

Order of Service for February 7, 2021 - Epiphany 5

GATHERING

Gathering Song - 532, Gather Us In

Here in this place the new light is streaming, now is the darkness vanished away;
See in this space our fears and our dreamings brought here to you in the light of this day.
Gather us in, the lost and forsaken, gather us in, the blind and the lame;
Call to us now, and we shall awaken, we shall arise at the sound of our name.

We are the young, our lives are a mystery, we are the old who yearn for your face;
We have been sung throughout all of hist'ry, called to be light to the whole human race.
Gather us in, the rich and the haughty, gather us in, the proud and the strong;
Give us a heart, so meek and so lowly, give us the courage to enter the song.

Not in the dark of buildings confining, not in some heaven, light years away —
Here in this place the new light is shining, now is the kingdom and now is the day.
Gather us in and hold us forever, gather us in and make us your own;
gather us in, all peoples together, fire of love in pour flesh and our bone.

(Hymn lyrics printed under CCLI Licence # 11411292)

Litany

P - The light shines in the night of our lives.
C - The Epiphany of God has come.
P - The Magi said, "We have seen his star in the east."
C - The Epiphany of God has come.
P - A voice came from the heavens, "This is my son, the beloved."
C - The Epiphany of God has come.
P - Jesus said to Philip, "Follow me." Philip said to Nathaniel, "Come and see."
C - The Epiphany of God has come.
P - Jesus proclaimed, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near."
C - The Epiphany of God has come.
P - The crowd was amazed, saying, "A new teaching — with authority."
C - The Epiphany of God has come.
P - Jesus said, "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came to do."
C - The Epiphany of God has come.
P - The light shines in the night of our lives.
C - The Epiphany of God has come. Thanks be to God.

Prayer of the Day

Everlasting God, you give strength to the weak and power to the faint. Make us agents of your healing and wholeness, that your good news may be made known to the ends of your creation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

WORD

Gospel Reading

Mark 1:29-39

As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." He answered, "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came to do." And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Sermon - From Bishop Sid Haugen, of the Saskatchewan Synod

In the Gospels we love The Good Samaritan story, the prodigal son story. We know them by heart. Both stories are in the Gospel according to Luke. Luke's gospel fires our imagination about a gracious God. In the Gospels, we love Matthew's gospel because in Matthew's Gospel Jesus gives us clear directions. In Matthew, Jesus tells the faith community about prayer, about love, about how to be church—even how to handle conflict step by step. But Mark. . . Mark's gospel is different.

Mark's gospel is often a puzzling narrative filled with unanswered questions. For example, as you make your way into Mark, often Jesus will heal someone and then command them in no uncertain terms to tell no one about it! Why Jesus would reject good advertising?? And do you know what? For 2000 years theologians have been wondering why he said that. Various solutions have been suggested. But we still don't know. We are not quite sure what God is up to in the story. Maybe neither was Mark.

Maybe that is why I'm so drawn to this narrative—because in fact, our lives are so much like that, aren't they? We are not always sure what God is up to in the events of our lives, of our world either. Maybe that is particularly the case in the last past year as we walk through this pandemic.

I'd invite you to turn to Mark chapter 1. As we begin, remember that the three similar Gospels, referred to collectively as the Synoptic gospels tell broadly a similar story of Jesus. Matthew, Mark and Luke all share a simple geographical order. Each gospel speaks at length of Jesus' one-year ministry in Galilee—the north province of Palestine; then tells of his journey to Jerusalem for the last week of his ministry, from Palm Sunday through Good Friday to Easter Day. So each Gospel presents a year in Galilee; then a week in Jerusalem. And each Gospel also includes a Prologue to give the readers a hint of where the story will go.

Turn for a moment to Mark's Prologue. To start with, notice what isn't there: no stable in Bethlehem, that's in Luke; no magi following the star, that's in Matthew. Mark's prologue is really brief. It is just 12 verses long and the first 8 verses are spent introducing John the Baptist. Verse 9 introduces Jesus and it does it like this:

It was at this time that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John.

That's it. Jesus just arrives a grown man from Nazareth in Galilee. He comes from Nazareth, which is to say, he comes from nowhere of importance as far as people knew—it's Jesus in blue jeans !

Then as you walk through chapter 1, he meets John the Baptist and is baptized. As the water runs down his body he hears the voice of God affirming that he is God's son and God is pleased with him. Then immediately following his baptism in verse 12, the Spirit drives him into

the desert. Notice. . .the Spirit doesn't advise Jesus to go into the wilderness. The Spirit doesn't simply guide him to the wilderness. The Spirit *drives* him in the desert where Jesus remains for 40 days and is put to test by the Satan. Why does the Spirit drive Jesus into the wilderness? Mark doesn't say.

