

Northway Christian Church

Beyond Sunday

A Worship Guide for Energy, Engagement and Enduring Change

Eastertide Worship: Dare to Dance

Use this guide as a weekly tool to reflect more fully on our worship in the days beyond Sunday. Each week in Eastertide we will have two lectionary texts and an element of dance to enhance our faith as we make our way beyond the cross, and toward Pentecost. Light your Christ Candle and say the opening prayer each day, then focus on the spiritual reflection for the current week. Each week questions will be posed for pondering; sit with them and reflect on these questions, journal on them to go deeper. This guide is offered to provide some support for engaging and energizing in your spiritual formation beyond Sunday; may it bless your journey and result in enduring change.



Light your Christ Candle

Pray

Dear God, we come seeking you and desiring to deepen our faith in formation through these reflections. As we move into and through this Eastertide season, guide us to experience more of you, more of your peace, more of your presence, more of your desire for us. Help us to hear your voice as we read your word. Open us to what you would have us to know. Make us new, renewing us day-by-day. Hear our prayers as we lift those who are both near and far, those who you have laid on our hearts and brought to our minds. We place our faith and rest our hope in you, knowing Christ is with us, Christ is in our midst. Amen.

Reflections Beyond Sunday:

Week of April 11, 2021

Scripture: John 20:19-31; Acts 4:32-35

Element of Dance: Body

In worship this week we Dare to Dance: Freely. The element of dance in focus is the body, which answers the question of who is dancing. For dance to happen, there must be a dancer. The one dancing is an essential element of dance. And we as followers of Christ have essential elements to consider when it comes to the body: who are we; who are we following; and who are we dancing with? The lectionary text for Sunday tells us something about the importance of the body as our faith tradition was being established. In the Gospel of John, we find the disciples locked away in the house they are meeting in. They are afraid of those who would persecute them. It is here that Jesus appears among them in bodily form. He shows himself post-resurrection so that they would believe and know who he is. Thomas missed out on the first appearance there in the room, and refuses to believe the others saw Jesus, until he can see him and touch Jesus's body, feeling the holes where the nails punctured his hands and placing his hand where the sword pierced his side. Jesus does return a few weeks later and allows Thomas this bodily experience. Why would Jesus do that? What is it about the ability to touch that allows Thomas to believe? What about those who believe, yet never got to touch and see? What about each of us? Can we still dance with Jesus in full belief, having heard only the testimony of others that indeed Jesus did stand bodily among them?

What is the response of that first body of believers having seen and been in Jesus's presence? We discover in Acts that the first church came to be a connected body of believers who cared well for one another, generously giving what each had so that no one went without. They sold property and shared the proceeds freely with one another. They dared to dance freely with one another in their community. How did they learn those dance moves and what might we learn to carry forward into our own community? The generosity they showed to one another created the body of Christ in that first church, they were one with one another and one with Jesus, as he prayed they would be before Good Friday. That same prayer is still calling us to join in and dare to dance freely. How might you respond this week?

Week of April 18, 2021

Scripture: Luke 24:36b-48; Acts 3:12-19

Element of Dance: Action

On Sunday we were invited to Dare to Dance: Join in. The element of dance we explore is action and the question we answer here is what does the dancer do? How does the dancer move? As Christians, who we are in Christ is largely tied to how we move in life. The lectionary text shares Luke's take on the sacred story John's Gospel shared last week. We learn a little more about Jesus's actions when he stood among them in the room that first time. The disciples were terrified, and Jesus acts to calm and assure them it is indeed he who is with them and that he was not a ghost. He shows his hands and feet and even asks for something to eat. He wants to be sure they understand that he is physically present there with them. Then he begins to teach them, opening their mind to understand the scripture. He helps them to understand who the disciples are in him and what they are to do. The disciples are to proclaim repentance and forgiveness in Jesus's name, (Luke 24:47). They are to do this as witnesses of all the things they saw that fulfilled the "law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms," (Luke:24:44).

The Book of Acts shows us the actions that took place as a result of the call Jesus places on the disciples. We find Peter healing in the name of Jesus and teaching the witnesses who wonder in bewilderment about the things they are seeing. Peter goes on to do as Jesus instructed the disciples, proclaiming repentance and the forgiveness of sins. As disciples today, does Jesus's teaching in Luke apply still to us? Are we called to act in accordance with his teaching? Is it ours to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins as witnesses of all that was fulfilled in the Gospels and through Jesus? How might you dare to dance and join in this week?

