

Epiphany and Ordinary Time
Year B

Follow Me!

Epiphany / Baptism of the Lord - Tearing Apart the Heavens

January 10, 2021 - [Mark 1:4-11](#)

Second Sunday after the Epiphany – Anything Good

January 17, 2021 - [John 1:43-51](#)

Third Sunday after the Epiphany – Follow Me

January 24, 2021 - [Mark 1:14-20](#)

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany – What Have You to Do with Us?

January 31, 2021 - [Mark 1:21-28](#)

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany – She Began to Serve

February 7, 2021 - [Mark 1:29-39](#)

Transfiguration Sunday – But Only Jesus

February 14, 2021 - [Mark 9:2-9](#)

There's nothing ordinary about Ordinary Time anymore. But then it was never really "ordinary." The season of Epiphany has always been about seeing the light that is Jesus the Christ breaking forth into the world in which we live. Seeing is only the first step, however. We don't see the light of Christ the same way we see the beauty of the Grand Canyon, for example, or a particularly beautiful sunset. While there is beauty in the presence of Christ, it is a beauty that calls forth a response.

There are many ways to respond to the presence of Christ. In this series, we focus on the invitation to follow. It is the mission of the church to make disciples, even as we are being made disciples. It is an ongoing process to follow Jesus; a transformation that continues through every stage of our lives.

It would, therefore, be an appropriate time to pair this worship series with a re-emphasis on the discipleship path. The worship team has produced a guide to making disciples through worship, and you can get it here:

<https://store.umcdiscipleship.org/product/forming-disciples-through-worship>.

The guide offers an explanation or description of the discipleship path, encouragement for those on the journey to continue to grow and thrive, and an invitation to those who have not yet embarked on the path. We don't advocate a heavy-handed, guilt-laden approach to making or growing disciples. Neither do you, we are sure. That is why we fall back on the invitation that Jesus gave: "Follow me!"

Epiphany / Baptism of the Lord - Tearing Apart the Heavens

January 10, 2021 - [Mark 1:4-11](#)

INTRODUCTION

We are suggesting that for this year the Epiphany and the Baptism of the Lord be celebrated together. Certainly, decisions will have to be made as to which takes central position in the observance during worship. The usual Epiphany symbols, like the wise men from Matthew's story, wouldn't fit as well when including the baptism of Jesus as a part of the remembrance. Yet, light as the central symbol of the season can be used, even as it might be enhanced with the water of baptism.

Epiphany is about seeing Christ, about the manifestation of Messiah in the person of Jesus. Certainly, the proclamation made at his baptism, the tearing open of the heavens, and the descending of the Spirit like a dove can be that revelatory experience.

A baptism remembrance could also provide the opportunity to remind the congregation that they are now the visible evidence of the presence of Christ in the world. When we claim the new life that we embrace at our baptism, we live the light that we proclaim. We are the witness to the activity of the Lord in the midst of the present-day reality.

This first service of the series is a perfect time to start with the invitation to discipleship—perhaps as a part of the baptism remembrance; perhaps as a separate invitation during the service. It is important to be as specific as possible about the invitation. Make sure people know the next steps if they decide to renew or begin their discipleship journey. How do they signal their intention? What support is provided? What commitment is required or suggested? Think the process through so that people understand clearly where they can start or take the next steps.

Worship should be a celebration; this is the beginning of a new year. We survived 2020, and while there might still be lingering effects of the pandemic and the unrest, it is time to embrace a new possibility, a new hope. The heavens have been torn open. But this isn't a threat; it's a promise of something new, something better. Let us commit ourselves to a closer walk with Christ. Let the waters of baptism renew us and cleanse us for our mission and ministry as followers of Jesus.

PREACHING NOTES

We are inviting you to combine the recognition of Epiphany and the baptism of Jesus into one event. It might seem like too much for one sermon, but we think it works. It might seem like we are not giving enough attention to the usual Epiphany observation. Yet, it seems as though this year is one where we need the light of Christ to resonate within our human experience most concretely. We need to find that light within as well as outside our experience. We need to

remember that Christ works in us as well as beyond us. If this series is about anything, it is about the response of the church and the individuals within it to respond to that light and walk the path of Jesus each and every day.

Besides, we are taking our cues from the Gospel of Mark. There are no magi in Mark's story, no star guiding the path. There are no dancing angels singing a proclamation of the coming of the one for whom all creation waits. The story begins with John, and a river, then the tearing of heaven as everything gets remade; and a dove descends. If anyone combines and packs together and overweights meanings and symbols and moments, it is Mark.

Ah, yes, this is the year of Mark. So, catch your breath now because once Mark gets going, there's no stopping until Holy Week anyway! Mark's Gospel is a fast gallop through the story of Jesus, and we are often left panting on the roadside wondering what is going on. Even this story, the baptism of Jesus, seems more concerned with meeting a flight schedule somewhere than with telling the tale.

Notice that there is nothing here about John's preaching that we get from Matthew and Luke. There is nothing about the conversation between Jesus and John that appears in the Gospel of John. Just in and out, get it done. There is no actual description of the baptism at all. Did you notice that? He came to be baptized; then as he was coming up out of that water, he saw what he saw. It is like we skipped over the event itself. And given how much we argue about the methodology of baptism, you would think there would be some more detail here. It is almost as if the real importance is what happens afterward.

Do you remember your baptism? Some do, those who were baptized as youth or adults. Many don't, because it happened before their *rememberers* kicked in. Yet even those of us who remember our baptism only because someone told us about it much later, we can still remember what happened afterward. Because now is afterward. The life we live as baptized followers of Jesus is that afterward. The new creation that we choose to make of ourselves every single day of our lives is that afterward.

And the new creation that we are and are becoming is a curious mixture of Word and Spirit. There are Words pronounced over us at our baptism and there is Spirit conferred from the community of faith. And we are remade. A new creation, a fresh start. So we need reminders.

Of course we need reminders of our baptism. It is too much of an event to keep in our hearts all the time. We forget what a transformative moment baptism is. We forget that everything old is torn away, like the heavens were rent apart, as Mark says. We forget that our orientation is from that moment; our new life is claimed in that moment. We forget that what we are looking for, longing for, is already ours in that moment. We lose our grip; we forget it even happened. We are still running; we are still looking for what we already have.

Remember your baptism. It isn't just an empty ritual for Sunday mornings. It is a way of living that keeps our eyes open for the descending doves of the Spirit. It is a choice that we can claim to embrace the possibilities in front of us instead of the doubts within us. It is an opportunity to know that we are loved and claimed and that whatever darkness is hiding away in our past or our hearts need not define us anymore. It is a family we've entered into, who will run with us as we search for what we are looking for, and who will avoid saying "told you so" when we realize what we are looking for has been with us all the time.

The tearing continues. The remaking continues. Our lives are constantly being taken apart and put back together. And whether we see it descending upon us like a dove or not, the Spirit is a constant companion throughout our lives. It is what inspires us to love and serve and learn and grow. It is what equips us to be a part of the body of Christ in unique and powerful ways. It is what tears us open to new ways of living, new ways of being.

And whether we hear it or not, the word that is spoken over us is a word of affirmation. God sees the light placed within us and pronounces it good. The voice proclaims, "you are my beloved, with you I am well pleased." Not done, not complete, not perfect, but good. In God's eyes, good.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

As we stated in other places, we start this series with a two-fer: Epiphany Sunday and Baptism of the Lord Sunday. Choices of emphasis need to be made, of course, but we believe that the two events meld together well. The central theme of the heavens being torn apart to let the light be seen as the Spirit descends brings both elements into the center of the frame. The tradition of the wise men as

central to the Epiphany proclamation doesn't fit as well and should probably be reserved for another year.

We recommend a remembrance of baptism service to guide the outline of worship. It can be found on page 50 of *The United Methodist Hymnal*, "Baptismal Covenant IV: Congregational Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant." If this is a regular practice of your congregation, then this will be a familiar environment with which to begin this new series of covenant and commitment. If this will be new experience, then please take time to walk the congregation through the various parts of the service.

Sometimes, especially when introducing a new ritual or experience in worship, it is helpful to create a "bifocal" way of seeing. By "bifocal" we refer to the ability to both engage in the ritual and to observe the ritual at the same time. Even as we do our reaffirmation, we pause and reflect on what we are doing. We consider the words that we say and their meaning, as we say them.

This series is calling for a new or renewed commitment to the path of discipleship, inviting both new and long-term members of the church to reaffirm and take up the challenge of new growth and new depth. We are called to follow Jesus, who went down into the waters of baptism and came up to new possibilities and a new world. The heavens were torn apart, not in destruction, but in removing the limitations and the divisions between this world and the coming kin-dom of God. Let us fully embrace the call to follow.

Call to Worship

(inspired by Isaiah 42:1-9, Mark 1:9-11, Matthew 3:13-17, Luke 3:21-23)

Today we celebrate a special baptism;
the baptism of Jesus of Nazareth.

God says:

Look! See my chosen servant,
the One in whom I utterly delight;

**I have placed my Spirit on him,
he will bring true justice to the nations.**

When Jesus was baptized, the heavens opened up,
and Spirit came down like a dove;
and there was a voice from heaven saying:

**“This is my dearly loved Son,
with whom I am delighted.”**

The joy of the Lord be with you all.
And also with you.

Opening Prayer

Most wonderful God,
foolish and flawed though we are,
we too delight in your beloved Son.
As in his name we gather in the house of many praises,
may the heavens be opened for us,
that we may catch a glimpse of that Light and Love
that transforms our common days
with a beauty not of our making.
Through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen!

(Written by Bruce Prewer and posted on Bruce Prewer's Home page.

<http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocA/10BAPTIS.htm>

Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2014/01/call-to-worship-prayer-baptism-of-jesus.html>)

Call to Worship (Mark 1)

Lost . . .
wandering without purpose, meaning, value,
acceptance, or place.
We wander lost. But the Spirit of God descends
like a dove upon us. We hear the ancient words
that name and claim us as children of God.
We are cleansed, refreshed, and made new
in the love of those words.

Contemporary Gathering Words

Water. Refreshing, cleansing, nourishing,
life-giving . . .

Water. Dangerous, life-threatening, powerful . . .

