



Listening for Jesus' Instructions

A Worship Resource for College & Young Adult Sunday
Centered on Matthew 14:22-33

By Rev. Colin Pettigrew & Natarsha P. Sanders

Order of Worship

Call to Worship

One: We gather to remember the wondrous works of your hands.

All: By your hands we were created, through your love we are formed.

One: We gather to hear the proclamation of your words.

All: By your words this world came into existence.

One: Your hands and your words heal and deliver, move mountains, and summon us forth.

All: We gather to worship the Savior who called Peter forward and caused the water to hold his footsteps. We gather to take up our courage and step out in faith. Let us worship God!

Gathering Prayer

O God of all creation, you formed the world and the cosmos; the mountains and the oceans obey you. With all power at your fingertips, you chose to reveal yourself to us in love and gentleness through Jesus Christ our Savior. With humble gratitude, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we lift all praise and honor to you now and forever.

Song *See suggestions on page 7.*

Call to Confession

The life that God calls us to live is not an easy one. We continually fall short, both individually and collectively. But God loves us still and promises forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Confident that God keeps God's promises, let us confess our sins together.

Prayer of Confession

Compassionate God, you call us to love you with our whole lives. Instead, we focus only on ourselves. You call us to love our neighbors and our enemies. Instead, we divide ourselves and fear those who are different from us. You call us to share with others the bounty that we have been given. Instead, we hoard what we have, believing in the world's scarcity rather than your abundance. Forgive us, O God,

and give to us the courage to live our lives in full obedience to your will now and forever. (Moments of silent prayer.) Amen.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Hear the good news: it was because God so loved the world that God sent God's only son. Christ came into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

One: Beloved, in the name of Jesus Christ we are forgiven!

All: Thanks be to God!

Passing of the Peace

God's forgiveness is a wonderful gift that brings with it peace for our minds and hearts. God's gifts of forgiveness and peace are not only given so that our relationship with God is made right, but also leads us to re-form our relationships with one another. In gratitude to God, let us share signs of Christ's peace with each other.

One: The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

All: And also with you!

Prayer for Illumination

God, take control of our thoughts, so that we may feel your way. Open up these words of old in our souls today. Open the eyes of our hearts so that we see you. Open the ears of our spirits so that we hear you. We are led, sustained, and called by you. Amen.

Reading(s)

Psalm 77

Matthew 14:22–33

Sermon *See sermon starter and illustration on page 8.*

Affirmation of Faith¹

**We believe that our lives are held within the encircling love of God,
who knows our names and recognizes our deepest needs.
We believe that Christ is the divine Child of the living God,
and that his grace is like living waters that can never be exhausted.
We believe in the birthing, renewing, enabling Spirit of God
who yearns over our welfare as a mother yearns for her child.
We believe that God is in the arid desert as well as in green pastures,
and that hard times and disciplines are also loving gifts.**

¹ From Patmos Abbey, Order of St. Columba (Australia).

**We believe that our journey has a purpose and a destination,
and that our path leads to a glory we cannot yet imagine.
We believe that in the church we are fellow pilgrims on the road,
and that we are called to love one another as God loves us.
This is our faith and we are humbled to profess it in Jesus the Christ.
Amen.**

Song *See suggestions on page 7.*

Commissioning Litany

A.

One: We are called by Jesus Christ to expand the Kin*dom of God. We are drawn by Jesus Christ with love and compassion to live out the Good News, to love each other like Christ loves us, and to walk humbly with God.

All: **They will know we are Christians by our love for all of humankind. They will know we are Christians by our appreciation of all of creation. Our lives are a reflection of the goodness of God.**

(For campus ministers) **One:** May you be reminded this day that you are a servant of the Most High God. Called to serve those on college and university campuses across the nation. Do you accept this call?

Campus Minister(s): Yes. I accept the call of God.

(For students) **One:** May you be reminded this day that you are a servant of the Most High God. Called not only to the academic demands of your institution but also to the discipleship of Christ. Do you accept this call?

Students: Yes. I accept the call of God.

(For families of students) **One:** May you be reminded this day that you are a servant of the Most High God. Called to love and support your student in this new stage of life, and to trust God to guide you in this new season of your own. Do you accept this call?

