

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
JANUARY 31, 2021

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



PRELUDE *Blessed Jesus, at Your Word* Setting: Jim Vyhanek

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN #904 *Blessed Jesus, at Your Word*

- 1 **Blessèd Jesus, at Your Word**
We are gathered all to hear You.
Let our hearts and souls be stirred
Now to seek and love and fear You,
By Your teachings, sweet and holy,
Drawn from earth to love You solely.

- 2 **All our knowledge, sense, and sight**
Lie in deepest darkness shrouded
Till Your Spirit breaks our night
With the beams of truth unclouded.
You alone to God can win us;
You must work all good within us.

- 3 **Gracious Savior, good and kind,**
Light of Light, from God proceeding,
Open now our heart and mind;
Help us by Your Spirit's pleading.
Hear the cry Your Church now raises;
Hear and bless our prayers and praises.

- 4 **Father, Son, and Spirit, Lord,**
Praise to You and adoration!
Grant that we may trust Your Word,
Confident of our salvation,
While we here below must wander,
Till we sing Your praises yonder.

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

In the name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Brief silence for reflection and self-examination.

Let us then confess our sins to God our Father.

Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ He gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

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.

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly king, almighty God and Father:

We worship You, we give You thanks, we praise You for Your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God:

You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.

You are seated at the right hand of the Father; receive our prayer.

For You alone are the Holy One, You alone are the Lord,

You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,

in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray. Almighty God,

You know we live in the midst of so many dangers that in our frailty we cannot stand upright.

Grant strength and protection to support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



FIRST LESSON Deuteronomy 18:15–20

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen— just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ And the LORD said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.’”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 111

Praise the LORD!
I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.
Great are the works of the LORD,
studied by all who delight in them.
Full of splendor and majesty is his work,
and his righteousness endures forever.
He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered;
the LORD is gracious and merciful.
He provides food for those who fear him;
he remembers his covenant forever.
He has shown his people the power of his works,
in giving them the inheritance of the nations.
The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy;
they are established forever and ever,
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.
He sent redemption to his people;
he has commanded his covenant forever.
Holy and awesome is his name!
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it have a good understanding.
His praise endures forever!

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

SECOND LESSON 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.

Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—yet 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.

However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CHILDREN’S SERMON

ALLELUIA VERSE

Alleluia.

Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life.

Alleluia, alleluia.

GOSPEL Mark 1:21-28

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark, the 1st chapter.

Glory to You, O Lord.

They went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath [Jesus] entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And 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.” But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ

SERMON

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen.
Dear friends in Christ:

Did you hear about the time when two trucks, each loaded with a thousand copies of Roget's Thesaurus, collided as they left a New York publishing house? According to the Associated Press, witnesses were stunned, startled, aghast, taken aback, stupefied, astonished, astounded and mesmerized. (Smile!).

In today's Gospel reading, the people listening to Jesus teach are astonished... or "amazed" if you're reading the NIV translation, "astounded" if you're reading the New Revised Standard. The exact English word to use here isn't important. What is important, is to think about the question of "why." Why were the people so astonished?

We might think it is because Jesus used such beautiful words. He does use beautiful words—coining phrases like "fishers of people," which we heard last Sunday.

But no, that's not the reason. Nor is it the fact that he told great stories. Jesus did tell great stories – like all the amazing parables which speak so powerfully to those who hear them. But that's not the reason either. Nor is it the thought-provoking ideas that Jesus put forward or the very great knowledge of his subject matter that he showed.

No, what astonished the people so much was that Jesus taught as one who had authority. The people even remarked about it twice.

In today's sermon we will seek to understand what is meant by Jesus teaching with authority. And we will also think about what the authority of his teaching means for us.

When the people made their declaration about Jesus' authority, they noted that his teaching was different than that of the scribes. The Scribes in Jesus' day were kind of like lawyers in ours. They were educated, good with words and they worked in different kinds of settings. Some were clerks, some copyists, some interpreters of the Law.

Whatever their task, scribes always worked under the authority of someone else. They answered to their employer, or to their party, or to the law of the land. Scribes knew the Holy Scriptures and could quote them quite well. But they would always do so in accordance with the teachings of a well-known rabbi or an accepted tradition.

This is not to knock the scribes. After all, Christian preaching is similar. We preachers interpret the scriptures according to our confessions and what could be called "the great tradition" of

Christianity. Some of us are more traditional. Some are less. But we are not our own authority. Or at least we shouldn't be.

Jesus, however, was his own authority. He spoke truth directly. Think about what he said in last week's text. He said: "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel." He didn't say: "the followers of Rabbi Hillel have suggested that the time of fulfillment could possibly be coming soon now, and a number of Pharisees I've talked to agree with this." No, Jesus spoke as his own authority.

