# Worship Plan - Church Year B

## 2023-2024

## Year B (2023-2024) – Advent

# *THE KING SHALL COME*

---

### NOTE

With this Church Year, Advent begins as late as it possibly can, with the First Sunday in Advent falling on December 3. That places the Fourth Sunday in Advent on December 24. Hypothetically, there would be Advent worship in that morning and Christmas Eve worship that afternoon/evening. Some worship planners may choose not to do that, understanding that perhaps many/most would not attend both services on December 24. One could omit the Fourth Sunday in Advent, noting that that day's Gospel, the Annunciation, is often part of a Christmas Eve service of Nine Lessons and Carols.

### SERIES EXPLANATION

The Church Year begins with the season of Advent, which means "coming." When someone is coming over, what do you do? It depends on who is coming and why they are coming. If it's a good friend popping in for a quick visit, you don't worry too much about how the house looks or serving a meal. But imagine the governor is coming over for an evening to give you some sort of citizen's award. That's a big deal. There is work to be done: deep cleaning, planning a menu, getting the yard looking its best, etc.

So, is Advent a big deal? It depends on who is coming and why they are coming. In this worship series, we get the answer to those questions. We see that the King shall come. We see why the King came on that first Christmas and why he shall come again on judgment day. In this season, we also cherish the way our King comes to us today in Word and sacrament, establishing his reign in our hearts.

Our worship will follow this pattern.

| | |
|---|---|
| First Sunday in Advent | *He Is Coming to Save Us* |
| Second Sunday in Advent | *Prepare to Meet Him* |
| Third Sunday in Advent | *He Is Bringing Perfect Joy* |
| Fourth Sunday in Advent | *Just as God Promised* |

### CHANGES FROM PREVIOUS YEARS OF *THE FOUNDATION*

The first years of *The Foundation* offered content for planning worship and preaching in two formats, an Excel spreadsheet for the entire church year and PDF exports from that spreadsheet for each season. For this new Year B, the thematic and sermon content is provided only in the seasonal PDFs. One reason for this is the addition of an occasional "Note to the Preacher," something that doesn't work as well in a spreadsheet.

The spreadsheet still contains dates and suggestions for hymns and liturgy. Those who like to customize the spreadsheet for local use are still able to do so. Since the new hymnal has now been in use for two years, this Year B spreadsheet does not include options for both cautious and ambitious introduction of new musical material. If your congregation is just starting to use the new hymnal, review the strategies in Years C and A for ideas on how to make introduction as comfortable as possible for as many as possible.

**First Sunday in Advent** **December 3, 2023**

*THE KING SHALL COME*

# *HE IS COMING TO SAVE US*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Rulers plan and administrate and govern. They typically do not save. If your house is on fire, it will not be the mayor who shows up to save you from the flames. If America were attacked, the President would serve as the commander in chief of the armed forces. The President would not pick up a weapon, go to the front lines, and fight to save you from the enemy.

Jesus is different. He is both infinitely greater than all other rulers, yet also infinitely humbler. He does not consider it beneath his rank as King to risk his life for his subjects. He is willing to fight for us. He is willing to die for us. For King Jesus came into our world for one reason—to save us.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Isaiah 64:1-9 – All of us have become unclean, tainted by sin. So we needed our King to come to save us.

1 Corinthians 1:3-9 – Our faithful God promises to enrich us with every spiritual gift so that we can stand firm as we wait for our King to come again on judgment day.

*Mark 11:1-10 – On Palm Sunday Jesus rides into Jerusalem as a king. The crowd shouts, “Hosanna!” which means, “Save us!”

## RESOURCE REMINDER

CW21’s *Altar Book* contains eight seasonal prayers of the church. These are spoken by the pastor, not responsive. *Service Builder* contains two responsive prayers for the Advent season.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 495 The King Shall Come |
| HOD | 301 Savior of the Nations, Come |
| Third/Distr | 548 The King of Glory Comes |
| Closing | 313 Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

Consider using "The King Shall Come" (CW495) in place of the Gloria. It's the title of the Advent series, and the Gloria is often omitted in Advent. One possible progression: Opening Hymn, Invocation, Confession and Absolution, Lighting of the Advent Candles (from the old CW Occasional Services) in place of the Kyrie, and select verses of "The King Shall Come" in place of the Gloria (just don't call it the Gloria since it's not), Prayer of the Day.

Note that this plan utilizes the Gospel reading of Jesus entry into Jerusalem, which serves as a microcosm for the message of the Festival Half of the Church Year. It sets up this series theme.

**Second Sunday in Advent** **December 10, 2023**

*THE KING SHALL COME*

# *PREPARE TO MEET HIM*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Scriptures teach that King Jesus is the Son of God in flesh and the only hope for salvation. Jesus himself claimed that he is the only way into the glorious kingdom of heaven. You do not approach meeting someone like that casually or carelessly. You prepare meticulously. What does that mean? What does a life of readiness—ready to meet such a King—look like? In one word: repentance. If we insist on hanging onto our sins, how can we receive the One who came for the very purpose of taking those sins away?

