

January 31, 2021
Youth Service 5th Sunday
Shepherd's Grace Church

Welcome—Good morning to all who are present in the Sanctuary and welcome all who have joined on Facebook

Sharing Joys and Concerns—(Lauren) Ask for Joys and Concerns and repeat them so that all can hear in the sanctuary and also on Facebook

Announcements—(Lauren) These will be on power point on the screen. Read them from there. (We won't know all the announcements until late in the week so they do not appear here.)

Praise and Worship—Now, let us join together in music and in Spirit to celebrate and give praise to God.

(Music will play from You Tube.) (We need two or three songs here)

Prayer in Unison: (32

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..Hadley)

Let us Pray together

Good Morning, Lord! We are glad to be here today. We hope you are glad to be with us because You are the only reason we have come. In this next hour or so, we want to say thank you to You for all you do for us. We do not always know You are doing things for us, but later, when we look back, we recognize that all we have and all we are able to do is because of You. So, thanks for being here this morning. Help us begin to praise You now. This we pray through the power of Your Holy Spirit and in Jesus' name. Amen!

Children's Time—(Lauren) Ask the children of the congregation to come to the front. Ask the children on Facebook to lean in a little closer and listen carefully.

You—Are any of you guys sports fans? (wait for answers) Are any of you guys Kansas City Chiefs fans? (Wait for answers) Do any of you guys cheer for your team? (Wait for answers) Did any of you know that I am a cheerleader? (Wait for answers) I cheer for the Ark City Bulldogs! I don't yell at television sets or holler at ref's! I just cheer for my team. Do any of you ever wish bad luck for the other team when you watch sports? (Wait for answers) When I am cheering, I don't wish for bad luck for the other team. I just want my team to do the best it can. As a cheerleader, my job is to help get the fans behind my team. It is not about the other

team. It is just wanting to see my team do their best! That is part of what Jesus wants us to know today. We do not root for bad luck or bad things to happen to others. No. Instead, we want the very best for our friends and our families! Do you know who our friends and families are? Well, according to Jesus they are everybody. So, who do we not wish bad things to happen for? For anybody. We want good things to happen for everybody and good things happen when we trust God as our coach and we all cheer for God's team.

Let's Pray: Dear God. Thank you for Jesus. He is our team leader. Help us to follow him. Help us to cheer for him. Help us to cheer for others. Help us to know that our victory is in Him. This we pray. In Jesus name. Amen!

Epistle Lesson: (Shae/Baylee) Our epistle lesson this morning is from First Corinthians 8: 1-13

Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. ²Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; ³but anyone who loves God is known by him.

⁴Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "no idol in the world really exists," and that "there is no God but one." ⁵Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords— ⁶yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

⁷It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸"Food will not bring us close to God." We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? ¹¹So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. ¹²But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

This is the word of God, for the people of God.

Hymn of Preparation—

Pastoral Prayer—(Aiden)

Good morning God, it's me, but I guess You already know that don't you? I mean, you know who I am and you know what I am going to ask for even before I ask it. You already know it is me. But, hey, I am here with a bunch of other people this morning. It may not look like a bunch of other people. I mean...right here in the sanctuary there are not a bunch of people, at least, not as many as there usually are...not as many as we would like to have be here, but there are a bunch of others. Who knows how many are listening on the internet. I guess you know about the internet don't you? You know there might be hundreds of people who are here this morning only they aren't here! That sound's pretty funny doesn't it. They are here but they aren't here. Some of them are as far away as Hawaii or maybe even or other places all over the world. They are not here in person but they are here with us so we say there are a whole bunch of people. It's probably not a whole bunch like you think of a whole bunch, cause you're used to thinking about the whole world and that is a whole bunch!

But, hey, maybe we should be thinking about the whole world too. You know, like when everyone joins together to pray. Maybe we should pray like we were praying for everybody. Heck, can I say heck?, well I guess it is too late for that, but you know what I mean...I mean that by praying for everybody and by including everybody in our prayers, we might just get everybody, or at least a few more to pray with us.

Now, God I have taken a few minutes to let you know just a part of what I want to talk to you about this morning and for these few minutes, maybe others who are with me have kind of felt left out of our conversation. That is OK. I am sure that they have their own prayers and hopefully, they have been talking to you about them as well. Anyway, right now, let's get back to the prayer for everyone...and of course, we now mean everyone.

