

**Prelude: “All Things Bright and Beautiful”****[Annie Schulz]****Gathering Thoughts, Call to Worship & Prayer:****[Laur Steven]**

Good morning! And it is! Wasn't it good, last week, to worship here in person? It has been a long time coming. Yet this week we are back to a recorded service. We are still in pandemic protocols. We're not out of the woods yet. But we are hopeful, aren't we? It was great last week to see folks we haven't seen in a long time—even if we still had to distance. And though we are not physically together today, we can sense that we soon will be again. We are strengthened to endure the government restrictions a little longer.

Our over-arching preaching and worship theme right through until Advent is “Growing in God”, and our focus topic for this week and next continues to be “Abiding”. Our congregation is part of the house the Christian Church builds and within which the Holy Spirit abides, which means we abide with the Spirit. And that is amazing grace, a gift that can carry us joyfully into fuller participation in God's creation; a gift that can sustain us when we are weary, laden with a burden of care. Jan Steven's sermon entitled “No Rest for the Weary” will speak to this today.

Many of us at Grace carry a heavy burden of care currently, and want to cry out “How long, O Lord?”. But at the same time many of us continue to be amazed by God's grace. And, most wondrously, usually those people are the same. That ability to relish God's grace even as we feel exhausted by the world around us and our own world of care just is the evidence of our Abiding.

I want to thank Annie Schulz and the Grace Singers for their gift of music and song today, Jan Steven for her reflection, and Ted Kopp for being our stalwart sound technician.

Now I ask you to join me in our Call to Worship, beginning with a moment of silence as we bend our hearts to those in need of care, followed by our Opening Prayer.

Call to Worship:

[moment of silence]

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

I call all of you to worship this morning:

for those marvelling in summer's beauty

I call you to praise the creator's endless gifts;

for those facing illness of self, family, or friend

I call you to touch the healing hem of our redeemer's cloak;

for those who are weary and heavy-laden

I call you to rest upon the sustainer's outstretched wings.

Let us pray:

Whether, as we gather in worship today, we are  
praising or lamenting, blessed with energy or burdened with exhaustion,  
we have faith, that you, O living God,  
will melt us, mold us, fill us, use us,  
fall afresh on us.

Amen

**Hymn: "Praise with Joy the World's Creator" [Voices Together #428]**

*Praise with joy the world's Creator, God of justice, love, and peace  
source and end of human knowledge, God whose grace shall never cease.  
Celebrate the Maker's glory – pow'r to rescue and release.*

*Praise to Christ who feeds the hungry, frees the captive, finds the lost,  
heals the sick, upsets, religion, fearless both of fate and cost.  
Celebrate Christ's constant presence – friend and stranger, guest and host.*

*Praise the Spirit sent among us, liberating truth from pride,  
forging bonds where race or gender, age or nation dare divide.  
Celebrate the Spirit's treasure – foolishness none dare deride.*

*Praise the Maker, Christ, and Spirit, one God in community,  
calling Christians to embody oneness and diversity.  
This the world shall see reflected: God is One and One in Three.*

**Scripture: Psalm 146 [Laur Steven]**

- <sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD!  
Praise the LORD, O my soul!
- <sup>2</sup> I will praise the LORD as long as I live;  
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.
- <sup>3</sup> Do not put your trust in princes,  
in mortals, in whom there is no help.
- <sup>4</sup> When their breath departs, they return to the earth;  
on that very day their plans perish.
- <sup>5</sup> Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the LORD their God,
- <sup>6</sup> who made heaven and earth,  
the sea, and all that is in them;  
who keeps faith forever;
- <sup>7</sup> who executes justice for the oppressed;  
who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;  
8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.  
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;  
the LORD loves the righteous.  
9 The LORD watches over the strangers;  
he upholds the orphan and the widow,  
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.  
10 The LORD will reign forever,  
your God, O Zion, for all generations.  
Praise the LORD!

## **Prayers of the People**

**[DS]**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
when you walked on dusty roads  
or sat by glistening waters,  
you met people where they were.

When you bent down low  
to touch the leper,  
or raised your eyes to touch Zacchaeus' heart,  
heaven and earth were met.

And so our prayer today is that our world will know  
your healing touch  
and your forgiving heart.

That those who have been hurt  
by insincere actions  
and damning words  
will hear your healing voice.

That those whose lives are filled with dark thoughts,  
or unimaginable fears,  
will know your peace.

Walk beside those who are close to giving up hope  
and where life seems to have no point;  
where people struggle to make ends meet  
and fear the bailiffs' knock on the door.

