Home Service for February 25, 2024

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

*God’s voice names us in holy love. Christ’s voice chastens us when we go astray. The Spirit’s voice draws us back to the paths of righteousness. Thanks be to God!*

Call to Worship:

### “Let go and let God.” This is not just a phrase; it’s a lifestyle. “Die to the old and embrace the new.” This is not just a phrase, but a  promise of possibilities in God that we often cannot see.

Opening Prayer:

Spirit of the ages, name us and claim us according to your purposes, as you once called Abram and Sarai long ago. Train our ears to hear your call, and tune our hearts to open at the sound of your voice. As we pick up our cross to follow you, raise us to newness of life. For you call us to be children of your covenant, heirs with your Son, and disciples of your grace. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Name above all names, visit us in our dreams and shake us from our waking nightmares. For we are tired of stumbling in the dark, blindly following human teachings and placidly heeding human advice. When we lose our way and wander from your path, we need your love to heal us and your grace to complete us. When the forces of destruction close around us, grant us the strength to follow Christ. Love us back onto the right paths and restore us to life, through your faithful and transforming love. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

*By saying no to ourselves, and picking up our cross, we find ourselves. By saying yes to the good news of Christ’s spirit, we find faith and wholeness. Thanks be to God.*

Read Psalm 22:23-31

You who fear the Lord, praise him!  
    All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!  
    Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!  
**24**For he has not despised or scorned  
    the suffering of the afflicted one;  
he has not hidden his face from him  
    but has listened to his cry for help.

**25**From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;  
    before those who fear you[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+22%3A23-31&version=NIV&interface=print#fen-NIV-14230a)] I will fulfill my vows.  
**26**The poor will eat and be satisfied;  
    those who seek the Lord will praise him—  
    may your hearts live forever!

**27**All the ends of the earth  
    will remember and turn to the Lord,  
and all the families of the nations  
    will bow down before him,  
**28**for dominion belongs to the Lord  
    and he rules over the nations.

**29**All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;  
    all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—  
    those who cannot keep themselves alive.  
**30**Posterity will serve him;  
    future generations will be told about the Lord.  
**31**They will proclaim his righteousness,  
    declaring to a people yet unborn:  
    He has done it!

Prayers of the People:

*As we come to you in prayer and ask for Your loving care for those we have named and that they each may feel Your loving presence each day and that Your healing hand will touch them. We also ask that you up lift their families for we know that they too are struggling as they stand by their love ones. At the same time, You, O Lord, remind us that discipleship is not a “sometime” thing. We are called to place our whole lives in your care; to follow you; to serve you by caring for others, not just once in a while, but always. We admit that we’re not always ready to do this. The demand is great; the need is great; our energies are limited. Help us to place our trust and our lives in your care. You will give us the strength and courage that we will need for this step on the journey. Be with us. Help us to remember that your love is poured out for all your people; you are never far away. It is in Jesus’ Name, we pray. AMEN.*

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

Read the Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+17%3A1-7%2C+15-16&version=NIV&interface=print#fen-NIV-399a)]; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. **2**Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”

**3**Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, **4**“As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. **5**No longer will you be called Abram[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+17%3A1-7%2C+15-16&version=NIV&interface=print#fen-NIV-403b)]; your name will be Abraham,[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+17%3A1-7%2C+15-16&version=NIV&interface=print" \l "fen-NIV-403c" \o "See footnote c)] for I have made you a father of many nations. **6**I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. **7**I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

**15**God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. **16**I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”

Read the Epistle Lesson: Romans 4:13-25

It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. **14**For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, **15**because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

**16**Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. **17**As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.”[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+4%3A13-25&version=NIV&interface=print#fen-NIV-28040a)] He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

**18**Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+4%3A13-25&version=NIV&interface=print#fen-NIV-28041b)] **19**Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. **20**Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, **21**being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. **22**This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” **23**The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, **24**but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. **25**He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Mark 8:31-38

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. **32**He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

**33**But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

**34**Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. **35**For whoever wants to save their life[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+8%3A31-38&version=NIV&interface=print#fen-NIV-24536a)] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. **36**What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? **37**Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? **38**If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

Message

There are a couple of things I want to remind you of as I start today’s sermon. Just verses before we have Peter declaring, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God!” Jesus is the Messiah, the one who has come to save his people, to lift them above the “oppressor’s rod”, to bring about the Kingdom of God where the people of God will be safe, secure and vindicated from all their enemies. Peter and his brother Andrew had left a thriving fishing business and the security of their home to follow this man. They staked their future on the assumption that this truly was the Messiah who would restore the fortunes of Israel. Finally all the laments and hopes of the Psalms will come true.

Robert Frost wrote the poem: “The Road Less Traveled,” which talks about having to choose which road to take at a fork in a road through the woods. It was the last two lines that spoke to me as I read the Gospel. They are: I took the one less traveled by,And that has made all the difference.

