

Kuhn Memorial Presbyterian Church
 955 Main Street
 Barboursville, West Virginia 25504
 January 24, 2021
 Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Prelude

Call to Worship

Mark 1:15

The time is fulfilled
 and the kingdom of God is at hand;
 repent, and believe the good news.

Hymn

Seek Ye First

Text and Music: Karen Lafferty, 1971

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and its righteousness,
 and all these things shall be added unto you. Allelu, alleluia!

Ask and it shall be given unto you, seek, and you shall find;
 knock, and the door shall be opened unto you. Allelu, alleluia!

You shall not live by bread alone, but by every word
 that proceeds from the mouth of God. Allelu, alleluia!

Prayer of Confession

Loving God,
 through your Son you have called us to repent of our sin,
 to believe the good news,
 and to celebrate the coming of your kingdom.
 Like Christ's first apostles,
 may we hear his call to discipleship,
 and, forsaking old ways,
 proclaim the gospel of new life to a broken world;
 through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior,
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and forever. Amen.

Response

Take, O Take Me as I Am

Text and Music: John Bell,

1995

Take, O take me as I am; summon out what I shall be;
 set your seal upon my heart and live in me. Repeat.

Assurance of Pardon

Whenever a people humble themselves,
 turn from their evil ways,
 and put their hope and trust in divine mercy,
 God sees and forgives their sin,
 and enfolds them in the strength and love of Christ.
 Friends, believe the good news of the gospel.
 Your sins are forgiven. Be at peace. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Mark 1:14-20

Jonah 3:1-5, 10 Conversion of Nineveh

³The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, ²‘Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.’ ³So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. ⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, ‘Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’ ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Mark 1:14-20

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

16 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. ¹⁷And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people.’ ¹⁸And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

The Morning Message A Call and a Charge

Amanda Gorman. I had never heard that name before Wednesday. I'm guessing you hadn't either. But, I know who she is now. A poet. A preacher. A prophet.

Twenty two years old, this slip of a young woman stood before four Presidents and at least three vice presidents, Lady Gaga and Jennifer Lopez, the first youth Poet Laureate to address a Presidential Inauguration ceremony in history. In a bright yellow coat, a red band around a crown of braids, she owned the moment- erect, poised, and powerful.

No trace of the speech impairment she had overcome. No nerves shook voice or limb. Her message, *The Hill We Climb*. It was as music to me.

Chosen by Jill Biden for the task, Amanda's assignment was to compose and deliver a poem about national unity. That was the inauguration theme: "America United." According to *The New York Times*, Gorman set out to write a poem that would inspire hope and foster a sense of collective purpose, at a moment when Americans are reeling from a deadly pandemic, political violence and partisan division.

She said about it, "I had this huge thing, probably one of the most important things I'll ever do in my career. It was like, if I try to climb this mountain all at once, I'm just going to pass out."

So she wrote a few lines every day and was about half-way through when rioters stormed the halls of congress January 6. She said she stayed awake way into the night, adding verses about the apocalyptic scene that unfolded at the Capitol that day:

*We've seen a force that would shatter our nation rather than share it,
Would destroy our country if it meant delaying our democracy.
And this effort very nearly succeeded.
But while democracy can be periodically delayed,
It can never be permanently defeated.*

Amanda has said of her work, “In my poem, I’m not going to gloss over what we’ve seen over the past few weeks, and I dare say, the past few years. But what I really aspire to do in the poem is to be able to use my words to envision a way in which our country can still come together and can still heal. It’s doing that in a way that is not erasing or neglecting the harsh truths I think America needs to reconcile with.”

And that, my friends, is the call and charge of a prophet.

Jonah was a prophet. Not a very good one. We know his story. God tapped Jonah to go to Ninevah, a cruel, hard-hearted, sinful city in Assyria. He was to preach obedience to God and repentance. Turning from sin and turning toward God.

Well Jonah voted no on that assignment. He ran as far and as fast as he could to get away from God.

That never works out well.

Jonah boarded a ship on its way to Tarshish. A big storm blew up, threatening certain death. Jonah was thrown overboard to appease the gods of the sea and save the others from their fate.

Only he didn’t die, though he might have wished he had. Jonah was swallowed up by a big fish, maybe a whale. He apparently fussed and fumed for three days in the belly of the fish, wrestled with God and reformed his ways. Jonah decided to obey God and go on to Ninevah to deliver God’s message and the fish spewed him out on land.

Jonah was an effective speaker. The spirit apparently moved through Jonah’s words and the people repented of their sinful ways and God saved them after all.

