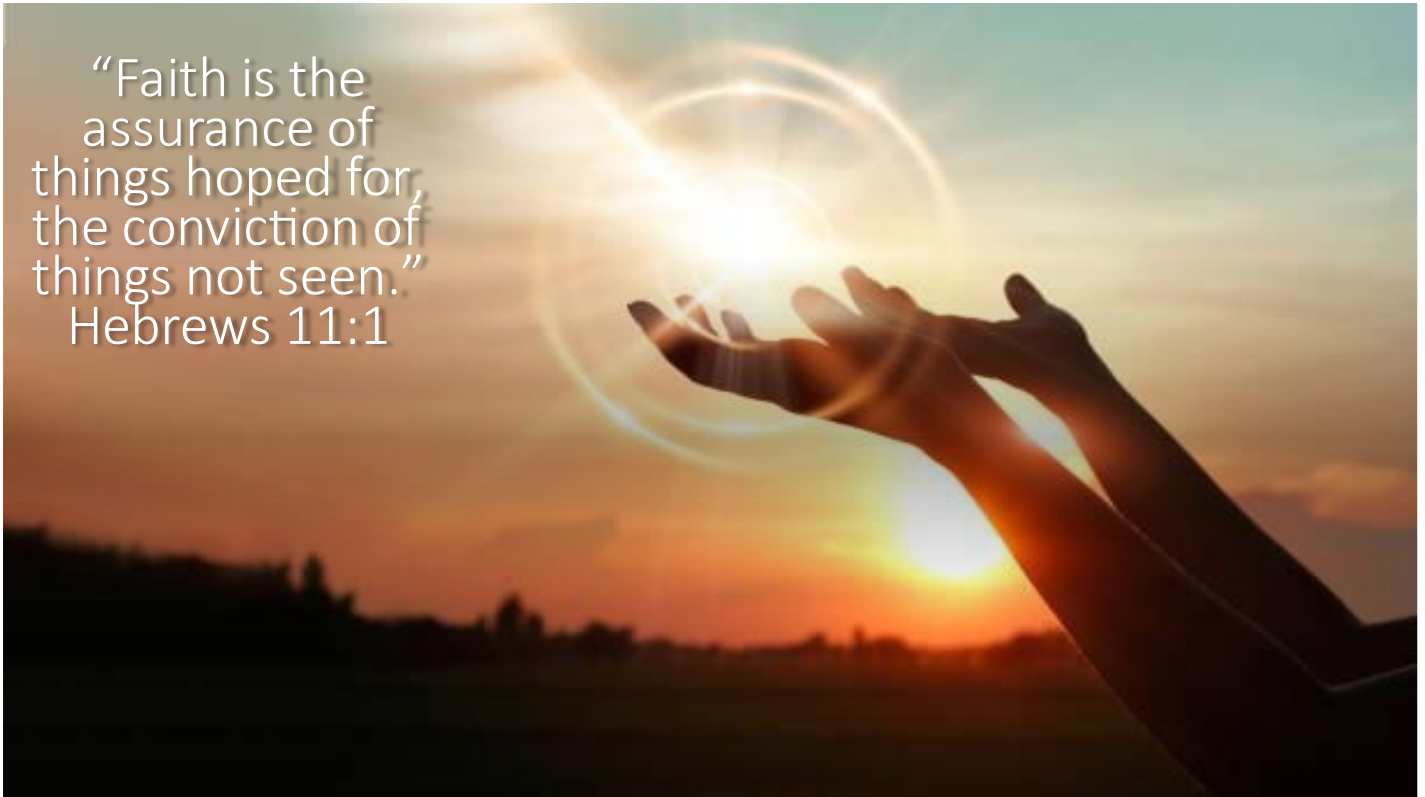


“Faith is the
assurance of
things hoped for,
the conviction of
things not seen.”
Hebrews 11:1



Worship Celebration **August 7, 2022**

Twin Towers United Methodist Church
1411 Oak Street, Alameda, CA 94501

510.522.6744

twintowers.office@gmail.com www.twintowersumc.org

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 [Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes]

God of abundant grace, you spread out Creation like a feast before us. You pour out your love like rain upon us. You stir in our souls like the molten earth beneath our continents. Help us to receive. Help us to trust. Help us now to listen for your word and be renewed in your Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.