The waters rush over us in our baptism.

And we are filled with the Holy Spirit. Alleluia!

Bryan Schneider-Thomas, Ministry Matters

<https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2213/worship-elements-january-7-2018>

Prayer of Confession

“We Have Ignored the Prophets”

Unison: **Loving Lord, we confess we have not always heeded your prophets’ voices. We admit we have not acknowledged John the baptizer who proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. We acknowledge in our failure to do so we missed John’s all too important declaration about the greater One who was coming. God, today we gather needing grace and the gift of forgiveness granted through your Son. Amen.**

(Silence)

Words of Assurance

When we confess our sins and shortcomings, God shows up and shows out!
Receive God’s forgiveness. Put regret behind you and walk in the joy of the Lord!

(Darlene A. Moore, The Africana Worship Book for Year B, Discipleship Resources, 2007, p. 147.)

Prayer of Commitment

(Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-23)

Loving Father,
you anointed Jesus at his baptism
with the Holy Spirit,
and revealed him as your dear Son.
Thank you for making us your children

by water and the Spirit.
Keep us faithful to you
throughout our lives.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

— from the Lutheran Church of Australia's [Worship Planning Page](#).

Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/12/prayer-of-commitment-epiphany-1-b.html>

Intercessory Prayer

Sisters and brothers,
our baptismal vows call us to compassion and mercy
on behalf of those in need.
We offer our prayers for the church and the world.

Prayers of the People, concluding with:

Lord God,
you revealed your Son in the waters of the Jordan
and anointed him with the power of the Holy Spirit
to proclaim good news to all people.
Sanctify us by the same Spirit,
that we may proclaim the healing power of the gospel
by acts of love in your name. **Amen.**

<https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/prayers.php?id=60>

Thematic Prayer

God of grace and glory,
You call us with your voice of flame
to be your people, faithful and courageous.
As your beloved Son
embraced his mission in the waters of baptism,
inspire us with the fire of your Spirit

to join in his transforming work.

We ask this in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

<https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/prayers.php?id=60>

Litany: God of the Waters

(inspired by Mark 1: 4-11, Luke 3:21-22)

God of the waters. Water of birth,
moving us from safety into the world.

God of the waters. Water of connection,
**engaging the playful Spirit,
the passionate Christ,
the challenging God.**

God of the waters. Water of life,
**sustaining,
quenching,
cleansing.**

God of the waters. Water of trouble,
**journeying us from here to there,
from the known to the unknown.**

God of the waters.

Birth us.

Connect us.

Live in us.

Trouble us.

— written by Scott A. Ressman in *Immerse Yourself: Elements for a Liturgy on Baptism of Christ Sunday*. Posted on the [United Church of Christ](#) website.

Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/12/litany-god-of-waters.html>

Commission & Benediction

(based on Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:9-15, Luke 4:1-13)

Go now, and live in the spirit of your baptism,
even when you are led into wild and hard places.
With repentance and trust, give yourselves to God,
and with fasting and prayer,
strengthen yourselves against the ways of the tempter.

And may God enfold you in tender and lasting love.
May Christ be beside you in times of struggle.
And may the Spirit guide you back to the path whenever you stray,
that you may keep the covenant.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
In the name of Christ. Amen.

— Copyright © 2000 Nathan Nettleton <http://www.laughingbird.net/>

Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/02/commission-benediction-mark-9.html>

Second Sunday after the Epiphany – Anything Good?

Jan 17, 2021 - [John 1:43-51](#)

INTRODUCTION

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” That’s our guiding phrase from our gospel text for this week. “Anything good?” Surely you can hear how that sounds. Surely in our contentious environment, you hear the presupposition behind the sarcasm. You can hear the prejudice tucked away in such an innocuous joke. We are potentially dealing with some difficult topics this week. They are not difficult because they are complicated but because they are threatening. And personal. And most folk have some pretty entrenched positions on race and ethnicity.

Let’s be clear: worship is not the place to have confrontations, arguments, or even discussions about race. However, it can be a place for self-examination of the state of our souls as we bring our all before the Lord. Worship can be a time where we hold up the ideal of the human community and pledge to live into it as we seek union with the God we follow. Sometimes, worship confronts us with our sinfulness; and other times, worship offers us grace and healing and a way forward.

We suggest that the worship team concentrate on the healing and the grace, on creating an atmosphere of community and inclusion, so that the call to higher living can be heard and claimed, even when dealing with difficult subjects. Find ways to tell stories of transformation. Let those who are being made disciples of Jesus Christ bear witness to what God is doing in their lives to help them overcome their lack of vision and prejudices. Let the prayers of confession be said by all but include words of grace that pour over us like healing oil, that we might be commissioned for the task of living a life worthy of the gospel.

It might be a time to include an anointing component to the service. If we are being challenged to change our hearts and minds, then let us be equipped by the visible, tactile signs of grace as we are anointed and prayed over by the pastor or leaders of the church.

In the end, the question “can anything good” come from those unlike us, gets turned around to be asked of us, “can anything good” come from within us? Is there anything good in us that is worth God’s grace and Christ’s compassion? Maybe the worship team could set up mirrors around the sanctuary so that people can look at themselves and ask, “Can anything good come from the face that I see in front of me?”

And the answer in this service should be a resounding yes! Yes, there is good even in us, as flawed as we are. There is the good of the image of God in which we were created, and God’s grace is available to restore us into examples of the saints of God as we worship together. Let our prayer be that our eyes be opened to see the good in those around us and the face that stares back at us in the mirror.

PREACHING NOTES

Yes, we are going to focus on the Gospel. Even though the lectionary threw us a curve and tossed in this text from John instead of the Mark we were expecting and will continue with next week; it is the Gospel that guides us. But it brings a light to the interactions in this text by looking back at the reading from the Hebrew Scriptures before we wrestle with Nathaniel and his sarcasm. So, go back and read I Samuel 3:1-10. It’s a familiar story and kind of fun to tell. As always,

don't assume that everyone in the congregation has already heard it so you can just skip over it with a passing reference. "You know, the call of Samuel story!" Many won't, and some who do remember it won't remember it well enough to catch the echo in Nathaniel in the Gospel text. So, if you decide to use it, tell it again.

Tell it; don't just read it. Or read it and then tell it. Let it live and breathe. Tell the story about the boy who thought his old mentor was off his rocker, mumbling in his sleep. Tell the story about the mentor who had lost his grip on everything and thought the boy was just being annoying. Until the light dawned (we're in Epiphany, remember?), and they realized that God just might have something to say even to them. Tell the story as if it were happening to people in the congregation. Because it just might be. Some of those sitting out there might have had troubled sleep the night before because God has been trying to get their attention. So, tell the story to see if they recognize themselves.

Once again, the lectionary stops before we find out what is really going on. So, we have only half a story here—a great half, to be sure. Lots of lessons are tucked away in this half a story. The starkest is signaled by the very first verse: "The word of the Lord was rare in those days..." Why is that? Did God not have anything to say? Or did the people forget how to listen? Was the weight of the world simply too much to bear and no one was lifting their eyes to heaven? Was the darkness so deep that no one remembered the light? We don't know. All we know is that the Word of the Lord was rare in those days.

Yet God spoke. That's our first wake up call, I suppose. In a time when the Word of the Lord was rare, God spoke. Maybe that helps explain the situation a little bit. Not that we need to find who is to blame, not that we need to know who is at fault, but God still spoke when visions were not widespread. How easy it is to give up on God, to decide that we are on our own and God has abandoned us because we don't have a clear vision. The Word is rare in our days. We feel cut off; we feel alone, as though no one understands what we are going through, as though no one cares that we are struggling; we are hurting. So, we develop that layer of cynicism, a sarcastic streak that keeps the world at arm's length to protect ourselves. And we hear even less of a word of hope because that is what we have come to expect.

That's the attitude that seems to be reflected in one of Jesus' disciples. Well, before he became a disciple anyway. As we turn back to the Gospel text from John, we find the calling of Nathaniel. Nathaniel appears only here in the Gospel of John. Some scholars think that the Bartholomew mentioned in the other three gospels is Nathaniel. William Barclay even argues that Bartholomew is a last name, translated as "son of Tholmai." So, his name might have been Nathaniel Bartholomew. Maybe. Others argue that Nathaniel wasn't even a real person, but rather a representative of a human trait of pride and prejudice and the need to listen for the call. It's hard to tell really, but it is obvious that there is something of significance going on here.

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" The Word of the Lord was rare in those days. We don't know why Nathaniel said what he said. Maybe he just wanted to be left alone, didn't want to be bothered by Philip and his new best friend. Maybe he really thought anyone from a hick town like Nazareth wouldn't have anything of significance to say to him. Maybe he had given up the search that Philip was still on. Maybe he had decided he didn't need a Messiah after all. He was doing all right on his own.

But was he? Are we doing all right on our own? Most of the time, we think so. Most of the time, we are content with the world as it is, with our lot in it. Most of the time, we are grateful that things aren't any worse than they are. And the Word of the Lord is rare most days.

Every now and then, we ache to hear that Word. When we let down our guard, in our heart, we long to know and to be known. We want so much more of life than we settle for most of the time. We want our relationships to be deep and satisfying. We want those we love to trust in that love; we want to live the fullness of that love. We want someone to know us, all our weaknesses and strengths, all our beauty and ugliness; to know us and love us still.

It almost sounds like fantasy, doesn't it? Such knowledge, such love is not possible in this world, a world where the Word of the Lord is rare. So, we bury such thoughts, such quiet desperation behind the facade of being all right, of not needing anyone or anything. Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Or anywhere for that matter?

Well, yes, it can. Out of Nazareth can come the one who knows and who loves still. Out of the darkness of the night can come the voice that calls us by name. Out of your church filled with hypocrites and sinners can come a sense of family and community that remakes us. Out of your house can come a trust and openness that gives you that sense of home you were created for. From surprising people can come unconditional love that builds us up and makes us whole.

