

22 January 2023

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that the land where we gather for worship belongs to God, as does all of creation. We also know that this is the unceded territory of the Lkwungen and WSÁNEĆ people. As we pray, reflect, and celebrate in this place, we do so as guests lamenting the injustice in our history. We ask that the God of love and justice lead us along the path of reconciliation, bringing accountability and healing. May we be inspired to forge new relationships of respect and solidarity.

➤ *For mornings bright (verses 1 and 4)*

Call to Worship

The Lord is our light and salvation.

We will not be afraid.

Behold the beauty of the Lord!

God will shelter us on any day of trouble and set us high upon a rock.

Let God's people shout for joy!

For Christ calls us and claims us as his own.

Come and worship in unity and love; let us rejoice together!

† Gathering Prayer and The Lord's Prayer

Gracious God, you shepherd us by still waters and guide us along paths of justice and peace. You send your comfort and courage to relieve our tears and fears in the shadows of death. We offer our praise in love and loyalty for you are always with us.

Merciful God, you call us to follow your way of compassion but too often we criticize each other. You call us to follow your way of peace but too often we remain divided. You call us to trust you but too often our fears and doubts overwhelm us. Forgive us, O God, and strengthen our commitment to follow your ways. Hear us now as we join together in the prayer that Jesus taught us to say... ***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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen***

Words of Hope

God calls to us in love and forgiveness and welcomes us in with a warm embrace. Hear the good news of the Gospel. Rejoice that in Christ we are forgiven, and be at peace with God, yourself and with each other.

† Prayer for Understanding

O God, we seek your wisdom and truth in the Scriptures. Send your Holy Spirit upon us to open our minds and hearts to receive the gift of your Word. Challenge and comfort us in what we hear, and strength us to follow Jesus, your Living Word. Amen

Scripture

Isaiah 9: 1-4 [OT 638]

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined.

You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

Matthew 4:12-23 [NT 3]

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them.

Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Message

Prayer: Gracious and Loving God, speak in this place, in the calming of our minds and in the longing of our hearts, by the words of my lips and in the thoughts that we form. Speak, Loving God, as we listen for your word. Amen

Last week, Rev. Laura made the distinction between the gospels of John and Matthew. We were looking at John's account of the beginning of Jesus' ministry and today the lectionary invites us to look at Matthew's account of the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

One of the first things we see in Matthew's account is how he connects our Old Testament lesson for today with Jesus' ministry. It was Matthew's habit to find in the Old Testament something which he could use as a prophecy about every event in Jesus' life. He finds this in Isaiah 9:1 and 2. He writes, Jesus left Galilee and came and made his home in Capernaum which is on the lakeside in the districts of Zebulun and Naphtali. This was done that there might be fulfilled that which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, when he said, "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles - the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and a light has risen for those who sat in the land and in the shadow of death."

To put these verses into context we need to read backwards. We need to read a few chapters before our reading for today and we discover that our reading comes out of the crisis years of 733-732. Isaiah's world looked out to approaching hostile armies. The picture was one of deep darkness but there was still hope. The light would scatter the darkness if only the king and nation would acknowledge their helplessness and place their trust in God, their only source of strength. So in the midst of this crisis Isaiah went to Ahaz but he wouldn't listen. His response to the crisis was not to turn to God but he sued for military aid, he raises taxes, increases his defence spending, and renews the draft. In the

ways of the world, he chooses not to oppose evil with godly trust and courage. He opposes evil with evil and draws up a pact with the Assyrians. It appears that Isaiah's mission has failed but Isaiah still hold on to hope. He says in chapter 8, "I will wait for the Lord who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him". Because Isaiah was able to recognize darkness for darkness and sin as sin, he is able to recognize the great light that enters the world as divine grace.

Returning to today's Gospel, we see the arrival of Immanuel, "God-with-us". In Jesus life we see the dawning of the light of God.

When Jesus sees Peter and Andrew, James and John on the beach, he says "come and follow me". This isn't thought to be the first time Jesus met them. Remember from last week, as John told the story, at least some of them were already disciples of John the Baptist. They had probably talked with Jesus and already listened to him but in this moment Jesus challenges them to come follow him, to leave their nets behind and follow him.

These were ordinary men - fishermen - who did not have great scholarship, or influence, or wealth, or social background and probably would have been thought that they didn't have a great future. But Jesus sees in them the qualities to be good disciples.

It has been pointed out by many scholars that good fishermen possess the same qualities that could be turned into good fishermen of people. Let's look at some of these qualities.

First, a good fisherman must have patience. There's a lot of waiting involved in fishing. If they are restless and quick to move they will scare the fish off and not catch many fish. The good fisher of people will need to have patience. It is rare in the church that results happen right away. We must learn to wait and seek God's timing in everything we do.

