

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

207 South Brodie St. <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

Third Sunday after Epiphany January 24, 2021

Words of Welcome

We value time in western culture. We appreciate it when people arrive on time, honour our time, and use our time well. Time was of importance when it came to Jesus as well. There are various ways to use and view time and it is the conversation today. Join me now in a call to worship.

Call to Worship

It's time.

It's time to invite.

It's time to love.

It's time to speak.

It's time for truth.

It is time for faith seeking understanding.

It's time to connect.

It's time to worship. ©Joyce Yanishewski written for the 3rd Sunday after Epiphany, Year B. January 24, 2021.

Hymn

I have decided to follow Jesus

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1. I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus,
no turning back, no turning back.
2. The world behind me, the cross before me
the world behind me, the cross before me;
the world behind me, the cross before me,
no turning back, no turning back.
3. Though none go with me, I still will follow;
though none go with me, I still will follow;
though none go with me, I still will follow,
no turning back, no turning back.
4. Will you decide now to follow Jesus?
Will you decide now to follow Jesus?
Will you decide now to follow Jesus?
No turning back, no turning back?

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Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Lord Jesus Christ, you have called us together as your people.
You have called us your friends and invited us to follow you.
And so your church has grown from scattered homes in ancient times—to a worldwide community, embracing men and women, old and young, from many nations and cultures. In our worship today, inspire us to wonder at the miracle of your church. Help us see the privilege we share to be part of your people across the ages and across the continents. It is your love that keeps drawing us to you and to each other, and so we offer our wonder and praise with millions of people who also gather in your name this day.

God of all the ages,
we gather in worship week by week, hoping to encounter your presence.
But we confess it's not easy to hear your voice.
Sometimes we get distracted by what's happening around us.
Sometimes we get confused by conflicting views of what you expect from us.
Sometimes we feel challenged and resist a new word from you.
We confess it is hard to turn our lives around when we think we already know where we're going. Lord, have mercy upon us.

God of new life, speak to us in the rich, ancient words of scripture.
Send us your Holy Spirit so that we will hear your call,
leave behind our old ways,
and follow Jesus Christ, your Living Word. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

The God who challenges us is also the God who encourages us.
The God who confronts us is also the God who accepts us.
Be assured that God is with us even now, accepting, guiding, and forgiving.
Thanks be to God.

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Scripture Reading Mark 1:14-20

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." ¹⁶As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁷And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." ¹⁸And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

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The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message It's time

Three priests were fishing on a boat when they ran out of bait. The first priest got up and walked across the water to get some more bait. After 2 hours they ran out of bait again and the second priest said he would go get more bait, so he got up and walked across the water. After 3 hours of fishing, they ran out of bait again and the third priest said he would get more bait. So, he stepped out of the boat and went straight to the bottom. The first priest turned to the second priest and asked, "Should we have told him where the rocks were?"

I can tell a joke about fishing especially one that includes clergy, but really, I don't have the first clue about fishing. I have never even tried to fish, and rarely hung out around other people fishing, so when I read stories in the Bible about fishing, I must confess that I don't have any experience to draw from. That does not mean that I have not observed people fishing or getting gear together to fish as I have spent a considerable amount of time camping around lakes where others were fishing. I have also heard people tell stories about their fishing experiences.

Those who fish seems to have patience for this in a way that they may not have for other things in their lives. They are willing to do what it takes, getting up early if necessary, to get the gear in the boat and get in position, being patient and quiet as they wait for a bite. Often times there is no boat involved as one pulls up a stump and throws a line in the lake. Sit back and wait – that seems to be the requirement. It appears to be a soothing activity unless the disappointment of not even having a nibble brings down the mood.

Still there are others for whom the catch of fish determines their livelihood and if they can afford to keep a roof over their head and food on the table. For commercial fishermen the job can be harrowing and dangerous, complicated weather conditions. It is hard work as equipment must be kept in good condition, nets mended, boats cleaned, and large quantities of fish handled.

As most might remember, Jesus was raised in the town of Nazareth in the region of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee, important for its fishing economy, was the backdrop for some of Jesus stories and experiences. In today's reading it is the place of the calling of the first disciples. As the fishing economy was important to the region and one of the food staples it might be safe to say that people understood at least the basics about fishing. These "fish stories" were a way to help people relate and identify with the stories of Jesus. In particular this narrative, about the calling of the first disciples, speaks of Jesus saying the simple words, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people" and life changing decisions were made.

The Gospel of Mark is known for its immediacy. Every thing happened immediately. "Immediately [Simon and Andrew] left their nets and followed [Jesus]." "Immediately he

called [James and John]; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.” (vv18, 20). Often the focus of this story has been how they “left every thing immediately” to fish for people, and there is much to glean from that. Today though let’s consider the first two verses, which read. “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’”

Here too there seems to be an immediacy of time. “The time is fulfilled.” Rather than thinking that this is talking about an ending, it really signals the start of something, something that was urged on or immanent, because John the Baptizer had been arrested. There seems to be something in that moment that indicates to Jesus it is time to fulfill his own calling, to get a move on and start teaching, preaching, calling others, and healing. The kingdom of God was on the move, Jesus was on the move, and with that, others were called to be on the move. It was time.

It was time for teaching, preaching, healing, and calling. It was time for fishermen, to cast their nets, not to get as many people on board for Jesus as possible, but rather to start fulfilling their own work in the kingdom. They were to cast nets of connection, love, and grace in ways that brought the kingdom of God near to others. It is that time for us now.