Week of April 25, 2021

Scripture: John 10:11-18; Acts 4:5-12

Element of Dance: Space

This week in worship we Dare to Dance: Dare to be Led. Space is the element of dance we are exploring, answering the question of where the dance is moving. The Gospel text tells us something about the space we occupy as followers of Christ, who is our good shepherd. By knowing who we follow, we find ourselves in safe, protected spaces with one who has laid his life down for us and cares for us. We are protected from the one who would seek to snatch us away from Jesus, (John 10:12).

We are part of one flock with one shepherd, (John 10:17). We know the shepherd's voice and can follow where he leads - if we will listen. What gets in the way of your listening and willingness to be led? Are you occupying a space where you sense the presence of your good shepherd, and do you feel well cared for as a result? Read Psalm 23, if you need to reflect further on what it means to have this good shepherd leading your life and consider the spaces you are invited to encounter as you consent to follow the shepherd's lead.

In this week's passage in the book of Acts, we find Peter pointing once again to who he is following and who is leading his actions. He teaches the leaders and the scribes how to recognize our good shepherd the one through whom Peter is healing the sick; this one they rejected who "has become the cornerstone," (Acts:4:11). Peter proclaims what is to be gained under heaven in the name of Jesus. This space we occupy as followers of Jesus brings salvation. This is a space that offers healing and transformation. Have you encountered the power of the name of Jesus in your life or when you have proclaimed it for others? How might you move more fully into the space that Peter occupies by letting Jesus take the lead as your good shepherd?

Week of May 2, 2021

Scripture: John 15:1-8; Acts 8:26-40

Element of Dance: Time

In worship on Sunday with Dare to Dance: Guide My Steps, we encounter time as the element of dance we are discovering. Time answers the question of when and in what manner the dance occurs. Our lectionary texts for Sunday leads us to discern what it means to abide in Christ with the Gospel account and how this played out with Philip in the fast-paced story in Acts. The speed of the events in the encounter in Acts, moves the story (and Philip) quickly through time.

The Gospel of John shows us how we are meant to stay connected to Christ as a branch is connected to the vine, so that we can bear good fruit. We are given the choice to abide in Christ and bear much fruit or risk being discarded as we wither without the connection to the vine. How well are you connecting to the vine and have you found that without Christ you are able to do much of anything well?

In this week's Acts text, we see the impact of the act of abiding in Christ and the speed with which the fruit in this instance is borne. Philip abides in Christ and is called to help the Eunuch get grafted in. He is quickly moved to where the Eunuch is reading the scripture.

Philip proclaims the good news, the word is received and the new disciple asks to be baptized in water they happen upon, as soon as it is done, “the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away,” (Acts 8:39). We are not told what becomes of this new believer, however we learn that Philip’s work continues where he is moved along to. What do you suppose is the impact on the one whom Philip teaches and baptized? How has your life been impacted by another who is abiding in Christ? How is your continued abiding in Christ impacting others still? What might you do this week as a continuance of this abiding and fruit bearing work?

Week of May 9, 2021

Scripture: John 15:9-17; Acts 10:44-48

Element of Dance: Energy

This Sunday is Mother’s Day and in worship we will discover the Dare to Dance: Dance of Life. The element of dance associated with this week is energy, which answers the question of how we dance and in what ways we move. The gospel passage continues the teaching on abiding in Christ and reveals the outcome it has when we do so. The story we find in the Book of Acts shows this outcome in practice as Peter moves in the dance of life with a family, whom he is directed to accompany in their learning to abide. Peter’s initial energy is an experience of tension that eventually gives way to a freedom of movement when he goes along with the call and prompting of God. The Gospel of John teaches that our abiding is an act of love, lived out coming from the love of the Father, to the love Jesus has for us and the love we are commanded to love one another with. We are to love as we have been loved by Jesus. We see what this means in the Acts text this week when Peter chooses to love those, he initially is not so sure about. He is commanded to love them and he goes. When he gets to the house and is “speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word,” (Acts 10:44).