We all need a wakeup call from time to time to keep from sleeping through our own lives. It is a call to hope. Speak, Lord, your servants are listening. Because something good is coming to us. Or rather, something good is already among us. Let us claim it, even as we claim our call to be what Christ has called us to be.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

While the story in our gospel text might seem like a small town/big town rivalry or a southerner's disdain for northerners, it is really an exposé of prejudice that often hides in all of us. In the current climate, this worship experience has the potential to trouble many participants. Therefore, it is up to the worship team to create an atmosphere of acceptance, even as there are opportunities for confession and true repentance. As stated in the planning notes, however, this is not the forum for a frank discussion about racism and prejudice. This is a place, however, for casting a vision of a kin-dom of inclusion and a church of hospitality.

The words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. ring especially well from this text, and it would be good to acknowledge the day set aside for remembrance of that civil rights prophet.

This is another opportunity to invite people to buy into the vision or to step onto or move farther on the discipleship path. "Come and see" is a winsome invitation that is easily given to any and to all.

Call to Worship

(based on Mark 1:17, Mark 2:14, Matthew 4:19, Luke 5:27-28, John 1:43-45)

Jesus comes along side us and calls us by name:

"[your name], follow me."

A simple call. A hard call.

Because following requires leaving.

And we look around to see who else Jesus could be talking to.

And we look around to see the trappings of the life we know.

It's hard to leave our nets and walk away from the lake.

But we have come this far,

to this place,

where we can listen and be transformed.

*~ written by Joanna Harader and posted on **Spacious Faith**, <https://spaciousfaith.com/>*

Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2018/01/call-to-worship-come-follow-me.html>

Contemporary Gathering Words (John 1, Epiphany Season)

Come into worship,

and see what God has in store for us today!

We have busy lives, but still, we're curious . . .

Come into God's presence,

and see the difference love makes!

We've been burned by love before,

but still, we're needy . . .

Come into the light and see the glory of God!

Our eyes have been closed for so long,

but still, we yearn for the light . . .

Come and see! Come and see!

By Laura Jaquith Bartlett, <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2224/worship-elements-january-14-2018>

Prayer for Illumination (1 Samuel 3, John 1)

Open our ears, O God,

that we might hear your Word

speaking to us in this moment.
Open our ears, O God,
that we might listen for your voice
calling to us through scripture.
Open our ears, O God,
that we might understand your promises
to followers both old and young, ancient and modern.
Open our hearts, O God,
that we might enter into the love
you offer us. Amen.

By Laura Jaquith Bartlett, <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2224/worship-elements-january-14-2018>

Epiphany Prayer

(based on 1 Samuel 3:1-10, 11-20 and John 1:43-51)

Lord God, you call your people to tasks we would not ourselves choose. Give us the grace to love you enough to follow when you call. You know our weakness and have promised to give resources for that which you ask of us. We praise you for your generous care. Like Samuel, let us say "Here I am." God of surprising light, **here we are.**

We are surrounded, O God, with people who need to hear the story, people who need to meet the one from Nazareth, Jesus our Lord. Make our places of worship places of hospitality and welcome. Make our words and actions, words and actions of invitation. Like Philip, let us say, "Come and see." God of surprising light, **here we are.**

— from [Lift Up Your Hearts: Worship and Spirituality Site of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada \(ELCIC\)](#).

Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/12/epiphany-prayer-here-we-are.html>

Epiphany Prayer

(based on 1 Samuel 3, John 1: 43-51)

Beloved God,
You know us inside and out and you still call us to serve you.
Lord, honestly we are often hesitant, afraid, and wish to remain hidden.
Empower us to listen for and to hear your call
Empower us to answer your call with “Here I am Lord”
Empower us to follow you when you call us to follow you.

Lord of mercy and justice,
So many have gone before us working to bring
Justice and peace to our country and our world.
Their footsteps seem too big to step into
to continue the work you have called us all to;
so we hesitantly step one step at a time,
bringing your seeds of hope, justice and peace
in a world crying out for them.

Lord of hope,
We pray for our country, our leaders and especially our new president as he is
inaugurated into leading our country in tumultuous times. We pray for healing of
our country, reconciliation, forgiveness and peace.

Lord of peace,
We pray for your compassion and healing for those individuals in our
congregation who need it. We pray for your comfort and presence for those who
are grieving lonely and oppressed. We pray for warmth, shelter, clothing and food
for those who are without.

Lord we say to you this day,
“Here we are your servants willing to preach your word,
offer care where care is needed,
presence where presence is needed,
your love where your love is needed.”
Lord, strengthen us for our ministry today and everyday.
In the name of the Father, Son and the Holy spirit. **Amen.**

— written by Rev Abi, and posted on her [Long and Winding Road](#) blog.

Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/12/prayers-of-people-january-15-2012.html>

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious God, you create us and love us; you invite us to live together in a community.

We acknowledge our slowness to do good, our blindness to injustice, and our complicity in deferring the dreams and hopes of the oppressed.

We condemn racial injustice in our pronouncements, yet we cling to the privileges derived from inequity. Forgive us, Gracious God.

On this day, we thank you for Martin Luther King, Jr. and all your children who have been filled with your vision for life and who have worked to bring your vision into reality.

May we join them on the journey of faith.

Fill us with your vision of love. Guide us to live by your vision of compassion and justice, and empower us to work to build the beloved community where everyone is welcomed, all are valued, power is shared, privilege is no more, and all your children know wholeness and well-being. In accordance with the commands of Jesus Christ, shake us from our sleep with your imperative to do justice; move us to action with the compassion of your grace; and give us courage to pay the price, however painful or costly, that the justice you intend, may be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Hear us now, as we pray this prayer with one voice...

<http://www.chulavistachurch.com/2018/01/12/1-14-18call-follow-me/>

Commission & Benediction

Go now. Listen for the voice of the Lord and follow wherever it leads.

Do not be dominated by anything.

Allow no room within yourselves for deceit, but offer yourselves as a temple for the Holy Spirit.

And may God be with you and speak through you;
May Christ Jesus be one with you and raise you to life;
And may the Holy Spirit dwell within you and make you holy.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
.....***In the name of Christ. Amen.***

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Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/12/commission-benediction-epiphany-2.html>

Benediction

Jesus said “follow me” and “come and see” how we can change the world. Let us follow Jesus and see what happens next. Amen.

*(Stephon Williams, **The Africana Worship Book for Year B**, Discipleship Resources, 2007, p. 214.)*

Third Sunday after the Epiphany – Follow Me

January 24, 2021 - [Mark 1:14-20](#)

INTRODUCTION

Fishing for people. What images come to mind with this phrase? Can we move beyond the simplistic “rounding people up for Jesus” and talk about making connections, about the interwoven net of interrelationships of influence and support? The fishing idea needs to expand beyond the numbers, wide enough to include acceptance and hospitality. Jesus is inviting his followers to a life of engagement. Here again, we can celebrate the moments of fellowship within the life of the community, particularly the ones that open arms wide to include those who are not yet a part of the church. Lift up teams and individuals who are finding ways to use their gifts and their connections and their vocations to further the cause of Christ in direct and indirect ways. Here is where we can thank teachers, who might not be able to be direct in their “fishing” expeditions but can certainly represent the love of Christ in how they treat their charges, how they interact with staff and administration. Celebrate the businesspeople who work to improve

the community in ways that aren't always reflected in the bottom line. Encourage the neighbors who bring a shepherding, caring presence into their communities. Fishing for people is more than filling pews on a Sunday morning.

How do we convince people that following Jesus is not simply about a state of being, but a call to doing? Certainly, there is a need for training, for preparation, for growing as disciples; but the end is always an outward focus, always looking for ways to connect, to widen the net.

Our prayers are not just for ourselves, but for the needs of the community around us. Our prayers are not just for our aches and pains, but for the brokenness of the "least of these" around us, the hungry and the hurting. Our songs are not just about the state of our souls or the home we have in heaven, but about the influence we can have on building the kin-dom of God in the world where we live.

Our text is a call story; let's think about reissuing that call. Some of those who are worshiping in your congregation answered that call so long ago that they forgot what it was like to be new in the faith, to be so energized by this new relationship with Christ that they couldn't help but tell everyone they knew. Remind them. Ask them to make the choice again. "I Have Decided" (*The Faith We Sing*, #2129) is a great chorus to sing today. It is simple and repetitive, but it is a reminder of the decision being made here. And it might be a way to recapture a little of the passion behind the choice. "Follow me," says Jesus, "and I'll keep you busy, keep you bubbling over with a desire to connect, to share, to gather. Follow me and you'll never be alone again."

PREACHING NOTES

Again, this week, we have to look back so that we can look forward. We need Jonah to help set the context for Simon, Andrew, James, and John. Let's outline the possibilities of response to the invitation to follow. Let's be reminded that there isn't an inevitability of response when we issue that call. Perhaps, if we dare, even point out that some of the devout, some of those hearing this word, may be inclined to run away rather than to follow. Jonah was a prophet; Jonah worked for the Lord. And still, when faced with the call to follow into what he

thought was dangerous, or futile territory, he ran away. Rather than dropping everything, he gathered up his fears and ran for it.

The lectionary text is Jonah 3:1-5, 10, but you need to tell more of the story. Remind the hearers of Jonah's choices first. But don't forget God's story too. Remember, the Bible is really about how God never gives up on us, even though we might seem imminently give-up-able. The text begins "the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time."

A second time, did you hear that? *The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time...* because the first time didn't go so well. The first time the Word came, Jonah went ... the other way. God's Word said go; Jonah's feet said no. And for his troubles, he got a sea cruise berthed in an inside cabin with no view and a pervasive smell (and don't get me started on the plumbing!). But that was then; this is now. "The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time." And this time, he decided he'd better go in the direction the Word pointed.

The problem was it pointed toward Nineveh. Yikes. If there was ever a town you didn't want to go, it was Nineveh. If there was ever a place full of the wrong sort of folk, it was Nineveh. You know some cities have a side of town you're told you ought to avoid? Well, that's the good side of Nineveh. No wonder Jonah didn't want to go. They didn't like him, and he didn't like them; and they were both happy keeping things that way. Except... "the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time."

