



St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church
 Wilton, WI
 Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
 January 31, 2021
**Inviting People to
 Journey with Christ's Family
 in Spreading God's Love and Mercy**

In Deuteronomy God promises to raise up a prophet like Moses, who will speak for God; in Psalm 111 God shows the people the power of God's works. For the church these are ways of pointing to the unique authority people sensed in Jesus' actions and words. We encounter that authority in God's word, around which we gather, the word that prevails over any lesser spirit that would claim power over us, freeing us to follow Jesus.

Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies



1 Christ, whose glo - ry fills the skies, Christ, the true and on - ly light,
 2 Dark and cheer-less is the morn un - ac - com - pa - nied by thee;
 3 Vis - it then this soul of mine, pierce the gloom of sin and grief;



Sun of righ-teous-ness, a - rise, tri - umph o'er the shades of night;
 joy-less is the day's re - turn, till thy mer-cy's beams I see.
 fill me, ra - dian - cy di - vine, scat - ter all my un - be - lief;



Day - spring from on high, be near; Day - star, in my heart ap - pear.
 till they in - ward light im - part, glad my eyes, and warm my heart.
 more and more thy - self dis - play, shin - ing to the per - fect day.

Text: Charles Wesley, 1707–1788
 Music: RATISBON, J. G. Werner. *Choralbuch*, 1815

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Compassionate God, you gather the whole universe into your radiant presence and continually reveal your Son as our Savior. Bring wholeness to all that is broken and speak truth to us in our confusion, that all creation will see and know your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
 Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING

Today's reading is part of a longer discourse in Deuteronomy, an updating of the law for the Israelite community as the people wait to enter the promised land. Here Moses assures the people that God will continue to guide them through prophets who will proclaim the divine word.

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

[Moses said:] ¹⁵The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. ¹⁶This is what you requested of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: "If I hear the voice of the LORD my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die." ¹⁷Then the LORD replied to me: "They are right in what they have said. ¹⁸I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. ¹⁹Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. ²⁰But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak—that prophet shall die."

Psalm 111

¹Hallelujah! I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the assembly of the upright, in the congregation.

²Great are your works, O LORD,
pondered by all who delight in them.

³Majesty and splendor mark your deeds,
and your righteousness endures forever.

⁴You cause your wonders to be remembered;
you are gracious and full of compassion.

⁵You give food to those who fear you,
remembering forever your covenant.

⁶You have shown your people the power of your works
in giving them the lands of the nations.

⁷The works of your hands are faithfulness and justice;
all of your precepts are sure.

⁸They stand fast forever and ever,
because they are done in truth and equity.

⁹You sent redemption to your people and commanded
your covenant forever; holy and awesome is your name.

¹⁰The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all who practice this have a good understanding.
God's praise endures forever.

SECOND READING

Paul is concerned about the way some Corinthian Christians use their freedom in Christ as license to engage in non-Christian behavior that sets a damaging example to other, impressionable believers. Christians have a responsibility to each other that their behavior does not cause another to sin.

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

¹Now 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.

HOLY GOSPEL

Forces that would bring death and disease have taken hold of a man, yet they recognize Jesus and know what his power means for them. Jesus commands these forces to leave and people are amazed at his authority

Mark 1:21-28

²¹[Jesus and his disciples] 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.

SERMON

Years ago, I recall a time when I was visiting friends in a small town in Minnesota. They were working on a project, so I offered to get some items they needed from the local hardware store. My friends said to take their son, (whom I will call) Ben, along to help. (Ben was a very nice boy, who was about 10 or 11 years old at the time.) We headed uptown to the hardware store.

After roaming around and finding the items we needed, we went to the checkout. The woman clerk/co-owner said in a strict tone, "Ben, who is this with you? I have never seen her before." (I felt like she was questioning what I had to do in their town. Why was I bringing a child that she knew wasn't my own to her store? I felt like an outsider; as if she was saying, "What do you have to do with him? with us?") Ben said, "This is Cathy, she is a friend from Wisconsin." (Apparently, that wasn't enough of an explanation for her, because she continued to look at me suspiciously.) She said to Ben, "Where are your parents?" (Perhaps in her mind, a boy of 10 or 11 should be with his parents, not with an outsider.) Ben said something like, "They're at home working on the basement." She continued to look at me suspiciously, as if to say, "What do you have to do with him?" "What do you have to do with us?"

