

Beachburg Pastoral Charge

Worship Service January 17, 2021

Welcome back to our weekly worship service, welcome back to winter, welcome back to these four beige walls that surround us. I am hoping that when we emerge from this lockdown that I don't look like John the Baptist. On the bright side maybe, this stay at home order may finally give me the time to tackle that "to do" list that Michele keeps hinting at.

Whatever you are called "to do", I hope that we can put it aside for a few minutes and spend some time together today to listen for the voice of the Holy One, to experience the gentle nudging of God's Spirit! To become aware of the hand of the Mysterious One at work in our life.

Surrounded by hints of the Divine. May we be open to answer God's call we come together in God's presence and Let us pray:

Opening Prayer

Every time we answer your call, O God, we meet you again as if for the first time.

Each moment is a revelation.

Each meeting leads to our hearts opening wider to you and to others.

Each encounter shines light onto the strength of relationships fostered while following you, Jesus the Christ—

For you are the one who invites and equips,
the one who is companion and guide,
the one who is Giver and Gift, So now in your midst
we have set aside this time for worship, O God.

Clear the chaos from our minds and hearts,
clear our senses to discover your presence, and
show us things that really do matter,
as we strengthen our faith. In your Holy name we pray. Amen.

Song – In our Scripture today Jesus calls his first disciples, so let us begin our service with the song "Here I Am, Lord" performed by Chris Bray.

Scripture

Mark 1:14-20 Jesus Announces the Good News and calls his first Disciples

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him.

¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Meditation

It's Not The Same

As we settle into today's service our "to do" list probably does not contain nets and boats and hired servants. But we may be preoccupied with other things, our kids, our finances or lack thereof, our job..... Or maybe this latest lockdown has us looking for something to occupy our time.

Normally what I do at this time each week, is our weekly church service, but we all know that has changed and will probably never be the same. The latest estimate is that 30% of those who used to regularly attend an in-person service will not return or will partake only in online services such as this.

And that of course means we miss our visiting time with friends and neighbours, or some inspirational music from Heather, Barry, Murray, or the choir. I know I miss our time together when we become part of a family, knowing that whatever is going on out there in our lives, in community we are being cared for and nourished.

But one thing that is not different is how Jesus continues to extend his invitation to hear the good news of God and in doing so, whether we are at home or in the pew whenever we hear word we come away refreshed and renewed, ready to head back to life in this world.

We've heard the call to real life in this morning's reading where Mark sets this invite before us briefly and simply. He had to be brief. When the Bible was written there was no Staples. There was no paper to waste or shred. The writers used papyrus which was very precious and scarce. So they could not waste words.

You see it in his writing. Mark is the breathless gospel. Mark uses the word immediately or "at once" or "without delay" something like 12 times in the first chapter and 43 times all together. (I'm thinking a good High School English

teacher would have knocked that habit out of him in a hurry.)

You have to be sharp and quick to keep up with Jesus in Mark's Gospel because "immediately" something else will happen.

We consider one of those immediately's this morning. Jesus, walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, sees Simon and Andrew, two poor fishermen who couldn't even afford a boat. They were casting a net into the lake. Jesus said "Follow me." And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

A little further on he saw James and John and their father, Zebedee in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and they followed him.

Notice the details of this story. Mark, conserving his words still puts in five proper names, Simon, Andrew, James, John, Zebedee. Then there are the hired men, the boats, the mending, the casting, the following – swiftly painted details that draw us from our pews or seat into the scene.

And yet, Mark leaves out many details that would interest us. He doesn't say whether these men had ever met Jesus before. He doesn't explain what repentance means. He doesn't tell us what happened to Zebedee without his two sons, or sketch the emotions churning inside these four men as they answer the call to a new life. Mark just shows Jesus, the Son of God, with authority, calling people, and immediately they respond.

There is a phrase as this passage opens that jumped out at me as I prepared this sermon. Jesus came preaching the Gospel of God, the Good News of God.

Many years ago when I lived in the city I often found myself on Sunday morning listening to the local Christian station, that at the time often featured Billy Graham. Now I would be reluctant to criticize the late Billy Graham's dedication, or deny the vast numbers of people that he helped in his incredible life-long ministry.

But I remember on this particular Sunday, there he was preaching the same tired, old message about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and how they were so bad that God threw them out of the garden.

Immediately I said to myself, "Billy, Billy, Billy, you have missed one of the verses in Genesis."

The writer of Genesis clearly says that God sewed together some skins. God made clothes for Adam and Eve so that they would be warm and comfortable. I wonder why more people don't preach the Gospel of God, the Good News of God, like Jesus did?

Mark pictures Jesus, full of the Good News of God, sweeping through the countryside.

A former United Church moderator, Bruce McLeod, writes this about Jesus,

Here is a man who, without slowing his pace, can draw busy, down-to-earth people after him like a magnet, just by the power of his presence and the authority of his word. He uses no flattery or persuasion ... nothing but the force of his passing. You come too, he says, and dropping everything, they come.

Now I am not that decisive a person. I have trouble with choices and decisions, trouble with immediately. It usually takes me a long time to decide something. An old friend

recognized this and told me once, "If you were a dog catcher, I would find you standing in the middle of the street wondering, should I catch this dog, or let that one go."

Imagine if Simon or John had said, "Let me get back to you on that. Let's do lunch next week. I'll check my schedule, but is Wednesday or Thursday okay, Jesus?"