Throughout history, God has raised up called servants—like John the Baptist—to preach a message of repentance. This repentance is central to our preparation for the Lord's coming. Without repentance, the King's coming only terrifies. But all those who believe and repent look forward to the coming of the King and the consummation of his everlasting kingdom.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Isaiah 40:1-11 – Isaiah prophesies about one who could come to prepare people to meet their sovereign LORD. This prophecy is fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist.

*2 Peter 3:8-14 – St. Peter reminds us that judgment day will come at an unexpected time. So prepare with daily repentance.

Mark 1:1-8 – God raised up John the Baptist to preach a message of repentance and forgiveness, preparing people to meet their Lord and King.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 312 Comfort, Comfort All My People |
| HOD | 316 On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry |
| Third/Distr | 325 My Soul In Stillness Waits |
| Closing | 302 Prepare the Royal Highway - v1,4 |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

If you are not using "The King Shall Come" in place of the Gloria, consider singing select verses as the closing hymn throughout Advent, echoing the theme of the worship series.

**Third Sunday in Advent** **December 17, 2023**

***THE KING SHALL COME***

# *HE IS BRINGING PERFECT JOY*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

The historic Christian Church gave Latin titles to each Sunday. They titled the Third Sunday in Advent "Gaudete," which means "Rejoice!" As we reach the midway point of Advent, we remember that when the King shall come, he will bring us perfect and everlasting joy.

Joy is not the same thing as happiness. Happiness is an emotion. Joyfulness is a condition. Happiness comes from your circumstances. Joyfulness comes from your King entering into your heart and assuring you of his abiding love and your glorious future. Therefore, happiness is fleeting. Joyfulness is enduring.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

*Isaiah 61:1-3,10,11 – Through the prophet Isaiah, the Savior-King proclaims good news of great joy for all those who are brokenhearted.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 – The promises of the coming King let us live with joy, regardless of present circumstances.

John 1:6-8,19-28 – John the Baptist teaches the infinite superiority of Christ Jesus. John was only a witness to the light. Jesus is the light who gives life and perfect joy.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 524 Rejoice, the Lord Is King |
| HOD | 324 O Lord, How Shall I Meet You |
| Third/Distr | 315 Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord |
| Closing | 493 Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers - v1,4 |

**Fourth Sunday in Advent** **December 24, 2023**

*THE KING SHALL COME*

# *JUST AS GOD PROMISED*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

In Eden, mankind fell into sin, bringing death and despair to Paradise. God immediately promised to send a Savior who would undo that devastation. This Savior would be a descendant of Adam and Eve—a human being. Century after century, through the prophets, God reiterated and expanded upon that promise of a Savior-King. In a manger in Bethlehem, on that first Christmas, God's promise was fulfilled.

The perfect faithfulness God demonstrated in keeping all his promises about Christ's first coming at Christmas is what gives us the certainty and comfort that God will keep his promises about Christ's second coming on judgment day. The King shall come!

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

2 Samuel 7:8-16 – The LORD promised King David that one of his descendants would establish an everlasting kingdom.

Romans 16:25-27 – The prophetic writings about King Jesus prove that God keeps his promises.

*Luke 1:26-38 – In the womb of the Virgin Mary, God kept his promise to send a Savior who would establish an everlasting kingdom.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 328 The Angel Gabriel |
| HOD | 327 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel |
| Third/Distr | 349 A Great and Mighty Wonder |
| Closing | 320 As Angels Joyed with One Accord - v1,2,6,7 |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

"The Angel Gabriel" provides a very simple option for a small choir or assembly of cantors. It could even be done by children. The choir serves as the narrator. One cantor sings anything spoken by Gabriel. Another sings any text spoken by Mary. The congregation could join in on the final "Gloria" at the end of each verse.

## Year B (2023) – Christmas

# *GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY*

**SERIES EXPLANATION**

We live in a world with a 24-hour news cycle. Between the countless cable networks or online sources or social media posts, news is flying at us constantly. Most of it seems awful. We doomscroll on our phones—bad news after more bad news. Our hearts grow heavy. Our minds grow anxious.

The world is starving for good news. And that is exactly what we get at Christmas. On that first Christmas Eve, the angel told the shepherds, "I bring you good news of great joy" (Luke 2:10). News is not advice. The angel had not come to give advice about how to cope in a messed-up world. News is simply a report of facts. The angel reported a fact—the birth of One who would make everything right again. This child would remove all our fears and fill our hearts with joy.

Our worship follows this pattern.

| | |
|---|---|
| Christmas Eve | *A Savior Has Been Born* |
| Christmas Day | *God Became Man* |
| First Sunday after Christmas | *Peace on Earth* |
| Epiphany of Our Lord | *For All People* |

**Nativity of our Lord – Christmas Eve** **December 24, 2023**

***GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY***

# *A SAVIOR HAS BEEN BORN*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

"I bring you good news of great joy…. A Savior has been born." Think of what the angel's statement means. If you believe you are basically a decent person—not perfect, but good enough—you can still enjoy the carols and appreciate the pretty lights. You can still relish giving presents and gathering with family. But you will not have "great joy" this Christmas. For the angel said that the "good news of great joy" was the fact that "a Savior has been born." One cannot truly celebrate Christmas unless one believes he needs salvation.

