



## **WORSHIP AT HOME**

*with UCC Westerly  
during the Covid-19 outbreak*

**July 5, 2020  
Independence Day Weekend**

□ Create a small worship space in your home anywhere. Add a candle, a bible and perhaps a small summer bouquet!

□ If you are doing this on your own, settle into your worship space around 9:30am on Sunday and begin. Make your list of prayer concerns. Then sit in silence and let your mind calm down. When you reach the Prayer Time in the service, aloud or just in your own mind, ask God to bless each of the persons and situations on your list. End with the Lord's Prayer in whatever words are most comfortable for you.

- If you are joining in the prayers during the Facebook Live broadcast, before worship take a few minutes to send them to me via text, email or Facebook message. It is helpful for me to receive them at least 30 minutes before the service begins.
- A reminder I will be streaming our worship service on Facebook Live beginning at 9:45am. You can still access it even if you are not on Facebook by going to the church website, [www.uccwesterly.org](http://www.uccwesterly.org), and clicking on the Facebook icon on the homepage.
- Since we will be celebrating the sacrament of Communion together though scattered you will need to have your own Communion elements ready. The kind of bread or cracker and juice is your choice!

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### **Light your candle as a reminder of God's presence with you**

#### **Gathering Music – "America! America!"**

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#### **CALL TO WORSHIP** [From Psalm 100]

May a joyful noise to the Lord, all the lands!

Know that the Lord, who made us, is God. We are the people of God.

God's steadfast love endures forever; God's faithfulness to all generations.

#### **OPENING SONG – "America the Beautiful"**

[WORDS: Katharine Lee Bates & MUSIC: Samuel A. Ward, Public Domain. Reprinted under ONE LICENSE#A-734569]

1. *O beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain;  
For purple mountain majesties above the fruited plain!  
America! America! God shed his grace on thee,  
And crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea.*
2. *O beautiful for heroes proved in liberating strife,  
Who more than self their country loved, and mercy more than life!  
America! America! May God thy gold refine,  
Till all success be nobleness, and every gain divine.*
3. *O beautiful for patriot dream that sees beyond the years  
Thine alabaster cities gleam undimmed by human tears!  
America! America! God mend thine every flaw,  
Confirm thy soul in self control, thy liberty in law.*

### **UNISON PRAYER OF REFLECTION**

**Most Holy God, we give you thanks for your presence among us this morning. We thank you for the gift of your Creation; for the gift of family and friends; for the gift of stories, for the gifts of leaning and knowledge, for the gifts of questions and doubt; for the fire of enthusiasm and the wind of reason. For all we understand, for all that remains a mystery, for your loving presence in and through it all, we give you thanks and praise. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.**

### **THE CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION\***

Statement of Faith (adapted from Worship Resources, *New Century Hymnal*, #887)

**We believe in God: who has created and is creating, who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the Spirit.**

**We trust in God.**

**We are called to be the Church: to celebrate God's presence, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.**

**In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.**

**We are not alone. Thanks be to God.**

COMMUNION HYMN -- "Let Us Break Bread Together"

[CONTRIBUTORS: William Farley Smith; TUNE: United Methodist Publishing House/Abingdon Press. All rights reserved. Reprinted under ONE LICENSE#A-734569]

V. 1 -- *Let us break bread together on our knees (2 X)  
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,  
O Lord, have mercy on me.*

Words of Invitation and Prayer

Sharing of the Elements

Unison Prayer of Thanksgiving

**May we be as living loaves, kneaded and shaped by the hands of God. May we be as wine of the Spirit, poured out that others might know joy. Love be the leaven within. Love be the flavor of thought and word and deed. Peace be among us, always. Amen.**

**COMMUNION HYMN – Let Us Break Bread Together”**

*V. 3 -- Let us praise God together on our knees (2 X)  
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,  
O Lord, have mercy on me.*

**SCRIPTURE READING**

**Morning Message**

*In Search of Joy*

Psalm 30

Rev. Ruth

**A TIME OF PRAYER**

Pastoral Prayers

Silent Prayers

The Lord’s Prayer in whatever words are most comfortable for you

**OUR RESPONSE TO GOD**

Acknowledgement of Gifts & Offerings\*

*\*Doxology “Praise God from who all blessings flow; Praise Christ all creatures here below; Praise Holy Spirit, Comforter; One God, Triune, whom we adore. Amen.”*

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**CLOSING SONG – “Let There Be Peace on Earth”**

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*Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me;  
Let there be peace on earth, the pace that was meant to be.  
With God our Creator, children all are we.  
Let us walk with each other in perfect harmony.  
Let peace begin with me; let this be the moment now.  
With every step I take let this be my solemn vow:  
To take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally.  
Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.*

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**A PRAYER OF BENEDICTION –**

May you love God so much that you love nothing else too much;  
May you fear God enough that you need fear nothing else at all.

