

First Lutheran Church, Morris MN

Order of Worship for Sunday, February 28, 2021: Second Sunday in Lent

The second covenant in this year's Lenten readings is the one made with Abraham and Sarah: God's promise to make them the ancestors of many, with whom God will remain in everlasting covenant. Paul says this promise comes to all who share Abraham's faith in the God who brings life into being where there is no life. We receive this baptismal promise of resurrection life in faith. Sarah and Abraham receive new names as a sign of the covenant, and we too get new identities in baptism, as we put on Christ.

Gathering

Welcoming & Announcements

Confession & Forgiveness

Blessed be the Holy Trinity, + one God, the keeper of the covenant, the source of steadfast love, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

*God hears us when we cry, and draws us close in Jesus Christ. Let us return to the one who is full of compassion. (silence is kept for reflection) Fountain of living water, **pour out your mercy over us. Our sin is heavy, and we long to be free. Rebuild what we have ruined and mend what we have torn. Wash us in your cleansing flood. Make us alive in the Spirit to follow in the way of Jesus, as healers and restorers of the world you so love. Amen.***

Beloved, God's word never fails. The promise rests on grace: by the saving love of Jesus Christ, the wisdom and power of God, your sins are + forgiven, and God remembers them no more. Journey in the way of Jesus. 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

O God, by the passion of your blessed Son you made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life. Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn: "Lift High the Cross" #660

Refrain:

**Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim
till all the world adore his sacred name.**

1. Come, Christians, follow where our captain trod,
our king victorious, Christ, the Son of God. **Refrain**
2. All newborn servants of the Crucified
bear on their brow the seal of him who died. **Refrain**
3. O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree,
as thou hast promised, draw us all to thee. **Refrain**
4. So shall our song of triumph ever be:
praise to the Crucified for victory! **Refrain**

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Word

Reading: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. ² And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." ³ Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, ⁴ "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. ¹⁵ God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶ I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

Psalm 22:23-31

You who fear the Lord; give praise! All you of Jacob's line, give glory, **stand in awe of the Lord, all you offspring of Israel.**

For the Lord does not despise nor abhor the poor in poverty; neither is the Lord's face hidden from them; **but when they cry out, the Lord hears them.**

From you comes my praise in the great assembly; **I will perform my vows in the sight of those who fear the Lord.**

The poor shall eat and be satisfied, **let those who seek the Lord give praise! May your hearts live forever!**

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; **all the families of nations shall bow before God.**

For dominion belongs to the Lord, **who rules over the nations.**

Indeed, all who sleep in the earth shall bow down in worship; **all who go down to the dust, through they be dead, shall kneel before the Lord.**

Their descendants shall serve the Lord, **whom they shall proclaim to generations to come.**

They shall proclaim God's deliverance to a people yet unborn, **saying to them, "The Lord has acted!"**

Reading: Romans 4:13-25

¹³ For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. ¹⁶ For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, ¹⁷ as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”) —in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So numerous shall your descendants be.” ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. ²⁰ No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² Therefore his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” ²³ Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Gospel Acclamation Return to the Lord, your God, return to the Lord, you God, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

Gospel: Mark 8:31-38 (*response after announcement of Gospel: **Glory to you, O Lord***)

³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” ³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

*(response after reading of Gospel: **Praise to you, O Christ**)*

Message

Hymn: “O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee” #818

1. O Master, let me walk with you
in lowly paths of service true;
tell me your secret; help me bear
the strain of toil, the fret of care.
2. Help me the slow of heart to move
by some clear, winning word of love;
teach me the wayward feet to stay,
and guide them in the homeward way.
3. Teach me your patience; share with me
a closer, dearer company,
in work that keeps faith sweet and strong,
in trust that triumphs over wrong.
4. In hope that sends a shining ray
far down the future’s broad’ning way,
in peace that only you can give;
with you, O Master, let me live.

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.**

Offering/Offertory 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.

Prayers & Lord's Prayer

Sharing the Peace *Please share a sign of peace with one another*

Sending

Hymn: "Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus" #802

1. Let us ever walk with Jesus,
follow his example pure,
through a world that would deceive us
and to sin our spirits lure.
Onward in his footsteps treading,
trav'lers here, our home above,
full of faith and hope and love,
let us do our Savior's bidding.
Faithful Lord, with me abide;
I shall follow where you guide.
2. Let us suffer here with Jesus,
and with patience bear our cross.
Joy will follow all our sadness;
where he is there is no loss.
Though today we sow no laughter,
we shall reap celestial joy;
all discomforts that annoy
shall give way to mirth hereafter.
Jesus, here I share your woe;
help me there your joy to know.
3. Let us gladly die with Jesus.
Since by death he conquered death,
he will free us from destruction,
give to us immortal breath.
Let us mortify all passion
that would lead us into sin;
and the grave that shuts us in
shall but prove the gate of heaven.
Jesus, here with you I die,
there to live with you on high.
4. Let us also live with Jesus.
He has risen from the dead
that to life we may awaken.
Jesus, you are now our head,
we are your own living members;
where you live, there we shall be
in your presence constantly,
living there with you forever.
Jesus, let me faithful be;
life eternal grant to me.

