



Leura Uniting Church

24 January 2021

Epiphany 3

Gail Hinton

Welcome

Welcome to those of you reading this Service at home. May God bless you this week.

Acknowledgment of country

*We acknowledge the Darug and the Gundungurra people,
the first inhabitants of this place*

*We honour them for their custodianship of the land,
On which we gather today.*

Announcements

Call to Worship

*Our souls wait in silence;
our hope rests in God
our rock
our salvation
our refuge.*

***We will not be shaken.**
In this time of worship,
we pour out our hearts
because we trust in God's steadfast love.*

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

Let us continue to worship God in prayer,

Prayer of Adoration

Creator God, we praise you for the gift of life.

We take delight in the joys of nature and marvel at the work of your hands.

Lord, we adore you.

You call us into your embrace and declare us your children.

As our Divine Parent you are trustworthy, patient and forgiving.

Lord, we adore you.

*You sent us your only Son, to teach us and guide us
in the way that leads to abundant life.*

Lord, we adore you.

You hear our cries and soothe our souls,

You send your Spirit to console us and inspire us.

Lord, we adore you.

Amen.

Hymn: Tis 143 Immortal, invisible, God only wise

1. Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious,
the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious,
your great name we praise.

2. Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting,
but ruling in might;
your justice like mountains
high soaring above,
your clouds which are fountains
of goodness and love.

3. You give life to all, Lord,
to both great and small,
in all life now living, the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish
as leaves on the tree,
then wither;
but ever unchanged you will be.

4. Great Father of glory,
pure Father of light,
your angels adore you,
all veiling their sight;
of all your rich graces this grace,
Lord, impart -
take the veil from our faces,
the veil from our heart.

5. All praise we would render:
reveal to our sight
what hides you is only
the splendor of light;
All praise we would render
and so let your glory, Almighty, impart,
through Christ in your story,
your Christ to the heart.

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Walter Chalmers Smith
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Prayer of Confession and Declaration of Forgiveness

Let us in silence confess our sin

And seek God's mercy and forgiveness.

.....

Gracious Lord Jesus,

We confess that we often take you and your word for granted.

Sometimes we even try and pack you away,

and get on with our lives as if we didn't know you.

*We confess, that we often turn a blind eye and a deaf ear
to your call,*

and deny you, your rightful place in our lives,

as Lord, Master, Teacher and Saviour.

Give us insight and humble us Lord,

so that we embrace the good news

and follow you wherever you may lead us.

Amen.

*Those who are in Christ are a new creation;
Everything old has passed away;
See the new has come!
All this is from God,
Who reconciled us to himself through Christ.
Hear then Christ's word of grace to us:
'Your sins are forgiven'
Thanks be to God.*

Readings: Psalm 62:5-12 and Mark 1:14-20

Kerry Jordan

Sermon

*In recent years I have tried to spend less time watching television and instead focus on more active and productive past times. There is however one show I am addicted to it's called *Dancing with the Stars*. For those of you who have never watched this programme, the premise is basically about pairing up minor celebrities with professional dancers. Each week the couple are required to learn a particular style of dance and then perform the routine in front of qualified judges. The three things I like best about this show are the funny moments when things go hilariously wrong, then there are the amazing moments when a difficult and potentially dangerous move goes incredibly right and lastly I enjoy watching the relationship develop between the master dance teacher and their novice, newbie, partner. Through the sweat and tears each couple forge deep bonds, getting to know one another on a level that could take months or years under normal circumstances. In facing the challenge of learning a new routine each week they have the opportunity to build a relationship that is based on trust, discipline, and the willingness to put in hours of practice. Many of the dance moves they rehearse require enormous amounts of trust, check this famous example out, there are so many ways that this lift could go wrong. I'd be very fearful of being dropped on my head. (image dirty dancing)*



<https://movieweb.com/dirty-dancing-lift-wedding-rehearsal-gone-bad/> (No infringement of copyright intended.)

In a few moments we will think about the relationship we have individually and communally, with our master teacher, our Lord, Jesus Christ, but let's first consider today's gospel reading. In Mark's account of the call of the fishermen, the relationship between Jesus and his first followers appears mysterious, and supernatural; Jesus calls and they immediately respond. If I imagine myself in the place of these first followers there are loads of questions that I would have asked first, basic things like who are you exactly, where are we going and what are we going to do? I would have also needed to say things like, can you wait a sec while I hang the clothes out, feed the dog, say goodbye to my family and pack a travel bag? If Jesus walked in here right now and asked each of us to leave everything in order to follow him what would your response be?

