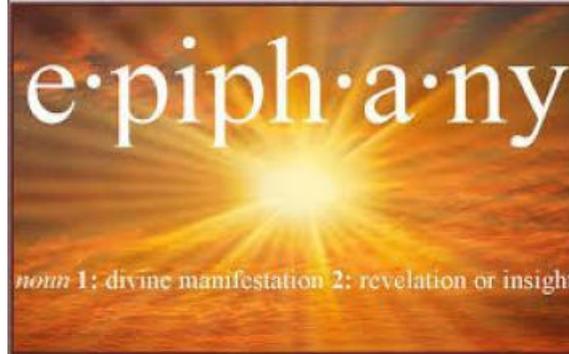


SECOND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN NEWCASTLE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Fifth Sunday After Epiphany
Sermon Series: 5 of 6
The Light Has Come: The Source of Our Strength
Online Worship – February 7, 2021, 10:00 AM



INVITATION

Welcome to Virtual Worship with the community of Second Congregational Church in Newcastle, United Church of Christ in Newcastle, Maine. From our various spaces, on our various devices, we enter sacred time together. No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here. God meets us everywhere and in all our humanness. Be here in this sacred moment. God is with you. God is with us. May this worship of saints be blessed, be nourishing, be comforting, be church.

PREPARING FOR WORSHIP ON COMMUNION SUNDAY:

This Sunday is the first Sunday of the month, when our congregation celebrates the sacrament of Communion. Before the time of the service you will want to prepare some bread and a cup. In our tradition, these elements can be what you have at home – a slice or small loaf of bread, tortilla, rice cake, or crackers. Let it be something you alone or you with others in your house may break and share. Prepare a cup or cups of juice (like grape or cranberry) or wine. Ultimately you want to bring to the table the elements that bring you comfort, are common to your household and the people and connect you with others.

Set these elements in the living room or kitchen where you experience worship electronically with our faith community. Some suggestions: perhaps light a candle or place a cross; or place a flower or other symbol of faith and hope on the table; include the photograph of someone you wish to bring into the circle of faith beside the bread and the cup. Follow your heart.

DEVICES

As we gather, please be sure that your device (computer, phone or tablet) is in the mute mode to avoid feedback and background noise. You are encouraged to use the “chat” or “comment” features to offer prayer requests at any time during the service.

***Thank you for your preparation. Let us now be present to the Spirit
which brings us together and loves us where we are!***

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GATHERING MUSIC

Communion Elevations – Benoit

Jane Wilmot, Organ

Link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jn21MnLJ2RADzAUyKNLopCXw01cupFUr/view?usp=sharing>

WELCOME AND CENTERING MOMENT

CALL TO WORSHIP (from Isaiah 40): (Said aloud together but muted):

One: We're waiting! Actively waiting for the Lord!

Many: Our strength renewed, no longer weary and faint!

One: For our God does not faint or grow weary,

Many: but gives power and strength to those who wait.

One: Beyond the Zoom, the quarantine, the COVID, the cold,

Many: we're gathered to lift our eyes to the everlasting God,

All: Creator of the ends of the earth!

HYMN

"Kum ba Yah"

Desmond

We will remain muted to avoid audio feedback and lags. Please sing aloud at home or follow along as best as you are able. Remember, it's our spiritual intention that matters!

Link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EildMCWAQIStuoGWpnX6yveh6dxh-k5Y/view?usp=sharing>

Kum ba Yah

1. Kum ba yah, my Lord, kum ba yah! Kum ba yah, my Lord, kum ba yah!
2. Some-one's cry - ing, Lord, kum ba yah! Some-one's cry - ing, Lord, kum ba yah!
3. Some-one's sing - ing, Lord, kum ba yah! Some-one's sing - ing, Lord, kum ba yah!
4. Some-one's pray - ing, Lord, kum ba yah! Some-one's pray - ing, Lord, kum ba yah!

Kum ba yah, my Lord, kum ba yah! O Lord, kum ba yah!
Some - one's cry - ing, Lord, kum ba yah! O Lord, kum ba yah!
Some - one's sing - ing, Lord, kum ba yah! O Lord, kum ba yah!
Some - one's pray - ing, Lord, kum ba yah! O Lord, kum ba yah!