God has a thing for lost causes. And it was a cause God was trying to enlist Jonah in. So Jonah went, dragging his feet all the way into a city that was "a three days walk across." He walked one day and was a third of the way in. He planted his feet on a busy street corner and muttered his eight-word sermon while picking fish bones out of his beard. "Check that off the list," Jonah thinks to himself and turns to make his way back out of town. Ready to duck the rotting vegetables and pointed sticks, he hunched down and then realized that the city was eerily silent. His eight-word sermon froze people in their tracks. They were staring at him with that "deer-in-the-headlights," "hand-caught-in-the-cookie-jar" kind of glaze. And one by one, they turned. First they turned in and didn't like what they saw. So, next they turned out and began grasping at straws. They put on sackcloth as a sign of how bad they felt. They poured ashes on their heads. Whole families,

whole neighborhoods, turned. That's what repent means, you know; they turned. They were heading in one direction and then because of a word, well eight words, they turned a whole new direction.

That's the fishy bit, at least as far as anyone is concerned. How could that possibly be? How could a few words turn a life around? It is almost too incredible to be believed. Why, if we were to accept the possibility of such a thing, then we would find no situation beyond our ability to affect; we would find no life beyond the possibility of redemption; we would find no excuse to wash our hands of anyone at any time. Because we just might have the word that would cause their lives to turn around. No, it can't really be possible in the real world. The real world is hard and cruel, and there are good guys and bad guys, and we know who is who. We live a world different from Nineveh, at least the Nineveh that Jonah found or helped to create. No, our world is a world of hard work, back-breaking labor to get anywhere. The kind of world guys like Simon and Andrew, James and John lived in. Men who knew their trade, who knew what mattered, who kept their noses to the grindstone. Right? Well...

They must have known him before. Or maybe they heard about him. It just seems incredible that with a word - *follow me* - that they would follow him. It seems like there must have been more than that. More to it than we see. It seems too fishy. Too unbelievable.

There is power in words. God's word certainly, but even in our words. Knowing this, we now have the responsibility to use our words, to turn lives around. Our own certainly, but others as well. We have an obligation and a joy; we have been given a gift that we can't hoard, that we can't keep secret. It is a part of the gift itself that we share it. It is woven into the fabric of love that it is shared, multiplied infinitely until all know what we know, all know who we know. Even those we don't think are worthy of it.

That was Jonah's problem. That's why the word had to come a second time. We discover in the final chapter that Jonah's reluctance came from the fact that he was afraid that God would love the Ninevites as much as God loved him. He was afraid that God would forgive the citizens of Nineveh as he had forgiven Jonah. And that burned him up. God's grace was fishy to Jonah. It was too incredible, too

encompassing, too accepting. After all, Jonah was caught up in that net of God's love. Who knows who else might be included?

"I'll make you fish for people," says Jesus. But before they could fish, they had to be caught. This means we are all fishers and fish at the same time. Hmmm. Something's fishy. "Follow me," he says; and we follow. Most of the time, some of the time, we follow. And as we do, we live an invitation. Follow with me. Follow as I follow. And we might even find ourselves in downtown Nineveh. Follow me.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Here is the clearest statement of the theme of this series. The overall title is the same as this week's title, as you can see. This is a central moment in the Epiphany series. If you provide only one opportunity for people to come forward, or to somehow signal a willingness to enter or rededicate themselves to the discipleship path, this is the week to do it. It might be a physical, moving forward or kneeling at the rail, if you are in person; or it might be signing a card or sending a text or email indicating willingness to participate, if virtual. But give the worshiping congregation the opportunity to make this commitment. No matter how many times it has been made before, it is worth making again and again.

If your church has a clearly stated discipleship path, then invite the congregation to familiarize themselves with that path. Do some analysis: "Where am I on the path? What would my next steps be?" If there is no clear path outlined, then provide some suggestions about what each worshiper might do to keep the commitment made in this act of worship. Find ways to partner people. Growing as disciples is always easier when people do it together.

Here could be an emphasis on or relaunch of small groups. What groups already exist that would be open to receiving new members? What groups can you start? How could a "buddy system" or a mentoring relationship be established?

Much of this is an extension of the worship experience, and the planning team might think this is someone else's job. But worship can be a great encourager to help people over the hump of deciding to participate. Bring in testimonies of those who have grown in their relationship with Christ through groups or studies or mentors.

You task, as the worship planning team, is to emphasize the call and to help bring some understanding of what the call involves. Point out, for example, that the call is “follow me” much more often than it is “believe in me.” Our faith is not simply a head thing; it is a life thing. How do I follow with my whole life and not just in the hour of worship? Help people find the links between worship and life. Perhaps remind the congregation that a benediction is not really the end of worship. It is a transition moment between corporate worship in the sanctuary and the ongoing worship of each life in the world.

Call to Worship

(based on Psalm 62, Mark 1: 14-20)

It is time to become focused,
not on our wants or complaints but on God:
*In the silent places of my soul I turn to God,
for God alone is our rock and salvation.*

Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the good news of God,
saying the time has come, the realm of God is at hand.
*The realm of God is not very far from any one of us,
for in God we live and, move and have our being.*

Jesus said: repent and believe the good news.
The time has come.
*In the silent places of my soul I turn to God,
for God alone is our rock and salvation.*

— written by Bruce Prewer, on [Bruce Prewer's Homepage](#).

Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/call-to-worship-epiphany-3-b.html>

Intergenerational Call to Worship

(inspired by Jonah 3, Matthew 4: 18-22, Mark 1: 14-20)

For just this hour,

Follow me

Listen to my word

Follow me

Think about your life as my disciple every day

Follow me

Pray

Follow me

Sing

Follow me

Come, let us worship God!

Intergenerational Closing

(inspired by Jonah 3, Matthew 4: 18-22, Mark 1: 14-20)

As you go out into the world

Follow me

At home with your household

Follow me

At school and work

Follow me

In everything you do this week

Follow me

And as you do, remember that I am with you always,
even to the end of the world.

— written by Carolyn Brown, and posted on her excellent [Worshipping with Children](http://www.worshippingwithchildren.com) website.
Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/intergenerational-litanies-epiphany-3-b.html>

Prayer

You call us,
Wanderer of seashores and sidewalks,
inviting us to sail out of our smug harbors
into the uncharted waters of faith
to wander off from our predictable paths to follow You
into the unpredictable footsteps of the kingdom;

to leave the comfort of our homes and accompany
You into the uncomfortable neighborhoods we usually avoid.

As we wait,
in our simple, sometimes crazy,
constantly uncertain lives,
speak to us, Spirit of Grace:
of that hope which is our anchor;
of that peace which is our rock;
of that grace which is our refuge.

~ from a worship order prepared by Rev. Bob Gibson for the London Conference of the United Church of Canada.

<http://www.londonconference.ca/>

Reposted: https://cmbbs.mennonitebrethren.ca/worship_resources/come-follow-me-the-call-to-christian-discipleship/

Litany

“O God We Long for Your Presence”

One: Though often misunderstood, often held captive by our fabricated realities,
our souls long for peace.

Many: O God, we long for your presence; we long for peace.

One: We run without a destination, surrounded by highways of turbulent noise.
We are tired, worn and battered, and our souls long for joy.

Many: O God, we long for your presence; we long for joy.

One: Through it all; in it all; and around all of it – choose to love the astounding
teachings of the Messiah. Look to experience peace and joy – even in the midst of
disappointment, war, injustice, or poverty. Allow your soul to become acquainted
with the One who changes hard challenges into opportunities for transformation
and growth.

Many: Peace and Joy are possible in the presence of the Savior.

All: In spite of the world's challenges, we choose peace; we choose joy; we choose to follow YOU, Lord!

(Carolyn W. Dandridge, The Africana Worship Book for Year B, Discipleship Resources, 2007, p. 61.)

Prayer of Commitment

(based on Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 1: 14-20, Micah 6: 1-8)

“And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people.’” Mark 1:17

Lord Jesus,
The one and only Christ,
You called many people
From many walks of life -
To leave their own ways and follow you;
To be your disciples;
And to prize people as something to seek, find and restore.

Lord Jesus,
The one true leader of every church,
We choose to stand as one church – your church –
And to lift our focus from our differences and divides.
We will leave our own ways and follow you together;
Support each other as we seek to be your disciples;
And work together to focus on fishing once more.

For we must act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly together
Before you – and each other.
For the sake of our worship of you,
Our love for each other,
And the future and freedom of all those still living in poverty.

Lord Jesus,
We ask for your Spirit's help with this
For we are quick to focus on ourselves, our labels and our differences

Rather than the same nets in our hands, and the same leader before us.
Christ have mercy - in your precious name which unites us all. **Amen.**

— from the [Monthly Prayers](#) page of the Christian Aid website

Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/prayer-of-commitment-mark-1-14-20.html>

Prayer of Confession

Almighty God, as the church, we are part of your redeeming work in history. Yet we know that often we seek our own success and salvation, and fear to follow Christ in commitment to a vision of wholeness for the world and its peoples. Help us to speak and act our parts of the great drama of your love, and in the freeing gospel of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Leader: Hear the good news! God has forgiven each one of us and calls us to take our parts in the drama of redeeming love.

People: **Praise God, who accepts and uses our very human lives in the unfolding story of salvation and new life!**

*Ruth Duck, **Bread for the Journey**, Pilgrim Press, 1981, pp. 28-29.*

Prayer of Confession

(inspired by Jonah; Mark 1:14-20)

God...you call us...and sometimes...we duck under the table...
hoping you didn't notice us when you walked into the room.
You call us...and sometimes...we grab a stapler and a stack of papers...
trying to look too busy to be bothered at the moment.
You call us...and sometimes we just say, "No!"
We know that we aren't expected to do everything...
but we often forget that you call us to be ourselves
in the places where our very self is what is most needed.
So give us the grace to say "Yes" to your call...
even now...as we offer our silent confessions...

— written by Rev. Scott Cervas, and posted on the [LiturgyLink](#) website.

Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/prayer-of-confession-god-you-call-us.html>

Commission & Benediction

Go now, follow where Christ calls you
and proclaim the message God gives you.

Wait in hope for God.

Avoid become bound up in the business of the world,
but live in readiness for the in-breaking of the Kingdom.

And may God be your haven and your glory;
May Christ Jesus give you courage for his mission;
And may the Spirit embrace your soul in God's silence.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
.....***In the name of Christ. Amen.***

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Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/benediction-epiphany-3-b.html>

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany – What Have You to Do with Us?

