

New Scotland Presbyterian Church
Worship for the Third Sunday After Epiphany
(video link at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>)
January 24, 2021
The Rev. Holly S. Cameron

Prelude
"Minuet"

Ryan Dwyer

Introduction

Welcome to worship at New Scotland Presbyterian Church. After our worship today, at 11:00 a.m., we will be having our annual meeting via Zoom. If you need more information about that, please call the church office.

Call to Worship

Matthew 4:23, Luke 4:13

Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom and healed every sickness among the people, saying, "The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor and release to the captives."

Hymn

Choir

"O Jesus, I Have Promised" #388 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Opening Prayer

Mighty and merciful God, you have called us to be your people and claimed us for the service of Jesus Christ. We confess that we have not always lived up to our calling. We have been timid and frightened disciples, forgetful of your powerful presence and the strength of your Spirit among us. Forgive us when we have turned the other way rather than help those in need. Forgive us when we have tried to hoard your forgiveness for ourselves, and have been unwilling to offer forgiveness to others. Forgive us when we nurture our anger and self-pity and ask you to punish those who have offended us. O God, forgive all our foolish and sinful ways. As we listen for your Word, inspire us to follow Jesus that we may proclaim your kingdom, bring good news to the poor, bind up the brokenhearted, and proclaim liberty to the captive. Give us your Holy Spirit to provide us with the gifts of grace that we need. Strengthen us anew to choose Christ's way in this world. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Dear friends in Christ: The word "repent" means to return, specifically to return to God. Feeling sorry over our mistakes is not really part of repentance; it is our turning toward God that marks repentance. God has seen all we have done, yet when we turn from our former ways, scripture promises that God turns from judgment, and saves us from our despair. Believe the Good News: God is with us; and offers us a new beginning. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Old Testament Lesson Jonah 3:1-5,10

¹ The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, ² “Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” ³ So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. ⁴ Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵ And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

¹⁰ When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Kids’ Time

For those unable to see the video, the children’s sermon is about how Jonah did not want to go to Ninevah to give them God’s word. He did not like that country, and wanted to stay mad at them forever. But we can be surprised that people we don’t like can change and be forgiven, just like God does for 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, thank you for Bible stories that remind us you call ordinary people like us to be helpers in your world. Even when we are mad or stubborn, keep working on us to make our hearts more like yours. Help us to see when it is time for us to stop being mad. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Epistle Lesson First Corinthians 7:29-31

²⁹ I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, ³⁰ and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, ³¹ and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

Gospel Lesson Mark 1:14-20

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

¹⁶ As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Sermon

In the Old Testament lesson today, we heard part of the story of Jonah, the part where Jonah successfully convinces the great, bustling city of Ninevah that they need to

repent. But, in spite of his success, Jonah refuses to be happy.

I have said before that I love the book of Jonah. It is a short story, but a good story. As we heard in the children's time, God asks Jonah to preach to the city of Ninevah about their wicked ways, but Jonah runs away. When he gets a second chance to do what God has asked, Ninevah repents and changes their ways so that God decides not to destroy the city. And Jonah is furious— he is so angry he says he wants to die!

I love Jonah because he is completely human. If ever we think that the people in the Bible were holier than we are, all we have to do is read Jonah, and realize that God really does pick ordinary, flawed, completely human people to do God's work.

But Jonah is not really the hero of the story, because Jonah is everything we do not want in a disciple. He is scared, angry, whiny, and reluctant for anything to change.

By contrast, in Mark's gospel we hear about some of Jesus's first disciples. When Jesus calls the four fishermen, they neither contemplate nor hesitate – they simply drop everything and follow him. The text does not give us any background or tell us if there had been some previous relationship among these four and Jesus. All we know is that he calls, and they drop their nets, and walk away from the security of their family business, and worldly affairs, to follow Jesus.

Of course, they were not the last to do so. It is amazing to me how people through the centuries have heard the call of Jesus and responded just as drastically and completely as these four fishermen. St. Francis is good example: Francis grew up in a wealthy family, served as a soldier, and then began to work for the church. His father did not like this turn of events, and did not think it was an appropriate career path for Francis, so, he confronted Francis in public to get witnesses to agree that Francis should obey his father's wishes. While his father made these accusations, Francis listened, and when he was done, Francis simply took the money out of his pockets, stripped off his clothes, and laid it all at his father's feet, saying that he would no longer ask his father to support him in any way, but would rely completely on his heavenly Father.

Of course, we know there are others who have made such radical commitments to follow Jesus – we remember Mother Teresa who went to work with the poorest and sickest people in India. Someone told me once that when Mother Teresa traveled in the United States or Europe, she refused to be put up in any kind of luxury hotel, and would not even use an air-conditioner if it was in her room. She did not want any comforts that the people she served did not have. She wanted to follow Jesus completely, to rely only on him and his ways.

Paul says something similar in the passage we heard from First Corinthians today – that Christians should live as though everything that we rely on in the world is about to be taken away, because, in fact, everything in this world will be taken away. We come into this world with nothing, and when we leave this world, we take nothing. No one remembers the things we accumulated while we are here; what people remember is how we treated them, how we made them feel.

