

Links for the Recording of the Service from January 24, 2021 and the Upcoming Service of January 31, 2021 are at the end of the News Blast.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE LINK FOR JANUARY 31 IS NEW!

Dear Members and Friends of Idylwood Presbyterian Church,

Pastoral announcement:

- The **annual congregational meeting** will be this Sunday, January 31, 2021, immediately after church. The **new pastor, Maggie Taylor Smith**, will be introduced. She will begin work on Monday, February 1. Please bring a snack if you will get hungry before the end of the meeting, which is expected to last about an hour.

Please keep in your prayers:

- **Linda Dono's** father-in-law, Joseph Petras, died of COVID-19 on January 23. Let us keep his family in our prayers.
- **Nancy Budny** broke her humerus bone in three places. The outpatient surgery went well.
- **Bob Osman's** brother Paul was hospitalized recently with blood clots in his lungs after a heart attack/surgery in December. Paul is home but still needs prayers.
- **Linda Dono's** aunt, Marge Dono Neuberger, who died December 20, of COVID-19.
- **Kate Untiedt** asks for prayers for her right eye, which is still not right.
- **Kate Untiedt's** colleague Nancy with cancer and a recent heart attack.
- **Linda Dono's** friend, Rev. Tom Wade with leukemia.
- **George Petras's** cousin Marlene with lung cancer.
- **Richard Williams' uncle** Bill Axline with cancer.
- **Danielle Moraes** dealing with a difficult work lawsuit.
- Prayers for a smooth transition in **Presidential administrations**.
- **All with COVID-19 or at risk:** medical, delivery, teachers and first responders.

Devotions and Final Reflections from Pastor Alice:

Devotions for 1-27-2021

Gen 8:6-7 At the end of forty days, Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made ⁷and sent out the raven; it went to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth.

In the Talmud, Reish Lakish (Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish) describes a fascinating conversation between God and the raven. This is what is called a midrash, an explanatory story written to answer a question that the biblical text raises but does not itself answer.

According to this story, when God sent the raven out when the flood began to subside, the raven was cross with God. You see, the raven is a non-kosher animal and therefore only one pair of ravens were on the ark. The raven was concerned that if anything happened to him while he was flying around checking out the landscape, then his species would become extinct. He thought

God must hate ravens, and so he told God. God listened carefully, and the next time he sent out a bird, he sent a dove, a clean animal of which there were seven pairs in the ark. That explains why God sent out a raven the first time, but a dove the second time.

Now, what we can learn from this story is the importance of protecting species from extinction. According to recent research in China, the estimated percentage of species loss from among 252 protected vertebrate species over the last half-century is 47.7% of mammals, 28.8% for amphibians and reptiles, and 19.8% for birds.

Gen 9:20 Noah, the tiller of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard.

Rashi, the famous medieval sage, wrote that according to Midrash, Noah brought grape vines and fig cuttings into the Ark and after the flood planted them, but about a foot of topsoil was washed away in the flood, which makes sense, but how did Noah manage to plant a vineyard if the soil was so barren? The answer is that the ark was built in three stories, the top one for the people, the middle one for the animals, and the lower one to collect all the dung. Once they landed back on dry land, Noah could then use the dung as fertilizer to get his garden started.

In Kerala, India, in the heavy monsoons of 2018 more than 450 people died and millions took shelter in camps, yet somehow, the topsoil remained intact. Afterward, the Fairtrade Association was able to use that topsoil as the foundation for 200,000 seedlings to help people start over.

Gen 11:1-3 Everyone on earth had the same language and the same words. ²And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³They said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn them hard.”—Brick served them as stone, and bitumen served them as mortar.—

In the famous **Tower of Babel** story, the Sumerians were arrogant. They thought their man-made methods could solve all problems, but due to their unsustainable agricultural practices, the Sumerians did not survive, while the Israelites, living frugally on the margins, using the best stewardship they knew, not only survived, but are here with us today, still impacting world history. Technology is wonderful, but it has unintended consequences, so we need a great deal of humility as we employ the wonders we have wrought.