The less traveled road can be the more difficult road, but at the same time it can be the most wondrous road. The less traveled road can be filled with wonder as only a few have seen what lie in its path. The less traveled road can be filled with excitement as the unexpected can lie beyond each bend.

Jesus is talking about the less traveled road in our gospel lesson this morning. Jesus begins teaching the disciples about what is going to happen next in his ministry. Jesus tells the disciples that the son of man, Jesus himself, must suffer many things, be rejected by all the religious rulers and die and then rise on the third day. This was the less traveled road of the cross, of suffering, of dying. This is the less traveled road of the theology of the cross. This is the less traveled road of dying for the sake of the good news.

And then Peter stopped Jesus in his tracks and said what a minute. This can’t be right. You can be telling us that this is the way of God. Peter is saying this because he has traveled the wrong path, the path that says success, power and glory are the way of the world and the way of God. Not death, not the cross!

We share Peter’s hope. We know how Peter feels. Peter knew exactly how Jesus should act, what his goals ought to be, what was acceptable and what was not. He wanted a leader who will save his people, but do it in a way of which he approved. God’s idea of leadership is not to be confused with Peter’s or ours. Peter had assumed the normal expectations associated with a Messiah. For Peter Jesus was a figure of hope, not a figure of failure but of success and power. We know these hopes and dreams. To these assumptions, Jesus says, “Get behind me Satan.” It is possible to have the words and devotion and yet miss what Jesus is all about. It happened to Peter and it can happen to us.

Peter loved Jesus but could not understand this untraveled road Jesus was about to in bark on. He could not understand that suffering was the way of Jesus. For the road that Peter traveled and wanted Jesus to travel was the road of glory, success, power and might. Jesus was supposed to be a conquering Messiah, not a dead one. And then just as Peter is trying to understand this, Jesus turns to all of them and says: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Jesus asks us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow. We are to be true to the person God created us to be, willingly get involved in the life around us in a way in keeping with our identity as a child of God. We are to follow. We are not to lead but are to follow. This means being willing to go where Jesus would lead us. This may mean that we find ourselves in uncomfortable situations, situations where we feel ill-prepared to be. To be willing to follow is to trust Jesus completely and take his lead certain that we will not be abandoned but given the skills and words needed. A willingness to follow is to be always watching for opportunities of service, not concerned about the cross that might be left in front of us. A willingness to follow leaves us open to be molded by God into our true self. It leaves us open to address injustices that confront us. In response to a leader who suffered, was rejected, killed but rose again, we are free to act, given power to act, are expected to act.

We do not take up our crosses and follow so that God would love us, that is already assured, we take up our crosses and follow in response to that love. We will be held accountable for the life we choose. To be ashamed of God, to refuse to live a life of loving response, refusing to take up the crosses we find in our way, will result in the Son of Man being ashamed of us when he comes in his glory. “For those who want to save their life will lose it.”

We worship Jesus, we follow Jesus, because he is the one who showed us that only he has power over death and suffering. He rose from the dead. To choose to follow anything or anyone else is to give ourselves over to evil. We journey through Lent to remind us of the true self God has created us to be, we journey through Lent to remind us of the path that leads to life. A path that may have suffering and rejection along the way, but the only true path because this is the path our Savior chose to walk. He is the one who is our leader, we ask for strength to follow where he would lead us.

This is not an easy road to follow, to emulate our Lord. And without the help of God’s Spirit, I doubt that any of us could truly follow him. But God’s Spirit has been given to us, and to many who have embrace Jesus to be the Messiah, the Suffering Servant of God, who gave his life, not only for our redemption, but as a call to live in relationship with God.

I hope that God’s Spirit leads us all, during this time of Lent, to come to realize what it means to truly follow Christ, to pick up our cross and begin to follow him in faith and life. For Jesus is, not only the Messiah, but also the incarnate Word of God, who gave us an example of what it means to follow him as Children of God.

Let us pray: Dear Heavenly Father, as we move through this season of Lent, inspire us through the power of your Holy Spirit, to embrace anew your love for us, as revealed in the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus the Christ. Give us the faith we need to be your disciples. Enable us to discern Your Word, that it might transform us to embrace your will for our lives, and live in witness to your saving grace. This we ask in Christ’s holy name. Amen.

There are a couple of things I want to remind you of as I start today’s sermon. Just verses before we have Peter declaring, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God!” Jesus is the Messiah, the one who has come to save his people, to lift them above the “oppressor’s rod”, to bring about the Kingdom of God where the people of God will be safe, secure and vindicated from all their enemies. Peter and his brother Andrew had left a thriving fishing business and the security of their home to follow this man. They staked their future on the assumption that this truly was the Messiah who would restore the fortunes of Israel. Finally all the laments and hopes of the Psalms will come true.

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Benediction:

*The step of discipleship requires commitment and faith. Go now in peace, bringing the good news of Jesus’ love to all people. Do not be afraid. God is with you. AMEN.*