

Prelude:**[Annie Schulz]****Gathering Thoughts:****[Doug Schulz]**

Welcome to this worship service on what is known as Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday. The music we just heard being played by Annie is from prayer-songs developed by Anabaptist Christians in both the historical German setting and a modern Japanese setting. Other songs today were suggested by the Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday liturgical planning team. And all of the music today is contained in our brand new Mennonite hymnbook called *Voices Together!*

The word Anabaptist arose 500 years ago to label those who chose to be re-baptized as adults as a sign of personal faith in Jesus, a faith that could cost you your life at that time because rebaptism was seen as heresy – a crime for which you could be executed in a number of excruciating ways! Today Anabaptism refers to what is also called Believers Church, of which Mennonites are a part. The point today is to remind us that being a believer in Jesus is all about following Jesus faithfully in all parts of life, and at all costs. That's quite a challenge!

Pastor Beth will later present a reflection on this theme, explaining why the earliest disciples of Jesus were willing to 'take up with him', why they felt called to awaken to his vision as they sensed the desire to have his power manifest in their own lives. Simple fisherfolk seeking ultimate meaning in this one named Jesus who urged them to imagine how, in following him, their lives would find value and purpose beyond anything they could experience or accomplish on their own. What a claim! What a vision! What a call! It seizes the imagination. It inspires to action.

We are grateful again today to Annie Schulz and Grace Singers for the music, and to Laur Steven providing sound and recording, as we continue our Epiphany theme of "Awake! Arise! God is Calling Now".

Call to Worship:**[Doug Schulz]**

For our Call to Worship this morning, meditate a moment on these thoughts some of which we will hear again in the song that comes after our first Scripture reading. Let this Call to Worship also be our Prayer as we enter into reflective and obedient worship today, an act of following Jesus faithfully along life's way.

O God of our strength, source of all life, fountain of love,
we come to this moment with our hearts full of praise.

We raise the eyes of our sometimes humble, sometimes hard, hearts
by faith to gaze at You, confessing that we need your grace
to give us a vision true, and strong, and pure, and motivated to grow
and to move us into ever deeper awakenings in heart, body, mind and soul.

Today, we pray for sustaining joy and peace and hope to be refreshed as we think about the call of Jesus in our lives, and as we strive to wait for your wisdom where we have challenges in our daily walk and to act with your empowerment wherever that wisdom leads.

God of our strength, source of all life, fountain of love,
we are here in this moment willing to praise you, follow you, love you.
May we know your presence now – above, within, all around.
May we be strong in the goodness of the peace we have found
in Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray now. AMEN

Scripture:

Psalm 62:5-12

[Doug Schulz]

- 5 For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him.
- 6 He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
- 7 On God rests my deliverance and my honor;
my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.
- 8 Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us.
- 9 Those of low estate are but a breath,
those of high estate are a delusion;
in the balances they go up;
they are together lighter than a breath.
- 10 Put no confidence in extortion,
and set no vain hopes on robbery;
if riches increase, do not set your heart on them.
- 11 Once God has spoken;
twice have I heard this:
that power belongs to God,
- 12 and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord.
For you repay to all according to their work.

Grace Singers:

“God of Our Strength”

[Voices Together, #47]

*God of our strength, enthroned above, the source of life, the fount of love,
O let devotion’s sacred flame our souls awake to praise thy name.*

Refrain: *God of our strength, we wait on thee, our sure defense forever be.*

*To thee we lift our joyful eyes, to thee on wings of faith we rise.
Come thou, and let thy courts on earth ring out thy praise in days of mirth. [R]*

*God of our strength, from day to day direct our thoughts and guide our way.
Oh, may our hearts united be in sweet communion, God, with thee. [R]*

*God of our strength, on thee we call. God of our hope, our light, our all,
thy name we praise, thy love adore, our rock, our shield, forevermore. [R]*

Prayers of the People:

[Doug Schulz]

We have just heard some powerful images sung about – God as our Rock and our Shield – that are often used in biblical Old Testament references to God’s presence as our great protector. Strong images like that are, in fact, rarely used by Jesus himself. He offers, typically, gentler pictures, if you will, about the way God is present to us day by day and throughout the entire way of our lifetime. Notice I said ‘gentler’ images, not weaker ones.