Final Reflections

Dear Members and Friends of Idylwood Presbyterian Church,

I cannot tell you how much the opportunity to be your pastor for the better part of this last year has meant to me. I have been an assistant pastor, an associate pastor, an acting head of staff, a fill-in pastor for several months, but somehow I had never really quite felt like a full-fledged pastor. Although I have been with you for less than a year and in a virtual and temporary role, I have felt more like a real pastor during this period than in all of my previous roles. It has filled a deep longing within my soul, for which I will be eternally grateful to you.

You have been patient with my shortcomings, supportive of me as I have grown into the role, encouraged me when you saw how you could help me be what you needed me to be. I have learned so much that I cannot even begin to outline, but especially about the importance of all of us working together. I knew that in theory, but I have come to understand this much more in my bones during our time together.

I know that I do not need to remind you to extend to Pastor Maggie the same kind of grace that you have offered to me. It is who you are. She will have different strengths from mine. Having gotten to know her a little over the last couple of weeks as we have prepared for the transition, I know that we agree on much. I also believe her chaplaincy training will give her tools that will help the congregation develop in new ways. She is young, but she has much to offer. I believe that you all will work well together.

And, as I keep saying, when she needs some time off, and you all require a supply preacher, I really do look forward to the day, after the pandemic, when we can meet face to face and can give each other proper hugs.

Warmly,

Alice

Lectionary texts for 1-31-2021:

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

18:15 The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet.

18:16 This is what you requested of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: "If I hear the voice of the LORD my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die."

18:17 Then the LORD replied to me: "They are right in what they have said.

18:18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command.

18:19 Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable.

18:20 But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak--that prophet shall die."

Psalm 111

111:1 Praise the LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

111:2 Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them.

111:3 Full of honor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever.

111:4 He has gained renown by his wonderful deeds; the LORD is gracious and merciful.

111:5 He provides food for those who fear him; he is ever mindful of his covenant.

111:6 He has shown his people the power of his works, in giving them the heritage of the nations.

111:7 The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy.
111:8 They are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.
111:9 He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name.
111:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever.

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

8:1 Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.
8:2 Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge;
8:3 but anyone who loves God is known by him.
8:4 Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "no idol in the world really exists," and that "there is no God but one."
8:5 Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth--as in fact there are many gods and many lords--
8:6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.
8:7 It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.
8:8 "Food will not bring us close to God." We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.
8:9 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.
8:10 For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols?
8:11 So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed.
8:12 But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.
8:13 Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

Mark 1:21-28

1:21 They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught.
1:22 They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.
1:23 Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit,
1:24 and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God."
1:25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!"
1:26 And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.
1:27 They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching--with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."

1:28 At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Links for the Recording of the Service from 1-24-2021:

Topic: IPC Worship

Date: Jan 24, 2021 10:31 AM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Meeting Recording:

[https://zoom.us/rec/share/-](https://zoom.us/rec/share/)

LPSlzY3BMb5Ub_RAGO1A05uzEgD5dbJLQcklpvRpM6BiY_goIUbbBtqm9qqMf-Y.FFCZO5gIB4hnj1c6

Access Passcode: **h1xa.=6***

and the Upcoming Service of 1-31-2021 (NEW LINK):

Topic: IPC Worship

Time: Jan 24, 2021 10:30 AM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Every week on Sun, until Jan 31, 2021, 2 occurrence(s)

Jan 24, 2021 10:30 AM

Jan 31, 2021 10:30 AM

Please download and import the following iCalendar (.ics) files to your calendar system.

Weekly: [https://zoom.us/meeting/tJMtdu-](https://zoom.us/meeting/tJMtdu-hrTgoGtxB08s_6SDKTEmItyDq2K1M/ics?icsToken=98tyKuCvrjosE9eWshmpRowEAoj4M_PztnZBjbdFvk-9EB8FUSfdAsdPG6ZmNMmC)

[hrTgoGtxB08s_6SDKTEmItyDq2K1M/ics?icsToken=98tyKuCvrjosE9eWshmpRowEAoj4M_PztnZBjbdFvk-9EB8FUSfdAsdPG6ZmNMmC](https://zoom.us/meeting/tJMtdu-hrTgoGtxB08s_6SDKTEmItyDq2K1M/ics?icsToken=98tyKuCvrjosE9eWshmpRowEAoj4M_PztnZBjbdFvk-9EB8FUSfdAsdPG6ZmNMmC)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/97016933208?pwd=dFo0Z3duMi9sd0RvQ2p2VzY4ZEZBUT09>

