

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Toledo, Ohio

A congregation of the Northwestern Ohio Synod

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Sunday, February 7, 2021

Fifth 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 Isaiah the one God who sits above the earth and numbers the stars also strengthens the powerless. So in Jesus' healing work we see the hand of the creator God, lifting up the sick woman to health and service (*diakonia*). Like Simon's mother-in-law, we are lifted up and healed to serve. Following Jesus, we strengthen the powerless; like Jesus, we seek to renew our own strength in quiet times of prayer.

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

Everlasting God, you give strength to the weak and power to the faint. Make us agents of your healing and wholeness, that your good news may be made known to the ends of your creation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

First Reading: Isaiah 40:21-31

The Judeans in exile have a good reason to be hopeful: the one who will bring them to freedom is the God who created the world, the God who subdues the rulers of the earth and gives strength to those who are weary.

²¹Have you not known? Have you not heard?

Has it not been told you from the beginning?

Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

²²It 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 live in;

²³who brings princes to naught,

and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.

²⁴Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,

scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,

when he blows upon them, and they wither,

and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

²⁵To whom then will you compare me,
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.

²⁶Lift up your eyes on high and see:
Who created these?

He who brings out their host and numbers them,
calling them all by name;
because he is great in strength,
mighty in power,
not one is missing.

²⁷Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
“My way is hidden from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God”?

²⁸Have 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.

²⁹He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.

³⁰Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;

³¹but those 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.

Psalm: Psalm 147:1-11, 20c

The LORD heals the brokenhearted. (Ps. 147:3)

¹Hallelujah! How good it is to sing praises to our God!
How pleasant it is to honor God with praise!

²**The LORD rebuilds Jerusalem,
and gathers the exiles of Israel.**

³The LORD heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.

⁴**The LORD counts the number of the stars
and calls them all by their names.**

⁵Great is our LORD and mighty in power;
there is no limit to God’s wisdom.

⁶**The LORD lifts up the lowly,
but casts the wicked to the ground.**

⁷Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving;
make music upon the harp to our God,

⁸**who covers the heavens with clouds
and prepares rain for the earth, making grass to grow upon the mountains.**

⁹God provides food for the cattle
and for the young ravens when they cry.

¹⁰**God is not impressed by the might of a horse,
and has no pleasure in the speed of a runner,**

¹¹but finds pleasure in those who fear the LORD,
in those who await God’s steadfast love. ^{20c} Hallelujah!

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

God entrusted Paul with the responsibility of bringing the gospel to diverse people. Hence the focus of Paul’s ministry is not his own rights or privileges as an apostle but the privilege of serving God by freely sharing the good news of Christ with others.

¹⁶If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! ¹⁷For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. ¹⁸What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.

¹⁹For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. ²⁰To 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 I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. ²¹To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law) so that I might win those outside the law. ²²To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. ²³I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia. The servant of God took our infirmities* and bore our diseases. *Alleluia.* (Matt. 8:17)

Gospel: Mark 1:29-39

Everywhere Jesus goes, many people expect him to set them free from oppression. Everywhere he goes, he heals people and sets them free. Disease, devils, and death are running for their lives. The forces that diminish human life are rendered powerless by Jesus.

²⁹As soon as [Jesus and the disciples] left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

³²That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴And he cured 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.

³⁵In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." ³⁸He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." ³⁹And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Meditation by David O'Brien

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

I read a story about a town on a dangerous seacoast. Shipwrecks often occurred there. As a result, some of the town's folks got together and started a lifesaving station. The station was little more than a shed and they had only one boat, but there were a few members who kept a constant watch over the sea. When there was a wreck in the vicinity, they went out without thought of themselves and searched for the missing sailors and passengers. Many lives were saved by the dedicated members of this life saving station. Some of those who were saved by their efforts wanted to give back something. They gave their money and time and soon new boats were purchased and new crews trained, and the little station grew.

Some of the newer members of the lifesaving station became unhappy that the building they occupied as their headquarters was so small and poorly equipped. They felt as though those being rescued should be in a more comfortable and welcoming place than a mere shed. So, they enlarged the building, put in new furniture to replace the basic stuff that was there already. The lifesaving station became a popular place for the members to gather and so they decided to decorate it and it became a sort of clubhouse. Fewer and fewer of its members were interested in watching the sea and going out to rescue stranded sailors, so they decided to hire professional lifesavers to man the boats when necessary. About this time a large ship was wrecked off their shore and the hired crew, doing what they were hired to do, brought the victims, bedraggled, cold, wet and some injured into the station to recover. They were dirty and sick. Some were Latin American; some were African American, and some were Asian. The clubhouse, with all its new furnishings, was in total disarray and chaos.

At the next meeting of the lifesaving club a discussion arose regarding this and most of the members decided to stop the club's lifesaving activities as it disrupted their normal social routine. Others objected pointing out that the primary purpose of the club when it was formed was saving lives, but they were voted down. The members that wanted to continue the lifesaving mission of the club went down the coast a bit and built their own lifesaving station. It was little more than a shed and again had only one boat, but the dedicated members continued their efforts and saved many lives. Eventually, some of those saved again began to want to provide more for the station and once again, the lifesaving station began a slow change into a club and again lost it way. As the station grew, its members forgot their purpose.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians brought this story to mind for me because he starts out talking about his obligation to proclaim the Gospel. Throughout his letter to the Church in Corinth, Paul talks about things that he could be doing, but refrains from it so as not to detract from his primary purpose, to bring souls to Christ. He could have demanded compensation but declined to do so. He could have eaten meat that had been offered to idols but declined to do so in order that others who were new to the faith would continue to grow in their faith. In verse 22 he states that he has become all things to all people, so that some might be saved.

How easy would it have been for Christ to have stayed in one area and continue to heal the sick and drive out demons? Certainly, he would have achieved great adulation in that town had he chosen to do so. But Jesus had his purpose and that was to proclaim the message, not just to one town, but as many as he could in the time he had here.

As we consider calling a new Pastor, we should consider what we are here to do and as a result what that called Pastor would be called here to help us do. I pray that we will not lose sight of our purpose in Toledo and try to simply make ourselves comfortable with our new choice. I pray that we will call a Pastor that will help us to serve our community in a way that is pleasing to God.

(The story about the lifesaving station was adapted from a story told in Howard Clinebell's "Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling".)

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 the church: for ministries of healing and wholeness, for hospital, hospice, and military chaplains, for those serving in prison ministry, for Daniel and Elizabeth, our Bishops, and Howard, our Pastor, for all who proclaim freedom and release in the name of Christ, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

For creation: for insects in the grass, clouds on the mountaintops, for cattle and the rainwater they drink, for the humility to take our place among all creatures of the earth, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

For the nations: for all who lead in cities and towns, states and countries; for community organizers, school officials, and CEOs; for international health organizations, that in times of trial, fear, or hopelessness, they find freedom in service to those most in need, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

For all wearied by life's burdens: for those who are poor, for those lacking supportive relationships, for those crushed by debt, for those struggling with chronic pain or other sickness, for those exhausted from overwork or stress, and for all who cry out to you, especially those people on our prayer list, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

For this congregation: for outreach and social ministries centered here; for parish nurses and visitors; for ministries of companionship and support, for the young people in this place who open us to new understandings, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

In thanksgiving for the faithful departed, who were called by name and now rest from their labors, that their lives serve as witnesses to the goodness of God, 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. Bless the world. Be God's grace.

Thanks be to God.