

Easter 3 Prayers, Sunday, May 1, 2022**Prayer Concerns**

Larry & Faith Seabrook, Evelyn Crafts' granddaughter Brittany, Rona's mother, Vi, Jenny & family, Randy Greer, Cherie Doyon, Shirley Griffin, Cathy Tredenick, Karl Crocker, Linda Hepburn, Sharon Axford, Lori Ann, Clarence, Tucker Johnson, the people of Ukraine, Fraser, Aleta Behie

Morning Prayer

**Loving God, Creator of life
We offer prayers that they
May be a blessing to others
And honoring to you.
Thankyou for all the gifts of life:
For this day that stands before us
Filled with promise or challenge or
Mediocrity or surprise...
May we find signs of your grace
And love dappling this day
And changing it from hour
To hour into an offering of praise.**

**Risen Christ, here among us
Dressed as friend, family or stranger
Speak to our hearts
Even as you spoke to Peter
At the seashore.
Forgive those times when in
Our speaking or silences,
Acting or inaction
We betrayed our loyalty to
Your loving way.
Breathe your Spirit upon us,
That, anointed and filled,
We may walk your narrow way
Of non-violence, peace making
And gracious giving.**

**Holy Spirit, wind of creation
Breath of recreation
Direct our steps
Inspire our deeds
Open our minds
Raise our awareness
Crack open our hearts**

To your redemptive work in the world
And in our lives.
Loving God
May your peace, courage and hope
Surround and hold
Those who suffer
In mind, body or spirit.
May your angels, disguised as nurses, doctors,
therapists, advocates, mentors,
friends, and family members
minister to their needs even
as we would minister to Christ.

We lift up to you our sisters and brothers of Ukraine,
Whose homes, businesses,
neighborhoods and lives have been shattered
and scattered by an unjust, unholy war.
Thank you for nations and individuals,
religious communities, military and humanitarians
who are helping the people of Ukraine in this crisis.
We are thankful that in situations so dire
we see profound proof of humanity's essential
goodness and selfless, courage and compassion---
family traits inherited from you.

Bless our church family as we enter a time
of leadership transition while still dealing with the
transition of living with a pandemic.
May this church continue to provide an environment
for people to explore, develop and celebrate their
faith in you, loving, forgiving and gracious God.
Thank you for the gifts all around us...
especially for the gift of Jesus Christ,
our leader, Savior and friend.
In Jesus face we see your light shining
brightly—He is the Light of the world,
who calls us to be lights in our world, too.
Thank you for the meal we will soon share around his table.
We always look forward to this simple feast
where the community of Christ
gathers around the table
to remember Jesus in his
life, death and risen life—
and to be renewed in Spirit
that we may love our neighbors as
ourselves---and follow the Jesus Way in all our living. Amen

Gospel John 21: 1-19

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We will go with you.' They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, 'Children, you have no fish, have you?' They answered him, 'No.' He said to them, 'Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the lake. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.' So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.' (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, 'Follow me.'

Sermon: TO LOVE JESUS

Two miles west of St. Peter's hometown of Capernaum is a small village named Tabgha. Like Capernaum it is located at the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee. In the gospel for today, the Sea of Galilee is called the Sea of Tiberias. The village of Tabgha hosts multitudes of visiting tourists and Christian pilgrims each year. Most of them come,

primarily, to visit two notable churches which were built to mark the spots of two significant events in the ministry of Jesus and the ongoing life of the church.

One of the churches is named, *The Church of the Multiplication*. This church marks the place where Jesus took five loaves and two fish and after praying, used them to feed a large crowd of over 5000 men, women and children.

In Mark's version of the story, as daylight waned, the disciples urged Jesus to send the people away because they were in a deserted place. "Send them away so that they can go to the surrounding villages and get something to eat," the disciples said to Jesus. Perhaps their bellies were growling, too!

In response, Jesus said, "You give them something to eat." And then he asked them how much food there was among the crowd. The disciples returned from their fact finding mission with a rather meager menu. "Five loaves and two fishes."

Taking the loaves and fish in his hands, Jesus blessed the food, broke it, and passed it around. As it turned out there were 12 baskets of leftovers after the multitude of thousands had had their fill.

