

## Worship at Home Guide



**July 5, 2020**

**14<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

This Worship at Home Guide is a supplement to our worship services.

- 8:30 a.m. Zoom based worship service.
- 10:30 a.m. Drive-In Church in the church parking lot.
- 5:30 p.m. Outdoor worship around the fire pit. Lawn chairs suggested. Bring your own dinner.

Join Zoom Meeting (Click link below). You will be prompted to enter the username/password.

[Join our Cloud HD Video Meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 840 5188 5876

Password: 903205

\* If there are technical difficulties, communication will come via email.

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**Gathering Question**

**Gathering Music**

**Opening Sentences**                      **Acts 2:17**

Remember the promise of the Lord:

God will pour out the Spirit on all flesh.

**Hymn       “Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness”**

Spirit, spirit of gentleness, blow through the wilderness, calling and free.

Spirit, spirit of restlessness, stir me from placidness, wind on the sea. (refrain)

    You moved on the waters; you called to the deep;  
then you coaxed up the mountains from the valleys of sleep;  
And over the eons you called to each thing,  
“Awake from your slumbers and rise on your wings.”

**Prayer of the Day**

Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost; to toil and not seek for rest; to labor and not ask for any reward, save that of knowing we do your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession**

God of grace, love, and communion, we confess that we have failed to love you  
With all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind;  
and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Have mercy on us as we lift our individual prayers to you...

    Have mercy on us. Forgive our sin and raise us to new life  
    that we may serve you faithfully and give honor to your holy name. Amen.

**Hymn       “Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness”**

Spirit, spirit of gentleness, blow through the wilderness, calling and free.

Spirit, spirit of restlessness, stir me from placidness, wind on the sea. (refrain)

    You swept through the desert; you stung with the sand;  
and you goaded your people with a law and a land.  
When they were confounded with idols and lies,  
then you spoke through your prophets to open their eyes.

**Scripture/Meditation** [Acts 6:1-15 and Acts 7:1, 51-60](#)

Anthem

**Hymn       “Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness”**

Spirit, spirit of gentleness, blow through the wilderness, calling and free.

Spirit, spirit of restlessness, stir me from placidness, wind on the sea. (refrain)

    You sang in a stable, you cried from a hill;  
    then you whispered in silence when the whole world was still.  
    And down in the city, you called once again

when you blew through your people on the rush of the wind.

### **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

Almighty God, in Jesus Christ you taught us to pray. Guide us by your Holy Spirit, that our prayers may serve your will and show your steadfast love.

Gracious God, you have called us to be the church of Jesus Christ:

we pray for our brothers and sisters who witness to your love...

Eternal God, you sent Jesus Christ to break down the walls of hostility:

we pray for those who work for reconciliation in our communities...

O God, you who so loved the world that you shared Jesus as a gift:

we pray for our neighbors, those we know and those we are yet to know...

Merciful God, you who bear the pain of the world:

We pray for those who are ill and those who care for the ill...

Mighty God, whose Word we trust, whose Spirit equips us to pray, we pray saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

### **Hymn "Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness"**

Spirit, spirit of gentleness, blow through the wilderness, calling and free.

Spirit, spirit of restlessness, stir me from placidness, wind on the sea. (refrain)

You call from tomorrow; you break ancient schemes;

from the bondage of sorrow the captives dream dreams.

Our women see visions; our men clear their eyes.

With bold new decisions your people arise.

Sharing of the Peace: Sharing Jesus' invitation to his disciples:

Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you!

*Resources from the Book of Common Worship and Glory to God Hymnal, PCUSA*

### **Scripture Lesson Acts 6:1-15 and Acts 7:1, 51-60**

*The Choosing of the Seven*

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, friends, select from

among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while, we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.”

What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolatus, a proselyte of Antioch. They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

### *Stephen Seized*

Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others of those from Cilicia and Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke.

Then they secretly instigated some men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.”

They stirred up the people as well as the elders and the scribes; then they suddenly confronted him, seized him, and brought him before the council. They set up false witnesses who said, “This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us.”

