

# Olney Presbyterian Church

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

January 22, 2023

## Meditation for Worship Preparation

*The book of Psalms provides many aids for living to those who seek to draw closer to God. It is a record of those who have experienced God's presence; who have sought comfort, strength and guidance from their connection and relationship which God provides to those who seek to draw near. Psalm 27:1—“The Lord is my light and my salvation; the Lord is the stronghold of my life: whom shall I fear?” The psalmist goes on to list many things present during his life's journey, but then concludes that the best way to deal with them rests on this: <sup>14</sup>“Wait for the Lord: be strong and let your heart take courage: wait for the Lord.” This waiting (seeking God) allows seeing the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Much of our stress could be eliminated if we sought to see the Lord's presence with us as we deal with the events in our lives.*

Prelude                      *Father Eternal, Lord of the Ages, Barnard*

A news commentator made the remark as he was giving the weather forecast for the period spanning from last Wednesday through the middle of this coming week that it like winter only visits this area; winter is living somewhere else and just drops by on occasion. With the spring like days we are having in January, that seems an apt description. The temperatures and blustery winds we have been given as well as the storms which have occurred in other places seem very like the weather which occurs during the spring transition from winter to summer. Although I think that evidence shows humanity's activity has altered some of the design God created to sustain creation, the power of these forces remind us of God's power and majesty in creation. Because we know and trust that God's power and majesty will be sovereign in the end we can look for the beauty inherent in all creation and take time to lift our praise and gratitude that:

This is the day the Lord has made; **Let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

## Welcome & Announcements

In the Hebrew text for today from Isaiah 9:2 we read this familiar word: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light—on them light has shined.” This translation places the arrival of the light in the past tense. The verbs in the tenses found in the Hebrew could also be translated as “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.” The Hebrew past tense used here also carries the meaning that an action began in the past is still present or continuing. Considering the amount of darkness still present in our world this seems a better description of our

situation. The world is still dark around us, but we do have the light shown through arrival of Christ in our world shining for us. Our call to worship drawn from Psalm 27 reminds us that even in this dark world, God provides. **Please stand as you are able** for our responsive call to worship.

\*Call to Worship

Based on Psalm 27

The Lord is the stronghold of my life.

**The Lord is our light and our salvation.**

With the Lord as our stronghold, whom should we fear?

**We see your goodness and wait for you, O Lord.**

**Teach us your way, O Lord; lead us on a level path.**

Our opening hymn of praise celebrates the light we have been shown and our invitation to come and dwell within it; to joyously proclaim the gift. It is Hymn #466 from the Presbyterian Hymnal.

\*Hymn of Praise

*O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing*

#466, PH

Although we claim discipleship and seek to draw closer to our Lord, we often have problems seeing God's presence in our day to day lives. Let us pause here to confess the sins that have kept us from recognizing and enjoying God's presence with us and actions within our world.

\*Prayer of Confession

**God of light, we live in the darkness of a broken world worried about our lives; concerned for our health; despairing when brokenness and suffering overwhelm us. We cry out for you and feel abandoned. We doubt your presence and your promises. We believe you have turned from us in anger. We ask: "Why you have forsaken us?" The yoke of our burdens lies heavy upon us: our unwillingness to forgive, our fears of one another, our divisions and quarrels, our reluctance to share what you have provided. We long to turn from the dark to live in your light; to leave what is evil and follow your righteous ways, but are fearful. In these moments strengthen us in faith. Fill our hearts with courage. Forgive us and help our unbelief. Amen.**

\*Assurance of Pardon

Rejoice and celebrate this truth from Psalm 103:17—"The steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting." Know that we are forgiven and be at peace. Amen.

\*Hymn of Response

*Spirit of the Living God*

**Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me.**

**Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me.**

**Break me, melt me, mold me, fill me.**

**Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me.**

**Please be seated.**

It is fundamental to our faith's understanding that when we come together to seek our Lord, our Lord is present with us. Because we so often bring a multitude of distraction with us, let us go to the Lord asking that his presence with us may be heard and felt among us this day. Let us pray of God's light to illuminate us.