**PASSING OF THE PEACE**

**Music as the Service ends – “Trumpet Tune”**

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## *In Search of Joy*

A Message for Sunday Morning Worship with Communion  
during the Independence Day Weekend – July 5, 2020  
United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT  
Originally preached on July 3, 2016  
Text: Psalm 30

How many of you have sung, or pretended to sing, *The Star Spangled Banner*? Everyone, right? Since we all know this song which defines our national identity, let's check your knowledge of *Star Spangled Banner* trivia – just for fun. Who wrote it? [*Francis Scott Key*] Where was he when he wrote it? [*on the deck of a British warship in Baltimore harbor during the Battle of Fort McHenry*] What year did he write it? [*1814*] What year was it designated as the National Anthem of the United States of America? [*1931*] How many verses does it have? [*four*]

Yes, the *Star Spangled Banner* does indeed have four verses, but traditionally only the first one is sung. That is undoubtedly because the other three are just dreadful. Francis Scott Key was an “amateur” poet and those verses are the proof of it. I thought about reading them to you so you could get the whole feel of what he was trying to express, but I confess to an intense dislike of this song. I was never crazy about it (it's ridiculously difficult to sing) but when I recently rediscovered the racist language in a later stanza that clearly endorses slavery, that was it.

But, it's still our national anthem so let's explore a little more of its background since it is this song which defines how we see ourselves as a nation. First, it was written as a poem, not a song. It was quickly set to music in the aftermath of the battle, sung to the tune of a popular British folk tune of the time. Second, the *Star Spangled Banner* was the actual name of the flag which flew over Fort McHenry. Third, at the time it became the National Anthem, this song actually beat out other equally popular patriotic songs such as “My Country 'Tis of Thee” and “America the Beautiful.” This is because the Veterans of Foreign Wars were so upset the United States didn't have an official National Anthem that they started a petition in 1930 to have the *Star Spangled Banner* so designated. Their efforts paid off and President Herbert Hoover signed the Congressional resolution proclaiming it as the National Anthem in 1931.

So, what's up with all this thinking about the National Anthem this morning? Well, one obvious reason is that this is Independence Day Weekend and a strange one it will be this year with parades and fireworks displays cancelled. The specter of the Coronavirus looms large, causing cities and towns to cancel long-standing local events since the crowds they gather are the antithesis of the Coronavirus precautions needed. I have to admit I won't miss the fireworks myself, even though they are supposed to remind us of the price paid in battle for us to be the United States of America. This sentiment is visible in the *Star Spangled Banner's* most famous line – “And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air, gave proof through the night that our flag was still

there.” Setting aside that Key was actually describing a battle during the War of 1812 and not the Revolutionary War, this description of bursting bombs as proof that the flag had survived IS what we’re remembering through all those fireworks. We forget that, I think. It’s just fun to set off fireworks although some folks have gotten entirely too carried away with this recently. Their cavalier use belies the significance these pyrotechnics originally held in these celebrations as visible reminders that our freedom was won at a high cost, a cost that we have had to pay far too often in war after war.

I think what is so compelling about the first verse of Key’s poem is the scene it describes so vividly. Key and all the Americans with him, and in the Fort, knew that if they could survive the bombardment through the night, if they could keep that flag flying through the worst the British could throw at them, then they would be okay. They would win the battle and maybe, just maybe, those pesky British would go home. And, in fact, the war did end just six months later in February of 1815. The heroic battle of Fort McHenry did prove to be an important turning point in the birth of the United States.

