

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL
Wallace, Idaho

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

May 1, 2022

Third Sunday of Easter

PRELUDE “*For the Beauty of the Earth*”

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL TO WORSHIP

Now is the time to sing! to sing the good news of God:

who awakens us with dawn’s embrace, who surrounds us with joy and life.

Now is the time to offer praise to God, in every place, with every voice:

to rejoice in the One who leads us through each moment with a gentle hand and a word of hope.

Now is the time to join all creation in extolling God, from the depths of the sea to the farthest galaxies:

We will sing the good news of Easter! We will rejoice in the God who loves us.

(Thom Shuman, LectionaryLiturgies.blogspot.com)

HYMN No. 1 “*Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*”

Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee, God of glory, Lord of love;

Hearts unfold like flowers before Thee, Opening to the sun above.

Melt the clouds of sin and sadness, Drive the dark of doubt away;

Giver of immortal gladness, Fill us with the light of day.

All Thy works with joy surround Thee, Earth and heaven reflect Thy rays,

Stars and angels sing around Thee, Center of unbroken praise.

Field and forest, vale and mountain, Flowery meadow, flashing sea,

Chanting bird and blowing fountain, Call us to rejoice in Thee.

OPENING PRAYER

Because you made the world, and intended it to be a good place, and called its people your children; because, when things seemed at their worst, you came in Christ to bring out the best in us; so, gracious God, we gladly say:

Goodness is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate, light is stronger than darkness, truth is stronger than lies.

Because confusion can reign inside us, despite our faith; because anger, tension, bitterness and envy distort our vision; because our minds sometimes worry small things out of all proportion; because we do not always get it right, we want to believe:

Goodness is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate, light is stronger than darkness, truth is stronger than lies.

Because you have promised to hear us, and are able to change us, and are willing to make our hearts your home, we ask you to confront, control, forgive and encourage us, as you know best. (*Pause*) Then let us cherish in our hearts that which we proclaim with our lips:

Goodness is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate, light is stronger than darkness, truth is stronger than lies.

God, hear our prayer, and change our lives until we illustrate the grace of the God who makes all things new. **Amen.** (*A Wee Worship Book, Fourth Incarnation, Wild Goose Worship Group*)

SCRIPTURE READING John 21:1-19

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of

Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

SERMON

So how long did they stay in Jerusalem, huddled together and hunkered down in that room? He made three appearances to his followers in the first 8 days. Did they linger another week, two, a month, in the hope that he'd appear again? How long did his gift of peace have to sink in before they were able to unbolt the door? When did they decide it was time to head home and get on with their lives? They couldn't live in limbo forever; there were families to feed and bills to pay, and as wonderful, transformative as it had been, they had no idea what to do with any of it now. The story was finished; the magic was over; it was time to move on. So they headed home. And finally when he couldn't stand sitting around the house one more minute, Peter pushed back his chair, pulled on his boots and said, that's it: I'm going fishing. We all have our coping mechanisms, the things we turn to when we have absolutely no idea what to do with ourselves: shopping, eating, drinking, cleaning, building, breaking. For Peter, it was fishing. So he and six of the others headed out.

Ironically, they had about as much to show for their night of fishing as they did for the last three years: once again, they came up empty. As dawn began to color the sky, and they slowly made their way back to the beach, they were aware of a faint glow on to the sand. They hadn't begun to figure out what they were seeing when they heard a voice call: children, you don't have any fish, do you? When they said no, the stranger spoke again: put your nets back in, this time on the starboard side; you'll find a catch there. It's curious to me that this group of experienced but frustrated fishermen followed the instructions of this outsider. I can't help wondering if I, if we'd be as receptive to advice and instruction

from some stranger who just happened to walk in off the street. But these guys did as he said, and to their amazement, the next thing they knew, the nets were full to bursting.

