

First Lutheran Church, Morris MN

Order of Worship for Sunday, January 24, 2021: Third Sunday after Epiphany

Gathering

When he stepped into the muddy waters of the Jordan River to be baptized, Jesus fully identified with us and our human dilemma. Though he did not need a baptism of rebirth, as we do, he was baptized and God declared: "This is my Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Welcoming & Announcements

Thanksgiving for Baptism

*In the name of the Father, and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit, **Amen.***

Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism, we are clothed with God's mercy and forgiveness. Let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning your Spirit moved over the waters and by your Word you created the world, calling forth life in which you took delight.

Through the waters of the flood you delivered Noah and his family. Through the sea you led your people Israel from slavery into freedom. At the river your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Holy Spirit. By water and your Word you claim us as daughters and sons, making us heirs of your promise and servants of all.

We praise you for the gift of water that sustains life, and above all we praise you for the gift of new life in Jesus Christ. Shower us with your Spirit, and renew our lives with your forgiveness, grace and love.

*To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever. **Amen.***

Greeting:

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.***

Kyrie

*In peace, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.***

*For the peace from above, and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.***

*For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.***

*For this holy house, and for all who offer here their worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.***

*Help, save, comfort and defend us gracious Lord. **Amen.***

Prayer of the Day

*Almighty God, by grace alone you call us and accept us in your service. Strengthen us by your Spirit, and make us worthy of your call, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.***

Hymn: "How Great Thou Art" #308

1. O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
consider all the works thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
thy pow'r throughout the universe displayed.
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee,
how great thou art! How great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee,
how great thou art! How great thou art!
2. When through the woods and forest glades I wander
I hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze;
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee,
how great thou art! How great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee,
how great thou art! How great thou art!
3. But when I think that God, his Son not sparing,
sent him to die, I scarce can take it in,
that on the cross my burden gladly bearing
he bled and died to take away my sin;
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee,
how great thou art! How great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee,
how great thou art! How great thou art!
4. When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation,
and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration
and there proclaim, "My God, how great thou art!"
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee,
how great thou art! How great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee,
how great thou art! How great thou art!

*Text: Carl G. Boberg, Music: Swedish folk tune, adapt. Stuart K Hine. © 1981 Manna Music Inc.
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Word

Reading: Jonah 3:1-5, 10

The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Psalm 62:5-12

For God alone I wait in silence; **truly my hope is in God.**

God alone is my rock and my salvation, **my stronghold, so that I shall never be shaken.**

In God is my deliverance and my honor; **God is my strong rock and my refuge.**

Put your trust in God always, O people, **pour out your hearts before the one who is our refuge.**

Those of high degree are but a fleeting breath; those of low estate cannot be trusted. **Placed on the scales together they weigh even less than a breath.**

Put no trust in extortion; in robbery take no empty pride; **though wealth increase, set not your heart upon it.**

God has spoken once, twice have I heard it, **that power belongs to God.**

Steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord, **for you repay all according to their deeds.**

Reading: 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

Brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

Gospel Acclamation Alleluia, Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia. Alleluia.

Gospel: Mark 1:14-20 (*response after announcement of Gospel: **Glory to you, O Lord***)

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. (*response after reading of Gospel: **Praise to you, O Christ***)

Message

Hymn: "Beautiful Savior" #838

1. Beautiful Savior, King of creation,
Son of God and Son of Man!
Truly I'd love thee, truly I'd serve thee,
light of my soul, my joy, my crown.
2. Fair are the meadows, fair are the woodlands,
robed in flow'rs of blooming spring,
Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer,
he makes our sorrowing spirit sing.
4. Beautiful Savior, Lord of the nations,
Son of God and Son of Man!
Glory and honor, praise, adoration,
now and forevermore be thine!

Music: Silesian folk tune. Text: Munster, 1677. Joseph A. Seiss. Public Domain

Apostles' Creed

**I believe in God, the Father almighty
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers

Sharing the Peace

Offering/Offertory “Create in Me a Clean Heart”

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with your free spirit.

Music: J.A. Freylinghausen. Public Domain.

Words of Institution

Lord’s Prayer

Communion & Post Communion Blessing

Sending

Hymn: “Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound” #779

1. Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
was blind, but now I see.
2. ‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!
3. Through many dangers, toils, and snares
I have already come;
‘tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.
4. The Lord has promised good to me;
his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.
5. When we’ve been there ten thousand years,
bright shining as the sun,
we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise
than when we’d first begun.

Text: John Newton. Music: W. Walker. Public Domain.

Blessing & Dismissal

Remember in your prayers

Sandy Grove’s brother, Mick Rose, those affected by COVID-19, those working in our hospitals and care centers, those who serve in the military, families of victims of war, terrorism and violence, those in our nursing homes and those who are homebound. Continue to pray for the overseas missionary we support, Pastor Alex LaChappelle serving as a pastor of Nairobi International Lutheran in Kenya, Africa. Note: you may honor a loved one and support Pastor LaChappelle in Kenya. Contact the church office for information.