Meeting ID: 970 1693 3208

Passcode: **pcJY1z**

One tap mobile

+13017158592,,97016933208#,,,,*531963# US (Washington D.C)

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Dial by your location

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+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

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+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)

+1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)

Meeting ID: 970 1693 3208

Passcode: 531963

Find your local number: <https://zoom.us/j/aeAIYJfiIT>

Sermon from 1-24-2021, including Lectionary texts on which it is based:

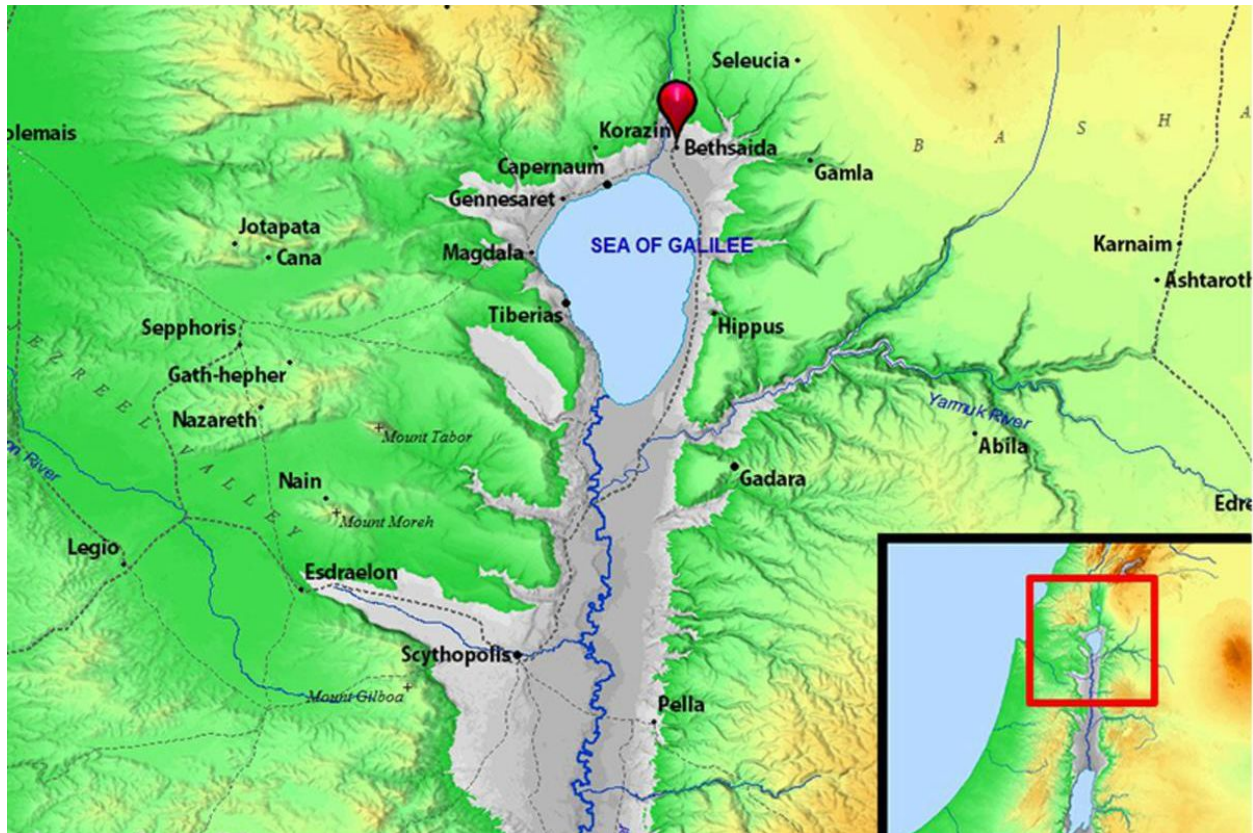
Hab 2:14-17 and Mark 1:14-20

Fishing

The NT lesson this morning provides a brief but significant story about how Jesus began his ministry. We are so familiar with it that we have largely lost a sense of its oddness. Jesus strolls up to several fishermen in the middle of the day. Before I go any further, we immediately face a conundrum, in this day of gender-neutral language, of what to call these men, as they were undoubtedly male. A quick look online reveals that the word of choice is fishers. Runner-up for a plural such as we need here is fisherfolk. Other options include piscator (from the Latin), fishist, fish meister, and rather ridiculously, fish procurement worker. Since you all are used to fishermen and since they were male, I'll stick mainly with fishermen, even though my grammar checker is screaming at me every time I use the term.