And all who sat in the council looked intently at him, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

### **Acts 7:1, 51-60**

#### *Stephen's Speech to the Sanhedrin*

Then the high priest asked him, “Are these things so?” And Stephen replied:

“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers. You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it.”

### *The Stoning of Stephen*

When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen. But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”

But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he died.

### **Questions for Reflection and Discernment**

1. What questions do you have for Luke as the storyteller?
2. Jesus and the disciples as storylivers?
3. What word or phrase catches your eye/ear in this story?
4. What do you make of this story? What seems plausible? What is challenging?
5. There is disagreement in the midst of this community. How is it successfully addressed?
6. How did Stephen go from “waiting on tables” to doing “great wonders and signs”?

### **Interpretation of Acts**

Something there is about religious communities that makes them among the most conserving and traditionalist groups within a society. Today’s clerical vestments were the clothing of everyday Romans of the fourth century. Contemporary ecclesiastical (church) terminology is replete with strange words from dead languages. The church’s traditionalism may be partly ascribed to the church’s need to conserve what is true, to remain faithful to the truth once received. We have seen in the speeches in Acts the gospel proclaimed through remembrance of past promises to Israel. The Pharisees and Sadducees on the council are only doing their duty in protecting the faith of the ancestors from destructive innovation. But in their effort to conserve what is true, they, like Jesus’ critics before them, have missed the truth.

In contrast to the council the Spirit-led community is ready to move in order to remain obedient to the Spirit. A new challenge has arisen within the community. The community is multiplying and new organization and leadership are needed. The “Hellenists” (probably, Greek-speaking Jews of the diaspora (those from areas where Jews had dispersed from Jerusalem and Judea)) feel that their widows are being neglected in the daily distribution of goods. There was a long tradition of care of the poor within the synagogue, and Christians continued this practice. But distribution has become unmanageable.

In saying “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables” (6:2), the apostles are not disparaging such work; they were taking decisive action so that this

necessary social (and liturgical?) administration might be assured—even though their words imply that the task of preaching is a primary apostolic duty. Although Luke does not use the term “deacon” for those who are selected to serve in the table fellowship, it may be that Luke is accounting for the origins of a diaconate. Hands are laid upon these new leaders—a gesture of the bestowal of authority and power taken from Judaism.

A few conclusions can be drawn regarding leadership within the community of the Spirit:

1. Leadership within the church arises from the community’s utterly necessary functional needs;
2. Leadership arises from “below” not from “above: leaders arise from the needs of God’s people for guidance and service;
3. The ordained ministry (as it evolves in the church) in its present form is an adaptation of the church to its leadership needs.

Acts 6:1-6 shares how the early church demonstrated an admirable ability to attend to the essential and to follow the leading of the Spirit and to respond creatively to new challenges. Acts 7 shares the consequences for Stephen of the Spirit’s leading in his life.

-- from *Acts, A Bible Commentary For Teaching and Preaching*, William H. Willimon

### **Meditation on Acts 6:1-15**

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! Blessings in God’s name on this fourth Sunday after Pentecost, or the 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time. We have entered the most extended time in the church year, the time referred to as Ordinary Time. It is called Ordinary Time not because it is a time of low expectations but because it is a time that does not have a holiday, like Christmas or Easter, or a specifically devoted season, such as Advent or Lent as its context. It is a season of growth and the liturgical color is green. Given that this is a time of growth for all of us as we continue to adjust to the new normal brought on by Covid-19 and the societal unrest in our land, for the near future we will be listening to and reflecting on stories from the Acts of the Apostles, overhearing how the early Church found her voice as she witnessed to what God was doing through Jesus.

