

Jan. 24, 2021 Third Sunday after Epiphany ~ Service of Word and Prayer

We are using the Service of the Word liturgy this morning, from your green hymn book, the Lutheran Book of Worship, page 126. The prayers are based on Sundays & Seasons. Shut off all the distractions in your home. Enjoy the quiet for a bit – take in some deep breaths. Light your candle. May your family be blessed in this time together.

The Gathering

Greeting: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Call to Worship:

God knows each one of us personally, and God loves each one of us. We gather together and come into the presence of our Lord. We set aside our feelings of boredom, our confusion and our concerns as we stay at home. We worship today with grateful hearts and we take delight in all that we have and all that we are. We celebrate the hope that God offers to us all. Amen.

Hymn: ELW 720 - We Are Called

God has made us his people through our Baptism into Christ. Living together in trust and hope, we confess our faith.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.*
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,

and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Lord be with you ~ and also with you.

Prayer of the day: Almighty God, by grace alone you call us and accept us in your service. Strengthen us by your spirit, and make us worthy of your call, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, Amen.

The Word

The Old Testament lesson is from **Jonah 3:1-5,10**

Psalms 62: 5-12 found on page 242

The New Testament lesson is from **1 Corinthians 7: 29-31**

Please rise for the gospel lesson. *Holy, Holy, Holy, our hearts adore you. Our hearts are glad to say the words: you are Holy God.*

Bishop Greg Mohr from our British Columbia Synod brings us the message this morning. Gospel: **Mark 1:14-20**

Ominous words begin today's gospel reading.

“Now after John was arrested...” You can hear the music in the background change. There is a sense of foreboding . . . danger. Granted, these are not the first words in the gospel of Mark, but they are pretty close to the beginning. After all, we're only in chapter 1, verse 14 here. But these are the first words of this large, major section of the gospel of Mark. This begins Jesus' ministry.

Before I go further, I want to bring my greetings to all you across the ELCIC, as well as to the parishes of the Anglican Diocese of Caledonia in northern BC, and to Bishop David Lehmann, upon his invitation to share in this way for the observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Now after John was arrested..."Reading those words, you know that there is more than a hint of danger here. There is a recognition that evil, that sinister powers, are at work. There's a darkness that hangs in the air. It's a foreshadowing, certainly, for we know the rest of the story and of what happened to Jesus.

Jesus is always mindful of what he will be facing, confronting, and encountering in the months and years ahead. The gospel writers often refer to Jesus as "turning his face toward Jerusalem." (Again, another ominous statement.) Maybe John's arrest was expected; inevitable.

Not only did John confront the religious leaders of the day by using some not-very-nice words "–you brood of vipers" probably doesn't sit very well; I mean, that is going to elicit a few calls to the Bishop, I tell you, by congregational members concerned about their pastor's lack of tactfulness.

But John the Baptist also had the temerity to challenge King Herod #2. John made the unpardonable sin (from the King's perspective, that is) of challenging the King's morality. Herod not only married his own niece, which was *verboten* enough, but his niece was also married to Herod's brother at the time.

Well, John the Baptist didn't think this was an action worthy of a king and said so. He condemned Herod and Herod took offence.

And so now John is in prison and things look grim. Enter, stage right, Jesus. Jesus is from the town of Nazareth in Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is about 30 kms to the east. Jesus comes proclaiming the good news of God — “gospel.”

This is the **kairos time**, the right time. The reign of God has come near. It is at hand, right in front of you, all around you. This is God’s time, breaking in, among us, in us, through us.

“Turn around,” said Jesus. “Repent. You’re going the wrong way. The good news is here. God’s activity is among you.”

Then Jesus goes for a walk along the beach. He sees Simon and Andrew — brothers — fishing. And he calls them, to come and follow.

It’s sort of **not** how we do things when calling someone for ministry. What happened to the colloquy exams of candidates? And what of ordinations and council meetings and issuing formal letters of call?

No. Here, Jesus speaks, a word: “Come. Follow me.”

It is a word that invites us, calls us, calls us to something, calls us into something; calls us on a journey of which we cannot know the ending.

Simon and Andrew are the first to be so called. Then also, Jim and Johnny. There are more to come in this Round #1 of the Disciple Draft. But these four begin the gathering of the disciples.

Now remember what I said about the theme of the opening statement in this story — about John’s imprisonment. That is the context in which this “Call” story

takes place. It speaks of the hardships and challenges of life, and it speaks of ministry “*in spite of*” such things.

The gospel calls us, compels us, to be people of grace, to be light in this world, and salt of the earth, in spite of, or maybe *because* of the difficulties and challenges we face.

Jesus calls. Jesus does not promise a life of ease. He certainly does not promise riches and wealth. But he does promise that he will be with us, all the way to the cross and beyond.

It is this promise of grace and presence that sustains us during the dark moments of our lives.

Jesus and John the Baptist faced the reality of despotic rulers and the likelihood of imprisonment – even death. They witnessed evil incarnate, and they also saw how cheap life was and how easily people were cast aside in their society.

For us, maybe it’s not “evil,” so much as just the reality of life in this day and age. COVID-19 is laying bare the divisions in our society and the systemic injustices all around us. We see more clearly the financial inequities, the extra burdens placed upon the poor, the underemployed, those without security of housing, without secure access to food, without guarantees of work. We see those who are marginalized be even more at risk.

We see so vividly how this COVID-era has affected people’s mental and emotional health; the increasing stress and strain, the challenges many face in their relationships.

We see more clearly the fragility of life, the vulnerability of elders in care.

And yes, for many of us, for ***all of us***, there is the reality of heartache, pain and sorrow; of isolation and loneliness, and perhaps also the death of a loved one. For many people in this COVID-era, there is a renewed search for meaning and purpose; unsure of their place in this world, of what they want their future to be.