Each of the gospels record similar accounts of Jesus calling his first disciples and each follows the same pattern, call and immediate acceptance. The willingness of these first followers to get up and leave everything and their instantaneous, obedient response can leave us as the modern-day reader, feeling inadequate and unsure about our own life of faith and witness. This is an uncomfortable thought to hang on to, yet it does prompt us to reassess the way we allow our faith to shape our lives. This kind of reflection and self-examination can be challenging and painful, yet it allows us to grow and deepen our understanding of what it truly means to follow Christ. Unlike the disciples who dropped everything to follow Christ, you and I need may need to open ourselves to God's searching Spirit for guidance and put in many hours of practice, so that we can in time, trust Christ to lift us up high,.... but definitely not drop us on our heads.

Another positive lesson we can learn from today's reading is to consider 'what happens next?', what is in store for these disciples and how will they allow their faith in Jesus to shape their lives . They certainly start out as shining examples of faith and obedience, yet in Mark's gospel we see them make mistake after mistake; they are slow to understand Jesus teachings, argue about who is Jesus' number one, right hand man, and as the gospel narrative unfolds, they will desert him, betray him, and deny him. If they were dancing, we would describe them as having two left feet.

Commentators suggest that Mark offers us this portrait of the disciples as ordinary, clumsy people, in order to highlight Jesus' call as a choice based on grace, not qualifications, intelligence, vocation, social status or even aptitude. This is good news for us, because Jesus calls us too, wherever we are and just as we are. As God's beloved children, we are known for who we truly are, and God sees our hidden potential. This divine knowledge of the hidden potential in all of us may explain Jesus' unusual and diverse band of early followers, fishermen, a tax collector, a Zealot, a wealthy Roman citizen, members of the religious elite, and of course women, some of whom had high social status and financial means and others who have gained over the centuries bad reputations for shady pasts. A pretty unlikely bunch really, yet all of them regardless of who they were had something to contribute to Jesus mission and the proclamation of the good news.

Today's gospel reading begins with the announcement of the good news. Listen again to the opening verses:

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news^[a] of God,^[b] 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;^[c] repent, and believe in the good news."^[d]

All of the gospel readings during this season of Epiphany, have revealed facets of the good news of Jesus Christ. They have revealed Jesus as the eternal Word and the beloved Son of God, the King of Israel, and the Son of Man. These lofty and awe-inspiring descriptions of the One we follow signify the amazing truth, that God chose to reveal Godself in human form, as one of us. Over the last few weeks this central truth of the gospel message has revealed to us a calling to live holy and godly lives as God's beloved children, empowered by

the Spirit, so that we might see God in everyone we meet. I hope and pray that one or maybe all of these revelations have resonated with you and that you will 'make epiphany last' by taking that revelation with you into this New Year.

These high callings are challenging and rightly so because following Jesus requires discipline and sacrifice. Just like Jesus' first followers we too will take missteps, we will stumble and trip over and things will not always go smoothly. Here is the good news, Jesus didn't fire those hapless disciples, he stuck with them and they with him, and as they got to know him they began to trust in his words and his ways. In time they came to understand the lessons they had learnt from Jesus; they had their very own epiphanies. In Christ's Spirit they go on to proclaim the message, that started in a sleepy town in Israel, to the entire world. So, there is surely hope for us.

Because of our relationship with God in Jesus, it's okay to make mistakes, to get the steps wrong. Jesus as our divine partner is there to help us regain our balance and encourage us to start over. In him we have a patient and understanding master teacher, one who knows what it is like to be human and one who has fulfilled God's promise to never stop loving us, in the here and now and into eternity. The Lord of the Dance of Life calls us right here, right now, whoever we are, wherever we are and at all stages of life.

*You know it has been said that that anyone can dance and that anyone can sing for that matter, ... **if you have the right teacher.** Well, I am not 100% convinced of that but I am 100% convinced that all of us who have heard Jesus call can live out a live of faith and mission, living holy and godly lives, because in Jesus we have the most patient, trustworthy, understanding teacher of all time. He will lift us up in his steadfast love.*

Amen.

Hymn: Tis 242 (I danced in the morning) The Lord of the Dance

1. I danced in the morning
When the world was begun,
And I danced in the moon
And the stars and the sun;
And I came down from heaven
And I danced on the earth,
At Bethlehem I had My birth:

3. I danced on the Sabbath
and I cured the lame:
the holy people said it was a shame.
They whipped and they stripped
and they hung Me on high,
and they left Me there
on a Cross to die:

Chorus

Dance then wherever you may be;
I am the Lord of the dance, said He;
and I'll lead you all
wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all
in the dance said He.

