

Call to Worship

Creator God,  
you call us to love and serve you  
with body, mind, and spirit  
through loving your creation  
and our sisters and brothers.  
Open our hearts in compassion  
and receive these petitions  
on behalf of the needs of the church and the world.

Prayer of Approach

Through the storms of life, O God,  
you are with your people  
in the person of Jesus your Son.  
Calm our fears and strengthen our faith  
that we may never doubt his presence among us  
but proclaim that he is your Son,  
risen from the dead,  
living for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

O God we confess that we need you.  
Whether we've had a sense of your presence our whole lives long;  
Or whether we've only just begun to be aware of you- we confess we need you.

O God we confess that we need you.  
When we experience a lot of struggles, or when we experience a lot of comfort;  
O God, we confess we need your grace.

O God we confess that we need you.  
When we are feeling strong and in control or when we are feeling lost in the storm;  
O God, we confess we need your strength.

O God we confess that we need you.  
When we feel unloved and unloveable, unrighteous and alone;  
When we feel righteous in our actions and in our beliefs,  
or in our doctrines and denominations;  
O God we confess that it is your righteousness which saves us.

O God, place us in the grip of your grace that we may receive your love, strength, mercy and righteousness -and in so receiving live by faith in your abiding presence, loving you and neighbour above ourselves.

O God we confess that we need you.  
Receive our confession, through Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Forgiveness

May the God of mercy,  
Who forgives all our sins,  
strengthen us in all goodness;  
and by the power of the Holy Spirit,  
keep us in the knowledge of your saving grace,  
that we may love one another and serve your kingdom in the world.

Amen.

Hymn *FIX YOUR EYES ON JESUS*

Words and music by Elise Kennedy

Verse 1

When our focus starts to stray. Evil thoughts begin to sway.  
And we just can't seem to pray, This is how we find our way

*Chorus*

Fix your eyes on Jesus. Take the love He gives us.  
He's the One Who saves us. Fix your eyes on Jesus.  
Fix your eyes on Jesus. Give the love He gives us.  
Thank the One Who saves us. Fix your eyes on Jesus.

Verse 2

Sometimes days can seem so long. Everything is going wrong.  
Feeling lost and can't go on. Be encouraged by this song. *Chorus*

Verse 3

Come to Jesus with your need. To His Father He will plead.  
Jesus helps us to succeed, When we let His Spirit lead. *Chorus*

Scripture Reading

Matthew 14:22-33

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.

And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Message (Note: You may want to read at least the first chapter of Jonah before you read the sermon)

A few weeks ago, we looked at this passage from the perspective of personal power and control. And how when we meet Jesus and his peace we can, by faith ... or by necessity (as in Peter's case) let go of personal control and rest instead in the grip of Jesus' grace.

I focused my message on personal power but there was more to the story than this. I left the message with the suggestion that when Jesus enters a community as the source of power and control then the community receives peace from the storms.

Yet a community is never itself in isolation from other communities and even when a community finds peace within itself how will it respond when it encounters another community?

For example, in chapter 12 of Matthew's gospel, the community around Jesus is constantly under threat. The disciples are constantly harassed by the Pharisees. They are accused of being Law breakers when in their hunger they pick grain on the Sabbath. They witness their leader Jesus, being accused of being a messenger of the devil when as he casts out demons.

Yet when we get to chapter 14, the wider setting of stories in which the account of Jesus walking on the water takes place, we see a total reversal in power dynamics. You may remember in the story of the feeding of the 5000. At the beginning there were definitely two communities in that story, bringing up issues of inclusion and exclusion.

In that story of the feeding of the 5000, the disciples feel they are in the inner circle. 'Send the crowd away' ... say the disciples, 'it is too much to feed them'. As his chosen followers, they feel possessive of Jesus; they are the inner circle. They know that to be close to him is to be close to power. They know that to be close to him is to be close to control.

He is the Lord of Sea and Sky.

Communities like individuals are susceptible to power dynamics.

And this is the angle that I want to look at this week. The sense of a community's power.

So let's go back to the story of Jesus walking on the water.