In response to the outpouring of the Spirit on them, Peter asks “can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” (Acts 10:47). He advocates for the them and they are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. This is an act of love and will allow the new believers to continue this dance of life and love to others beyond them. Have you found yourself a reluctant dance partner when God had called you to add someone to your card? How did you resolve the tension and were you able to be released to move freely to the beat of God’s call? If you have not encountered this kind of tension, watch for opportunities to share the love of Christ and see if you don’t feel yourself pulled in directions that are not always familiar and can sometimes feel uncomfortable, at least at first.

Week of May 16, 2021

Scripture: John 17:6-19; Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

Element of Dance: Body

This week in worship we consider our role in Dare to Dance: Your Part. The element of dance we return to for our reflection is the body. Who is dancing and who is being called to be a part of the movement? In John's Gospel we learn more about the relationship of Jesus and his followers and how he was given those he calls his own and in turn how he gives them back to God. And in Acts we find the twelve being restored as Judas "the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled," is replaced (John 17:12).

The body of Christ is made up of us, and Jesus assures us we belong to him and God and not to the world. Through Jesus our joy is to be made complete in the world. We are protected and sanctified in the truth, and that the word of God is the truth. Jesus loves us and cares for us and gives us to God for our good, and says he is glorified in us. This relationship with Jesus Christ and God with us is ongoing. In Acts we find the circle of the initial twelve continuing as well, with the selection of Matthias over Justus through the casting of lots. The selection of Matthias restores the body of the twelve.

The work of the Spirit is including in Matthias's selection through the casting of lots. Just as Jesus selected the first twelve, the selection is offered to him once again with this process. While the selection is left to the Spirit and the falling of the lots, it is ultimately up to Matthias to do his part and accept the call. How have you experienced a proverbial falling of the lots in your Christian vocation and call? Have you found yourself selected and had the choice to do your part? Has such a call come as a surprise and if it has, did it seem to have the hand of God in it as it played out? How are you experiencing the call of God at present? What is uniquely your part to do now? If you are unsure, spend some time in prayer this week and ask God to show you where and how you might cooperate with God in the work that is happening all around you.

Week of May 23, 2021

Scripture: John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15; Acts 2:1-21

Element of Dance: Action

We conclude the season of Eastertide at Pentecost this Sunday with Dare to Dance: Together. The element of dance we recall for our reflection this week is action. Action seems a fitting response to the advocate that was released on the body of Christ through the coming of the Holy Spirit to the church. In the Gospel of John Jesus shares that the advocate will come and can only come if Jesus returns to heaven, (John 16:7). And in Acts we find the passage that describes the bewildering and amazing scene when the Holy Spirit came “like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting,” (Act 2:2).

The coming of the advocate is to our advantage as Jesus puts it. He tells us that there are many things he wished to share with his followers, but they could not bare it all - just yet. With the coming of the Holy Spirit, Christ’s truth and thereby God’s truth would be offered to us. A truth that confounds the world, proving “the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment,” (John 16:8). In the account in Acts we see how the actions that come about by those filled with the Spirit confound those who witness it, and how their initial assessments of what is happening is proven wrong by the bold preaching of Peter. Jesus said his followers would be advantaged by the coming of the advocate and we see the impact the Spirit has on Peter in particular, but he is not alone. The power of the Spirit poured out in those first believers is still having effect through us as in-filled believers and witnesses of the Gospel of Christ.

This week reflect on the impact that Pentecost has had on your life. Consider the ways that the Holy Spirit as advocate can offer a boldness to your witness and service to Christ as you continue the work of Christ in the world. How might you prove the world wrong about its thoughts about sin, righteousness and judgment, and the ways that the love of God fits into those aspects of our lives together in Christ? We have a powerful advocate within; we need only seek and listen to discern the wisdom that is available to us through the Spirit within us - this gift of Jesus Christ sent to us, which we celebrate with Pentecost.

Act

What might you do to as an act of devotion today? How can you bring the reflections you have engaged in these past weeks and the presence of Christ into your everyday activities today? Is there a movement that is emerging from your Eastertide journey you could share with another to encourage them?

Share

Let us know about the ways you are experiencing God's presence during this Eastertide series. Have you discovered something new through your spiritual reflection and dance? Do you have questions? Would you like to explore something further? Are you feeling called to something new, could a pastor to act as a partner in faith to process it with you? Let us know how we can aid you in your journey as we commit this year to engaging with energy while seeking enduring change.

Email us at mail@northwaychristian.org or call us at 214-361-6641, we look forward to hearing from you.