

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Toledo, Ohio

A congregation of the Northwestern Ohio Synod

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Sunday, January 31, 2021

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Introduction & Welcome

Welcome to worship today, God's gift to us because God is good!

all the time!

and all the time!

God is good!

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.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
whose voice is upon the waters,
whose mercy is poured out upon all people,
whose goodness cascades over all creation.

Amen.

Let us confess our sin, trusting in the abundant grace of God.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Holy God,

you search us and know us.

You are acquainted with all our ways.

**We confess that our hearts are burdened by sin—
our own sins and the broken systems that bind us.**

We turn inward, failing to follow your outward way of love.

We distrust those who are not like us.

We exploit the earth and its resources and fail to consider generations to come.

Forgive us, gracious God, for all we have done and left undone.

**Even before the words are on our tongues, you know them;
receive them in your divine mercy.**

Amen.

How vast is God's grace!

Through the power and promise of † Christ Jesus,

our sins are washed away

and we are claimed as God's own beloved.

Indeed, we are forgiven.

In the wake of God's forgiveness,

we are called to be the beloved community

living out Christ's justice

and the Spirit's reconciling peace.

Amen.

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.

First Reading: Deuteronomy 18:15-20

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.

[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: Psalm 111

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. (*Ps. 111:10*)

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

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

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

⁴**You 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.

⁶**You 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.

⁸**They 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.

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

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

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.

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.

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia. The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light;* for those who sat in the shadow of death light has dawned. *Alleluia.* (*Matt. 4:16*)

Gospel: Mark 1:21-28

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.

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.”²⁸ At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Meditation by David O'Brien

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, and give Glory to Your Name, Oh Lord. Amen

Knowledge versus wisdom. Webster's dictionary defines knowledge as the fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association. It also calls it an acquaintance with or understanding of a science, art or technique. Wisdom, on the other hand, is defined as the ability to discern inner qualities, insight or good sense. Some might say that the difference between them is akin to the difference between book smart and street smart. Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit and not a vegetable. Wisdom is not putting a tomato in a fruit salad.

There was a woman who lived a pretty wild life. She liked to drink and party almost every weekend. One day, she heard God calling her to something better and decided to turn her life around. She wanted to go to Church, but she knew that lots of her behaviors were considered sinful and she didn't want to be lectured. She used that knowledge of her own sinfulness and the lecture she might receive as an excuse to stay away. One day she decided to give Church a try. She got up early on Sunday, dressed nicely and went to a local Church. In the back of her mind she was hoping that her fears would be confirmed, and she could continue to use them as an excuse for not going. Instead, she was welcomed and told that it was nice to see her. The congregants, knowing who she was and what she had been up to could have looked to their knowledge of the rules and treated her according to her sin. Instead, they had the wisdom to look past that, see the person God was calling her to be and to treat her with the dignity that all of God's children should be treated with. The woman continued to attend services and became a valued member of that congregation.

I remember a Muslim inmate at the prison I worked at approaching me once and asking what I thought of folks who think that it's sinful to eat pork. He was trying to bait me into an argument on the merits of that particular dietary restriction, but we continued to talk anyway. I could have given him the facts of why I believe the way I do, but in the end, all that would have done is spark a long debate where I would have run the risk of offending him. Rather than justifying my position that it was okay to eat pork, I told him that if not eating pork is his way of giving glory to God, then by all means he should abstain.

How often do we know lots of facts, but fail to apply them in a wise or helpful manner? Paul's letter to the Corinthians is talking about just that kind of situation. He talks about the eating of food that has been offered to idols, or false gods. The society in which the Church of Corinth found itself had followers of many beliefs. There were many people with varying customs and religions. Many times, there were celebrations that, as members of the larger community, the Christians would be expected to attend. Sometimes this would mean participating in a meal where food that had been offered to an idol was consumed. Paul maintains that since the Christians know that these idols are not gods, the dedication of the food to them is of no effect. Therefore, it is acceptable for them to consume it. However, being as there were members of the Christian community that didn't feel that way, was it wise to offend them by eating such food? If a Christian, who's believes that it's not okay to eat that food, feels compelled to eat because they see another Christian doing so, does that not cause them to sin in their heart? If the eating Christian causes the other to sin, have they not sinned themselves?

As I am writing this meditation on January 18, I have a heavy heart. I just read about the vandalism perpetrated at our Roman Catholic brothers' and sisters' Holy Rosary Cathedral. Somebody spray painted a message on the walls of that Church and tried to set fire to the building. While the Cathedral is only a building, attacking it in this manner seems to be directed towards the people that worship there. The message they painted on the walls attempted to assign Jesus to a particular race or skin color. Although the master painters of the Renaissance Era almost universally depicted Christ as a European, I suspect that while here on Earth, His human form more likely resembled the peoples that we call Arabs. But does that really matter? Do we want to make our God, the only God, so small that He fits into one category or another? It is my considered opinion that Jesus is beyond racial classification. He is a God for all. Therefore, to limit Him to be of one race or another lessens Him. As I'm editing this on January 23, I have sadly learned that the police believe that the individual who vandalized the Cathedral, was later involved in a standoff with the police which ended in a shootout between him and the police. Unfortunately, he took the life of one of the responding officers as well as losing his own. I pray for our fallen officer, having given his life in service of his fellow human beings, that now in the arms of our Savior, he may rest well. I also pray for his family, that somehow they can find peace after this tragedy and that they may know that our community supports them. I pray for the perpetrator as well. Whatever caused him to think that perpetrating this crime against our Catholic brothers and sisters, and really against all of us, and against God, and then to take another person's life, let him be free of that malady now. Also for his family that they too may find peace. May God grant all of us the wisdom to approach our brothers and sisters with love instead of hate.

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.

A brief silence.

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, especially Elizabeth and Daniel, our bishops, and Howard, our pastor, 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, which includes all of us, 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, those struggling with mental illness, those who are hungry or homeless, and all in any need especially those on our prayer list; for caregivers, hospice workers, and home health aides, for first responders of all types, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

For the concerns of this congregation: those who travel, those absent from worship, those celebrating birthdays or anniversaries; for the people of God in this place 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.

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.

Together, let us profess our faith using the words of the 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 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.

And now, as our Savior, Christ is teaching us, we boldly pray:

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, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Blessing

God the creator strengthen you;
Jesus the beloved fill you;
and the Holy Spirit the comforter ☩ keep you in peace.

Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Be the light of Christ.

Thanks be to God.