

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.

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

“Christ, Be Our Light”

#715, vs. 1,3,4

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.

Children's Message

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

[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.”

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

Holy Gospel according to Saint Mark 1:21-28

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

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.

During my travels this past week I had an encounter that has stuck with me from the moment it happened. Actually, being in New Orleans, there were quite a few encounters that simply won't go away.

But, there was one in particular that will not leave me alone.

As I was preparing for the journey home, passing time in the Airport, I approached a doorway at the same time as a gentleman that was wearing a POW-MIA cap on his head. It was clear to me that he had served in the military years ago and I did as my father has engrained in me to do, and I thanked him for his service.

I thought that would be the end of that encounter. Until he responded with four simple words.

"You were worth it."

And that encounter has stuck with me since. The gentleman wearing the POW-MIA cap on his head, who pretty clearly served in the military told me, a complete stranger that many folks in the Airport gave the look of, "is that Matt LaFleur," that I. AM. WORTH. IT.

Trying to make sense of all of that and what it meant that this gentleman would tell me, and I'd imagine anyone else that thanks him for his service, I found myself reading this Gospel text.

For a bit of context, Jesus has just called the first of the disciples along the Sea of Galilee telling them, "follow me and I will make you fish for people."

They had heard about this Jesus fella, and you might even say this wasn't their first encounter with him. The chronology of the multiple accounts muddies these waters a little bit. However it all played out, them hearing Jesus say, "follow me and I will make you fish for people," made them hop out of their boats, immediately, and follow him. Leaving their father and their livelihood behind, they followed.

I would imagine there was some questioning about what fishing for people would look like. As a child at Luther Park, it was always my favorite part of being a part of "the crowd" during the Thursday evening Christwalk to shout out during this scene, "that's going to take a big net." I thought I was so funny!

Regardless of what they might have thought about what fishing for people would look like, as he always does, Jesus shows them.

As they are in Capernaum as the Sabbath approaches, Jesus and his followers entered the synagogue. During His time teaching in the synagogue there is a man there with an unclean spirit, a demon if you will, to which Jesus gives a command to come out of the man. And the demon does.

There are many parts of this story that I think we can latch onto, and rightfully so. But as I read this in the context of being told by a complete stranger who went to war many years ago that I was worth it, I can't help but think that Jesus is telling his followers that nobody is not worth it.

We live in a world that is dominated by stigma. So much of what we have come to know, and so much of what so many of our neighbors and ourselves are living with, is stigmatized.

Another encounter in New Orleans was a phonecall from a friend back home. I often refer to him as "the best Christian I know claims not to be one." He is everything that I hope any child I have ever baptized or given a blessing to would strive to become. He is generous, caring, compassionate, and won't back down from any cause he deems worthy. He is what a Christian should be, aside from not necessarily believing in Jesus.

But he called me about a fund he had started at the school in our hometown. He started this fund to ensure that children of families who have fallen behind on their lunch payments would still be able to eat lunch and even have their debts forgiven and a few months of lunch money covered. Someone wrote a letter saying that this is a form of welfare and the fund was canceled.

I think Jesus would say, "those children are worth it."

Mental Health, which you might say this Gospel text is about, is something that has been stigmatized in our society as well.

Another encounter in New Orleans was simply a shirt that I saw someone wearing that simply stated:

"It's okay to have Jesus and a therapist too."

Again, mental health has been stigmatized, and quite frankly church has played a dangerous role in this stigmatization, to the point that their needs to be a theological statement on a shirt that states that it is okay to have a therapist and be a Jesus follower.

Why? Because Jesus would say, "you are worth it."

Yes it is absolutely incredible the authority that Jesus shows that he has not only over the scriptures and his teaching, but the fact that he can demand a demon to come out of a person and that person would be healed.

And again, he just come from telling His new disciples to follow him and he will make them fish for people. Amid their wondering of what that will look like he shows them. To fish for people is to show love to those that the world is quick to show the exact opposite.

Jesus could have, like the rest of society at the time had done to the man with the unclean spirit, turned his back and paid no attention.

People of God, yes this story is about the authority of Jesus and the power he holds, and we can absolutely long for that message and wish that is what had been preached here, but we can't ignore that Jesus gives this person experiencing a mental health moment the time of day. He stops what he is doing and declares that making this person well is worth his time.

And, in doing so, he says to anyone who might be feeling like an unclean spirit has taken them over that they, too, are worth. God's love is greater than whatever this world we live in might tell you.

For Jesus, and for us as a church, you are known, you are seen, you are loved, and you are worth it.

Thanks be to God. AMEN

Hymn of the Day

“Healer of Our Every Ill”

#612 vs. 1,3

Apostle’s Creed

Prayers of Intercession

Loving God, we pray that your example of teaching with confidence and authority builds up your church in love. May all church leaders and teachers honor your instruction and model your inclusive ways. God of grace, **receive our prayer.**

Renewing God, we pray for all of creation, that waterways flow clean and clear, natural spaces are protected, and our planet is healed. Let us commit to thoughtful care of the earth. God of grace, **receive our prayer.**

Justice-seeking God, we pray for those in government and community leadership, that they lead with honor and mindfulness. May they remember their covenants and be upright in their ways. God of grace, **receive our prayer.**

Compassionate God, we pray for all in need, especially those who have known rejection, any who struggle with long-term illness or chronic pain, those without access to safe housing or health care, and any who suffer (*especially*). God of grace, **receive our prayer.**

Still-speaking God, we pray for our congregation, for its artists and musicians, for its educators and caregivers, that all gifts are used to care for those in need and to live out your example of accompaniment, gospel witness, and love. God of grace, **receive our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Eternal God, we remember all who have been teachers, mentors, and companions in the church and in our lives (*especially Thomas Aquinas whom we commemorate today*). We trust that all who have died rest in your loving care. 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 "Christ, Be Our Light" #715 vs. 2,5

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.

Your Generosity in Action:



Our Mission Plan makes room for valuable Continuing Education for Pastor Toufar, and supply preachers like Valerian Ahles possible. Here, Pastor Valerian talks with Shepherd'sKids about what it must have been like in the belly of the whale. Your generosity makes the mission plan possible!

THANK YOU!!

Monthly Financials to date:	Total Revenue	Total Expenses	Difference
	\$26,436	\$18,085	\$8,351
	2023: \$35,377	2023: \$27,631	

The Annual Meeting will be Sunday, Feb. 4 following worship. Annual Reports are available at the church and online.

Ruby's Pantry will be here on Thursday, Feb. 1 with distribution from 3:30-5:30. It is a cash donation of \$25 for one share.



Stories from the Flock

I want to commend LCGS. Y'all show the presence of Jesus. My wife and I always felt welcome at your church. We felt loved, we never felt judged. It reminds me of the Church of Philippians and how supportive they were to Paul.

To this day we still think of Good Shepherd and the impact it made in our lives. I hope and pray the best, a wonderful harvest, that fruit will ripen. I pray that God will bless your missions and community outreach financially. I pray for humility and stewards. Have a wonderful night my friend in Jesus.

Telling the Good Shepherd Story
Share your Good Shepherd Story with LCGSstories@gmail.com