Back to the story. Jesus demands that the fishermen stop what they are doing, put down their fishing nets, and follow him to become fishers of people rather than fish. Immediately, they agree. What an odd story. There has to be more to it. Why would these men cease their usual activities without any further explanation? What paid their bills? Who took care of their families? The Jewish people had strong family values. They were unlikely to abandon them to follow an itinerant rabbi.

There are two pieces to the answer to this question. The first is very practical. In 2017 archaeologists discovered a fishing village on the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee in what we think was ancient Beth Saida (<https://www.deseret.com/2017/8/8/20617179/is-this-unearthed-fishing-village-the-birthplace-of-three-of-jesus-apostles>)



In one of the episodes of a show called the *Naked Archaeologist*, hosted and prepared by the Emmy Award-winning journalist *Simcha Jacobovici* Simcha focuses on this discovery. He suggests that a building that looks like a manor house with multiple living spaces was a kind of dorm that was a residence for a colony of fisherfolk, who had an enterprise doing well enough to support the early Jesus movement. That would explain what would allow these young men the luxury to leave the fishing trade.

There's a second part to the answer to why they would leave. In Jesus's day, the rabbis chose young men to be their students called *talmidim*. When a rabbi invited you to be his student, it was a great honor. Those who did not become *talmidim* went into the trades, like fishing, which was considered the worst job. Why? Fishermen didn't go out for leisurely sails with rods and reels. They weren't anglers. They rode in crude boats on the Sea of Galilee. Dangerous storms could come up with little notice. They used hand-made nets to catch as many fish as possible. It was hard, back-breaking work. Some were salted with salt from the Dead Sea to preserve them for longer periods. They had to gut at least some of the fish and get them to market, a messy, smelly business.

In the Old Testament, fishing is a metaphor for catching people, but not in the pleasant way people think of when we read this story about Jesus. When Jeremiah talked about fishing for people, he meant that God would bring people back from their evil ways into a new way of living.

Amos uses the image graphically, almost pornographically. The prophets usually aim their critique at men, at males, because they had most of the power, but in one of Amos's oracles, he directs his barbs at wealthy officials' wives, who indirectly wield power. Listen to what he says:

Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, 'Bring, that we may drink!' The Lord God has sworn by his holiness that, behold, the days are coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks.

As is usual for the NRSV translation, the translators have sanitized the Hebrew a bit, for what it literally says is that they will take you away with hooks, even your **rear ends** with fish hooks. So the grotesque picture here is of sleek cows, standing in for the elite women of Israel, being carried away, probably suspended from poles by giant fish hooks in their bottoms like slabs of meat. They were cows, after all, presumably dead at this point.

And I could go on and on with Old Testament depictions of fishing as images of judgment, but I've said enough to give you the picture.

Returning to the fishing business in Jesus's time, not only was fishing a grueling, messy, smelly business; there were also taxes to pay. Herod forced fishermen to buy fishing licenses and to procure leases, to fill quotas, in short, to pay taxes, tolls, and other fees to an extensive bureaucracy, which cut into the profits produced in the first place.

So, when Jesus comes along, whom they surely have heard of – as word probably spread fast, about this astounding rabbi named Jesus – he is offering them an incredible deal, a different way of doing business. He is offering them an alternative, the opportunity to be a *talmid*, a student, with a very unusual rabbi. Jesus had proved himself to be a brilliant rabbi in sparring with the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. For example, in Matt 22: 31-32, Jesus masterfully answers a question the Sadducees pose about a woman who has had several husbands and what her status will be in the afterlife. Jesus first explains that there will be no marriage in the resurrection life and then proves the resurrection through an ingenious scriptural argument. As a result, everyone is amazed.

So now, rather than catching fish, which was hard, dirty work, Jesus offers them the opportunity of a lifetime. He invites them to become his graduate students (to put it in modern terms), his interns, to follow him everywhere and learn his methods so that they can eventually go out on their own as master fishers themselves. Their mission is to catch people, not to kill them, but to transform them from their old, sick, sinful ways so they can heal and live in the kingdom of God, which Jesus is proclaiming is eminent. He is calling them to participate in a different sort of domain, not Herod's kingdom, not a kingdom of this world, but the very kingdom of God.