Benediction

Go in peace, serve the Lord! Thanks be to God!

Remember in your prayers

Judy & Dick Bluth, Eric Brekke, 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.

Sermon for Sunday, February 21, 2021 Pastor Dan Belgum

Life after Baptism: It's a Life Full of Testing

Thesis: Testing comes to us continually in life. Jesus himself was “driven by the Spirit” into the wilderness to be tested and tempted by Satan. He overcame! Will we? Today, many of us head to “wilderness” areas to get away from it all and to commune with nature. Many go to experience solitude, and beauty, and-or to have a break from 24/7 news and technology. To be renewed and refreshed. Unlike such a “wilderness experience,” the wilderness experience of Jesus was quite different. Mark tells us that immediately after his baptism, Jesus was “driven by the spirit” into the wilderness. However, this is not just communing with nature: Jesus is tempted by Satan. Jesus’ wilderness journey involved dangers and perils. He was alone. He faced wild beasts – snakes, lions, and other fearsome threats. He was vulnerable and exposed and he faced Satan and temptations. In Mark’s telling, he doesn’t tell us what temptations he faced. We know he overcame. “And he was with the wild animals” (was this an image of the new creation when lion and lamb will lie down together? Or, were the wild animals dangerous to him? We don’t know). Further: Mark reports that Jesus was assisted by angels, reminiscent of Elijah! So, he wasn’t so alone as we may think.

What was the Spirit’s design in the Spirit driving him into the wilderness to be tested? Did Jesus need to be tested to be prepared for and to fulfill all that he would have to face in the days to come? It seems like a preparation for further ministry. Life for us, after our Baptism is a life full of testing. Testing and temptation comes to us continually. We may be tempted by any number of things: like cheating on a test; giving in to stereotypes of others; dishonest business deals; an affair; or by ignoring our own conscience. We may be tempted to lash out in anger at someone. The list is endless!

Recent news highlights testings that people have faced: Imagine you’re the parent of an eight-year old child. A boy or a girl. Young, full of fun, learning about his or her surroundings. Playing ball, birthday parties.... This week, an eight-year-old boy migrating up through Mexico and drowned attempting to cross the Rio Grande, with his family, into the U.S. Earlier in the week, a woman drowned in the same area, trying to cross the perilous river. Honduras and Guatemala had a devastating hurricanes in November, leaving millions without crops or adequate housing. For them, an extreme test for survival, and no doubt, that is why so many are seeking a life in the United States. Talk about a testing of faith and hope in the wilderness! And grief for those families.

A man in Texas described this week’s Polar Vortex and what it has led to for his family, including losing power, no heat or running water, pipes burst in the attic; sheet rock collapsing, low overnight temps in the teens; taking their kids to their cousins where they hope to have heat. He said, I quote: “These events are a good reminder of just how ‘thin the line is’ between society and what we all take for granted . All it takes is one deep freeze to show us Mother Nature rules the roost, and we are all just along for the ride.” A wilderness testing. Aren’t you glad we’re ready for such weather here?.

A mother I know describes that in this pandemic, I quote: “when you have school children, you don’t know what the next week will hold. It’s an enormous amount of chaos.” She related that she keeps five different spread sheets to account for their two kids’ schedules, her work, and their families’ schedule! And, I know many parents who have similar stories. This pandemic has tested all of us, in ways we would have not imagined. It has been brutal. A wilderness of testing of faith, hope and love.

The farmer, in good faith, prepares his fields for planting, and finally, on a fine spring day begins planting his fields. The crops of soy, and wheat and corn come up and grow well, and in mid-July those crops look good, until a hail storm comes and takes out half the crop. A time of testing one’s faith and mettle, and perhaps the temptation to leave farming and get a job in the town.

A friend’s sister ended up on a ventilator in an induced coma for weeks, due to COVID-19. Thanks be, she

survived, barely. The family, and my friend, didn't think she would make it. For the whole family, it was a "test of faith and life in the wilderness."

In the book *Hillbilly Elegy*, since made into a dramatic movie, J.D. Vance tells the story of moving from Jackson Kentucky, to the rust belt city of Middletown, Ohio; growing up in a family, where poverty was close at hand, with a mother who loved him, and whom he loved, but who had her own demons; and while she loved him, she also abused drugs and also abused him, and had more men in her life than there are cereals in the cereal aisle. His wild-eyed Grandmother "May-mah" spoke in expletives, raised him firmly, and with structure; when he wasn't living with his mother. By sheer will-power, and his grandma's presence and guiding, and the grace of God, he went from nearly flunking out of high school, to becoming a top student.

At one point, as a young high schooler, Vance joined a friend group that became delinquent and abused substances. Then, his grandmother "put the screws to him" and made him cut loose from those friends and to start to focus on his school work. Against the odds, He ended up graduating college and later from Yale Law School. Meanwhile, the very evening he was invited to a "black tie" dinner meeting with a potential employer, he received word from his sister: his mom had overdosed, but was alive. Today his mother is sober, and works as a bookkeeper, and he is married with children. They made it through, but man, the tests and trials! Life after our baptism is a life of testing, and temptation.