Score, right? Not for Jonah. You see, he had a secret hidden in his heart: he hated the Ninevites. They weren’t Hebrews. They worshiped a foreign god. They were not of his race. They were a stiff-necked and brutal bunch of people. They deserved to be destroyed.

We can hear Jonah saying, “It isn’t right. It isn’t fair. They aren’t *my* people. How can they be *God’s* people?”

And that is the question of the day and may be the existential question we all must answer.

In our scripture texts last week and this week, we read stories of call. Jesus calls his disciples, the ones who will join his work, with whom he will have the closest relationships, the ones who will carry the ministry on after Jesus’ death.

As far as I can tell, Jesus is just focusing on call, assembling the team. He hasn't had a staff meeting yet. We aren't told much more about their assignment other than Jesus will teach them to fish for people. The gospel message has yet to unfold. When it does, it is hopeful and expansive and full of renewal, reconciliation, regeneration. Life. Life for everyone.

And, like Jonah before them, they will surely engage with people they may judge to be unworthy of the good news, unworthy of God's grace, unworthy of being healed, reformed, reunited with their families. Unworthy, undeserving of a better life.

Why? Well, there's nothing new under the sun. Refer to Jonah: Jesus will minister to sinners of the highest order. Stubborn, stiff-necked, foreign, female, of mixed race, the handicapped, people who prayed to the unknown god. In other words, if they aren't *my* people, they can't be *God's* people. Why bother?

Because the gifts and benefits of faith cannot be reduced to a finite few. Because we can't claim good news for ourselves, and in some misguided attempt to keep it, exclude others from it.

Last week I spoke to the great ends of the church. They speak to a fellowship of Christian faith that seeks the best for all people, that lifts us all. If we were to summarize them, I would have us look back to the prophet Micah, who asked just what it is that will satisfy God:

*With what shall I come before the Lord?
And bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:6-8)*

When Amanda Gorman stood before the nation Wednesday, I was struck with her words that had both weight and wings. A young black woman, raised by a single mother, who had excelled in school and graduated from Harvard, who is a witness to life and a prophet to the living. A prophecy that is to be fulfilled. For we aren't there yet.

Addressing the forces that have battered this nation of late, she writes,

*When day comes, we ask ourselves,
Where can we find light
In this never-ending shade?
The loss we carry, a sea we must wade.
We have braved the belly of the beast.
We've learned that quiet isn't always peace.
In the norms and notions of what is just
Isn't always justice...*

*...and yet the dawn is ours before we knew it.
Somehow, we do it.
Somehow, we've weathered and witnessed
A nation that isn't broken, but simply unfinished.*

What unfinished work awaits within you?

<https://thehill.com/homenews/news/535052-read-transcript-of-amanda-gormans-inaugural-poem>

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

God, our Savior, Healer, and Friend,
 we give you all thanks and praise,
 for you are our rock, our stronghold, our refuge, and our glory.
 You created the earth and its inhabitants,
 and called them to put their trust in you.
 Through your prophets you revealed your mercy to those who turn from evil,
 humbling themselves and following your ways.
 When the time was fulfilled,
 your kingdom drew near to us in your child, Jesus of Nazareth.
 He came proclaiming the good news and called on all to repent and embrace you as you have
 embraced us.
 Jesus died a sinless death for our sakes.
 But you raised him from the dead and turned our mourning into joy.
 In this long year of illness and isolation, anxiety, and need, we are reminded that weeping
 lasts for the night,
 but joy comes in the morning.
 Believing in your goodness and grace, we cling to that promise,
 and devote ourselves again to your ways.
 Jesus taught us how to see and hear and feel the needs of the world,
 and gifted and empowered us to transform the world beginning with ourselves.
 We thank you for the peaceful transition of power this past week as one president left office
 and another was inaugurated. For all that represents, we have hope, and ask your blessing
 upon this land.
 We pray for those in our community of faith who have needs and concerns, for the sick, the
 troubled, the lonely, the poor and dispossessed, students and school employees who returned
 to school this week, and all those who serve in harm's way for the safety of others.
 We pray for ourselves...
 With hearts lifted up to you, we offer our prayers in Jesus' name and after his example,
 saying, Our Father...Amen.

Blessing

Go now, follow where Christ calls you
 and proclaim the message God gives you.
 Wait in hope for God.
 Avoid becoming bound up in the business of the world,
 but live in readiness for the Kingdom.
 And may God be your haven and your glory;
 may Christ Jesus give you courage for his mission;
 and may the Spirit enfold you in love. Amen.

Postlude