Another trait of a good fisherman is perseverance. Fishermen must learn not to be discouraged but always to try again. It's difficult but in the church we need to learn not to be discouraged when things don't happen the way we want or as quickly as we hoped. I'm sure you've heard someone say, "oh we can't do that. We tried that before and it doesn't work". We must not give up and we must always be ready to try again or be ready to hear a new idea. Here's another saying you may have heard before, "but we've always done it this way". Maybe we have to try another way. Even the fishermen disciples had to cast their nets on the other side of the boat in order to get a huge catch.

The third trait of a good fisherman is to have courage. When the fishermen went out to sea they never knew when they would get caught in a storm especially on the Sea of Galilee. Getting caught in a storm is very risky. In the church or in our outer world there are risks when we speak out. It is not always the most popular thing to do and it may even affect our reputation or job status or even cause some waves in our families.

The fourth trait of a good fisherman is to have an eye for the right moment. The wise fisherman knows that there are times when it doesn't make sense to go fishing. They know when to go fishing and when to stay home. In the church we need to choose the right time for presenting the truth and reading the signs around us. During the height of COVID we had to learn how to worship and be the church from a distance. What a learning curve that was for all of us. And as restrictions eased up we had to learn when was the right time to welcome people back for in-person services. We also had to learn to welcome people in-person and respect that some may not come back quite yet. The church needs to always be listening and looking for that right moment.

The fifth trait of a good fisherman is to find the right bait. One fish will rise to one bait and another to another. Paul said that he became all things to all people if by any chance he might win some. The church needs to know that the same approach will not work for everyone. We need to discover different approaches to attract different people in ministry.

Our last trait of the wise fisherman is to keep out of sight. A fisherman has to be very quiet and hidden from the fish before they will bite. The same thing is true of the church. The church's ministry can't be about us. The church needs to make sure it is not worshipping their minister or church leader. We need to be more like John the Baptist and Andrew pointing the way to others and away from ourselves.

It's interesting to see how these traits for good fishing works for us in the church as well. Whether we are fishing fish or sharing the Good News of the Gospel in our community, these are guidelines for us to remember.

In closing this morning, I'd like to share an illustration that was in my devotional book this week. If you have ever tried to carry too many grocery bags at once, you will know the relief it is to reach your destination. Even greater is the relief when someone comes along and helps, removing from your shoulders the burden that may be more than you can bear. Could you have made it, or would the bags have fallen? You will never know the answer to that question, but isn't it better not to have to find out?

Often we carry burdens, whether it is at the church or at home or in the community. The Good News is that God does more than lift the yoke; God breaks it. God destroys, dismantles, and even demolishes the means of oppression. Perhaps we will find the opportunity in our own journeys not only to share or lift the burden but to break some rods of oppression as well.

Let us pray: Gracious and loving God. We thank you for using ordinary people like us to carry your message to others. Help us to be good fishermen as we meet people in our daily lives. Keep our eyes and ears open to the needs of those around us and help us to spread the Good News of your love in our families, in our church, in our community and in our world in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen

➤ *Will you come and follow me*

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Offering Invitation

Jesus called the first disciples who followed, not knowing that we would follow their example so many centuries later. We bring our gifts in Jesus' name, not knowing whose lives will be touched, but trusting that something good will come of everything we offer to God.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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Offering Prayer

God of the fishers who first followed Jesus, you have called us to follow and here we are. We offer what we have and ask you to bless our gifts. Give us the courage we need to invite others to join us in following Jesus, our friend and saviour. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers

God in whom we live and move and have our being, this week we join with Christians around the world to pray for peace and unity, and for justice and mercy in your fragile creation. We remember before you today people living face to face with war and violence, especially those places where ancient hatreds burn...God, speak to us a word of peace and embrace us with your love.

We remember before you today people living face to face with economic uncertainty, those struggling with rising costs of daily necessities, and those who have lost their jobs, their savings, their homes or businesses. And we pray for people in other regions of

Canada who face different challenges than we do... God, speak to us a word of reassurance and embrace us with your love.

We remember before you today people living face to face with discrimination and social prejudice, those who are bullied at school, at work or at home, and all those who have been made ashamed of who they are... God, speak to us a word of dignity and embrace us with your love.

We remember before you today people living face to face with illness and suffering, those waiting for diagnosis or treatment, those struggling with disability or delay in medical attention, and those who know grief or fear... God, speak to us a word of healing and embrace us with your love.

We remember before you today people of different creeds and faiths, those who seek understanding and co-operation among different religious traditions, and those who show love to their neighbours, whatever their creed or conviction...God, speak to us a word of reconciliation and embrace us with your love.

We remember before you today your whole creation and its many vulnerable facets and faces. Teach us how to care for the rips and tears in the fabric of the world you love so we may live together wisely and protect the future in our attitudes and actions ... God, speak to us a word of wisdom and embrace us with your love. **Amen**

➤ *We have this ministry*

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Blessing

Go in peace, love and care for one another in Christ's name, and may the power of Christ's cross work its way in your lives – may your eyes be open to see the light of his gospel – may your ears be open to hear his speaking – may your hearts be open to his love – and may your hands and your heart be open to give his strength, his tenderness, and his wisdom to those around you both now and forevermore. **Amen**

➤ *We are marching (repeat)*

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