First we want to thank you. We thank you for our church and for the commitment here to the future. The people of this church believe in the future and in us young people as leaders in the future. Every few weeks, they kind of give us the keys to the kingdom, that is, they let us take over worship and do things a little differently. We get to practice and we get to imagine and we get to think about how things might be in the future and we get to invite others to think with us so the future can be closer to now. So, first, thanks for a church that thinks about the future.

This morning, we want to thank you for that future. Thank you for your promise that in the future you complete your plan and you will use us, all of us, to help you. Today, God we want to than you for just letting us be part of your plan. Help us to remember that the work we do here in this place is important work. Help us to remember that what we think here, what we say here, what we do here matters. It matters to those who are less fortunate than us. It matters to those who are going through difficult times. It matters to those who just need to

know, like we do, that you are here. It matters to all of us. Let us do your work today and always because it matters!

Second, we want to thank you for the work you have called us all to do. Right now, we are in the middle of this whole pandemic thing. Maybe you have heard about it. It has caused a lot of problems down here. People are having to stay home from work. People are having to stay home from school. You know, God, some times that school thing would be a good thing, but it has been going on for a long time. We haven't been able to be with our friends or go to games or to parties...not that any of those things are a big deal, but because we have been cut off from friends and even family, we miss them. We feel a little depressed or anxious and we need to know that things will be OK here. Today, we pray that you will give us strength to remember that you are in control and you will make all things OK at just the right time. So, help us to be patient and to find different ways to spend time with friends and family, ways like that whole internet thing we talked about earlier. Just reach out to us this morning and let us know you are hanging with us and you will always be with us. We really do appreciate that!

Next, we want to remember all the people who do things for us. We want to say thanks to you for them. Today, we especially want to say thanks for all the brave people who have put themselves in harm's way today. They have done this because they love us and they believe in the liberty and freedom you have given us. Keep them all safe today. Bring them home safely to us and to their families. When they get here, let us go out to meet them and let us gather with them to give you all the praise and honor for their safe return.

But this prayer goes farther than that, God. Today we want to pray for others. We want to pray for those who seem to be against us. We want to pray for those who would speak to us harshly or bully us or even threaten to harm us. Today we pray for our enemies. We ask you to keep them safe and protect them too. Bring them home safely to their friends and families and let their friends and families give you all the praise and honor for their safe return.

Finally, we want to ask you to honor your promise. You have told us that one day you would come back to us. Today we ask that when you come, when you pass through our town, that you call us all out into the streets and lead us to a place you have already chosen. There, we ask that you teach us, all of us, friends and enemies alike, to lay down our weapons and join together our arms. Arm in arm, let us walk to the top of your Holy Mountain and there let us sit down together and learn from you how to beat our swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks. This is our prayer today, a prayer for peace. It is a prayer for your presence with us because we know that when you are with us, nothing can be against us; when you are with us, nothing will be missing and nothing will be broken. Pastor Jack tells us it is shalom. Let it be so for all of us even as we continue to struggle in this difficult time.

Now, we continue to pray the words Jesus taught us so long ago. Together we say,

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 lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever

Amen.

Offering: (Aiden) (call the ushers forward and pray)

God, today we have brought our money. This is not the only thing you have given us. You have given us health and clothes and places to live and people who care for us. Still, the money is the only thing that will fit in the offering plate. We are thankful for everything you give us and we want to give some of it back so you can use it for others who have less than we do. Let our gifts be used to bring you honor. This we pray through the power of Your Holy Spirit and in Jesus' name. Amen!

Gospel Lesson: (Chance) Mark 1: 21-28

²¹They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. ²²They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. ²³Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, ²⁴and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." ²⁵But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" ²⁶And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." ²⁸At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee

Will you pray with me? Good morning, God! We have come to learn a little about you and Jesus today, but we really don't have much to do with demon possession in our world. I mean, we see this stuff in the movies, but we really don't see much in real life. Could you kind of help us make some 21st century sense out of what Mark is trying to tell us? Help us to listen as one group and to hear your words so they clarify for us what you are trying to say. Maybe let the words I am about to speak and the thoughts we are about to have be pleasing and helpful

to us and acceptable to you, cause we know you are our rock, our strength and our savior. All this we ask through the power of Your Holy Spirit and in Jesus' name. Amen!

