

A Midweek Lenten Series Created for Community

Week 1 February 24th In Community with Creation

Welcome and announcements

Welcome to worship. We will not share Holy Communion in these Wednesday services however we will have Holy Communion on the Maundy Thursday on-line service. Good Friday you will have a choice of an on-line worship or in-person worship at St. Mark's church at 6:00pm. For Easter Sunday St. Mark's will hold a simple on-line worship or you may come to one of the two in-person worship services at the church at either 8:30am or 10:30am. Please see the details in the March newsletter which will come out soon.

During the Lenten season, we join with the whole church on earth remembering God's love for us in Christ Jesus. Common practices of repentance, prayer, fasting sacrificial giving and works of love are encouraged. As we transition into gathering, I am choosing to encourage you to give to the ELCA World Hunger drive. You can google that or look for more information in the March newsletter.

In this Wednesday Lenten series, we will reflect on Mark's gospel and what it means to be in community with one another, with the world, with creation, and with God.

Week 1 - In community with creation

Prayer Week 1

Gracious Creator, you fashioned us in your image in the midst of a world beyond our knowledge and understanding. Continue to weave us together in community with all created things, and deepen our awareness of the ways you connect us to the earth. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Appointed Scripture

During Lent I invite you to join me in the ancient spiritual practice of Lectio Divina which is Latin for Divine Reading. I will read the scripture 3 times. Before I read the scripture I will ask you to reflect on something different each time.

As I read it the first time: Listen for a word or short phrase that stands out to you.

Mark 4:35-41 Jesus calms a storm (*Jesus was teaching a large crowd by the sea*)

35 On that day, when evening had come, he (Jesus) said to them (the disciples), "Let us go across to the other side."

36 And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him.

37 A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.

38 But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

39 He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.

40 He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

41 And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

As it is read for the second time: Listen for a way in which God is speaking to you personally.

As it is read for the third time: Listen for a way in which God is speaking to the community/communities of which you are a part.

Homily (Short message)

This story of Jesus calming the storm is one of those stories that is than a miracle story but it is layered with meaning for us as the church as well as for our personal spiritual journey. Was it hard to listen to it 3 times? Each time I read the story I see and hear new things. I never noticed before the phrase "*other boats were with them*". Other boats were with the boat Jesus was in. How does this story apply to you personally? What storms of life are you navigating through? Jesus spoke to me personally asking "*Why are you afraid?*" How did Jesus speak to you? In this exercise of Divine reading where did you find community? I found community in the disciples who were afraid together and they amazed at the power of Jesus asking "Who is

this man?

The image of being in the boat with Jesus has been an image of the church for centuries. We travel through the sea of life together with Jesus. Although we are with Jesus in the community boat of the church, it doesn't mean the seas of our lives will be smooth sailing.

When we think of storms in this context, we might think of something terrible happening in our lives. Perhaps someone we love dies, we have an illness, financial loss, divorce, job loss or another challenge that brings us into prayer saying wake up Jesus "*do you not care that we are perishing?*" In this year of the pandemic, it has felt as if the winds and waves of life batter the hull of our boat. Our faith has been tested and I suspect we all know deep inside that Jesus is with us in this storm like others in our past.

At a leadership training some time ago, a young man who worked as a youth minister was asked "What is one thing you would like to say to the church?" The young answered simply and forcefully "You are irrelevant and you are inconsistent." That was something no one wanted to hear. This implies when the storms rage around us in our Western culture, we allow it to toss the church around because we do not want to wake up from our comfortable slumber. Even when we are dozing in the back of the boat it might be risky to wake Jesus up.

If we wake Jesus up, what questions might he ask us? Might he ask why are we afraid and declare we have little faith? Might he ask if we are working for justice and the poor? Might he ask if we are living out our faith as stewards of creation? How do we know when the church is on the move? There is controversy. When we advocate for the poor, when we look outside ourselves into the community near and far, there is controversy. When we focus on being kinder to the environment and reducing plastic and chemicals to be better stewards of creation, there is controversy. Being in the boat with Jesus, there is controversy. In order to be relevant and consistent we need to continue addressing pollution and racism.

In Jesus own ministry he upset people; he challenged existing power structures in the society and the religion; he called people to live differently, to different personal and communal behaviors. Jesus shakes the tree; he rattles the cage; he knocks over the money changers tables.

We are called to share in his work, not just make padded seats for the boat so the ride can remain smooth.

The good news of the story for us is that whether he is awake or asleep Jesus is with us and he cares. As a congregation we face the storm together knowing Jesus is with us. This is a source of hope and I am often buoyed by the care and love shared by other Christians.

The challenge to us, the call of faith, in the story is Jesus' question "What are you afraid of? Have you no faith?"

Whatever our answer to these questions we know that Jesus will continue to walk

beside us just as he did with the disciples.

Take a moment to consider have you left Jesus sleeping in the back of the boat? Are you prepared to wake him? Or is he already standing in your midst asking, “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?”

Prayer for Creation

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, who in your self-emptying love gathered up and reconciled all creation to the Father. Innumerable galaxies of the heavens worship you. Creatures that grace the earth rejoice in you. All those in the deepest seas bow to you in adoration. As with them we give you praise, grant that we may cherish the earth, our home, and live in harmony with this good creation.

Stir up your power, O God, and save your good creation. The earth groans. Forests fall, oceans rise, crops fail. The air is thick with so much burning. Free us from the powerful who destroy the air, water, and land. Frustrate their violence, expose their lies, overthrow their schemes. Pour out over the earth justice that rolls down like water to nourish the life of the world. Preserve the health of your beloved creation especially our polluted oceans. Strengthen those who serve and protect the garden of this earth. Restore the choir of your creatures and let us sing for joy. Gather us at your river, under the tree of life. Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth; in the name of the one who from a wounded tree birthed a new creation, Jesus our redeemer. Amen

The 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.

Blessing

The Creator who fashions us together with all things,
the Christ who leads us into a new beloved community,
the Spirit who holds us in the communion of saints,
one God, † bless you now and always. Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace, joined together in Christ.
Thanks be to God.