

3rd Sunday after Pentecost

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14
Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20
Galatians 5:1, 13-25
Luke 9:51-62

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Good Samaritan Society
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Northern Area Worship

God, hold us in love as you call us out into something new. Amen,

Lately, we've been needing to refill our cup more and more, and the imagery of our cup overflowing before us isn't necessarily as comforting as Psalm 23 intends. Lately, it's more the storms that come and come and come.

Overflowing lately might mean we are about up to our eyeballs in it and still searching for a way to pull the drain. This is true in my call to health and continuing care at the Good Samaritan, but its true for all us.

Nearly three years of COVID, generational shifts in church practices, community development, urban growth, murder hornets, sorry, I slipped into the list of the 2020's bingo cardsⁱ. It's been a challenge; we've been challenged. Our wells aren't producing the same way they used to, and every time they come up with less resources, we feel the need even more strongly. So we crave refreshment, but lately when it comes its is so much more than we can handle. Parched and deluged, a unique time.

Our early lessons today share the imagery of water, Elijah's whirlwind, and the storms of the psalms. But these are complex pictures of God being with us and even driving the storms that may rage around us. So we prefer the grace in our remembrance of baptism, hoping that it makes no requests of us as it grants us its promise. The opposite of some of our readings today.

I recently came across a video of a child playing on a summer days with a hose in their back yardⁱⁱ. The Twitter quote that went with it is that welcoming a child into your family makes you a parent, but unkinging the hose after you tell the child to point it at themselves makes you a real mom, dad or lalaⁱⁱⁱ.

Somedays, that's how the storm feels - like it hits us out of nowhere. Like even joy somehow betrays us, shocks us, stuns us.

Smaller and changing churches, aging buildings, health restrictions, less candidates for ministry, weariness, frustration, burnout. We've been people of the garden, stewards of the earth, tenders of community for so long we've seen seasons of drought and floods before, but it seems to be undoing us in a different way this time. This whirlwind. This overflowing.

We ache for a season of refreshment, for care and replenishment, for calm skies and warm seasons. Cooling water to rest in. To feel the balm and blessing.

Instead we have the gospel lesson for today. And this is likely the message we need, Good news for us. Because while we're weary, this call to discipleship is the hand calling us through the storm. In Luke is the start of a new message and theme, as Jesus turns his face towards Jerusalem he begins a new teaching, one more complex and

opaque for his followers. One of discipleship that calls us to do challenging things^{iv}. To trust in the whirlwind, change and storm.

This call to discipleship is to leave a place of comfort and safety and to follow into something new. This, like the overflowing cup that we can't quite keep up with, is a new starting place for us today, the gospel preparing us as a synod for a season of discipleship and growth that will make new paths ahead.

Our tradition reminds us of vocation and discipleship in Luther's words – that " God doesn't need your good works, but your neighbour does.' (imagine this in a thick German accent) This paraphrase comes from Luther's treatise working for our neighbours where Luther focuses again on vocation, on calling. Luther claims we love our neighbour by vocation because we've been freed from all else. That over the course of an ordinary life, loving our neighbour transforms us, through faith working in love.

In this, we connect to God through vocation, and find God hidden in our neighbours^v. In serving our neighbours, we find the fullness of ourselves in community. This call to discipleship in the new world calls new things from us, maybe more challenging things.

We are ready for the messages of love our neighbour, we think we've done this well in the past but we aren't as ready for the call not to look back as workers of the field on what we have accomplished before.

Looking back is how we built our church, from our first beginnings in Alberta and the territories as an immigrant community. But nostalgia is different than learning from our history. It creates kingdoms of previous comforts and triumphs. Here now the call is to see God guiding us into a new world, to carry our history with us but into new partnerships, into a new discipleship.

What does a missional church look like for us? How is loving our neighbours as our vocation practically lived out?

How do we welcome and make space for those who need inclusion, who are the widows and orphans among us today, those excluded by society and its comforts? How do we widen our circles and bridge gaps to truly include those who have been pushed out before – even by our well-meaning selves?

How do we make space for the voice of people of different ethnicities, cultures, and traditions in such a homogenous church^{vi}? How do we make our communities accessible to people with disability, unique needs, and atypical neural expressions? How do we express love in a way that represents all identities, relationships, and gender expressions? How do those of us with comfort sacrifice this to focus on the call we hear in these verses from Jesus? What does discipleship look like in Alberta and the territories? The answer this Sunday is with challenge, but that's why we're called together to do this incredible thing as community.