Good morning everyone! I am Shae Mars and most of you know me, but this is the first time I have done anything like this and just because you know me and I know you, that doesn't stop me from being just a little nervous. I hope you will bear with me this morning and be patient. I think I will get the hang of it, but if I seem like I am fidgeting just a bit maybe just lift up a silent prayer for me and we will make it through this together. Thank you.

As I said, most of you know me and those of you who do know me know that I love to play volleyball. As I was reading the scripture for this morning, I was thinking, what do I know about demon possession. Back in the day when Pastor Jack was about my age they had a movie out called "The Exorcist", at least that is what he said. He said it was all the rage. Imagine anyone describing a movie as being all the rage...what does that even mean. Anyway, just because he is old, I guess I won't hold that against him.

Well, he said the movie was all about this possession stuff and a lot of you would know what I was talking about if I talked about the movie. But, I don't know anything about the movie so I was thinking it would probably be better if I talked to you about stuff I do know something about. So, I re-read passage and started thinking about what I know something about. It occurred to me that I know a lot about playing volleyball. The more I read the scripture, the more I thought volleyball might help us understand this so...and you will just have to bear with me on this while I bring you along...so I am going to help you get to know a little more about volleyball and at the end, I am going to use what you have learned to get to know a little more about Jesus!

Before we get into the demon stuff, let's start with something all of us can claim a knowledge of...Food. Earlier in our service, we heard Paul talking about food and the point he was trying to make is that people get the wrong ideas about food. Back in the days of Paul, food was brought to these temples to a lot of different kinds of gods. Now, never mind that there are is no other God. Apparently, not everyone knew that. They took food and offerings to all these gods and the food from the temples was given to the people to eat.

When the people ate the food, some thought that meant that they believed in all these gods, but the Jewish people knew there was just one God. They didn't want to have anyone think they believed in false gods and they didn't want anyone to think others should believe in false gods so they were critical of anyone who ate food from the temples.

Paul kind of thought that if a person is hungry, that person should eat and if the food was just going to be thrown out, it shouldn't go to waste. There was a bigger issue however. See,

when the food was eaten, it was like telling people it is ok to believe in things that don't exist. No one wanted to say that was ok.

So Paul said he would never cause someone to believe in something that wasn't real even if it meant that he would go hungry to make his point. For him, it was more important for people to know that what they believed in was real than to lose faith because of what they saw someone else doing.

It's kind of like this. If you go into a store and you see someone stealing a candy bar you know that is wrong. You may not know that the person has had no food for days and the only way they could get something to eat was to steal. It is still wrong to steal.

Now, if you don't know the person who is stealing, you might not report it to the store worker but if you do know the person, well, you are going to think less of that person because you know they steal. Well, if that person is someone who is trying to teach you about Jesus, it will be a lot harder for you to believe them because you have seen them doing things that you know Jesus would not do or approve of.

For this reason, Paul said he would never do anything that might cause another person to stumble or fall away from what Jesus was teaching. Now, I don't know about you, but I think that is pretty good advice. I also think it is a good place to begin to understand the volleyball match that Mark is talking about this morning.

Mark begins today by telling us Jesus came to Capernaum. Before this morning, Jesus has been on a traveling team. He has played a little in Jerusalem and at a place by the Jordan river. Nobody knew him at any of these places. He then went out into the wilderness to play a very tough opponent. When he was out there, he didn't have any food to eat but his opponent had some. Jesus suspected that the food was stolen or that it was prepared in such a way as to cause others who might see him eat it to doubt his teaching. He turned it down along with a lot of other stuff that would have tempted many people. He only wanted to play for one team though. He knew his opponent had a strong team but it was not a good team and he held out for a chance to play for a good team.

In volleyball, at least in traveling volleyball you have tryouts with teams and they pick you or they don't. Jesus wanted to be picked by the team he believed was the best. He said know to one team so that he could play for the team he really wanted.

After he turned down this team, let's call them the daredevils, the coach of the team he really wanted to play for saw how good he could be. The coach made him captain of the team and sent him out to pick other players. He had heard there were good players in Galilee so he

traveled there. He found four guys he wanted to play with; Simon, Andrew, James and John. They agreed and he had the beginnings of a team.