January 31, 2021 - [Mark 1:21-28](#)

INTRODUCTION

Regardless of our position on the personification of demons in the enlightened age, it is hard to deny that we are surrounded by the demonic in our world today—haunted by it, perhaps. And sometimes it affects families within the life of the church. We might name it mental illness, or addiction, or systemic racism, or the cycle of poverty. That there are powers and principalities in the world over which we have little power seems undeniable.

But what does that and what do demons have to do with worship? We proclaim that there is help available. We worship a power and a presence greater than all that is broken around us and within us. Worship is an opportunity to celebrate all that is possible in Christ.

Two weeks ago, we acknowledged that the question “can anything good” be asked about us. In this text, the question asked could also be our question: “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?” It was a question afraid of change, a question to a greater power than self. Ultimately, it is a question of surrender and then of transformation. We ask if Jesus has come to destroy us, destroy our lifestyle, destroy our image of ourselves, our self-confidence, our self-dependence.

We are people on a journey of transformation, and it isn’t always easy. Today, we acknowledge the hard work of becoming disciples and of setting aside the weight that clings so closely, of handing over the reins of our lives so that we can be led into wholeness. And so, we can proclaim wholeness to the broken world around us.

Let this worship not be burdened by defining the demonic, but by praising the power that conquers all that would press us down, by praising the one who breaks the chain of oppression in whatever forms it presents itself. And let us join in the proclaiming of this setting free, not fearing any power, not shrinking from any evil but offering grace and a way to wholeness.

If your church houses a recovery group, then your church is a part of the proclamation against evil. Find a way to celebrate that mission and ministry housed in your building. Be careful not to do away with anonymity, but rather than talking about the strain on the facility, give God thanks that you are fulfilling your baptism vows. If you have anyone working in the mental health field, say thank you and bless them; better yet, commission them for carrying out the mission of the church in their work each day. If your volunteers – ushers and hospitality team, Sunday school teachers and childcare workers - have been trained on how to respond to people with mental issues, then bless them today.

What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? What changes are you making in us and among us? How are you recruiting us for the task of overcoming evil, ending oppression, bringing justice to an unjust world? We are yours; we commit ourselves to you again, right here, right now.

PREACHING NOTES

Demons, the modern-day thinker believes, were the scapegoats for any unexplainable bad thing that happened. But now days, we know better. Don't we? How do we understand demons in this day and age? What are we to do with passages like the one for this week? When it says that Jesus cast out demons, or unclean spirits to be accurate, do we simply reinterpret that to be, "He healed them of their mental illness?"

I looked for information about demons, and I found a list of named demons on one website. And there at the top of the list was Acham, the demon of Thursday. I never knew there was a demon of Thursday. But there it was. There was also a demon assigned to Friday and, oddly enough, one for Sunday. But the other days of the week didn't have one. Most people think Monday is the day of the week that is most demonic, probably.

"I Don't like Mondays" is the title of a song by the Boomtown Rats and Bob Geldolf, before he was a Sir. Geldolf got the idea for the song from a news report that came across the teletype while he and his band were being interviewed at Georgia State University. Over forty years ago, there was an elementary school shooting in San Diego, California. Two adults and eight children were killed and one police officer was wounded. The violence shocked the nation. This incident was before Columbine and Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook. The shooter was a high school student named Brenda Ann Spencer who lived across the street from the school. The only explanation she ever gave for committing the act was, "I don't like Mondays."

We ascribe the title *demonic* to an incomprehensible evil. Sometimes it is used as a way to avoid responsibility, which is why many of us are reluctant to use a word like demon when speaking of human actions. But it also reminds us that there are "powers and principalities" that are beyond our understanding. It reminds us that there is evil in the world greater than the total of the evil that resides in human hearts.

Our response to such a realization is either to live in fear and suspicion of everyone and everything or to stand against such evil with the power of our Savior wrapped up in the community of faith. One of the questions in the baptism ritual asks parents and sponsors, as well as the candidates for baptism when they are able to answer for themselves, "Do you accept the freedom and power God

gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?” It is a part of the nature of our faith that we stand against the demonic both in our society and in ourselves.

The United Methodist Church has begun to take a stand against the demonic evil of racism. Acknowledging our own history, which is troubling to say the least; we now claim that we no longer stay silent in the face of injustice and oppression perpetrated against a group of people because of the color of their skin.

We do not all stand at the same place on this issue, it is clear. And it may seem to others that in difficult financial times we need to focus energies elsewhere to rescue our local economy. It also could be said that it is precisely in desperate times that we need to be even more vigilant against evil and injustice. When you give into despair, all kinds of choices seem less unthinkable. That is when the demonic can begin to seem sensible. When the nonsense becomes sensible then you have given in to evil.

Brenda Ann thought it sensible to counter her dislike of Mondays by causing suffering for so many others. And twenty years later, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold went to their school (Columbine High School) to express the pain of rejection with an act of nonsensical violence. And then again, Seung-Hui Cho let his fellow Virginia Tech students and faculty know that he was caught by something he couldn't keep in anymore. And Adam Lanza at Sandy Hook; Nikolas Cruz at Parkland. And too many more to mention. What other description do we have for actions such as these but demonic? In their broken thinking, these people's actions made sense to them. Who of us is immune from irrationality? Extremes such as these appall us, and they should; but what might we justify in a desperate moment?

This just might be why there is a demon of Thursday. That is when we get caught unaware—on just an ordinary day. On any day, we too might fall. “What have you to do with us, Jesus?” The demon's question might be on our lips as well. This Christ comes to change everything, every broken thing about us.

But by the grace of God any day, whether it is Thursday, or Monday, any day can be an opportunity to make a stand and cast out the demonic.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

True worship brings transformation into our minds and hearts and souls. This story is about the challenge that Christ brings into our lives. Are we willing to surrender that to which we are beholden? Are we willing to allow the Spirit to work within us that we might be vessels of grace and invitation in the world around us? Here we are reminded that this discipleship thing isn't easy and that it does require a readjustment of our whole lives that we might follow where Christ leads.

Testimony is the best way to cast a vision of a "before and after" kind of discipleship. Hearing the stories of those who have walked a difficult path, and maybe still are, but are beginning to see a difference in how they live their lives can be compelling to the hearer.

This could also be an appropriate time for a healing service to be a part of worship. Be sure to follow all the safety protocols. Perhaps, pray from a distance; even anoint from a distance. But the willingness to offer prayers, specific and general, for healing and for peace of mind and heart will help make the theme concrete.

Opening Litany

(inspired by Mark 1:21-28)

Brothers and sisters in Christ,
what hopes do you bring to worship?

We bring hope for health and wholeness.

What afflictions do you bring to worship?

Physical pain?

From illness and injury.

Emotional pain?

From sad and scary life situations.

Mental pain?

From dis-ease of many kinds.

With all of these afflictions,

it's a miracle that any of us have made it to worship this morning!

But where else would we be?

**We yearn to know God's powerful love
and to know that wholeness is possible.**

In today's gospel, a person with an *"afflicting spirit"* * interrupts Jesus
and Jesus frees him.

And where does the miracle of his story and our stories begin?

**When we bring all of who we are
—hopeful, afflicted, bold—
into relationship with the Divine.**

So come, let us enter this sanctuary with our whole selves
—hopeful, afflicted and bold—

Come, let us worship!

— taken from *Holy, Whole-y One: Service Prayers for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany*, written by the Rev. Dr. Ginny Brown Daniel, pastor of Plymouth United Church, UCC, in Spring, Texas. Posted on the United Church of Christ's [Worship Ways](http://www.worshipways.com) website. Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/opening-litany-epiphany-4b.html>

Call to Worship

L: Come to worship this day. Bring with you all your joys and sorrows.

P: Jesus will offer hope.

L: Come to worship this day believing in the power of God through Jesus Christ.

P: Jesus will bring us healing.

L: Come to worship this day feeling the presence of God.

P: Jesus will teach us new ways to live. AMEN.

Nancy C. Townley, <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2279/classic-worship-connection-january-28-2018>

Prayer of Confession

Let us confess together that we have not always lived as those forgiven, set free, and united in Christ:

O God, source of life and grace, we are aware that we are, at times, prisoners of fear and habit. Through the healing touch of Christ, set us free to live and to love, that we may be the people you have created us to be. Amen.

Words of Assurance

The good news is that Christ calls us to new life and enables us to begin again and again and again. Let us praise God with songs of joy!

*Ruth Duck, **Bread for the Journey**, Pilgrim Press, 1981, p. 29.*

Prayer for Illumination

(inspired by Mark 1:21-28)

Un-stop our ears, O God,
that we may hear your Word proclaimed this day.
Open our minds and hearts to be changed.
Free us from the unclean spirits of worry, fear, destruction, and pride.
Teach us, Lord, that we may follow you more faithfully.

*written by Amy Loving, and posted on **The Worship Closet: The Place for Creative Worship Ideas**.<http://worshipcloset.com/baptism-of-the-lord-sunday-year-b-words-for-worship/>
Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2015/01/prayer-of-illumination-mark-1-21-28.html>*

Prayer for Others: Epiphany 4B

Most holy Friend, Saviour of those who call on you, please give us more of the compassion and authority of Jesus. Embolden us to heal the multiple diseases that afflict humanity and drive out the demons that afflict our contemporary world. Hear us, O God.

Loving God, in your abundant grace, hear our prayers

Send your agents to lands that lie under darkness and oppression; where government is corrupt, justice is rare, abuse is endemic, and the weak and the poor have nowhere to turn for hope. Please increase the spiritual authority of the Red Cross, Amnesty, and Christian World Service, to more adequately become

your ready channels of compassion, justice, practical aid, reconciliation and peace. Hear us, O God.

Loving God, in your abundant grace, hear our prayers

Send your messengers to situations where diseases like AIDS are reaping a grim harvest. Especially we pray for the afflicted nations of Africa and Asia. Please give authority to people of disciplined compassion, to provide pharmaceutical help, nursing care, and better health education that will drive out the demons of superstition and fatalism. Hear us, O God.

