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Worship
January 31, 2021

(To watch the videotaped version of the worship service, click the link below)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCt8qX94ICK-omDHSc71en4w>

GATHERING

GREETING & ANNOUNCEMENTS

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

OPENING HYMN - "10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord)"

CALL TO WORSHIP

Come, people of God, and worship the Christ.

***Once we were separated from him, aliens and strangers who did not belong,
without hope and without God in the world.***

Once we loved darkness rather than light. Once we could not sing the Lord's song.

But now we are joined with Christ, brought near through his blood, for He is our peace.

Now we who lived in darkness have come into the light have been given a new song.

Let us come and worship the Living Light of Christ!

A BRIEF CONFESSION

Let us confess our sins, trusting in the abundant grace of Christ.

A moment of silence

***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 the generations to come.***

Forgive us, gracious God, for all we have done and left undone.

***Yet we are forgiven by our God through the Risen Christ, and we are called to be the
beloved community living out Christ's justice and the Spirit's reconciling peace. Amen***

HYMN OF PRAISE - "Glory to God"

GREETING

The Lord be with you

Be filled with the spirit of God today.

We worship to open our hearts for God's blessings.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

First Reading

Deuteronomy 18:15-18

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. This 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.' Then the LORD replied to me: 'They are right in what they have said. I 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.

Second Reading

Psalms 111

Praise the LORD!

***I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.***

***Great are the works of the LORD,
studied by all who delight in them.***

***Full of honour and majesty is his work,
and his righteousness endures for ever.***

***He has gained renown by his wonderful deeds;
the LORD is gracious and merciful.***

***He provides food for those who fear him;
he is ever mindful of his covenant.***

***He has shown his people the power of his works,
in giving them the heritage of the nations.***

***The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy.***

***They are established for ever and ever,
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.***

***He sent redemption to his people;
he has commanded his covenant for ever.***

Holy and awesome is his name.

***The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practise it have a good understanding.***

His praise endures for ever.

PSALM RESPONSE – “I Will Give Thanks”

GOSPEL READING

Mark 1:21-28

They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and 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.' But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They 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.' At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

SERMON

4th Sunday After the Epiphany. Jan. 31, 2021. "Battles of Powers." Bethany

The incident at the synagogue in Capernaum tells us two things about the ministry of Jesus: First that the people were amazed at the teachings of Jesus. Now we are not sure exactly what that teaching was because Mark doesn't tell us, other than Jesus taught with an authority that transcended that of the scribes and Pharisees. Second: this is also a story about the exercise of power. It is about the power of evil vs. the power of the word of God that Jesus proclaims.

While it is easy for us to focus on the man's possession and for to understand it as a mental illness perhaps, but make no mistake, even mental illness points to the brokenness of creation. Mark here is letting us know that Jesus came to do battle with evil—that Jesus came to free humanity from evil, from illness, from oppression and death.

In the world in which Jesus walked, evil was a very real thing. Evil brought terror and fear to the hearts and minds of people throughout the world. That evil spirits could possess people was a given in those days. Possession in that time was seen not as a result of sin, but a tragedy that overwhelmed a person and their family. It was a tragedy that separated an individual from their family, their community, and their God. And here Mark tells us that Jesus comes to break the hold that evil had over people and over creation. He does so with a word of power. The words that we translate "Come Out" and "Be Still" are each a single word in the Greek. Jesus needed no long, involved incantation; no long prayer to cast out the unclean spirit that had overwhelmed the man in the synagogue, just a word. Indeed, all of Scripture tells us that the Word of God is that powerful Word that brought forth creation; called Abraham to faith; choose the people of Israel as His people; and the Gospels tell us that in Christ, that living Word of God became flesh for us in Jesus Christ. It is a Word that come to bring hope and freedom from all the forces of darkness that come for us in this world. We need that Word, for the world stills struggles with the power of evil and the possession of people in various ways.

How else can explain—even try to begin to explain—the evils that have destroyed so much in our lifetimes? How can understand the evil of Nazism and Communism which destroyed millions of lives in the 20th Century without an understanding of the reality of evil? How else can we begin to understand the hungering greed that feeds the lust of gathering more

and more, while millions try and make do with less and less without understanding the reality of evil? How do we not understand the brokenness of all creation, as Saint Paul reminds us, as we deal with pandemics, increasing extremes in our weather? And we know that the list of evil and brokenness in our world could go on and on. And is not the result of evil and the lust of domination the cause of the increasing separation of people one from another, from their community, from their God?