For those of you who are having trouble following the metaphor, I could tell you these players could also be called disciples or students. Either way, they agreed to be on Jesus' team and off they went.

Then Jesus came to Capernaum. Now, we know Jesus was born in Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth. These were to be the towns of his youth, but his home team for volleyball was to be Capernaum. In fact, if you ever get to go there, you will see the sign just outside the town that says, "Hometown of Jesus." You have seen these kinds of signs along many roads I'm sure. When you leave Ark City, you see signs that dedicate the road to Robert Docking. Just an example of the kind of things that happen to you when you are really talented and people think a lot of you.

When they got to town, Jesus and the team that was assembled began to practice. The first thing they did was to learn a little about the terms of the game. You all know how this works. You don't play football without knowing a pass and a run. You don't play the game without understanding offsides on the defense and illegal procedure on the offense. It is the same way in volleyball. This is a team sport and teams that work well together and become really good learn the vocabulary of the game and use it to communicate with one another.

In volleyball, much of the terminology is about hitting the ball. Part of the goal in the game is to get the ball over the net and the other part is to get it over in such a way that the other team cannot return it to you. When you are successful at both these things, your team gets the point.

When you are hitting the ball, it may surprise you that you can and should hit it in a few different ways. One way to hit it is to serve it. On the serve, the ball has to cross over the net without another player from your team touching it or helping it in anyway. When the opposing team serves, your team then begins to go to work.

One of the first hitting strategies you learn is to "set" the ball. When you set, you turn your hands out and in a very controlled way, hit the ball up in the air so that another player from your team can then hit the ball. A set is a play that changes the direction of the ball and gives another player a chance to hit the ball to the other side of the net and to a place where your opponents are not. The set does not hit the ball over the net, but to another member of your own team. The other member hits the ball over the net.

The shot the other player uses is called a spike. This shot is accomplished with the hand open and facing outward. It is a hard shot designed so that the other team cannot return it.

Another type of hit is called a dig. A dig is where a player dives or bends down low to the floor to hit the ball up into the air so that one of the player's teammates can set or spike the ball to a teammate or to the other side of the net.

The play back and forth across the net is called a volley which is where the name of the game volleyball comes from. Teams score when the opponent is unable to return the ball back across the net to the opponent's side in no more than three hits.

There are other rules to the game but you all are just novice players and like Jesus' new disciples, you are not ready for more now. Let's see if you can apply the rules and strategies of the game to the contest Mark gives us this morning.

Jesus is in Capernaum. This is his hometown now. The contest is going to be a home game for Jesus. For those of you who have moved around before, you know that hometown or home court advantage does not just happen. Nobody knew who Jesus was. He had not played the game around this part of the country before so even though he was on his homecourt, he really did not have much of an advantage when he started. It is kind of like John said, he came to his own people but his own people did not know him. (John 1: 10)

Jesus shows up at the court with his team. Translated, he shows up at synagogue with his newly chosen disciples. The whole town watched him and his team warm up. They were amazed at the way he coached his players. The townspeople, being big volleyball fans were amazed at the way the players responded to him. He taught them with skill and great ability. They knew how to serve, they knew how to set, they knew how to spike and how to dig. Every thing that came their way, they were prepared for and the people were impressed.

The people had seen different teams come to their town in the past. These people tried to teach the dig before they taught the serve. They tried to teach the spike before they knew the set. They tried to teach that keeping the ball low was better than hitting it high even though hitting it high for new players gave them more time to think about what to do.

So when Jesus began teaching and the people began listening, they recognized his gift as a teacher. They could understand his strategies and they made sense to them. It was as if a whole new game had been opened up to them, a game they could imagine winning.

For years the people of the town had struggled to play the game. Others taught them without thinking about explaining the true meanings of the strategies. The townspeople had come to expect that bad things were destined to happen to them. They began to believe the might and power of the other team was just too great for them.

Of course, the other team was thought to be the Romans. The most powerful empire in the history of the world beat them down and demanded they give them all their income and most

of their crops . The people had come to accept that to submit to the Romans was just the way the game was played.

Now, Jesus came to town and began to teach that God has a different plan. They heard from others who had been along the sea at Galilee that there was good news from God and this good news offered a plan for them, a plan for a future with hope. (Jeremiah 29: 11) For the first time perhaps, they saw their lives in ways that might have meaning.