Let us then use this night to acknowledge that we *aren't* good enough people in God's eyes. Sin lives in our hearts and permeates our lives. We need to be saved—from the guilt of that sin, from the power of the devil, and from eternal death. So, Jesus came to do just that—save us. So great was his love for us, he left the throne of heaven, crawled into a manger, and would not stop until he reached the cross. Oh, come let us adore him!

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Isaiah 7:10-14 – When confronted with King Ahaz's sin, the LORD promises to send a Savior, born of a virgin.

Titus 3:4-7 – St. Paul tells us why Jesus appeared—to save us.

*Luke 2:1-20 – The account of our Savior's birth.

## HYMNS (standard service)

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 350 Hark! The Herald Angels Sing |
| HOD | 335 To Shepherds as They Watched by Night |
| Third/Distr | 345 Where Shepherds Lately Knelt |
| Closing | 337 Silent Night |

## HYMNS (lessons & carols option)

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 354 Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful - v1,2,3 |
| 1st | 362 Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising - v1-5 |
| 2nd | 333 O Little Town of Bethlehem - v1-3 |
| 3rd | 345 Where Shepherds Lately Knelt |
| 4th | 352 Joy Has Dawned |
| 5th | a version of the Magnificat, like hymn 975 |
| 6th | 350 Hark! The Herald Angels Sing |
| 7th | 346 Angels We Have Heard on High - v1-3 |
| Closing | 337 Silent Night |

*(continued)*

## SERVICE OPTIONS

A simple, modified version of Lessons and Carols can be a wonderful opportunity to invite the de-churched in your community. Christmas Eve has surpassed Easter as the number one service that unchurched people are willing to attend. Multiple studies have shown the majority of people will accept a direct invitation to Christmas Eve if asked by someone they trust. Those same studies show that de-chruched enjoy singing Christmas carols that are familiar. The selected hymns contain five that are on most lists of favorite Christmas hymns. The lessons could be read by lectors. Most would have short, one-sentence introductions. The pastor's lesson would serve as the basis for a sermonette. The suggested hymns (played at the proper tempo) and lessons allow for a fifteen-minute sermonette with the service still concluding in 60 minutes. Another option is to incorporate greater use of candlelight. Some congregations set up extra candelabra. (They can be rented.) Others order small personal candles for every adult, to be lit during the offertory before the final hymn.

**Nativity of our Lord – Christmas Day** **December 25, 2023**

***GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY***

# *GOD BECAME MAN*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

How can an omnipresent God be held is his mother's arms? How can an all-powerful God be too weak to walk? This is the mystery of the incarnation—that God took on human flesh. We cannot understand how it can be so. But the Spirit enables us to grasp that this incomprehensible truth is very good news. This is the Savior we need! As true man, he was born under God's law, all the commandments that we have broken. Where we have failed, Jesus was perfect. As true God, when he laid down his perfect life, it was a sacrifice valuable enough to pay for the sins of the world, so that we might be adopted as God's children.

Christmas Day fills us with wonder—that the Creator God *could* become flesh and dwell among us and that, in his great love for us, he *would* do such a thing. Let us marvel at this good news of great joy!

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Micah 5:2-5a – Bethlehem was a little town. Yet, it will be known throughout history as the birthplace of the God-man.

Galatians 4:4-7 – The Son of God was born of a woman so that he might redeem us and make us heirs of the heavenly Father.

*John 1:1-18 – The mystery of the incarnation—God became man; the Word became flesh.

## RESOURCE REMINDER

CW21's *Altar Book* contains eight seasonal prayers of the church. These are spoken by the pastor, not responsive. *Service Builder* contains a wealth of additional responsive prayers of the church. It also includes two Christmas dialogues that may be used to begin the service. To find these, "Insert / Rite." Then find the dialogues in the drop down at the top left under Seasonal Inserts. The occasional resource reminders in The Foundation do not mention every possibility, just a few to assure that users occasionally check for these options.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 353 Joy to the World |
| HOD | 366 O Rejoice, All Christians, Loudly |
| Third/Distr | 342 O Jesus Christ, Your Manger Is |
| Closing | 363 Now Sing We, Now Rejoice |

*(continued)*

## SERVICE OPTIONS

Consider using a special Gloria on Christmas Day. There are many options where a choir/cantor sing the verses, and the congregation joins in on the refrain. Another option is simply using hymn 347 "Angels from the Realms of Glory" in place of the Gloria.

Also note that *Service Builder* has a Christmas litany that can be inserted in place of the confession of sins and Kyrie.