Again, if you might be expecting a long conversation with the Satan tempting him to throw himself from the top of temple or turn stones into bread—it's not there. That's in Luke and Matthew. What does he go through in the desert? Mark doesn't say. What does the Satan say? Mark doesn't say. Just that he was driven into the lonely place and was tested for 40 days. Then this:

And afterward the angels served him.

The Greek word for served here is diakoneo, the word behind our word "deacon." The angels literally ministered to him. They served him so that he could continue the journey.

With the Prologue complete we move into the long Galilean ministry section that continues till chapter 11 when Jesus will enter Jerusalem. Mark says, verse 15, that Jesus went into Galilee and proclaimed this message:

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel.

What does the kingdom of God look like? Many groups in Jesus' time were putting forward a way to the "kingdom of God," to God's new world. The Zealots called for an armed rebellion against the Roman overlords to bring in a new world. They wanted to storm the Capitol! The Essenes called the people to withdraw from the world into a colony and follow the Scripture together and wait for God's Kingdom to break in. The Pharisees and Sadducees each had a plan for meeting the Kingdom of God, for God's new world to break in. What does the kingdom of God Jesus proclaims look like? Mark doesn't say.

But in the Galilean section, right at the outset, the narrative does clarify one thing about how that new world, that kingdom of God Jesus proclaimed was coming. Jesus immediately gathers together a community. The community he gathers is always surprising. It was not the religious leaders of the time, nor was it the most prominent secular leaders.

While Jesus was walking along by the Lake of Galilee, he meets two fishermen: Simon and Simon's brother Andrew. Jesus calls them to follow him. Mark says:

And at once they left their nets and followed him.

It is the same story, just down the lakeshore, were two other fishermen, James and John. Jesus calls them as well and immediately get up and follow Jesus. Why did they find themselves following Jesus? Mark doesn't say. The fishermen don't tell us, either. Only that Jesus called them and they found themselves following after him.

I wonder if they were wondering what the Kingdom of God Jesus was announcing was going to look like, too. What were they being brought into? Were they going to be an army? Or a cloister? Or something else?

Now our Gospel text is located during one day of the life of this Church of Four Fishermen. The sabbath day begins with the church of four fishermen following Jesus into Capernaum where Jesus preaches in a synagogue. Mark says that the people marveled at his words. What did he teach? Mark doesn't say. Then after preaching Jesus meets a person we would describe as sick in body and mind and soul. Jesus heals him.

So from the outset, the little church of four fishermen are beginning to know what this Kingdom of God was going to be about: it would be about gathering and teaching and it was going to be about bringing healing to the broken and rejected.

On leaving the synagogue, Jesus and his church of four fishermen went to the home of Simon's mother-in-law. She was in bed with a fever. The church had said, "Jesus, is there something you can do for Simon's mother-in-law?" Does that sound familiar? The church of Jesus prays for each other. And yes, they didn't just pray, they go on the road with Jesus to where the need is.

Listen to what happens at the house. Mark in so few words tells it beautifully.

Jesus went in to her, took her by the hand, lifted her up, and the fever left her.

It was a ministry of presence. He went to see her. It was a ministry of touch. He "took her by the hand." It was a ministry of healing: he "lifted her up." The little church of four fishermen was learning that this kingdom of God Jesus was proclaiming was not about leading an uprising against the Romans. Nor was it withdrawing from the world. It would be about dwelling deeply in the world. It would be about "drawing near" to people. It would be about "lifting people up." It would be about bringing healing.

Finally, the moment at the house closes so simply—you could almost miss it.

Then she served them.

The Greek word for "serving" here is diakoneo—the same word used for how the Angels ministered to Jesus after his 40-day temptation. Simon's mother-in-law got up and did angels' work—she ministered to Jesus and this little church of four fishermen—the church now of four fisherman and one mother-in-law.

The healed had become the healer. Those lifted up became those who lifted up others.

Finally, the day closes for the little church like this. The text reads:

That evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were sick and those who were possessed by devils. The whole town came crowding round the door; and he cured many who were sick with diseases of one kind or another; he also drove out many devils, but he would not allow them to speak, because they knew who he was.

