

Worship at home

February 7, 2021



<https://smallboatsmonthly.com/article/rowing-rough-water/>

Call to worship:

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

Candle is lit.

For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.¹

Prayers of Praise, Confession, and Assurance:²

Creator God, Source of all life,
in you all creatures are connected
and all creation redeemed and made new.
Day by day you make yourself known to your people.
In the beauty of the heavens, we see your glory.
In the bounty of the earth, we know your generosity.
In strength for our bodies, we experience your energy.
In your word preserved in scripture we learn your way.
Delighting in all that we have seen, known, and heard,
we worship you, one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Along with our praise, we offer our confession.
At times we forget what we once knew of your love.

¹ Isaiah 60:1, 2

² Adapted from worship resource for February 7, 2021 from <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>

Consumed by worry, we forget to trust you.
Although we know you made us for a purpose, we choose our own ways.
Discouragement seeps into our hearts and we do not serve you with eagerness.
We fail to speak out against injustice in our community.
Forgive us.
Renew our energy for your purposes.
Raise us up on wings of faith.
May we walk by your light and not grow weary.
May we run and not faint.
In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen.

While it is true that we have all sinned,
it is a greater truth that we are forgiven through God's love in Jesus Christ.
To all who humbly seek the mercy of God I say,
in Jesus Christ our sin is forgiven.
Be at peace with God, with yourself and with one another.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.
His love endures forever.

Hymn #325 "Eternal Father, strong to save"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAxv3BAZhtI>

God's Word read and interpreted:

READ MARK 6:7-13, 30-53.

Rowing against the wind

1. It's probably best to not confuse the stories. In Mark's gospel there are two stories in close succession involving boats and rough weather. Mark 4 contains the first story. In that instance there was a storm; Jesus was with them; yet despite Jesus' presence in the boat, the disciples were afraid. In the story Mark recorded in chapter 6, they are not in a storm, Jesus is not with them, and they are not frightened. Not in the beginning.

Jesus has sent them across the lake while he stayed behind to disperse the crowds and to pray. In obedience, the disciples went. They soon found themselves straining against a head-wind. This struggle lasted into the wee hours of the morning. They could have turned back. They could have run before the wind back to safe harbour. They could have attempted the crossing the next morning. But they didn't. In obedience to Jesus, they pressed on. Slowly. Deliberately. With their backs to the oars.

They were straining at the oars.
But they weren't afraid.

It was only when they saw Jesus walking alongside that they then became terrified. It was only when Jesus got into the boat and the wind ceased that they were "utterly astounded."

Sometimes the English language doesn't quite do the story justice. The original Greek word was *existanto* which means, according to my research, to displace or to stand aside from.

When Jesus climbed aboard and the wind ceased, the disciples were displaced from themselves; they were beside themselves; they were out of their minds.

They had been rowing against the wind, not particularly frightened.
They saw what they assumed to be a ghost.
They then became frightened.
Jesus greeted them and climbed aboard.
The wind ceased.
And then the disciples went out of their minds.

Mark then explained that the reason they were so astounded was that they did not understand about the loaves, and their hearts were hardened.

That's a very curious explanation.

They weren't astounded because Jesus walked on the water. They weren't astounded because he stilled the wind. They were out of their minds because they didn't understand about the loaves.

2. At this point in the story, one would think that the disciples and apostles had seen enough that miracles performed at the hand of Jesus would no longer astonish them. Just before the multiplication of some bread and fish the apostles had finished a ministry tour in which they witnessed Jesus healing people through their own words and hand, without Jesus even being present! Shortly before that as they were again crossing the sea of Galilee, Jesus had commanded the forces of nature and silenced the storm! They had seen Jesus himself heal countless of illnesses and exorcize any number of varieties of unclean spirits! To say nothing of the stories about his conception and birth.

What did they not understand?

I wonder if the confusion and the astonishment was related not to Jesus' *ability* but instead related to Jesus' *willingness* to perform such feats.

3. Maybe they didn't perceive the parallels between what Jesus had done with the loaves and fish and the prophetic words of scripture. In Ezekiel 34, the prophet wrote how, contrary to the then current leaders, the true shepherd of God's people would look with compassion and would gather the scattered flocks onto green pastures. God's true shepherd would ensure the sheep were well fed and watered.

And here, we see people gathering from all the scattered towns. We see Jesus motivated by compassion. We see Jesus working through his disciples to seat the crowds on green grass. And feeding them abundantly.

Here we see yet again that Jesus born of Mary, adopted into the family of Joseph, is truly the Son of God and the true leader of God's people.

But this episode is set against the backdrop of that other leader: Herod. In Mark 6:14-29 which we skipped over, we read of Herod's orders to imprison and behead John the Baptist so that he could silence the voice of conscience and pursue his own pleasures. Herod had every ability to do great good in the world. Herod had every ability to feed all the people in his kingdom. But like other kings and other gods, he saw the people as tools to further his own comfort and pleasure.

A wonder in all of this is not that Jesus multiplied the loaves and the fish, nor that he walked on water. If Jesus is the incarnate God as these events do testify, then it shouldn't be a surprise he's able to do amazing things. The wonder is that there *is* a God who is not only able *but who wants to intervene in our lives, to partner with us in real and timely ways for our benefit and the benefit of others.*

The astounding good news is not that Jesus can perform miracles. If he is the incarnate form of the God of creation of course he can command nature! The good news is that he wants to command nature for our good and his glory!