OPENING HYMN – “Great is Thy Faithfulness”

UMH #140

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

SCRIPTURE READING – Hebrews 11:1-3 and 8-16 NSRV

¹Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ²Indeed, by faith^[a] our ancestors received approval. ³By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.^[b]

⁸By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. ¹²Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, ‘as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.’

¹³All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, ¹⁴for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a

homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

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

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

This morning's scripture from the Letter to the Hebrews Chapter 11 is focused on faith. To understand why that was the subject of this letter, let us first take a look at who were the intended recipients of this letter.

Scholars have thought that the recipients of this letter were probably Jewish and Gentile Christians with a strong interest in matters of the Jewish faith. That they were second-generation Christians. This meant they heard of Jesus' ministry from people who heard it directly from Jesus. Some were educated, some had gone through hard times, experienced persecution, abuse, and suffering. They were also considered very effective in doing good work such as extending compassion and being empathetic to others. However, there was concern that they were moving away from their faith that caused some Christians to pull away and no longer meeting with their community.

The purpose of the letter to the Hebrews was to encourage Christians not to give up on their faith.¹ They had been waiting for Jesus' return and as time passed, people were getting anxious and trying to make their own meaning in the waiting.

Interesting that the characteristics of the recipients of this letter to the Hebrews sounds very similar to our current day experience. We come from all walks of life some experiencing meaningful moments, hardship, and challenges; doing good and needed work, and also desiring to seek justice for others. We also know others who either do not believe in church due to bad experiences or those who question what they believe.

This makes Chapter 11 fascinating as it is speaking to faith and subsequently trust. This because the book of Hebrews' definition of faith in verse 1 is the "confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."² This definition links faith with our hopes. We know that what we hope for sometimes turns out the way we want which is great and a relief. We are grateful for the answered prayers when treatment for a medical condition works, or getting a new job, or perhaps celebrating a young person's accomplishment that we are related, or we have been mentoring. It is easy to affirm our

¹ Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 430-432.

² Hebrews 11:1 NIV.

faith when our hopes are realized, but the challenge is when things take longer or when things do not go as we desired or planned.

We hear in verses 8-16 about the story from the Old Testament of the faith of Abraham. That Abraham left his home that he knew by following God without question on the promise of an inheritance, a promised land, for Abraham and his descendants. Abraham believed in the promise that God had made with him, and Abraham left his home behind. But that was a tall order because Abraham and his wife Sarah did not have children and Sarah was beyond childbearing years. Yet God also gave Abraham the promise that he would grow Abraham's descendants through his son with Sarah. The promise that Abraham's descendants would be like the stars in the sky and as many as the sand in the seashore.

So, Abraham left his home for a place that he did not know and as an old man without a son with Sarah. That's a lot of faith. We hear in today's text that Abraham, his wife Sarah, his son Isaac, his grandson Jacob "were still living by faith when they died."³ That they did not receive what was promised to Abraham and yet they died in faith without seeing the promise being fulfilled.

With having the benefit of knowing how the story goes, we know that God's promise was eventually fulfilled. The reminder that sometimes we do the hard work now for the benefit of others in the future. Like the work that those that came before us have done here at Twin Towers so we can be stewards today of this church going out in faith in doing good works for a future and people that we do not know yet we work to do good in every way possible.

The Book of Hebrews was telling the early church that faith means having the reassurance about what we do not see because our confidence is in the God of creation. Easier said than done. Because we know it is hard to follow God when we are uncertain where God is leading. That if we do not see or experience evidence of action, we may wonder if God is watching over us at all. But then sometimes, something positive takes place and restores our belief, reminds us why we believe what we believe and reinforces our hearts. Today's scripture is the reminder that our faith is beyond what we see, beyond this life when compared to eternity.

The core of the Hebrew concept of faith is to hold on to something firmly, with conviction and confidence.⁴ But that confidence comes from a relationship of time spent with the object of such faith and for us our faith is rooted in the love of God for us as seen in the life of Jesus who was a man who loved and accepted all people unconditionally, died a horrible death, resurrected; brought back to life, ascended to Heaven and will one day return. We

³ Hebrews 11:13 NIV.

⁴ Alan Richardson, *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company), 75-76.

are all on different stages of our faith journey from being raised in the church, experiencing life changing events that sometimes we can only attest is due to nothing but the love of God. On that pendulum also is having no faith, or being curious, seeking, asking lots of questions, and engaging with others also on a faith journey working together to further understand what faith means for each of us.

