



First Congregational Church of Anoka United Church of Christ

An Open and Affirming Congregation

January 22, 2023 ♦ 3rd Sunday after Epiphany



This bulletin is designed to assist you as you watch our livestreamed worship service, whether you follow along live or view it at a later time.

The stream can be found on our YouTube channel at this location:

<https://www.youtube.com/@AnokaUCC>

Welcome & Announcements

If you are a guest with us today, welcome! If you are comfortable sharing your information with us, there are cards in the pew holders that you can use for that purpose (place them in the offering plate).

If you would like to join our mailing list, email office@uccanoka.org and ask to be added.

Prelude

Koki Sato

The Church Bell Rings

* Opening Hymn

“Jesus Calls Us, o’er the Tumult” #172 (vv. 1-2, 4-5)

**Jesus calls us, o’er the tumult of our life’s wild, restless sea;
day by day that voice still calls us, saying, “Christian, follow me.”**

**As of old, Saint Andrew heard it by the Galilean lake,
turned from home and toil and kindred, leaving all for Jesus’s sake.**

**In our joys and in our sorrows, days of toil and hours of ease,
Jesus calls, in cares and pleasures, “Christian, love me more than these.”**

**Jesus calls us! By your mercies, Savior, may we hear your call,
give our hearts to your obedience, serve and love you best of all.**

* Call to Worship and Opening Prayer (drawing on Psalm 22)

One: You who revere the Font of Life, praise her!

Many: May the offspring of Leah and Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah glorify her!

One: For God sees us in our affliction and does not hide her face from us.

Many: When I cry to her, she hears!

One: On your account, Holy One, is our praise in the great congregation.

Many: We praise the great Mother of All!

One: Let us pray.

Many: Gracious One, your care is so beyond our understanding that we can hardly fathom it, but it draws us in like moths to flame. We cannot help but follow when you call our name, for how can we reject such infinite Love? How can we not drop our nets like those first disciples and follow? Give us the courage to do that each and every day, that we may be disciples true with every breath, living out the Gospel and showing forth your love in ways that upbuild the world and heal all afflictions. In the name of Jesus we pray; amen!

Choir Anthem

“Amazing Grace”

arr. Bob Krogstad

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.
'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.
Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come;
'tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.
When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun,
we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun.*

** All your stuff is good!*

A Time for Children (10:30)

*ADVISORY: The livestream of the service continues during the Children's Time;
if your child sits facing the Pastor their face shouldn't appear on camera.*

Prayer of Preparation

“Send Out Your Light”

John Bell

Send out your light, Lord, send your truth to be my guide.

Then let them lead me to the place where you reside.

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea-- for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, **"Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."** ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. ²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. ²⁴ So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. ²⁵ And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

One: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

Many: Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Rev. Chris McArdle

Hymn

"You Have Come down to the Lakeshore" #173

**You have come down to the lakeshore
seeking neither the wise nor the wealthy,
but only asking for me to follow.**

(refrain) **O Jesus, you have looked into my eyes;
kindly smiling, you've called out my name.**

**On the sand I have abandoned my small boat;
now with you I will seek other seas.**

**You know full well my possessions.
Neither treasure nor weapons for conquest,
just these my fishnets and will for working. *(refrain)***

**You need my hands, my exhaustion,
working love for the rest of the weary—
a love that's willing to go on loving. *(refrain)***

**You who have fished other waters;
you, the longing of souls that are yearning:
as loving Friend, you have come to call me. (refrain)**

Acts of Prayer

*If you wish to share a prayer with the congregation (joy, concern, hope, worry, or anything at all),
you may write it upon the supplied index card and give it to a Deacon during the Interlude.
Write "SILENT" on the card if you want the Pastor to see it but not say it aloud.*

Offering

Text-to-Give: **844-334-1477**

*Thank you for your gifts to our ministries!
If you are watching from home (live or later), please consider adding to the Offering
by sending your gifts by mail, text, or online (uccanoka.org/donate).*

Interlude

Koki Sato

Refrain

"Jesus Calls Us, o'er the Tumult" #172 (v. 3)

**Jesus calls us from the worship of the treasures we adore,
from each idol that would keep us, saying, "Christian, love me more."**

Prayers of the People

*The Pastor will read aloud the prayers of the congregation, occasionally including the call/response:
God in your love // **Hear our prayer.** Prayers marked "SILENT" will not be read aloud.*

Prayer of Our Savior (unison)

*The Prayer has many versions; pray whichever you desire (debts, sins, trespasses, etc.).
We affirm that God has many names, so use one of the suggested or another of your choosing.*

**Our Father/Mother/Creator, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy
kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our
daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not
into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the
power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

Benediction

Congregational Blessing

"God Be With You" (#809)

Dorsey/Hutchins

**God be with you. God be with you. God be with you 'til we meet again.
O God be with you. God be with you. God be with you 'til we meet again.**

You may be seated as you listen to the Postlude. If you choose to depart at this time, please speak gently as you exit out of respect for those who choose to listen.

Acknowledgements

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Sermon Text

If I had a time machine and I knew Aramaic, I'd dearly love to go back in time and meet Jesus. I'd want to find out how many of the stories were true. I'd want to find out if there really was something about him that drew people to him like moths to a flame. Because that's what I find so remarkable about the story we get today from Matthew in the scene where he calls his first four disciples.

