

Worship-at-home

January 30, 2022

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Abundant waters and full nets



Call to worship¹:

In you, O Lord, I seek refuge;
do not let me ever be put to shame;
in your righteousness deliver me.
Incline your ear to me;
rescue me speedily.
Be a rock of refuge for me,
a strong fortress to save me. ...
O how abundant is your goodness
that you have laid up for those who fear you,
and accomplished for those who take refuge in you.
Love the LORD, all you his saints.
The LORD preserves the faithful,
but abundantly repays the one who acts haughtily.
Be strong, and let your heart take courage,
all you who wait for the LORD.

Hymn: #385 “Like the murmur of the dove’s song”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6TjaPHVsB4>
(Steven Weikle)

¹ Psalm 31 selected verses

Prayers of Praise, Confession, and Supplication:²

Almighty and everlasting One,
your power is incomparable, your majesty infinite,
and your love beyond our imagining.
You are hidden in mystery, and yet so present.
In a hectic world, you are peace and rest.
In a harsh world, you are tenderness and mercy.
In the cold and dark of winter, you are light and comfort,
and so we bring you our worship,
for you are the One who created us,
the One who redeems us,
and the One who gives us life,
our one and only God,
to whom we offer all love and loyalty, now and always. Amen.

God, whose name is love,
we confess our faults and failings,
knowing you know us through and through.
You tell us love is patient and kind,
and you know when our patience and kindness fell short.
You tell us love is never rude or selfish,
and you see the times we insisted on our own way.
Forgive us the excuses we make to ourselves when our love falters.
Strengthen us by your Spirit so that our love is genuine and reliable.

Assurance of Pardon:

God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.
As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is God's love;
as far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our sins.
Thanks be to God whose love and forgiveness are steadfast.
May we be steadfast in our forgiveness of one another.

And give thanks to the Lord,
for He is good;
his love endures forever.

Hymn: "I will make you fishers of men"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoipyRpRq4>
(Living Water North Lakes Baptist Church)

² Adapted from worship resource for January 30, 2022 available at: <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>

The Word of God:

God of wisdom, we long to hear your holy Word in new and fresh ways.

Open our ears to hear your call.

Open our minds to understand your truth.

Open our eyes to the work of your kingdom and equip us to take our part. Amen.

Abundant waters and full nets

Despite his initial rejection by his hometown synagogue, Jesus attracted large crowds as he travelled around Galilee. They were eager to hear the word of God, to be healed of their afflictions, and to be freed of their demons.

So great was the human need that Jesus began to gather and train other labourers for his kingdom work.

He started with four fishermen and a tax collector.

Listen now to the Word of the Lord:

READ LUKE 5:1-11, 27-28.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

1. The lake of Gennesaret (aka the Sea of Galilee) was famous for its fisheries. There was abundant marine life in those waters and during the night, the fish swam closer to the surface. As was the accepted practice, Simon and his colleagues had been fishing all night. However, despite the abundance of fish Simon, presumably his brother Andrew – whom Luke didn't mention, James, and John had caught nothing.

It's now daylight. The fishermen are discouraged and tired. They're cleaning their nets. And along comes Jesus who told them to go back out, and let their nets down in the deep water.

Of all the gospel writers, Luke tells us the most of Jesus' pre-ministry years. From Luke's testimony, we know that Jesus was circumcised when he was 8 days and that he stayed at the temple to hang out with the teachers when he was 12 years old. Several times Luke's gospel records that "he grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him." And then, when he was 30 years old, he began teaching and healing, exorcising demons and proclaiming the kingdom of God.

But, apart from these few instances, we don't know much of what occupied Jesus' days for the first 30 of his 33-year earthly life.

We do know that his adopted father, Joseph, was a carpenter. And people tend to assume that Jesus was also trained in his father's trade. There is one reference in Mark 6:3 supporting this assumption; however, depending on the translation, that verse could equally read that Jesus was the *son* of the carpenter and of Mary.

Whether or not he was trained as a carpenter, being raised in a carpenter's house, it stands to reason that he was more a carpenter than a fisher.

