

Health and Human Service Sunday

United Church of Christ

Liturgical Elements & Prayers for the 3rd Sunday after Epiphany
January 25, 2026

[Isaiah 9:1-4](#)

[Psalm 27:1, 4-9](#)

[1 Cor. 1:10-18](#)

[Mt. 4:12-23](#)

Greeting

Today, we gather together with the whole United Church of Christ in observing Health and Human Service Sunday. We bear witness to the tradition, and the history being made today, of how the UCC has expressed extravagant welcome through service within and beyond our church walls. We take time to honor the 400 member site locations of the Council for Health and Human Service Ministries, those serving as chaplains and parish nurses, those working for justice and care in the ministries of health and wellness, gender and sexuality, disabilities, mental health, harm reduction, and HIV/AIDS. We praise God for the ways these disciples embody the Good News of freedom and compassion alongside those impacted by structural violence—whether that be by a lack of housing or healthcare, stigma and shame, or harmful beliefs and policies. We give thanks to the Spirit for remembering how Jesus chose to spend his time in his ministry—in healing, in community, and in service. Amen.

Call to Worship

One: "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death,

All: "light has dawned." (Mt 4:16)

One: Come! Fellow people of the day who have survived another night, let us worship.

All: Let us gather at the shores of our savior and friend!

One: Christ called his disciples in the midst of their daily lives, as our scripture today illuminates. Where were you when you heard Christ say, "Follow me"?

All: Some of us were dropping our nets into the sea, busy at work.

One: Others were mending the trials from the day, ready to go home.

All: Some of us felt the harshness of life right under our feet, thirsting for living water, starving for bread.

One: While others of us still, were looking out at the horizon, longing for solace, for belonging, for a resurrecting energy we did not yet know. No matter where we were,

All: here we are now.

One: No matter where we are going,

All: here we are now,

One: to worship,

All: to journey together. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Divine Fisher, you catch us all in your net of cosmic safety, interconnection, and care. Tenderly, you scoop us up. Lovingly, you release us back into the wild waters of life. As we navigate the ever-changing tides, grant us the grace to have the wisdom of when to rest on the shore and when to go out into even deeper waters. As you invite us to follow you, grant us your guidance when we ask, “to where?” or “for how long?” or “with what stamina?”. Help us to cultivate the courage to put down our nets and take up our call of healing and service—the call of the Good News. Amen.

A Ritual to Honor the Collective Call of Healing and Service

Recommended Items Needed: *small strips of twine, thread, or rope; small pebbles or rocks; bowls to hold these items in when gathered. Please distribute the twine and pebbles to folks before worship begins. Feel free to edit or adapt this ritual to whatever works best for your community and context.*

Our Gospel reading today shows us how—in Matthew’s account—Jesus first called the fishermen Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John into discipleship.

The reading ends with setting the foundation of their ministry: healing in community and teaching the Good News. Inspired by this powerful passage, let us take a moment to honor our own call to service, to healing, or of simply saying “yes” to God.

I invite you to imagine your call, your relationship with Jesus, or perhaps just where you are in your life right now—as a boat. If it feels good to you, cup your hands together to make the shape of a boat, giving you a point of focus. Or feel free to close your eyes or do whatever helps you settle in.

Now imagine your vocation or life as a boat. Who is in it? Where is it going? What is it carrying? Is there something that serves as its anchor, something to secure it in place? (pause)

What did you catch today in your boat? What did you *not* catch today, though all your planning had prepared you to do? (pause)

Perhaps Jesus enters the scene, now. Looking at you with deep knowing, he says, “Follow me.” What do you see, notice, hear, or wonder about with this invitation? (pause)

Before the disciples follow Jesus, they first drop their nets. What are you being asked to put down, to leave behind or to leave for another time? Maybe it is a way of thinking or being, a place or situation, a burden you will no longer carry. As you reflect on this, place your piece of string in the bowl as it gets passed around to symbolize this letting go. (pause)

Now following Jesus to the shore, you discover how he spends his time, with whom he chooses to be around, and where his energy goes: teaching about the Good News and curing “every disease and every sickness among the people.” What healing work has arrived on your

