

GAYLORD UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Third Sunday after Epiphany January 24, 2021



Morning Meditation

“Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies.”

— Nelson Mandela

Welcome and News of the Church

Statement of Welcome

**No matter who I am, No matter where I am on life’s journey, I am welcome here.
No matter who you are, no matter where you are on life’s journey, You are welcome here!**

Statement of Purpose

One: Who are you?

All: I am a beloved child of God!

One: What does that mean?

All: I am a person of worth to be valued!

One: Then what will you do?

All: I will live a life of Love and Acceptance of myself and all God’s people!

- ❖ **We will continue meeting in person for worship** and will be **live streaming** our service this Sunday and each time we meet on our Facebook page. The service is also recorded and will be available later for viewing from our web page and Facebook. To view our service on the website click on the link: <https://listen2god.org/weekly-message/>
- ❖ We will have a brief **Annual Meeting following worship today.** We will be hearing the reports of the church boards, nominating committee, and the proposed budget. Business will be conducted in the sanctuary to allow for distancing. Like worship, **distancing and masks will be required.** There will be *no* food provided.

Prelude

Stacy Pauly

The Call

Psalm 62:5-12

For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. God alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God. Trust in God at all times, O people; pour out your heart before our God; God is a refuge for us.

Those of low estate are but a breath, those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath. Put no confidence in extortion, and set no vain hopes on robbery, if riches increase, do not set your heart on them. Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God, and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord.

Call to Community

One: We gather to respond to the call of God’s love

People: Thankful that someone cared enough to share this good news with us.

One: May we be compassionate enough to share this divine presence with others.

People: Love, when shared, is not divided but multiplied.

One: Love, given away, is not diminished but expanded.

People: May our gathering beckon and welcome those near and far to know the love of this divine presence.

Gathering Hymn

"Gather Us In"

WOV #718

Piano: Play through hymn

People: Here is this place new light is streaming now is darkness vanished away
See in this place our fears and our dreaming.
Brought here to you in the light of this day.
Gather us in, the lost and forsaken, gather us in, the blind and the lame;
Call to us now, and we shall awaken, we shall arise at the sound of our name.

Piano: Play stanzas 4, 5, 6

People: We are the young, our lives are a mystery, we are the old who yearn for
your face. We have been sung throughout all of hist'ry, called to be light
To the whole human race.
Gather us in the rich and the haughty gather us in the proud and the strong
Give us a heart so meek and so lowly give us the courage to enter the song

Piano: Play stanzas 4, 5, 6

Invocation

One: Let us pray: From deep within us we know of a loving presence.
All around us we see glory, beauty, life and light.
We have no words for what we experience so we cry out, "God!".
In this moment of worship may that loving presence grow deeper,
may our awareness of the divine presence around us grow more intense.
May we, gathered in this place, learn to pay more attention to God,
who loves us at all times and in all places.

People: God of love and life, in this moment of prayer be more and more in us that we
might live more and more in you. Amen.

Confession

Holy One, what a blessing and privilege we share here in this sacred space and among
this loving community. But, like Jonah, we sometimes are jealous of what we share
here. We know that others are longing and thirsting for what we know and experience.
Forgive us our reluctance to open our doors, to open our hearts to others; some like us,
some not. We repent of our hesitations and unwillingness to witness to those we have
considered strangers and even enemies for fear they just might become friends.
Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

One: The one who calls us to this place calls us to reconciliation through grace.
God will not deny a repentant heart or an open spirit.
Know that you are forgiven and walk in the new way that is made known to you
in God's love. **Amen.**

Doxology

Piano: play first line

Response: Glory be to Creator, and to the Christ and to the Holy Ghost.

Piano: play second line

Response: As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be
World without end, Amen, Amen.

Piano: play line three

Scripture

Jonah 3:1-5, 10;

3 The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, 2 “Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” 3 So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. 4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” 5 And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Mark 1:14-20

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” 16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20 Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Sermon

“My Nineveh”

The book of Jonah is Jonah’s story of being a prophet for God and his relationship with God. It is the story of Jonah’s call to a corrupt people who have developed a godless lifestyle of self-serving privilege. It is the common call of prophets to call for people to turn around and start honoring God in their everyday life as a government as well as individuals.

