

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

FEBRUARY 7, 2021

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

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



PRELUDE *Greet the Rising Sun* Setting: J. Wayne Kerr

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN #871 *Greet the Rising Sun*



1 Greet the ris - ing sun, Shin - ing with bright force,
2 Fa - ther, hear my prayer, Keep me safe to - day;
3 Lord, I will to - day On Your love re - ly;



Like an ath - lete strong, Set to run the course;
Sanc - ti - fy my thoughts, All I do and say:
Let no e - vil thought Cloud the clear blue sky.



Birds soar high a - bove, Wild-flow'rs bloom be - low;
As I teach the young And es - teem the old,
Joy - ful and con - tent With life's sim - pler things,



With the day's new light, Glad to work I go.
May Your boun - teous grace By my life be told.
Know - ing all I need From Your kind - ness springs.

CONFESSON 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. O Lord,

keep Your family the Church continually in the true faith that, relying on the hope of Your heavenly grace, we may ever be defended by Your mighty power; 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 Isaiah 40:21–31

Do you not know? Do you not hear?

Has it not been told you from the beginning?

Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,

and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;

who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them like a tent to dwell in;
who brings princes to nothing,
and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.
Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,
when he blows on them, and they wither,
and the tempest carries them off like stubble.
To whom then will you compare me,
that I should be like him? says the Holy One.
Lift up your eyes on high and see:
who created these?
He who brings out their host by number,
calling them all by name,
by the greatness of his might,
and because he is strong in power
not one is missing.
Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
“My way is hidden from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God”?
Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength.
Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;
but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 147:1-11

Praise the LORD!
For it is good to sing praises to our God;
for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting.
The LORD builds up Jerusalem;
he gathers the outcasts of Israel.
He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.
He determines the number of the stars;
he gives to all of them their names.

Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;
his understanding is beyond measure.
The LORD lifts up the humble;
he casts the wicked to the ground.

Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving;
make melody to our God on the lyre!
He covers the heavens with clouds;
he prepares rain for the earth;
he makes grass grow on the hills.
He gives to the beasts their food,
and to the young ravens that cry.
His delight is not in the strength of the horse,
nor his pleasure in the legs of a man,
but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him,
in those who hope in his steadfast love.

**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 9:16-27

If I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

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.**

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

Glory to You, O Lord.

Immediately [Jesus] left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

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:

In today's reading, the Gospel of Mark continues its introduction of Jesus and his work. Here we see that Jesus is now repeating some of his actions – specifically his healing and his preaching. Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law, as well as many others, then moves on to other towns to do more preaching.

We don't get much detail about these healings, nor his preaching. The only thing mentioned is that Jesus would not let the demons that he cast out speak, for they knew who he was. The demons, we recall from last week, had shown that they would openly proclaim his identity as the Holy One of God. Jesus wanted to keep this identity as quiet as possible so that he could move around more freely. He was not yet ready to reveal himself in full.

Because we don't get much detail, perhaps the thing that we should note from this text today is the repetition. The repetition of his healing and preaching shows that Jesus is establishing a pattern to his ministry. Healing and preaching are what Jesus is all about.

But the text today also adds an additional element – one that will continue to be mentioned in the Gospel and should therefore be seen as part of the pattern. Here Jesus also takes time to pray.

Regarding his praying, we get some details. We're told that Jesus rose very early in the morning and that he went out to a desolate place to pray. These details have always been seen, and rightfully so, as helpful suggestions for our own prayer.

Prayer at the start of the day can be a very good thing. It helps start the day off right. It puts our time and its work in the proper perspective and prepares us for what is ahead. This is especially important when life gets busy. Luther would say: "I have so many things to do today that I must take time for prayer!"

During this time of the pandemic, I have found that prayer in the morning is also important when the day isn't so full. I find myself praying: "Lord, help me to make good use of my time, and provide me opportunities to help and serve."