Families of Students: Yes. I accept the call of God.

One: May we all be reminded today that we belong to the Lord.

All: Lord, I belong to you.

One: May we all be reminded today that we can depend on Jesus Christ.

All: Christ, I depend on you.

One: May we yield ourselves to the work and way of the Holy Spirit.

All: Holy Spirit, I yield to you.

(To those commissioned) One: You are a member of a community of believers. You are never alone. You are held in the daily grace of a fierce savior and in our love and prayers.

(To all gathered) One: You can lean on one another. You are a living demonstration that the Holy Spirit leads us. Follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As challenges arise, remember that you are called to this. As joys arise, remember that you are called to this. As weariness arises, remember that nothing shall separate any of us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

B.

Blessed are you, on the brink of something new: new opportunities, new friendships, new classes, new journeys. Blessed are you, dear one, so full of hope—you whose horizon extends far beyond what your eyes can see. May your celebration be sweet and delicious and have as much laughter as tears. This new thing is worth rejoicing. May the joy that buoys you today carry you through the difficult spots to come.

And blessed are you, closing the door on something: maybe just something, maybe something you loved, something that challenged you, something that will be significant in your life for years to come—a school, a team, friendships, connections, spaces that feel like home. You sit on the edge of something new. There is great joy, but there may be some grief too.

May you, dear ones, find comfort from places and people you don't anticipate—those who remind you that you are not alone. You may be saying goodbye to something or someone dear, but something new is being born. I cannot promise it will replace what was there ... and I will not tell you that it will not be hard ... and it may not even feel better ... but I do believe that you can and will find beauty, meaning, and truth right where you stand.

In our transitions, in our hellos and goodbyes—the love of God will always surround you, the peace of Christ will be with you, and the Holy Spirit will comfort you in community always.²

C. Commissioning of a Campus Minister

One: Acknowledging Jesus Christ of Nazareth as your Savior, will you serve the people with love and compassion, energy and humility?

Campus Minister: Yes, I will.

One: Acknowledging the responsibility of this service, will you rely on the mercy of God and work toward justice?

Campus Minister: Yes, I will.

² Based on a prayer written for the Class of 2023 by Rev. Michelle Thomas Bush, adapted from "A Blessing for Hellos and Goodbyes" by Kate Bowler (katebowler.com/resources).

One: Acknowledging a community you can trust, will you seek help when necessary? You are not expected to do this work alone.

Campus Minister: I will ask for help when needed.

Congregation (to the Campus Minister): As members of the body of Christ, we confirm God's call of [Name(s)] to campus ministry. We pledge support of prayer and resources in the months ahead. We pledge before God and each other to pray for your ministry, our college and university students, and all young adults who are called to the workforce and other endeavors. Our love and God's journeys with you all.

Invitation to Offering

God's generosity knows no limits. Let us respond to God's generosity with our own.

A note from UKirk National: College and Young Adult Sunday is a great time to receive a special offering in support of collegiate ministry! We encourage you to find the UKirk(s) closest to you and ask how you can best support them. (Not sure who's nearby? A map of our network ministries is available at ukirk.org/ministries.) If you'd also like to support the UKirk Collegiate Ministries Association as we seek to support campus ministers, chaplains, and their student faith communities, visit ukirk.org/donate.

Prayer of Dedication

Holy God, we give thanks for all that you have done, are doing, and will do for your people. Take these humble offerings and multiply them like loaves and fishes. Use them so that all might know of your abundant love. Amen.

Prayers of the People

One: Almighty and all-loving God, your care for us is unending. Despite our continuous failings, you have given us all that we could ever need, even before we could ask for it. Yet, through Christ you encourage us to lift our prayers to you anyway, as a sign of trust in you. So we lift to you now the prayers of our hearts and minds. Thy will be done,

All: on earth as it is in heaven.

One: Creator God, you established all of creation and called it good. We have not been good stewards of the earth and resources you have entrusted to us. Correct us. Give to us a vision for creation that supports life for all of your creatures. And give us the fortitude to follow through on that vision so that future generations may enjoy your creation as we have. Thy will be done,

All: on earth as it is in heaven.

