

Worship Introduction: "A Home for God's Light"

Welcome, beloved community.

Today we gather with the wisdom of St. Teresa of Ávila, a woman who believed, fiercely and tenderly, that God makes a home in every human heart. St. Teresa was a 16th-century Spanish Carmelite nun, mystic, and reformer whose writings and spiritual leadership reshaped Christian contemplative life. She is one of only four women ever named a *Doctor of the Church* for the depth and influence of her theology.

Teresa was two years old when Martin Luther launched the Protestant Reformation with the nailing of his Theses. She lived in a world of war and religious persecution... yet she kept returning to this truth: God dwells within us, not far away, not in some unreachable heaven, but here—closer than breath, steady as our own heartbeat.

We come today because we, too, long for that steadiness. We come because the world is loud, and Teresa teaches us to listen for the quiet voice of God inside us.

We come because she reminds us that prayer is not escape—it is courage. It is the place where love grows strong enough to move into the world.

As we worship, we step into the spaciousness Teresa describes... the inner room where God waits for us, the holy ground of our own belovedness, the place where peace begins and justice takes root.

May this hour open the doors of our hearts, and may we discover again that God is already here. And may we leave this place ready to carry that presence into every corner of creation.

Welcome to the home God builds in us.

Children's Time

John 14:1–14

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, but if you do not, then believe because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me^l for anything, I will do it.

“Where Your Heart Finds Its Home

There are seasons in life when our hearts feel restless. When the world feels loud. When the news is heavy and our own thoughts scatter like startled birds. When we long—deeply, quietly—for a place to rest, a place to breathe, a place to belong.

St. Teresa of Ávila understood that longing. She lived in a world full of upheaval... political tension, religious conflict, personal illness, and the constant pressure to be someone she wasn't. And yet, in the middle of all that noise, she discovered something astonishing:

God had made a home inside her.

And she could return to that home anytime.

She called this sacred place the *Interior Castle*—a place within the soul where God dwells, where peace is possible, where love is real, where the heart finds its true home.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled..." we are told today... "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places... I will come again and take you to myself... I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

These are words spoken to disciples whose world is trembling. Words spoken into fear, confusion, and grief. Words meant to anchor the heart.

We spend so much of our lives searching for home... in relationships, in success, in security, in approval, in the next thing that promises to make everything feel settled.

Jesus doesn't say, "Go find Me." He says, "I am already with you."

Teresa says to us today: "*You don't have to run after God. God is already inside, waiting for you to slow down enough to notice.*"

Our spiritual home is not a destination. It's a relationship. We experience it when God breathes peace into troubled hearts. It's the place where Christ walks beside us. It's the moment when the Spirit whispers courage into our ears.

Home is the presence that holds you when everything else feels unsteady.

Stephen shows us what it looks like when the heart has found its home. He stands before a furious crowd... misunderstood and accused, surrounded by violence. The ground beneath him is literally shaking with rage. But he is not

moved. We are told that he is “filled with the Holy Spirit.” And, he looks up and sees Jesus standing there... ready to welcome him home.

Stephen’s peace does not come from the world around him. It comes from the world within him. From the God who has made a dwelling place in his soul. From the Christ who promised, “Where I am, you may be also.”

Stephen is not fearless because he is strong. He is fearless because he is *held*. Even as the stones fly and the hatred rises, his faith does not waver. Stephen’s final words echo Jesus’ own words of forgiveness and mercy, words that reveal a heart anchored in divine love.

St. Teresa wrote that God looks at us with “eyes of great tenderness.” She believed that God delights in us. Delights in the “us” that we hide from others: The tired us... The anxious us... The hopeful us... The complicated us.

Or as Jesus says, “I know my own.” To be known by God is to be seen without fear. To be loved by God is to be welcomed in without condition

1500 years after Jesus and Stephen walked the earth, St. Teresa prayed deeply as she worked tirelessly for compassion, justice and the dignity of each person. She did this as she lived with chronic illness, political scrutiny, and spiritual struggle. She knew fear intimately. But she also knew this truth:

“Let nothing disturb you,
let nothing frighten you.
God alone is enough.”

These words ring true for us today. We live in troubled times and it’s sometimes hard to know which way to turn. This eternal reminder that God alone is enough is what we need to move forward in faith and hope.

This past week and later today, we have continued our discussions about who we are and what God is calling us to be. This is a bigger conversation than whether or not we become Open and Affirming. This is the time to look forward and wrestle with what it means to be truly welcoming and inclusive. If we do not radically and intentionally welcome all people, then can we say

that we are truly a welcoming congregation? Being ONA is less about who someone loves and more about how we share God's love with one another. It is about living into our motto: "Whoever you are or wherever you are in life's journey, you are welcome here."

I know some are worried about the risks of publicly proclaiming ourselves to be Open and Affirming. Stephen reminds us that our walk of faith can be dangerous... but it is always rewarding. His courage is not self-protection; it is love in action. Stephen models a life poured out for the sake of the gospel.

When Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," he is not dismissing our fear. He is grounding us in a deeper truth:

You are held.

You are accompanied.

You are never alone.

Stephen's story is a seed and we see what is growing right before our eyes. We witness a beginning that sparks the church's mission. Stephen shows us a life rooted so deeply in Christ that even prejudice and death cannot uproot it.

Teresa believed that resurrection is not just an event... it is a way of life. A daily rising. We return to the One who created us in love and remember that God's love is stronger than anything that tries to diminish us.

When Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life," he is not giving us a road map to follow. He is giving us himself... A living, breathing home where our hearts can rest and rise and begin again. And once our heart finds its home, we are called to help all of our siblings to find their own home: not in perfection or certainty. We don't need all the answers or have everything figured out.

Our heart finds its home in the God who dwells within us, in the Christ who walks beside us, in the Spirit who breathes courage into you.

The heart finds its home in the One who welcomed Stephen, the One who comforted Teresa, the One who promises you a place of our own. The One

who promises all of God's children a place of welcome, love and belonging. May it be so.

Amen.

Communion

The Invitation

"Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you. All things are passing; God only is changeless. Patience gains all things. Who has God wants nothing. God alone suffices!"

Come to this table, not because you are perfect, but because you are a dwelling place for Christ

Let us pray:

Lord of the Castle, we have too often wandered in the outer courtyards of our own lives. We have been distracted by the noise of the world and the reptiles of our own anxieties. Open the door to our centermost chamber. Remind us that our souls are made of crystal, meant to reflect your light. Soften our hearts to receive you in the silence.**

The Great Thanksgiving

It is right and a good thing to give thanks to you, the Divine Gardener. You planted the garden of the soul and watered it with the tears of our longing. Throughout the ages, you have called us to "the prayer of union," inviting us to lose ourselves in the vastness of your love.

Even when we felt like "dry wood," you remained the fire. Today we join with the angels who behold your face and the saints who walked the Way of Perfection, as we gather at the Table.

The Story

On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said:

> "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said:

> "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

The Prayer of Self-Surrender (inspired by Teresa's "Vuestra soy"):

I am yours, for you I was born.

What do you ask of me?

Give me wealth or poverty,

Give me comfort or discomfort,

Give me joy or sorrow.

Yours I am, for you I was born.

What do you want to do with me?***

Share the Meal

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Let us join our voices together in the blessed prayer he gave to us...

The Blessing

In peace, remember that the journey inward is the journey toward the neighbor. May the "Interior Wine" of Christ's presence sustain you in every trial. Amen.