

FEBRUARY 14, 2021 WORSHIP SERVICE

WELCOME

Welcome on this snowy, frigid day. In these challenging times, we are grateful for technology that allows us to worship together, even if it is not how we'd ideally like it to be.

Jesus has said, "where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am also." Maybe in the 21st century he also would have said where two or more are connected online in my name, there I am also." We trust that it is so.

You'll notice that I am at home, and in fact all of us are at home. Because of the weather, we did not want to ask anyone to drive to the church. This is the first time no one is at the church.

I'll plan to make the prerecorded segments available as a playlist after the service. And for some perspective, in a normal year, we almost certainly would be cancelling church. So it is somewhat ironic that we are instead finding a way to worship together.

I invite us all to greet each other's faces. You can do this by switching your view in Zoom to gallery view if you are on a computer. This is found in the upper-right hand corner. On a phone, I believe you have to swipe to the left to see other faces of people.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Next Sunday; we are planning to offer an option for coming to the sanctuary; this will be with the same safety guidelines as in the fall, asking for everyone to wear a mask and socially distance.

If you are at a higher risk or are in contact with a larger number of people and you are able to worship at home, we encourage you to continue to do so. Our COVID taskforce will meet tomorrow and review this plan. You will receive communication if there is any change in plans.

One important change to highlight is that the service will begin at 9:30 am. This is to allow us to have time after the service for a Faith formation Zoom call. That call will take place at 11:00 am. It will begin with sharing of prayer requests and then allow us to split into groups. In most cases you will see something on your screen inviting you to choose a group. Some adult SS classes may meet in their own group. The main group will have conversation about the Scripture passage from the service using the Upside Down King curriculum.

CALL TO WORSHIP

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Lord Jesus Christ,

This bone-chilling morning as we look out at the frozen landscape from the warm confines of our homes, disturb us, upend us, like you did for the first disciples trying to fish along the lake.

Like Simon Peter, we are sinful people, but we ask that you *not* go away from us, that you not let us get away from you.

Stand in our midst, disturb our souls to come awake. *Amen*

MORNING PRAYER – PASTOR CALEB YODER

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Good news: we announce the birth of the youngest member of our church family, Cameron Michelle. She was born to Maryanne and Evan on Thursday afternoon, and she is welcomed by her big sister Kennedy. So we celebrate with Maryanne, Evan, uncle Anthony, and grandparents David and Aileen.
- Another announcement – you may know already that Milferd Schmidt passed away early Thursday morning. We will have an indoor service Wednesday at 2 for family members. The service will also be viewable on Zoom, and we will send an invitation for that.
- Another is the unexpected death of Leon Nikkel in a car accident Thursday night. Service details are still being worked out.

Creator God,

Water, earth, and sky, and all their creatures belong to you.

In you we live and move and find our being.

You've placed us in this terrifying and beautiful world in which you dwell.

You've made each one of us in your image.

You've not been content to let alone as fractured image-bearers, so you call us by name.

You give us birth and re-birth through Jesus in order to live in your kingdom that seems so upside down and strange compared to the what we expect from our world.

We celebrate the birth of Cameron Michelle. She, like all children, has so much to teach us about the humility, and letting go needed to enter your kingdom.

We pray for sleep and enjoyment for Maryanne and Evan. We pray for Kennedy as she adjusts to becoming a big sister.

We give thanks for the Faith Ex class and the opportunity that it affords to explore rebirth in the way of Jesus. We pray for these seven young people in the coming weeks as they deepen their understanding of the biblical story, and juggle this exploration with their many commitments.

We bring other prayer requests of this congregation.

We pray for Mary Lou Unrau as she continues at Newton Medical Center. We pray for her recovery and for her comfort, as well as your comfort to Glen, Lynel, DeAlan, and other family members.

We pray for Steve and LaNae Unruh as they both continue to care for their mothers as well as Steve's dad.

We pray for your comfort for Marilyn Schmidt and her family as they say good-bye to Milferd this week. Be with them as they prepare to celebrate Milferd's life of nearly 93 years.

We pray likewise for the family of Leon Nikkel following his tragic accident. We pray for Karen, for Ted and Joann, and for Kermit and Sandra, as they support one another in this time of loss.

We offer our continued prayers for residents, staff, and leadership at Bethesda Home after such a difficult time of trial. We pray for your comfort and peace to be with the Bethesda community as they grieve the loss of beloved residents who have passed in the last couple of weeks, including Irvin Voth and Willard Regier.

We give thanks for the negative Covid test results this past week!

We remember residents from our church family at Bethesda: Art and Ann Boese, Linda Deasy, Milton Duerksen, Mary Ann Funk, Alice Jantz, Phyllis Nickel, Julia Regier, Eulalia Schroeder, Elsie Unruh, Phyllis Voth, and for John Wiebe.

We also pray for Loise Schmidt, Martha Voth, and Ruben Klassen at Pine Village and Kidron.

God, you call us in our moments of happiness and in our moments of pain. Your love is the same always. You invite us into loving community to have companions on the journey.

Anchor us by your Spirit, and let our selfishness not hinder us from hearing your call.

Give us courage to answer it, as you draw all people to yourself.

Through Jesus Christ...

OFFERING PRAYER – (ADAPTED FROM VT 1015)

Generous God, you gave us life;

Now we give our lives back to you.

We present ourselves:
our work and play,
our joys and sorrows,
our thoughts and deeds,
our gifts and resources,

To be used by you as you love and offer new life to all people everywhere, through Jesus Christ.
Amen

SIMON PETER AND TWO FISHERMEN – ADAPTED FROM SKIT BY CAROL DUERKSEN

Fisherman 1: It had been a horrible fishing night for us. I mean, nothing was biting. We came back in to shore, washed our nets and put the boats up, hoping for better luck the next day.

Fisherman 2: Then the preacher Jesus, who was having some crowd control issues, asked to use Simon's boat.

Simon: (in a kind of "know-it-all" sort of tone) The part of the lakeshore there close to Capernaum has a zigzagging shoreline. Each inlet is kind of a natural amphitheater. If you get in a boat and push out from the shore, anyone on the slopes of the inlet can hear you.

Fisherman 1: (sarcastic) Thank you for that explanation, Simon.

Simon: No problem. I just thought they might want to know how so many people could hear Jesus from my boat.

Fisherman 1: ANYWAY, Jesus preached from Simon's boat. When he was done preaching, he told us we should go back out and try fishing again. He said we should "let the nets down in the deep water".

Fisherman 2: To be honest, we were not thrilled about the idea.

Simon: We'd been trying all night. No luck. We'd just come in, and cleaned the nets.

Fisherman 1: But you don't exactly say no to Jesus, so we did what he asked us to do.

Fisherman 2: And we had the catch of our lives! So many fish, the nets were breaking!

Simon: When we finally got them all in and had time to think about it, I realized this Jesus had to be some sort of miracle-worker or something. He had the power of God! And I figured, "I don't even deserve to be around someone like him!"

Fisherman 2: To be honest, I was thinking, "It could be good for business to spend more time with this guy. He knows where the fish are! We could offer him a cut of the profits." In fact, I was just getting ready to make the offer, but then Simon was telling Jesus to leave because he was a sinner and yada, yada, ya... Simon kind of goes on and on sometimes. And the next thing I know, rather than US inviting Jesus into the fishing business, HE had invited us to come with him. He said we'd be "catching people". It sounded fishy to me. Not nearly as lucrative as my idea.

Fisherman 1: But we did it. Just left our boats. Our homes. Our livelihoods. The best catch of our lives. We left it all and followed him.

JESUS' CALL – PASTOR LOIS HARDER

Luke 5:1-11

It's pretty tough for us to imagine going fishing right now in our current sub-zero, deep-freezer, but let your imagination take you to the lake in the summer. Luke calls it Lake Gennesaret; it's another name for the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was there, by the shore, apparently having a little trouble with crowd control – it says the crowd was “pressing in on him to hear the word of God”. It's unclear whether it's the same crowd that just a few verses earlier had become so irate with Jesus' teachings that they “drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill... so that they might hurl him off the cliff”. That was part of the story that pastor Caleb talked about last week. At any rate, THIS crowd was so eager to hear what Jesus was teaching that they were practically pushing him into the lake! Fortunately, there were a couple of empty boats there, so Jesus climbed into one and asked its owner, Simon to just push him out a little ways into the water. Brilliant! The people likely wouldn't follow him into the water, so he was gaining himself a little distance from the pushy crowd, while at the same time creating a nice speaking venue for himself. As the young man in the skit so helpfully pointed out – the sound was naturally amplified, bouncing off the water and going right into the crowd in the amphitheater created by the hill.

Luke doesn't give us any clues about what Jesus taught that day, but the way Luke tells the story, by this time Jesus had been proclaimed the Messiah, heralded by the prophets, he'd been baptized and commissioned by John, tempted in the wilderness, he'd been teaching in the synagogue and rejected in his own hometown because of his unexpected, upside down message of good news for the poor, release for the captives and salvation for the last and the least. Yeah – he had already made a lot of people really uncomfortable. Then, as Luke goes on, Jesus exorcised a demon, and he healed Simon's sick mother-in-law. So by this point in Luke's story Jesus had already established quite a reputation in the area and apparently already had a significant relationship with Simon, his family and his fishing crew. These fishermen and Jesus had spent some time together. They knew each other and seemed to have some deep and good connection.

So after Jesus wrapped up his teaching he told Simon to take his boat back out, into the deep water and go get a catch. It's easy to imagine that Simon was not thrilled with this idea. His nets, by this time, were all cleaned up, Simon was likely tired and discouraged and ready to call it a day. They'd been fishing all night already and hadn't caught anything. Maybe Simon felt like saying, “Come on, Jesus... we're all ready to go home, have a good meal, maybe play a little music, relax our aching muscles... “Yet if you say so, Master, I will let down the nets.”

What was it about Jesus that compelled Simon to show this kind of perseverance and obedience, willingness to go above and beyond? Clearly, Simon trusted Jesus and was invested in his relationship with him. Jesus' message struck a chord with Simon, his teaching was aimed pretty directly at poor, blue-collar workers like these fishermen. Simon was captivated by the hope and possibility that he saw in Jesus. And, Jesus HAD just healed Simon's mother-in-law!

But of course, Simon could have never anticipated what happened next. The catch... what a catch! So many fish that Simon had to ask for help – we all know how difficult it can be to ask

for help. And the fishermen had to work together to haul in the catch. It wasn't a competition to see which one of them could grab the most fish. None of them were going to come out of this experience with a boat or their nets intact unless they worked together. And suddenly, Simon himself was caught. Caught off-guard, caught by surprise, caught like a fish. Humbled. Brought to confession, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." Simon was a proud man. We learn to know him later as Simon Peter – the rock. Bold and brash, blustery and bigger-than-life! Brought to his knees – and we know this won't be the last time that happens to Peter. He'll be humbled and brought to his knees several times on his journey with Jesus.

And then there are these interesting final comments from Jesus, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." The Greek word that Jesus uses for the *people fishing* includes the word for life and it means catching an animal, like a fish, alive for its own benefit. Now what could that possibly look like? I don't know of any living thing – animal or human – that easily embraces the notion that being caught alive would have many benefits. But this is the idea that Jesus is trying to get across here.

Turns out this is a clever play on words. In the Hebrew, the Old Testament prophets (Amos 4, Habakkuk 1, Jeremiah 16), used the term "fishing" metaphorically to talk about gathering people for judgment which, of course, carried over in the tradition and was also a strong theme in John the Baptist's preaching. But to be caught for the purpose of judgment isn't very inviting. Today, we call this being in jail or prison. This metaphor is also used in Greek writing to talk about what philosopher-teachers did; they would catch their students in order to teach and improve them, which is better but it still has some harsh elements of judgment in it. Think, bad grades, or hurtful, discouraging comments from teachers. But when this word is used in the gospels, Jesus uses it as an invitation, a call to his followers to gather, to invite men and women, boys and girls, ALL people, into the kingdom of God. It gives the disciples permission to "catch" people. Catch their attention and imaginations and invite them, for their own benefit and by their own choice to repent, to turn their lives around, to humble themselves, and to join in the Jesus-Way.

Simon and the others have clearly been caught by Jesus. He has caught their attention and imaginations, and now they're being invited to learn how to catch others. Not with a hook or a net or anything violent or destructive, but to catch people alive and unharmed, to extend invitational love, mercy and grace – entrance into God's kingdom. So once again, we see Jesus taking a traditional word and idea that was common and well-accepted in that culture and context, and turning it on its head. He transformed and redeemed the idea of catching people in order to judge or condemn them into catching people in order to invite them in and to restore them to life and wholeness!

So what are ways that this story can speak to us in mid-February, 2021? I would be interested to hear the various connections each of you might make. Meanwhile, here are a couple of ideas.

This Wednesday begins the season of Lent, the time each year when we remember and reflect on the days leading up to Jesus' journey into Jerusalem that then led to his crucifixion. It's a season of humility, a good time to ponder the parts of ourselves that may be like Simon – proud, recognizing our need to ask for help, our need to work together. It's a good time to think about how invested we are in our relationship with Jesus. Is our attention and our imagination caught by the love and the call of Jesus in our lives? How is that manifested in our decisions, our words or actions?

When Simon and the others docked their boats, dropped their nets and followed Jesus they began to learn how to relinquish their hold on control of their lives and give themselves to the unknown. Simon, especially, was asked over and over again to trust Jesus. To be clear, trusting Jesus does not mean that we don't plan and act responsibly and use wisely the tools and the minds we have been given. But even when we do all of those things we all know that life happens and a lot of it is beyond our control. We live with many unknowns. Henri Nouwen, the beloved Dutch priest and author wrote, "A growing surrender to the unknown is a sign of spiritual maturity."

The season of Lent is a good time to metaphorically put our tired, sore, discouraged selves back into our boats, row them out into the deep water and let down our nets. It's a good time to be attentive and imaginative about what kind of catch Jesus might provide for us.

And in the midst of the unknown, we can hear Jesus say, "Don't be afraid. Follow me and I'll teach you."

BENEDICTION – PASTOR CALEB

May God give you special insight to cast your nets to the other side and see an abundant catch.

May each of us draw ourselves and others nearer to the abundant life of the kingdom.