

Third Sunday after the Epiphany
Jan 24th, 2021
Immanuel United Church

Welcome

Call to Worship:

As Jonah moved from whale belly to town crier,
from runaway to prophet,
**we will move from where we are,
to where you will take us.**

As Peter and Andrew moved
from shoreline to ministry,
from net-menders to disciples,
**we will move from our routine
into your surprises.**

As James and John moved
from boat builders to community,
from habit to adventure,
**we will move from what is known
into what is unknown.**

Prayer:

**O God, we long for your way of justice
and we are willing to follow you
as you journey into places of injustice.**

**O God, we long for peace to prevail
and we are willing to follow you
as you journey into places of conflict.**

**O God, we long to know your healing
and we are willing to follow you
as you journey into places of dis-ease and pain.**

**O God, we long for your way in this world
and we are willing to follow you
as you journey into new and unknown places
in order to share the love of God.**

Hymn: MV 12 *Come Touch Our Hearts*

Scripture: Mark 1:14-20

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Choir Anthem

Reflection: "It's a puck."

It has been three months since my younger son Jah-Bi, now 10 years old, has not been on the ice rink to play hockey with his team, due to lockdown. Like many kids of his age, hockey is his most favourite activity. How many times has he eagerly told me he "wants to skate right now!" That led us to skating on the frozen Duck Pond in St. Vital Park. But I wanted to do more for him. Hoping that it may be comforting, for a bedtime story, we picked "Hockey Crazy!" and opened the page 90. Gear Talk. "Hockey is a straightforward game, but you do need some basic equipment to play." After reading this sentence, I suggested to Jah-bi, "Let's make this a quiz! What are they?" Jah-bi listed the items he used to put on in the change room every weekend: Shin pads, socks, yellow pants, and "something on chest". "What else?" "Hmm... Yeah! Neck guard! Mouth guard!" "And...?" "Skates!" "And...?" "A stick!" "And...?" I continued to the second sentence. "Skates, a stick and a **** will get you started, ..." He couldn't figure out what else he might need to play a hockey game, after saying, "a stick." So Jah-bi mentioned everything he said earlier one more time. "Do you want a hint? Hundreds of years ago - or longer - hockey-like games were played out on frozen lakes, with apples, slices of tree stumps or even chunks of frozen cow dung used as a ****." He thought and thought trying to figure out what **** was. Then he said, "I need to go to the washroom." I began to worry, what if he cannot figure this out? He might be sorry. I didn't need to worry, though. Soon, he came back, smiling, and said so naturally and confidently, "It's a puck."

There are things in life which are so important and integral for our relationships and work, but if we do not pay special attention to them, we might miss acknowledging what crucial roles they play. Especially if they are outside of our immediate social circle and physical boundary (such as a puck on the ice, compared to other hockey gear on the child's body).

Today's reading is one of the passages I thought I knew pretty well. It's one of the most told and famous "calling" stories from the Gospel: The fishers will catch people who will follow Jesus into a new future. In today's story, Jesus calls his disciples, Simon, Andrew, James and John, who were in the boat mending the nets. Jesus says, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And Immediately the four men left their nets and followed him (V. 18). Until reading this verse again, which I preached on probably at least once in every three years, I hadn't thought about one important "Puck Fact." Simon, Andrew, James and John were fishermen. Fishing nets were their essential livelihood tools to do their job and get the food necessary for daily living. They sold the fish to the market, not to mention having something to put on their own kitchen tables to eat for their evening family meal. Most likely, they were the major bread winner in their multigenerational family. I paused to think a little further.

"And Immediately they left their nets and followed Jesus."

Now, Simon, Andrew, James and John and eight more disciples started a group of 12: Simon, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, another James, another Simon, two Judas. These 12, plus Jesus, embarked on the Kingdom of God journey. They became occupied with ministry and helping people who demanded healing each and every day.

Who fed them?

Since they left their nets and no longer went to the lake to catch fish, how were they able to sustain their life together? How could they focus on their ministry of healing and proclamation? Who fed this community? Who cooked? How did they get the food of daily living? Who clothed these brethren? Who gave beds to this wandering study group on which to sleep? It couldn't be that there was always a dinner party in town, or a wedding feast or some kind of gathering every night, where the disciples were invited as guests and asked to join in the meal. Outside of the immediate circle of 12 there must have been other disciples and people, including many women, who continued to offer them steady support. I would like to call them "puck" people. They may not have been considered as equipment gear on the body, but they were mobile. They moved around the countryside and shared stories about Jesus, his words and the miracles he preformed to neighbours and towns. I would wonder If these puck people like Peter's mother-in-law, Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, and Mary Magdalene, were also those who cooked, fed and, sheltered the twelve.

In Buddhism, when Buddha started a community following his great enlightenment, he taught his disciples (Sangha) the teaching of non-possession, which started a tradition in which the Buddhist monks may go out to the town and "ask" people for food. I imagine those who ask can learn in a very humbling way how to be interdependent and open to receive.

As I started to wonder who these puck people could have been in the life of Jesus and the disciples, those who offered food, clothing, money and a roof and sustained the disciples and Jesus' ministry, more individuals and groups came to my mind, especially the women who

stayed with Jesus on the cross until his death. The women in Jerusalem wailed on the streets, on the path of Jesus's passion. Among them, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome visited the gravesite at the dawn of the Easter morning. Also, the Samaritan woman who immediately ran to her town after having a conversation with Jesus and proclaimed that he was the Messiah everyone was waiting for. She played a role of an equipped apostle. The Evangelist who wrote the fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John, mentioned the "beloved disciple" many times. The beloved disciple might be referring to himself, but we can put "puck" disciples, women apostles, unnamed, unrecorded followers and supporters who were indeed beloved, essential and crucial in their roles in sustaining the group in the proclamation of the good news.