**First Sunday after Christmas** **December 31, 2023**

***GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY***

# *PEACE ON EARTH*

## NOTE

This year the First Sunday after Christmas falls on December 31st, New Year's Eve. Hypothetically, a congregation might look at the readings for the First Sunday after Christmas in the morning and then utilize readings for New Year's Eve in the evening. (Christmas Worship offers three different sets of readings for New Year's Eve.) Some worship planners may offer only one or the other service on December 31. If that is the case, it is recommended that the congregation utilizes the readings for the First Sunday after Christmas, staying within this worship series, which all focus on the few texts that tell us about Christ's pre-adult life. A Sunday morning service, utilizing those readings, could still incorporate end-of-year themes at appropriate points in the service: the Prayer of the Church (at the close of the year), in select hymns (CW21 368-369), etc. Moreover, it is relatively easy to find application in Simeon's song that help us face the unknowns of the coming year.

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

On Christmas Eve a choir of angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." So, where is this peace on earth? Between nations? There are always wars going on somewhere. In our country? Disagreements have only grown more contentious, one group screaming angrily at another group. We might not even have perfect peace in our homes! So, what were the angels singing about?

They were singing about peace between a holy God who hates sin and human beings who sin every day. Because of what Christ did as our Savior, there is no hostility between us and God, only peace and love. We have the peace of salvation in our hearts. As we draw near the end of life, like elderly Simeon or Anna, we have the peace of knowing of the glorious eternal life that is to come. As this peace with God fills our hearts, it moves us to live in peace with each other too.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

1 Kings 8:6-13 – King Solomon dedicates the temple, a place where the glory of the LORD would be revealed as the peace of salvation was proclaimed.

Colossians 3:12-17 – As the peace of Christ rules our hearts, we are moved to live in peace.

*Luke 2:22-40 – God allows elderly Simeon and Anna to see their Savior with their own eyes. This fills them with peace.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 356 God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen |
| HOD | 355 Let All Together Praise Our God |
| Third/Distr | 330 Peace Came to Earth |
| Closing | 950 Lord, Bid Your Servant Go in Peace |

**Epiphany of Our Lord** **January 6, 2024**

***GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY***

# *FOR ALL PEOPLE*

---

## NOTE

This year Epiphany falls on a Saturday. Some worship planners may focus on Epiphany on Saturday, January 6 and then focus on the Baptism of Our Lord on Sunday, January 7. Others will observe Epiphany for the entire weekend. If your congregation goes that direction, it is recommended that Epiphany be observed on January 6 and 7, rather than on the weekend of December 31. This keeps the season of Christmas closer to its normal length, rather than passing quickly in a few days. If this option is chosen, it is further recommended that the worship planner move the readings for the First Sunday after Epiphany (The Baptism of our Lord) to the weekend of January 14. The readings for the Second Sunday after Epiphany would just not be utilized this year. On the weekend of January 21, the readings for the Third Sunday after Epiphany would be used as normal.

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

On Christmas Eve the angel told the shepherds, "I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people" (Luke 2:10). One wonders if those words struck those Jewish shepherds as odd. For centuries, God had given special attention to one nation—Israel. There were Jewish religious leaders who taught that only members of that special people would be saved. Not according to the Christmas angel! The birth of the Savior was good news *for all people.*

Today we celebrate the Epiphany of our Lord. Epiphany comes from a Greek word meaning "reveal." When the Savior was born, he was first revealed to Israelites: the shepherds, Simeon, Anna. But today, the Lord miraculously guides foreigners across countless miles, so the Savior could be revealed to them as well. How did the magi respond? "They were overjoyed" (Matthew 2:10). Epiphany is sometimes known as "The Gentiles' Christmas." We Gentiles (non-Jews) rejoice in the good news that this Jewish baby is not just the Savior of Jews. He is for all people—the Savior of the world.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Numbers 24:15-17a – God compels the heathen magician Balaam to prophecy that out of the nation of Israel would come one who would shine like a star for all peoples to see.

Romans 11:13-15,28-32 – Paul writes about his passion for sharing the good news with all people.

*Matthew 2:1-12 – Magi from the east are miraculously led to their Savior, and they worship him.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 372 As With Gladness Men of Old |
| HOD | 370 How Lovely Shines the Morning Star |
| Third/Distr | 347 Angels from the Realms of Glory |
| Closing | 344 What Child Is This |

## Year B (2024) – Sundays after Epiphany

# *FROM THE RIVER TO THE MOUNTAIN*

### SERIES EXPLANATION

"Epiphany" comes from a Greek word that means "reveal." Today, if someone says, "I had an epiphany," he means he had some extremely important, life-changing revelation. Within the Church Year, that is the purpose of the season of Epiphany—to reveal important truths about Jesus Christ, truths that will indeed change your life.

For most of his adult life, Jesus was known simply as Mary's son. He followed his adoptive father, Joseph, into the carpentry business. People in his hometown of Nazareth probably thought of Jesus as a very nice man—hardworking, honest, a role model for others. (That is still how many think of Jesus today.) But around the age of thirty, the fuller truth about Jesus began to be revealed: his person, his power, his purpose. It started with Jesus standing in a river with John the Baptist. The biggest epiphany took place at a mountain, where select followers saw Jesus shining brighter than the sun. All these epiphanies—all these revelations about Jesus—changed the lives of everyone around him. In this season of Epiphany, as we follow Jesus from the river to the mountain, may they change us too.