The unique thing about Jonah’s call is that he is called to witness to a people, who in his opinion, did neither deserve to have the opportunity to hear the word of God, nor to have the opportunity to repent and receive God’s grace.

Jonah says no to God. Jonah had the desire to live the life he had planned, not the one to which God called him. He had a great deal of resentment toward the recipients of God’s word.

Jonah’s story is filled with stories of grace given to him by God yet he does not believe the corrupt should receive grace. Yet Jesus tells us we should love our enemies.

Cheryl Lindsay writes, “Jesus, in relaying the Greatest Commandment, does not provide any outs. When he said you should love your neighbor as yourself, he did not say to love your good neighbor.”

It is easy to love the neighbor who keeps their yard up, greets you, and shares a cup of sugar when you need it. But the other neighbor is a different story, that one you do not desire to see and try to avoid.

In our world today, our neighbor, has become a global term. World news and social media have opened the world to us all. It is difficult to follow through with the command to love our neighbors because they are so different. Lifestyles and belief systems often serve to divide us upon first encounter. We are tempted to narrow our concept of neighbor to boundaries that include more homogenous communities. In that way, ignoring the needs of those we do not consider as neighbors becomes acceptable. We have the choice to widen our view, or live more isolated lives.

Jonah is called to witness to a large city-three days journey across. A city full of differing lifestyles, values. And in resentment he says no to God and goes away from his call. And we know the big fish story and his change of heart.

Our scripture today picks up on God's second call to which Jonah obeys. He puts aside his own thoughts and feelings about the people, puts aside his judgment, and goes to deliver God's message. He only goes one day's journey into the city, not even half way across the city and delivers his message. No Bible thumping, no blow horn, no pamphlets to pass out. He simply states, perhaps with a bit of resentment in his voice, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

The Ninevites stop, drop, and roll! They turn from their wickedness repenting of their evil ways. The King, all the peoples and even the animals turn to honor God.

Why did they respond so quickly?

Why did the fishermen who were called to follow Jesus immediately drop their nets and follow?

Immediate action in response to new information shows a great hunger for something more.

The people of Nineveh and the fishermen of Jesus' call, were so eager to hear a new word that the cry of Jonah and the call of Jesus was heard and devoured immediately. The people were hungry for a new message of something more, a better life. Was it that they had the feeling that they were headed in the wrong direction? Was it that they were weary of a shallow life lacking in meaning and purpose yet did not know a better way? Whatever their thinking, their inner hunger was great, and was making them ready to hear the call.

What is your hunger?

Lindsay states, "there are people who join movements because they are looking for meaning and purpose in their lives. They get caught up and indoctrinated in its beliefs, values, and community." It's hard to get them out of its grip because it fed them when they were hungry. It filled the dry spaces. It visited them in their loneliness and gave them hope. Hope for a better path to follow so they turn immediately upon hearing the message. Our hunger is great.

Our hunger goes beyond physical and emotional needs. There is a deep spiritual need within us that yearns for satisfaction. So often the message that is proclaimed as Christian is shallow and not fulfilling. Christianity is more than repenting; it is living in sacrifice of our own desires to the call of God on a daily basis.

Jonah was called to give the people of Nineveh the opportunity to repent, but that was only the beginning. Because after repentance comes the challenge to live more meaningful lives with a purpose in relationship to God and to each other; hearing the call of God to the cries of God's people.

So many times, we imagine a spiritual call to repentance as standing on a corner waving a Bible and telling people they are going to hell. When I was in Las Vegas several years ago, Lee and I were walking down the strip and heard a voice coming over a loud speaker. It was a man and a woman standing on a corner of a busy intersection telling the people they were all going to hell if they didn't repent from the evils of the city. I don't know if their message was being taken to heart by anyone,

but what I observed was that they were just adding to the congestion of the intersection. People trying to dodge them as they kept moving with the flow of the crowd.

However, the spiritual call might be working to give voice to the message that we can do better than to work together not out of guilt and fear of punishment, but out of grace given and grace to give. Out of love given and love to give.

You see, Jonah exists whenever someone says they love God but fails to love all that God loves. And we know we can do better!