It is easy to overlook the fact that this story from Acts reflects a time of crisis. Crisis is a word that tends to have a well-earned negative connotation to it. And yet, crisis is not simply about danger, it is also about opportunity. The community of folks who identify with Jesus as Messiah, or Christ—God’s chosen one—are increasing rapidly in number. Within this growth is found persons who are primarily Greek speakers as well as those who would have spoken Hebrew or Aramaic. Following traditional Jewish custom, the customs the original disciples, as Jews, would have been very familiar with, those who are most vulnerable within the community are to be cared for, widows and children being the traditional categories. Here we are told that the Greek-speaking widows are not receiving the food that they need, and the disagreement pitting them

against the Hebrew/Aramaic-speaking members of the community has become known within the community's leadership.

We're told that "the twelve," here not identified as "the apostles," called together the "whole community of the disciples" and named the challenge: there was a need for additional leadership within the community to respond to the increasing demands and responsibilities in their midst. Seven men, and here they are all men, are chosen by the community to be set apart for this leadership and serving opportunity. These persons are to already be members of the community and they are to be "men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom".

These have been general guidelines that the Church has followed for most of two thousand years: the leaders of the community have been mostly men (we began to ordain women as deacons and elders and later ministers of the word and sacrament in the 1950s), they have been persons of good standing credited with having wisdom, the wisdom that comes with age if not otherwise identified. In the Presbyterian Church as well as other faith communities, we have taken the word "elder" to reflect one's age as much as a title.

Those considered and nominated for leadership were expected to be persons of God, of course, for they were members of the church, after all. With age came experience in the worlds of family and business and the world. Election as a deacon was often understood to be a prerequisite to being elected as an elder, for instance, and the criteria for consideration was often as much civic related as faith related. One bided one's time, "waited on tables" so to speak, working while waiting one's "time" to serve.

The story presents some with an uncomfortable thought: that the idea of "waiting on tables" was somehow less important than "prayer and serving the word" as stated by the twelve. The implication of this thought undoubtedly led to it being easier to nominate women to serve as deacons rather than elders—ruling as well as teaching—for many years.

Let us sit with the discomfort for a bit, rather than trying to explain it away, and as we sit, reflect on how such texts have shaped individuals and communities through the years. And let us also remember Jesus who is on record as saying that it is better *to serve* than *to be served*, to be the one waiting on tables rather than the one seated at the table. It is another example of how Jesus challenged the norms of his day and, if we are willing to be honest, the norms of our day. Who, after all, does not want to be served?

And yet the challenge presented in this vignette from the early church is that there are persons who need to be served something important: food. Implied in the text is the understanding that nothing should stand as a barrier between equality and unanimity in this faith community. It is that important. It is that necessary. And as a result, seven (a holy number) men are identified and

set apart for the work by being prayed over by the twelve who lay their hands upon them. For those of us who have been ordained for service of any kind in the Presbyterian Church, the experience of being prayed over while having hands laid upon us is a memory that holds fast. Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus are the ones identified and set apart for the work. We will hear stories involving Stephen and Philip and their work, the others are not heard from again.

And, interestingly enough, what we learn about these two are not stellar stories recounting how efficiently they were at distributing physical food, but food of a more metaphorical kind: they too become servants of the word. Stephen, we are told, is a man “full of grace and power, (who) did great wonders and signs among the people”, signs and wonders that attract the attention of persons in power who challenge him. Stephen proves to have been a good choice of the people, as an evangelist if not a table waiter, especially when it comes to him manifesting his embodiment of being “full of the Spirit and of wisdom.” Stephen is portrayed as a witness—the word ‘martyr’ in Greek—to what God has done in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, or Jesus the ‘Nazorean’ (from where one of our sister churches on Jefferson Street taken their name). As chapter seven of Acts shares, Stephen is fully a martyr, he is killed as a result of his witnessing. Is there another outcome possible to witnessing short of death? The answer is that, for most of us yes, for others, no.

Stephen is an example of one of the others. His story is shared as an example of not only early church preaching but of the crises that the early church faced. The crisis that introduces us to him is real: persons who are vulnerable are being neglected. The crisis that leads to his death is real: he has come to understand that because of what God has done in the person of Jesus the world has changed and those who wish to be children of God must change and be changed as well. This crisis is the meaning of the cross: hope or despair. Stephen answers in a hopeful way with his life as a faithful witness for all. Amen.