

As we continue through the time after Epiphany, stories of the call to discipleship show us the implications of our baptismal calling to show Christ to the world. Jesus begins proclaiming the good news and calling people to repentance right after John the Baptist is arrested for preaching in a similar way. Knowing that John was later executed, we see at the very outset the cost of discipleship. Still, the two sets of brothers leave everything they have known and worked for all their lives to follow Jesus and fish for people.

Greeting – The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
creator of darkness and light,
word of truth,
wind sweeping over the waters.

Amen.

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Silence is kept for reflection.

God, our rock and refuge,

we pour out our hearts before you.

We have known you but have not always loved you.

**We have wounded one another
and sinned against you.**

**We have not always recognized the Holy Spirit
dwelling in each of us.**

Remember your covenant.

Renew your creation.

Restore us,

that we might proclaim your good news to all.

Amen.

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters.

God has spoken:

The time of grace is now.

In Jesus, the reign of God has come near.

By the authority of † Jesus Christ,

your sins are forgiven.

You are God's beloved.

Amen.

Gathering Hymn

“Rise, Shine, You People”

#665

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, by grace alone you call us and accept us in your service. Strengthen us by your Spirit, and make us worthy of your call, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Children's Message

Reading: Jonah 3:1-5, 10

¹The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, ²“Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” ³So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. ⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

¹⁰When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

Holy Gospel according to Saint Mark 1:14-20

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

¹⁶As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁷And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” ¹⁸And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to You, O Christ

Sermon

Pastor Josh is away at a conference. Pastor Valerian Ahles will be filling in.

Think for a moment in your mind, who in the world is NOT worthy of God’s mercy. It might be someone you know like a co-worker, or a politician, or a dictator, or a terrorist, or a rapist or murderer, or even the neighbor living next door to you. WHO in your mind, is not worthy of God’s mercy?

When the Word of the Lord came to Jonah the first time concerning the people of Nineveh, Jonah boarded a ship going a different direction because Jonah knew that the people of Nineveh might indeed repent, turn from their sinful ways, and embrace God’s mercy. Jonah didn’t want God’s mercy to fall on them. They were not worthy of God’s mercy--according to Jonah’s mind and heart. It took a great storm on the sea and the belly of a whale to change Jonah’s mind.

Still, time was running out for the people of Nineveh. The word of the Lord comes to Jonah a second time, and this time Jonah goes to Nineveh even though he still didn’t want to. Going a day’s walk into the city, Jonah cries out: “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” Jonah had a four-word sermon for Nineveh: “Forty Days Nineveh Overthrown.”

They had forty days to turn from their wickedness in the eyes of God. Forty days to change God’s mind.

And they changed God’s mind. The people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

Even the animals did not eat and sackcloth was put on them. Verses 6 through 9, that were left out of the Old Testament lesson for today, describe the “Fast” in detail. 6 When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. 8 Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands.

9 Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.” It’s like they proclaimed a Season of Lent to avoid Jonah’s message “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” The people changed their behavior.

God saw what the people of Nineveh did. God saw that they turned from their evil ways. The mind of God changed concerning the destruction of Nineveh. God didn’t do the calamity that was planned for them. God had mercy on the people of Nineveh even though they were not worthy of God’s Mercy in Jonah’s mind and heart.

Jonah becomes very angry with the Lord to the point that he prays to God to let him die. “And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” (Jonah 4:3)

Then, Jonah goes and sits in a booth, East of the city of Nineveh, to see what would happen to it. A fast-growing bush comes up to give him shade and for the moment Jonah is happy with the Lord. The next morning a worm attacks the bush, and it withers. A sultry east wind comes up with the sun beating down on Jonah and again he prays: “It is better for me to die than to live.” (Jonah 4:8)

Then we come to the point of the story of Jonah. As concerned as Jonah was about the bush that withered because of a worm, so the Lord is concerned about the people of Nineveh who don’t know their right hand from their left, and also many animals. The Lord has mercy on people, including those we think are not worthy of God’s mercy.

So, the Book of Jonah is not so much a miraculous story of Jonah being swallowed up by a whale to bring him back to be obedient to God’s Word.

It is a story for us to wrestle with the question “On whom should God have mercy”?

I say, God will have mercy on whomever God chooses to have mercy. What do you think?

Yet before we get too wrapped up into thinking about who God chooses to have mercy upon, let’s consider the Gospel lesson for today. As John the Baptist fades away into the background, Jesus comes proclaiming the Good News of God in the region of Galilee. “The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the Good News.”

Notice here that the Good News that Jesus is proclaiming is not something he has thought up and developed on his own. Jesus doesn’t proclaim himself as the Good News. Jesus doesn’t call attention to himself by saying he is a very important person or even that he is the Son of God.

What Jesus does proclaim, is the Good News of God, the Good News of God’s kingdom—of love and mercy. Yes, Jesus is the center of the Good News of God, but he proclaims the Good News of God so that people will repent and believe that God is a God of mercy, even on those we don’t think are worthy of that mercy.

Jesus calls us to believe in God, to believe in God’s love for the whole world, to believe that God loves people we cannot love because we don’t think they deserve it. Like Jonah, we don’t want to proclaim repentance and forgiveness for people who are not worth saving in our eyes. When Jesus proclaims the Good News of God, he is talking about the love that God has for the whole world. From this point forward, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the sending of the Holy Spirit, teaches and demonstrates the Good News of God’s love for all the world.

Now, what I am currently struggling with, in light of Jonah and the Gospel lesson for today, is that it occurs to me that the only person that God doesn’t have mercy on, is the Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. God does not show mercy to Jesus—the innocent, sinless one who becomes God’s Good News of love and mercy for the whole world. Jesus is crucified and put to death on the cross so that we, who do not know our right hand from our left, have God’s mercy.

