**epiphany 4- january 31, 2021**

**zion evangelical lutheran church philipsburg**

Welcome to everyone on this 4th Sunday of Epiphany where we continue to gather in love for one another from the safety of our homes. We had some colder weather this week and some snow but also some sunshine and blue skies! God is good!

I ask that you keep the congregation of St. Peter’s Linwood and the family of Pastor Mark Urquhart in your prayers. Pastor Mark passed away peacefully at GRH on January 23, just a month after retiring from St. Peter’s; a private family funeral was held this past week with Bishop Michael Pryse officiating. A celebration of his life will take place when it is safe to gather.

Preaching this week is our National Bishop Susan Johnson. I am grateful that the ELCIC has made these sermons available in these pandemic times. Our goto meeting coffee hour takes place today at 11, please consider joining us! Please remember that Zion relies on your continued support to meet our monthly expenses. Sincere thanks to everyone who remembers us in your prayers.

**GATHERING**

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

**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.**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Let us pray.

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.**

**GATHERING SONG*Dearest Jesus, at Your Word* (ELW 520)**

1 Dearest Jesus, at your word
we have come again to hear you;
let our thoughts and hearts be stirred
and in glowing faith be near you
as the promises here given
draw us wholly up to heaven.
2 All our knowledge, sense, and sight
lie in deepest darkness shrouded
till your Spirit breaks the night,
filling us with light unclouded.
All good thoughts and all good living
come but by your gracious giving.
3 Radiance of God's glory bright,
Light of light from God proceeding,
Jesus, send your blessed light;
help our hearing, speaking, heeding,
that our prayers and songs may please you,
as with grateful hearts we praise you.
4 Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
praise to you and adoration!
Grant us what we need the most:
all your gospel's consolation
while we here on earth await you,
till in heav'n with praise we greet you.

**WORD**

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

**FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 18:15-20**

A reading from Deuteronomy.

[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**

 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**

A reading from 1 Corinthians.

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: Mark 1:21-28**

The holy gospel according to Mark.

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.

**SERMON – National Bishop -The Rev. Susan Johnson**

Grace to you and peace in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. And greetings to you from your siblings in Christ from coast to coast to coast that make up this part of the family of God that we call the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

 Mark’s gospel is really interesting. At least to me it is! It is so compact, so fast moving. In some ways. It’s like the Readers Digest condensed version of the gospels.

 This morning’s gospel lesson starts at only the 21st verse of the 1st chapter. But in the 20 verses prior we have heard John the Baptist proclaim prepare the way of the Lord, Jesus has been baptized, then tempted in the wilderness and then the first disciples have been called. That is compact writing!

 Today’s gospel lesson is also jam packed. Jesus teaches at the synagogue in Capernaum as one who has authority. A man approaches, full of an unclean spirit. The spirit taunts Jesus. Jesus rebukes the spirt and calls the spirit out. The crowd is amazed at both the teaching and the healing and Jesus’ fame spreads.

 Jesus teaches with authority and the unclean spirit taunts him. What does this mean to us in our times when the phrase “fake news’ has entered our regular conversation?

 Jesus is not just any self-proclaimed prophet. He is the holy one of God. Even his enemies recognize this. When the unclean spirit speaks out, Jesus calls out what is not right. He names the evil. Martin Luther King Jr. said “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

 What do these statements of Jesus and of Martin Luther King Jr. mean to us right now in the light of the happenings that have been taking place at the capitol in the United States?

 The current pandemic has become the focus of much of our lives. The temptation is for us to be very inward looking, focused on our bubble, and our work, and our provinces’ restrictions and numbers of cases and numbers of deaths.

 But the realities of COVID call us to look out beyond ourselves to the see the ways that the pandemic is pointing out and underlining disparities and structural inequities around the world and in Canada. In Canada there are higher incidence rates of COVID in poorer and racialized communities. Many in those communities also experience more severe symptoms often due to underlying health conditions due to poverty.

 Women in the workforce have faced more challenges than men have. They often bear the primary burden of childcare and homeschooling and have fallen farther behind in terms of the gendered pay gap. There has also been an increase in domestic violence in Canada and around the world as lockdowns have increased both stress and proximity.

 We may be concerned because there are worries about us not having enough vaccine to keep up with our capacity to vaccinate. Yet there are many developing countries that have still not received any vaccine. And recent news has shown that countries that are willing to pay above market value for vaccines are able to jump the queue and procure them faster.

 When I think about these things and then look back on today’s text, Jesus’ actions cause me to ask these questions.

* First what is the evil, what is the injustice, what are the evil spirits that need to be named and confronted around us?
* Second, how can we, like Martin Luther King Jr. and like Jesus “stop being silent about things that matter.” For to do this is to participate in the new life that Jesus promises us.

 It is hard for us to know how and when to speak out. We would usually rather wait for things to change and problems to go away. But speaking out to injustice, speaking out to lies, is part of Jesus’ command to love our neighbours. It is a way we show our commitment to the common good. It is a way that we can follow the way of Jesus and live by his example.

 I recently heard Anglican Archbishop Linda Nicholls talk about the moral injury that people are experiencing. So many things happening around us that break our understanding of what our moral code is. Even after the pandemic ends, we will need to continue working to address this moral injury. We will need to follow Jesus in speaking out against injustice, working for healing, and building up healthy community. But we are not alone.

 In this time of Epiphany, we begin by remembering the wise ones who followed a star to find the Christ child, the light of the world. In the season of Epiphany, we reflect on how we are called to follow and share that light. Jesus continues to call to each of us to follow him and sends the spirit to nurture the gifts we have been given to work to build God’s reign among us. It is the source of our light, our hope, our love and our strength. Amen.

**HYMN OF THE DAY*Rise, Shine, You People!* (ELW 665)**

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycnLh7p7fMA**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycnLh7p7fMA)

**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, 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, 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, for all struggling with Covid and cancer, heart disease and the many other illnesses, for those struggling with mental illness, those who are hungry or homeless, and all in any need especially Eddy, Elaine, Susie, Donelda, Lynette, Barb, Sarah, Alea, Mary Ann, Cheryl, Bonnie, Mary, the family of Pastor Mark Urquhart, the congregation of St. Peter’s, Linwood and those we name in the stillness of our hearts (*pause)*, let us pray. **Have mercy, O God.**

For all residents and workers in our Long-term Care and Retirement Homes that are affected by Covid protocols and outbreaks. We especially remember Listowel Carressant Care, peopleCare Tavistock, and all other homes in outbreak. 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.**

**PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

**THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD**

Let us pray.

O God of justice and love, we give thanks to you that you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, awaken us to the needs of others, and at the end bring all the world to your feast; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever.

**Amen.**

**LORD’S PRAYER**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**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.**

**SENDING**

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

**BLESSING**

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord’s face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and ☩ give you peace. **Amen.**

**DISMISSAL**

Go forth into the world to serve God with gladness; be of good courage; hold fast to that which is good; render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honor all people; love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Thanks be to God.**

**SENDING SONG*Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing* (ELW 886)**

1 Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace!

2 My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim,
to spread through all the earth abroad
the honors of your name.

3 The name of Jesus charms our fears
and bids our sorrows cease,
sings music in the sinner's ears,
brings life and health and peace.
4 He speaks, and list'ning to his voice,
new life the dead receive;
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
the humble poor believe.

5 Look unto him, your Savior own,
O fallen human race!

Look and be saved through faith alone,
be justified by grace!

6 To God all glory, praise, and love
be now and ever giv'n
by saints below and saints above,
the church in earth and heav'n.

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