But along that journey, we start developing trust and this because God's grace is extended to each of us which means God's love is available for each of us even before we even know God. That is what John Wesley the founder of Methodists calls prevenient grace. The grace of God that is there for us before we even know it. That God keeps waiting for us and does not give up on us. But the growth of our faith is personal to each of us in our own response.

I am reminded of a dimension of my own faith story when I was struggling with my own call to ordained ministry. You see, God has been very patient with me as it took me a long time to understand my own call to ministry. I thought my purpose was to be a productive and active lay person and did so for many years and others would ask if I considered being a pastor, but I did not see that as my path. In looking back, I see that God used those years where I was dragging my feet to prepare me by the blessing of opportunities to learn and grow in my gifts but most importantly grow my faith to the point where what I thought was important was no longer sufficient and did not give me the joy I thought I would get. So I said ok God, I will try it your way; lead and I will follow.

Well, I found myself accepted to the Claremont School of Theology in Southern California the week of Christmas 2017 with an exception to start in January 2018 (yes within 2 weeks). I was not sure which direction I was going but I had said yes to God. Yes, for God to lead and I would follow. That first day I walked onto campus I remember calling my husband, Tame, so very excited because it felt so right that I was there. The next question was ok, I'm here at seminary, but what exactly am I working towards, Lord? You see I was not sure if I was working towards being a deacon, a local pastor or perhaps to be an elder in the church.

In that first semester I was taking an Introduction to Worship class and the final for that class required putting on a pretend worship service with a focus of one of three options: a funeral, a baptism, or Holy Communion.

I chose Holy Communion. I had to get approval from my pastor for this pretend worship service where I'd be pretending to serve Holy Communion. I could only do so on a Saturday and I had to invite friends and family so that I would have people in the church as this had to be videotaped for submission. We decided to host a family BBQ and asked our family to first join us at church for this "make believe" worship service which would be taped including the pretend congregation. I explained this was a make-believe worship

service and only a few people should come up to receive communion as it was not a real service as I could not bless the elements.

The service was underway, camera rolling, and it was time for me to move to behind the altar at our home church in Hayward. As I got behind that altar and started to recite the communion liturgy, I got this overwhelming feeling come over me with such intensity and warmth that I got emotional. In that moment it was clear to me that my call was to the Order of Elder and it was because of Holy Communion.

This because to extend Jesus' table by being able to serve Holy Communion beyond a local church; on the streets or where there is a need is something that only an Elder can do in the UMC. This was important to me because I was fenced from Jesus' table in the past. That means I was not welcomed to participate in communion in other denominations. You see I had family members who were Catholic, and Mormons and I could not participate in their communion table when I would visit. So, knowing that I could extend Jesus' table to others no matter where they were on their journey of life was so meaningful and extremely humbling for me and affirming of my call.

This affirmation came at a time when I was still not sure of the path forward related to my call. I had to trust God's leading especially when I was not comfortable with the unknown but having that experience in my pretend worship service was not only affirming but also helped me to trust God more despite me being uncomfortable with the uncertainty of my call after years of dragging my feet. Holy Communion is sacred and very special to me because it was a defining moment of clarity as part of my faith journey.

Faith does matter; our faith offers assurance that God has our best interests at heart even when the journey is not easy, that God knows what we hope for, and God holds our future and we in return learn to trust God more. Believing in something is what faith is about and our faith is a gift of God's grace that can enable us to live freely and meaningfully in this beautiful and yet dangerous world especially when we are unsure of what is to come.

As the hymnist tells us that like Abraham, "we are a wilderness wandering people on a journey of the soul. May we find our destination in our longing to be whole. Our Holy God is calling to us. With Jesus by our side"⁵ may faith, trust and compassion be our compass; may the Spirit be our guide. Amen.

ANTHEM OF RESPONSE – "A Wilderness Wandering People" W&S #3113
Listen [here](#) for a gift featuring our worship team of Lucca, Barack, and Anne.

⁵ Worship & Song Hymnal, *A Wilderness Wandering People*, #3113.

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 – “We Walk by Faith”

TFWS #2196

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

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 will be starting Friday, August 5 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.

Concert “Pandemic & Racism: What’s Going on” 8/7 & 8/14 – In support of our very own Lucca Troutman who is performing with the Afterglow Chorus for 2 special memorial

concerts on Sunday, August 7 & 14, honoring the lives and victims lost to both the pandemic and racism in the past two years. Tickets are available at <https://www.afterglowchorus.com/>.

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.