As we consider our gospel passage for today, we hear about Jesus' actions in a village other than his own. He is with the disciples in Capernaum. He has not only entered the synagogue, but he is teaching there. Most of the people seem to accept that he is an outsider. But, they are surprised by his ability to teach, "[F]or he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (vs. 22)

This statement from our gospel passage requires some explanation. What was Jesus doing in his teaching that was different than the scribes? What was he doing that justified his being there? Per Osvaldo Vena, "The main activity of scribes was teaching. It consisted of an exposition of the Law or the Prophets with relevant implications for the present. Jesus is showing more authority than them. As Mark describes it, he is not presenting a new teaching but is giving an interpretation that proved to be more relevant"

As we know, Jesus' authority is far beyond the authority of any human being. Yet, the scribes' teaching is being compared to Jesus' teaching in this passage. The scribes' focus on "the Law or the Prophets with relevant implications for the present," is improved upon by Jesus. Because, Jesus adds something different and highly relevant to his teaching.

In Lutheran preaching, each sermon is to include both law and gospel. The law provides the rules, such as the Ten Commandments, that we are to follow, and/or it denounces sinfulness. We hear about our sins, and the sins of others in the law proclaimed in the Bible and in preaching.

The gospel, tells us the good news of God! It tells us about Jesus' coming to earth for our sake. It tells of his death and resurrection. It tells of his mercy, forgiveness of sins, grace, peace, and never-ending love for us! Jesus, on that day in Capernaum, was most likely proclaiming the law, and also proclaiming the good news to them!

The man who is possessed says, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?" (vs. 24) This statement also requires explanation. If Jesus can teach with such authority by speaking relevantly and directly to the people, why is there any question about Jesus' concern for him [the speaker]/them? Is it the demon speaking through the man? Is it because the demon was able to possess the man, and God did not stop it from happening? Why is Jesus' presence and concern for him/them challenged through the man's question?

Jesus' concern goes beyond his ability to provide relevant information through his teaching. His concern

comes from his divine mission to rescue sinners! His exorcism of the demon, calling it out of the man, demonstrates Jesus' power over all evil! Jesus' concern, expressed through his proclamation of the good news, demonstrates his compassion, mercy, grace and love for the man, and for all of them.

"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?" If presented with this question, how would we respond? By questioning Jesus' authority, questioning his intentions, treating him like an outsider, or by saying, "Everything, everything." For Jesus has everything to do with us! Jesus, the incarnate son of God has authority as a member of the one, Triune God. Jesus came to earth for us! He did everything, everything for human beings during his time on earth. Jesus came to earth for the sake of all people; past, present, and future. He came for our sake, and for the sake of all human beings. Even Jesus' death on the cross was to atone for the sins of all humanity! Jesus died and rose again, so that all who believe in him would know of his forgiveness of sins, mercy, grace and love, and receive new life in him.

"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?" There are some persons who have heard Jesus' message, yet they have turned away from God. Some have turned away because they do not feel that the Christian message is relevant. They question God. They see the people of the church at times divided, splintered, focusing on their own goals rather than the kingdom's goals. They see those who profess to be Christians acting in unchristian ways. So they too may ask, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?"

Perhaps those who ask are questioning, because they desperately want to believe! They desperately want life to be better, to have God perform a miracle, to rid the world of pain, suffering, grief, and so many other things. They let evil things within the world harden their hearts. Yes, the person in the scripture passage asking this question is possessed by a demon. But, there are other things that can possess people too, like greed, the desire for personal wealth and power, and even the desire to place one's own authority above God's authority.

But, Jesus wants to have a relationship with us, each and every one of us! The person who was possessed in the pericope today needed cleansing of his demon. Those who harden their hearts need cleansing too, so that they will open their eyes, ears, hearts, and minds to hear God's message.

Perhaps we too need new ears to hear God's word. Perhaps we too need new eyes to see the work of Christ and Christians doing God's will around us. Perhaps we too need new hands and feet for carrying out God's service in this world. When our hearts are filled with the joy of knowing Jesus' gospel message, and the work of the Holy Spirit, we share this good news with others! Perhaps we share a story of what God has done in our life. Perhaps we share a favorite scripture passage. Perhaps we share God with them in some other way. However we share the good news, it too can proclaim a message of the relevance, power, and authority of Jesus' teaching in the world today.

Everything that we have, everything that we "possess," including our families, our jobs, our very lives; everything there is comes from God. God who is present with us each and every day. God who desires to have a relationship with us now and forever. God who loves us, even when we fall short of God's desires for us. God who will not leave us or forsake us. All authority, honor, glory and praise be to God, now and forever.

"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? To this we respond, "Everything, everything. God you are our everything." Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Guided by Christ made known to the nations, let us offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all people in need.