Four fishermen felt this God’s mercy immediately. Four fishermen felt the immediacy of God’s kingdom come near. When Jesus called them to follow him, they immediately left their boats. There was no time to pull in and clean the nets. There was no time to finish mending the nets and explain to Father Zebedee that his sons would no longer help him or the hired hands with fishing chores. Jesus called them and said “I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets to follow Jesus.

They will go to proclaim the Good News of God’s mercy, like Jonah going to Nineveh. The time is now. The time is immediate.

So, how much time do we think we have? Do we have three weeks to respond to God’s good news in Jesus Christ, or just a few hours before the big dance in the sky? Do we have forty days, like the people of Nineveh--- a season of Lent to respond to God’s Good News? Or is the time, NOW!

For the kingdom of God has come near and in fact resides in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. The time for faith that trusts in God's abundant mercy for all, even those whom we think are not worthy.

The scripture readings for today make us realize that we don't have forever when it comes to responding to God's kingdom that has come near in the Spirit of Jesus. We dare not think that the grace of God means that we can wait around for a better day to respond to God's good news. Today is the day. Now is the time. Go, and proclaim God's mercy and love for all the world and many animals.

Amen.

Hymn of the Day

"Bind Us Together"

WOV 748

Apostle's Creed

Prayers of Intercession

As we celebrate Christ embodied in human form, we pray for God's blessing on the church, the world, and all of creation.

A brief silence.

God our rock and deliverance, do not let your church be shaken. We trust you never abandon your promises to the most vulnerable among us. Give your church wisdom and empathy in its varied ministries. God of grace,
receive our prayer.

God our hope and refuge, you placed the fish in the sea. Guide our care of oceans and all creatures that live in them. Hold us accountable for actions that endanger water sources and the people who depend on them. God of grace,
receive our prayer.

God who proclaims judgement and offers mercy, be a model to the leaders of our nation and the world. As they lead, may they follow in your way of justice and truth. God of grace,
receive our prayer.

God who cares for the suffering, care for survivors of assault and sexual abuse and sustain all who minister to them (*as the martyr, Agnes, ministered to victims of sexual abuse*). Keep safe any who live under threat of violence, those living in poverty, and any among us who are ill or in pain (*We pray especially for Peyton, Matt, David, Clarice, Steve, Kathy, Val, Jacob, Cherri, Keith and JoJo, Bob and Joanne, Frank and Heather, Bob and Sonja, Bill and Betty, Tom and Kay, Sherm and Mary*). God of grace,
receive our prayer.

God of resurrection and new life, as the first disciples shared the good news, empower us and this faith community to be open to your call. When we are uncertain of your call, assure us. When we have strayed from your ways, redirect us. God of grace,
receive our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

God who holds the saints against your tender bosom, we trust you welcome them into your care. Comfort those who grieve, even as we place our hope in your salvation. God of grace,
receive our prayer.

Knowing the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, we offer these prayers and the silent prayers of our hearts in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Offering

Offertory Prayer

Blessed are you, Holy One,
for all good things come from you.
In bread and cup you open heaven to us.
Meet us at this table,

that we receive what we seek
and follow your Son, Jesus,
in whose name we pray.

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 #471 & #466

Prayer

Giver of every gift,
Christ's body is our food, and we are Christ's body.
Raise us to life by your power
for the benefit of all and to your glory,
now and forever.

Amen.

Dismissal

You are God's beloved. Go in peace!

Okay! We will! Thanks be to God!

And all of Good Shepherd said...

AMEN!

Sending Song "What a Fellowship, What a Joy Divine" #774

Blessing

God who names you,
Christ who claims you,
and the Holy Spirit who dwells in you,
✠ bless you and remain with you always.

Amen.

The Annual Meeting will be Sunday, Feb. 4 following worship.

The flower chart is up for 2024! Cost is \$22 and can be paid at the time the flowers are placed. Give DeAnne a call in the office, have them for a birthday, an anniversary, or in memory of someone special.



A guiding word for 2024.

Who do we invite?

What are we inviting to?

Where are we headed that we'd want to invite others to come along?

When will we know that we've gotten there?

Why wouldn't we invite?

And, how? How do we not only invite, but go beyond the invitation?

Our First Quarter Mission Offering partner is the [Northwest Synod of Wisconsin - ELCA Endowment Fund Appeal](https://nswi.org/endowment-fund/today-tomorrow-together). The NWSWI Endowment does incredible work that we have benefited greatly from here at Good Shepherd through various grants as well as Seminary Debt Relief for Pastor Toufar. We are so grateful for their work and this partnership. Now it's time for us to step up and support THEIR work!

You can read more about the appeal here: <https://nswi.org/endowment-fund/today-tomorrow-together>

A promotional image for a performance of the Gospel of Mark. The background is black. On the right side, there is a photograph of a man with a beard and short hair, wearing a dark blue striped shirt, looking upwards and to the left with his hands clasped. The text is in white, sans-serif font. The main title "GOSPEL OF MARK" is in a large, bold font. Other text includes "LIVE, WORD FOR WORD PERFORMANCE OF THE", "FROM MEMORY", "1 TO 3 PM SATURDAY, JANUARY 20TH", "GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH 202 W. GRAND AVE EAU CLAIRE, WI", and "FREEWILL OFFERING FOR THE SYNOD ENDOWMENT FUND".

LIVE, WORD FOR WORD
PERFORMANCE OF THE

GOSPEL OF MARK

FROM MEMORY

1 TO 3 PM
SATURDAY, JANUARY 20TH

GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH
202 W. GRAND AVE EAU CLAIRE, WI

FREEWILL OFFERING FOR
THE SYNOD ENDOWMENT
FUND