

Worship – First Congregational UCC, Eagle River
February 21, 2021
L. Gail Irwin, Interim Pastor
Texts: Genesis 7-9 (selections) and Mark 1:9-13

Dear God, be good to me. The sea is so wide, and my boat is so small.
Breton Fisherman's Prayer

Announcements: Hello and welcome to worship at First Congregational UCC in Eagle River. This is the service for Sunday, February 21st, the first Sunday of Lent.

- Today, Sunday, we will have a Zoom fellowship at 10 AM, just to check in with anyone who wants to talk to church friends. See your Friday email or our Facebook page for the Zoom link.
- This week Tuesday night we will gather for our first in a 5 week adult study on Five Purposes of the Church, talking about why we bother doing church, especially during a pandemic, and what we are supposed to be accomplishing.
- The study guide for the class is in your Lent Kits you picked up this week. If you still need a Lent Kit, email me! I have some left over.
- Today we will celebrate Communion together, so bring some simple food to worship with you.

Let's begin worship with a prayer of Confession: (Anglican Church of Canada)
God of the wilderness, your Spirit leads us to face the truth, unprotected and exposed. In our times of trial, help us to resist the worship of empty power, so that we may find our true food in Jesus Christ, the broken bread. Hear our confessions in silence...Amen.

Words of Assurance: God has set a rainbow in the sky, as a promise to care for us. Accept God's forgiveness and return to the arms of the One who calls you beloved. Let everyone at home say AMEN.

A Sermon for All Ages:

When I was a little girl my family took a road trip to the capitol of our state: Sacramento, California. It was a beautiful day and we walked on the capitol grounds where there were trees and grass and ...a squirrel!

I was about 5 years old and we didn't have squirrels where I lived, so I was excited! I decided I would catch that squirrel and scratch it behind the ears!

But when I ran up to it, it ran away.

So, I chased the squirrel and it ran down a grassy hill toward the busy street. I followed, running as fast as I could.

Then the squirrel darted out into the street and hid under a parked car. So I also darted out into the street!

Meanwhile, my family had seen that I was running after the squirrel and into the busy street, and they all came running for me: my mom and dad and two sisters and brother, but they were too far behind to stop me from running into the street.

And just when I got into the street, where it was not safe because cars were going by, two big hands grabbed me and pulled me onto the sidewalk on the other side of the street!

It was a stranger! I looked up to see a big man with a big bushy beard, all dressed in black. And he had a big smile on his face!

He was a kind of person we don't see much these days: a beatnik! A beatnik is a person who looks serious all the time, wears black turtlenecks, grows their hair long, and looks scary.

But mostly they write poems and play the guitar. Most beatnicks are extinct now.

Anyway, the beatnik had me by the shoulders and I didn't know if he was there to hurt me or help me.

Meanwhile, my entire family was crossing the street trying to get to me. And when they finally got there, the beatnik smiled at them and handed me over.

He was smiling because he got to save a little kid. I smiled because I realized he was nice and I kind of needed to be saved! And the squirrel smiled because she never got caught!

Often when I tell this story, I call it the story of "The day I got saved by a beatnik".

But I also realize that there was someone else who saved me that day: God!

- God made sure the drivers slowed down so I didn't get hit
- God made sure that nice beatnik was there to pull me out of the street

Have you ever been saved from danger or trouble by someone?

- Who saved you? A person? A dog?

I bet God helped whoever it was so they could help you. Let's say a prayer to thank God for all the ways we've been saved:

Dear God, thank you for all the ways you watch out for us and save us from trouble every day. Help us remember you're always with us. Amen.

Hebrew Scripture Reading: Genesis 7:1-5

(Dale Bishop)

Then the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation. ² Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and its mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and its mate; ³ and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive on the face of all the earth. ⁴ For in seven days I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground." ⁵ And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him.

Genesis 8: 6-11

⁶ At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made ⁷ and sent out the raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. ⁸ Then he sent out the dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground...¹¹ and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth.