But there is another special church in Tabgha. It is named the *Church of the Primacy of Peter*. The current edifice was built in the 1930's by the Franciscans, on the site where a church had previously stood. The original church, which was built in the 800's had been called *The Place of the Coals*, referring to a certain campfire. The modern church stands on the same site

and houses a projection of ROCK that is located right in front of the present altar. The rock has a Latin name, *Mensa Christi* which means the *Table of Christ*. This rock is said to be the place where the risen Jesus built a campfire and hosted a fish supper for Peter and six other disciples. This came after Jesus' sharp eye had sighted fish that the disciples couldn't see from their boat. Jesus' guidance resulted in filling an empty net with a lot of fish. No one has been able to decipher the significance of the number of fish 153, except to conclude that because of Jesus, that which was barren and empty became filled up with an abundant harvest --because of him.

Although the results of this fishing miracle pales in size to that of others and the feeding of the multitudes, its purpose in the mind of the storyteller is to reinforce an amazing mind-blowing truth: The sight of a risen Jesus was neither that of a ghost nor caused by hallucinations. The risen Christ was not a figment of his followers' imaginations or a fictional character cooked up by the gospel writers. He was real. He was alive. And the proof was that he bore upon his body the horrific marks of crucifixion. The marks of nail prints in his hands proved to a doubting Thomas that his friends had told him the truth about seeing Jesus in the flesh. It was his voice that Mary Magdalene recognized as he spoke her name, even though she thought he was the gardener. And it was the sound of Jesus' voice calling to them from the shore of Tabgha that caused the seven disciples to make a beeline for the beach.

It was Jesus' words of invitation that prompted Peter to gather his nerve along with his cloak and leap into the water, impatient to be near him. To be near the friend and teacher he loved so dearly--- and had failed so miserably.

After supper, as the disciples licked their fingers and cleaned up the remnants from the pan, Jesus and Peter had a conversation. This is the first recorded conversation between Peter and Jesus since the last supper, that is, The LAST supper they shared together. You remember that it happened on the eve before Passover, in an upper room. All the disciples

were present, including Judas who would betray him later that night. It was at that supper when Jesus showed up with a towel tied at his waist and a bowl of water in his hands. It was at that last supper where Peter refused to let Jesus wash his feet, and after being rebuffed by Jesus, he gave in. It was there at that table, that Jesus foretold Judas' betrayal. Indignant at the thought of any of them betraying their messiah, Peter pledged to him that he would die before he ever betrayed Jesus. It was at that last supper when Jesus gazed into Peter's indignant eyes and said, "Peter, before the rooster crows you will deny that you ever knew me. And you'll do it 3 times." That had been their last conversation before Jesus' dire predictions had come true. In the late hours of that fateful day, Peter, in a panic to save his own life, had stood beside a roaring campfire in a courtyard and denied that he was not a friend of Jesus. And he declared it, not once or twice but three times. "I am not." "I am not!" "I AM NOT!"

My friends, if you were Peter, and you found yourself by some divine miracle, standing, some days or weeks after that traumatic, terrible day, standing beside a roaring campfire with the one you had denied knowing -- how would you have been feeling?

I'm sure that Peter was both relieved and awestruck that Jesus had been raised to life, despite being killed in the most gruesome way that Rome could manufacture. But even as that incredible reality began to sink in, a great regret must have been weighing him down-- That night in Tabgha, the giant elephant in the room, well, at the campfire, was the deep shame and grief that Peter must have felt remembering how he had denied Jesus in order to protect his life.

You know, my friends, Jesus could have been doing a lot of amazing things after his resurrection and before the Holy Spirit was given to believers at Pentecost. He could have confronted Pilate, Herod and the Sanhedrin with their grave errors. He could have done things that would have humbled Rome or elevated his own nation to its former status--- but that was never the kind of messiah Jesus was. Jesus was a servant king of a kingdom that is founded, not on force, not on greed, not on violence, but on forgiveness, grace and compassion. So, the risen Jesus spent his extra time, that sacred and very precious time with the friends who, in their very human and natural response to danger— had raced away into the darkness leaving him to his captors.

Why did Jesus act so? He came to them because he loved them. And he also knew that despite their very human tendencies and frailties, they loved him, they *really* did.

Jesus spent his after Easter moments wanting his followers, including Peter, to know beyond any doubt, that "there is no greater love than this: "that a man lay down his life for his friends." Jesus knew that if his friends were to invest their lives in promoting God's kingdom and its values in their world, then they needed to be assured that he would always be with them.