As I lead us into Prayers of the People now, please think about your own needs and concerns and those of others, and the realities of difficult, complex situations in the political and social realms of our nation, of our neighbours the United States, and of other parts of the world where conflict and/or injustice prevails. Join your heart with mine in this prayer:

O, Lord Jesus, you stood on the shore of the lake and gazed over the rippling waves and sparkling waters. What was in your mind before you spoke to those fisherfolk way back then? What did you see in those muscles? What did you hear in the chatter, the songs and laughter, or maybe the curses of those hard-working souls? [Pause]

Jesus, we wish we could hear today the very tone of your voice on those days when you called out, “Come, won’t you follow me? Won’t you let me make you into those who are able to draw people into the good, grace-filled Kin-dom of God?” Oh, Good Shepherd, Strong Companion, help us hear that voice again! We are listening. [Pause]

Help those we care about who are suffering or struggling in any way hear your voice today and see your face, and know that you are there with them, calling, comforting, encouraging, caring, providing, challenging, and always regarding them as beloved children of God. [Pause]

O, Light of the World, wash over the shorelines of our fear or sadness or ignorance or resistance to God's will. Let waves of awareness about your kind, forgiving, inspiring presence within us stir our souls into daily devoted action, so that we will always work with joy in stepping with you into the world of need. Help us be your peacemaking people, in spirit and in enterprise, among family, neighbours, strangers and enemies all alike. For you asked us to follow you everywhere you go, and we know this whole world is a home for your perfect love. [Pause]

And Lord, sometimes our so many words just fall over each other, and sometimes we don't know how to pray at all, so we thank you for leading us also with strong, kind words of prayer, when you said:

"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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever." AMEN

Grace Singers: "Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore" [VT, #283]

*Lord, you have come to the lakeshore
looking neither for wealthy nor wise ones.
You only asked me to follow humbly.*

*Refrain: O Lord, with your eyes you have searched me,
kindly smiling, have spoken my name.
Now my boat's left on the shoreline behind me;
by your side I will seek other seas.*

*You know so well my possessions;
my boat carries no gold and no weapons,
but nets for fishing, my daily labour. [R]*

*You need my hands, full of caring;
use my labours to give others rest,
with love desiring to keep on loving. [R]*

*You, who have fished other oceans,
ever longed for by souls who are waiting,
call me "beloved," and seek my friendship. [R]*

Scripture:**Mark 1:14-20****[Beth Woelk]**

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.

Reflection:**“Come, follow me...”****[Beth Woelk]**

Today I invite you to come with me to the seaside. Most of us aren't travelling very far from home these days, so let's journey together in our imaginations to another time and place. Walk with me along the Sea of Galilee which the locals call Lake of Gennesaret. Feel the sun's warmth and the gentle breeze in your hair, listen to the waves hitting the rocky shore, notice the smell of fish in the air and the boats dotting the water. And now hear the voice of Jesus as he calls to Simon and Andrew “*Follow me*”. “*Follow me*” he says again to another set of brothers James and John.

“Follow me and I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I'll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass.” (The Message)

I'm struck by how quickly these fisherfolk leave their nets, boats, and parents. What do they hear in the voice that calls them? What do they recognize in this Jesus who beckons them to cast aside all they have known? Did their guts tell them something? Did they feel something in their bones? Did their hearts burn within?

This scene takes place against the backdrop of Roman occupied Palestine. Herod Antipas controls the seas, the harbors, all fishing rights, and the tolls for the roads. These two pairs of brothers aren't just village entrepreneurs out to catch some fish for their families. They are part of large cooperatives that bid competitively for fishing contracts. Their big catches enter the fish economy with further taxation through processing, preserving and selling, with chief tax collectors taking a cut at every turn, and with all the money funneling up to Herod who pays tribute directly to Rome.

The call to follow Jesus requires a complete reordering and reimagining of their values. These are fishermen. It is their identity. Their nets and boats define them.

So do their families. They have names, family and tribal, inherited from their fathers. And Jesus is calling them to leave it all behind. And famously, they will do it, they will let it all go and begin their re-education. In the days, weeks and years to come these four along with the other disciples will learn again and again what it takes to follow Christ - they will receive a profound reorientation to where their treasure lies. They will learn that the way of Jesus requires them to step out in faith in radical ways that put them at odds with the social, cultural and political norms of the time, in ways that align them with a different kind of economy or commonwealth - a new kind of kingdom. These early disciples will also soon learn that this path is not without risk and hazards. For all that it asks from them, this path will not offer much by way of earthly security.

So why follow? Why take the risk? What's the draw? Where is the good news in this?