The people took note of this. They understood what it meant that he wasn't quoting others, and that he didn't qualify his words by saying that his statements were simply his own personal perspective. When Jesus spoke, he was offering his words as truth.

What Jesus did regularly quote were the scriptures. These he considered to be direct revelations from God.

As for the rabbinical consensus about the scriptures that had developed over the years, Jesus would often contradict it in his teachings. Think about his great Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus repeatedly used the phrase: “You have heard it said... but I say to you...” and then offered a different interpretation.

Jesus taught very directly about the things of God – as if he knew God’s mind. Which, of course, he did. And Jesus would keep teaching in this way throughout his ministry. It is because of this kind of teaching that he would be perceived as a threat by many. And it would eventually lead to his death.

But God redeemed Jesus and his teachings. He did this by raising him from the dead.

What, then, does all of this mean for us?

First, it means that we, like Jesus, should uphold the presence of divine truth in the world. We should operate as if some teachings are true and others are false and believe that these judgments about truth and falsehood are not just someone’s biased opinion but based on a direct revelation from an ultimate authority – that authority being God.

We in the Church are to reject what is often called the “post-modern view” – the view that truth is always relative. We reject this because we believe truth is more than simply a perspective. Truth is an eternal principle and a statement of fact.

Pontius Pilate represents the contrary side to our view, asking “what is truth?” (John 18:38). Jesus, on the other hand, said: “I came into the world to testify to the truth (John 18:37)” and “you shall know the truth... and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:32).

A second and related principle for us is that we are to see the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as God’s revelation of truth. These are to be the authority we use in determining what is true and false, right and wrong. We should see the Holy Scriptures as the very words of God and not just the thoughts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and the other writers.

The people in today’s text perceived the authority in Jesus’ words by noting what he said and who he quoted. We are to perceive these things too.

And because we perceive these words to be true, we are to live according to them also. We are to uphold the disciplines of life that the scriptures teach. And honor its description of life, including its sanctity. And we are to proclaim God’s mercy toward the sinner and the power of his forgiveness. We are, as Lutherans like to say, to cherish both God’s Law and God’s Gospel.

Jesus spoke as if his words were truth. And then, as we see in the text, he backed up his words. After teaching the people, Jesus showed his authority by performing a great miracle – casting out an evil spirit from a man who was possessed.

We should note here that while the people may have noticed the authority of Jesus via the manner and content of his teaching, the spirits knew the authority of Jesus because of who he was. They knew the power and authority Jesus possessed in his own person. As the spirit in our text stated: “I know who you are – the Holy One of God.”

And here we perceive another lesson for us. Because Jesus is the Holy One of God, the things he says and does are holy. We are therefore to pay special attention to them. And this becomes an important principle of interpretation – shared with us right here at the beginning of Mark’s Gospel. When interpreting the scriptures, we are to see Jesus’ words and actions as central to the scripture’s

meaning. We are to see him as the holy one of whom the scriptures speak, as well as the holy one whose words speak the loudest in the scriptures.

Furthermore, we have here also a lesson about Jesus' mission. When Jesus encountered the spirit, he wasn't satisfied with the fact that the spirit knew who he was. Rather, he told the spirit to be silent, and then cast it out. Because it was unclean.

We see here that Jesus isn't just concerned about truth. He also wants to get rid of that which is unclean.

Some things are unclean because they oppose the truth. These are the lies and half-truths that people tell as a means of gaining advantage over others or covering their tracks. We all know how dangerous this playing loose with the truth is, and we are grateful that Jesus stands against it. We should stand against it too.

Other things are unclean because they oppose God's will for his people. These are the sinful words and actions that hurt others or hurt our relationship to God – the times when God's truth-filled commandments are broken.

In today's text, we don't know what kind of an unclean spirit the man had. We don't know if the spirit caused the man to lie or deceive. Or if it caused him to hurt himself or others. Often such spirits do both. What we do know is that the spirit tried to resist its casting out by Jesus, but Jesus quickly prevailed.

By the casting out of this unclean spirit, Jesus proves that he has power over the forces of evil. He shows his authority by defeating a power that people cannot defeat on their own.

He also shows that he is on the side of truth—for everything that is of God is true and everything that is true is on the side of God. Even the demon, whose normal course of action is to speak words of falseness, is forced to utter words of truth in the presence of Jesus.

The same is true when we stand in the presence of Jesus. Jesus leads us into truth. Not that we will always remember it. Nor that we will always heed it. But Jesus always calls us back to the truth; always points us toward the truth.

Jesus does this especially as he leads us to confess our sin. "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us," says the scripture (1 John 1:8). Jesus leads us into this truth too – painful as it is. But only so that the sin can be cast out.