It is also a time to repent. To repent is not necessarily a private confession of one’s sin, but as Pastor Gary Charles¹ has been roughly quoted as saying, “it is an opportunity to turn around and take a hold of something better than you have now.” To repent is a turning, to say enough is enough, and point to the presence of God and the promise of Good News.

It is our time to believe that God has Good News and that Jesus *is* the Good News. It is time to share that with others, not in a hit you over the head with a Bible kind of way, but in a way that casts a net of love, acceptance, grace, forgiveness, and faith. One thing to remember is that when you cast a net you get things you hadn’t planned for, sometimes or often you may get things you don’t want or are frustrated by, along with all that. one may find and receive surprises and gifts they could only have hoped for.

Now fishing is not necessarily a perfect analogy for what we are called to do and be, but it is a starting place. It is a lens to understand that we are part of the way in which God works to bring the love, grace, and forgiveness of God to other human beings. You may not be a fisherman, few of us are, but you may be a teacher, nurse, doctor, business person, store clerk, stock person, custodian, health care provider, trucker, waiter, artist, musician, crafter, technician, scientist, volunteer, resident, friend or family member, and so much more. In each and every role you identify with you have the opportunity to share God’s love, to cast a net of hope that reaches far beyond where you might have thought

¹ Gary W. Charles is Pastor of Central Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia.

you had any influence, to bring the Good News that in Christ we are forgiven, loved, and freed.

It is important to remember that this calling, this timing, is not about you and your abilities. Simon, Andrew, James, and John were fishermen, they became disciples and leaders. Our faith is not only for our private enjoyment and edification, it is a public vocation. This is a calling to share love, faith, and hope. It is a calling to share the promises of God with people who are looking for meaning, purpose, healing, and abundant life.

Whether you were born into a Christian family and have thought of yourself as a Christian all your life or you are new to all this - God is calling you because of love, because of who you are and who you can become. Calling is allowing God to enter into your life, and work with you as God's hands and feet in the world. It is fascinating, amazing, sometimes nerve racking, even terrifying, but to answer the call, in our time, is living life at it most fulfilling. "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe in the good news." (V15)

It was and is time for Jesus. It is our time. It is time to invite others into this exploring and abundant life. It is time for truth. It is time to care for the most vulnerable among us. It is time for learning, sharing, and understanding. It is time to speak. It is time to connect. It is time to love.

It is time for Jesus. Amen.

Closing Prayer

God of fishers and farmers and factory workers,
God of those serving in health care, hospitality and at home,
God of our offices and businesses, our stores and our streets, our schools and recreation centres, of emergency services and entertainers, we thank you for the many ways we can serve your purposes.

You called Jesus' first followers to change their livelihoods and so they did. Today we pray for all those whose work has changed without their choice because of COVID-19; for those struggling with little or no work, whose businesses are in jeopardy, who fear for what this year may hold. Assure them of their value to you and to us all. Give them courage and perseverance as the future unfolds.

God of the churches who bear your Son's name,
whatever denomination or perspective or tradition that shapes us,
we thank you for the fellowship we share and the gifts of the Spirit we receive. We pray that the differences between us which seem so important to us will not blunt our witness to Jesus and the healing and hope he offers. Teach us to value diversity

in our discipleship and honour what unites us more than what divides us, so that the world may see Jesus reflected in all our lives.

God of our cities and towns, of our villages and reserves,
God of all nations and neighbourhoods, of all clans and tribes, cultures and families that shape our identities, you created us for community, to find enjoyment and support, collaboration and productivity together.

We pray for all those who suffer because others judge their identities, their language or religion, their orientation or ethnicity, their social standing or lack of resources.

Guide us all to appreciate our common humanity and find ways to learn from each other through our differences. Help us to recognize the face of Christ in those who challenge our assumptions.

God of all times and situations,

We bear on our hearts concerns for many around us, people we know and situations we care about, where suffering exerts its power and challenges seem overwhelming. Hear us in this time of silence as we open our hearts and their needs to you:

Bind up the broken hearted, O God.

Bring justice for the vulnerable.

Send your Spirit of healing and hope to embrace those who need you.

We dare to ask all this because we trust in the name of Jesus, your Son, who taught all his followers to pray:

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Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Invitation to make an offering

Jesus asked his first disciples to answer his call with their lives. Our offering is one way we answer his call and carry forward his ministry in the world. Consider what Christ can accomplish through the gifts you offer today.

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If you would like to make a donation toward the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian in Thunder Bay visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> for more information.'

1. You walk along our shoreline where land meets unknown sea.
We hear your voice of power, "Now come and follow me.
And if you still will follow through storm and wave and shoal,
then I will make you fishers, but of the human soul."
2. You call us, Christ, to gather the people of the earth.
We cannot fish for only those lives we think have worth.
We spread your net of gospel across the water's face,
our boat a common shelter for all found by your grace.
3. We cast our net, O Jesus; we cry the kingdom's name;
we work for love and justice; we learn to hope through pain.
You call us, Lord, to gather God's daughters and God's sons,
to let your judgement heal us so that all may be one.

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Benediction

As the disciples walked with Christ so long ago,
walk with Christ in your hearts and spirits.
Feel the power of the Holy Spirit guiding your path.
Know the love of God which is poured out for you and rejoice.
Go in peace and may God's peace go with you.

<https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2240/worship-connection-january-24-2021>