

Nothing

06 February 2022

Call to Worship Psalm 138

We give you thanks, O LORD, with our whole hearts;

Before the gods we sing your praise;

We bow down toward your holy temple

And give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness;

For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly;

But the haughty he perceives from far away.

Though we walk in the midst of trouble,

**You preserve us, you stretch out your hand,
and your right hand delivers us.**

Because he lives

God sent His son, they called Him Jesus

He came to love, heal and forgive

He lived and died to buy my pardon

An empty grave is there to prove my Saviour lives

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow

Because He lives, all fear is gone

Because I know He holds the future

And life is worth the living, just because He lives

How sweet to hold a newborn baby

And feel the pride and joy He gives

But greater still the calm assurance

This child can face uncertain day, because He lives

And then one day, I'll cross the river

I'll fight life's final war with pain

And then, as death gives way to victory

I'll see the lights of glory and I'll know He reigns

Notices

The Peace

Reading 1 Luke 5:1-5

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

Reflection 1

Have you ever blown up a balloon only for it to pop just as you finish blowing? Frustrating – right? All that effort and for nothing. Some small fragments of rubber to collect off the floor the only sign that you put in any work at all. It just doesn't seem fair.

Of course, that's a trivial example. I think of the farmers who put in effort all year simply to have a storm or a drought wipe all their profits off the map. Or the owners of tourism businesses built up over years only to have a virus completely destroy their life's work. Or, at a lower level the baker putting effort into baking a cake, only to have the power go off at a critical moment and the cake becoming a stodgy flop. I suspect that most of us can identify times in our lives when it feels like we can turn to Jesus, along with Simon, and say, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing." The depth of frustration and disappointment can be quite overwhelming. I am reminded of playing in the Masters Games a few years back. Our team worked hard in the lead up and we played well, making it through to the final. Only to be thoroughly thrashed by our finals opponents. That was a moment that felt like we had worked all night long and come up with nothing.

The truth is, we all have experiences like that in one way or another. We can frequently come away from them wondering why we bothered. And in the cases where the situation affects our livelihoods it can be even more distressing. Thing is, it's not the disappointing event that matters so much as what follows that determines our character. Are we ready to get up, dust off and get back into it?

I think there are two parts to this story that display Simon's character. The first is that he helped Jesus by placing his boat for Jesus to speak to the crowd. After a long, unsuccessful night fishing, the last thing you would want to be doing is acting as a taxi for someone speaking to a crowd. Right there we see someone with a servant heart.

The second is that after a night filled with frustration, he would follow the instruction of a man clearly no expert in fishing. I'm guessing that the fish would not normally be running at whatever time of day it was just then. But Simon shows Jesus respect, probably tinged with a healthy dose of skepticism, and heads out to fish again. To which I can only say, 'Wow!' I'm not sure I would have displayed the same manner. Perhaps it is one reason Simon came to be called Simon, the rock. He got up, dusted himself down and was right back to work. A defining moment...

Friend of God

Israel Houghton

Who am I that You are mindful of me
That You hear me when I call
Is it true that You are thinking of me
How You love me it's amazing

I am a friend of God
I am a friend of God
I am a friend of God
He calls me friend

God almighty
Lord of glory
You have called me friend

Prayer of adoration and confession

In this time of Covid, masks and vaccinations, restrictions and MIQs, we are reminded of the incredible intricacy of life on this planet we call home. The interconnections between the fish in the sea and the plants on land, the animals and birds and us human beings defy our ability to catalogue and understand. And so we pause, amazed at what the Word, with God in the beginning, brought to pass, life and light shining in the darkness.

Pause

We take a moment to acknowledge that Covid is as much a part of the creation as we are. And though we find ourselves anxious, perhaps fearful, at what may

come to pass, we proclaim that you alone are God. Our understanding is not required, our wisdom too small to grasp how this all fits together.

Yet we do not suffer in silence, and we cry out to you with cries of anguish and perhaps anger, and knowing that you remain, God of the living and the dead. We are but a breath, O God. Fill us with your breath we pray. Help us to see a little of the way ahead that in our times of doubt and need we may yet serve you in your strength and your power.

In the mighty name of Jesus, we bring our prayers to you.

Amen

Reading 2 Luke 5:6-11

⁶When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" ⁹For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."
¹¹When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Reflection 2

These fishermen knew when to fish. They had been fishing at night because they knew that was when they would catch fish. You ask any fisherman, and they will tell you the best time to catch fish and where to catch them. Years of experience has taught them how to ensure they get the best possible catch. They knew that going out right then was a waste of time. There was no way they were going to catch any fish. But if it would keep the preacher happy... I'm not sure I can imagine their astonishment when they caught so many fish their nets were beginning to break. None of it made any sense. Perhaps it was like the night we put on a community meal in Brockville, expecting what we thought would be a huge 70 people. By the end of the evening over 120 had crammed their way into the hall. It was a genuine miracle everyone had enough to eat.