Slowly bells of recognition began to go off, and the disciple Jesus loved declared that the stranger speaking to them was indeed the Lord. At which point, Peter pulled on some clothes and jumped into the sea – which has got to be one of the strangest details I've ever read in a biblical story. You might be interested to know that I tried that once. Ben and I were leading worship for a mission conference that was happening at a camp on a lake. Our sailboat was moored just off the beach, and we were staying on the boat. I was headed ashore to preach on this very text, so as soon as we had breakfast, we climbed into the cockpit, I threw my back pack over my shoulder and somewhere between the sailboat and the dinghy, I lost my balance and went into the lake. With our youngest son sitting in the dinghy, not sure if he could laugh or needed to be worried. I still have no idea what Peter was up to, other than getting to Jesus while leaving the rest of the disciples to haul in the catch. When they got to shore, dragging all 153 fish in the net, Jesus greeted them warmly saying: come and have breakfast.

I love the ways this story points to other stories and nudges Jesus' disciples to remember what they saw and did before, when they were together. Like, remember that story of a night when the disciples fished these very waters all night and came up empty, and how Jesus helped them fill up their nets. In fact, if you scan all four of the gospels, you see that the disciples never caught any fish without Jesus' help. It's as if John is saying, don't be thinking you can fulfill the mission that is now being entrusted to you by yourselves: you will still need his help every step of the way. And remember how Jesus took that boy's lunch of bread and fish and fed a multitude? Well, those days of abundance are not over; you saw what he did with those five loaves and two fish – just watch what he can do with 153 large fish. This risen one continues to bless and feed you and a whole host of others. And then as some kind of challenge mixed with reassurance, we're told that it wasn't just Mary who didn't recognize the risen Jesus on the far side of the tomb; neither did Peter and his fishing buddies. Pay attention, because the risen Christ is likely to be much more present among you than you recognize. And finally, lest we be tempted to think that the Passover meal was the last one Jesus ate with his followers, he came to them on the beach, spread before them the best comfort food any of their souls desired and invited them to join him in the most important meal of the day. Even now, two thousand years later, the risen Christ continues to join us at our tables, to strengthen and nourish us for our lives and the work he's calling us to do.

Before we go, there's one more scene in this story: Jesus and Peter sitting together beside a charcoal fire, for Peter a painfully reminiscent charcoal fire, one that continued to haunt him sleeping and waking. In fact, I can only find three references to charcoal fires in the entire Bible, one in Proverbs and two in John's Gospel. One when Peter insisted – three times – that he was not a disciple of Jesus, how dare you even think such a thing; and here now, when Jesus turns to Peter and names the elephant in the middle of the circle: using his given name, not the nickname he assigned, he asks, Simon son of John, do you love me? It's interesting to ponder what Jesus' tone of voice was when he asked that; I don't think he was angry or condemning, but I guess he could have been. Was he sad? disappointed? hopeful? curious? insistent? And what about Peter? For all the hours he'd tormented himself, knowing there are words that can't be unsaid, is he ready to have this conversation? What can he say? His shame won't let him proclaim his unflinching love for Jesus; that didn't work out so well for him last time. So this time, he nods toward Jesus and says, you know. You know that I love you. To which, three times, Jesus says: feed my sheep. And in the process, Jesus calls him, again, to follow, to be his disciple, to carry on the work that Jesus did while he was with them and that they did together.

Through a gift of forgiveness he didn't ask for, and knew he had no right to ever seek out, Peter was embraced, healed, made whole and called. Perhaps in an understated way, without brass or fanfare, Peter was quietly accepted just as he was and given the greatest of all tasks: feeding Jesus' sheep. As one writer says, maybe this is what the resurrection is all about. "the power of Jesus is not stunning as

the world recognizes the spectacular. It is not about razzle or dazzle, glitz or eye-popping special effects. Instead it's about the quiet way of Jesus with his people, forgiving their failures, recognizing their limitations, but in grace setting them to work anyway." (Scott Hoezee, *The Lectionary Commentary, The Gospels*, page 601)

Where only hours earlier, Peter had wondered if the story had come to an end, Jesus stood in front of him now and made perfectly clear that nothing had ended. Quite the opposite. Even as he drew Peter back into the fold, nurtured him with an abundance of food and welcomed him with an extravagance of grace, he also called him, and sent him out with clear yet simple instructions: feed my sheep.