I think it's deeply significant that it isn't until the second part of the reading that we find out that Jesus is going all over Galilee performing miracles, miracles that fill Jesus with this peculiar gravity. So maybe some folks think or assume it was a magical gravity that made these folks follow him. We say he was the Son of God, after all, fully human all mixed up with fully divine. Was it some kind of mystical influence that touched people's hearts and made them want to follow? It's certainly traditional to think so.

But I guess I'm not always traditional, and I dig the really human Jesus, so I'd want to meet him to experience what those first disciples did especially because I don't think it was magical. Maybe that's the point? The point of how these four guys just dropped everything, leaving their families behind to carry the load, and started following this stranger around? There's no magic spell in that moment; there are only words: "follow me." The miracles come later. There's not even the barest hint of a suggestion that he did anything magic to get them to follow. Is that even believable? I'd want to go back in time and experience it for myself, just to see if it was true.

Alas, I have no TARDIS in which I can travel through time and space. But I do have the experience of having met someone of whom this story reminds me. I won't tell you who they are because it doesn't really matter, but I had a similar reaction to first meeting them as the disciples did when they met Jesus.

The circumstances are political, which shouldn't really surprise anyone who knows me at all. I was living out my civic obligations as a delegate at a political convention, and I didn't know who I was going to support for a particular office. I had actually spoken on the phone with a couple of the options, because that's how it sometimes works. Neither of the folks who called me left me feeling like I had to throw my support toward them. But then, at the convention itself, I met another of my options, one with whom I hadn't yet had a chance to speak, and in about six seconds they earned my complete and unfettered loyalty. I was ready to drop my nets and follow.

There wasn't anything magical about that encounter, of course. It's just that when I was with this person, they somehow made me feel like I was the most important person in their world—and I was, because that's how genuine that person is. They listened. They cared what I thought. They truly wanted to know what I thought was important. And then, and this is the important part, they asked for my support *having already earned it*. Was it like that with Jesus? I suspect there was more to the conversation with the disciples than a simple, "Follow me!" He probably chatted for at least a *little* bit of time, but from personal experience, I know that's all it sometimes takes. When they met Jesus, they realized that he

respected them without reservation. They were whole in his eyes. Worthy. Valued. Loved. It made it really easy to drop those nets.

I once let this person know this, sort of. A year or so later, this person called me to ask me to support someone else who was running for a particular office, and I told them, “Now, you know this isn’t fair. You have power over me because you know I’ll do whatever you ask. So of course they’ll have my vote!” They just chuckled at me.

So yeah, I can believe that there was something about Jesus that caused these folks to drop their nets and follow, and it was strong enough that it kept them tied to him throughout all the joys and sorrows that would come. It was strong enough that even though a number of them ran away at the worst of it, Scripture says they came back later and rededicated themselves to his Way. Tradition says most of them even suffered the same fate for their faith, becoming martyrs just as he did. Other than the martyrdom, I would love to go back in time and experience all of that, too. Wouldn’t you?

Here’s the not-so-secret-secret: that kind of thing is experienced in this place all the time. I’m serious! We are continually blessed in this church by the regular appearance of visitors who come in for a variety of reasons, and our public, inclusive embrace of our LGBTQIA+ neighbors is the most common one. Do you understand that a fair chunk of those visitors get hooked on the first visit? It’s true, and it isn’t because they met Jesus here, at least not in any literal way. But they did meet, in the assembled congregation, a spirit of Love that, for all intents and purposes, says to each person who enters, “Follow me.” “Stick around.” “Join us!” And a lot of our visitors respond the same way those disciples did. Many of you may have responded the same way too.

You understand why this happens, right? The banners and the reputation might bring them inside the walls, but it’s all of us together that get them to stay. The friendliness. The realization that we actually mean it, as much as we can in our shared humanity, when we say, “No matter who you are or where you are on your life’s journey, you are welcome here.” The singing. The fact that a handful of our members will just walk right up to a new person and introduce themselves and show an unfiltered, genuine interest in getting to know the other person, and not because they might give money or serve on a committee or pad our membership numbers. People in the pews will offer a warm “good morning” and do a little introduction of their own. Multiple people will remember the visitors’ names when they come back to visit again.

Friends, I don’t need a time machine to solve this puzzle about Jesus. I just need to look out across this congregation of loving people. Y’all have committed yourselves to each other and to the mission of this church just as surely as those disciples committed themselves to Jesus, and it’s a wonder. I admit that I’m terribly biased, but I tell you that isn’t a universal experience across the church, or at least, it hasn’t been for me. I grew up in a church that was filled with people who had also grown up there. I served one like that. You stayed because that’s what you did. But here? That’s only true for a very small number of our folks. Everyone else showed up one day and stayed. And every one of you—including the ones born here—makes that choice every day to continue to be part of this congregation, this community, this beloved family of grace and choice. Each of us in our own way has dropped our nets for this congregation. Each of us gives our loyalty to the rest, saying, “Yeah. I’ll follow you. Let’s go fish for people.”

Thanks be to God! Amen.

◆ **First Congregational Church UCC, Anoka, MN** ◆

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Director of Music Ministries – Don Shier
Keyboardist – Koki Sato
Moderator – Terja Larsen

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First Congregational Church, UCC of Anoka is an Open and Affirming Christian Community for all. We affirm that the image of God is most fully reflected in diversity. We invite all people to share their energy and talents in full participation with our community. We welcome all individuals and families of any sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, relationship status, race, national origin, socioeconomic status, age, mental and physical health or ability, or belief. Together, we celebrate these and all other facets of one's essential being.