Here we see that the ways of the kingdom of God are indeed good.

The challenge that every disciple of Jesus face is that the ways of the kingdoms of humanity are so pervasive and so embedded in our culture and mindsets that when we are tired and fighting the headwinds it is hard to see any other way. We become fixated on what we assume is the right way and our hardened hearts can't perceive the presence any other paradigm.

When the disciples saw Jesus walking across the lake, their first assumption was that they were still on their own. Jesus was back on shore. This person must be a ghost.

When they saw Jesus, they became scared.

When they realized Jesus could and was willing to provide real and timely help, they went out of their minds!

4. I came across the following story told by one Dale McKinnon in the Small Boats Monthly magazine (whose picture is the header of this worship service transcript):

I had the first difficult row of my wilderness-rowing career 10 years ago in Wright Sound, British Columbia. I was into the third week of rowing my 20' dory from Ketchikan, Alaska, to Bellingham, Washington, a distance just shy of 800 miles. Halfway across the entrance to McKay Reach I encountered swirling gale-force winds and waves coming at me from all directions. As my fear increased, my grip on the oars grew tighter. I was tiring quickly and my hands, forearms, and back ached. I knew that if I didn't regain my composure and relax, fatigue would add exponentially to the danger I was in. To reach the safety of even the nearest lee I would have to conserve energy. I kept pulling and calmed myself. I loosened my grip and soon felt my body begin to relax. As my spine became less stiff, my hips could adjust to the wild gyrations of the hull. My head no longer swayed with every

wave, and my growing dizziness subsided. My blades stopped getting slapped skyward off the tops of waves ... I could feel the water on each blade and adjust more quickly to the waves' erratic shapes.

[~https://smallboatsmonthly.com/article/rowing-rough-water/](https://smallboatsmonthly.com/article/rowing-rough-water/), accessed February 4, 2021

We still need to cross the lake.
We still need to feed the hungry.

It's not a question of what we are to do as much as how we are to do it.

How shall we row against the wind?
How shall we feed the multitudes?

The approaches the disciples proposed are those of the kingdoms of this age: send the people away to fend for themselves; spend a lot of money to procure a feast; just muscle in and "git-er-done!"

The gospel reminds us that the kingdom of God has come near. Jesus, and all of his compassion, all of his healing ability, all of his providence is near. Unlike the disciples, we can't see him with the naked eye. However, like the disciples, it is all too easy for us to assume that Jesus with all of his promises and power is but a ghost. A figment of our imagination. The subject of some good yarns.

Faith is a choice. We can choose to believe that we and everyone else has to fend for themselves. We can choose to believe that to make progress against the wind we just need to grip the oars tighter and buckle down to get to work.

Or, we can choose to drop our pride and partner with Jesus. To do the same work by his compassion and his strength.

I don't think this means solely sitting back and praying: "O God, give me compassion.... O God, give me strength.... O God, give me patience." Although that's a perfectly acceptable first step when in troubled waters.

I think it involves a little more effort. When confronted with the extraordinary task of feeding 5,000 souls Jesus told the disciples: "Give them something to eat!" When they were straining at the oars, Jesus walked alongside "intending to pass them by." He is near, able, and willing, but he never forces himself on us!

Partnering with Jesus involves recognizing when we are facing a monumental task; when we are rowing against the wind. It involves regularly returning in the privacy of our minds and heart to Jesus and his ways. It involves learning to pray in whatever way will equip us to face the daily interruptions without being disturbed and proclaim the gospel of peace with thanksgiving at all times. It involves examining our embedded beliefs which drive our thoughts and behaviours and choosing to embrace those that emphasize the nearness of the kingdom of God.

For God's glory, the health of our souls, and the good of our societies.
Amen.

Hymn #645 "Follow me, the Master said"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKLaiXK9L70>

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession:³

Jesus, saviour of the world, come to us in your mercy;
we look to you to save and help us.

By your birth, you reclaim your creation;
we look to you to save and help us.

By your life, you reorient your people;
we look to you to save and help us.

By your cross and your life laid down, you set your people free;
we look to you to save and help us.

When they were ready to perish, you saved your disciples;
we look to you to save and help us.

In the greatness of your mercy, loose us from our chains:
 forgive the sins of your people;
we look to you to save and help us.

Make yourself known as our Saviour and Mighty Deliverer;
we look to you to save and help us.

Dwell with us, Lord Christ Jesus;
we look to you to save and help us.

³ Adapted from *The Rhythm of Life*, David Adam, 103.

To you, O Lord, we come for healing,
for you alone can make us whole.

We come with the broken-hearted and broken-spirited,
for you alone can make us whole.

We come with those with broken relationships,
for you alone can make us whole.

We come with the broken in body or in mind,
for you alone can make us whole.

We come with the sinners and the guilty,
for you alone can make us whole.

We come with the weak,
for you alone can make us whole.

We come rowing against the wind,
for you alone can make us whole.

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits which you have won for us,
for all the pains and insults you have born for us.

May we know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly,
day by day.

In your name we pray,
Amen.

Benediction:

May the Lord bless you and keep you,
the Lord be kind and gracious to you,
the Lord look upon you with favour,
and grant you peace.
Amen.