Likewise, prayer, as many have found, can sometimes be more effective when it is done in a desolate place, as Jesus did here. The word for desolate is literally "desert" – as in the nearby desert or wilderness that the people knew so well. But since we have a two-word phrase here – desert place – the meaning goes beyond just a literal reference. The guidance here is for prayer to be done alone or in some place that is different – one that is maybe even a little uncomfortable. We think of the idea of retreat – and not one to a place of luxury or distraction. Retreats, as many of us know, can be an excellent way to connect more fully with God in prayer.

Beyond the time and place of Jesus' prayer, however, what's most important to notice here is simply the pattern being established. Jesus broke up his work by taking time to pray.

God, of course, had always encouraged this practice; commanded it even. "Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy." Every seventh day was to be a day of rest. And not just a day to lounge around in one's pajamas, but a day to pray.

Jesus will have much more to say about what it means to keep the Sabbath as his ministry progresses. We won't cover all those teachings here. Suffice it to say that Jesus pushed people to move beyond a literalistic interpretation of the Sabbath – especially as it was understood by the religious establishment of his day. "The Sabbath was made for man; not man for the Sabbath," he said. Man's particular needs sometimes call for different kinds of Sabbath observance.

There is, however, one important thing for us to note in today's text about Jesus' understanding of all this. When his disciples finally found Jesus, who had been off on his own engaging in prayer, Jesus said to them: "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." Jesus here gives a word of explanation... sharing with us a "why." "That is why I came out," he says. And we should take note of this.

The problem, however, is that we're not exactly sure what he means. Come out from where?

At first glance, we might conclude that these words simply refer to his coming out of town. Jesus was in Capernaum but then left that town to go to the others. The usage of the phrase makes sense. And this could certainly be one explanation.

But then, knowing what we know about Jesus, we might also conclude that it points to the fact that Jesus "came out" from the heavenly realms into our own – a reference to his incarnation. That would make sense too.

Or, along those same lines, it could mean that he came out from his anonymity to become a public figure.

Any of these explanations could work. And there's no reason for doubting that Mark might intentionally insert here a double-entendre – maybe even a triple-entendre! – to make multiple points.

However, there is still one more explanation for Jesus' words here. And this one has evidence from the context to back it up. The verb used here – coming out – was also used just a few sentences earlier, at the beginning of this whole episode of Jesus' prayer time. There we are told that very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus *departed* and went out to a desolate place. The verb for "departed" is the same as "coming out." It's the same form of the verb too.

With this connection, we can then see that Jesus is declaring his prayer time a preparation for his next actions. Jesus came out for a time of prayer before moving on to the next towns to preach. He needed the time to pray. That's why he came out.

This leads to an important understanding about the intentions of God's rest. God's rest is not something we simply do as an act of recovery. It is also something we do as a preparation for what comes next.

I know that the first image we're first given of the Sabbath in the scriptures, when God works for six days to create the world and then rests, communicates rest as recovery. We work hard and then we take a break.

But today's text can remind us that rest is also preparation for what lies ahead. We rest so that we can face the future with good energy and with a God-directed sense of purpose.

In a recent seminar with fellow church workers, we were challenged to perhaps be more intentional about scheduling the rest we need. In fact, the suggestion was made that we schedule our rest first, so that we always work from a place of rest.

I can see the wisdom of that practice... with the understanding, however, that sometimes work will need to take priority. There are times we need to push ourselves in our work. We see in the life of Jesus that he prioritized his service and made decisions out of compassion for others, not just his own needs. To be a follower of Jesus means there will be times when we make sacrifices for the sake of goods greater than our own health and happiness.

It's all about balance, of course. We need to make sure we devote time to both rest and work. Our work will cause us to need rest; and our rest will allow us to better work.

In my experience, I've found that some people are tempted more by the desire to rest, while others are tempted more by the desire to work. This should remind us that we need to know ourselves and what tempts us. It should also remind us that in the face of these temptations, we do well to make plans and establish patterns. God's teaching on the Sabbath compels us to do so.

