

FEBRUARY 7TH : PWS&D Sunday

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Call to Worship

Leader: God has invited us to come.

People: So we gather.

Leader: God has spoken to the world.

People: So we listen.

Leader: God has given us glimpses of grace and mercy.

People: So we wait and watch, longing for healing, eager for hope.

Leader: God has been faithful to all generations.

People: So we trust. And so we worship God, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

Prayer of Adoration

Creator God, source of all life, in you all creatures are connected and all creation redeemed and made new. Day by day you make yourself known to your people. In the beauty of the heavens we see your glory. In the bounty of the earth we know your generosity. In strength for our bodies and minds we experience your energy. Delighting in all that we have seen, known, and heard, we worship you, one God, Creator, Christ, and Spirit. Amen.

Hymn 290 Immortal, invisible, God only wise

Prayer of Confession

O God, you search us and know our hearts, and now in this time of confession, we are aware of our weakness and our failures. We confess it is hard to face our shortcomings. Forgive us and help us to see with your eyes. Help us to let you heal us and shape us in your love. Hear our prayer through our faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

L: Friends, hear the Good News! In the Spirit Jesus still comes, healing and freeing people.

P: In the Spirit Jesus calls us to come to him.

L: Friends, believe the Good News!

P: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

Hymn 519 Jesus, friend so kind and gentle

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“Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy, and love others as well as you love yourself.” Mark 12: 29-31

Mission Capsule – PWS&D Sunday

Inspired by God’s promise of abundant life, Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D) envisions a sustainable, compassionate and just world. On PWS&D Sunday, we celebrate and reflect on the work our church is doing to ensure vulnerable communities around the world are able to improve their quality of life. From responding to emergencies to helping people access nutritious food, clean water, adequate health care and quality education, PWS&D is helping people thrive. Through the generous support of individuals and congregations, and in collaboration with global partners, we respond together.

READINGS for February 7 – God speaks through the Scriptures

READING	VERSE	REFLECTION
<i>Old Testament</i>	Isaiah 40: 21-31	All things come from the Creator, including the community of God’s people.
<i>Psalms</i>	Psalms 147:1-11	A thanksgiving to God for restoration and plenty.
<i>Epistle</i>	1 Corinthians 9: 16-23	The greatest treasure is God’s calling to proclaim good news.
<i>Gospel</i>	Mark 1: 29-39	Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law and prays alone in a desolate place.

Hymn 824 At evening when the sun had set

SERMON: A Lonely and Solitary Place

The French painter, Henri Matisse was entertaining a friend one day. The friend, whose name was Andre, was speaking with Matisse about how worried and preoccupied he was in his job. After a fairly lengthy conversation Matisse looked Andre in the eye and said:

“Andre, you must find the artichokes in your life.”

With that, Matisse led Andre into his garden where a patch of artichokes were growing. Matisse said that each morning after he spent a number of hours painting in his studio he came into the garden to be still and meditate. This simple ritual he said gave him inspiration and a new perspective toward his work.

A time to get away from it all, to be alone, to relax. A doctor returns home after seeing many sick patients all day and seeks to spend a quiet time alone.

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A teacher spending the day in a classroom comes home and needs some down time. We know how that works. A brisk walk or a quiet evening sitting on the porch. In the process we might even hum or sing the words:

“There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God, a place where sin cannot molest, Near to the heart of God.”

In Mark’s gospel this morning we hear these words,

“In the morning, while it was very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.”

So, like any of us, Jesus needed time to be alone, away from the crowd. This place, this deserted place is secluded, lonely, and solitary. It is not, however, as the hymn suggests, a place where sin cannot molest. It is in fact a tempting place. The word used here in Greek for deserted can also mean a **kind** of wilderness, a place where temptations are close at hand. It is in essence a place of crucial and perhaps risky decision making.

So early, very early in fact, Jesus slips out of town and finds this deserted place to pray. Notice it doesn’t last long, one sentence in fact, verse 35. In the next verse Simon Peter and his friends track Jesus down and say to him.

“Everyone is searching for you.”

The crowd felt entitled to have him present all the time. Some years ago when I was serving in the Kirk church in New Glasgow, the Canadian Bible Society contacted churches in the area with the invitation to have a guest speaker come to talk about the Bible Society. The speaker we were assigned was Henry Hicks, former premier of the province, and at that time a senator in Ottawa. One of my recollections of that Sunday was during lunch at the manse, when he wanted to know where I was from. When I told him Cape Breton he seemed to smirk and told about when he was premier and had to go to Cape Breton he would always stay at the Norfolk Hotel in New Glasgow the night before. Then he would take the train the next day for Cape Breton. In response to why that was, he stated that once you got on the Island, people would not leave you alone with their requests for one thing or another.

“Everybody’s looking for you.”

