

Rev. Lynne Ogren
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Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT
5th Sunday after Epiphany, Year B

Mark 1:29-39

The light shines in the darkness, **and the darkness did not overcome it. Amen**

One of the side effects of this pandemic has been the disruption of our routines. At the beginning, when most of us were staying home just about all the time, it was hard to keep track of what day it was. I've heard the transition to retirement is like that, too, until you figure out new patterns for exercise, volunteering, and socializing.

My mother's church in California has been prerecording videos for their Sunday services since the shutdowns began there. She goes to the church on Tuesdays to record a reading or some prayers, and then the video is available later in the week for their congregation.

Early on, Mom spent an entire day trying to run errands and couldn't figure out why the Post Office wasn't staffed and the pharmacy was closed. Finally, she realized it was Sunday! She hadn't gone to church that morning, so it didn't feel like Sunday.

We are all creatures of habit and routine. We order our lives by rituals, which helps us do the things that are important to us. Maybe you make your lunch while your oatmeal is cooking for breakfast. Or you might get ready for bed with a series of habits that you do in the same order every night so that you are sure your teeth are brushed, your face is clean, and the dog has had his final trip outside for the night.

We have weekly patterns, too. A wise friend told me how she created a pattern as her kids were growing up so that each person was responsible for making dinner one night each week and they all shared house cleaning chores on Thursday evenings so that their weekends were free for fun activities. (I wish I had figured that out when my kids were at home!)

Jesus shows his disciples a pattern for their new calling to fish for people in our gospel reading today. He and the disciples had been to a synagogue where he had been teaching and freed a man from an unclean spirit. They left the synagogue and went home, where Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law and many others.

He got up early the next day to pray, and when the disciples finally found him, they traveled to the next town to start again, going to a synagogue to teach and preach, followed by healing the sick and releasing those held captive by demons.

Jesus had invited the fishermen to follow him. That invitation was about more than just accompanying him from town to town. He wanted them to watch and listen and learn and eventually do what he did. In these early days, Jesus helps the disciples develop the pattern of worshiping, followed by serving, spending time in dedicated prayer, then traveling to the next place to worship, serve, and pray all over again.

When my husband, Eric, worked in Alaska for several years, he moved from town to town, staying in each place for several months, to a year or more depending on the construction project. Whenever he came to a new place he would go to a Lutheran church on the first Sunday.

Eric knew that he would find the familiar there—a familiar pattern for worship, and people who often resembled the people he knew and loved in the congregations he had known since his childhood. And he knew that he would meet Jesus there, in the Word and Sacraments, and in the Body of Christ who gathered to worship.

The pattern for discipleship Jesus teaches us today is shaped rather like the symbol for infinity that goes on and on.



We gather together with others to hear and be fed by the word of God, to join in praise of God's gifts to us, to receive God's grace in words of forgiveness, and to offer ourselves in prayer and in the gifts we bring for God's mission and ministry in the world.

Then we are sent out to serve the world with what we have received—grace, hope, and the promises of God. We serve as Christ's disciples in our homes, at work, and with our various neighbors, to show God's love in ways that bring peace and wholeness to others.

Then we return to gather with the assembly of the faithful to start again. Gather in community to worship and receive God's grace—Go out to live and share with others what we have received—Gather again—Go out again.

In the middle of this pattern, Jesus shows us that it is important to take time for prayer and communion with God. We don't know how frequently Jesus went off to a deserted place to pray, but all the gospels include stories of him doing that.

At the time of our baptisms we, too, were called to follow Jesus in lives of worship, prayer, and service. The season of Lent is just around the corner, and this year our confirmation youth will be considering the discipleship life based on the baptismal covenant.

A few of our youth will be preparing to make affirmation of their baptism this spring, in which they commit to following Jesus for themselves. We use this same liturgy when we receive new members, and it serves as an opportunity for all of us to renew our commitment to the covenant God made with us in Holy Baptism.

We ask, Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism:
to live among God's faithful people,
to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,
to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,
and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?

Perhaps the pattern Jesus demonstrates today can inspire a renewed focus on a discipline for Lent this year. Do you want to recommit to worshiping regularly? Maybe you can start a journal of how you served a neighbor each day, or witnessed the love of Christ in others. Or maybe you will prepare a space in your home devoted to prayer and contemplation.

The baptismal life, the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ, is a life to which we are called by God to follow the ways of Jesus. Those ways become integrated into our daily living through intentional rituals and patterns of worship, prayer, and service, which form the identity we share with all believers as children of God.

Let us renew our commitment to the discipleship life trusting that God is at work in us, helping us grow in faith, love, and obedience to the will of God.

Thanks be to God. Amen