Prayer for Illumination

God of revelation, of epiphanies from the beginning of creation, you reveal yourself to us in diverse and numerous ways. Free us from the many distractions that turn our focus away from you and your Word. Open us to the truth you reveal to us today through your presence with us. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Our first text this morning comes from one of Paul's letters: one written to the diverse community at Corinth after his departure to continue his evangelistic work among gentiles. The reading is from 1 Corinthians 1:10-18. Listen for what this Apostle understood about his call and ours to continue Christ's work among us.

Epistle Lesson

1 Corinthians 1: 10-18

P.1772, Pew Bible

Musical Interlude

*Holy, Holy, Owens*

Last Sunday the text from John's gospel narrated Jesus' calling of his first disciples beginning near the River Jordan. This morning we read a passage from one of the synoptic gospels about this first move of Jesus to begin his ministry. However Matthew's gospel's relating of this event begins by the Sea of Galilee where Jesus asks some fishermen to leave their nets and go with him. Unlike John's description of Jesus just offering an invitation to come and see, in Matthew those who are called are already told they will have a purpose. Our text is from Matthew 4:12-23. Hear what Jesus' call to these men involved from the beginning and how it relates to the call given to all who follow him.

Gospel Lesson

Matthew 4: 12-23  
The Word of God for the people of God  
**Thanks be to God!**

P.1500, Pew Bible

Sermon

Called or Sent?

Elizabeth Sigmon

It is time for us to affirm some of what we understand about God and God's revelations to us about our relationship, not only with our Lord but with each other. Today we will use some of the statements drawn from scripture which form the not so brief, Brief Statement of Faith from our Book of Confessions. **Please stand as you are able.**

\*Affirmation of Faith

from A Brief Statement of Faith

**We trust in God the Holy Spirit, everywhere the giver and renewer of life. The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith, sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor, and binds us together with all believers in the one body of Christ, the Church. The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture, engages us through the Word proclaimed, claims us in the waters of baptism, feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation, and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church. In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing, to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in Church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace. In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives, even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth, praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"**

**Please be seated.**

Joining together as the faithful have done in all ages past, in confidence we now bring before our Lord all the concerns we have about this world which still walks in darkness even as we rejoice and celebrate God's self-revelations given to us. Let us join in prayers of intercession.

Prayers of Intercession & Lord's Prayer

Eternal God, in this season of Epiphany, this season of Divine "showing" and revelation, while we remember the wonder of Christmas and the birth of Emmanuel with joy and gratitude, we are also aware that darkness still prevails in many forms. Still, our problems, our brokenness and our suffering remain. Our hearts cry out for you as we seek to know you face to face, as intimate as it can be between creature and creator. So often we feel we cannot find you and feel forsaken in the midst of our despair. We ask to be shown how wrong we are, Holy One. Restore our confidence in your constant presence. We pause for these moments so focus our hearts and minds on you, God, in this prayer for ourselves and our world. The psalmists, ages ago, lifted their prayers to you in faithful confidence that you would hear and receive their petitions. Following their lead, we lift our petitions for the world, our communities and our

loved ones orally and in the silence of our hearts. In your mercy, O God, hear our prayers. We pray for our world full of violence, political tensions, divisions and suffering. We pray for the Ukrainians whose struggle reminds us of democracy's fragility and inspire us to cherish our right to self-determination. Protect those who hold to good and resist evil in all the places of our world. Soften the tyrants who fail to see the global consequences of greedy pursuits. Lift the lowly in need of grace. Set all the oppressed free. In your mercy, O Lord, hear our prayers. We pray for our nation and communities, for all people searching for companionship and communion, for the ill and their caregivers, for all those who labor to see our needs are met. God help us see you at work among us in the many and various ways you seek to shine your light into our brokenness. Help us to see you in the bonds we form serving together, in kindness shown and care received, in the ways we grow in understanding and empathy for those whose lives and experiences are different. We praise you Lord for the many times and ways you show up to reveal your ways and purpose for humanity. We praise you for becoming God-with-us in Jesus Christ. Dispel our doubts and fears so we can embrace your presence in the flesh. In your mercy, O God, hear our prayers. We pray for our loved ones, those whom we hold closest to heart and mind. Comfort those who grieve. Encourage those who are ill. Embrace those who have received bad news. Make space for those who struggle to belong. Generous God, filter our despair through your good news of great joy so we might see and know and share your abundant hope and irresistible grace. In your mercy, O Lord, hear the prayers of your people. Help us to live as epiphanies of your work and your presence, showing your love to all the world. Now, hear us as we pray the prayer Christ taught us, saying, 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 debts as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen

In gratitude for all that we receive let us return a portion of these blessings as gifts to proclaiming Christ's ministry and for the use of those most needy.

#### Offering

Offertory

*Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light*, Bach

\**Gloria Patri*

*Glory Be to the Father*

\*Prayer of Dedication

Holy God, we present these offerings to you in faith. We trust that you will bless and use them to further Christ's ministry and serve those in need. May these gifts bless those we know who are suffering and those known only to you. In Christ's name we lift this prayer. Amen.

Our hymn of sending this morning seems apt for considering how we are called to respond to the invitation issued by God for us to join in the mission to proclaim, to serve and to join in providing what is needed in our world.

\*Hymn of Sending

*Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore*

Insert

\*Charge and Blessing

Christ is always issuing that invitation to come to him and see how we are called to be a part of God's reign, we are always invited to not only follow but to cast out nets to capture and bring others into the fold of our good shepherd, we are always being called and shown how God's desire is for us to live abundantly as the one community sheltered under God's ways. So we are truly both called to come and then sent out to gather others. That is always the charge given to those who seek to draw closer to our Lord. That is the mission given to all those who are disciples. We do this in many ways, but probably the most effective is to demonstrate love and acceptance to all. Our hearts desire to be closer to our Lord, so as we leave this place of worship let us seek the Lord's presence within those we encounter, and following the example of our Lord, invite them to join us in this endeavor. May the grace, hope and peace and love of God the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of all live be with us all, now and forever. Amen.

Postlude

Praise Him, Praise Him!, Allen

#### Called or Sent?

Whenever discipleship is mentioned in Scriptures one of these two situations provides the context for what happens...we like to separate them as two separate events now different aspects of the same relationship that God seek to develop with us. But think about it beginning with Abraham...how he was given an open invitation to go, but not given a destination...God's message was just go to a place where I will show you. Moses spoke to God from a burning bush and was given a mission...both an obvious call and sending pretty much simultaneously. The text from John's gospel last week highlighted the invitation given by Jesus to those disciples of John the Baptist to come and see what he was about. They went and remained with him, even announcing what they discovered and further extending the invitation. Matthew's text for today is again described in the scripture as Jesus's first gathering of disciples. But here instead of issuing an invitation to "come and see" to ones who have sought him, Jesus goes out walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and invites two pairs of brothers to come with him...to follow him for the purpose of gathering others. In Matthew's gospel the narration has a focus on how what Jesus does fulfills what the prophets had proclaimed about how God was going to send light into the darkness of the people's lives. John the Baptist has proclaimed two related purposes: the need for repentance because the kingdom or reign of God was near. In his proclamation he provided witness that Jesus was the one to fulfill God's purpose, to put God