In other words, let’s go back to Capernaum where we have done so much good. Jesus has experienced the pressing of needy masses and in Mark Jesus’

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attention to the crowd, which is mentioned close to forty times, speaks of a desire to help the disenfranchised. This is a period not long before the Roman-Jewish war when illness and disability were part and parcel of the cycle of poverty for the poor, as they still are today. So Jesus needs space to pray, to contemplate. Here in this place Jesus has to decide where he is going. Will it be to the comfort and praise of Capernaum or will it be somewhere else? The theme song in Capernaum is “Loud Hosanna,” and the theme song somewhere else might well be, “Crucify him.”

So Jesus says,

“Let us go to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also, for that is what I came to do.”

The Church, you and I, face this decision making also. The silence of being alone with God to seek direction for the time that is before us. That is not as easy as it may seem. If you have never been to a monastery, it is worth going. The monasteries of the Benedictine order, for example, follow a vigorous liturgy of prayer and meditation.

Silence, inviting as it can be, can also be very disturbing because you are not hearing other voices. Indeed, in this pandemic that has been a problem, for so much time is spent away from other people. Prayer begins in stillness and naming God. If one cannot say anymore to God, then one needs to be quiet, and if one listens long enough one may find that like Elijah of old you hear God in the still small voice.

An old minister in Toronto was once asked by an inquiring person where the garden of Eden was located. We know he wasn't from Pictou County, for if he was he would have said between Blue Mountain and East River St. Mary's. The old minister's response was 2728 Young Street. The inquirer wasn't very amused. Then the old minister added, “I say 2728 Young street because as a boy living at that address I stole money from mother's purse one day and went to the store to buy treats. When I returned I was so scared that I hid in the closet. My mother found me and asked what I was doing in the closet, and then she said: “What have you done?” That was the garden of Eden for me. A dark place, a place of decision.

William Willimon tells of the time he received a phone call on a Sunday evening from a member of the church he was serving as minister. The member said that his daughter Anne had just decided to drop out of Pharmacy school. Anne had been home for the weekend, and in fact had worshiped that morning with

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her parents. The news of her leaving school caught them by complete surprise. Willimon asked why Anne was doing such a thing. The father had no explanation but he did have a request. Could Willimon call Anne and talk some sense into her. Willimon agreed and in the call he reminded Anne of the many hours she had already put into her pharmaceutical training and her many academic achievements, all of which she now seemed ready to throw away. How in the world did you come to this decision? Willimon asked. Well, she said, it was your sermon this morning that got me thinking. She described her own experience of seclusion. She said she went to Pharmacy school to earn a good living and meet her own self-defined needs.

Willimon's sermon that day has been on God's call and how God calls each of us. The sermon caused Anne to think of a recent summer she spent teaching in a church literacy program for migrant workers and she felt she was serving God. She told Willimon that after his sermon she decided to leave school and give her life to helping these migrant workers.

Willimon says there was a long silence on my end of the phone, then, "Now look Anne, I said, at last, I was just preaching." Wherever that time of reflection, prayer, and meditation happens is where one hears God speaking. Jesus after an early morning of solitary prayer decided to go where God was sending him, and because he went to those places he ended up in First Church, Lower Sackville and St. John's Church, Windsor. Amen.

Prayers:

O Holy God, God of the psalmist, you are not impressed by the strength of a stallion or the might of a human arm. Yet we idolize the strong and the mighty among us, be they mortal or machine. We trust them to entertain and amuse us, guide and protect us. Their strength allows us to be weak; their might permits us to be meek. While we watch from the sidelines, their ambitions compete. We are impressed and we wonder why you, O God, are not.

If you be the God of the psalmist then you are also the God of Paul, once named Saul. You are the God of that angry and zealous defender of religious tradition who could not tolerate new visions. You threw him off the stallion he rode down to Damascus, waving a persecutor's sword in his mighty arm. You shone a light into him and said. "Saul you do not know what you do." Your love for him, O God, sent him on a new path with a new name, Paul, who became a Jew among Jews and a Gentile among Gentiles. He became all things to all people, so that others might see the light, dismount their horse, and throw down their sword.

If you are the God of Paul, then you are also the God of Simon's mother-in-law. She was an aging woman, likely a widow, she was weak and ill but Jesus went to her, touched her. She

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then arose and served, not a meal, but a calling. She served as one ministering to others, a woman healed on the Sabbath arose to serve the Lord of the Sabbath.

Simon chased after Jesus and interrupted his time in prayer to beg for more miracles. Lord, if you are God of Simon, then, you are our God, for we too, fail to understand this kingdom that you have sent among us. Open our hearts, that we may see what is real, what is desirable, what is good. Show us again what strength is, and what might can do. Help us, like the psalmist, to sing of it, to preach about it, as did the Apostle; and to embody it, as did the disciple, who understood and served. O God, may your light burn brightly in ordinary lives, bringing light, life, and love to this world, your beloved creation. These our prayers we offer in the name of your son, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray...the Lord's Prayer...

Hymn 442 *Speak, Lord, in the stillness*

COMMISSIONING/BENEDICTION

Let us enter the world again, a world that is broken and hurting, a world crying for healing and comforting action, and be part of God's solution. Let us bring peace, comfort and love, through the love of neighbor, and led by the living Christ. Amen.

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