Thankfully I don’t think too many of us have had to keep watch through the night for the outcome of a battle to become clear. Peter’s dad had some stories about all night vigils during World War II, and perhaps you’ve heard those kinds of stories from other veterans you know but for the majority of us, that’s not an experience we’ve had. However, I’m also pretty sure most of us have had the experience of being up all night for some reason. Maybe it was the need to pull an “all-nighter” in college to cram for finals or finish a term paper. Maybe it was the night a baby was born. Maybe it was a night, or a series of nights, when worries about your job, or your finances, or your relationship, or your health, or just life in general gobbled up every anxious moment of the darkness. Maybe it was the night a loved one was in an accident and you received that dreaded middle of the night call. Maybe it was when a loved one was seriously ill in the hospital with you keeping vigil at the bedside. This scene in particular is all too easy to envision in the midst of the current pandemic. Except the ones keeping vigil at the bedside of your loved one wasn’t you. It was a “health care hero” since visitors can’t be with loved ones at the moment. Those painful all night vigils for loved ones in this Coronavirus age have both parties facing those long nights alone, joined only in heart and mind.

Those sleepless nights, whatever the reason, are not easy to make it through. Minutes pass like hours when it’s 3am and sleep is just not possible. I remember one night when I was sitting at my sick child’s bedside in a hospital emergency room and I swear it stayed 3:05am for at least two hours. I don’t know what it is about those long, long nights when you’re waiting for something to happen, or hoping something won’t happen or just wondering if you’ll get through whatever looms in front of you. If any of this sounds familiar, then you have had the same experience which the author of Psalm 30, our text for this morning, has lived through and written about.

The Psalms are simply amazing, one of the greatest bodies of literature ever compiled. Written over a span of five centuries the Psalms are remarkable in that they retain an incredible ability to address our emotions, our concerns, our worries, our deepest thoughts about God, just as powerfully today as they did when they were first written. Composed primarily of two types of songs, hymns and laments, the psalms record the range of human emotion about life with its successes and failures, its ups and downs, its joys and fears. Psalm 30 is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving apparently written after the author has come through some sort of ordeal, most likely a serious illness which could have ended his life. It contains a series of images which repeat a theme – a going down, death, silence and then a rising up, new life and praise to God for new beginnings.

This repeating theme of a going down and rising up due to the intervention of God is a powerful one for all of us. It speaks so clearly to what we've all experienced. "I will extol you O Lord for you have drawn me up ... [you] have restored me to life." "Yes, God, I was at my wit's end," the Psalmist is saying. "I didn't know if I'd make it through all this stuff happening in my life. I didn't know if I'd make it through that long, long night but I reached out and you were there, God. You were there and I know it." This psalm was written thousands of years ago and sung by all sorts of people for thousands of years precisely to remember and celebrate that God is always there, even when God seems so far away. "Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning."

Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning. Francis Scott Key knew that to be true and we have the proof in the Star Spangled Banner. Each one of you have the proof of it too, right inside yourselves. All those sleepless nights you made it through, all those times you didn't think you'd ever be able to move forward again, but somehow you did. Maybe not perfectly. Maybe not willingly. Maybe not for any other reason than because you had to reach for that morning. But, always, always, always, you made it through that long night, that dark night of the soul, because you did it grace-fully – filled with God's grace freely poured out on you just as you are. The simple truth is life can be very, very hard. It can be so discouraging and disempowering. I know we have had an especially challenging time these last few months dealing with everything being totally upended by the Coronavirus. Worries about the illness compounded by the total disruption of every facet of life from things as mundane as grocery shopping to watching beloved local businesses fighting for survival. We have been powerfully reminded by recent events that life sometimes just beats us down so that we don't know where to turn or what to do. But God does. God always knows what to do. God always is there, ready to reach back to us when we reach out to God. The truth is, dear friends, God is right beside us through all those sleepless nights. God is right there at the bedside of the sick loved one. God is right beside you as you sit in the darkness wondering if daylight will ever come and, what it could bring when it does. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy creeps up on us as the sun crests the horizon once more. Each new day carries within it the hope of a new day, a new beginning – sometimes so tiny as to be almost invisible, but there nonetheless. We know this is true because God promises us it is. God's grace enables us to hold on even

as we search for this joy that wipes away tears and carries us into the future, one tiny step forward at a time.

May your search for joy in this time be fruitful and successful, bringing you hope and strength, courage and peace. Amen.