

JANUARY 21, 2024
THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY



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CHURCH OF CHRIST

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***CALL TO WORSHIP: (Inspired by Psalm 62)**

One: Everlasting God, our souls wait for you.

Many: You are our Mighty Rock. We will not be shaken.

One: Everlasting God, our souls wait for you.

Many: You are our hope. We place our trust in you.

One: Everlasting God, our souls wait for you.

Many: You are our refuge. We rest in your abiding love.

***INVOCATION:**

God of Many Seasons, we enter into your presence with joy and thanksgiving. We acknowledge all the ways that you meet us as we gather in your name. May our songs and prayers be a sweet sound in your ears. May we demonstrate our trust in you through both praise and lament. May our hearts yearn, our spirits stir, and our souls wait in holy hope and expectation. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: “The Summons”**

**Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don’t know and never be the same?**

**Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?**

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?

Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?

**Will you risk the hostile stare
Should your life attract or scare?**

Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

**Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean,
And do such as this unseen,
And admit to what I mean in you and you in me?**

**Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus, I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.**

***INVITATION TO CONFESSION:** God's word sometimes comes as a warning. How often we have pushed aside the words we find unpleasant. Even if we grudgingly acknowledge its truth, we like to postpone any action to change. God comes to us today, saying that our days are fewer than we think. The time for us to repent is now.

***UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**
Holy One, we can be so impatient. We have become used to instant gratification and have forgotten the holiness of the waiting. Help us to rest in your timing. Encourage us to persevere through struggles

and storms. Reveal the unfolding of your kingdom before our eyes and empower us to be agents of transformation in the world as you infuse us with new life. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

Beloved, while we wait, we have grace to love fully, pursue liberty, and seek a just world. The Holy One has given us the blueprint and invitation to the path of new life. Follow Jesus with grace and in truth.

***GLORIA:**

**Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat two more times.)
(end) One God always here. One God always here.**

SCRIPTURE LESSONS: Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Nineveh hears God's word

3 The LORD's word came to Jonah a second time: ² "Get up and go to Nineveh, that great city, and declare against it the proclamation that I am commanding you." ³ And Jonah got up and went to Nineveh, according to the LORD's word. (Now Nineveh was indeed an enormous city, a three days' walk across.)

⁴ Jonah started into the city, walking one day, and he cried out, "Just forty days more and Nineveh will be overthrown!" ⁵ And the people of Nineveh believed

God. They proclaimed a fast and put on mourning clothes, from the greatest of them to the least significant.¹⁰ God saw what they were doing—that they had ceased their evil behavior. So God stopped planning to destroy them, and he didn't do it.

EPISTLE: 1 Corinthians 7:29-31 ²⁹ This is what I'm saying, brothers and sisters: The time has drawn short. From now on, those who have wives should be like people who don't have them. ³⁰ Those who are sad should be like people who aren't crying. Those who are happy should be like people who aren't happy. Those who buy something should be like people who don't have possessions. ³¹ Those who use the world should be like people who aren't preoccupied with it, because this world in its present form is passing away.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Mark 1:14-20**
Jesus' message

¹⁴ After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee announcing God's good news, ¹⁵ saying, "Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!"

Jesus calls disciples

¹⁶ As Jesus passed alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew, throwing fishing

nets into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ "Come, follow me," he said, "and I'll show you how to fish for people." ¹⁸ Right away, they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ After going a little farther, he saw James and John, Zebedee's sons, in their boat repairing the fishing nets. ²⁰ At that very moment he called them. They followed him, leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired workers.

These are the Ancient Words revealed to us anew.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: "Security"

What is the definition of the word "security"? Webster says "security is protection from, or resilience against, potential harm (or other unwanted coercion) caused by others by restraining the freedom of others to act.

I would add that the word safety is right up there next to security.

Security is a home with heat, a roof, and food in the fridge. Security is knowing that you have or had a good job that can pay for that home, heat, and food.

When we get to a certain age it's time to seek for that job. Perhaps some of us joined our family's

business where there is security and the safety that comes with a thriving business.

We have no idea how many generations the Zebedee family had been fishing on the sea of Galilee, but it was quite likely a lot more than four. In that country and culture, as in many countries and cultures to this day, a small family business can be handed on not only through generations but through centuries. It's safe and secure; people know what they're doing. If times are hard, the usual answer is simply to work a bit harder.

But then along came the young prophet from Nazareth, and he told James and John, and their neighbors Peter and Andrew, to drop it all and follow him. And they did. They didn't stop to ask about benefits such as health insurance, pension plans, how many vacation days they would get and what shift they would work. They didn't ask "where are we going?" or "how long will we be gone?" What about their families? Did they have a chance to stop by their homes and tell their wives where they were going? Imagine what these ladies thought when their husbands didn't come home for dinner and how are their families going to survive without a breadwinner.