The assignment is so simple and straightforward that we sometimes miss it, or complicate it as we ponder how to address it. Feed my sheep. We can make it as simple or complicated as we want, but it's pretty clear. I appreciate a story about a woman whose work I came in contact with in the Boston area. Debbie Little Wyman describes it as having an itch that wouldn't go away: she had this crazy desire to get closer to people on the street. She felt called to create a church without a building, but didn't really know how to begin, so the day after her ordination, she started her ministry with a plain knapsack filled with peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. She told about buying two cups of coffee at a cafe, and then wandering into Boston Commons, looking for someone on a bench who looked homeless. She spotted a man, went over and sat down. Full of doubt and with no idea what to say, she handed him one of the cups of coffee. He took it and looked at her and said, "So, how are you doing today?" And then she laughed, clear who it was that was taking care of whom. (Sara Miles, *Jesus Freak*, page 46)

We live in a post resurrection world, and we follow a resurrected leader: one who assures us day after day that the story of his life and ministry is not only in the past, but that he continues to show up where we work and walk, to join us at our tables, feed us with abundance, welcome us with mercy, cleanse us with extravagance, and commission us with grace. He calls us to keep our eyes and hearts open to signs of his presence among us, and then to pass along to others a portion of the abundance with which he's blessing us. Amen.

PRAYER REQUESTS

PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy Risen One, signs of your resurrection surprise us with their ordinary sacred.

We go about our lives, not knowing how to live into the new life you promise, so we do what we know to do – As the disciples go back to fishing, we get back to business. All the while, in the back of our minds and hearts, we grieve Your Absence, we miss Your Presence.

And just as we start to think You were just a dream, You show up as ordinary sacred, grilling fish on the beach, offering a small kindness through a stranger on the street, a simple magic moment with a friend, a tulip blooming in the rain.

Help us to remember that everything is different in the living of our lives because of You.

As we celebrate new life, we are mindful of the places and peoples and creatures who suffer in mind, body, and spirit.

We are mindful of war-torn countries, and refugee children who pick scraps of bread off the street to eat...

We are mindful for those who deal with the stress of caring for a loved one and those whose bodies are racked with disease and sickness.

We pause here to remember them. (*silent prayer*)

Like Paul, make the scales fall from our hearts' eyes so that we can see your world in the way You see it. Clear our vision so that we can love with the love you so freely offer us.

In the name of Christ, our brother and friend, who taught us how to pray saying: Our Father...

(Rev Karla, <https://revgalblogpals.org/2016/04/09/sunday-prayer-190/>)

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (debts)

OFFERING

I love the ways in which today's Gospel lesson tells us that Jesus was waiting for the disciples on the beach. In front of him was a charcoal fire, and on that fire sat both fish and bread. And then, as the disciples hauled that mass of 153 squirming fish ashore, Jesus invited them to bring some fish with them as they joined him for breakfast. Now maybe he did that because he realized he hadn't brought enough fish to feed 7 hungry fishermen after a long night on the water. Whether or not that was the case, I also think he invited them to bring some of their catch with them because he knows how important it is for us to contribute something of what we have, rather than just receiving from others. To share from our own resources as a way of investing ourselves and playing a part in making a difference. Being able to give and share gives us at least as much joy as it does to those who will benefit from our gifts. Thank you for all of the ways you share what you have to build up the life and ministry of our church, and to expand God's work in the world. All gifts are gratefully received and richly blessed.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (in unison)

God of faithfulness, in every age you call men and women to make known your love. May we who celebrate this holy meal today be so strengthened in the ministries to which we are called, that we may always witness to your holy name. This we pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

HYMN "Come to the Table of Grace"

Come to the table of grace. Come to the table of grace.

This is Christ's table, not just yours or mine. Come to the table of grace.