Genesis 9:8-13

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark.^[a] ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by

the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”¹² God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

Gospel Reading: Mark 1:9-13

⁹ *In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”*

¹² *And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.*

Sermon:

- I. I don't know why anyone has the idea that the story of Noah's ark is a story for children.
 - a. Sure, the animals are cute, trotting up into the ark two by two
 - b. But there is no mention of the obvious detail that, in order to be saved from a disaster, the world had to experience a disaster.
 - c. And in this case, the waters would be teeming with the bodies of those were not saved, people and animals...
 - d. This is a pretty dark tale of God's power: the power to make rain and sun; the power to give life and take it away; to destroy and to restore;
 - e. It's also about God's power to save us! A God who refuses to give up on us; who even makes an eternal promise with the rainbow.
 - f. In the adult study that starts this Tuesday, we will talk about salvation stories like this when we learn the Greek word *kerygma*.

- II. Lent is the season when we face the fact that we all need to be saved sometimes:
 - a. we personally need to be saved from our own mistakes
 - b. And our world needs to be saved: our nation, our environment, the poor; the sick and those in prison;
 - c. Some of the behavior we see around us in our culture these days just makes us cringe and wonder if we can still hold up our own standards of morality.
 - d. There is a helplessness we feel, in the face of the pandemic and political unrest and environmental devastation; we don't know how to get out of the situations we're in by ourselves.
 - e. Sometimes it feels like we have faced the limits of our human resourcefulness and we're stuck watching things spiral into chaos around us.
 - f. We need to be saved.

- III. What does it mean for us to experience being saved in Christian life?

- a. Some use this term specifically to describe the moment a person gives their life to Christ spiritually;
 - b. But the bible gives us so many versions of salvation: people miraculously saved from starvation; saved from being stoned by mobs or locked in prison or saved from drowning or disease. The lost being found, the dead being resurrected.
 - c. What salvation always seems to indicate is that we have reached the end of our rope:
 - i. you can no longer save yourself;
 - ii. no human strength or ingenuity, creativity, money, resilience or stubbornness will get you through on your own;
 - iii. to be saved is to admit you are powerless;
 - iv. Then, in your weakness, a greater power comes to your aid.
 - v. Maybe it's just the power of a dove to bring you a sprig of hope
- IV. There are some who will never experience this kind of salvation; not because they're so evil; but because they're just too self-reliant to ever admit they need help from someone else.
- a. Some of us are rigid in our refusal to be vulnerable;
 - b. Or we are so addicted to our bad habits, we cannot let go and trust that any new way of living will work for us;
 - c. In AA, the first step to recovery is admitting powerlessness; vulnerability is the only true route to deep change;
- V. I read this week the story of a waitress who served a family that made her suspicious at her restaurant in Florida:
- a. 3 family members sat on one side of table; an 8 year old boy sat on the other side
 - b. They ordered food for the 3 people, but not for the boy
 - c. He looked thin, emaciated; and she noticed scars on his face and arm
 - d. She ventured to act on her suspicion; she wrote a note "Are you okay?" and held it up for him to see from behind the heads of his family; he made an uncertain gesture;
 - e. She tried again with another note: "Do you need help?" This time he nodded cautiously.
 - f. She called her boss, then 911; they called the police and an abuse specialist;
 - g. The boy was found to be malnourished and severely abused; but he was saved;
 - h. This is a hard world; we all try to hold up our little house of cards on our own; even kids!
 - i. But that boy found real courage when he nodded his head and let himself be saved by the waitress and all the other people who came to help!
- VI. Salvation is a team effort;
- a. God will not swoop in to save you if the door of your heart is locked tight;
 - b. And you cannot save your alcoholic sibling if s/he doesn't even realize they have a problem!
 - c. Not everybody will be saved; but God is mightily trying!

- VII. During the impeachment trial last week, we heard testimony from people who witnessed the attack on the capitol. One story was told by Senator Patty Murray.
- a. She had to hide in her office with her husband while people outside were pounding on the door and yelling “*kill the infidels*”.
 - b. But when she reflected later about what happened, she remembered a different story: she was also at the capitol on 9/11: on that day, she understood the nation was being attacked from multiple points, and the capitol was the next target.
 - c. She soon learned that about 40 Americans, ordinary people on a passenger jet, had sacrificed their lives and let their plane fall from the sky, sparing the capitol. Many of them died praying the Lord’s Prayer and reciting the 23rd Psalm.
 - d. Despite what happened recently at the capitol, Patty Murray has experienced her country as a place where ordinary people make costly sacrifices to save each other every day.
- VIII. How was Noah saved? How was the boy in the restaurant saved? How were the people at the capitol saved? Not by themselves, not by a magical God swooping in, but by God working in tandem with people who surrender their own power to God’s power;
- IX. What about you? What is your salvation story? You probably have more than one.
- a. To tell it is the power of *kerygma*: sharing your salvation story so that someone else can hear about the God who is always saving us;
 - b. And also: remembering your salvation story on those dark days when you realize you cannot always save yourself or those around you;
 - c. God CAN bring saving grace if we open the door for it.
 - d. And once that salvation story is told, remembered, repeated, it becomes more and more a part of you,
 - e. And later, when God needs you to participate, even sacrifice something in some saving grace for another, you and God will know what to do to make salvation happen.