If they hadn't recognized that Jesus was more than a carpenter's son, from Simon's perspective, Jesus had no right to commandeer his fishing boat and no experience to then give instructions to these seasoned fishermen about how to do their job.

Nevertheless, Simon, James, and John yielded to his command and their nets were filled to the breaking point.

2. There is a parallel in the narrative between the abundance of fish in the sea and the abundance of people in the crowd. Luke wrote that there were so many people eager to hear Jesus that they were "pressing in on him" – just as the fish overwhelmed the boats.

The people were eager to hear a word from God and experience a tangible expression of his mercy. They needed hope. They needed reassurance. They needed healing – emotional, psychological, and physical. They needed to be caught in the nets of God's grace, mercy, and peace.

I recognize the metaphor isn't perfect – in reality, fish caught in a net are not bound to experience much grace nor peace! The focus of the metaphor is on the overwhelming need of the people, matched by the abundant fish in the water.

Last Wednesday was Bell's "Let's Talk Day" – a day devoted to raising awareness and funds to fight the stigma of mental health and to help agencies that work for mental health recovery. Several news articles have come out this week which highlight the need. Mental health is strained. Discouragement and depression are rampant. Addiction related complications, even death, are increasing. Therapists, counsellors,

psychologists, doctors, and nurses are overwhelmed by the crowds of people coming to find help and relief.

The waters are abundant. The crowds are pressing in to hear a word of God's grace and experience a tangible expression of His mercy.

The need is great.

The Lord needs workers.

3. Jesus calls disciples to learn from him and, by the internal power of the Holy Spirit, to continue His kingdom work in His name – to be the handlers of his nets of grace, mercy, and peace in our societies.

Maybe you're nodding your head right now. Maybe you agree and are trying to do your part. But maybe, like the fishers, you're discouraged and frustrated. Maybe you're tired. Maybe you feel more like the fish than the fishers; more like one in the crowd eager to hear the word of God than one of the disciples.

What Jesus asks of us is not to save the world – that's his job – but to be witnesses of and testifiers to *his* grace, mercy, and peace.

When Mary, his mother, realized that she had a role to play in bringing God's salvation to bear on human lives, she *yielded* to the power of the Holy Spirit:

Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your Word.

And Jesus brought the blessing.

When the fishermen recognized that it was the Christ who was among them – that he wasn't solely the son of a carpenter, but was in fact Lord and Master – they surrendered to his command and *yielded* to him their nets and boats:

Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.

And Jesus brought the blessing.

4. That's what this episode of Jesus' life means for us. At least in part.

When we *yield* our skills and passions in grateful obedience to the Master, *he* will make them effective to the Kingdom's goals. When we *yield* our skills and passions to

the Master, *he* will use them to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Just be careful to yield one's own gifts and not try to acquire (and then yield) someone else's!

Here we see Jesus calling his first disciples to join him in his kingdom work. He called Simon, (Andrew), James and John to fearlessly go into the chaotic unknown (the deep; the place of greatest need) and cast their nets of God's grace.

Later, Jesus would also call the tax collector named Levi/Matthew to follow him and join the kingdom work. But notice: He did not tell Levi to let down *his* nets! Levi wasn't a fisherman; it wouldn't have made sense!

Neither am I a fisher. Often this surprises people because I love water, boats, maritime folklore, and camping. I do, occasionally, enjoy recreational fishing. But I am not a fisher. I have never worked on a commercial fishing boat, as much as I love the lore! Jesus never called me to be a fisher of people. He called me, at least for now, to be an interpreter and communicator of Scripture. He called me to be a teacher of the faith. He called me to be a husband and a father. These are the boats the Master has entrusted to me. And to help me work the boats He has given certain skills, interests, and passions. These are the oars and the sails. By the careful and diligent exercise of those gifts, finding the strength and comfort in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord can then through me navigate His boats to the deep water. And there, in the place/context where my passion meets other's needs, His nets of grace, mercy, and peace will reach the hungry, thirsty, needy crowds for their good and His glory.