Now Mark is saying, it is the turn of the unclean spirits, it is the turn of evil to be afraid, to be very afraid, for God has come! Jesus the Holy One of God now walks the earth, and He has come to bring freedom from the oppression of evil. We should not be surprised that the unclean spirits know who Jesus is. They know that He is the Holy One of God that has come to destroy their power—to destroy their hold over humanity. Jesus has come to bring the freedom of God to creation, and nothing in the arsenal of evil can withstand the power of the Word of God.

But Mark is also a realist. He is also saying that the struggle between the forces of God and the forces of evil continues to this day. Oh, clearly Mark tells us that the war is won, let there be no doubt about that. Yet the battles for the spirit of humanity continues. Mark is reminding us that God has chosen us to be His people and as such, we should use the Word of God as Jesus used it: to overcome the power of evil. We the power of that Word of God every time we bring hope to those who feel that they have no hope; the poor, the broken in spirit, the lost in spirit; those who feel that evil does indeed rule the world. Every time we reach out with service and words of hope to those who are possessed by their addictions; by their greed; by their materialism. As we proclaim the message of Christ, we bring life and light; we bring the hope of reconciliation with God and others, and liberation to those overwhelmed by forces that seem beyond their control. With Christ guiding us, we stand as a beacon of hope to all who long for freedom from the forces of darkness that are all around us. As Luther's great hymn reminds us, "one little word" chases the devil away. Indeed so. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY - "Healer of Every Ill"

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

We believe that God is Spirit, and we worship Him and must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

We believe that God is Light, and that if we walk in the light, we then have fellowship not only with one another, but with our Lord as well.

We believe that God is Love, and that everyone who loves is born of God and know God.

We believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

We believe that Jesus Christ is the Resurrection and the Life and that whoever believes on Him, will abide forever.

(from the Book of Common Worship by Wilbur P Thirkield)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

As we are guided by the Spirit, let us offer our prayers for the church, for the nation, for all in need, and for our world.

A brief silence

Pastor: Gracious God, in this time of worry, fear, division, uncertainty, we pray that you will bring insight, compassion, understanding, and strength of character to our leaders of communities, churches, states, and nation that calm and direction will be restored to our people. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

Reader: Gracious God, we pray that we shall use wisely all the gifts of our world: the water that provides life to us all; the land that provides our food; for you call us to be good stewards of all that you have made, and we ask that you let it be so. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Pastor: Lord, we pray for the safety of all who protect us: police officers and firefighters, military personnel, peacekeepers, and for the leaders of governments. We pray that all act with justice and understanding to all whom they encounter. And Lord, we pray for the time when peace will come, and violence will be no more. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Reader: We pray for our world, nation, and community in the midst of this Covid-19 pandemic. We know that health care workers are having to make difficult decisions of life and death. Give them wisdom in those decisions. Give strength that they may give care to those suffering with Covid and other diseases, and we ask that you would protect them from illness and despair. We also pray for all who are ill here at Bethany and we ask for hand of wholeness and healing; comfort and strength for all who are ill of body, mind, or spirit. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Pastor: Listen to each of us Lord, as we come to you in this moment of silent prayer. It is into Your hands, great and compassionate God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Listen to each of us, Lord, as we come to you in a moment of silent prayer

Into your hands, great and compassionate God, we commend all for whom and about which we pray, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

OFFERING *(Please mail your weekly offering to the church - 4300 N 82nd St. Scottsdale, AZ 85251)*

PRAYER OF BLESSING

God of all blessings, giver of all good gifts; day by day you shower us with what we need to live and prosper. With glad and generous hearts and in a response to thanksgiving, we return a portion of our wealth. May what we give be a symbol of our gratitude and a blessing of your love for those who may be helped through our offering. Amen.

THE 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.

BENEDICTION

May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ fill you with every good blessing. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN - "Lead Me Lord"

DISMISSAL

Go in Peace...to live and serve in the way of the cross. Thanks be to God.