Again, what is your Nineveh? What is it in you that needs to be faced in order to free you to go forth and give voice to the grace so needed by a Nineveh in your sight?

Like Jonah, many times it is resentment that keeps us from following a call. Judgement that someone is not deserving of grace. Someone has treated us unkindly, has wronged us or others, and we do not want them to receive the grace of a loving God because they just don't deserve it!

A story tells of a merchant in a small town who had identical twin sons. The boys worked for their father in the department store he owned and, when he died, they took over the store.

Everything went well until the day a dollar bill disappeared. One of the brothers had left the bill on the cash register and walked outside with a customer. When he returned, the money was gone. He asked his brother, "did you see that bill on the cash register?" His brother replied that he had not.

But the brother kept probing and questioning. He would not let it alone. "Dollar bills just don't get up and walk away! Surely you must have seen it!" There was subtle accusation in his voice. Tempers began to rise. Resentment set in. Before long, a deep and bitter chasm divided the young men. They refused to speak.

They finally decided they could no longer work together and a dividing wall was built down the center of the store. For twenty years hostility and bitterness grew, spreading to their families and to the community.

Then one day a man, in an automobile licensed in another state, stopped in front of the store. He walked in and asked the clerk, "How long have you been here?" The clerk replied that he'd been there all his life. The customer said, "I must share something with you. Twenty years ago I was riding the rails and came into this town in a boxcar. I hadn't eaten for three days. I came into this store from the back door and saw a dollar bill on the cash register. I put it in my pocket and walked out. All these years I haven't been able to forget that. I know it wasn't much money, but I had to come back and ask your forgiveness."

The stranger was amazed to see tears well up in the eyes of this middle-aged man. "Would you please go next door and tell that same story to the man in the store?" he asked. Then the man was even more amazed to see two middle-men, who looked very much alike, embracing each other and weeping together in the front of the store. After twenty years, the brokenness was mended. The wall of resentment that divided them came down.

Resentment, one brother thinking the other had mistreated him, caused one brother to withhold grace for twenty years. Grace that could have saved a relationship was not given.

Again, what is your Nineveh? Where or to whom do you need to bestow grace?

Prayers of the People

Piano

“Three Fold Amen”

Call for the Offering

One: Gestures of gratitude are a demonstration that a blessing or benefit has been received. We heard a call, dropped our nets and came to this place to find new life.

The gifts we give today are but tokens of the blessings of the new life we live in Christ. Bring your gifts with joy for they remind us of just how blessed we are to know this love that flows so generously from the spirit of God.

Dedication of the Offering

One: Let us pray

People: **May these gifts, given to these ministries of grace, be a blessing to friends and strangers, those like us and those not, those deserving and those not, for in this way the love of God reaches all of God’s beloved.**

Piano Response

“Holy, Holy, Holy”

NCH #793

Benediction (unison)

Now may the One who is faithful to all be with us all as we depart this blessed place. May we be a blessing to every place we go, until we gather again. Amen.

Postlude

Stacy Pauly

ANNUAL MEETING



IN SANCTUARY

Remember in Prayer: Gary Wentzloff, Greg Armstrong (Howard’s brother), Dick Carlson, Bill and Nancy Cowell, Eunice Gasow, and Aggie Schue. We pray for health and healing for all people. Pray especially for those serving on the front lines caring for those with COVID-19. Pray for the ministries of our church. Pray for those serving in the military and for our local and national leaders.

If you have a prayer request or would like to receive a call from Pastor Dennis call his office at 237-2595 (leave a private voice mail) or his cell 763-258-3371

Pastor Dennis is usually in the office each Tuesday and Wednesday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. He can be reached at the office, 237-2595 (private voice mail) or his cell: 763-258-3371. E-mail: dmckee545@gmail.com • Website at listen2god.org

- ❖ **Gaylord UCC Annual Meeting** – today after church.
- ❖ Our January **From the Heart Offering** goes to the **Salvation Army of Sibley County.**

Tithes, Offerings and Pledges can be sent to Gaylord United Church of Christ P.O. Box 385 Gaylord, MN 55334. You can also donate on our website or drop off at the church office on Wednesday between 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