Gandhi called this idea – of living as though everything is about to be taken away – the principle of non-attachment. Letting go of worldly ways gives us the freedom to be committed to personal and social transformation. That is the call of Jesus. God is longing to transform our lives, so that we are not overwhelmed and burdened by the

difficulties of this world. God longs for us to see that the kingdom of Heaven is at hand – it is here, now; and it offers us relief from all that plagues us in this life. The kingdom of Heaven releases us from the need to dominate, or control, or judge, or fight; the kingdom of Heaven releases us from the need to work like slaves, or accumulate more and more stuff, or to feed our addictions for alcohol, drugs, gambling, shopping, eating, adrenaline—whatever we use to distract ourselves, or numb ourselves. And, make no mistake, our modern media has learned very well how to keep us hooked into staring at our screens more and more each day – whether it’s games, or social media, or news feeds, they are programmed to give us hits of adrenaline so that we cannot imagine going a day without turning them on. I’ve often said when this life is over and I have to account for myself, I do not think God is going to be too impressed if all I can say is I reached the 10,000th level of Candy Crush, or I looked at every episode on Netflix, or I watched the news 20 hours a day.

The Kingdom of Heaven is here, now, to release us from the things, we have come to believe, we cannot do without.

I heard someone say this week that both John the Baptist and Jesus were preaching about the Kingdom of Heaven, but they gave the message in different ways. John seems to be like those revival-tent preachers you may have seen, yelling and threatening his audience, “Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” Then, as we heard in today’s gospel, when John is arrested, we hear Jesus saying, “The Kingdom of Heaven is here! So, repent.” The difference is in the delivery – is the Kingdom of Heaven a threat meant to scare us into toeing the line that we resent, or is it an invitation meant to open our eyes so we see that our chains to this world have been broken and we are free to live in a new way.

We can hear the words of Paul through the same lens. Paul is saying, whatever is taking all your attention is only temporary, so you can look up and be free, in the midst of this world, to see God’s eternity. Paul wants us to detach from our worldly concerns. When Jesus called Simon and Andrew and James and John, they were focused on their work, on their fishing rituals. Paul is trying to get us to look up from our “fishing rituals” – casting out new nets, repairing old nets, working slavishly, battling in difficult relationships, trying to avoid and deaden our feelings – Paul wants us to look up from the ongoing habits we have in our lives, so that we can hear Jesus, calling to us, now, to come and follow him.

Because Jesus does still call to us. And his call is for transformation. Jesus wants to transform our lives into something meaningful; to transform our communities into places of compassion, and healing, and wholeness.

Jesus is calling us. Are we like Jonah – looking to get away, jumping aboard anything that will take us in another direction, demanding that God do what we think is right? Or are we like the fishermen, ready to hear the invitation, ready to break with “business as usual,” ready to find a new way of understanding, ready to discover better way of living in this world?

Jesus calls us. Are we listening?

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

Song
“Knowing You”

Choir

Pastoral Prayer

Loving God, we come to you always with prayers of thanks. Thanks for the times we recognize your call to us. Thanks for the power of your words to draw us together in your ministry. Thanks for the stories that show us the pain of this world can be relieved, and the hope of this world can be restored. Thanks for your mercies visible and invisible, and the ways your grace continues to move through this world.

Almighty God, you taught us to pray not only for ourselves but for people everywhere. We pray for the nations of the world; lead them in the ways of justice and goodwill. Direct those who govern into the ways of your peace and your freedom and your truth, that they may rule fairly, maintain order, uphold those in need, and defend those on the margins, so that this world may follow your commandments.

God of our Savior, we remember Jesus' call to pray for our enemies, so we lift up all those who wish us harm, and all whom we have injured or offended. Remove all hate and prejudice from us and from all people, that the barriers between us may come down and we may see that you are God of all.

God of hope, comfort and relieve all who are in trouble: those who are separated from loved ones and isolated in their homes; those who are worn down by waiting; those who are exhausted from worry; those who are filled with anxiety; those who are burdened by illness or abuse or addiction or grieving or regret. Uphold all who are suffering, not only those we know and love, but those who are known only to you, and use us to bring them your light and your grace.

Grant that we may follow in the way of Christ to minister in your name, with your love in our hearts, your truth on our tongues, and your courage in our wills. And hear us as we say the prayer that Jesus 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.

Hymn

Choir

"Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore" #377 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Offering

Scripture says that we are to do good and share what we have with others. (Hebrew 13:16) So, this is the time we are invited to give from the gifts we have been given.

January is a month with extra expenses for the church because quarterly payroll taxes are due, so if you have not had a chance to give lately, or you are in a position to give a little extra, this is a good time to do that.

January is also the month that we support the mission of the Souper Bowl, to help relieve hunger. All the proceeds for the Souper Bowl go to the New Scotland Community Food Pantry. If you would like to support this mission, you can give online at our website, and put in the Notes that the gift is designated for January mission: Souper Bowl; or you can mail a check and write Souper Bowl in the memo line; or if you want to

drop a donation at the church, there are Souper Bowl envelopes on the table in the hall.

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. If all you can offer is prayers for the church, we love you for that gift. 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 who loves us, great and small
Praise God who hears our faintest call
The Sovereign Lamb redeemed the fall
Praise God the Savior, Lord of all.

Benediction and Blessing

Let us go forth from this worship, to be bearers of God's presence in the world, to bring the light of Christ to dark places, to journey with those who need to know that they are not alone. And be assured that God – the companion of the sojourner, the friend of the sinner, the comforter of the lost – will be with you wherever you go, 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"