4. I danced on a Friday
when the sky turned black;
it's hard to dance
with the devil on your back.
They buried my body
and they thought I'd gone;
but I am the dance
and I still go on:

2. I danced for the scribe
and the Pharisee,
but they would not dance
and they wouldn't follow Me.
I danced for the fishermen,
for James and John,
they came with Me
and the dance went on:

5. They cut Me down
and I leapt up high,
I am the life
that'll never never die;
I'll live in you
if you'll live in Me:
I am the Lord
of the dance said He:

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Offering Prayer

*We bring our gifts to you, Lord God,
in gratitude and hope.
In dedicating them, we dedicate ourselves again
to be your people in the world,
in the strength and enabling power
of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Prayers of the People and The Lord's Prayer: Mark Hillis

In Psalm 62 (1) we read, "For God alone my soul waits in silence; my salvation comes from the Lord." Gracious God, assist us to adopt the posture of the Psalmist and to find our way through life in your presence. In receiving your gracious Spirit, may we demonstrate your ways in this world. In reading today's Gospel we see how Simon and Andrew, John and James were called by Jesus to do the same: to be emissaries of your best news for humanity and all life; to embody your way and your hope.

We pray with thankful and open hearts today, Author of Life. We thank you and pray for your continued blessing upon the people of all nations who work for good and from a loving motivation that is so like the way of Jesus. Thank you for those who are considerate towards others regardless of official requirements or requests. Thank you for people who work for a better environment, before any rules are made. The examples are many, including, from Indonesia: Melati and Isabel Wijsen and their work combatting plastics pollution in Bali; and the women who have become Forest Guardians in Sumatra.

Thank you for all who care for injured and endangered wildlife, including so many veterinarians who give their time to diagnose and treat injured animals. We thank you for people who give time, warmly and generously, to serve those in need who are poor or oppressed in our own country. We think of the ones who assist others to navigate the labyrinthine bureaucracies of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), and agencies like Centrelink. We give thanks for all who strive with the discouraging powers controlling immigration. We give thanks for the persistent enduring care of those who advocate for disempowered refugees. *[You are invited to add your own thoughts and meditations of thankfulness and praise, in the quiet we may now share.]*

And as we give thanks, we commit ourselves to listen for the call of Jesus to us today; to respond as willingly and freely as the first disciples so long ago.

We hear the Psalm again (62:11-12): "Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God, and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord." In the light of these verses, we pray for the nations and for our own communities. For the nations we pray that they will receive and celebrate the examples from among the best of their people: that the worship of power and position will no longer govern the public discussion. Instead, may we and all who attempt to lead, be led by the compassion and love of God, so well portrayed in Jesus. Free the world from ideological attachments that distort life and discourage the love and generosity of

so many who know what is good. Give us courage to be seen with those who are motivated by forgiveness and love.

For our own Church community, we pray. In receiving the ministry and leadership of Myung Hwa Park, once she arrives, may we seek to deepen our commitment to reflect Jesus in our local actions and to be aware of our global responsibilities. Let us also be mindful of those in our midst struggling with any malaise or discomfort: grief, sadness, anxiety, illness, or pain. *[Respectful silence]* May we rejoice with those who rejoice. May we encourage the gifts we see in others. *[Respectful silence]*. We listen for the call of Jesus. Spirit of the living God: Guide our responses through all our days, and in each moment of life we are given.

In the name of the one who taught the first disciples to pray, we think of the wonderful guide to prayer that is called “The Lord’s Prayer.” Our Father ...” AMEN.

Hymn: Tis 599 Take my life, and let it be

1. Take my life, and let it be
consecrated, Lord to Thee.
Take my moments and my days
let them flow in ceaseless praise

2. Take my hands, and let them move
at the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet and let them be
swift and beautiful for Thee.

3. Take my voice, and let me sing
always, only, for my King.
Take my lips and let them be
filled with messages from Thee.

4. Take my silver and my gold,
nothing, Lord, would I withhold.
Take my intellect, and use
every power as Thou shalt choose.

5. Take my will and make it Thine;
it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is Thine own;
it shall be Thy royal throne.

6. Take my love: my Lord, I pour
at Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for Thee

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Blessing and Dismissal

*Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
May God, who is love, fill your hearts.
Christ Jesus who is the new life, inspire your hopes.
The holy spirit, who is lifegiver,
Spur you to deeds of compassion.
Amen.*

*Go out into the world in the power of the Spirit;
in all things and at all times,
remember that Christ is with you,
to hold you up and keep you steady,
as you respond to his call upon your life.
Amen.*