

Sermon and Prayers for the Third Sunday of Epiphany + January 24, 2021
Bishop Bill Gafkjen, Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA

Psalms 62:5-12

For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from God.
God alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.
Trust in God at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.
Those of low estate are but a breath, those of high estate are a delusion;
in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath.
Put no confidence in extortion, and set no vain hopes on robbery;
if riches increase, do not set your heart on them.
Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this:
that power belongs to God, and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord.
For you repay to all according to their work.

Mark 1:14-20

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

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

The Word of the Lord.

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in abundance, dear people of God, from God our creator, through the Lord Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen

And from your other 45,000 or so siblings who are part of some 180 congregations, ministries, and agencies spread across the territory of this synod, greetings and woohoo in the name of Jesus!

“God alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.”

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

I grieved at the sight of crosses and banners and flags bearing the name of Jesus that were used in the violent, death-dealing assault on our nation’s capital on January 6th, the Day of Epiphany. I grieved because what happened that day – as what has happened on so many other violent days in recent times – revealed allegiance to kingdoms other than the kingdom of God that has come near in Jesus.

The kingdoms of the world that we see on display far too often in this country and around the world and even in the church rely on violence to get their way. The kingdom of God does the much harder work of making peace.

Kingdoms of the world seek to demean, and dismiss, and dominate others. The kingdom of God honors, welcomes, and serves all.

Kingdoms of this world hoard in a spirit of scarcity. The kingdom of God shares in a spirit of abundance. The central concern of the kingdoms of the world is to self-protect and self-promote, to retreat into and demand likeness. The kingdom of God welcomes and celebrates difference and risks protecting and lifting up others.

A core feature of the kingdoms of this world is that they require us to betray almost every other commitment that we have, including commitments like those that flow from the baptismal waters, or arise from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, or are seen in the way Jesus walked through the world, died on the cross, and rose from the grave.

Some of these commitments that characterize a life lived in response to God's gift of life in Christ are captured in the rite of Affirmation of Baptism that we use at confirmation and other times in our life together, and they are very different from what kingdoms of the world require of us.

*Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism:
to live among God's faithful people,
to hear the Word of God and share in the Lord's supper,
to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,
and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?*

And do you remember what we say?
I do, and I ask God to help and guide me.

In other words, we have come to know and have been made citizens of the kingdom of God through baptismal submersion in the forgiving grace and persistent self-giving love of Jesus, crucified and risen for the life of the world. We are marked indelibly with his cross and sealed in his Spirit forever.

Consequently, we are called by the Spirit of Jesus to repent of giving ourselves to other kingdoms and to believe in and entrust ourselves to and lean into the good news of God's kingdom above all other kingdoms.

Over and over, day and night, and many times throughout each day these days, we are called, along with Simon and Andrew and James and John, to believe the good news of God's kingdom come near, drop the nets of other kingdoms woven with the barbed wire of empty promises pick up the cruciform nets of Jesus that are woven with the sure and certain promises of new, abundant, and lasting life wrapped in forgiveness, mercy, justice, peace, and love for us and for all.

Secure in **God's** grace, renewed in **God's** forgiveness, citizens of **God's** kingdom, we follow Jesus to fish for people. We reach deep into God's tackle box of cross-borne love to find every possible way to share with others – including those with whom we disagree or differ, or who we are tempted to dismiss, dominate, or despise – to share with “them” the beautiful, bountiful, beneficent kingdom of God where place, and purpose, and a secure place in the world are gifts discovered most often in the sharing of them.

The time is fulfilled, sisters and brothers. The kingdom of God has come near. The Spirit of Jesus calls us to repent of our allegiance to the kingdoms of this world, and to believe in and live into the great good news of God's kingdom come near, to us and to our world.

For, surely God alone is our rock and our salvation, our fortress; we shall not be shaken. On God rests our deliverance and our honor; our mighty rock, our refuge in in God.

Trust in God at all times, dear people; pour out your heart before God. God alone is our refuge.

Thanks be to God.

Prayers

(from "Morning Prayer" in **Evangelical Lutheran Worship**)

Let us pray.

A brief silence for prayer follows each petition.

Mighty God of mercy, we thank you for the resurrection dawn, bringing the glory of our risen Lord who makes every day new.

Especially we thank you—

for the sustaining goodness of your creation . . .

for the new creation in Christ and all gifts of healing and forgiveness . . .

for the gifts of relationship with others . . .

for the communion of faith in your church . . .

Other thanksgivings may be added.

Merciful God of might, renew this weary world, heal the hurts of all your children, and bring about your peace for all in Christ Jesus, the living Lord. Especially we pray—

for those who govern nations of the world . . .

for the people in countries ravaged by strife or warfare . . .

for all who work for peace and international harmony . . .

for all who strive to save the earth from carelessness and destruction . . .

for the church of Jesus Christ in every land . . .

Other intercessions may be added.

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.