One other item of explanation in all of this. Perhaps you have noticed throughout this sermon that I have equated prayer with rest. Prayer is, of course, to be a time when one receives spiritual rest and renewal through connection with the Lord. Prayer, like worship, is meant to heal our spirits and bring us to a place of peace. The scriptures often use the idea of rest to describe communion with God. "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden," said Jesus, "and I will give you rest." The Book of Hebrews (4:3) adds: "We who have believed enter that rest."

But as you know, prayer can also be like work. It definitely feels that way at times, and it certainly takes effort. Jesus got up early, we just heard. That sounds like work!

As you know, the church uses the word "liturgy" to describe its worship forms and prayers. The word liturgy, in its original sense, means work. Liturgy is "the work of the people" we can say; even as we understand that worship is also and primarily a work of God towards us.

We all need to work. We all need to rest. We all need to pray. Our life circumstances will certainly dictate how much of each of these we need. But let us be thoughtful and intentional about incorporating each of these into our day, our week, our year and our life. We will be blessed as we do.

Most of all, know that Jesus, who prayed so that he could best serve others, still serves today. He is the great servant who continues to heal and preach. He heals our souls; and our bodies too, according to his wisdom. And he proclaims his word to us so that we know his truth – especially the truth of our salvation through the forgiveness of sins.

As I was thinking of an appropriate concluding thought, I was reminded of this word from St. Paul to the Philippians (1:6): "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

May it be so, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY #398 Hail to the Lord's Anointed

- 1 Hail to the Lord's anointed,
Great David's greater Son!
Hail, in the time appointed,
His reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression,
To set the captive free,
To take away transgression
And rule in equity.**
- 2 He comes with rescue speedy
To those who suffer wrong,
To help the poor and needy
And bid the weak be strong;
To give them songs for sighing,
Their darkness turn to light,
Whose souls, condemned and dying,
Were precious in His sight.**
- 3 He shall come down like showers
Upon the fruitful earth;
Love, joy, and hope, like flowers,
Spring in His path to birth.
Before Him on the mountains
Shall peace, the herald, go;
And righteousness in fountains
From hill to valley flow.**
- 4 Kings shall fall down before Him
And gold and incense bring;
All nations shall adore Him,
His praise all people sing.
To Him shall prayer unceasing
And daily vows ascend;
His kingdom still increasing,
A kingdom without end.**
- 5 O'er ev'ry foe victorious,
He on His throne shall rest,
From age to age more glorious,
All blessing and all-blest.
The tide of time shall never
His covenant remove;
His name shall stand forever—
That name to us is Love.**

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.

OFFERING Hail to the Lord's Anointed Setting: Matthew Machermer

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

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

In thanksgiving for sending Christ Jesus as our incarnate brother; for His proclamation of the Kingdom and His casting out of the corrupting works of sin and Satan; and that He would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the Church, that God would give joy to His servants Whom He has called to preach the Gospel, especially all missionaries, that many who do not now know Him would confess Him, and that together we would praise Him and serve Him, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all Christian homes, for husbands and wives, parents and children, that they may love and care for one another, and shine with the light of Christ, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For this good land and all who lead her, especially Joseph our President and Ralph our Governor, and that the Lord would lead us to unity and mercy for each other and for the nations, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those in any need, that the Lord would heal and bless them, especially _____, and that He would bless all who care for them, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who commune, that rejoicing to receive His Body broken and His Blood shed, that Christ would strengthen us against every evil, turn us in love toward our neighbor, and preserve us to life everlasting, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

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 #411 I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light

- 1 I want to walk as a child of the light.
I want to follow Jesus.
God set the stars to give light to the world.
The star of my life is Jesus. *Refrain***

Refrain

**In Him there is no darkness at all.
The night and the day are both alike.
The Lamb is the light of the city of God.
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.**

- 2 I want to see the brightness of God.
I want to look at Jesus.
Clear Sun of Righteousness, shine on my path,
And show me the way to the Father. *Refrain***
- 3 I'm looking for the coming of Christ.
I want to be with Jesus.
When we have run with patience the race,
We shall know the joy of Jesus. *Refrain***

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light Setting: Mark Bender

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