May children living in sewers  
or tending AIDS-racked parents  
feel the touch of a caring hand  
and an end to injustice and fear.

And may all who weep and mourn,  
or feel abandoned and unloved  
turn towards your voice,  
move towards your arms  
and hear the whisper of your presence  
in the long hours of night.

Inspire us and encourage us to bend down low;  
to embrace those for whom society has no time or patience.

Raise our eyes upwards to see the struggling patient  
and the exhausted care giver.  
And where young and old stumble and fall, may we be there to offer support,  
that all will know your love that transcends all others.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

[Written by Reverend Eleanor Macalister, Church of Scotland].

**Hymn:                    “Life-Giver, Maker, God of All”                    [Voices Together #38]**

*Life-giver, Maker, God of all, your breath sustains creation.  
Your arms enfold the universe, its ev'ry constellation.  
Yet when we gather in this place, we know your nearness, your embrace.  
You make your home among us!*

*Here we become your living church; we learn and claim your vision:  
we are the hands and feet of Christ, empowered, bless'd for mission.  
Your Spirit fills the church, each part; your Spirit dwells in ev'ry heart:  
you make your home among us!*

*We hold your gifts in open hands, to offer peace and healing.  
We leave this place to share our bread, your tender care revealing.  
Thus, through us, may your love be shown' through us,  
this truth to all be known:  
you make your home among us!*

**Scripture:                    Mark 6:30-34, 53-56                    [Jan Steven]**

<sup>30</sup> The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup> He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. <sup>32</sup> And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. <sup>33</sup> Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. <sup>34</sup> As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd;

and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

<sup>53</sup> When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. <sup>54</sup> When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, <sup>55</sup> and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. <sup>56</sup> And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

**Reflection:**                      **“No Rest for the Weary”**                      **[Jan Steven]**

When I look out our kitchen window, I can see in the distance a grotto. It's Mary holding her dead son Jesus, his wounds still fresh. Recently a structure has been built over it to protect it somewhat. There are benches where you can sit and reflect and pray. Occasionally, a priest will come out and sit and talk with people who come by.

This sounds very rustic and peaceful. It is anything but. It's on the side of a massive parking lot which serves St. Alfred's Catholic Church and St. Alfred's Elementary school. It is a few feet away from the Food Bank which serves so many – Vine St. south of Scott has many very poor people living in high density housing. And the traffic on Vine St. and Carlton – which is very close to this grotto – can at times be crazy in volume and noise level.

But still the people come and are ministered to in this unprotected and at-times noisy environment, and then return to environments that are likely even more busy than this one.

This situation has become the relatable image for me in the reading of Mark's Gospel today. People trying to catch a break where there is very little break to be had. As much as I love our apartment, there are days when the busyness surrounding it tires me out. But reading today's verses absolutely exhausts me.

If ever you were inclined to think that the Gospels are a Self Help book – showing you how to do self care – this selection of scripture from the sixth chapter of the Gospel of Mark will disabuse you of that notion.

Listen to this again...

... Because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat. Jesus said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

<sup>32</sup> So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. <sup>33</sup> But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.

And then...

As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. 55 They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. 56 And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

And the readings don't give the half of it. They leave out the hours of teaching and the feeding of the five thousand. They skip the terrible storm that has the disciples straining at the oars and Jesus walking on the water and calming the sea.

What I'd like to do over the next few minutes is point out a few things from today's scripture reading. And then look at our lives in relation to it. How can we be fed and calmed when there seems to be no nourishment available and the waves of crises are upending us.

OK – some things from the reading.

First thing.

Because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, Jesus said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." But things are so chaotic, that they have to go into a boat to a deserted place.

And this sounds pastoral and restful. But picture this. It sounds like – from the fact that people are able to track Jesus from the shoreline and from the hills – that the only place the disciples and Jesus can catch a break is in the lake where they are constantly being observed. And you can imagine how relentlessly hot it must be in that boat, not to mention the smell of fish guts... Not much of a retreat centre I must say.

Second thing.

When the disciples point the boat to land, the crowds get there before they arrive. How does Jesus cope with this relentlessness other than with prayer? Scripture says he has compassion on them. For they are like sheep without a shepherd. They feel so lost.

And think about the other leadership at the time. Herod? Gah! He's just killed John the Baptist. Some though not all of the religious leaders of the day? Tyrants. Finally someone who cares for them.

Jesus teaches them. What might he be teaching them? We have some good ideas from our Psalm Reading today - #146...

