

Order of Worship

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, February 7, 2021

WELCOME

Hello God, thank you for this day.

It's 9:03 and we need your help.

**Guide us by your Holy Spirit to reach new people,
Connect us all through Christ's love, and
Empower us to love and serve others. Amen.**

PRELUDE *Herr Jesu Christ, du höchstes Gott* J.B. Kehl

CALL TO WORSHIP Psalm 147:1-11 UMH 859

HYMN 66 *Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven* LAUDA ANIMA

SCRIPTURE Isaiah 40:21-31

PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

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. Amen.

HYMN 474 *Precious Lord, Take My Hand* PRECIOUS LORD

SCRIPTURE Mark 1:29-39

MESSAGE Rev. Rebecca Voss

GENEROSITY, INVITATIONS and CELEBRATIONS

HYMN *O God, We Ask for Strength* ST. AGNES

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE *Prelude and Fugue in C Minor* G. Kirchhoff

Prayer Corner

Gracious God, we ask for your comfort for all the family and friends of Jerry Evans as we grieve our loss. Grant us your peace as we celebrate his life and honor his legacy as a leader in our church and community.

Loving Lord, we pray for Tim Harvey as he recovers from shoulder surgery. Give him your strength and patience and keep him safe from complications.

Four years ago, I took a trip to the Holy Land and saw the very places we just read about in the Bible. Capernaum is a town on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. The ruins of the synagogue where Jesus first taught and cast out the unclean spirit are pictured here, and the dark basalt steps that Jesus and the first disciples walked up and down can still be stood on today. A few hundred yards away are the walls of a square stone house which was most likely Simon Peter's home where Jesus healed his mother-in-law. There's an octagonal stone structure that was built in the 5th century surrounding Simon Peter's home, known as the original "First Church". In 1990 St. Peter's Catholic Church was built to shade and cover all of it, with a glass viewing area in the center floor of the modern building. I stood and marveled at those ruins for quite a while.

In our modern day, do you know that you can view YouTube videos at faster speeds? For instance, if these 35-40 minute online worship services seem too long, then you could click the "Settings" gear icon, select "Playback Speed", and choose from 8 options to make the video play faster or slower. Since discovering this trick, I'm enjoying a faster pace of keeping up with current events as I watch and listen at 1.5 times the normal speed. Conversely, I set it at a slower setting to refresh my former language skills. When I watch a video in French at .5 or .75 speed, I can understand so much more (but certainly not all).

The Gospel of Mark is Good News on a mostly high-speed setting. It seems like it is written for people like me whose internal engines usually idle on the fast side. All of this is very appealing to us who want our lunches heated within 2 minutes and immediate replies from Siri or Alexa.

We're still only half-way through the first chapter, and already we've met John the Baptist, seen Jesus baptized and tested in the wilderness, heard Jesus call his first disciples, preach a sermon in the synagogue, frustrate religious authorities, cast out an unclean spirit, and cause the news about his powerful words and miraculous healing and deliverance to spread fast and far. Right after quickly and fully healing Simon's mother-in-law of a fever (which had a much higher fatality rate in those days), it says, *"That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who*

were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him."
(Mark 1:32-34)

It's important to note it says Jesus "cured many", and "cast out many demons". In other words, though many were set free in an instant, not everyone got a miraculously fast answer to their prayers. This is not a matter of God not wanting to or not being able to heal and cure. It's likely that God is wanting us to slow down to see a greater purpose and blessing in ongoing prayer and waiting. Are we waiting with faith, or procrastinating with frustration or distraction?

When we dawdled as kids, my dad used to say *Mach schnell!* (Make haste!) in German. To get people moving in Greek, you'd say, *Euthys!* which means *straight away, at once, immediately, or suddenly*. Mark uses it 14 times in the first two chapters. But speed is not always a friend of understanding. Despite the overall fast-paced *euthys* of Mark's Gospel, in verse 35 it slows down: "*In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.*" Jesus dialed down the distractions that the daylight would bring. He slowed down so he could deeply understand the language of God's love and absorb God's presence in his life.

We often think of prayer as asking God for what we or other people need or want. We think of God as the Giver who can keep us healthy and happy in life. That is all true, but it is secondary. We are primarily called to pray in order to know and love God. We are called to seek the Giver more than the gifts. We are called to slow down and savor God's presence and love that isn't based in what we do or what God gives.

When we focus on prayer as the way to ask God for what we want, it's easy to get frustrated and impatient. After all, waiting isn't easy when the fever rages, the depression suffocates, the loneliness lingers, or the pain persists. Our prayers may seem unheard or unanswered, and our hope turns to impatience or even doubt. Is God listening? Is God worn out? The answers seem too slow in coming.

Many of us, including myself, struggle through times when our lives seem dark, deserted, and too quiet or slow. We prefer to stay busy and distract ourselves as we wait for God to do what we cannot. That isn't necessarily bad, but it can be when we're going too fast to notice how God *is* working and speaking in our lives.

Are we answering the call to pray in the midst of darkness or despair? Are we willing to wait on God even when we're weary and weak? Many in Capernaum and the Galilean towns had probably suffered for a long time and maybe even had given up hope. But the words of Isaiah (40:28-31) spoken in that synagogue carried them through difficult times of praying while waiting, just as it continues to do so for us.

"Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

Despite not everyone's *what* prayers being answered immediately, they were seeing *Who* was the answer to their prayers. Jesus tried to get away to pray and wait on God, but vs. 36 says, *"Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you."*

I hope we continue to search for Jesus. I hope we continue to know that we'll find him in prayer. We will find him with the hurting and the weary. We will find him when we slow down the speed and reach out in prayer to God in relationship. Tommy Dorsey wrote a prayer we can sing or say:

*Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light.*

Even after we get through the storms and darkness and we start to see the light, God's not done with us. As Jesus told Simon Peter and the other disciples, *"Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do. And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons."* (vs. 38-39). The pace is about to pick up again as the Good News is proclaimed everywhere, but it is built on the foundation of having a deep relationship with God. Keep praying and waiting on the Lord, not for what God gives but because of who God is. Christ will renew your strength, hold your hand, and lead you to the light. Amen.