



St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Wilton, WI
Second Sunday after Epiphany
February 28, 2021
**Inviting People to
Journey with Christ's Family
in Spreading God's Love and Mercy**

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 was 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.

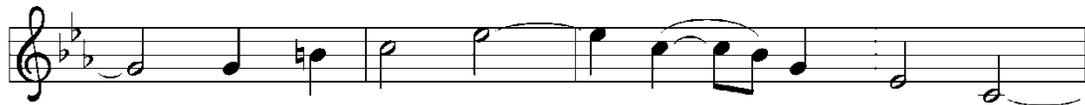
I Want Jesus to Walk with Me



1 I want Je - sus to walk with me;
2 In my tri - als, Lord, walk with me;
3 When I'm in trou - ble, Lord, walk with me;



I want Je - sus to walk with me;
in my tri - als, Lord, walk with me;
when I'm in trou - ble, Lord, walk with me;



all a - long my pil - grim jour - ney,
when my heart is al - most break - ing,
when my head is bowed in sor - row,



Lord, I want Je - sus to walk with me.
Lord, I want Je - sus to walk with me.
Lord, I want Je - sus to walk with me.

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.

WORD

FIRST READING

As with Noah, God makes an everlasting covenant with Abraham and Sarah. God promises this old couple that they will be the ancestors of nations, though they have no child together. God will miraculously bring forth new life from Sarah's womb. The name changes emphasize the firmness of God's promise.

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

¹When 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. ²And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." ³Then 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. ⁵No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁶I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. ⁷I 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."

¹⁵God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶I 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."

Psalms 22:23-31

²³You 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.

²⁴For the LORD does not despise nor abhor the poor in their poverty; neither is the LORD's face hidden from them; but when they cry out, the LORD hears them.

²⁵From you comes my praise in the great assembly;

I will perform my vows in the sight of those who fear the LORD.

²⁶The poor shall eat and be satisfied,

Let those who seek the LORD give praise! May your hearts live forever!

²⁷All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD;
all the families of nations shall bow before God.

²⁸For dominion belongs to the LORD,
who rules over the nations.

²⁹Indeed, all who sleep in the earth shall bow down in worship;

all who go down to the dust, though they be dead, shall kneel before the LORD.

³⁰Their descendants shall serve the LORD,
whom they shall proclaim to generations to come.

³¹They shall proclaim God's deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying to them, "The LORD has acted!"

SECOND READING

Paul presents Abraham as the example for how a person comes into a right relationship with God not through works of the law but through faith. Though Abraham and Sarah were far too old for bearing children, Abraham trusted that God would accomplish what God had promised to accomplish.

Romans 4:13-25

¹³The 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. ¹⁴If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

¹⁶For 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, ¹⁷as 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. ¹⁸Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be." ¹⁹He 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. ²⁰No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²²Therefore his faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness." ²³Now the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone, ²⁴but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

HOLY GOSPEL

After Peter confesses his belief that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus tells his disciples for the first time what is to come. Peter's response indicates that he does not yet understand the way of the cross that Jesus will travel.

Gospel: Mark 8:31-38

³¹[Jesus] 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. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But 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."

³⁴He 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. ³⁵For 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. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those 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."

SERMON

What is valuable? What is needed? These are two questions that our gospel passage begs us to consider as we reflect on its message and attempt to answer these questions.

What is valuable, typically relates to what we as human beings consider most important. Is it money? Is it prestige? Is it one's reputation? Is it all of these things, or is it something entirely different?

What is needed, depends on the context. What may be needed on one occasion may be entirely different from what is needed on another occasion. What is needed may evolve from the loss of a job, loss of money, sickness or loss of a family member, concerns revolving around the Coronavirus pandemic, or any number of things. Therefore we ask, "What is needed for this person/family at this particular time?"

I recall many years ago, after the death of a family member, an old friend of my mother's came to our house. She read about the death in the newspaper, and she called my mother to ask if she could help. I was 21 years old at the time, yet I had never met her. She lived on the other side of town, and our paths didn't cross. She and my mother had been in an organization perhaps 25-years previously. To my knowledge, they had only seen each other in passing since that time. She was not from our church (although I learned she was a church-goer), or in any current organizations to which my mother belonged. Her coming to help us seemed to me to be completely "out of the blue."