and God's ways back as the way Judah was governed. After being tempted in the wilderness, when Jesus returns he is greeted by news of John's arrest so he leaves Nazareth and makes his home in Capernaum "by the sea." Herod probably had many reasons beside the personal criticisms levied by John for arresting him because John's proclamation challenged the rule of Rome. Herod was the puppet ruler installed on Judah's throne by Rome whose rule oppressed the people. Herod probably assumed arresting John would eliminate this call for change being made by such a popular voice. Then when Jesus moves from Nazareth to take up residence in Capernaum fulfilled the prophecy that the light God would send would shine in that area...across the Jordan in Galilee of the Gentiles he immediately takes up the role of bringing light as he begins proclaiming the same message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. When the Isaiah scroll was written, Assyria was the one creating darkness for the people; in Jesus' time the Roman Empire has assumed that role through their domination and oppression of the people. The message is when God's kingdom, when God's reign is not providing the guidance for governance, often the result for many people is oppression, darkness and death. Jesus enters the scene to demonstrate how God's reign is different. Jesus calls people to encounter God's empire. The Greek word Matthew uses is *basileia* and is translated in various ways: kingdom, reign, rule and empire. The phrase he uses "*basileia* of heaven is not commonly found outside the Gospels. The concept of God as king who asserts sovereign rule among God's people and the nations, however, is common in Hebrew Scriptures. There God is revealed as creator, savior and judge; God is presented as active and intervening in a world that does not live according to God's purposes. God asserts God's rule in redeeming the world. In the gospel the use of *basileia* is imitative of the world's description of the world's status but at the same time is at work in redefining the term's meaning through the descriptions of Jesus' healing and his liberating powers. The Gospel envisions God's empire as already established in the heavens. It is now being extended among humans in Jesus' activity as reflected in one of the petitions found in the Lord's prayer that "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The story of how God's reign is to extended forms the basis of what is narrated about Jesus' life, his proclamations and his actions. In today's text Jesus walks by the Sea of Galilee and begins that process of gathering those around him to participate in this extending God's reign, of the in-breaking of God's rule into this world's way of doing things.

We are often amazed by the response of these two sets of brothers who immediately drop what they are doing, leaving the life they know to join Jesus in this work of extending God's reign. The men's immediate response is stark. We often like to think these men have come to know Jesus as he is living in their village. What the scene in the text doesn't illuminate is just how their actions defy the Roman Empire. Rome asserted control over land and sea, their production, and the transportation and marketing of their yields with contracts and taxes. Jesus disrupts these men's lives, calls them to a different loyalty and way of life, creates a new community and gives them a new mission of gathering more people to join in this defiance of Rome's ways. As God's agent, Jesus is to manifest the light of God's saving presence and reign. Such initiative and gift designed to change the world are appropriately welcomed with an instant response. Their call and accepting response anticipate other people who join Jesus' followers throughout the gospel. Jesus is shown wandering the countryside preaching and



teaching the good news of God's empire that has invaded Roman Galilee. He also heals people's diseases and infirmities some of which are described in detail. Jesus' healings are acts designed to repair imperial damage and enact God's life-giving empire which restores people's lives. They anticipate the completion of God's working that creates the world envisioned in Isaiah where all people enjoy abundant good food and physical wholeness, where the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have good news brought to them. Jesus is shown calling people as they are, from where they are, and being just who they are. It seems remarkable that all four of these people, just as they are follow after this newly arrived resident of their village who interrupts their daily routine. All Jesus asks of them at this point is simply that they follow: as they are, from where they are, being who they are. As is always true for those who are followers of Jesus who come after them, including us, the meaning of their choice will unfold over time. When God calls the answered invitation will empower the choices needed. It may be that answering the call will mean leaving some things behind those called might have preferred to keep. Those first disciples might have preferred to remain with their families, to keep their steady employment, to stay with what they know...yet they followed. Answering God's call fundamentally always calls for change. As those who have received this invitation to also follow Jesus, we need to consider what this means; what type of choices and changes have we been invited into to participate in this in-breaking of God's reign into our world? In our culture we often consider the subject of being called as something related to vocation. If we limit our understanding of call to vocation, to those people who take up a formal role in ministry, we fail to embrace the way Jesus calls—the call to each of us where we are, being where we are to then embrace the ways of God's reign. Answering Jesus' call means we have to make choices which are contrary to the kingdom in which we are residing—the kingdom and ways of our society which has a world view of scarcity causing us to be fearful of others, to want to gather more than we need, to act in self-serving ways rather than acting to serve other. In a little book called What Do They Hear: Bridging the Gap Between Pulpit and Pew, Mark Allen Powell explores the significant difference between how preachers and listeners approach the texts before us. Each seeks to understand the meaning of the text, but in a different manner. Pastors often are concerned with describing and explaining the context, trying to make clear what is being described; trying to convey what the writers of the text were trying to make plain. Most who are paying attention are trying to discern the meaning of the text for them...in this case the question is what does this story of the call of the disciples mean for me. When we approach textual meaning as explanation, the focus is on what happened in the past. If we seek to approach a text for the meaning it has for us that shifts focus at the least into the present, or more importantly into the future. What is the message in this text for me that will impact how I am working at this project of following Jesus to bring God's reign to earth? Answering that kind of question is about the future. It is about us imagining that God has a lot of work for us to do. This can be surprisingly challenging move for many of us to make because it is likely to be disruptive to our daily routine, and our complacency about our immediate society's governance. Do those places and people we encounter daily resemble and support the values and relationships illustrated in the gospels as God's ways or do they accept and support the worldview always supported by those in opposition God's in-breaking work. In the passage

