

Listening for Jesus' Instructions

A Worship Resource for
College and Young Adult Sunday
August 6, 2023

By

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**Office of Christian
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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.

HYMN OR OTHER SONG (see Additional Resources for hymn and song selections)

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.

(Continue in a time of silent confession...) **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.

Beloved, in the name of Jesus Christ we are forgiven! **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.

The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. **And also with you!**

PRAYER OF 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 ONE: Psalm 77

READING TWO: Matthew 14:22–33

SERMON (see [Additional Resources for sermon starters](#))

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

(from the Patmos Abbey, Order of St. Columba, in Australia)

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.

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.**

HYMN OR OTHER SONG

RECOGNIZING YOUNG ADULTS

Before leading the litany below, you might invite the following people to raise their hands, stand, or otherwise be recognized:

- Young adults entering the workforce or a vocational training program.
- Those entering the [Young Adult Volunteer](#) program in the PC(USA) or a similar service-learning program.
- People transitioning to a college, university, graduate or professional school or program.
- Those taking a gap year or entering their first year beyond secondary school or an educational program.
- Those trying something new in life or navigating life in new ways.
- People who work with young adults as educators, mentors, counselors, or coaches, such as teachers, college faculty and staff, campus ministers, pastors, and lay leaders.
- *Worship leaders are encouraged to adapt this list to fit their context.*

You may present them with a gift to mark the start of the new academic year or a new life venture, such as a journal. If your congregation has a prayer shawl ministry or some talented knitters, consider giving a small “prayer square” with a message that reminds them of the blessings of God who is knitting them together even still, their home congregation’s prayers for them, and their ties to the whole communion of saints.

COMMISSIONING LITANY *(Liturgical options are at the end of this document. Feel free to adapt them as is fitting for your context.)*

INVITATION TO OFFERING

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

OFFERING

A note from UKirk National: College and Young Adult Sunday would be 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

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, **on earth as it is in heaven.**

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, **on earth as it is in heaven.**

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, **on earth as it is in heaven.**

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, **on earth as it is in heaven.**

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, **on earth as it is in heaven.**

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, **on earth as it is in heaven.**

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 possibly this paraphrase from New Zealand written by 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.

Written by New Zealand hymn writer [Bill Wallace](#), Aotearoa/New Zealand

SENDING HYMN OR OTHER SONG

BENEDICTION

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

HYMN AND SONG SUGGESTIONS

From the *Glory to God* 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 from *Lift Every Voice and Sing II—An African-American Hymnal*

“Walking on Water” by Need to Breathe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abwwcmOriQ0>

“You’ll Never Walk Alone” by Gerry & the Pacemakers

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OV5_LQArLa0

SERMON STARTER for Matthew 14:22–33

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-hearted, 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@ <http://clemsonpsa.org/>

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.

OPTIONS FOR COMMISSIONING LITURGY

Feel free to adapt or edit the liturgy to fit your context.

OPTION 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) 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?

Yes. I accept the call of God.

(For students) 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?

Yes. I accept the call of God.

(For families of students) 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?

Yes. I accept the call of God.

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

ALL: Lord, I belong to you.

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

ALL: Christ, I depend on you.

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

ALL: Holy Spirit, I yield to you.

(Leader, to those commissioned) 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..

(Leader, to all gathered) 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.

Written by Rev. Colin Pettigrew and Natarsha Sanders

OPTION TWO - COMMISSIONING OF A CAMPUS MINISTER

Acknowledging Jesus Christ of Nazareth as your Savior, will you serve the people with love and compassion, energy and humility? **Yes, I will.**

Acknowledging the responsibility of this service, will you rely on the mercy of God and work toward justice? **Yes, I will.**

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

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.

ALL: 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.

Written by Rev. Colin Pettigrew and Natarsha Sanders

OPTION THREE

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.

Based off a prayer written for the class of 2023 by Michelle Thomas Bush, adapted from a blessing based off [A blessing for Hellos and Goodbyes](https://katebowler.com/resources/) from Kate Bowler

OPTION FOUR

For young adults of varied experiences, that they might receive encouragement on their journeys of faith as they continue becoming the people God has called them to be, supporting each other and accepting support: **O God, we pray.**

For campus ministries and spiritual communities for young adults, that they might be settling spaces, places of welcome, comfort, and rest, and also places to stretch, change, and grow: **O God, we pray.**

For the leaders who guide these communities, discerning faithful ways to accompany young adults in the midst of an often-overwhelming world, and learning from those they serve: **O God, we pray.**

For college faculty and staff members, as well as those who supervise or mentor young adults during formative years: **O God, we pray.**

For the siblings of faith who have nurtured each of us along our way, and the ways we might share that care with the ones who come after us: **O God, we give you thanks.**

Written by Rev. Dorothy Piatt-Esguerra for UKirk's College and Young Adult Sunday 2022 liturgical resources.