Music: “Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days”
 (Claudia Frances Hernaman; Tune: ST. FLAVIAN) CCLI#82577

*Lord, who throughout these forty days
 For us did fast and pray,
 Teach us with you to mourn our sin,
 And close by You to stay.*

*As You with Satan did contend
 And did the vict'ry win,
 O give us strength in You to fight,
 In You to conquer sin.*

*And through these days of penitence,
 And through Your Passion-tide,*

*For evermore, in life and death,
O Lord, with us abide.*

*Abide with us that through this life
of doubts and hope and pain.
An Easter of unending joy
We may at last attain!*

Pastoral Prayer:

Holy God, our loving Creator, close to us as breathing, and distant as the farthest star, we thank you for making us and all creation in love.

We thank you for all that sustains life, for all people of faith in every generation

Who have given themselves to your will,

And especially for Jesus Christ, whom you sent from your own being as our Savior.

We praise you for his birth, life, death and resurrection,

And for calling forth your church for its mission in the world.

Hear our prayers of gratitude for your blessings poured out on us.

For warm places to live and sunshine and food to share;

For the joy of children's laughter and the faces of friends on a Zoom.

Loving God, although you have cared for us, we are all too aware that the world is drenched in sin and decay.

We lift up to you our sorrow for promises broken and souls discarded;
for the cries of the hungry and the pleas of the oppressed.

For the beauty of nature ravaged by human greed.

Teach us not to despair, but to turn to you with hope and commitment to serve your purpose.

Gifted by the presence of your Holy Spirit, we offer ourselves to you as we unite our voices with the entire family of your faithful people everywhere.

Bless this bread and fruit of the vine. Bless us all in our eating and drinking at this table, that our eyes may be opened to recognize the risen Christ in our midst.

We pray now the prayer he taught us, saying...

The Lord's Prayer.

Service of Holy Communion

Invitation:

Throughout his ministry, Jesus could often be found eating meals with people who were considered to be sinners or unclean people: tax-collectors, children, women, the poor and people with generally bad reputations. He was criticized for caring about these people; yet Jesus believed it was the people on the margins of society, people who knew they were vulnerable, who would embrace his teachings most, and allow themselves to be transformed into saints.

At Christ's table, all are welcome, young and old, rich and poor, men and women, member and stranger. Christ sets this table in preparation for the heavenly banquet being prepared for all the saints in His coming reign.

Words of Institution

...By this ritual we are made one with Christ, and with each other.

Sharing of the Bread and Cup

Prayer of Thanks:

O Great Creator God, we thank you that you have received even the broken heart, the troubled conscience, the conflicted spirit, at your table. We praise your power that overcomes all evil, and we thank you for filling us with love and bread which nourishes us for the journey to the cross. Stay with us, Lord, every step of the way. Amen.

A Mission Moment:

During Lent, I want to offer some mission moments about ways you can engage in saving ministry in your community and around the world. The story of the boy in the restaurant led me to look up your local domestic abuse shelter. It is run by the Tri County Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. You can go to their Facebook page to see a good video here:

<https://www.facebook.com/TCCDVSA/videos/1160344070968132>

And you can learn how to give needed items on their wish list through Amazon.com by going here:

https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/genericItemsPage/47LJ965P6TPQ?fbclid=IwAR2AwSZYGuCkAFFjZeUyf4MIF2V9zj-KscwIcN5HB48_IPs41jgpYhXoHx4&ref_=wl_share

Thank you for everything you're doing to keep kids and adults safe in your area!

Blessing/Benediction:

God has made an eternal covenant with us!

Go into the world trusting in God's power to save you. Go in peace. Amen.

Closing: "Let There Be Peace on Earth"
By Sy Miller and Jill Jackson CCLI #1562668

*Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me.
Let there be peace on earth
The peace that was meant to be.
To take each moment and live each moment
In peace eternally!
Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me!*