Hope in God, not rulers, because God – unlike the rulers -

- upholds the cause of the oppressed
- gives food to the hungry.
- sets prisoners free
- gives sight to the blind,
- lifts up those who are bowed down,
- the LORD loves the righteous.
- the LORD watches over the foreigner
- sustains the fatherless and the widow,
- and frustrates the ways of the wicked.

<sup>10</sup> The LORD reigns forever.

And we as the hands and feet of Jesus are called to do this work. And we, when we are in need of the things mentioned above – in God’s intended world – would be receiving these.

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Where can you and I go after reading this passage of scripture and reflecting on it. Other than curling up on our couch or bed with noise-reducing headphones?

A couple of thoughts. First of all, we can take comfort that we are not Jesus nor are we the twelve disciples or the Apostle Paul – they preached, taught, healed and exorcised for Christ pretty much 24/7/365 – but not for many years. They didn’t live very long. They were called in a way we are not.

And I think that most of us feel we are in the situation of the boat-spotters and fringe-of-his-garment holders. That we are in need of being taught and healed. Nothing wrong with this. Life can deal some very tough blows.

But there are times when we are called to take on roles of Christian maturity and grit and be the hands and feet of Jesus – times when we provide round the clock care at high levels of intensity for what seems to be a never-ending amount of time.

What is it that sustained Jesus? And his Apostles? Prayer and compassion.

I cannot tell you a personal story about how this looks. I don’t do well without a night of sleep, let alone high levels of demand. But here is a story about what prayer and compassion can look like in a busy community setting.

Rick Hamlin is the Executive Director of Guideposts - my spiritual mentor’s, Irja’s, favorite monthly publication. Rick Hamlin wrote a book called Finding God on the A Train. Every morning when Rick takes a long subway ride in New York to get to his office, this is where he does his Bible reading or an inspirational reading and says his prayers. Talk about a place of no peace and no privacy.

And then this event happened which taught him more about compassion and connection than any of his readings. He writes:

→In the height of covid, “Somewhere deep underground between 145th and 168th Street, the train came to a sudden halt and the lights dimmed. “We’ve lost power,” the driver said.

There’d been an accident. Someone had “fallen” onto the tracks from the train going the other direction. The power had to be shut off for the rescue operation.

Of course, at first people are a combination of super annoyed and extremely scared. But then a Spirit of compassion entered his car – a person had died, likely died by suicide. The Spirit came by way of a conductor who, explaining the tragic situation, asked us for prayer.

One guy got up and opened the windows, attempting to give us more air. One woman stood up and announced that she was an internist and would be glad to help anyone suffering. (Anyone on the entire train – I might add.)

Time went on. We chatted amongst ourselves, putting each other at ease. Finally, after an hour, the driver lifted the brakes, the lights came back up, the power rumbled again through the train, one of those noises that I’d always found comforting, even more now. Slowly we pulled ahead, rumbling to the next station where I got off. ←

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I love this story. It’s a story of fear and anger, then of prayer and compassion, and then of these same people becoming the hands and feet of Jesus.

May we receive the Holy Spirit in prayer and may we be conduits of the Holy Spirit in our day to day lives. Amen.

**Hymn of Response: “God Who Touches Earth with Beauty” [VT #550]**

*God who touches earth with beauty, make my heart anew.  
With your Spirit recreate me pure and strong and true.*

*Like your springs and running water, make me crystal pure.  
Like your rocks of tow’ring grandeur, make me strong and sure.*

*Like your dancing waves in sunlight, make me glad and free.  
Like the straightness of the pine trees, let me upright be.*

*Like the arching of the heavens, lift my thoughts above.  
Turn my dreams to noble action, ministries of love.*

*God who touches earth with beauty, make my heart anew.  
Keep me ever, by your Spirit, pure and strong and true.*

**Benediction: [adapted fr. Mennonite Church Canada website]**

**[DS]**

God invites us into his future,  
where the one who makes all things new has made his home among us.

We are called and chosen,  
together embraced by the God in whom tears,  
mourning, crying, pain and even death will be no more.

Remember God's future, for this is our story.  
Our Lord says, "See, I am coming soon!"

Come, Lord Jesus! Amen..

**Sending Hymn: "Spirit of the Living God"**

**[Voices United #376]**

*Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.  
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.  
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.  
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.*

*Spirit of the living God, move among us all;  
make us one in heart and mind, make us one in love:  
humble, caring selfless, sharing.  
Spirit of the living God, fill our lives with love!*