Loving God, in your abundant grace, hear our prayers

Send your servants into places where food is scarce and crops are poor. Please strengthen the authority of those local leaders and outside advisers, who seek to empower the people to conserve water, dig new wells, plant trees, grow new food crops, farm fish, start new cottage industries, and obtain better prices for their goods. Hear us, O God.

Loving God, in your abundant grace, hear our prayers

Send your human angels of mercy into situations, both here and abroad, where there is neglect, illness, sorrow, frustration and anger. Please give some of the compassionate authority of Jesus to chaplains in hospitals and prisons, to nurses and ambulance offices, physicians and surgeons, social workers and foster parents, police officers and counsellors. Hear us, O God.

Loving God, in your abundant grace, hear our prayers

Send your gifts of comfort and great joy among the many congregations of your church. May more of the spiritual authority of Jesus empower every ordinary church member, and the wisdom and compassion of Christ enlarge the ministries of lay leaders and ordained pastors. By the grace of Christ, may our deeds more adequately match our creeds, and our love expand to embrace those misfits who appear lonely and unlovable. Hear us, O God.

Loving God, in your abundant grace, hear our prayers

God, our most holy Friend, in your mercy may we go from strength to strength in things of the spirit, and become the lovers and the agents of that holy awe which is the beginning of true wisdom.

Through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

— written by Bruce Prewer, and posted on [Bruce Prewer's Homepage](https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/prayers-of-people-for-january-29-2012.html). Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/prayers-of-people-for-january-29-2012.html>

Benediction, Blessing, Commission

Jesus comes to us, offering healing and hope, speaking and acting with authority. Listen to him. Go into this world, confident in God's love and healing power. Go in peace and may God's love and peace always be with you. AMEN.

Nancy C. Townley, <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2279/classic-worship-connection-january-28-2018>

Benediction

(based on Mark 1:21-28)

Go forth...

...replenished by the grace and mercy of God,

...blessed by the healing love of Jesus,

...energized by the limitless power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

— written by Moira Laidlaw, and posted on her [Liturgies Online](https://www.liturgiesonline.com/) website.

Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/benediction-epiphany-4b.html>

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany – She Began to Serve

February 7, 2021 - [Mark 1:29-39](https://www.bible.com/bible/1/Mark/1/29-39)

INTRODUCTION

We've talked about making a commitment throughout this series. "Follow Me" is the call we respond to every time we say yes to Jesus. So, this week, once again,

we make our commitment to serve. Because we have been healed in so many ways, because we have been claimed and loved and accepted in ways that surprise us even still, we commit to serve in the name of the one who loves like that. Peter's mother-in-law doesn't have any lines in this gospel drama, but her witness is strong. As soon as she got to her feet, her first action was to serve. As soon as she came to herself, she didn't think of herself. She set herself aside in order to serve.

Let us celebrate service today, but not as another call to do more, to give more, to work harder or to fill our overburdened schedules with work. Yes, there is always a call to more service. But instead, let's celebrate service by saying "thank you." Who can we thank for service? How can we cultivate a spirit of gratitude for the ones we have gotten used to ignoring, those who have become a part of the background noise of living in the world as it is? A few months ago, we called them "essential workers." Do we remember that? They were essential, but as a society, we don't pay them enough, or give them time off, or provide adequate healthcare, or thank them enough.

The specific action of this woman in Mark is skimmed over. We don't know what she did, how she served. We only know that she did. And that was worth comment for Mark. He could have said, she got up, and she was well. Instead, he had to tell us that her response to this gift was service. Her gratitude was not in words, but in action.

When we begin to celebrate the small and large acts of service of others, we find encouragement and an atmosphere for service for all of us. Let our prayers include reference to the humble servants around us. Let our confession be of how we have overlooked the presence of Christ in a simple act of giving and service in front of us. In a time of reflection during worship, invite those in attendance to think about who has served them recently whom they could thank. And perhaps, they might on about whom they could serve without being told. "She began to serve them."

PREACHING NOTES

We rush from the first exorcism in the previous text to the first healing in this text. Does it seem to anyone else that Mark is trying to fill out Jesus' resume in this first chapter? Heaven is torn apart at his baptism, and the world is turned upside down from that moment on. Nothing is safe, nothing is sacred, nothing is untouched. Except that everything is sacred and everything is touched. And safe isn't on the agenda of this Messiah on the run.

Everything is sacred because there isn't anywhere he is unwilling to go. He dives into the depths of the broken and the possessed. He meets those out of control of their own lives, perhaps because of personal choices, perhaps through no fault of their own. What the community considered unclean, Jesus finds pulsing with the presence of the holy. What society stands apart from, Jesus challenges with healing.

Notice the difference between the exorcism in the previous text and the healing in this one. There are some maladies that require confrontation and some that need kindness and the human touch. The key, of course, is knowing which is which.

We know nothing about the people involved in this event. The four new disciples, remember the other names – Philip and Bartholomew – came from John. According to Mark, we're just in the beginning stages and the twelve are not yet twelve, but four. So, after the exorcism in the synagogue, Simon invites them home, ostensibly to figure out what might be next for this new mission team. As they enter the house, something reminds Simon about his mother-in-law's condition. Maybe he says, "Glad you're here, Jesus, please keep it down, my MIL is sick." There is no asking here, no plea of faith. Mark simply says they told him about her. The next thing you know, Jesus is marching down the hallway into the mother-in-law's room and takes her by the hand and lifts her up.

Think about that for a moment. Sure, we had that confrontation in the synagogue and the compelling call from the fishing boats. But nothing to this point suggests such a power. What did they think as Jesus strides off to find the fevered woman and pulls her to her feet? Need we be reminded about all the taboos, contact between men and women, laws of hospitality between guest and host, being in the presence of the sick, too many to mention. Yet, there he goes without so much as a word.

And the healing is also silent. No “your sins are forgiven” or “your faith has made you well.” He just grabs her hand and yanks her to her feet. Eyes were popping and necks were cracking all over the house. Except mom. Mark, in what will become his familiar spare prose, describes the only proper response to a miracle such as this: “and she began to serve them.”

What did she do? It isn’t specified. Who was included? Everyone. Notice that she served them. Not just him. When we are blessed, then the blessing spills out on those around us. We don’t just bask in the healing, in the blessing. We get to work. Let’s be clear, however, she wasn’t paying a debt. She wasn’t earning the gift. She was responding to the blessing. All our work, all our service is in response to what has already been given.

From that small domestic scene, we move back into the wild world surrounding them. Word got out, hope stirred many feet, so they beat a path to his door. Mark implies that the healings and the exorcisms continued into the night. These first two opened the floodgates, and Jesus’ fame spread.

Then we have a little leadership message slipped into the story. Jesus worked long into the night, healing all who came. But then, early in the morning, he slipped away, to pray, to breathe, to connect with the source of his strength. He was gone long enough to cause concern, as they went hunting for him. He took the time he needed. He kept his priorities, even in the face of the demands on him that continued. “Everyone is searching for you,” the disciples told him when they found him. Everyone - the crowd, the hungry, needy, demanding crowd - is searching for you.

Why did he leave? It doesn’t feel right, to leave behind those who were searching, those who were hurting. But he moves on—not to avoid responsibility since he healed and taught and exorcised there too. He keeps focused on the mission, even when it seems a bit harsh. It was his service to cover more ground in the limited amount of time.

See, some would have us stay in one place and focus on those who were already there, those on the inside. Some argue that our emphasis ought to be on the ones who belong, who have already come. Yet, Jesus says, “I have to go to those who haven’t yet heard; I have to continue to move out, go further, speak to more.”

What about those who are already in? Don't we care about them? To put it in terms of a parable from Matthew and Luke, but not by Mark, what about the ninety-nine? Don't they matter? Of course they do. But they have the community around them. They have the experience of Jesus that they can share with one another. They can build on the knowledge that they already have.

And we who carry the name of Jesus before us, must, like him, carry it out to those who haven't yet heard—those who don't yet know him. We are making disciples, even as we are being made disciples. That is our service. Like Simon's mother-in-law, we don't just serve him; we serve them. All of them. Any of them. We serve them.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

At the heart of being a disciple of Jesus Christ is a life of service. There is nothing really controversial about that. We just argue about what that service might entail and who we are called to serve. We value some service more than others, for lots of reasons. But today, as we worship, it would be a valuable exercise to find instances of service that often get overlooked. Maybe the challenge would be for the whole congregation, not just the worship team, to engage in the task of acknowledging service to themselves, to their church, to their community, paying special attention to those who don't get recognized very often. Identify those who don't do what they do for the recognition. They might even resist being recognized. And this isn't a call to embarrass workers in the church and community, but to model selfless service. Thereby, the call to service is issued anew.

For many people, a commitment to "follow Jesus" might not seem compelling enough to move them out of the pew or from behind their screen. But a call to service, to engage in a specific act at a specific time benefiting specific people who are visible is the kind of call they are longing for. We have suggested the call to discipleship throughout this series, but here perhaps a more specific call would make an impact. And while a workday at the church is useful and often necessary, it doesn't carry the urgency that a call to serve neighbors does. Plus, for many, it feels like self-serving to focus on the church building. So, what needs in the wider community can your congregation support? Think of hands-on ministry, but also

consider resource raising for those who aren't able to swing a hammer or wield a paintbrush. Find ways to partner worship in the congregation with work in the wider community. Find ways for us to rise up and begin to serve, as though the two things were really one thing in the end.

Certainly, healing is also at the core of this story. To talk about, or even provide services of healing, would be appropriate. If, however, that was the focus of the service the week before, then to turn to the response to healing in this story would be a compelling connection. We are answering the question: "What are we healed for?" A life of service!

Opening Meditation

(or possibly Benediction)

"Lord, Here We Stand"

Lord, here we stand

with the whole city gathered at our door

waiting for our Sunday celebrations to end,

hoping that we will notice

that there is a community outside these walls

longing for healing, help and hope.

As we rise from our knees,

help us to worship and work with our eyes open.

As we walk through these doors,

remove the blinders from our hearts

so that we might love and feel and even ache with our neighbors.

When tomorrow comes,

let worship continue to flow through our hands,

testifying to your love and greatness.

Amen.