When I arrived home, my mother introduced us. I noticed that she immediately began to help with whatever was needed. She did the laundry, made sure we were eating, and helped my mother with other things. I wondered--why did she decide to come to help us? She didn't have to come. She hasn't been in contact with my mother for years, and they weren't really close friends even when they were in the same organization. What encouraged her to call and offer her help now?

I do not know the answers to these questions, except that I believe she was being a Christian disciple. She wasn't doing things that were important for her own self esteem, but rather, what we needed! There wasn't any special pride, prestige or reward that she would experience or receive for coming to assist our family. She was simply being Jesus' servant, helping us in any way that was needed during that very challenging time.

After coming over to our house for 3-days, she stopped coming. No doubt, she had done what she needed to do. Perhaps she contacted my mother again to check on her, but I don't think I ever saw her again. She came to our aid, did whatever was needed to help us through that difficult time, and then, she made a quiet exit.

This is an example of being a servant of Jesus. This is an example of taking up one's cross. While some might say--one needs to do something really important in order to take up one's cross! But to me, her humble service pointed to Jesus, as she demonstrated her love for God and neighbor. She did what was important to God. She did what was needed.

As we continue on our journey walking with Jesus during the 40-days of Lent, we take notice of certain elements in our gospel passage for today. Our passage talks of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection in light of discipleship. This is discipleship in which Jesus' followers are called to deny themselves, to walk with God, to take up their cross, and to follow him.

Our gospel passage is the first of three announcements in the gospel of Mark of Jesus' suffering, death,

and resurrection. (See Mark 9:31-32 and 10:32-34). In each of the announcements, Jesus is foreshadowing what is to happen to him. The announcements become more descriptive. The first states that Jesus will suffer, be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and scribes; be killed, and after three days rise again. The second adds that Jesus will be betrayed into human hands. The third states that Jesus will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, condemned to death, and handed over to the Gentiles. Then, Jesus describes in detail how they will persecute him: they will mock him, spit on him, flog him, and kill him. In other words, they will verbally insult him, attempt to shame him, physically beat him, and torture him until death.

In response, we ask--"What is valuable?" In our human ways of thinking, we would expect that being shamed, physically beaten, and tortured until death, would not be considered valuable! The disciples are no doubt of this mindset. They are human beings who were expecting a king, a victor, a triumphant warrior, someone important in their human value system, who would lead Israel through these difficult times. How could Jesus' death be valuable? And yet... it is. The value is not in our earthly standards, but in heavenly standards. Jesus has a mission from God the Father. He has come to do something very important that only the Son of God can do! He has come to die for us, to atone for the sins of all humanity. He has come to rise again, so that we might have forgiveness of sins and new life in him!

What is needed? That question, too, is beyond the disciples' comprehension. Peter's comments to Jesus are like Satan's temptations in the wilderness, because Jesus knows his fate, and he refuses to give in to temptation. He will not give in, as we who are fallible human beings might give in. He must be steadfast, deny himself, walk with God, take up his cross, and do God the Father's will.

Oftentimes, the disciples do not understand what is happening in Jesus' stories and parables. In Mark, they are frequently portrayed as listening without understanding. They question Jesus about the meaning of his parables. They want to understand, but they just don't get it.

So, as our scripture passage continues, Jesus tries to explain what will happen as clearly as possible. He tells the 12 disciples, and the crowd, what it means to be a disciple. He states, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Jesus continues, "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."

Jesus is foreshadowing what is to come. He must give up his human life, he must lose it, he must die. But in dying, he will accomplish a much greater purpose! He will die for the sake of the gospel, and in so doing, set an example for all of his disciples, past, present and future. The message they are to receive is-- in losing one's life for Jesus' sake, and the sake of the gospel, one's life will be saved!