What happens when we're step outside of our church proper and into the world? An incredible thing happens, when we encounter a boundary. An edge appears.

The Edge effect is something near and dear to my diaconal heart, so bear with me for a second. In ecology (and I will get this wrong because I am not an ecologist), in ecology the edge effect takes place where two or more habitats meet to form a boundary and in this space something incredible happens - instead of two, there becomes more. You can think of the wetlands or beaches. These boundary habitats allow for more extraordinary biodiversity than either habitat on its own. The space in between creates something new. This means when we step out to meet the world as God is calling us, there is an incredible opportunity, there is a seeding of new gardens with incredible fruits.

But a warning is hidden in the emergence of edges - with change, many new worlds and communities will collide. And while generalist species thrive and new biodiversity is created, edge-intolerant species find challenging times. They seek the old ways and find no comfort in this new middle ground.

We are a remarkable community, as the letter to the Galatian's names; our fruits are varied and diverse. Together, we can support each other, so we don't become lost in place or time. We are called to this new opportunity, called through the storm with God's promise to guide us.

We have been freed from our nostalgia to dreams and visions, from our commonness to diversity and inclusion, from our weariness to refreshment and promise.

The call of baptism is a promise of love; with this love and freedom we are called to go and love others. The remembrance of baptism we shared today is something we can share again each time we stand in the storm, each time we venture out to care for the garden, each time we wash our hands – each of these can be in service to our neighbour. This is the balm we seek; this is the refreshment that revives us.

Where we are now is a little like a child who has had the hose unkinked on us, But God's right hand is always held out to us from where they are waiting for us out in the world

I want to close with a poem by Lindsay gallant, an east coast poet. The secret of the buried seed^{vii}, which calls us to where we are and what we might be next. She says

The secret of the buried seed is to accept the darkness as a gift,
to trust the finger that presses us down
into what we fear will be a grave.
We have always feared facing death.
We have always feared being poured out
of our colourful packaging with its sunny promises,
and into that terrifying mystery called germination.
We fear the hiddenness. We fear the silence.
We fear the change, perhaps, more than anything.
But perhaps it is a grace
that this breaking of our protective shells takes place in concealment,
and if we stop grasping so tightly to our fragile skins
we may feel the embrace of the soil,
and hear its comforting whispers that *yes, yes, life comes from death,*

and this breaking is indeed a new beginning.
It is good to be small. It is grace to be buried.
In this we return to the earth from which we were formed.
In this we are reminded we are earth – *humus*.
We learn *humility*. We become *human*.
And all this is not an end, oh no.
All this pressing and breaking is actually a movement of love,
love that pours downward,
love that has pierced this dark path before,
love that invites us to follow past the fear
and into the deepest mystery of existence:
What is broken is multiplied,
What is dead is raised to life,
What is surrendered may finally grow,
And what love accomplishes, no other power can unmake.
It is just as human to be hidden and quiet.
And all waiting is an invitation to trust,
and these deaths are an opening to life bright and beautiful beyond –
This is the way of love,
And love is the only way.

Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wacbCyTYN8> a meme using "Bet you didn't have (insert crazy thing here) on your 2022 bingo card."

ⁱⁱ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjDyuQwPq14>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://twitter.com/henpeckedhal/status/1285372286367936519?lang=en> language updated for inclusion

^{iv} <https://www.workingpreacher.org/podcasts/sermon-brainwave-669-third-sunday-after-pentecost-ord-13>

^v Diana Butler Bass – *Grounded: Finding God in the World*

‘All of the world’s religions make neighbors the central concern of spirituality and ethics. Love of God and neighbor are absolutely intertwined. . . . If we understand that neighborly relations are woven into divine love, then we can grasp that God is a near- dwelling God. We know God through our neighbors.’

^{vi} A coming research report echoing a 2015 Pew Report naming the ELCA, our sister denomination in the USA the whitest church in America <https://distinction-projects.pages.roanoke.edu/the-evangelical-lutheran-church-in-america/>

^{vii} *The secret of the buried seed* – Lindsey

Gallant <http://www.lindseygallant.com/2020/04/03/the-secret-of-the-buried-seed/>