Only when you think about the sort of life Peter, Andrew, James, and John had had, and the totally

unknown future Jesus was inviting them into, do we understand just how earth-shattering this little story that we just heard from the Bible was and is. Leave everything you've known, all your security, your family, (and family solidarity was hugely important in that culture), and follow Jesus. Some people face that call today.

The way the author of the Gospel of Mark tells the story sends echoes ringing back through the scriptures the larger narrative of God's people. "Leave your country and your father's house", said God to Abraham, "and go to the land I will show you." Abraham, like Peter and the others, did what he was told, and went where he was sent. Mark is hinting to his readers that the old family business of the people of God is being left behind. God wants a new story to be written and is calling a new people to write it.

And the name of the story is "the kingdom of God." This was what all Israel had been waiting for. It wasn't a new piece of good advice. It wasn't a new political agenda. It wasn't a new type of spirituality. It might eventually lead to advice, agendas and certainly to prayer, but it was itself something more than all of these. It was the good (and extremely dangerous) news that the living God was on the move, was indeed now coming into God's kingdom.

And it demanded a definite response. It was “God’s good news.”

If we were to walk down the street of any town or village with any Christian background and were to call out “Repent and believe the gospel,” people would think they knew what we meant: “Give up your sins and become a Christian.” Of course, Jesus wanted people to stop sinning, but “repentance” for him meant two rather different things as well. First, it meant turning away from the social and political agendas which were driving Israel into a crazy, ruinous war. We can imagine someone saying that today in a country of ideologies are driving half the population into violent behavior.

Secondly, repentance meant calling Israel to turn back to a true loyalty to YHWH, their God. This was what had to happen before God would redeem Israel at last. The call to repent is part of the announcement that this was the time for the great moment of freedom, of God’s rescue.

That’s why it goes with the call to believe. Jesus’ contemporaries trusted all sorts of things: their ancestry, their land, their temple, their laws. Even their God – provided that this God did what they expected God to do. Jesus was now calling them to trust the good news that their God was doing something new. To get in on the act, they had to cut

loose from other ties and trust Jesus and his message. That wasn’t easy then and isn’t easy now. But it’s what Peter, Andrew, James, and John did, and it’s what all Christians are called to do today, tomorrow, and on into God’s future.

Are we today willing to give up on present securities to follow Jesus and trust God’s future?

Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Sovereign God, Living Lord Jesus, Eternal Spirit, we cannot tell what life will bring us, but we do believe that you will ever leave us, whatever comes. If sorrow comes, comfort us with the hope of glory. If illness comes, help us to bear it gallantly and to reach health again. If disappointment comes, help us always to remember that in spite of everything, the best is always yet to be. If we have to face a hard task or a difficult decision, make us sure that with the challenge there comes the power to do. If we are tempted, help us to turn to the One who was also tempted and who conquered and who can enable us to share his victory. If we are to be misunderstood and unappreciated, help us always to remember that you know us and that it is your verdict that matters.

Especially bless those who are in trouble and distress not of their own making; those to whom what has happened is beyond any explanation that

they may accept what they cannot understand; those who have been led astray by someone else, that even yet they may find a way back; those whose background and environment never really gave them a chance. Help them to rise above their circumstances and grant that we who are more fortunate may not rest until we rid this land of conditions in which no one should have to live, in circumstances in which no human being should be entangled.

Bless our world. Bless all those in authority.

Bless all whom we love and especially those from whom we are separated.

Bless each and all of us that we may follow faithfully in the steps of our Lord Jesus Christ until with him we stand before your throne, O God. Amen.

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 debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE: "Shepherd Lead" 774
Shepherd, lead, lead me in your righteousness,
Make your way plain before my face.
For it is you, God, you, God only,

who makes me to lie down in safety.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

Our communities and world rely upon the generosity of those who have received the Creator's abundance. Let us offer our gifts in the knowledge that some wait on us to act, to share, and to give.

***UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION:**

Eternal God, magnify these gifts that we return in gratitude and for your glory. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus"**

**I have decided to follow Jesus,
I have decided to follow Jesus.
I have decided to follow Jesus.
No turning back, no turning back.**

**The world behind me, the cross before me . . .
Though none go with me, I still will follow, . . .
Will you decide now to follow Jesus? . . .**

***BENEDICTION**

May the grace of God, the hope of God, and the communion of God rest and abide in you and shine through you as you arise in the world Amen.