There are wilderness tests and temptations. Some we overcome, some we do not. There are some of the wilderness experiences that seem to scar us, and others that give us character, and push us to grow to trust God. Tests and temptations in the "real world." How can we make the most of them! How can they lead us to become the people God is molding us to become? How might we grow through them to maturity in Christ.

Jesus was "driven by the Spirit" into the wilderness to be tempted/tested by Satan for 40 days. Was he tested or tempted? Both. To be tested means your ability, your knowledge, your skill is challenged. The goal of the tester is not that you fail. It is rather to see what you know, to determine your character, your ability at something..... Students are tested for their knowledge of a subject area. Doctors, lawyers, real estate agents, and others, all have to pass tests to be certified competent to practice. To be tempted, on the other hand, is to try to lead someone to do wrong, to go against their conscience, and to fail... The goal of the temptor is for you to fail.

Of course, we all know that smooth sailing is not our lot, after our Baptism into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. As your pastor, who has baptized many infants, youth and a few adults over the years, I wish I could look you in the eye and tell you: "Look, now that your baptized, and have confirmed your faith in Christ, everything is clear sailing. You'll have none of the problems that other people face." Well, I wish.... Yet, even Jesus faced trials and tests and temptations in his life. It started from the day of his baptism by John, and it ended with him nailed to a cross. The extreme testing.

What makes us think that we won't face challenges? Tests? Temptations? We know we will, because each of us has, or, we will soon enough. COVID-19 Pandemic has been a wild ride in a wilderness with plenty of change, uncertainty, anxiety, stress, and tumult and who hasn't seen their life rather dramatically changed? It's a test of our character, our will, our faith and hope and love! Let's not let it pass without making the most of it!

WW II tested people to the extreme. And one of the most famous of it's people was a teenager: Anne Frank. The teenager, Anne Frank is one of the most discussed and famous victims of the Holocaust. The Jewish teenager journaled her World War II experiences in a diary that later became one of the most widely read books in the world. Hope: Ann Frank lived through tests that were momentous. Of hope she said: "In spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart." From Wikipedia: In 1940, after Germany invaded the Netherlands, Anne and her family couldn't leave the country, so they decided to hide in a warehouse in an attempt to escape the persecution of Jews by the Nazis. For over two years, Anne wrote in her diary with an

awareness that was extremely mature for her age. She detailed her experiences and insights while she and her family were in hiding, living in a constant fear of being arrested. Anne Frank's diary is a record of her understanding of the war, and showcases her incredible storytelling abilities in such horrific circumstances. In 1944, the Franks were found and sent to concentration camps. Anne died before she turned 16, and her father, Otto Frank, was the only family member to survive the Holocaust. After the War, Otto returned to Amsterdam, where he found his daughter's diary and later published it as *The Diary of a Young Girl*.

I don't think of all the misery, she wrote, but of all the beauty that remains. "Parents can only give good advice or put them on the right paths, but the final forming of a person's character lies in their own hands." – Anne Frank. "The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quite alone with the heavens, nature and God." – Anne Frank

Testing and temptation may come from our situation, yet, I agree with Brian Stofregen who writes: "I don't think that most of our 'testings' of our faith come from Satan or demonic beings, but from other people. From whomever it comes, the "Tempter" or "tester" does not have the power to make you or I do something." Yes, 'Satan' can be a person. In Scripture, Satan is simply a force that opposes God. Jesus told Peter, when he tried to stop Jesus from fulfilling his mission: "Get behind me, Satan!" Anyone whose mind is not set on divine things, who seeks to stand in the way of Jesus (or us?) fulfilling GOD's purpose in our lives. Meanwhile, we have a will and choices and further; it's not a problem of knowing good from evil for us. Rather it's a problem of the will. We can often be tempted because we simply don't have the fortitude or will to fight.

There is good news in all this! The Holy Spirit can make good come out of a bad situation (as the Spirit did for J.D. Vance; who has since written: *A Relevant Faith: Searching for a Meaningful American Christianity*). We don't seek to be tested, but the Holy Spirit can use these experiences of testing and temptation for good – to strengthen our faith, create opportunities to witness, and to build our character in Christ. We do not face our trials alone, nor do we face temptation alone. Just as Jesus overcame his own trials and testings he helps us in the face of ours.

When we were Baptized into Christ, we joined him to share in his sufferings, but also to be joined to his Life – which is a power for new life. The Psalmist confesses: "I was pushed hard so that I was falling, but the Lord helped me... The Lord is my strength and my might, he has become my salvation" (Ps. 118) In James, we read: "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. What if we fail the test, or fall to temptation? Then what: Let us hear what Romans 8:3-4 declares: "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

Christ sits at the Right Hand of God and angels, authorities and powers are in submission to him. (1 Peter 3: 2) He is powerful to help us when we face trials and tests. He holds the Keys to the kingdom and how can we make the most of life's trials? How can they lead us to become the people God is molding us to become? How might we grow through these testings and temptations to maturity in Christ? In Him, we shall overcome; because he overcame, we too shall overcome. We shall overcome, someday. Amen.