us to see beyond the challenges we are experiencing. Also, our faith helps us to understand that while we may not think that God is hearing us or answering our prayers, we are reminded in today's scripture that we are not alone, and God is working for our good, but we have to trust that may not be what we are expecting or when we are expecting. This because the answer from God based on Ephesians 3:20 may be no or not now but that in either case, I know it is because there is something better in store. This because we hear in Ephesians 3:20, God can do exceedingly "more than we ask or imagine."⁵ That our trust cannot be in ourselves but in the God who created the universe, the God who created us and gave us Jesus who came with a new covenant, a new promise that includes all of us regardless of where our journey has brought us. That's the assurance

³ Hebrews 12:1.

⁴ Hebrews 11:1.

⁵ Ephesians 3:20.

that we have as believers in Jesus. Our trust as a people of faith needs to be outwardly focused on the God who stayed true to our ancestors in faith and will stay true to us.

I know that trusting God fully is not easy and takes time as we develop and grow our faith which is different for everyone. As a person who likes to be in control and plan things out in detail, I struggle with giving over to God so I am constantly in prayer so I can be aware when that struggle happens. So, when I feel challenged about something or something makes me anxious, I pause, pray and ask myself a few questions to get to the why. Is it anxiety, is it fear and if so, what am I afraid of? Fear of failure, fear of being wrong, fear of judgment, or the fear of inaction when I need to act? I remind myself of 1 Peter 5:7 that says to “cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you” and then I intentionally lean into that very thing that is causing me pause and take the action needed especially when I’m uncomfortable. I will confess it is a work in progress, but I am grateful for Jesus, the perfecter of our faith.

My working to let go and let God lead has been hard yet freeing, empowering and enlightening for me. Enlightening in that when I am told “you can’t do it” then I know that is not a message from God who would not put a dream on my heart only to discourage me. So, I challenge you let your life be an embarrassment to the enemy (yes, I’m going to name it: the devil, evil one, Satan, etc.) who whispers words of discouragement to hold you back from what God has put on your heart. Today’s scripture encourages us to look to Jesus who suffered on the cross for the “joy that was set before him, endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his place at the right hand of the throne of God.”⁶

We may not get it right but we keep trying to do our best and grow our faith so we can have the strength and confidence to persevere in those tough moments when the journey does not make sense, or the pain is so intense. But in community is where together we share in each other’s joy and share in each other’s struggle that we experience but also where we do the intentional work together to grow our faith which is what deepens that well of perseverance needed for life’s challenging moments.

For those of us who have had moments of crisis and challenge, it is our village, our Holy Spirit empowered community that help hold us up, they lift prayers for and with us, they encourage us, helps us reorient our perception and helps us with our healing. They help talk us off that ledge of overwhelm, off the ledge of frustration and the off the ledge of uncertainty. It is in those moments that God is present with us through the love and encouragement of others. I invite you to be prayerful, come talk to me as I invite you to consider joining a small group if you have not already done so. A couple of groups have started forming and we are praying for the ones to come as we continue our journey together desiring to deepen our faith in Jesus’ name. May it be so. Amen.

⁶ Hebrews 12:2 NSRV.

HYMN OF RESPONSE – “Through It All”

UMH #507

Listen [here](#) for a gift featuring our worship team of Lucca, Barack, and Anne.

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 – “God of Grace and God of Glory”

UMH #577

Listen [here](#) for a gift featuring Lucca and all within the building.

BENEDICTION

Go forth in peace to love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all as we journey through this next week. Amen.

POSTLUDE

Listen [here](#) for a gift from our worship team featuring Barack on the trumpet to *Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me*, UMH #361.

NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST’S PEACE!

Please make note of the following invitations:

New Book Study – Come and be part of the study and conversations! A new book study led by Deacon Mike Friedrich called “Sermon on the Mount” by Amy-Jill Levine has started on Fridays, for 3 weeks in August and 3 weeks in September at 7:00 p.m. on

Fridays. Please reach out to Deacon Mike for additional information.

Midway Shelter Help Needed – We support Midway Shelter, the only women and children shelter operating in Alameda, by providing 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. If you are unable to participate, you can still help by praying for our neighbors and our volunteers serving them through this critical ministry. Thank you for your support!

Dine & Connect Need Help for September 5 – We serve the first Monday of each month and need help for September 5. If you can help on September 5, please click [here](#) for more information and please sign up as we can use your help. Thank you so much to those who have already signed-up!

Holy Land 2023 Pilgrimage – After five years, the Friends of Wadi Foquin are renewing their Holy Land pilgrimages in Spring 2023. Those interested in participating in this pilgrimage will need to confirm interest in joining before September 1, 2022. For more information, please click [here](#) or contact Deacon Mike Friedrich. There will be more information to come if you are interested in going on the trip or in a group study in advance of the trip.

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.