Simon, Andrew, James and John make an instant decision, which in the twinkling of an eye, immediately changes their life.

Margaret Atwood, in her novel *Cat's Eye*, has Elaine, a high school student speaking,

I know I'll do well in the two Biology exams ... But in the middle of the Botany examination it comes to me, like a sudden epileptic fit, that, I'm not going to be a biologist, as I have thought. I am going to be a painter. I look at the page, where the life cycle of the mushroom from spore to fruiting body is taking shape, and I know this with absolute certainty. My life has been changed, soundlessly, instantaneously.

Well, for some, life changes happen that suddenly. For others it is more of a gradual growing into a vocation that puts us in line with God's will for us and for the world.

Our vocation, our calling in life is to be aware of God's liberating work, and allow God to weave God's story through our lives so that we can participate in this ongoing story, bringing peace, love and justice to our world.

Are you still waiting for your call to life? Some of us still are. Many of us experience repeated calls throughout our life, to new experiences. Others, are asleep, or not paying attention, or too numbed by life to hear the call of God, or see it.

Consider Anne Tyler's wonderful character, Jeremy, the sculptor, in her book *Celestial Navigation*:

"I often dream that I am a caveman," he says. " And it's always back beforemen could make fire, you understand. They observed it, yes, but only when lightening struck and forests caught fire by accident and burned themselves out. In my dream I sit all night watching the treetops, hoping that within my lifetime something will be set on fire for me to see."

Poor Jeremy. If only there had been an “immediately” to challenge him and draw him out of that dream.

God uses a variety of language, persons and situations in calling us to follow. It may not always mean that we have to give up everything like Simon and Andrew and James and John did. We live in a different world.

Professor Tom Long’s comment on this is useful:

The same summons comes to all of us. For some it still comes as a call to leave our nets, our books, our desks, our homes. For others it will come as a call to mend our nets more carefully, read our books more thoroughly, mind our desks more faithfully, live in our homes more lovingly.

Perhaps that is the real challenge, the authentic call to life, to be more faithful followers right now, using what we have, and who we are.

This sermon today will end with one more story from one of my favourite story tellers the late pastor Fred Craddock. He describes how

A family is out for a drive on a Sunday afternoon. It is a pleasant afternoon, and they relax at a leisurely pace down the highway. Suddenly, the two children begin to beat their father on the back: "Daddy, Daddy! Stop the car! There's a kitten back there on the side of the road!"

The father protests, "We can't stop; we're having a drive. Besides, we don't have room for another animal; we already have a zoo at home."

"But Daddy, it will die! Are you going to just let it die??!!"

Finally, the father turns the car around, returns to the spot, and pulls off to the side of the road. "You kids stay in the car. I'll see about it." He goes out to pick up the little kitten, who is just skin and bones, sore-eyed, and full of fleas. When he reaches down to pick it up, with its last bit of energy the little kitten bristles, baring tooth and claw and a loud HISS!!

He picks up the kitten by the loose skin at the neck, brings it over to the car, and says, "Don't touch it. It's probably got leprosy."

Back home they go, where the children give the kitten several baths, about a gallon of warm milk, and beg their parents: "Can we let it stay in the house just tonight? Tomorrow we'll fix a place for it in the garage..."

Reluctantly, the father allows it.

Several weeks pass. One day the father walks in, feels something rub against his leg, and there is the cat. He reaches down toward the cat, carefully checking to see that no one is watching. When the cat sees his hand, it does not bare its claws or hiss; instead, it arches its back to receive a caress. Can this be the same cat? It's not the same as that frightened, hurt, starving, hissing kitten on the side of the road. Of course not, and you know as well as I do what makes the difference.

In his calling God reaches out a hand to bless you and me. And if you look closely you will notice that hand; is covered with scratches. Such is the hand of love, extended to all who hunger and thirst for life.

In Jesus, God offers us his hand and calls us to a life where we are known, loved, sheltered, fed, cherished, forgiven and guided. For In Christ, our life will never be the same. Thanks be to God.

Pastoral Prayer

To You Life-giving God we express our gratitude, for you have called us to a new life based on your steadfast love and faithfulness.

We have sought your presence here, focussing on your Word: your Word that gives life; your Word that heals the wounded heart; your Word that speaks truth.

Teach us your Way, Lord Jesus. Lead us on your well-lit path . In the times when you are silent, grant us the courage to wait, trusting in your grace that brings your resurrection power to our ends.

Today We bring to you our grieving over what we have lost, our fears about what the future might hold, our desire to love and serve you.

We pray for those in anguish, whose hearts are broken and weary with weeping.

We pray for those overwhelmed by despair, struggling for hope, desperate for life.

We pray for those who are ill, we ask to for healing presence for those now who occupy our heart.

We pray for relief to those who are weighed down by burdens.

We pray for our brothers and sisters who normally sit beside us in the pew but who are now isolated at home.

We pray for our brothers and sisters in this community

We pray for our brothers and sisters around the world, especially in the US and pray for a peaceful transition of power.

With the joy of your call giving wings to our spirits, we your call to follow you through all of life.

As By the power of your Holy Spirit, you are refining us, purifying our discipleship, pulling us forward into this new world.

Grant us mercy and grace as We pray all these things in the name of Jesus, the first-born of your new creation

our hope, our life and the one who taught us to pray saying

I leave you this morning with a new rendition of the classic hymn "Jesus Calls Us" performed by the artist "Koine" Have a safe and blessed week, until we meet again.