Continued on next page.

One: Holy Lord, you have given us the Church as a gift. But we have fractured your Church and made ourselves unrecognizable as the Body of Christ. Unite us again in one mission so that all might know your love. Give all who follow you the heart of Christ that seeks to serve the interests of others before ourselves. Thy will be done,

All: on earth as it is in heaven.

One: The issues of our world are too numerous to name. War, violence, hunger, and intolerance are all too common. We seek your guidance for all the nations of the world and their leaders. Give to them hearts for peace and love of neighbor. Soften the resolve for their own plans, and strengthen in them the determination to bring about justice for all people. Help us to hear the cries of your people and bring an end to all violence and oppression. Thy will be done,

All: on earth as it is in heaven.

One: God of healing, many of your people are hurting. They have visible and invisible wounds. Heal them. Take the physical, mental, and emotional ailments into your healing hands and sooth their suffering. Give them endurance for their struggle and the peace your presence provides. And ease the minds of those who care for them. Give to us caring and willing hearts to be instruments of your love to all in need of healing. Thy will be done,

All: on earth as it is in heaven.

One: Ever-present God, we pray especially this day for our college students, young adults, and all living through a transitional time. Give to them wisdom for their journey and remind them that you are always present with them. Guide their steps and decisions. Give us listening ears and humble hearts so that we might be good companions on the way. Thy will be done,

All: on earth as it is in heaven.

One: We pray all of these things, O God, and those things that we keep silent watch over, in the name of your Son, our Brother and our Friend, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying,

The traditional version of the Lord's Prayer can be used here, or use this paraphrase by New Zealand hymn writer [Bill Wallace](#):

**O most Compassionate Life-giver,
may we honor and praise you;
May we work with you to establish your new order of justice, peace, and love;
Give us what we need for growth,
And help us, through forgiving others, to accept forgiveness.
Strengthen us in the time of testing, that we may resist all evil,
For all tenderness, strength, and love are yours, now and forever. Amen.³**

³ <https://nzlpa.files.wordpress.com/2016/01/a-paraphrase-of-the-lords-prayer-bill-wallace.pdf>

Song *See suggestions below.*

Benediction

Song Suggestions

From Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal

- 353 My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less
- 463 How Firm a Foundation
- 834 Precious Lord, Take My Hand
- 821 My Life Flows on in Endless Song (How Can I Keep From Singing)
- 8 Eternal Father Strong to Save
- 720 Jesus Calls Us O'er the Tumult
- 815 Give to the Winds Thy Fears
- 645 Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above
- 185 Lonely the Boat

Other Songs

- "Stand by Me" 200 *Lift Every Voice and Sing II—An African-American Hymnal*
- "Walking on Water" by Needtobreathe <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abwwcmQriq0>
- "You'll Never Walk Alone" by Gerry & the Pacemakers https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OV5_LQArLa0

Sermon Starter

Jesus and the disciples had had a very long day. It began when they got news that John the Baptist had been beheaded by Herod (Matthew 14:13) and then tried to get away by themselves to process and grieve. The crowds, hearing that Jesus and the disciples had gone by boat to a solitary place, followed. Instead of telling them he needed to be by himself, Jesus looked upon them with compassion and healed them.

As evening approached, the disciples then urged Jesus to send the crowd away so that they may go into surrounding towns to find food. Jesus instead says, "You give them something to eat." Taking the five loaves and two fish the disciples had, Jesus blessed, broke, and gave the fish and loaves back to the disciples, and all ate and were satisfied. There were 5,000 men, besides women and children.

At the end of this day of roller coaster emotions, miracles, and heartbreak, **"Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to**

the other side, while he dismissed the crowd" (Matthew 14:22, NIV). Jesus then went up to the mountainside by himself to pray.

This is one possible place in the passage the preacher can focus. In the midst of ministry, Jesus guards the disciples, guiding them away from the crowd so that they could pull away for rejuvenation. Jesus also guards his own time, getting away by himself. Just as the sabbath day was part of creation, Jesus' and our alone time is *part* of ministry, not a "break" from ministry. As much as the five loaves and two fish are ways Jesus feeds us, so is time away from the chaos of life, work, study, and ministry.