WORDS and MUSIC: Marvin Virgil Frey, 1939

DESMOND
88.85

PRAYER OF INVOCATION AND CONFESSION (Isa 40, Ps 147, 1 Cor 9, Mark 1):

God of Strength, we confess our doubt.

We are weary, and so we turn to our habits, crutches and devices instead of waiting to be carried effortlessly on your eagle's wings. Forgive us, we pray. (silence)

God of Justice, we confess our lack of trust.

We are discouraged and worn, outraged and angry, and we turn to complaining, name-calling and demonizing others instead of trusting in you to lift us up from the pit. Forgive us, we pray. (silence)

God of Grace, we confess our reticence.

We praise you with enthusiasm on Sunday, but then we turn to safe clichés about separating religion and politics when we could be proclaiming the message of your limitless love for all people. Forgive us, we pray. (silence)

Powerful One, inspire us this day: to turn our praise into action, to share your good news with those who long to hear a word of hope, to proclaim your message of peace and justice throughout the world. Praise to you! Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE:

Hear God's promise to all:

"Those who wait for the Lord
shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint."

Know that God's promise of grace and forgiveness is true and unconditional!

THE LORD'S PRAYER *Second Church follows the version of the Lord's Prayer that is offered below. However, you are invited to say this prayer aloud in the tradition that brings you the most comfort.*

Our Father, 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.

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Mark 1:29-39 (New Revised Standard Version)

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹ He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

³² That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³ And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴ And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

³⁵ In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶ And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷ When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." ³⁸ He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." ³⁹ And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our minds and hearts gathered here this day be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.



Since Christmas Eve, we have heard different Biblical stories that reveal Jesus’ divine and human beingness - that mysterious, all-so-real presence of God growing, maturing and walking in the world. These first stories reveal Jesus to the biblical communities and to us as the Beloved One, the Son of God and the Holy One of God as well as a community leader, pastoral teacher and divine healer. These are stories of Jesus’ growing identity. And these biblical texts also tell us of the experiences of those who first encountered Jesus. We have heard about:

- 1) The Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist and the divine arrival, blessing and naming of Jesus by the Holy Spirit;
- 2) Jesus’ calling of the first disciples, first from the Gospel of John and the calling of Philip and Nathaniel, and then
- 3) the faithful response of two sets of brothers, Simon and Andrew, and James and John, as told from the Gospel of Mark. We haven’t learned about the other six disciples yet, but we have learned that Jesus’ budding ministry is healing many and creating crowds of awestruck followers.
- 4) Last week we then heard Mark’s story of Jesus teaching with authority in Capernaum’s synagogue and the moment he was confronted by a man struggling with a demonized spirit. Jesus healed him by silencing the demonic voice and demanding the spirit to leave. He recognized the man’s suffering and healed him – on the sabbath – in the middle of his preaching and teaching to all who had gathered. Jesus modeled to all who dare to see that showing true compassion wherever we are heals a person and also changes the world.

Today we continue this journey with Jesus through Mark’s lens. Jesus is still in Capernaum with the disciples, it’s still the same day, and the sun has not yet set so it’s still the sabbath, the sacred day of rest.

But Jesus is doing anything but resting this day. As the scripture tells us, “as soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew.” And it’s then that they are told that Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever.

Fevers were serious then, a dangerous thing in pre-penicillin days, much like the seriousness of today’s Covid fever without proper vaccination. We can relate to the household’s dread and panic and why they approached Jesus after having just witnessed him healing the man in the synagogue. There was hope, after all! He healed that man! Could he heal this woman, too?

But do you notice how Jesus heals this woman differently? Jesus healed the man with the demonic spirit by the command of his voice.

Jesus now heals Simon’s mother-in-law with not so much as a word, but instead by the touch of his hand. Jesus healed them both, supported them both, but in different ways.

We don’t know what became of the man after he convulsed and the spirit left him.

We do learn that Jesus' supportive hand lifted the mother-in-law up and she was able to resume her normal activities, beginning by serving those she was with. She's healthy again! She asks no questions, engages in no speculations, just begins to serve. We are the ones left wondering: was this the ultimate gesture of gratitude, taking up the forbidden role of serving those in the house on the sabbath when she would have had every right and reason to continue to rest? Did she just go back to her old habits and ways, without thinking through what just happened? Did Jesus' healing support change her health, her heart and her purpose? We never hear her side of the story, do we? The older Greek text gives us one little hint about this woman's response: the word for "serve" was written as *diekonei*, derived from *diakoneo*, meaning "to serve as a deacon." She began to *diekonei*, to serve them, as a deacon would serve the church. She served selflessly and with God's purpose in mind.