Come to the table of peace...

Come to the table of love...

SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

Words of Invitation

This table is open to all who love Jesus and who wish to follow in Christ's way. Come to this sacred table, not because you must, but because you may. Come not because you are fulfilled, but because in your emptiness you stand in need of God's mercy and assurance. Come not to express an opinion, but to seek a presence and to pray for a spirit. Come to this table then, sisters and brothers, as you are. Partake and share. It is spread for you and me, that we might again know that God has come to us, shared our common lot, and invited us to join the people of God's new age.

Communion Prayer

God be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to God.

Let us give thanks to God Most High.

It is right to give God thanks and praise.

It is indeed right, for you made us, and before us, you made the world we inhabit, and before the world, you made the eternal home in which, through Christ, we have a place.

All that is spectacular, all that is plain have their origin in you; all that is lovely, all who are loving point to you as their fulfillment.

And grateful as we are for the world we know and the universe beyond our knowing, we particularly praise you, whom eternity cannot contain, for coming to earth and entering time in Jesus. For his life which informs our living, for his compassion which changes our hearts, for his clear speaking which contradicts our harmless generalities, for his disturbing presence, his innocent suffering, his fearless dying, his rising to life breathing forgiveness, we praise you and worship him.

Here too our gratitude rises for the promise of the Holy Spirit, who even yet, even now, confronts us with your claims and attracts us to your goodness.

Therefore we gladly join our voices to the song of the Church on earth and in heaven:

Holy, holy, holy God of love and majesty, the whole universe speaks of your glory, O God Most High. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of our God! Hosanna in the highest!

And now, lest we believe that our praise alone fulfills your purpose, we fall silent and remember him who came because words weren't enough. Setting our wisdom, our will, our words aside, emptying our hearts, and bringing nothing in our hands, we yearn for the healing, the holding, the accepting, the forgiving which Christ alone can offer. *(Silence)*

Merciful God, send now, in kindness, your Holy Spirit to settle on this bread and cup, and fill them with the fullness of Jesus.

And let that same Spirit rest on us, converting us from the patterns of this passing world, until we conform to the shape of him whose food we now share. **Amen.**

Breaking the Bread, Pouring the Cup

We remember that on the night before his death, Jesus sat at table with his friends; and while they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them saying, This is my body, which is broken for you. Take and eat it, all of you, to remember me.

Later, he took a cup of wine. Offering it first to God in thanksgiving, he gave it to his friends, saying: This is the new covenant made possible because of my death, for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, to remember me.

He whom the universe could not contain is present to us in this bread. He who redeemed us and calls us by name now meets us in this cup. So take this bread and this cup. In them God comes to us, so that we may come to God.

Sharing the Elements

Take and eat; the body of Christ broken for you.

Take and drink; the cup of salvation poured out for you.

Prayer of Thanksgiving (in unison)

In gratitude, in deep gratitude, for this moment, this meal, these people, we give ourselves to you. Take us out to live as changed people because we have shared the Living Bread and cannot remain the same. Ask much of us, expect much from us, enable much by us, encourage many through us. So, God, may we live to your glory, both as inhabitants of earth and citizens of the commonwealth of heaven. Amen.

(A Wee Worship Book, Fifth Incarnation, Wild Goose Worship Group)

HYMN No. 375 *“Jesus Calls Us”*

Jesus calls us; o’er the tumult Of our life’s wild restless sea,
Day by day His sweet voice soundeth, Saying, “Christian, follow Me.”

In our joys and in our sorrows, Days of toil and hours of ease,
Still He calls in cares and pleasures, “Christian, love Me more than these.”

Jesus calls us: by Thy mercies, Savior, may we hear Thy call,
Give our hearts to Thine obedience, Serve and love Thee best of all.

BENEDICTION

May the God who shakes heaven and earth,
whom death could not contain,
who lives to disturb and heal us,
bless you with power to go forth
and proclaim the gospel. Amen.

(New Century Hymnal)