Our worship follows this pattern.

| | |
|---|---|
| First Sunday after Epiphany | *It Begins with Baptism* |
| Second Sunday after Epiphany | *The Kindness in His Calling* |
| Third Sunday after Epiphany | *Committed to a Lofty Charge* |
| Fourth Sunday after Epiphany | *Absolute Authority* |
| Fifth Sunday after Epiphany | *The Devil's Work Undone* |
| Last Sunday after Epiphany | *A Glimpse of His True Glory* |

### RESOURCE REMINDER

CW21's *Altar Book* contains eight seasonal prayers of the church. These are spoken by the pastor, not responsive. *Service Builder* contains a wealth of additional prayers of the church. For the Epiphany season, there are prayers for Epiphany, Baptism of our Lord (not responsive), and Transfiguration.

There are also dialogues for Epiphany and Transfiguration that may be used to begin the service and Farewell to Alleluia to end Transfiguration. To find these, "Insert / Rite." Then find the dialogues in the drop down at the top left under Seasonal Inserts. Farewell to Alleluia includes click on it, click delete, and select "Introduction to Holy Week" in the delete dropdown.

**First Sunday after Epiphany – Baptism of Our Lord** **January 7, 2024**

***FROM THE RIVER TO THE MOUNTAIN***

# *IT BEGINS WITH BAPTISM*

***(The Baptism of Our Lord)***

---

**NOTE**

This year the Festival of the Epiphany of our Lord falls on Saturday, January 6. Some worship planners may have that important service repeat (or only be observed) on Sunday, January 7. If that is the case, it is recommended that the readings for the Baptism of Our Lord be moved to the Second Sunday after Epiphany (the weekend of January 14). The proper readings for the Third Sunday after Epiphany (the weekend of January 21) would be used on that week. The normal readings for the Second Sunday after Epiphany (the weekend of January 14) would simply not be used this year.

**EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY**

At his baptism in the Jordan River Jesus was publicly anointed with the Holy Spirit and designated by God the Father as his chosen Messiah. Thus, Jesus' baptism was the beginning of his public ministry. Jesus' baptism revealed that he was not just a nice guy who could make a sturdy table. He was God's chosen servant, the one who had come to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. Jesus is the one willing to stand in our place as our substitute and Savior.

Jesus' baptism reveals to us who he really is. Our own baptism does the same! Our baptism was the beginning of a new and better life—eternal life!—a gift graciously given to us by our truest friend. Jesus' ministry and our eternity with him. It begins with baptism.

**READING INTRODUCTIONS** *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Isaiah 49:1-6 – Through the pen of the prophet Isaiah, the Messiah himself speaks, telling us of the work he would do when he was anointed at his baptism.

*Romans 6:1-11 – St. Paul connects our baptism to Christ, and he discusses the results of that connection in our lives.

Mark 1:4-11 – Jesus public ministry begins with the anointing he received in his baptism.

**HYMNS**

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 379 Christ, Your Footprints through the Desert |
| HOD | 377 To Jordan's River Came Our Lord |
| Third/Distr | 679 God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It |
| Closing | 692 All Who Believe and Are Baptized |

*(continued)*

## SERVICE OPTIONS

379 will likely require introduction, if your congregation doesn't yet know it. Its text matches the theme of the day and lessons perfectly, but the tune is unfamiliar. Perhaps have a cantor sing verse 1, a small group sing verse 2 in unison, and then have the congregation join on verses 3 and 4.

*Service Builder* includes a rite for Remembrance of Baptism that incorporates the Creed and is used in place of the Creed.

**Second Sunday after Epiphany** **January 14, 2024**

***FROM THE RIVER TO THE MOUNTAIN***

# *THE KINDNESS IN HIS CALLING*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

We try to hide our faults and failures from others. We want people to see us at our best. Perhaps we assume that if people knew what we were really like, they would want nothing to do with us. There's no hiding anything from God. He is all-seeing and all-knowing. Christ Jesus has witnessed our very worst, even the sins that only occurred in our heads. The psalmist says, "You perceive my thoughts from afar. You are familiar with all my ways" (139:2,3). Yet even though Jesus knows all our faults and failures, he badly wants something to do with us. So, he calls us to follow him. He wants us to be with him, secure in his love of forgiveness. Here is this week's epiphany: Jesus shows kindness when he calls us to discipleship. More, he shows kindness by giving us the ability to answer that call, so that we might always be near him and his blessing.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

1 Samuel 3:1-10 – At a time in history when the word of the LORD was rare, the LORD shows kindness to the boy Samuel by calling to him.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 – God called us to faith through the gospel, not because of any merit or worthiness in us, but entirely because of his grace and kindness.