OPTION FIVE - COMMISSIONING LITANY

One: When we find ourselves at the intersections of life, we remind ourselves...

All: God, we know you are with us!

One: As we move to new places and meet new faces, we say...

All: God, we know you are with us!

One: When we can't decide which way to turn, we say...

All: God, we know you are with us!

One: Even when we are sure of exactly where you are leading us, we say...

All: God, we know you are with us!

One: For new schools and new jobs, for new adventures and old friends, for going and growing, for learning and unlearning, for change and sameness, and for all that we will find in between, on this we can depend....

All: God, we know you are with us!

One: We give thanks to You, God, for being with us every step of the way. Let

this refrain be a charge to you to walk boldly into your next season of life reassured by God's promises and saying...

All: God, we know you are with us!

Written by Rev. Jasmine Evans and Rev. British Hyrams for the UKirk's College and Young Adult Liturgy Sunday 2021 liturgical resource.

WAYS TO SUPPORT COLLEGE STUDENTS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

If your congregation hosts a campus ministry or is in direct partnership with one:

- **Get involved!** Ask students what they need from you and the congregation in terms of support and show up when they ask you to. They might just need a meal for a program or they might need some help on an upcoming trip. You don't know until you ask!
- **Consider matching students with families in the congregation.** This can be a great way to provide a home away from home for students while also making them feel more connected to the life of the congregation. Families can invite students for meals and family activities and provide help connecting them to places in the community that a college student might not find. The church can also plan occasional meals or service projects for students and their "adopted church families" to attend together.

If your congregation doesn't host a campus ministry or have direct partnership with one:

- **If there is a campus ministry in a neighboring town you may still be close enough for some direct involvement.** Reach out and ask how you might be able to help. If there is not one nearby, is there one in your presbytery, or even at your alma mater that can use support?
- **Assign once-a-quarter check-in partners to young adults in your congregation.** An alumni of the school they attend would be great. Call or text young adults once a quarter to check in. Offer to pray with them or to meet for coffee, boba, tea, ice cream, frozen yogurt, or snacks to catch up.
- **Keep a list of students' names and addresses in order to send care packages.** You can do this for students that have grown up in your own congregation or for students at a campus ministry nearby. It is a reminder that you are thinking of them and that the church still

supports them no matter where they are. Sending care packages for birthdays and around exam time is a good way to keep things consistent. Get in touch with students to see what they could use in the packages! Care packages can include school supplies, toiletries, non-perishable snacks or foods, handwritten notes, prayer beads, homemade cookies, Visa or restaurant gift cards, etc.

- **Reach out to young adults you know via social media or text** just to check in. Ask them what is on their schedule that week and how you can pray for them. If you see something funny, or a spiritual “nugget” you’d like to share, send it! If they are local or you travel to where they are going to school, offer to take them out for a meal or coffee.
- **Refer students to the local UKirk network ministry at the college or university they are attending.** You can find a list at www.ukirk.org/ministries.
- **Help your youth connect with Presbyterian resources.** If your congregation has high school juniors or seniors who are preparing to go to college, encourage them to also visit the UKirk network ministry during college visits. There are also 54 [PC\(USA\) related colleges and universities](#) across the country, many of which give financial aid to Presbyterian students. The PC(USA) Office of Financial Aid for Service also has annual [scholarship and grant opportunities](#). Presbyterian students going to any accredited college or university can apply for.
- **Invite chaplains or campus ministers** from local or regional UKirk network ministries or Presbyterian-related colleges or universities to lead a youth event or to preach and lead worship at your congregation or presbytery.
- **Pray that God will be with and guide** all young adults, those who participate in campus ministry, UKirk network campus ministers and chaplains, their student leaders and outreach to students, ministry volunteers, faculty, staff, coaches, and the families of young adults.

If your congregation is considering starting (or re-starting) a college ministry, you can find resources to support your discernment at www.ukirk.org.

For more information about connecting to UKirk Collegiate Ministries and ideas for connecting with College Students in your contexts, visit the following link: <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/connecting-with-ukirk-collegiate-ministries/>