A catch that filled both boats to the point they began to sink was far more than the fishermen would have expected, even on a good day. It is no wonder they were amazed. None of it made any sense to them.

But Simon, the blusterer, the brash talker, full of his own importance, sees things for how they really are. Jesus has taken his nothing and turned it into abundance. The once empty nets had caught more fish than they had ever seen in one place. And Simon understands. I want to pause with that for a moment. There are three instances in the Gospels when we see Simon understand. This one. When he names Jesus as the Messiah. And when the cock crows. In each instance the understanding comes through the Holy Spirit. It is not generated by his own careful thought or calculation. The Holy Spirit gives him insight that he would not have come to of his own initiative. In this moment Simon sees nothing made into something through the power of God. I wonder if it has come time for us to pray that God might make something of our nothing. Certainly in my experience in the church we have generally been fairly good at telling God how good we are at whatever is before us. Looking around at the general state of the church in New Zealand I think it would be fair to say that we have been out fishing all night and our nets are empty. Frequently we read this story and focus on the fishers of men bit, thinking that we have a job to do. In doing so I wonder if we miss the part where we have done everything we can, to no avail, and then without invitation, God steps in. I for one am ready to confess that my nets are empty – not for lack of trying. I need to see God take over and prepare the catch that I have been missing. Then I can get up and go to work again.

Will you let God turn your nothing into something?

We Pray

God of surprises, of fish, of abundance. We come to you, yearning for you to take our nothing and fill it to overflowing with your mercy. As a church we confess that as hard as we have tried, we have not been very good at fishing for people. Gift us the humility and courage we need to say yes to your invitation. Grant us the vision to see your hand at work in our lives and those around us. Let us see your glory we pray. Amen.

You are my strength

Hillsong Worship

You are my strength
Strength like no other
Strength like no other
Reaches to me

You are my hope
Hope like no other
Hope like no other
Reaches to me

In the fullness of Your grace
In the power of Your Name
You lift me up
You lift me up

Unfailing love
Stronger than mountains
Deeper than oceans
Reaches to me

Your love O Lord
Reaches to the heavens
Your faithfulness
Reaches to the sky

Offering

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning>

Gracious and merciful God, we offer our gifts to you this day with open hands and open hearts. We know there have been days when we have clung to money for our security, to try to control our future. At times, we've been tempted to believe that in gaining more, we would find salvation. Open our ears and minds to hear the truth from your apostle Paul: we need only hold firmly to the good news of Christ's death and Resurrection – it alone will save us. In the holy name of Jesus, our redeemer, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for ourselves and others

Hazel Bennett

Dear God of our hearts and homes, thank you for your presence through this week in everything we've done, good and not so good. Some things we could show you, some things we'd rather not. We remember these things quietly now during this tumultuous time. Take our everyday experiences, we pray, and work upon them with your patient grace to bring us closer to you and to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord of our health and happiness, we know you're committed to our being well, and to our well-being. We pray now for those that are sick and ailing and all who are facing this major problem. We thank you and ask your blessing on those who, while continuing to worry about their own health, give their time and energy - Doctors and nurses, the police and the thousands of volunteers throughout our country and the world.

But Lord it's not all gloom and doom, there's a feeling that the countries of the world are pulling together against a common enemy. Pollution continues to be reduced in many cities with people staying home. Families are more available to each other, and for the most part we are more aware of those around us. We wonder Lord how much fighting in the world has stopped because of this virus, for that we sincerely thank you.

God of the universe, your renewing Spirit refreshes the furthest shores of creation. You never rest from your endless purpose of bringing all things together in Christ. Help us Lord this week, to live, as far as lies in us, especially as we head toward Easter, in the energy and joy of the resurrection.

All these things we pray through Jesus, our Lord, who taught us to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in Heaven, holy 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

Where the road runs out

Colin Gibson

Where the road runs out and the signposts end,
where we come to the edge of today,
be the God of Abraham for us,
send us out upon our way.

Lord, you were our beginning,
the faith that gave us birth.
We look to you, our ending,
our hope for heaven and earth.

When the coast is left and we journey on
to the rim of the sky and the sea,
be the sailor's friend, be the dolphin Christ
lead us in to eternity.

When the clouds are low and the wind is strong,
when tomorrow's storm draws near,
be the spirit bird hovering overhead
who will take away our fear.

Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here may we experience the overwhelming power of God to
turn our nothing into abundance.

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the Love of God,
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.