Old patterns and ways of being and thinking are being re-thought. What can be, should be, needs to be, set aside? What am I learning about this time that I want to ensure stays with me as we move forward together?

What does it mean to be kind? To be part of community? To live out our faith? To live out this calling that we have been given by Jesus?

As the world has changed around us, we are struggling with questions as to what it means to be the church in this 21st century. It used to be that we could put up a new church building and people would come and fill it. That doesn't happen anymore.

Our world today is quite different: it is increasingly multi-cultural; increasingly multi-faith; there is a strong emphasis on "personal" and "individual" faith; and where everything is "relative"; and there is a significant consumeristic approach to religion as people pick and choose from a variety of religious and spiritual practices.

In addition, religion is often seen as suspect, particularly as the radicalism of religion increases. As if these challenges were not enough, we are hearing more and more that people simply find the church irrelevant.

In light of such dramatic shifts in the world and within the church itself, it is easy to be paralyzed. We often are unsure of what it means to **be** the church and **how** to be the church in this day and age.

But in the midst of this uncertainty, in the midst of this changing culture, Christ's call to each of us remains the same. Jesus prayed for us with these words: "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." Such words are a reminder that the church does not exist for itself but that Christ calls us to be in the world. Jesus' call to us continues to re-orient us; to refocus our attention and our action.

First and foremost, his call reminds us of our **identity**: that we are claimed by God, adopted, spirited, enlivened. It is **Christ** who calls us; and it is Christ who sends us into the world . . .

Or maybe a better way to say that is: It is Christ who calls us out into the world in which Christ is already there; to join Christ in the world, walking along the seashore, serving those on the margins, challenging systems of injustice, caring for the lost, the last and the least, welcoming prodigal children, turning water into wine, and hearing that even a cup of water given in his name is big and huge and Christ-like.

Our identity informs our living; that is, our **living** arises out of our calling, out of our identity. Baptized into Christ we are called to the same mission and the same ministry to which Jesus himself was engaged. That is our calling. That is our vocation. The word **vocation** literally means a call or summons.

According to James Fowler, “Vocation is **NOT** our job, our work, or our occupation. It may, of course **include** (such things) but it should not be limited to ...one’s source of livelihood (or) identified with one’s career.”

“What is vocation, then?” asks Fowler. He proposes the following:

“Vocation is the response a person makes ... to the address of God and to the calling to (be in) partnership (with God).” “(It) involves the orchestration of our leisure, our relationships, our work, our private life, our public life, and the resources we steward, so as to put it all at the disposal of God’s purposes in the services of God and the neighbour.”

(James Fowler, Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian)

That is pretty heavy stuff. But what it is reminding us of, is that **because** we have been called by God, all of our life is to be lived in grace – in joyful response and thanksgiving to the grace and love of God.

Mother Teresa, among others, says it in a similar way. The story has it that when a young man asked Mother Teresa how he could know what he should do with his life, she responded, “Where the needs of the world intersect with your gifts, there is your calling.”

Jesus calls; calls us to follow, calls us to faithfulness, calls us to be like the sower, out there sowing the seed regardless of the results. The sower is all too aware of the rocks, the trodden path, the birds, the thorns. But the sower sows nonetheless.

Our job, our calling, our **vocation**, is to sow the seed, to serve and love, to worship and praise. Our calling, our vocation, recalls the words of the prophet Micah:

*“What does the Lord require of you,
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)*

“Now after John was arrested . . . “

Jesus walks beside the Sea of Galilee . . . and he calls: Simon, Andrew, James, John, me, you . . . to ventures of which we cannot see the ending by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown.

We walk forward in faith, trusting in the God who has called us by name. Amen

Hymn: WOV 784 or ELW 817 - You have come down to the lakeshore

Our Response

OFFERING PRAYER

Gracious God, receive our gifts as you receive us. Nourish us anew in your tender care, and empower us in faithful service to tend to others with this same love, through Jesus Christ our saving grace. **Amen.**

Prayers of the People by Andy Kalnins

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION JAN 24 2021

Guided by Christ made known to the nations, let us offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all people in need.

A brief silence.

For the church throughout the world, for pastors and teachers, for deacons and deaconesses, and for musicians and servers, that all proclaim the good news of God’s reconciling love, let us pray. **Have mercy, O God.**

For skies and seas, for birds and fish, for favorable weather and clean water, and for the well-being of creation, that God raise up advocates and scientists to guide our care for all the earth, let us pray. **Have mercy, O God.**

For those who provide leadership in our cities and around the world, for nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations, for planning commissions and homeless advocates, that God inspire all people in the just use of wealth, let us pray. **Have mercy, O God.**

For those who are sick, distressed, or grieving; for the outcast and all who await relief, *especially those we name in our hearts*, that in the midst of suffering, God’s peace and mercy surround them, let us pray. **Have mercy, O God.**

For our congregations and communities, for families big and small, that God's steadfast love serve as a model for all relationships, let us pray. **Have mercy, O God.**

In thanksgiving for our ancestors in the faith whose lives serve as an example of gospel living, that they point us to salvation through Christ, let us pray. **Have mercy, O God.**

Merciful God, hear the prayers of your people, spoken or silent, for the sake of the one who dwells among us, your Son, Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

The peace of Christ be with you always and also with you.

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray **The Lord's Prayer:**

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 trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn: WOV 650 or ELW 866 - We are marching in the light of God

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you,
The Lord's make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you,
The Lord look upon you with favour and give you (+) peace. Amen.

Dismissal Go in peace. Be the light of Christ.

Thanks be to God.