For all who share the gospel and proclaim freedom in Christ throughout the world: prophets, teachers, pastors, deacons, and lay leaders; for the church and its ministries, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

For all God's works in creation: plants and animals, water and soil, forests and farms; and for those tasked with protecting our natural resources and all that exists, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

For government and leaders: cities and nations, rescue professionals and legal aid attorneys, elected officials and grassroots organizers; for all responsible for the well-being of civil society, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

For those who suffer in mind, body, or spirit: those who are sick and hospitalized, those living with HIV/AIDS and other chronic conditions, those with the Coronavirus, those struggling with mental illness, those who are hungry or homeless, and all in any need, especially Katie, Judy, Darlene, Paul, Pam, Alrita, Frank, Jeff, Tessa, Lisa, Bud, Gary, Jim, Jerry, Patty, Harvey, and those we name aloud and in our hearts. For caregivers, hospice workers, and home health aides, nurses, doctors, and other medical professionals, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

For the concerns of this congregation: those who are separated from loved ones, those who live along, those who are missing their fellow congregation members, friends and neighbors; for the people of God worshipping in their homes and for other needs in our community, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

For the covenant God made with us in the waters of baptism, in thanksgiving for the baptized who have died in the Lord, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

In thanksgiving for the saints who have gone before us, that their lives give us a vision of the gospel in action, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

Merciful God, hear the prayers of your people, spoken or silent, for the sake of the one who dwells among us, your Son, Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

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 forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen

O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright!



1 O Morn - ing Star, how fair and bright! You shine with
 2 Come, pre - cious dia - mond, light di - vine, and deep with -
 3 Lord, when you look on us in love, at once there
 4 Al - might - y Fa - ther, in your Son you loved us,



God's own truth and light, a - glow with grace and mer - cy!
 in our hearts now shine; there light a flame un - dy - ing!
 falls from God a - bove a ray of pur - est plea - sure.
 when not yet be - gun was this old earth's foun - da - tion!



Of Ja - cob's line, King Da - vid's son, our Lord and Sav - ior,
 In your one bod - y let us be as liv - ing branch - es
 Your word and Spir - it, flesh and blood re - fresh our souls with
 Your Son has ran - somed us in love to live in him here



you have won our hearts to serve you on - ly! Low - ly,
 of a tree, your life our lives sup - ply - ing. Now, though
 heav'n - ly food. You are our dear - est trea - sure! Let your
 and a - bove: this is your great sal - va - tion. Al - le -



ho - ly! Great and glo - rious, all vic - to - rious, rich
 dai - ly earth's deep sad - ness may per - plex us and
 mer - cy warm and cheer us! Oh, draw near us! For
 lu - ia! Christ the liv - ing, to us giv - ing life



in bless - ing! Rule and might o'er all pos - sess - ing!
 dis - tress us, yet with heav'n - ly joy you bless us.
 you teach us God's own love through you has reached us.
 for - ev - er, keeps us yours and fails us nev - er!

5 Oh, let the harps break forth in sound!
 Our joy be all with music crowned,
 our voices gaily blending!
 For Christ goes with us all the way—
 today, tomorrow, ev'ry day!
 His love is never ending!
 Sing out! Ring out!
 Jubilation!
 Exultation!
 Tell the story!
 Praise to Christ, who reigns in glory!

6 What joy to know, when life is past,
 the Lord we love is first and last,
 the end and the beginning!
 He will one day, oh, glorious grace,
 transport us to that happy place
 beyond all tears and sinning!
 Amen! Amen!
 Come, Lord Jesus!
 Crown of gladness!
 We are yearning
 for the day of your returning.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

My letter for today, provides information about the February 2021 worship services. Included are some scripture passages that you and your family members can read to prepare for the Sunday worship services. Also included is the gospel passage for Ash Wednesday (February 17).

The gospel passage for next Sunday, February 7, is Mark 1:29-39. You may also like to read the Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 40:21-31. Children with Story Bibles can read "Please Remember! Never Forget," which reminds us that "...God's heart is very big. God loves us very much." It is found on pages 178-179.

The gospel passage for Sunday, February 14, is Mark 9:2-9. Today is "Transfiguration of Our Lord" Sunday. You may also like to read the Old Testament scripture passage from 2 Kings 2:1-12, which tells about the prophets Elijah and Elisha. Children with Story Bibles can read "I Will Not Leave You," which talks about the prophets, a chariot, and horses made of fire! It is found on pages 138-139.

The gospel passage for Wednesday, February 17, is Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21. Today is Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of Lent. The Rev. Chris Boerger, Interim Bishop of the La Crosse Area Synod, will be proving a sermon for us to watch online or read on this special day.

The gospel passage for Sunday, February 21, is Mark 1:9-15. Today is the first Sunday in Lent. The Old Testament passage is Genesis 9:8-17. Children with Story Bibles can read about the Old Testament passage in, "How Close is God?" The story is found on pages 174-175.

The gospel passage for Sunday, February 28, is Mark 8:31-38. The Old Testament passage is Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16. Children with Story Bibles can read about Abram (Abraham) and Sarai (Sarah) in, "Abram and Sarai Find a New Home." It is found on pages 26-27.

I hope these passages will encourage you in your Bible reading, quiet times, and understanding of God's word.

Peace,

Pastor Cathy