And just when you think that Jesus might actually be able to rest on this sabbath day, "the whole city" arrives on the doorstep of Simon's home! The healthy ones are bringing the sick and the demon-possessed ones for Jesus to cure. The entire city is there! And again, Mark's story doesn't tell us what became of the many he cured, the many who were sick with various diseases and those for whom he cast out many demons. We aren't told about the ones who witnessed the healings either, other than everyone was searching for Jesus by early the next morning, including "Simon and his companions."

Rev. William Sloan Coffin who, among other active and sometimes controversial ministries, was pastor and preacher at Riverside Church in New York City in the 1980s. He would often remind his parishioners of the distinction between protection and support:

God does not always provide protection.

We know from lived experience that bad things happen.

The world is a dangerous place.

We can't explain these bad things or always know why they happen. The explanation might even be silenced forever.

What we do know is that God will always be there to support us.

Why was that man demon-possessed? When did it happen? Why did Simon's mother-in-law become ill? How did it happen? Why were the demonic voices in the crowds silenced? Why did it happen? Why did Jesus have to die the awful death he did? Why have you and I lost loved ones to Alzheimer's, or cancer, or Covid-19 or any other harm? Why have you and I been unhealthy, sick, lost, afraid, struggling now or in the past? Why do these things happen?

We won't always know. Bad things happen. God does not always provide protection. The world can be a dangerous place. But God is always there and always supports us. And in that support, we are healed.

When the disciples went hunting for Jesus that morning, as the whole city was searching for him, they and the whole town wanted God's protection. They wanted Jesus to stay home and take care of them, to protect them from the evils of disease and dis-ease. They wanted miracles, simple answers and cures, someone else to do the work of making them better and keeping them safe.

But Jesus knew. Jesus knew who he was, the authority that he possessed, the divine support of God that he carried in his very being. And if Jesus stayed in Capernaum, where his beloved friends and family were, they would be healed and safe – but what of the rest of the world? What of God's mission to bring the Kin-dom of God to all people? To bring love, compassion, grace and support to all who suffer and seek release and true life?

For all the love Jesus had for his people, he knew that God's love for all people was greater, bigger, deeper and broader. He needed to share and proclaim this good news. Jesus and the disciples needed to go, to leave the comforts and the challenges of home in order to proclaim the message to all, for that was what Jesus had come to do.

We all want protection.

More importantly, we all need healing.

And ultimately, the Light of God is the very source of our healing and strength.

Our longing for real freedom and life is what gives us the power to learn from Jesus' way, to witness his healing presence in our lives and then to let Jesus go, releasing his grace, power and authority back out into the world to do God's work and proclaim God's word, with us and through us.

It will never be easy. As followers of Jesus' way, we too will seek solitude from the world at our darkened doorstep and all the pain we witness. We too will fall on our knees on occasion in prayer, begging for guidance or answers that seem silenced for a time and may not readily come. We will also seek God's personal protection in our fear and we won't always be protected the way we wish or count on. We will wonder why bad things have to happen, why God allows such awful things to possess the world or make us feverish and unwell. We'll convulse and fall into bed and think the end is near.

But God is here, supporting us, healing us, inviting us to get up, to serve and to follow. As we receive the blessings of Communion today, may we find the strength to let go of our earthly desires for protection in order to follow, serve and embrace the healing light of God's eternal living. Amen.

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A MOMENT OF REMEMBERING AND GIVING THANKS

DOXOLOGY: *Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God, for all that love has done
Creator, Christ and Spirit, One. Amen.*

Link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zf9vXKaxxAb6dJhE3Z67dlc0oJK5rC3W/view?usp=sharing>

COMMUNION HYMN "Let Us Break Bread Together" Let Us Break Bread
James H. O'Brien, soloist

Link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XLzR7503tWQARbK4CpMQ9eHOsR8PdP8o/view?usp=sharing>

- 1) Let us break bread together on our knees; Let us break bread together on our knees.
- 2) Let us drink wine together on our knees; Let us drink wine together on our knees.
- 3) Let us praise God together on our knees; Let us praise God together on our knees.