Just then, warm-ups were over and the opponent showed up. Jesus recognized the opponent at once. He knew the strength of the players on this team. He knew that they existed to fill his players with doubt. Jesus knew his players were only just beginning to learn the rules of the game and the strategies for winning. His coaching was great but his team was not yet ready to take on such a formidable opponent.

The opponent, possessing the ability to play mind games with Jesus' team took the court. Jesus' knowing the rules of the game recognized that the opponent had made an illegal substitution. He demanded that the opponent come out of the game at once.

Of course, the opponent was not happy with the challenge but he knew Jesus was correct in his call. That did not stop him from making a scene. He yelled and screamed and threw a very childish temper tantrum. He accused Jesus and coach of the team and even shouted obscenities at him. None of this stopped the correct call from being made however and the illegal substitution was forced to leave the court.

In verse 25, Jesus orders the illegal opponent to come out and be quiet and in verse 26, the illegal substitute comes out screaming and crying. See, Jesus knows that his new disciples are not yet ready to withstand the pressure and temptation of such a strong opponent. He also knows the opponent is none other than a disciple of the one who tempted him in the wilderness and vowed to return at a more opportune time.

What we need to know is that the opponent was not destroyed. The opponent was not banished. The opponent still lurks near to us. As God said to Abel in Genesis 4, evil is always lurking at the door. You must be ever vigilant or it will overtake you. The opponent that exists in the mind of the person in today's gospel is the same opponent that lurks near to us.

This opponent might be different for you or for me. It might be self-doubt or struggle with homework. It might be a lack of confidence with public speaking, the kind of lack that caused my nervousness this morning. It might be the lack of contact we are able to have with friends because of the Covid situation we are currently in.

Any of these things or any of a number of others can cause us to be crippled on the court. These doubts keep us from making the set pass to a teammate for the winning spike. They

cause us to fail to make the dig so we can continue to play. As a result, we give up. We become dejected and lose our sense of determination. A good volleyball team recognizes that as long as they are playing they are still in the game. They recognize that if they can just make one more dig, one more spike, one more kill, they can get back to the serve and from the serve they can start a long scoring run that will lead them to victory.

Jesus, our coach has rebuked the demon in the mind of the person in the synagogue. Today, we might say that Jesus has removed the doubt from our mind. He has made it possible for us to know that there is an opportunity that goes beyond oppression. There is a future that goes beyond death. There is a grace that goes beyond our shortsighted decision to steal the candy bar. There is a love that has come to earth to teach us and teach us with authority so that we might get better at sharing the good news with others.

If I remember correctly, that was his promise when he called his team, his disciples just last week. He said follow me and I will teach you how to play, how to be fishers for people, how to teach them everything I am teaching you and still more. He said to them, the time is fulfilled. God's kingdom is at hand. Repent, let the things you have been taught before go, and believe the good news.

In volleyball, the good news is not so much the win. That is nice. But the good news is that we get to keep on playing. We get to keep on getting better, that we get to try again and again and again.

As we get better, our fame grows and others know us and respect us and look forward to being around us. That is what happened with Jesus in this very first evidence of his ministry. His fame began to grow because he was and is a great coach. He cast the doubts from your mind and causes you to know that for those of us who believe in him, we have the power to become heirs with him to the kingdom. (John 1: 12)

Gradually, we get to know more of the rules and more of the ways we can work as a team to overcome every difficulty. We begin to understand that God has sent us a coach who will never leave us. We begin to trust that we are on a good team and that we can work together because all of us are committed to God and to one another. We begin to understand that there is only one game and we have not even completed the first set of that game. There is still a long way to go and even though we may be struggling to make the set pass, we will get it right and we will overcome the opponent, not because of anything we can do but because we recognize that we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength. Amen!

2nd Offering: (Aiden) (Invite Ushers Forward) Pray

God, today we are taking up a second offering. This one is for us...just kidding. It is for the youth group so we can do your work and share your gifts with others. Bless our congregation this morning for supporting us and bless these gifts. May they be used according to your will and always for your purposes. This we pray through the power of Your Holy Spirit and in Jesus' name. Amen

Blessing and Sending Song

Benediction—(Shae) Go now because we have another match very soon. The opponent is good, but God is great! He will teach us how to work together, how to live together and how to love together. Go in peace now, to love and serve the Lord!