I've often complained that every time I've been asked to give a sermon, the gospel lesson always seems to be about money, and I often wish that it would be about something else. Well, today's lesson is not about money, it is about something else. But it was a real challenge for me to prepare the message for today. So I think the lesson I learned is "Be careful what you pray for because you just might get it!"

When I first read the various scriptures for today, my initial reaction was "what's going on here? They all seem to be totally unrelated. What's the value of reading 4 different Bible lessons that talk about 4 different topics?" Then I got side tracked a bit, and began to wonder how did the church chose these particular verses for today? If the hymnals were back in the pews, I would ask you to open them to the very front. The first thing you'll find are about 70 pages of something called the Lectionary. The word "Lectionary" simply means "a list". It's a list of Bible scriptures that are to be read on a given Sunday.

Our Sunday services are organized around a church calendar relating to various aspects of God and Christ. Just like our secular world has a calendar that tells us when Memorial Day is or when we celebrate the life and death of Martin Luther King, our church also has a calendar that tells us what day Easter falls on, or when we celebrate the baptism of Christ (which by the way was last Sunday). And this make sense doesn't it? If we didn't have a standard calendar, Minnesota might celebrate Memorial Day on the last Monday in May, and South Dakota might celebrate it on June 23rd. So both our secular calendars and the church calendars were developed to standardize events across geographical areas and across different religions.

This concept of a Lectionary started about 1500 years ago as a way to help promote the growth of the early Christian church. By listing which Bible verses were to be used for each Sunday service, a larger portion of the Bible would be presented to the people. You can imagine that if each Church leader preached only from his /her favorite Bible verse, our knowledge of the Bible would be rather limited. If I had the privilege of doing that, I might pick only Matthew 13:1-23, where Jesus tells about planting seeds in good soil, because that's my professional background. And while that is an important lesson, there are many other good lessons that would never get discussed.

If the Lectionary specified a different Bible verse for each Sunday in a year, people would be exposed to only about 50 stories or messages of what God is all about. So the Lectionary was expanded to list Bible verses for 3 years' worth of Sundays. Then after the 3rd year, the cycle is repeated again. So if you come back to First Lutheran in 3 years on the 2nd Sunday after Epiphany, you'll likely hear the same bible verses as we read today. Now since God's works and possibilities are unlimited, the Lectionary was expanded even more by including 4 parts. The Old Testament reading, a Psalm, a New testament reading and finally a reading from the one of the Gospels.

Now, I apologize for boring you with this oversimplification of how scriptures are chosen for a given Sunday, but it helped me find a way to sort of tie all 4 Biblical scriptures for today into the central message. So let's get started with the Gospel. Last week, we learned of the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan by John the Baptist.

Today's Gospel starts by telling us that the day after Jesus was baptized, Andrew and another Disciple whose name we don't know, started to follow Jesus as He walked by. Jesus saw He was being followed, so like you or I would have done, He asked them, "What do you want?" It was getting late in the day, night time was fast approaching, and they simply said "Where are you staying tonight?" He didn't say where he was going to spend the night, it could have been close by in a friend's house, or maybe even on the ground in a neighboring village. We don't know. All he said was, "Come on, you'll see." Doesn't that just pique your curiosity and make you want to follow Jesus, just to see where he was going to spend the night?

So Andrew and the other disciple followed Jesus and stayed with him that night. We aren't told where this was, only that the disciples simply followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did the next morning was to find his brother, Simon, and bring him to Jesus. Jesus gave Simon the new name of Peter, and now we have 3 disciples following Jesus. The next day as Jesus was traveling to Galilee, he came across a man by the name of Philip, and simply said to him "Follow me". Didn't say why or where to, or for how long, just simply "Follow me." Philip did, and became the 4th disciple. And then Philip went to a person (probably a friend) named Nathanael and told him they had found the person who Moses wrote about, and this person was Jesus of Nazareth. Nathanael replied "Nazareth! Can anything good come from that town?" Why would Nathanael make such a sarcastic remark? Nazareth was a city on the border next to a country occupied by Gentiles. The Jewish people were very much against the Gentiles, and considered them to be unclean. Thus, anyone who lived close to that country was also automatically considered to be unclean.

Now, how would you react if you wanted your friend to come with you to meet someone, and your friend resisted because he had already made up his mind about that person without even knowing anything about him. Wouldn't you try to convince your friend and say "Hey, take it easy, this guy is OK; don't pre-judge him just because he's from a town you don't like." I know that's what I would do. But that's not the approach Philip took. Instead he simply said, "Come on, come and see." It's like telling a friend about a brand new restaurant that you just went to. "Boy, the food was good, it was priced reasonably, the service was great, Man you just have to go there and see for yourself!" Or maybe you just won a blue ribbon at the County fair for having the tallest stalk of corn in Stevens County, and you enthusiastically invite your friends "Hey, you just have to come and see it, it's awesome".

