

Second Sunday in Lent – *Unfinished: Called to Openness*

March 5, 2023

During Lent we journey with all those around the world who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil. In today's gospel Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born of water and Spirit. At the font we are given a new birth as children of God. As God made a covenant with Abraham, in baptism God promises to raise us up with Christ to new life. From worship we are sent forth to proclaim God's love for all the world.

Greeting

The Grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with you.
And also with you.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, + one God,
who journeys with us these forty days,
and sustains us with the gift of grace.

Amen.

Let us acknowledge before God and one another
our need for repentance and God's mercy.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Holy God,

**we confess to you our faults and failings.
Too often we neglect and do not trust your holy
word;
we take for ourselves instead of giving to others;**

**we spoil rather than steward your creation;
we cause hurt though you call us to heal;
we choose fear over compassion.**

**Forgive us, renew us, and lead us,
as we seek to follow in your way of life.**

Amen.

Hear the good news:

God so loved the world that God gave the only Son,
so that all may receive life.

This promise is for you!

God embraces you with divine mercy,
+ forgives you in Christ's name,
and revives you in the Spirit's power.

Amen.

Gathering Song

“Baptized and Set Free”

#453

Prayer of the Day

O God, our leader and guide, in the waters of baptism you bring us to new birth to live as your children.
Strengthen our faith in your promises, that by your Spirit we may lift up your life to all the world through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Reading: Psalm 121 – We will read responsively by verse

¹I lift up my eyes to the hills;
from where is my help to come?

²**My help comes from the LORD,
the maker of heaven and earth.**

³The LORD will not let your foot be moved
nor will the one who watches over you fall asleep.

⁴**Behold, the keeper of Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep;**

⁵the LORD watches over you;
the LORD is your shade at your right hand;

⁶**the sun will not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.**

⁷The LORD will preserve you from all evil
and will keep your life.

⁸The LORD will watch over your going out and your coming in,
from this time forth forevermore.

Children's Message

Gospel: John 3:1-17

¹Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." ³Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." ⁴Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" ⁵Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

¹¹"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ

Sermon

People of God, grace to you and peace from God, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN

Unfinished: Discovering God's Call in the Not Yet, our Lent theme for this year has us today reconnecting with perhaps the best known verse in all of scripture, John 3:16, and in that verse and text around it, the call to openness.

From our Lent resource we hear:

"Every day of our lives we are asked or expected to be open to different things, circumstances, experiences, or people. Some are rather minor. Am I open to trying a food I've never eaten before? Some could be life changing. Am I open to considering a perspective that is different from mine? Am I open to a new job opportunity that presents itself? Am I open to forgiving someone who has harmed me? Am I open to changing my plans to accommodate another's need? Am I open to imagining that God is up to something, around which I cannot quite wrap my head? In the story of Nicodemus, we encounter an unfinished person of faith who is desperately trying to be open to understanding what God might be up to in Jesus. Amid his wondering confusion, Jesus meets him. Amid our own wondering confusion, Jesus meets us, too."

There are many questions and feelings that this story brings up. And, there is much symbolism and insight to be gleaned with how these events come to be with the characters that are in play.

First, we are introduced to Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a leader of the Jew. Someone who strictly follows the rule of the books of the law, and applies them to God's activity in everyday life. But, he comes under the cover of night. Most likely that was intentional. And that decision is what points to much of the symbolism in this text.

Is it symbolic of Nicodemus, in the darkness, coming to Jesus who is the light?

Is it symbolic of the knowledge that Nicodemus has that coming to visit Jesus at all would get him in trouble with his colleagues?

We don't exactly know. We do know that each of the Gospel writers brings their own agendas to the table in their telling of the Jesus story. And for John, Jesus is a man of openness. Jesus in John's Gospel would go on from this encounter to show what he truly means by saying "God so loved 'the world'" when he will break down societal barriers by taking the time to have a conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well.

And this encounter calls us to think about our own openness and how we are called to openness as people of faith. For us to ponder in reflecting upon our own openness:

- Openness can cause confusion
- God calls us to be open to the new things God is doing in our lives and in the world.
- God meets us in our wonderment
- God meets us in our confusion
- God can handle our questions
- God does open our eyes and hearts

In our pondering these realities, and coming to our own understanding and grasp of our own openness, we ask ourselves these questions:

- How do I typically respond to invitations or expectations to be open?
- To what was I asked to be open today?
- To what did I say yes?
- To what did I say no?
- What do I need for tomorrow?