Refrain: When I fall on my knees, with my face to the rising sun, O Lord, have mercy on me.



THE SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION¹

Communion will be shared together virtually from our own homes.

INVITATION

Jesus said,

“Come to me all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

This morning you are invited for Holy Communion in the Body of Christ.

The Body of Christ is not the loaf of bread you see on your screen.

The Body of Christ is not even the bread on your table.

The Body of Christ is all of us, strengthened by sharing together this meal of hope and grace.

BLESSING OF THE BREAD AND CUP

We pause to ask God’s blessing of grace be upon this Communion table and the many tables in our homes, where meals and memories are shared and we are forever united in Spirit. May God’s blessing touch all of the sacramental elements of bread and drink prepared. May God’s blessings be upon all of us gathered and all those who are in our prayers this morning.

All (together but muted): Gentle Host, send your Spirit of life and love, power and blessing upon us all, scattered but gathered in joy for the sake of You and living in hope for all. Risen Christ, live in us, that we may live in you. Breathe in us, that we may breathe in you. Amen.

WORDS OF REMEMBERING:

We remember that on the night of betrayal and desertion, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to the disciples, saying: “This is my body, broken for you. As often as you eat of it, do so in remembrance of me.”

In the same manner, Jesus took the cup, blessed it and gave it to the disciples, saying: “This is the new covenant in my blood, poured out for you. As often as you drink of it, do so in remembrance of me.” By eating this bread and drinking this cup, we proclaim Christ’s birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection, and we live forever in the hope that Christ will come again.

SHARING THE ELEMENTS:

Let us at our many tables in churches, on the streets and at home, receive the gift of God, the Bread of Heaven.

We become the Body of Christ in the Bread we share. *(Let us eat bread together, recalling our communal relationship with the Spirit and one another).*

¹ Communion liturgy written by Rev. Char Corbett, June 29, 2020.

Let us in our many places around the world receive the gift of God, the Cup of Blessing.

We are one in Christ in the Cup we share. *(Let us all drink, recalling our individual devotion to God, our love of Christ and the Spirit of hope)*

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:

Loving God, you are the font of every blessing, the source of all we have. Your breath gives us life, your love gives us courage and strength, your grace gives us healing and compassion. You care for us and feed our spirits, our minds, and our bodies. We thank you for your abundance given freely to all. May we so live that our lives reflect our faith in You, knowing that your Light is meant to be shared with all our brothers and sisters, your children of the world. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN **“Lord, I Want to Be A Christian”** African-American Spiritual
We will remain muted to avoid audio feedback and lags. Please listen to the recording, sing aloud at home or follow along as best as you are able. Remember, it's our spiritual intention that matters!).

Song Leader: James H. O'Brien

Link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zOGt7MNdoL3hEgWS1mgKixTsRSZ7Dib8/view?usp=sharing>

1. Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart.
2. Lord, I want to be more loving in my heart.
3. Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart.
4. Lord, I want to be like Jesus in my heart.

BENEDICTION²

Go out in love, reconciled to one another in Christ.
Lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.
Live honorably, fulfilling the law through love for all.

And may God mark you with Love;
May Christ Jesus be present among you always,
And may the Holy Spirit reconcile you to one another in peace.
Strengthened by faith, go with grace to love and share with joy. Amen.

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Today's Worship has been prepared, sent out, offered and led by:

- ▶ **Peter Asche**, Recording and editing;
- ▶ **Bill Bausch**, Communications & Technology Support; Snippets Meister
- ▶ **Rev. Char Corbett**, Pastor
- ▶ **Jim Corbett**, Videographer and Technical Support
- ▶ **James H. O'Brien**, Song Leader and Soloist
- ▶ **Jane Wilmot**, Minister of Music; Organ

Have a question about Second Church or today's service? A concern or a joy to share? A prayer request? We're here to listen and respond! Contact our Pastor, Deacons or Pastoral Relations Committee:

- ▶ **Lonnie Anderson**, Deacon: lonnieba@gmail.com

² Benediction written by Rev. Char Corbett, September 2, 2020.

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