We often misunderstand what Jesus was up to. Catching people did not mean offering individual salvation. The Jews did not have a concept of personal salvation after death, although one was beginning to develop in the intertestamental period. Catching people rather than fish meant calling people first to repentance like John the Baptist did. It then meant bringing them into participation in God's kingdom, which was already dawning but was coming soon in its fullness. Jesus was calling Simon and Andrew, James, and John into a radical new reality. These fishermen were all too ready to dump the smelly, arduous old life they were living, even though they did not fully understand what they were getting themselves into. Jesus was calling them to participate in the new life that he was offering. It would not be easy either, but the disciples must have understood on an intuitive level that it was spiritually uplifting and offered a kind of hope that nothing else did.

Being fishers of people, however, was not going to be smooth going. Jesus was a divisive figure. The truth always is challenging. It makes us uncomfortable. Being part of the divine fishing team means opening our eyes to the world around us, as it is. It means discerning our role

in transforming the individual fish in the sea and the sea in which we are all swimming because if the sea is polluted, all of us will be unhealthy. Jesus came not just to catch the individual fish and reform them, though that was undoubtedly part of what he was doing, but also in the process to clean up the environment, again symbolically speaking, in which those fish were swimming.

So, today, we are a bit like Simon and Andrew, James and John. We are lugging fishing nets full of stinking fish around, gutting the fish, and trying to get them to market to eke out an existence after the empire takes its cut. Jesus calls us to become part of the kingdom of God, which is now and still to come. We may not all be able to quit our day jobs (sometimes we may wish we could). Nevertheless, we can join the divine kingdom. Here the top priority is the poor and marginalized, those who are hurting, the unhoused, the oppressed, the refugees and the aliens, and that includes those who make us a bit nervous, the incarcerated, the formerly incarcerated, the LGBTQ folks, and anyone else that doesn't quite fit in. If we can't become fisherfolk ourselves, we can feed the fishers, just as apparently a group of fishers took care of Jesus and his disciples.

A few years ago, I attended a course that my colleague Dean Trulear teaches. I've told you about him before. This course is called Ethics and Politics. It is part of a program called Inside Out in which university professors teach courses inside jails; half of the participants are inmates, and the other half are university students. I was a guest instructor, and my husband, Jeff, was a student. I am embarrassed to say that I had never been inside a jail before, even though Jesus enjoins us to visit those in prison, and even though the DC jail is just down the street from my house, a 15-minute walk. People who have taken the course say that it is transformative. I am grateful for the opportunity to be introduced to this kind of ministry in such a gentle way.

So, take a step toward rabbi Jesus. Assess your life, your finances, how you spend your time. In what ways can you move toward the kingdom of God? If Jesus walked into the room today, what do you think he would suggest you or we be doing? What uncomfortable questions would he be asking? The answer may be different for each of us. God calls each of us to step out of our comfort zones, or perhaps I should say further out of our comfort zones and become fishers of people in the kingdom that is dawning all around us if we would only open our eyes and see what is happening. If we can't get into the boats and catch the fish directly, we can feed the people who do.

In practical terms, what does this mean? We are already doing it when we contribute to the Lemon Road Elementary School food program in which the administrator at the school knows which families need food aid. We did it when we contributed to the Homestretch Christmas project to provide something extra for needy families at Christmas time. We are doing it when we contribute to the Jacob's-Backpack Brigade project. We do it when we donate to the Deacon's Fund, which we used this year to help someone who could not pay their rent. We are even doing it through our pledges to Idylwood that support the staff, the building, and the operations, all essential elements in keeping this community going. You could think of IPC as a little bit like the community that kept Jesus and his fishers of people afloat. We can imagine many ways to feed the fishers, and you all are doing many of them already. You probably just did not consider them in those terms.

So let us be fishers of people, or if we are not ready for that, let's think of ourselves as feeding the fishers, enabling the fishers, equipping the fishers, sustaining the fishers in whatever ways we can, for it takes a village to support the work of the kingdom.

To God, be the glory. Amen.