*John 1:43-51 – Jesus proves to Nathanael that he knows absolutely everything about us. In kindness, Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael to follow him.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 633 Speak, O Lord |
| HOD | 375 Arise and Shine in Splendor |
| Third/Distr | 711 Jesus Calls Us o'er the Tumult |
| Closing | 716 O Christ, Who Called the Twelve - v1,4 |

**Third Sunday after Epiphany** **January 21, 2024**

*FROM THE RIVER TO THE MOUNTAIN*

# *COMMITTED TO A LOFTY CHARGE*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

To whom does the work of salvation belong? Simple question. There is only one Savior. But this is how good Jesus is. So that our lives might have profound meaning and eternal purpose, he shares some of that work with us. He calls us not just to be followers, but to be follower-makers. Jesus asks some—prophets, apostles, pastors, missionaries, teachers—to do this full time. But ultimately Jesus asks all believers to serve as his ambassadors, sharing the gospel with whomever he brings into our sphere of influence. This lofty charge requires commitment—a willingness to abandon everything else should faithfulness require it. This is the life-changing revelation for this week. Jesus has committed us to a lofty charge: the privilege to play a role in his saving work.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Jonah 3:1-5,10 – The reluctant Jonah had been given the lofty charge of proclaiming a message from the LORD to the people of Nineveh.

*2 Corinthians 5:14-21 – Christ has committed to us, as his ambassadors, the message of reconciliation.

Mark 1:14-20 – When Jesus gave Simon and Andrew the lofty charge of fishing for people, they left everything else behind.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 901 O Christians, Haste |
| HOD | 743 I Hear the Savior Calling |
| Third/Distr | 695 Take My Life and Let It Be |
| Closing | 746 I Love to Tell the Story - v1,7,2 |

**Fourth Sunday after Epiphany** **January 28, 2024**

***FROM THE RIVER TO THE MOUNTAIN***

# *ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Authority is the power to determine what happens, the ability to give direction or even commands. Authority is limited. Authority is limited in duration. Parents have authority over their children until they grow up and move out. Authority is limited in scope. A governor has authority over the people of his state only, not the neighboring state. Authority is limited by levels. A manager has authority over employees unless the company owner—a higher authority—demotes him. Authority is limited in duration and scope. It is limited by higher levels of authority.

This week we see that there is one man—only one!—who has absolute authority. There is no one, not even the demons, who is outside his authority. As the Son of God there is no higher authority than Jesus. And his authority is everlasting. But here is the best part of this epiphany: Jesus graciously uses his absolute authority for our benefit and blessing.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Deuteronomy 18:15-20 – Moses prophesies that the LORD would raise up another prophet who would speak with all the authority of God himself.

Hebrews 3:1-6 – As great as Moses was, Jesus is worthy of infinitely greater honor. For only Jesus has absolute authority.

*Mark 1:21-28 – Jesus demonstrates absolute authority. Even his enemies, the demons, have to obey him.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 517 Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness |
| HOD | 744 Rise, Shine, You People |
| Third/Distr | 546 Since Our Great High Priest, Christ Jesus |
| Closing | 386 Songs of Thankfulness and Praise - v1,3,5 |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

546 is not a difficult tune, but it is new. Consider having a cantor sing the first verse or two.

**Fifth Sunday after Epiphany** **February 4, 2024**

***FROM THE RIVER TO THE MOUNTAIN***

# *THE DEVIL'S WORK UNDONE*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Martin Luther once said, "Where God built a church, there the devil would also build a chapel." Satan and the other demons hate God. They demonstrate hatred by hurting those that God loves in any way they can. The epiphany Christ wants us to have is this: demons are real, they are plenteous, and they are dangerous. But Christ would also have us see that he is continually undoing the devil's work. More, through his Word, Christ Jesus gives us the power to resist the devil and stand firm in the faith.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Isaiah 40:27-31 – When the devil's temptations make us tired and accusations make us weary, the LORD promises to renew our strength.

*1 Peter 5:6-11 – Our enemy the devil may stalk us like a hungry lion hunting prey, but the God of all grace cares for us and promises deliverance.

Mark 1:29-39 – The devil loves to see God's children suffer. Jesus undoes the devil's work.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 836 I Walk in Danger All the Way |
| HOD | 850 It Is Well with My Soul |
| Third/Distr | 867 Afflicted Saint, to Christ Draw Near |
| Closing | 924 Abide, O Dearest Jesus |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

867 is not only new, but it follows a pattern perhaps unfamiliar to our members—where you don't sing the refrain after every verse. It could be introduced by a cantor singing verses 1,2 and the refrain. Then members sing verse 3 followed by the refrain, then verse 4 followed by the refrain.

**Last Sunday after Epiphany – Transfiguration of Our Lord February 11, 2024**

***FROM THE RIVER TO THE MOUNTAIN***

# *A GLIMPSE OF HIS TRUE GLORY*

***(The Transfiguration of Our Lord)***

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

We began this worship series in the Jordan River. At his baptism, Jesus heard his Father's glorious voice: "You are my Son, whom I love" (Mark 1:11). From that day, in word and deed, Jesus began to reveal more about himself. He demonstrated the extent of his authority and power and love. Along the way, we had an epiphany. Jesus has to be the very Son of God! Yet, Jesus looked so normal, like an ordinary carpenter or your average rabbi or just another prophet. Until today. We have traveled from the river to the mountain. Today, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus gives us a glimpse of his true glory. As we see him in his dazzling brilliance, the Father speaks again, this time to us: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

This final epiphany prepares us for the journey of Lent where we will witness the most glorious work that Jesus would do when he came down from this mountain.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

2 Kings 2:1-12a – The prophet Elijah never tasted death but instead was taken directly to heaven. On the Mount of Transfiguration Elijah appeared with the glorious Son of God who would taste death.