On another note, this also touches the issue of "representation." Among so many of the puck people, puck disciples, the name of one disciple/apostle/beloved disciple was recorded and survived. It tells how integral a role she played in the Jesus movement: Mary Magdalene. She represents many women who experienced transformation, received teaching, and supported Jesus and his ministry with resources. This reminds me of Kamala Harris, the new Vice President of the United States (Show the picture of her single representation of being a woman and one of colour, being placed after the past 42 vice presidents who were all White and male) singly representing the existence, hope and contributions of women of colour everywhere, of the present and of the past. We also admired and congratulated the outstanding presentation of the youth inaugural poet Amanda Gordon who said, "We, the successors of a country and a time where a skinny black girl descended from slaves and raised by a single mother can dream of becoming president, only to find herself reciting for one." Finding the "puck" disciples - who they were and their roles as apostles in the life of Jesus and among his disciples - is also a matter of representation in our faith story that would potentially transform the understanding of church leadership.

The historical inauguration day in America may be comparable to the "Passion Sunday" moment. Jesus was welcomed and celebrated just before he entered the gates of Jerusalem. Just like palm leaves were thrown, the beautiful carpet was rolled out, the vice president and the first lady Dr. Biden, Michelle Obama, Hillary Clinton wore suffragette purple, Jennifer Lopez spoke the vision in Spanish, the Pledge of Allegiance was recited in ASL at the same time; President Biden called for the defeat of white supremacy. These sights cast a vision to be balm to our hurt soul. It was truly a New Year's Day for America, finally, especially after witnessing the storm riot into the Capitol two weeks before. We send our congratulations to our American neighbours — and yet, I would truly celebrate when we see the significant changes in the approach of the American foreign policy to the countries which are strategically important to keep their military power in the world. As Amana Gorman recited, "Quiet isn't always peace." I truly pray that this positive momentum of calling for justice and democracy moves beyond just the recovery of Pax Americana, until every child under the vines and fig tree is safe.

Jesus's calling us to the healing ministry of Kingdom of God has been "unfinished." I still think about the puck community, the puck disciples, who fed Jesus and his immediate circle. With

many unrecorded Beloved Disciples generation after generation, the body of Christ grew and comforted and transformed the lives of countless people in sorrow and hope. When church members bring a pot of roasted chicken to a family in grief after the death of the husband's father... Feeding changes the world. The pucker disciples of our time, as in the past, still throw nets and catch fish and feed the hungry, sharing the Kingdom of God moment. Like a pucker, lay leaders, you are on the move, messaging miracles wherever you go, everywhere, here and now. Jesus still plays a great game of the Kingdom of God with you, with us, with all beloved disciples and all beloved communities, for the healing ministry, for justice and peace.

Hymn: VU 567 ***Will You Come and Follow Me***

Prayers of the People:

Loving God,
we live in a world that is ever-changing.

Yet your love remains constant.

We give up on you,
and on ourselves, sometimes -

but you do not give up on us.

We thank you for calling us
to be prophets and disciples,
to partner with those who suffer, and
to be friends with those who hunger and thirst for good news.

Sometimes we answer quickly,
and sometimes slowly,
yet in all times, you accept us.

We pray this day for all who hear your call
and who respond.

Help us to embody your compassion for all creation in all we do.

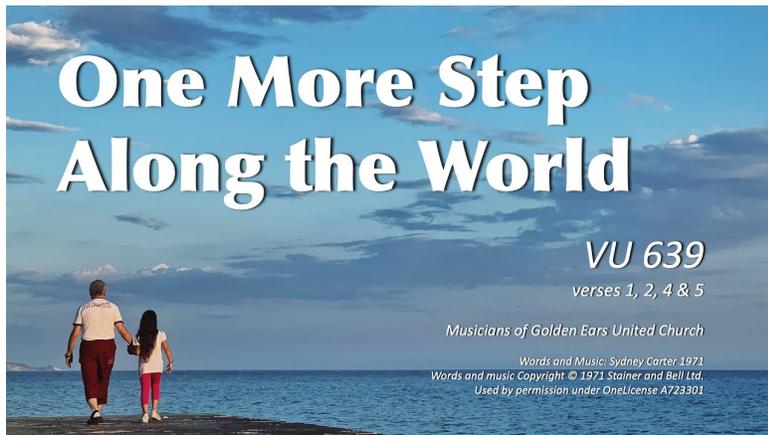
When we give up, get overwhelmed,
burnt out, discouraged,
give us rest and energy to carry on.

We pray also for those whose call is not affirmed
and whose response is silenced.

**Hear their lament,
and give their ministry, life and presence voice and vision.**

Fill us with your spirit
that we may speak your word,
love your people,
and care for your creation without limits.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.



**go from this place to be a people that lives and learn
God's reconciling love in the world. Amen.**

Hymn: VU 639

One More Step Along the World

Benediction:

May God, who is love, hold you.

**May God, who is liberation,
free you.**

**May God, who is healing,
restore you to wholeness.**

**May we who have celebrated the
gift of Christ's teaching and
healing,**