from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, Paul exhorts those of the community to concentrate on the purpose for which God has called them together...reminding them that it is only about expanding God's reign on earth, on proclaiming the message brought by Christ so that more people are invited to join the community and then in turn draw others into the community not only through words but through actions of serving and caring. So while we frequently speak of how we are called, how we are loved and gathered together, we need to remember that the calling is made for a purpose...to bring God's reign here among us...to demonstrate that we are indeed members of God's reign and seeking to live according to God's ways of love for others trusting in God's vision and working to make it more visible. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

## Called or Sent?

Whenever discipleship is mentioned in Scriptures one of these two situations provides the context for what happens...we like to separate them as two separate events now different aspects of the same relationship that God seek to develop with us. But think about it beginning with Abraham...how he was given an open invitation to go, but not given a destination...God's message was just go to a place where I will show you. Moses spoke to God from a burning bush and was given a mission...both an obvious call and sending pretty much simultaneously. The text from John's gospel last week highlighted the invitation given by Jesus to those disciples of John the Baptist to come and see what he was about. They went and remained with him, even announcing what they discovered and further extending the invitation. Matthew's text for today is again described in the scripture as Jesus's first gathering of disciples. But here instead of issuing an invitation to "come and see" to ones who have sought him, Jesus goes out walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and invites two pairs of brothers to come with him...to follow him for the purpose of gathering others. In Matthew's gospel the narration has a focus on how what Jesus does fulfills what the prophets had proclaimed about how God was going to send light into the darkness of the people's lives. John the Baptist has proclaimed two related purposes: the need for repentance because the kingdom or reign of God was near. In his proclamation he provided witness that Jesus was the one to fulfill God's purpose, to put God and God's ways back as the way Judah was governed. After being tempted in the wilderness, when Jesus returns he is greeted by news of John's arrest so he leaves Nazareth and makes his home in Capernaum "by the sea." Herod probably had many reasons beside the personal criticisms levied by John for arresting him because John's proclamation challenged the rule of Rome. Herod was the puppet ruler installed on Judah's throne by Rome whose rule oppressed the people. Herod probably assumed arresting John would eliminate this call for change being made by such a popular voice. Then when Jesus moves from Nazareth to take up residence in Capernaum fulfilled the prophecy that the light God would send would shine in that area...across the Jordan in Galilee of the Gentiles he immediately takes up the role of bringing light as he begins proclaiming the same message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. When the Isaiah scroll was written, Assyria was the one creating darkness for the people; in Jesus' time the Roman Empire has assumed that role through their domination and oppression of the people. The message is when God's kingdom, when God's reign is not providing the guidance for governance, often the result for many people is oppression, darkness and death. Jesus enters the scene to demonstrate how God's reign is different. Jesus calls people to encounter God's empire. The Greek word Matthew uses is *basileia* and is translated in various ways: kingdom, reign, rule and empire. The phrase he uses "*basileia* of heaven is not commonly found outside the Gospels. The concept of God as king who asserts sovereign rule among God's people and the nations, however, is common in Hebrew Scriptures. There God is revealed as creator, savior and judge; God is presented as active and intervening in a world that does not live according to God's purposes. God asserts God's rule in redeeming the world. In the gospel the use of *basileia* is imitative of the world's description of the world's status but at the same time is at work in redefining the term's meaning through the descriptions of Jesus' healing and his liberating powers. The Gospel envisions God's empire as

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