If I were to insist on using other people's gifts in my calling, I would meet with frustration and empty nets. I would toil all night and very few people would be caught up in God's grace for my efforts.

Jesus called Simon, Andrew, James, and John to use *their* gifts in the kingdom work.

He called Matthew to use *his*.

He calls us to use *ours*.

QUOTE 1ST CORINTHIANS 12:1, 27-30.

Our creator has given each of us skills and interests. *Those* are our “greater gifts”; *those*, not those of others are what the Master will use through us in his work of loving, healing and renewing Eden.

What are your sails and oars? What are your gifts? Abilities, interests, passions? They Intellectual or intuitive as much as physical.

What are your boats? What is the work that depends on those gifts? If you have the ability to see patterns and connect dots in history and literature, what work is enhanced by that? If you have the ability to see the finished product hidden within a pile of lumber, what work is enhanced by that? If you find great joy in seeing someone learn a new skill and apply a new theory, what work is enhanced by that? If your heart breaks at the sight of someone trying to navigate the healthcare system, what work is enhanced by that?

What are your sails and oars? What are your boats?

What is your deep water? Where is the place/what is the context in which your great passion meets the world’s great need? This is where the Master needs you.

There is a skit that used to be performed at almost every Scout camp I attended. One person would hold a flashlight like a streetlamp and another would crawl around in the circle of light as though looking for something. A scout would appear out of the darkness:

- What are you looking for?
- I lost my knife.
- Let me help you look for it.

And they would join the first youth in the circle of light to look. This would be repeated several more times. Finally, a scout would appear out of the darkness:

- What are you looking for?
- I lost my knife.
- Where did you lose it?
- Over there. (The first Scout would point into the darkness.)
- Why aren’t you looking over there?
- Because the light’s here.

Jesus didn't tell the disciples to stay within the breakwater. In the light of his presence and grace with us in the mystery of the Holy Spirit, he called them to go to the deep water where their particular gifts would have the most impact in the lives of the tired, anxious, and wounded world.

Do not be afraid. Go out to the deep water, let down *your* particular nets, yield to the Mastery of Jesus, and let him bring good news and healing to the crowds pressing in to hear the word of God.

Amen.

Hymn: "I surrender all"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2BnL_zI7uw
(Sharon Singers of the Sharon Mennonite Bible Institute)

Prayers of Intercession and Thanksgiving:³

O God, your love is patient.

We give you thanks for all those who have been patient with us,
teaching us and caring for us in so many ways.

We pray for the patience to love others as you have loved us.

God of love,

Hear our prayer.

O God, your love is kind.

Thank you for every unexpected gesture of kindness we have received.

Give us the courage to be kind to others,

serving those who seem unkind, rude, or difficult to love in these difficult days.

Remind us that each one we meet is your child,

our sister or brother made in your image.

God of love,

Hear our prayer.

O God, your love is not arrogant, nor does it seek its own interests.

Thank you for all who work to serve those who cannot fend for themselves.

Strengthen those who have lost hope and confidence in their own value.

Give us insight to speak the truth in love

and to work for change that creates opportunities for those on the margins
and respect for any who face discrimination.

God of love,

Hear our prayer.

O God, your love is not quick-tempered.

Thank you for every occasion when someone spared us from their anger.

We pray for those who are filled with anger

and for all around them who face or fear violence.

Raise up advocates for children and elders who are abused,

and rescue those who are trapped in relationships that injure and harm.

God of love,

Hear our prayer.

O God, your love bears all things; it never fails.

We thank you for those we have loved in this life

and who now dwell in the peace and joy of your presence.

Let your comfort settle on those who are bereaved or lonely this day.

We remember before you those with heavy burdens, many cares, much stress,

and those who find too little comfort and help.

Open our eyes to those in need around us

and show us how to offer support and companionship,

for the sake of Christ, our friend and savior,

who taught us to pray together:.

³ From worship resources for January 30 available at: <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: #637 "Take my life and let it be consecrated"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Of4l5bTdZ8M>
(Chet Valley Churches)

Benediction: