

New Scotland Presbyterian Church
Worship for the Fifth Sunday After Epiphany
(video link at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>)
February 7, 2021
The Rev. Holly S. Cameron

Prelude

“Minuet in G Minor”

Ryan Dwyer

Introduction

Welcome to worship at New Scotland Presbyterian Church.

Since it is the first Sunday of the month, we will be celebrating communion, so you are invited to gather elements to participate. Jesus sat at a dinner table with his friends, and used elements common to them: bread and wine. You are invited to use elements that are common to your table – bread or cracker or chip; and juice or wine or other drink, even water will do. You might set these on a special cloth and include a candle or flower or something to indicate you are welcoming a guest to the table. You may add a photo of someone you love to be part of the circle. Take a moment, if you haven't already, to gather those elements.

Call to Worship

Let us worship and sing praises to God, for the Lord is gracious and worthy of praise. God gathers the outcasts and heals the brokenhearted. God gives the stars their names and makes the grass to grow on the hills. Let us hope in God's steadfast love and worship God together!

Hymn

“What a Friend We Have in Jesus” #403 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Choir

Opening Prayer

God our Creator, you bring healing to our lives and comfort to our hearts. But there are times when we contribute to things that break your heart. You ask us to share our gifts with the world, but we often want to keep our resources close and our minds closed. You ask us to live in faithful community, but we view our neighbors with mistrust. You ask us to see all people as our sisters and brothers, but we separate ourselves from those who seem different from us. Open our hearts, O God, and reveal the great distance between your wisdom and human understanding. Open our minds to the simple truth of the gospel that we may be fervent in faith, tireless in love, and may become light and salt for the world. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Dear friends in Christ: the promise of scripture is that God's love and mercy surround us always. God created us; God cherishes us, and God offers us a new beginning. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Gospel Lesson Mark 1:29-39

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹ He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

³² That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³ And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴ 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.

³⁵ In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶ And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷ When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." ³⁸ He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." ³⁹ And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Kids' Time

For those unable to see the video, the children's sermon is about different ways to pray. We ask for daily bread because we don't want to be so poor that we are tempted to steal, and we don't want to have so much that we think we do not need God to help us. Now it's time to see the photos that remind us of God's love and hope and joy. {photos.}

Keep sending us your photos so we can share them in the coming weeks!

Prayer: Dear God, we give thanks that Jesus showed us how to pray to you in many ways. Help us to remember to ask for your guidance and listen for what you want us to know. Let us ask for help when we have too little, and let us share with others when we have too much. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hymn

Choir

"Now Praise the Lord" verses 1,3,4 #255 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Sermon

The ideas and many words in this sermon are from the writing of the Rev. Will Willimon.¹

We are hearing the stories of Jesus' first days in ministry. Two weeks ago we heard the story of Simon and Andrew and James and John leaving their fishing nets to follow Jesus, and now we hear about their first day together. As I said, it began with them going to the synagogue where Jesus amazed everyone with his teaching, and then healed a man of his demons. After synagogue, they went to Simon's house, where Jesus cured Simon's mother-in-law. Then the entire town came over, and Jesus healed every sick person they brought.

Sometimes we think of all this healing as miraculous, but the Bible does not name these actions as miracles. We use the word "miracle" because we do not know how to explain what is happening. The crowds are astonished, but Jesus acts as if his wondrous work is the most natural thing in the world. So, what we label as odd, unusual, out of this world, miraculous – all of that seems normal for Jesus. Jesus heals as a spontaneous, gracious outbreak of the kingdom of God. Jesus' actions, perhaps, give us a glimpse of what the "natural" world is intended to be.

Jesus challenges our notions of what we call “natural” and “supernatural.” We call things supernatural if they are weird or inexplicable or we don’t know what to think about them. But, Willimon suggests that maybe what we call “natural” is really a perversion of what God intended; and maybe what we call “supernatural” is the way the world is really meant to be. Maybe the miracles, which to our eyes appear supernatural, are, in the eyes of God, the most natural thing in the world.

Jesus was accused of turning the world upside down. But maybe he was really turning the world right side up.

We live in a do-it-yourself culture, where we rely upon ourselves and our technology to solve all our problems. Miracles are an insult to our self-sufficiency. Miracles mean that something outside of ourselves has power to change our lives, whether we want it or not.

John’s gospel calls Jesus’ miracles “signs.” So we can think of the exorcism of the demon in the synagogue, and the healing of Simon’s sick mother-in-law as signs, pointing to something else. These events are impressive on their own, but they point to something even more important.

Willimon believes that Jesus’ healings are like parables: pointing to the truth of who Jesus really is, and the direction in which the world is really headed.

The signs are not ends in themselves; they merely point to something larger. Anyone with the power to heal can attract large crowds. But many who come are likely there only to be fed, or cured, and have no interest at all in God. Jesus came looking for faithful disciples, not fascinated spectators. He comes not to impress people with great miracles, but to offer signs, pointing to who God is and what God wants. Jesus’ miracles disrupt the world as we think it is. Those signs give us a glimpse that there is more going on with God than we might imagine.

Jesus said, these good works are signs of an intrusion, an outbreak of the kingdom of God in our midst. So when he rebukes demons, he’s releasing hostages from their captors and reclaiming enemy territory. Every time Jesus intervened and healed someone he vividly demonstrated that this is the way the world is supposed to be. This is God’s intention for creation. This is what is normal.

St. Augustine said that Jesus’ miraculous feeding of the 5,000 is not much more of a miracle than what a baker does every day – taking a sack of flour and some water and producing loaves that can feed multitudes. He says we need to have eyes to see that some of what we consider “natural” is, through the eyes of faith, a sign of a miraculously loving God, who continues to work in many ways to bring healing and wholeness to us and all of creation. The difference, Augustine says, is the timing. Jesus is able to do in an instant what we “normally” expect to take hours or days or weeks. The question is: do we have eyes of faith to see the miracles that happen around us every day in the normal, but much slower, way?

Whether we do or not, the gospels are clear that miracles themselves are not the main thing. Miracles are signs that point to the main thing: and the main thing is God’s real and active presence in the world. As impressive as any individual miracle might be, the one event, the central sign, the wonder that puts all else about Jesus into proper perspective is his resurrection. We may still see some of the miracles Jesus performed in our everyday world, but God did something very different and uniquely revealing in raising Jesus from the tomb.

So, as we read the stories, we are not meant to work our way up from Jesus' small miracles of turning water into wine and healing and the like, to get us to believe that God later brought life out of death. Instead, we are meant to work backwards, just as the disciples did. When they were perplexed after the crucifixion, knowing Jesus had really died, but recognizing his undeniable presence with them, it was as if everything suddenly fell into place.

Now we get it, they said after his resurrection. Now we see that all those works of healing and feeding people were signs pointing to the much larger project that God is doing. Now we see that God is determined to have nothing less than the complete and utter defeat of sin and death, and the whole hurting world delivered back into the hands of God.

In that moment, the disciples recognized that this is who God really is. And this is who God means us to be.

Not only was Jesus a miraculous healer, he sent the disciples out two by two, so that they, too, would "preach the kingdom of God and ... heal." It would be one thing for Jesus to say, "I am able to bring healing, comfort, and wholeness to suffering people." But he does not stop at that. He says to his followers, to all of us, "I enable you to bring healing, comfort, and wholeness to suffering people."

This is the Word of the Lord for us. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Song

Ryan Dwyer

"I Never Thought I'd Be One"

Pastoral Prayer

Holy and Loving God, we come to you always with prayers of thanks for the goodness and blessings we know. We give you thanks for the beauty of this world that you created, for the love of our families and friends, for all gifts of healing and forgiveness. In the midst of a contentious and hurting world, help us to see the places where your hope is alive.

Hear our prayers, O God, for those who cry out for justice, mercy, and healing; for all those who wish us harm, and for all those whom we have hurt. We pray for those in positions of public trust and leadership, that they may know your wisdom and work for the good of all they serve.

We pray for those suffering in body, mind, or spirit; for those who are ill and in need of healing, for those who are exhausted and in need of rest; for those who are depressed; for those who are addicted; for those trapped by anger or hatred or vengeance; for those estranged and in need of reconciliation. Gracious God, bring peace and harmony to ourselves, our families, and our communities.

Finally we pray for your church in today's world, O God. You have brought us together to hear your Word, to be encouraged and strengthened, and you continually send us back into your world to serve you with our gifts. We ask that you will keep us attentive to your daily guidance so that we might bear witness to your love in our lives. Strengthen our resolve to be true disciples of Jesus Christ. And hear us as we pray the prayer he taught us:

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; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Communion

Today we celebrate the Lord's Supper with elements that we have at our own tables. It is no longer a church table or your family table. We invite the Lord to all our tables, and he becomes our host. He feeds everyone who is hungry, so all are welcome at this meal.

The Great Thanksgiving

Let us lift our hearts to the Lord, and offer our thanks and praise. Let us pray.

Eternal God, holy and mighty, it is truly right and our greatest joy to give you thanks and praise, and to worship you in every place where you abide. You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They are ever-changing, but you are always the same. You made us in your image, but we turned from you. Still you loved us and sought us. In Christ your grace defeated death and opened the way to eternal life.

Therefore, we praise you with the heavenly choirs, and with all the faithful of every time and place, who forever sing to the glory of your name, with the words of the sanctus and benedictus:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest, hosanna in the highest.**

You are holy, O God of majesty, and blessed is Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Revealing your love, Jesus taught those who would hear him, healed those who believed in him, received all who sought him, and lifted the burden of sin. We glorify you for your great power and love at work in Christ.

Remembering your mighty and merciful acts, we take our bread and our cups, from the gifts you have given us, and celebrate with joy the redemption won for us in Jesus Christ. With thanksgiving we offer our praise, and we offer our very selves to you, to be a living and holy sacrifice, dedicated to your service. Great is the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.**

Gracious God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and upon your gifts, that the bread we break and the cup we bless may be the communion of the body and blood of Christ. By your Spirit make us one with Christ that we may be one with all who share this feast, united in ministry in every place. As this bread is Christ's body for us, send us out to be the body of Christ in the world.

Help us, O God, to love as Christ loved. Knowing our own weakness, may we stand with all who stumble. Sharing in his suffering, may we remember all who suffer. Held in his love, may we embrace all whom the world denies. Rejoicing in his forgiveness, may

we forgive all who sin against us. Give us the strength to serve you faithfully until the promised day of resurrection, when, with the redeemed of all the ages, we will feast with you at your table in glory.

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory, praise, and honor are yours, eternal God, now and forever.

Amen, amen, amen.

Breaking the Bread

{Break your bread as these words are said.}

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, sat with his friends at a dinner table. He took bread, blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

{Pour your drink into a cup, or, if already in a cup, lift the cup as these words are said.}

In the same way he took the cup, saying: This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, which is poured out for you, and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me.

{Lift up the bread and cup.}

These are the gifts of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Take; eat the bread of heaven, and drink and the cup of new life.

Prayer After Communion

God of grace, you renew us at your table with the bread of life. May this food strengthen us in love and help us to serve you in each other. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen.

Hymn

"I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me" #369 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Choir

Offering

Sisters and Brothers, Jesus encourages us to bring all that we have, and give it in love, for the good of others.

Churches depend on the generosity of members and friends to support their ministries of doing God's work in a broken world. If you are able to mail in an offering, or give online at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>, we are grateful for that gift of financial support. If all you can offer is prayers, we love you for the gift of that spiritual support for our church, and for our ministry in this community and in the world. We are blessed to share our gifts and to love one another. Thank you for your generous giving!

Song of Praise

Ryan Dwyer

These are probably the most-sung lines in the last 300 years, so here are both the traditional words, and another variation:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God for all that love has done;
Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One.

Benediction and Blessing

Go out to love God and love God's people; to serve and serve God's people. And may the love of God go with you, and all those whom you love, both this day and always. Amen.

Choral Benediction

Choir

May God's blessings surround you each day
As you trust Him and walk in His way.
May His presence within
Guard and keep you from sin,
Go in peace, go in joy, go in love.
Go in peace, go in joy, go in love.

Postlude

Ryan Dwyer

"Minuet in G Minor"

Sermon Note

¹ William H. Willimon, "Signs and Wonders," in Pulpit Resource, Vol. 40, No. 1, 2012