People were gathering around this Jesus. He healed many. . .but just many—not all. Why was that? Why only some? Mark doesn't say. Maybe he doesn't know why either. Neither do we, come to think of it. Finally, Jesus told them not to tell anyone about the healing. Why are they to tell no one? Mark doesn't say.

As the gospel story closes, I believe that the Word, this story, will take its place in your life and speak. It may speak to you today or much later—without comment from me. That is the way of the Word. It will have its way. But I would share one place where the story takes me in this particular time of our lives.

I'm struck today, by the unpredictable journey of the church of four fishermen. I'm so struck by the questions they are obliged to walk with. Why did Jesus tell those healed not to tell anyone? They don't know. Why were only some healed? They don't know. Why did Jesus choose simple down to earth fisherman to lead his church? They don't know that either.

The questions on the journey for people of faith are still here with us, aren't they? What is this pandemic all about? What are we learning from it? What is God doing in the middle of all this? But like the church of four fishermen, we find ourselves following Jesus down the road day by day.

Barbara Brown Taylor in Gospel Medicine shares this. She says,

This is how we learn how we fit.

This is how we locate ourselves between the past and the future;

between our hopes and our fears, between the earth and the stars.

This is how we learn who we are and what we are supposed to be doing:

*by coming together to sing and to pray, to be silent and to be still,
by peering into the darkness together and telling each other what we will see when we
do.*

That's how important this following Jesus is for us. Isn't it!

I leave you the story of the church of four fishermen walking with Jesus. Walking each day learning how to be church. Walking each day with unexpected blessings and, yes, with unanswered questions.

But, I think, if you asked them about what walking with Jesus meant. . ., they would say. . ., "Everything." Everything. As do we. Amen.

RESPONSE TO THE WORD

Hymn of the Day - 787, On Eagle's Wings

You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord, who abide in this shadow for life,
Say to the Lord, "My refuge, my rock in whom I trust!"

Refrain

And I will raise you up on eagles wings, bear you on the breath of dawn,
Make you to shine like the sun, and hold you in the palm of my hand.

The snare of the fowler will never capture you, and famine will bring you no fear,
Under God's wing your refuge, with faithfulness your shield. *Refrain*

For to the angels God's given a command to guard you in all of your ways;
Upon their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.

And he will raise you up on eagles wings, bear you on the breath of dawn,
Make you to shine like the sun, and hold you in the palm of his hand.
And hold you, hold you in the palm of his hand.

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Prayers of the People

A - Walking in the dawning light of Christ, we offer our prayers for the world God loves, the church God calls, and for all people according to their needs.

[Short pause]

A - Gracious healer, loving restorer, purpose giver, you reach out to us in our isolation, moving us to a place in which we can take part in your life-giving work. We thank you for this opportunity. God of light,

C - Shine in us and through us.

A - Gracious healer, loving restorer, purpose giver, you call us in our weakness and frailty, and enable us to serve *in* our weakness and frailty. Inspire our trust in your promise. God of light,

C - Shine in us and through us.

A - Gracious healer, loving restorer, purpose giver, our broken world can overwhelm us; the pain we experience can immobilize us. Set us free to embrace the world with your care, that your love may become more visible. God of light,

C - Shine in us and through us.

A - Gracious healer, loving restorer, purpose giver, you create your church whenever compassion is shown and welcome is declared. Continue to make this congregation a community which holds the hurting, and lives out your hospitality. God of light,

C - Shine in us and through us.

A - Gracious healer, loving restorer, purpose giver, you continue to extend your healing presence to those who are ill today. May we touch those around us who need restoration, including those we name before you.

[Long silence]

God of light,

C - Shine in us and through us.

A - Gracious healer, loving restorer, purpose giver, you call us good, you bring us back, you send us out. Give us the faith and the will to respond. God of light,

C - Shine in us and through us.

P - Into your hands we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray,

Lord's Prayer

C - 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 trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

SENDING

Benediction

P - God the creator strengthen you, Jesus (†) the beloved fill you, and the Holy Spirit the comforter keep you in peace.

C - Amen.

Sending Song - 661, I Love to Tell the Story

I love to tell the story of unseen things above,
of Jesus and his glory, of Jesus and his love.

I love to tell the story, because I know it's true;
it satisfies my longings as nothing else would do.

Refrain

I love to tell the story; 'twill be my theme in glory
to tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love.

I love to tell the story, for those who know it best
seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest.

And when, in scenes of glory, I sing the new, new song,
I'll sing the old, old story that I have loved so long. *Refrain*

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Dismissal

P - Go in peace. Healed, restored, sent.

C - Thanks be to God!

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