One of the things that struck me about the passage -something that I had never noticed before was its similarity to the story of Jonah. At first the connection was evident to me because of the ship and the storm and the fear. But when I looked beyond the events of the two stories I saw a lot more

connections between these stories in terms of a community's collective power; the power of being an insider.

When I was a kid, I always thought the story of Jonah was about a fish ... and how running from God is futile. It isn't that these facts aren't true, but the heart of the story of Jonah is God's heart for redemption. Even the redemption of the enemies of God's people, in Jonah's case the people of Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire and they were the international bullies of the day. They would eventually destroy the Northern Kingdom of Israel ... and exile Jonah's people.

So when God called Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach grace through repentance Jonah didn't want to go. Why? Because he didn't like the people of Nineveh but neither did he want to admit that God could forgive his enemies. What a total loss of power it is to think that your God could love people outside of your community and love even the people you dislike or in Jonah's case, the people you despise.

When Jesus called Peter out of the boat, it was about power for Peter. But remember in that moment of searching for power and control, he forgot all about his friends back in the boat.

When Jonah was called to leave his community and go to the people of Nineveh, he didn't want to share the favour of his God. That represented a loss of power for him. He believed God only loved his people. The people who looked like him, believed like him and were like him.

Yet, other than the image of sinking into the water, this is where the similarities between the two main human characters ends. Peter and Jonah are similar only in that their weakness is the quest for gaining or maintaining power. The real similarities in the stories is what happens around them.

When God delivers Jonah to the whale and Peter back to the belly of the boat, there are two things that happen that are exactly alike in the two stories.

The first is that a sense of peace overcomes the two communities, that is the foreign sailors in the story of Jonah and the community of Jesus in the story of Jesus walking on the water.

The second similarity is that that two communities both begin to worship God that has offered them peace and grace. At the end of chapter 1 in the Book of Jonah we can read:

Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. Then they cried out to the Lord, "Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased." Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. ***At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.***

When Jesus and Peter re-enter the boat this is what happens: When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ***And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."***

As I said, when I was small, to me the story of Jonah was about a giant fish and our inability to hide from God. It isn't that these are not truths in the story, but like most storms and trials they are simply just distracting us from the true point of the story: God's mission to gather all to himself.

The two stories are about God's mission and how Peter and Jonah desire to remain insiders to power block God's mission to the world.

In my mind, the Christian ought to pay careful attention to two stories in the Old Testament, the Books of Jonah and Ruth. Why? Because they are the two stories of the Old Testament that more than any other, reveal how God's love is not limited to just one group of people, but how God's heart is desperate for all to be gathered to him. God's love is not limited to Jonah or Peter. God's love is not to a single nation or a single community of disciples -but the human quest to control God's powerful love -the desire to control who God might love, works against God's mission to the world.

Peter had experienced being an outsider. The minute he felt like he became a Jesus insider, he wanted to control who Jesus loved. More love for me, I guess, thinks Peter. And Jonah, is the same. More than how much he hates the people of Nineveh, he wants to control who is an insider to God's forgiveness and who is not.

So the hard questions for us to ask ourselves is how does our own place as insiders in the community of Jesus, inhibit or even prevent God's mission from going forward? What powerful things are we holding onto that work against the power of God's transforming grace ... from going forward into the greater community of faith?

In what ways have our hearts and minds and souls been closed to reaching out, because we are holding on to power, instead of being held in grace?

As Jesus chides Peter saying: "You of little faith, why did you doubt?", is the real source of doubt in fact our lack of faith in how much room ... is in the heart of God for salvation?

The final comparison is how the two main human characters end up. Jonah ends up being bitter sitting on a hill outside the redeemed city of Nineveh, being angry about a plant. Peter goes on to suffer and die for his great belief in how big is the love of God -even to those who are not in his immediate community.

The final hard question for this passage is then: How much more does each one of us need to let go of fear and power in order to play a greater part in God's mission the world?