People of God, in this season of Lent we are reminded again and again that we do not go it alone. Nicodemus came to Jesus because he knew he could. He had his questions about the way that it is and the way it ought to be and was willing to say, "how can this be?" We are urged to do the same. We are called to that same openness that Nicodemus and Jesus exhibit in this encounter.

The openness to say, I might not have it all figured out. But also, the openness to hear that God's love and where God is leading us is into "the world" and all that that means for us.

Thanks be to God. AMEN

Song of the Day "We Are Baptized in Christ Jesus" #451

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.**

Prayers of Intercession

Sustained by God's abundant mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all of creation.

A brief silence.

O God, you so love your church. Raise up leaders who care for your people. Bless lay theologians, seminary and college professors, and all who are called to the ministry of teaching, that they form and inspire us for the work of the gospel. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

O God, you so love your creation. Breathe new life into our planetary home. Guide the work of researchers, scientists, and activists who love your earth and who inspire us to care for the natural world. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

O God, you so love the world. Uphold leaders who resist tyranny and oppression. Strengthen organizations that promote peace and harmony (*especially*). Direct their work to alleviate human suffering and to address its root causes. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

O God, you so love your people. Draw near to all who live with mental illness, depression, or addiction, and accompany them in healing and recovery. Hear the cries of those who look to you in their distress (*We pray especially for Peyton, Matt, David, Verna, Irene, Connie, Clarice, Steve, Kathy, Val, Jacob, Keith and JoJo, Bob and Joanne, Bill and Bonnie, Frank and Heather, Bob and Sonja, Bill and Betty, Tom and Kay, Sherm and Mary, Sandy, family of Joseph Wulff*). Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

O God, you so love your children. Bless the young in our midst, and delight us with their joy, wonder, and curiosity. Revive our ministries with children and youth and equip us all for faithful discipleship. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

O God, you so love your saints. As our ancestors in the faith have been a blessing to us, so inspire us by their example of holy living to be a blessing to those who come after us. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

We lift our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your steadfast love and your promise to renew your whole creation; through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen.

Offering

Offertory Prayer

God of good gifts,
receive these and all our offerings
as we present them in faithful service
for the sake of your gospel.

Prepare our hearts to receive you in this meal
as you pour out your very presence
through Christ Jesus, the wellspring of eternal life.

Amen.

Words of Institution

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

Communion

Prayer

Embody God,
at your table, we have tasted the goodness of Jesus.
With the eyes of our hearts open to your promise,
empower us to hear the needs of our neighbors
and touch the world with your love.

Amen.

Blessing

God, the giver of love,
☩ Christ, the resurrection and the life,
and the Holy Spirit of rebirth
bless you in this Lenten journey.

Amen.

Sending Song "Lift High the Cross" #660 vs. 1,3,4

Dismissal

Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

Okay! We will! Thanks be to God!

And all of Good Shepherd said,

AMEN!

Announcements

Our prayers and sympathies to Joan Wulff and family in the death of Joe last week. A memorial service will be held for Joe at Stokes, Prock, and Mundt Funeral Chapel located at 535 S. Hillcrest Pkwy, Altoona, on Saturday, March 4 at 2 p.m. Visitation will be held from 12 p.m. until the time of the service.

Come support Stand in the Light Memory Choir on Monday, March 20, by dining at Burrachos in Eau Claire between 4 and 8 p.m. When you order an entree and mention you are there to support the Stand in the Light Memory Choir, 25% of the sales will be donated to us!

2023 Financial Snapshot

Month of February	Year-to-Date
Total Revenue	\$58,673
Total Expenses	\$27,224
Monthly Difference -\$3,927	Difference for the Year \$3,819

UNFINISHED
DISCOVERING GOD'S CALL
IN THE NOT YET

Sundays in Lent with Bible Study following worship.

In Community

Lent Midweek
Tuesday Bible Study at 11
Wednesday Soup at 5 pm
Wednesday Worship at 6:30

GOOD SHEPHERD ~ GOOD FRIDAY
FISH FRY
APRIL 7TH
4:30 - 6:00

FISH, POTATOES,
GREEN BEANS, CÔLE
SLAW, DINNER ROLLS,
DESSERT

2 OR 3 PIECE MEAL
KIDS MEAL INCLUDES
CHICKEN

QUILT RAFFLE
SPONSORED BY: LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD ENDOWMENT

Call the church office to get on the list!