In our gospel passage, Mark opens the scene by telling us that Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the Good News of God: *"This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God has drawn near! Change your hearts and minds, and believe this Good News!"* (Inclusive Bible)

Jesus will spend all of his short life inviting people to accept the good news that the kingdom of God has actually come near. He will heal people and announce that their sins are forgiven without recourse to a temple, a sacrifice or a priest. He will turn the concept of Sabbath upside down. He will teach the parables of the kingdom, explaining that it is not a physical kingdom to kill and die for, but a present reality, like seed sown on four kinds of soil, like an illuminating lamp on a stand, like invisibly growing seeds that suddenly sprout, or like a huge plant bursting up from a tiny mustard seed.

In this kingdom forgiveness is a fact. Healing of old wounds and diseases of the soul like bitterness and envy is possible. We can be forgiven forgivers who turn the other cheek. Guilt and shame can be traded in for grace and liberation. God can be known intimately as Abba-Father instead of a rigid score-keeping judge.

Us-and-them dualistic thinking can be left behind, back at the shore with the boat and old nets, and a new openness to others who are different, but equally loved by God can blossom. Lost sheep, prodigal sons and daughters are welcome, sinners and tax collectors are welcome, Samaritans and Gentiles are welcome, and the sick, poor and disheartened are all invited to live into their true identities as beloved children of God. When we can accept this, then the kingdom of God will come near for us!

So we too are invited to leave our nets, boats and nests; to let go of the group-think, the herd mentality, the devotion to the status quo and the dualistic either-or consciousness. The time is here, the moment is now. Jesus is calling us to a much richer, more satisfying, holistic and open way to live. It is life lived compassionately engaged in the real world; awake and connected to the God of love and mercy.

It's challenging at times to reconcile the seeming paradox that giving ourselves to the God of love and mercy does not always protect us from heartache and suffering; in fact, it sometimes does just the opposite. Called to engage the world, we find ourselves drawn deeply into our own humanity and into the pain and despair and thankfully the delight and joy of our fellow humans.

The Good News is that we are not alone. In our leaving and letting go, and in following Jesus we find our sustenance and our true home:

*God alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken*
sings the psalmist to the Holy One.

*On God rests my deliverance and my honor;
my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.*

Trust in God at all times; pour out your heart; God is refuge for us.

Christ means for us to share in the life, resurrection and presence that attends his path. Jesus' call to the fisherfolk falls close on the heels of his baptism in the Jordan, and we who are invited to share in Christ's baptism are likewise raised up in the life-giving waters to find our refuge and strength in the presence of Christ, who offers living water.

This week leading up to Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday, I have been reflecting on the courage of our Anabaptist forefathers and foremothers who listened to Christ's call to risk and step out in faith in radical ways that put them at odds with the social, cultural, and political norms of the time. I've been thinking about how they re-imagined and innovated practice and ritual for a free church. How with a deep reliance on God they stepped into the cold wintry waters on January 21st almost 500 years ago and baptized one another on the basis of confession of their faith.

I have been thinking of Anabaptist Christians across the globe who don't enjoy the same religious freedoms we do and who sometimes experience great fear, risk and persecution as they follow Christ.

As we've walked along the seaside together today and heard Christ's voice, what leaving and letting go, reordering and reimagining are we called to today?

"Come; follow me" Jesus invites us, find your true identity in the Living Waters.

"Come" Jesus calls, *"awake, arise, the time is now, the kingdom of God has come near, change your hearts and minds and follow me."*

In the coming days, may Christ raise you up, bless you with the depths of his love and sustain you as you follow him.

Hymn of Response: "We, Your People, Sing Your Praises" [VT, #849]

[A song with an East African melody]

*We, your people, sing your praises as together we are sent
to reveal your new creation in the shadows of lament.
Give us courage for the journey, shepherd Jesus, be our guide;
help us lead with hope and passion till all things are reconciled.*

Benediction: [from Ephesians & II Thessalonians] [Doug Schulz]

Peace be to the whole community... Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ... Now may the Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word. AMEN

Sending Hymn: "May the Peace of Christ Be with You" [VT, #843]

[A Japanese blessing with a folk melody]

*May the peace of Christ be with you.
May the love of Christ dwell deep in your heart.
May the Spirit enlighten your way.
May you live in the comfort of God's care.*

*May the grace of God be with you.
May the love of God dwell deep in your heart.
May you walk in the light of God's way.
May you live in the comfort of God's peace.*