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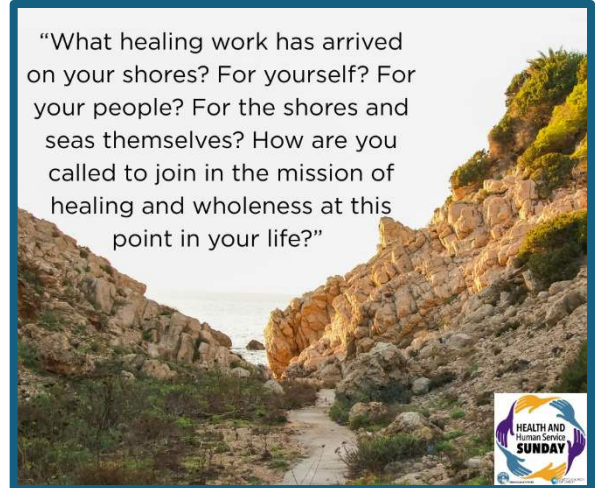


“Before the disciples follow Jesus, they first drop their nets. What are you being asked to put down, to leave behind, or to leave for another time?”



shores? For yourself? For your people? For the shores and seas themselves? How are you called to join in the mission of healing and wholeness at this point in your life? As you reflect on this, place your rock in the bowl as it gets passed around to represent taking the next step on land with your healing path.
(pause)

We offer up these boats, nets, and next steps to you, O God. May we notice and remember how we are not alone in this service or in the following of Christ. Amen.



Prayer of Confession

One: Our scripture today begins with Jesus learning that his cousin, John the Baptist, was arrested—

All: arrested for speaking truth to power, for refusing to stay silent.

One: God of Redemption and Resurrection, forgive us for the times and ways we are silent when we need to speak up or still when action is required.

All: Forgive us, too, for when we speak or act in harmful, thoughtless ways.

One: Teach us your ways of justice, love, and compassion.

All: Guide us closely when doing so is costly.

One: May we return, and return again, to the reconciling Oneness of all things.

**All: May we invite, and invite in again, the liberating Spirit within us.
Amen.**

Invitation to Offering

By the Sea of Galilee, Jesus called ordinary people doing ordinary things into the sacred work of healing and justice. He invited them to follow, to trust, to participate in God’s unfolding liberation. They left the lives they knew, not

because they had nothing to lose, but because they believed in what God was doing among them. May we, gathered here today, offer the part of the whole that is ours to give. Amen.

Prayer of Dedication and Thanksgiving

We offer up these gifts of time, energy, resources, skills, and connections to you, O God. May they be received as our investment in healing for a hurting world, our faith in abundance, our devotion turned into action, our one turned into many. Amen.

Communion Prayer

O God of fisherfolk, of those with weathered hands, of those who tend to the land and sea for food and safety, we gather at your humble table. We remember how when John was arrested, Jesus did not hide in fear from the empire. Rather, he built and gathered his community saying, "The kin-dom of God has come near" (Mt. 4:17). And so, he came closer to us still. And so, the disciples centered in on the purpose of their lives. And so, the people became well, even while the empire carried on with its violence. Let us remember the sacred ordinariness of this meal and its power to resist oppression and its softness to be nourished in. Grant that we may continue to carry forth such blessed balance here and always. Amen.

Benediction

One: In the words of the poet Lucille Clifton, "May the tide that is entering even now the lip of our understanding,

All: carry you out beyond the face of fear."

One: May we go forth from this shore with the push of courage.

All: May we be wayfinders of wisdom and service.

One: May we be guided by the spiral of healing,

All: remembering its shape is a journey, and mystery is its home.

One: Bless us as we carry on the work of communal care,

**All: giving and receiving, launching and anchoring, our way to peace.
Amen.**

For more information about [The Council for Health and Human Service Ministries, UCC](#), please visit: www.chhsm.org

For more information about [Health and Wholeness Advocacy of the UCC](#), please visit: <https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do/justice-local-church-ministries/justice/health-and-wholeness-advocacy-ministries/>

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