*(Safiyah Fosua, **The Africana Worship Book for Year B**, Discipleship Resources, 2007, p. 28.)*

Call to Worship

God comes into a world filled with uncertainties and darkness.

God seeks out the voids of belief and conviction.

God embraces the wounded and broken.

God knocks down the walls of division and strife.

God is the candle shining in the darkness of our days.

God is the light of our lives.

God is the one who makes all things new.

Praise be to God, now and forevermore!

— based on materials by Peter K. Perry, and posted on Richard Fairchild's [Kir-shalom](#) website.

Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/call-to-worship-prayer-epiphany-4b.html>

Prayer of Praise and Adoration

(inspired by Psalm 147:1-11, Mark 1:29-39)

God of all power, you are the One who called this world into being and we acknowledge that you have no equal in the extent of your power. Yet, you want to share your power—your strength—with those who are powerless; you ache to heal the brokenhearted and to bind up the wounds of the lost and rejected folk of this world. Such radical love leaves us speechless, but you gave it human form and shape in the person of Jesus, in whom your promises of healing and empowerment were fulfilled. We give you thanks and praise for blessing our lives in this way, and we pray that in Jesus and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we too can become radical lovers of the powerless, and passionate bearers of hope to those whose lives are filled with despair and hopelessness. May this time of worship be a true expression of our desire to praise and glorify you, O God, for the many ways in which you bless us, and may our lives reveal our gratitude in all we think, and do, and say. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

— written by Moira Laidlaw, and posted on the [Liturgies Online](#) website.

Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/prayer-of-praise-epiphany-5b.html>

Prayer of Approach

Loving God,

whose touch can heal the broken places of life,
touch us today...

God of peace,
whose spirit of peace can quiet our spirits
of confusion and despair,
reassure us today...

Forgiving God,
whose call to repentance promises grace upon grace,
place your mercy in our souls today...

You who heal the sick and liberate the imprisoned,
who bring justice in the midst of oppression
and strength in the midst of weakness,
pour out your spirit of power upon us today.

Open our hearts to new faithfulness,
redirect our waywardness,
and hold us gently in your goodness.

We confess our need to you,
and we turn to you with hearts filled with hope,
remembering the promises you have made to us.

May your name be glorified in us and through us.
We ask it through Christ Jesus,
your only begotten son,
he who is our Lord and our Savior,
our brother and our friend. **Amen.**

— based on materials by Peter K. Perry, and posted on Richard Fairchild's [Kir-shalom](http://kir-shalom.com) website.
Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/call-to-worship-prayer-epiphany-4b.html>

Prayer Litany

(based on Psalm 147, Isaiah 40:21-31, Mark 1:29-39)

Lord God, through Jesus you opened the eyes of the blind;
you healed the sick and you fed the hungry.

We give you thanks and praise for your mercy and your love.

Loving Father, by the Spirit you restore strength to the weary
and give hope to those who are in despair.

We give you thanks and praise for your mercy and your love.

You call us Lord to proclaim your deeds and your wonders to all people,
You call us to worship and serve you that all may be made whole.
You offer us a new life of righteousness.

We give you thanks and praise for your mercy and your love.

Make us worthy, O Lord, to receive all your gifts.
Descend on us like the light of a new day
give light to our souls
and put your praise upon our lips. Amen.

— written by Richard J. Fairchild, and posted on his [Kir-shalom](#) website.

Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/litany-of-approach-epiphany-5b.html>

A Prayer for Others

Lord Jesus Christ,
when you walked on dusty roads
or sat by glistening waters,
you met people where they were.

When you bent down low
to touch the leper,
or raised your eyes to touch Zacchaeus' heart,
heaven and earth were met.

And so our prayer today is that our world will know
your healing touch
and your forgiving heart.

That those who have been hurt
by insincere actions
and damning words
will hear your healing voice.

That those whose lives are filled with dark thoughts,

or unimaginable fears,
will know your peace.

Walk beside those who are close to giving up hope
and where life seems to have no point;
where people struggle to make ends meet
and fear the bailiffs' knock on the door.

May children living in sewers
or tending AIDS-racked parents
feel the touch of a caring hand
and an end to injustice and fear.

And may all who weep and mourn,
or feel abandoned and unloved
turn towards your voice,
move towards your arms
and hear the whisper of your presence
in the long hours of night.

Inspire us and encourage us to bend down low;
to embrace those for whom society has no time or patience.

Raise our eyes upwards to see the struggling patient
and the exhausted care giver.

And where young and old stumble and fall, may we be there to offer support,
that all will know your love that transcends all others.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. **Amen.**

— written by Reverend Eleanor Macalister, and posted on the Church of Scotland's [Starters for Sunday](#) website.

Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/prayer-of-intercession-february-5-2012.html>

Benediction, Blessing, Commission

We are being sent into a world in need of healing. We have been given all that we need to be God's messengers of peace. Go now into the world, rejoicing in God's presence with you. Bring the news of peace and hope to all you meet. AMEN.

By Nancy C. Townley, <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2322/classic-worship-connection-february-4-2018>

Transfiguration Sunday – But Only Jesus
February 14, 2021 - [Mark 9:2-9](#)

INTRODUCTION

Transfiguration Sunday might not be a common observance in the United Methodist tradition. There are those who do attempt to pay attention to this significant moment in the life and ministry of Jesus, but many do not. Now, as a part of the "Follow Me" series, would be a time to take a moment and consider this event.

This is the one who calls us to follow. We can always ask which is the real Jesus? Is it the one who gets his hands dirty with the mud and spit of this world, or is it the one who stands on the mountain top and glows with a radiance divine? Well, of course, the answer is yes! Yes, it is both. The human Jesus and the divine Christ. The transcendent part of the Trinity of God, and the immanent, incarnate human laid in a manger and nailed to a cross, the one who walked and taught and healed and loved on earth just like you. Yet not like you. More than you. A glimpse of what you might be. A hint of what you were created to be. An invitation and a hope.

It is not the task of the preacher or the worship team to explain transfiguration. Thanks be to God. But to stand with the congregation in open-mouthed wonder at the fullness of the Christ we worship. In this in between moment, before we launch into Lent, we catch our breath by standing on the mountaintop with Peter and John and James. And we watch Jesus do something unexplainable. The Transfiguration has always been a puzzle to the church, raising more questions than answers. At its heart, the event presents the "otherness" of Jesus, even as it celebrates his oneness with his followers. There is always more to Jesus than we

can know or figure out. And that's a good thing. We worship one who can still take our breath away in wonder and awe.

So, sing the songs about the glory and grandeur of God and of Jesus. And if you're not singing just yet, then listen to them. Get carried away by the wonder and the beauty of the Christ who calls us to follow. This is a moment for reaching beyond yourself, beyond everyone, and simply basking in the light that is the Christ. Worship today should be about lifting us up, higher than we thought we could reach. It should be deep, more profound than we have attempted before. Speak of the mysteries and the promises of eternity beyond the grasp of our human brain to comprehend.

Our prayers should be statements of praise and awe. Our confession should be full of the realization that we have diminished the wonder of Christ, that we have reduced God to something that we could grasp, simply because it makes us feel better about ourselves.

Provide the worshipers with an experience that is all-encompassing, that gathers them up and sparks the imagination and the hope. The response might be tears or might be laughter; both are appropriate in the awesomeness of God.

At the same time, in the face of the awestruck wonder, there is also a call to follow, to stay close to the one we worship. Even the voice on the mountain told us to listen to him. Now is the time, if you haven't before in the series, or even if you have, to come to the altar and declare your intention to follow where he leads. Now is the time to follow him down the mountain and to remember that the commandment to not tell was given to them, but not to us. We are to tell anyone and everyone. We are to live our telling, walk our proclamation.

But the key will be for us to keep the focus off ourselves and our successes and failures and instead keep our eyes on the Christ. That's the emphasis of the title for this Transfiguration Sunday: "But Only Jesus." We are surrounded by distractions and responsibilities aplenty. We are overwhelmed by injustice and oppression; we are almost overwhelmed by needs and brokenness, our own and that which envelops us. But in the end, it is only Jesus. The source of the strength and the focus of our attention is only Jesus. To be sure, this does not mean that we don't care about that which surrounds us. In fact, if anything, we are even more eager to be at work in the world, bringing hope and healing, bringing justice

and freedom. But it is not to our own benefit that we work in the world, but only Jesus.

Let our worship be that which lifts up the name of Jesus through our work and our service, through our passion and our commitment, through our songs and our prayers, through our compassion and our caring. Let us worship only Jesus.

PREACHING NOTES

“He changed in front of them,” it says. *Transfigured* is the word that we have become used to reading here. It is the Feast of the Transfiguration. after all. That sounds more holy somehow, more theological than to say simply that he changed. But the Greek word here is *metemorfw,qh* (*metamorphothe*) from which we get metamorphosis —or change.

So what happened on that mountain six days after a conversation about suffering and death? Something. Hard to say, except by repeating the words that we read there. He was transfigured; he was changed before them. What they were used to seeing they no longer saw; and something they hadn’t seen before suddenly became evident to their frightened eyes. And what did they see? Something well-nigh indescribable. Luckily, there were aids to their seeing all around them to help them define what it was that had happened in front of them.

First of all, there were those other guys. Mark says it was Moses and Elijah. How did they know who it was? Did they come with name tags? Were there prompters running around with signs? Or was it one of those “they just knew” kind of things? Maybe Moses had his famous staff - the staff by which he parted the sea and then struck the rock to get water. Maybe Elijah had his wilderness clothes on, a John the Baptist motif that showed he was a man of the desert, a man uneasy with so-called human civilization. Maybe it was a wild look in his eyes. Maybe Jesus called them by name when they appeared. We don’t know, because not a lot of attention is paid to the two of them. They were there as props; they were scenery for the lead actor; they were in supporting roles on this day. It wasn’t about them. They represented the law and the prophets, the story of the people of God, the heights of the Chosen People. But they were there to draw attention to the one

who was the Word of God, who was the Presence of God, Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Then there was the voice. The only words spoken on that mountain top, well besides the rather unfortunate mumblings of a desperate disciple who just had to say something. And that something was about as appropriate as a giggle in a funeral, as a belch during a silent prayer. He was the guy shouting “you da man” when D.J. putts to win the championship. The one giving away plot details in the darkened movie theater. Even Mark tries to shush him up by saying, “He didn’t know what to say.”