And that is what happens. "When we confess our sins God who is faithful and just forgives our sin and cleanses us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9)." We are cleansed because of what Jesus did on the cross. There Jesus gave his life so that sin's price would be paid.

Those who have received the washing of Jesus Christ—given through Holy Baptism and through faith; renewed through Absolution and the Lord's Supper—have been made clean. Now there is no unclean spirit which can possess us.

We may still find ourselves battling unclean spirits as they persist in and around us. But they are not our master. Jesus is our master.

When Jesus came teaching these things the people were astonished at his teaching. They soon came to love him for his teaching. Jesus taught them a new way. His teachings helped them to overcome evil with good. And his teachings helped them to both face the truth and be set free by it.

May God lead us to love Jesus as well. And may that love include a spirit of thankfulness and respect for his authority. In his holy name. Amen.

- 1 Son of God, eternal Savior,
Source of life and truth and grace,
Word made flesh, whose birth among us
Hallows all our human race,
You our Head, who, throned in glory,
For Your own will ever plead:
Fill us with Your love and pity,
Heal our wrongs, and help our need.**

- 2 As You, Lord, have lived for others,
So may we for others live.
Freely have Your gifts been granted;
Freely may Your servants give.
Yours the gold and Yours the silver,
Yours the wealth of land and sea;
We but stewards of Your bounty
Held in solemn trust will be.**

- 3 Come, O Christ, and reign among us,
King of love and Prince of Peace;
Hush the storm of strife and passion,
Bid its cruel discords cease.
By Your patient years of toiling,
By Your silent hours of pain,
Quench our fevered thirst of pleasure,
Stem our selfish greed of gain.**

- 4 Son of God, eternal Savior,
Source of life and truth and grace,
Word made flesh, whose birth among us
Hallows all our human race:
By Your praying, by Your willing
That Your people should be one,
Grant, O grant our hope's fruition:
Here on earth Your will be done.**

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His 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 into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

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

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

O Holy Trinity, God of gods and Lord of lords, open the hearts of those who do not know you, that Your saving Gospel may take root in all the world, and that all the nations would sing Your praise. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord our God, whose voice was heard at Sinai and whose authority and mercy are revealed in Christ, send faithful laborers into Your harvest and sustain all You have sent. Bless Matthew, our synod president, John, our district president, Andrew, our circuit visitor, Mark and Chris, our pastors, and all servants of Your Church. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, guard our families and homes, and build them up in love. Bless all parents as they teach the faith to their children; strengthen those whose faith is weak, and stir up in your people a winsome heart for others. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, give health and success to Joseph, our president, to Ralph, our governor, to all legislators, judges, and all who serve our nation. Watch over all who are in harm's way and bless their work, that peace would grow and all people might live in safety. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Dear Father. Our Lord Jesus cast out unclean spirits, healed every disease and taught with authority. Have mercy on those who are sick, distressed, in danger or facing any need [*especially* _____]. Sustain them, so that trusting in Your merciful care, You would graciously relieve them. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Dear Lord, look with favor on all receive Christ's holy body and blood, that in their eating and drinking they may receive the benefits of forgiveness of sins, renewal of life, and so also a foretaste of the feast to come. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things and whatever else You know that we need, grant us, Father, for the sake of Him who died and rose again and now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. **Amen.**

THE 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.**

BENEDICTION

The Lord bless us and keep us.
The Lord make His face shine on us
and be gracious to us.
The Lord look upon us with favor and ☩ give us peace.

SENDING HYMN #690 Hope of the World

- 1 Hope of the world, Thou Christ of great compassion;
Speak to our fearful hearts by conflict rent.
Save us, Thy people, from consuming passion,
Who by our own false hopes and aims are spent.**
- 2 Hope of the world, God's gift from highest heaven,
Bringing to hungry souls the bread of life,
Still let Thy Spirit unto us be given
To heal earth's wounds and end our bitter strife.**
- 3 Hope of the world, afoot on dusty highways,
Showing to wand'ring souls the path of light,
Walk Thou beside us lest the tempting byways
Lure us away from Thee to endless night.**
- 4 Hope of the world, who by Thy cross didst save us
From death and dark despair, from sin and guilt,
We render back the love Thy mercy gave us;
Take Thou our lives and use them as Thou wilt.**
- 5 Hope of the world, O Christ, o'er death victorious,
Who by this sign didst conquer grief and pain,
We would be faithful to Thy Gospel glorious.
Thou art our Lord! Thou dost forever reign!**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE Hope of the World Setting: Stephen Rosebrock

Altar Flowers: "In honor of our daughter's birthday and thanksgiving for our grandson's baptismal anniversary." By Pastor and Lois Lehrer

Acknowledgments

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