2 Corinthians 4:3-6 – We cannot yet physically see what those disciples saw on the Mount of Transfiguration. But St. Paul teaches we can still see the glory of Christ's light in the gospel.

Mark 9:2-9 – Jesus gives Peter, James, and John a glimpse of his true glory.

## RESOURCE REMINDER

**Farewell to Alleluia**. *Service Builder* contains a wealth of optional resources. To find this rite, "Insert / Rite." Then search in the drop down at the top left under Seasonal Inserts. The rite is followed by a lengthy Introduction to Holy Week which provides background to pastors (not content for a worship folder). Click on this intro and use the delete dropdown to remove it from the worship folder.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 389 How Good, Lord, to Be Here |
| HOD | 388 Down from the Mount of Glory |
| Third/Distr | 713 I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light |
| Closing | 522 Beautiful Savior |
| | or 884 Lord, When Your Glory I Shall See |

*(continued)*

## SERVICE OPTIONS

*Service Builder* includes a Rite titled "Farewell to Alleluia" that can be utilized after the Blessing in place of the closing hymn. It includes some text and hymn 977, "Alleluia, Song of Triumph." If using this option, consider adding some symbolic action to the hymn. Perhaps it could include making or purchasing a banner with "Alleluia!" printed on it that could be carried out of worship. Schools/ECMs have had children make their own "Alleluia!" banner (as simple as coloring in the word) the week prior. The children bring them forward during the hymn and place them in a decorative box. The children's signs are then used as decoration on Easter morning.

## Year B (2024) – Lent

# *RETHINKING RELIGION*

### SERIES EXPLANATION

Everyone has assumptions about God. Likewise, everyone has assumptions about religion. Increasingly, those assumptions are negative. Americans are walking away from Christianity in breathtaking numbers. It raises the question. How do those people know if their assumptions about religion are correct? Do they really understand Christianity at all? Do we? Do we truly understand this religion?

In the season of Lent, as much as any other, Jesus teaches things that turns the world's assumptions about religion completely upside down. We call it "*Christ*ianity." So, in this holy season, let us go straight to Christ and let him replace assumptions with truth. Jesus, help us to rethink religion!

Our worship follows this pattern.

| | |
|---|---|
| Ash Wednesday | *Rethinking Our Priorities* |
| First Sunday in Lent | *Rethinking Trials, Tests, and Temptations* |
| Second Sunday in Lent | *Rethinking Suffering under the Cross* |
| Third Sunday in Lent | *Rethinking the Worth of Worship* |
| Fourth Sunday in Lent | *Rethinking the Solution to Sin* |
| Fifth Sunday in Lent | *Rethinking Devoted Commitment* |
| Sunday of the Passion | *Rethinking Real Strength* |
| Holy Thursday | *Rethinking Our Appetites* |
| Good Friday | *Rethinking Sacrifice* |

### RESOURCE REMINDER

**Ash Wednesday Confessional Rite**. *Service Builder* contains a wealth of optional resources. To find this rite and additional Holy Week options, "Insert / Rite." Then search in the drop down at the top left under Seasonal Inserts. Note that this rite may be used with or without the Imposition of Ashes. The rite is preceded by a lengthy Introduction to Holy Week which provides background to pastors (not content for a worship folder). Click on this intro and use the delete dropdown to remove it from the worship folder.

The occasional resource reminders in The Foundation do not mention every possibility, just a few to assure that users occasionally check for these options.

**Sunday of the Passion—Year B**. In *Worship the Lord* #113 several pastors describe how they combine a Palm Sunday emphasis with a reading of the Passion History. It is available here: worship.welsrc.net/download-worship/worship-the-lord-hymnal-introduction-series.

A variety of resources are available at worship.welsrc.net/download-worship/service-folders-palm-sunday. These options can serve both congregations with the new hymnal and those using CW93.

*Service Builder* provides a responsive prayer for Lent 1.

**Ash Wednesday** **February 14, 2024**

*RETHINKING RELIGION*

# *RETHINKING OUR PRIORITIES*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

That potential promotion at work. The third date, which will signal if there is real potential in this relationship. The test this Friday, which will determine if you make honor roll or not. The game on Sunday with the playoffs on the line. So many things that compete for our attention! It's easy to think of religion as just another of many activities to cram into our schedules. Sometimes, perhaps, the schedule is just too crowded.