No, not those words, but the other words. Or, to be more accurate, the Words. Similar to a previous utterance. A few chapters earlier, there were the Words: “You are my Son, my Beloved, with you I am well-pleased.” Now the Words say, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him.” The first Words are directed to the one being baptized, the one launching a ministry and a hope. These mountain top Words are to those who would seek to follow that one. To them, the terrified mumblers. And to us, the followers at a distance. “Listen to Him. To the Beloved Son.” To the changed one, the revealed one. Pay attention.

Pay attention to what? To the change? To the glow, to the fireworks, to the power and the glory? Well, yes. And no.

In what context do we usually use the word metamorphosis? I remember science class and talking about butterflies. The process of changing from a rather ugly worm-like caterpillar into the fragile but breathtakingly beautiful butterfly is metamorphosis - change. Or maybe it was in earth science, and we were talking about metamorphic rock. Melted by the heat of the earth’s core, the rock flows from one form into another.

But here’s the question: “Which is the true form of the rock or the creature?” Or is the before and the after both a part of the whole? Is it a matter of perspective and a matter of timing? Where you are and when you are allows you to see one truth as opposed to another.

What happened on that mountain was not so much a change into something different, but a revealing of the essence of the one who was changed. Jesus became who he was on that mountain, even though he was who he was as he

climbed up and then down again. He is always who he is; he is always present in the fullness of his being. We can see only a part of him, the part we need at any given moment. We experience only a piece, a dimension of the reality that is the Christ. And we get used to that; it becomes familiar to us.

But every now and then, we catch a glimpse of something larger, something deeper and more profound. Every now and then, we hear a word that reverberates in our soul for weeks if not a lifetime. Every now and then, a tear comes to our eye as we stand on the precipice of glory. Every now and then, a lump comes to our throat as we encounter the depths of love and sacrifice. Every now and then, we climb a mountain and see what it is that we are following in what is most often the darkness of this life. Every now and then, we move a little closer, grow and little taller, move a little closer, and listen a little better. Then we can realize that who and what we are, even as we grow and change on the discipleship path, is possible because of him. Only Jesus.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

The “Follow Me” series ends where it began, with a contemplation of the one we follow. We began at the river, where Jesus, dripping from the waters of his baptism, hears a voice of approval and sending. We end with Jesus glowing on a mountain peak, with a voice announcing to all have ears to hear that this is indeed the very Son of God and that it would be in our best interest to listen to him. Following Jesus means, in the first place, listening to him.

But only Jesus means that at the center of our choosing, our thinking, our doing is the person of Christ, who guides and directs us, loves and redeems us, and supports and strengthens us. This experience of worship is an unashamed celebration of Jesus, who was revealed on the top of the mount of transfiguration as the fullness that we need. He steps into the role of the light of the world.

The season of Epiphany is framed by light, and here the light is revealed, is given. Like the three disciples in that moment, we don't always know what to do with it, how to respond to it. But we know we want it; we want to dwell in it. We want that light to remove all the darkness from our lives. So celebrate the light. Follow the light. Embrace the light.

Fill the worship space with light. Invite those worshipping at home to turn on the light, light candles, flashlights, cell phone lights. Let there be light. Sing about the light: "Christ is the World's Light," "I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light," "This Little Light of Mine." Sing whatever brings to mind the shining presence of Jesus in our midst.

It is also a truth that this person of light leads us back down the mountain. We can't stay in the peaks, away from all that might wound us. So, we are led out into the darkness that still exists, but we carry the light with us, within us, as we live and work in hope and confidence. Our service sometimes will take us into the darkness of this world. But we remain evidence that the light still shines.

Transfiguration Sunday Call to Worship

(Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-9, Luke 9:28-36)

We have seen the light of God;
**on high mountains of celebration
and in the ecstasy of a lover's embrace.**

We have seen the light of God;
**through the bitter scorn of betrayal
and the searing chasm of grief.**

We have seen the light of God;
**with eyes that have been shaded,
with eyes that have been opened,
with eyes that have been blinded.**

We have seen the light of God.

~ copyright © 1997 Katherine Hawker. Posted on her [Liturgies Outside](#) website.

Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/call-to-worship-transfiguration-sunday.html>

Call to Worship

(inspired by Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-9, Luke 9:28-36, 2 Peter 1:16-18)

Beyond our busyness,
Above the cold winter floor
there is a glory rising born of heaven
and reaching out to each one of us

**a light that shines through the clouds
an invitation seeking all of who we are
that transfigures the world**

that transforms darkness into hope
that brings life from a cross
where old life ends and new life is born

**In glory Jesus meets us here
raising us from depths of valley to the height of the mountain
carrying the weight of our humanity
to the heights of heavens glory.**

Let us worship from the mountain and hear again
“This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”

*~ written by Rev. Rob Smith, Spirit of Life Presbyterian Church, Apple Valley, MN. Posted:
<https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2017/02/call-to-worship-for-transfiguration.html>*

Prayer - Thematic

Holy God, mighty and immortal,
you are beyond our knowing,
yet we see your glory in the face of Jesus Christ,
whose compassion illumines the world.
Transform us into the likeness of the love of Christ,
who renewed our humanity so that we may share in his divinity,
the same Jesus Christ, our Lord,
who live and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

<https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/prayers.php?id=69>

Prayer of Invocation: Transfiguration

(2 Kings 2:1-12, Mark 9:2-9)

O Holy One,
on mountaintops and valley floors
you reveal to us the light of your love.
Our hearts desire is to bask in the amazing glory
of the divine presence.
With each encounter we are changed and transformed.
Draw us nearer
that we might receive a double portion of your Holy Spirit.
Help us, O Holy One, to live our lives as a reflection of divine glory.
May we walk among our brothers and sister as a blessing,
bearing light into dark places,
hope to displace despair,
and love that casts out hate.
Our world is hurting
and we need the followers of Jesus to follow more closely.
Maybe then we will hear your voice speaking to us and saying,
... "listen to my Child, the Beloved!" Amen.

— from ***Witness to Wonders: Service Prayers for Transfiguration Sunday***, written by the Rev. Madison Shockley, pastor of Pilgrim United Church of Christ in Carlsbad, CA. Posted on the United Church of Christ's [Worship Ways](#) website.

Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/invocation-transfiguration.html>

Prayer for Transfiguration Sunday

Our request for the light of God to shine in our lives brightly and in full force is heard and will be answered.

Radiant God, source of light,
as you surrounded Jesus with your glory,

so you come to us in penetrating brightness.

You catch us off guard and expose our weakness.

We choose the limelight while you call us to explore the shadows
and brighten the darkness.

We seek the spectacular while you bind up the broken in
countless acts of mercy.

We seek to stay on the mountain or in a comfortable pew while
you walk to the valleys of need.

Radiant God,

fill us with light and courage to carry good news into all the
corners of the world and to bring back the joy of your presence.

Amen

By [Reconciling Congregation Program](#) From *Shaping Sanctuary: Proclaiming God's Grace in an Inclusive Church*, Copyright 2000. Reprinted by permission.

Reposted: <https://www.manyvoices.org/blog/resource/prayer-for-transfiguration-sunday/>

Prayer: Glory

(inspired by Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-9, Luke 9:28-36, 2 Peter 1:16-18)

We worship you, O God, with songs of praise.

We worship you with words of prayer
and with ears that listen for you to speak
your saving truth into our lives.

We worship you in the silent spaces
where we struggle for hope and for courage.

We long for a glimpse of your glory:
the glory that shines in the darkness
and the darkness cannot overcome it;
the glory that touches lives with a beauty so holy
that it heals the wounded soul;

the glory that gives strength to the weary.

We, who stumble and fall so often,
worship you,
longing for your light to shine upon us.
Dazzle us with your holy love,
draw us into your purifying presence,
speak to us your transforming truth.
Then, grant us grace
to live every moment
changed by such glory—
daring to live with hope and courage and love
reflecting the life of Jesus,
through whom your glory shines
in the most unexpected ways. Amen.

~ written by Christine Jerrett, and posted on **Christine Jerrett: Reflections on being the Church in God's new creation**. <http://christinejerrett.wordpress.com/tag/prayer/>
Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2014/02/prayer-for-transfiguration-glory.html>

Prayer for Transfiguration

Holy God,
upon the mountain you revealed our Messiah,
who by his death and resurrection
would fulfill both the law and the prophets.

By his transfiguration enlighten our path
that we may dare to suffer with him in the service of humanity
and so share in the everlasting glory of him
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, for ever. **Amen.**

*Lawrence Hull Stookey, **United Methodist Hymnal, 259***

Prayer for Transfiguration

(inspired by Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-9, Luke 9:28-36, 2 Peter 1:16-18)

O God of the covenant,
the cloud of your splendor and the fire of your love
revealed your Son on the mountain heights.

Transform our lives in his image,
write your law of love on our hearts,
and make us prophets of your glory,
that we may lead others into your presence. Amen.

~ from **Revised Common Lectionary Prayers** copyright © 2002 Consultation on Common Texts
admin. Augsburg Fortress. Posted on **Thematic, Intercessory and Scripture Prayers for the RCL**,
Vanderbilt Divinity Library. <http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/>

Commission & Benediction for Transfiguration Sunday

(Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-9, Luke 9:28-36)

Go now, and speak of what you have seen of God's glory.
Do not cling to the holy moments
when heaven overshadows you,
but as the Lord lives, listen to Christ and follow him
from the places of revelation
to the places of mission.

And may God shine the light of glory into your hearts.
May Christ be with you and never leave you.
And may the Spirit renew the image of God within you.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
.....*In the name of Christ. Amen.*

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Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/benediction-transfiguration-sunday.html>

Benediction

(Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-9, Luke 9:28-36)

May God now send us back down the mountain of our worship.
We have been changed.
We can't be silent anymore
We have seen the Light of the World.
Go and share the radiance of love!

~ written by Rev. Dr. David Bahr, pastor of Park Hill Congregational United Church of Christ in Denver, Colorado. Posted on the [United Church of Christ](#) website.

Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/benediction-for-transfiguration-sunday.html>