Jesus' message is that the disciples and all disciples to follow, are not to be ashamed of him, or to look at his suffering as a sign of weakness, or his being mocked and spat upon as a sign of shame. We are not to look at

his persecution as an example of a lack of power, because they are none of these things! Jesus is using this story to teach his disciples and us about what is truly **important** and what is truly **needed**. Jesus is encouraging the disciples and us to do as he is doing, by **denying oneself, walking with God, taking up one's cross, and following him**. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need.

Your gift of grace is for all people. Give confident faith to all the baptized, that they may follow you wholeheartedly. Give new believers joy in your promises; give hope and courage to those who suffer for their faith. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

All the ends of the earth worship you. From galaxies to microorganisms, preserve your creation. Teach humanity to wonder at your works and to join you in tending to creation's well-being.

Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You rule over the nations. Raise up advocates for peace and justice within and between nations. Give life where hope seems dead; call into existence new realities we cannot even imagine.

Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

In Jesus you joined humanity in suffering and death. Reveal to all the depth of your love shown on the cross. Accompany all who suffer in body, mind, and spirit. Restore all who are sick or grieving especially Katie, Judy, Darlene, Paul, Pam, Alrita, Frank, Jeff, Tessa, Lisa, Bud, Jim, Harvey, the family of Gary, those we name aloud and in our hearts, that Christ our healer transform sickness into health, loneliness into companionship, bereavement into consolation, and suffering into peace. Bring vindication for victims of injustice, exploitation, and oppression.

Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You made Abraham and Sarah the ancestors of a multitude of nations. Bless grandparents, parents, and foster parents, and the children who look to them for care and guidance. Console those who deal with infertility, parents who have entrusted their children to adoption, and children longing to be adopted. Equip ministries and services to families.

Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We await the day of Christ's coming in glory. Lead us by the example of all the saints whom you have called to take up their cross and follow you, that together we may find our lives in you.

Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We entrust ourselves and all our prayers to you, O faithful God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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.

In the Cross of Christ I Glory



1 In the cross of Christ I glo - ry, tow'r - ing
2 When the woes of life o'er - take me, hopes de -
3 When the sun of bliss is beam - ing light and
4 Bane and bless - ing, pain and plea - sure, by the



o'er the wrecks of time. All the light of
ceive, and fears an - noy, nev - er shall the
love up - on my way, from the cross the
cross are sanc - ti - fied; peace is there that



sa - cred sto - ry gath - ers round its head sub - lime.
cross for - sake me; lo, it glows with peace and joy.
ra - diance stream - ing adds more lus - ter to the day.
knows no mea - sure, joys that through all time a - bide.

Text: John Bowring, 1792–1872

Music: RATHBUN, Ithamar Conkey, 1815–1867

2/24/2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Recently, I was looking at the comic strip, Mutts (Patrick McDonnell, *La Crosse Tribune*, Mon. Feb. 22, 2021). Its story for the day, included the characters Earl, the dog, and Sourpuss, the cat. (Note: Sourpuss is very appropriately named! Sourpuss does not like Mondays.)

Here is the story:

Sourpuss--"Foo", "Another rotten Monday for **me**."

Earl--"Instead of **always** thinking of yourself, Sourpuss, you should think of **others**."

Sourpuss--"Ok"

Sourpuss--"Another rotten Monday for me...and **everyone** else."

As my letter of last Sunday mentioned, as the months have gone on, we may be experiencing COVID or Pandemic Fatigue. We may also be expressing similar feelings to those of Sourpuss!

In the comic, we recognize that Earl is trying to encourage Sourpuss to think beyond himself. He is encouraging Sourpuss to think (or do) something that will take him away from self-absorption. While Sourpuss apparently does not understand what Earl is saying, we do! When we move away from focusing on ourselves and our own troubles, our spirits often improve! We see that what is happening to us is also happening to others. We may see that our load, our burden, is not as great as many others in the world. We may recognize that we can help lighten their load, and in so doing, brighten their day and our day, too!

As we walk with Jesus during our Lenten journey, may we not become self-absorbed, but rather, self-aware. In reaching out to others, we may find new joys through our connectedness with others. Thanks be to God.

Peace,

Pastor Cathy