It was from Jesus' vantage point from the mountainside where he went to pray that he later saw the disciples' boat straining against the wind and waves. Seeing them struggle, he went to them just before dawn. The disciples saw a figure walking towards them on the lake, and were terrified (the CEV adding "and started screaming").

"But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid'" (Matthew 14:27, NRSV). Preachers can also focus on Jesus' first response to the disciples' fear — to offer courage. When Jesus shows up, he takes our fears and replaces them with his courage.

Peter then wants proof, and says, **"Lord, if it's you...tell me to come to you on the water" (Matthew 14:28, NRSV).** Jesus invites Peter to step out, and for a few steps Peter succeeds in focusing on Jesus and ignoring the wind and the waves! Yet when his focus shifted again he became afraid and, **"beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!'" (Matthew 14:30, NRSV).**

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught Peter. Each version of the Bible translates v. 31 a bit differently. The CEB has Jesus saying "You man of weak faith! Why did you begin to have doubts?" The CEV, "You surely don't have much faith. Why do you doubt?" The NRSV, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" And the MSG, "Faint-heart, what got into you?"

Jesus' words (and tone) can be heard and interpreted very differently in our imaginations. Was he being harsh, chastising Peter? Was he deriding him for a moment of doubt and weak faith? Was Jesus' tone matter-of-fact, or compassionate, or even undergirded by laughter and love? How we hear Jesus can lead us to deeper trust in the midst of doubt or towards feeling judged (by ourselves, other disciples, or Jesus), and away from ever trying to get out of the boat again.

Wherever you feel called to focus, as Jesus and Peter finally get back into the boat, the wind dies down and the disciples recognize (again) who Jesus is and that his presence with them matters.

Sermon Illustration

Written by Rev. Colin Pettigrew

One of my students was an engineering student and a member of the honors college at Clemson. He was also part of at least three honors fraternities and had his own show on the campus radio station. He would tell me about how he stayed up until five o'clock in the morning on a regular basis to get all of his work done. He was brilliant, driven, and hilarious. He was also exhausted and struggling with imposter syndrome. He was doing all of the extra honors fraternities and research to prove his worthiness to someone.

But during one of our retreats, we focused on sabbath. We intentionally left the schedule open for the weekend so that all of the students could find the space they needed from work. During our devotional time at the end of the retreat, he told me that the first morning we were there was the first morning he had woken up without anxiety in months. Previously, he would always wake up worrying about all the things he needed to do, but that day he was allowed to just be. His struggle with imposter syndrome didn't end after that retreat, but his eyes were certainly opened to another way. And he was thankful for the reminder.

A call to post-secondary education can be as foreign to some as Peter's walk on water. Whether everyone in their family has gone to college for generations, or they are the first to go to college; attending because they want to or maybe to fulfill familial expectations, at times their journey can be overwhelming, underwhelming, or just plain whelming. Being invited into a campus community of faith to walk, rest, and pray amidst their studies is a great way for them to learn to pause and just BE, and for them to be assured that they are not feeling any emotions by themselves. It may be new territory for them as a college student, but knowing that Jesus sees them, and is there to guide them, help them relinquish their fears, and offer them courage along the way are just a few of the gifts their community of faith can give them.

Our students and young people entering the workforce are inundated with "grind" or "hustle" culture that tells them their worth comes from what they produce (and how much), or how good their grades are, or what job they get, or any other number of criteria. Many struggle with the idea that their worth comes from God and God has said they are worth the whole world. The Church is a place where they can be reminded of God's love and the importance of sabbath for their lives.

Other Resources

The following resources are available at pcusa.org/collegesunday.

- More full orders of worship for College & Young Adult Sunday:
 - *God Is with Us in Every Season* (Kings 19:4-8) by Rev. Jasmine Evans and Rev. L. British Hyrams
 - *Belonging & Becoming* (Jeremiah 1:4-10) by Rev. Dorothy Piatt-Esguerra
- Compiled ideas for supporting college students and young adults all year long.
- Compiled litanies for celebrating and commissioning college students, young adults, and their leaders.

About the Authors

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