And on that evening by the lake, if anyone needed reassurance of his loving presence, it was the man standing at that campfire, who was remembering another campfire-- It was the man whose face was red hot, not by the heat of the flames, but by the heat of shame.

Near that campfire, not that long before, Jesus had gazed at the crowds as they hung upon his every word, as they waited for his healing touch to heal their bodies and minds. That day, as he looked around, they seemed as lost sheep, sheep who needed a shepherd. He had told his disciples to feed them, but they had been unable to fulfill that role. But now the time had come for Peter and the others to become the good shepherds of God's flock. Jesus turned to Peter and asked, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" "Simon, son of John, do

you love me? “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” With each question, Peter answered “Yes, Lord.” With each answer, Peter became more agitated. He was certain that Jesus knew of his 3 denials and was reminding him to deepen his sense of guilt and shame. But that was not Jesus’ intention. Because in response to Peter’s trinity of “Yeses” Jesus offered a trinity of commissions: “Feed my sheep”. “Tend the flock.” “Follow me.” Jesus was not punishing Peter in this moment. For Peter’s deep sense of guilt and shame had been punishment enough. Nor was Jesus forgiving Peter for his cowardice. Forgiveness had happened for Peter and for the world as Jesus, from his cross, prayed, *“Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”*

Jesus was not out to punish Peter or to blame him. Instead, Jesus was affirming Peter, and commissioning Peter as a leader, as a shepherd to the flock of disciples and others who were not yet in the fold. At the last LAST SUPPER, Peter, despite his love for Jesus was not prepared to give his all for Jesus, or his life to leading the flock.

But at *this* Supper, the first Supper of a new age and a new beginning for Christ’s flock, Jesus believed that Peter was ready, really ready to serve.

He had been tried in the fire, and he would soon be inspired by the flames and wind of a Spirit— *The Holy Spirit of Pentecost*.

This Peter, the rash, compulsive, passionate fisher would become a humble, brave and obedient shepherd of the flock— the man that Jesus had believed in from the day that Jesus had found him at the lake shore with his fisher mates and said, “Follow me and I will teach you to fish for people.”

At the *Church of the Primacy of Peter*, at Tabgha, twelve heart shaped stones, were placed there in the 800’s. They mark a trail from the church to the edge of the lake. Twelve stones representing twelve disciples.

Pilgrims from all over the world go to see the stones, and the Mensa Christi, and the two churches, marking two unforgettable events in the story of our Christ.

In a YouTube video, a woman believer from France, named Claire, who recently visited the sites says, “When I come here, I hear Christ saying to me, “Claire, do you love me?” An American pilgrim, who was interviewed, testified that he and others with him “feel very loved by Jesus here.”

Today, like Peter and his six friends, and along with believers and pilgrims of every nation, we also meet Jesus in a very special place— It is a holy place where he has met with us many times before. It is at this table, this “Mensa Christi”, where we have often heard his voice, as bread as been broken and a cup offered up in prayer: *This is my body broken for you. Eat and remember. This is the cup of the new covenant sealed by my blood. Drink and remember.*

What are we to remember?

We remember not a what, but a Who: We remember Jesus and the way that he loves— He loves with a love that is self-less, and un-conditional; a love that is always timely and timeless. There are no words of judgment or condemnation spoken here at this table. This is a sacred place that reminds us that all that needed forgiveness happened at the cross. Jesus’ love for us is always affirming--- Jesus believes in you!

Jesus believes that Peter you can, you will, you must, feed his sheep, tend his lambs, care for each other and for those outside this sheepfold-- with all that your heart, hands and voice can give.

Jesus has believed in you, since the day your mother gave you birth-- And since the moment that you recognized his voice calling *your* name--- and have extended forgiveness to yourself or compassion and empathy to others, you've been loving Jesus.

And with the Spirit's presence and by the Spirit's power, you, you are called to be good shepherds; You are Christ's guardians of the good news of God's grace for a world of lost sheep.

Let us join Jesus, risen, real and bearing the wounds of love at his table.

Let us have something to eat and drink.

Then let us leave this place knowing

that we are loved, affirmed, ready and empowered by his risen Spirit ---

to follow Jesus ---

wherever he leads.

Amen