Prayer for the Offering

Lord, you have given us so many gifts over the years.  
We thank you for watching over us and guiding us.  
Thank you for your faithfulness and for promising never to leave us.  
Now we offer to you what you have given us;  
Use us and these gifts to help others know about you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Prayers of the People

O Holy Trinity,

In gratefulness,  
we come together to offer our prayers of Thanksgiving;  
In our common need we come offering our petitions.

ALL: O God, hear our prayers.

God, our Creator, we bless you for all the good gifts you give:  
For the wonder and beauty of the world,  
For the glory and majesty of the daylight hours,  
For the depth of a night's dark rest and for the brightness of the stars and moon,  
For the patterns and seasons and which give familiarity and newness,  
Just as you O Trinity, are both always familiar and always new ...

O Lord of all, we pray our thanksgivings:

ALL: O God, hear our prayers.

O Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, we bless you for the peace, help and healing you send us:  
For the immediate help we receive from doctors, nurses, first responders, police and firefighters we  
give you thanks and mark their sacrifices.  
For the now and eternal peace, help and healing you send us in Jesus Christ,  
we return thanks and offer our peace in return to You, O Trinity ...

O Lord of all, we pray our thanksgivings:

ALL: O God, hear our prayers.

O Holy Spirit, for the passion, hope and courage that you give us,  
the passion for justice and peace,  
the hope you give us in reconciliation and for reconciliation,  
for the courage to participate in your mission of Good News,  
for the fire that wakes us from our complacency,  
and discomferts us from our comfort,

O Holy Trinity, for your companionship on the journey, we pray our thanksgivings:

ALL: O God, hear our prayers.

O God our helper, hear now our petitions:

That we may help bring peace to the environment,  
That we may help to bring peace to our neighbourhoods,  
That we may help to bring peace among communities and people.

O God we need your help.

O Lord of all we pray our petitions:

ALL: O God, hear our prayers.

O God our healer, hear our petitions:

That those who are sick may receive strength and wholeness,  
That those who are dying may receive the assurance and comfort of your love and peace.  
That those who are persecuted may rest or unrest in the promise of your deliverance.  
That those who need to hear that their lives matter and that they are loved by you,  
may they be met by the dusty feet of those who bear Good News.

O Lord of all we pray our petitions:

ALL: O God, hear our prayers.

O God who arrests evil, hear our petitions:

That under your mothering wings, you will hide those those who live in fear,  
That under your power persistent spirits of evil and prejudice will cast out,  
That under your grace, people will learn to forgive and receive forgiveness.

O Lord of all we pray our petitions:

ALL: O God, hear our prayers.

And we add to these, our imperfect prayers, the perfecting words Jesus gave us to pray:

Our Father, in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your Name.  
Your Kingdom come,  
Your Will be done, on Earth as in Heaven.  
Give us today, our daily bread,  
And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.  
Lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil,  
For the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory are yours,  
For ever and ever. Amen.

## Hymn #592 I the Lord of Sea and Sky

[Verse 1]

I, the Lord of sea and sky  
I have heard my people cry  
All who dwell in dark and sin  
My hand will save

*[Chorus]*

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?  
I have heard you calling in the night  
I will go, Lord, if you lead me  
I will hold your people in my heart*

[Verse 2]

I, who made the stars of night  
I will make their darkness bright  
Who will bear my light to them?  
Whom shall I send? *[Chorus]*

[Verse 3]

I, the Lord of snow and rain  
I have borne my people's pain  
I have wept for love of them  
They turn away *[Chorus]*

[Verse 4]

I will break their hearts of stone  
Give them hearts for love alone  
I will speak my words to them  
Whom shall I send? *[Chorus]*

[Verse 5]

I, the Lord of wind and flame  
I will tend the poor and lame  
I will set a feast for them  
My hand will save *[Chorus]*

The Commissioning & Blessing

O God, we are listening and watching!  
Through dreams and visions, O God,  
you broaden the horizon and hope of your people,  
that they may discover the meaning of your covenant,  
even in the midst of trial and exile.

O God, we need your strength and compassion!  
Increase the number of those who believe in your word  
so that all people may joyfully respond to your call  
and share in your promises. Amen.