When you react that way, it means you are sharing the joy you gained from winning that blue ribbon, or discovering that great restaurant. And that's how Philip reacted to Nathanael's sarcasm. He just wanted to share his joy in following Jesus "Come, come and see." Nathanael is surprised when it becomes obvious that Jesus already knows how Nathanael is going to respond to that invitation. In the book of Micah, 4:4 it reads, "How do you know me" said Nathanael. Jesus answered "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathanael was under the fig tree, literally and spiritually.

In Palestine the fig tree stood for peace, security, rest, and worship. Very often a man would go seek solitude and worship under a fig tree. Micah 4: 4 tells us, "Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken." Many of us are like Nathanael today, many of us need our very own fig tree to sit under and rest—because we are exhausted with life and the things that our country is going through. It makes us want to find a fig tree somewhere, and just sit there in order to be by ourselves and contemplate on what life is all about. Phillip seemed to know just what his friend Nathanael needed—and so he said, "Come and see"! And as simple as that, Nathanael became the 5th disciple.

Do you see a pattern developing here? Five disciples followed Jesus, not because of a long discussion or debate about what it would mean to follow Jesus, but rather just the simple act of one person inviting another person to "Come and see. Experience the joy of seeing and knowing Jesus." And that's what it's like when we share the joy of inviting someone to our church. We belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This is who we are. This is what we do. We evangelize.

But whoa, wait a minute. I don't recall ever inviting someone to church. And I certainly haven't walked into a bar and invited someone to simply come and follow me. Have you? Evangelical Lutheran Church? Who are we kidding? OK, so I laid some good old fashioned Lutheran guilt on you, and on myself. But let's look at it in a different way. Why are you here sitting here in church? For those of you watching at home, why didn't you stay in bed rather than getting up to watch the service on your computer screen?

I would venture to guess it's because someone invited you to participate in this service. Maybe you don't realize it, but when your parents or friends or spouse brought you along to church, no matter at what age that might have been, weren't they in a real sense inviting you to share in something they felt was important, some measure of inner peace and joy they have experienced even if it wasn't outwardly expressed? They were inviting you to come, Come and see. And here you are.

I can honestly say that I'm here in this place today because of an invitation from someone many years ago. My parents were members of a Methodist church in Iowa. When they moved to Minnesota they settled smack dab in the middle of a Scandinavian community south west of Benson. My Dad didn't like the Minister of the local Lutheran church, so I was not brought up with any religious education until I got to high school. Then thanks to an invitation from my best friend's mother, and from my brother's wife, I was invited to be baptized and confirmed into the Lutheran religion when I was a junior in high school. I'm not sure I should call this an invitation, because both of these two women were died in the wool Norwegian Lutherans, and I had no alternative other than to surrender to their invitation. But seriously, they had an inner joy that compelled me to Come and see.

So how do the other scripture readings for today support our Gospel lesson? The Old Testament lesson in the 3rd chapter of First Samuel relates the story of Samuel when he was a young boy living with Eli who was a high priest. Samuel was a servant to Eli, and one night when Samuel heard his name being called, he thought it was Eli calling in the night. So he got up, ran to Eli and said "here I am." This happened 3 times. The 4th time it happened, Samuel realized it was the Lord calling his name, and Samuel answered "Speak, for your servant is listening". This was an invitation from God, and Samuel accepted that invitation and went on to become a major prophet.

We too must listen when the Lord calls our name and issues an invitation to serve Him in whatever capacity we can. Even though you and I are ordinary people, we can do extraordinary things. We are capable of being "Come and see" servants. The Psalm for today, Psalm 139, recognizes the fact that we are created by God, that He knows our every thought, and no matter how hard we try, we can not hide from his invitation to be "Come and see" people. The 6th chapter of 1st Corinthians seems out of place and not related to the Gospel lesson, because the focus is on sexual immorality. But the beginning verse is very appropriate. It reads "All things are lawful for me, but not everything is beneficial."

Another way to state this is "Just because something is legal doesn't make it right." A glass of red wine may be lawful, and may even be healthy for you. But over consumption is not beneficial. Material wealth may be lawful, but ignoring people who are poor and hungry is not beneficial. Freedom of speech is lawful, but spewing hate-filled words against your neighbor is not beneficial. Whether we realize it or not, our presence here today is seen by our neighbors, our friends, our colleagues at work, and our fellow students in school as a witness to the saving grace of Christ. We probably won't get people to follow Jesus by fancy words or persuasive arguments. But they will follow Christ if they can see in us our inner peace and joy of being in church. They will consider that as an invitation to come, just as Jesus said to his disciples "Come and see."

Come on, come and see what Christ has to offer. Amen.