So, Jesus lovingly whispers into our ear, "Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust." Those are the words spoken as a dead body is planted in the ground. The reality is that our time in this world is so short. After comes eternity, spent in one of two very different places. Jesus wants us to grasp that somber truth so we rethink where he should fall among all our priorities. Death can come at any time. So now is the time to cling to Christ in true repentance. Not later. Now. There is no higher priority.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Joel 2:12-19 – Through the prophet Joel, the LORD tells us that our top priority is to return to him in true repentance. We will find that the LORD is gracious and compassionate.

Revelation 3:1-3 – Jesus tells a spiritually dead church what their top priority should be: wake up, repent, and remember what they had heard about God's grace.

*Luke 12:13-21 – Jesus tells a parable about a man who forgot that we are all turning back into dust—a man with badly misguided priorities.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 393 Savior, When In Dust to You |
| HOD | 654 Jesus Sinners Does Receive |
| Third/Distr | |
| Closing | 420 Jesus, I Will Ponder Now |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

*Service Builder* includes "Ash Wednesday Confessional Rite," a longer responsive penitential dialogue. It allows for the inclusion of the Imposition of Ashes, though it can easily be used without it.

**First Sunday in Lent** **February 18, 2024**

*RETHINKING RELIGION*

# *RETHINKING TRIALS, TESTS, AND TEMPTATIONS*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

*"If God loves us, why doesn't he remove all the trials and tests and temptations that we face?"* That question demonstrates the religious assumption that those things are bad. They aren't. In the hands of a loving God, they are tools by which he refines our faith. He uses tests as a way to compel us to be less self-reliant, and instead trust in his strength. He uses trials to teach us that this broken world is not our true home. God even takes Satan's temptations and uses them for our good.

Trials, tests, and temptations are not exceptions to God's love. That's a false assumption! These are examples of God's love. Proof is that God allowed his beloved Son Jesus to face trials and temptations, so that he might be our perfect savior and substitute.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

*Genesis 22:1-18 – God gives Abraham a test which will demonstrate who Abraham loves and trusts most.

Romans 8:31-39 – The proof of God's love is not that he removes all our trouble. The proof of God's love is that he gave us his Son. If he did that, nothing can separate us from God's love.

Mark 1:12-15 – Sometimes we fail to stand firm in trial or temptation. But by grace the kingdom of God is still ours because Jesus, as our substitute, perfectly overcame all of Satan's temptations.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 404 Jesus, Grant That Balm and Healing |
| HOD | 864 A Mighty Fortress Is Our God |
| Third/Distr | 525 The Lamb |
| Closing | 833 I Run to Christ |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

Traditionally, the Gloria is omitted in Lent. One option is to utilize a hymn from the "Confession and Absolution" section (650-658) in its place. A fine choice would be 652:1,2. It would replace the Kyrie as well, as it is sung in the refrain. Ending after verse 2 has the congregation concluding this modified penitential rite by singing about the events of Good Friday. A variation would be to have a cantor/small group sing the verses, with the congregation joining in on the refrain.

If 883 is new, consider having a cantor sing the first verse. It could be the closing hymn multiple weeks for memorization.

**Second Sunday in Lent** **February 25, 2024**

***RETHINKING RELIGION***

# *RETHINKING SUFFERING UNDER THE CROSS*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

We know that the cross was an instrument of torture and execution. However, Scripture also uses the term "cross" to refer to any suffering that one endures because he is believer: the painful denial of the desires of the flesh; ridicule and persecution from unbelievers; etc. This is one reason people reject religion. They see Christians struggling in life with these crosses, while non-Christians often seem perfectly happy. Even the prophet Jeremiah asked, "Why do all the faithless live at ease?" (12:1).

Today, Jesus asks us to rethink suffering under the cross. It is not pointless pain. Our crosses are not how we pay for sin. Jesus already did that on his cross. Our crosses are not redemptive, but they are constructive. Any suffering unbelievers face is only bad, a foretaste of worse to come. But the suffering believers face under the cross is only good, a way Christ connects us tightly to himself with fire-tested faith.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Job 1:13-22 – Job is given a heavy cross, but it does not crush his faith. Instead, God uses Job's cross to move Job to worship and praise the LORD.

Romans 5:1-11 – St. Paul teaches that God works through our suffering to shape our Christian character and to lead us to cling to Christ's gracious promises.

*Mark 8:31-38 – Jesus teaches of the absolute necessity of the cross, both his and ours.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 694 Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken |
| HOD | 817 Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart |
| Third/Distr | 844 What God Ordains Is Always Good |
| Closing | 867 Afflicted Saint, to Christ Draw Near |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

867 was recommended on the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, just a few weeks ago. It is recommended to be sung again now. Not only does it fit perfectly thematically, but also the repetition of a newer hymn will help encourage familiarity.

**Third Sunday in Lent** **March 3, 2024**

*RETHINKING RELIGION*

# *RETHINKING THE WORTH OF WORSHIP*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Person A never attends worship. He can't see the point. Person B attends every week out of a slavish sense of obligation. Her mind wanders during the services, for she views the activities of worship merely as tasks for her to complete. Who is worse off? Rather than debating the point, let us just admit neither understand the true worth of worship. And that is exactly what Satan wants.

Many think worship is about what we do for God. It is the other way around. As we gather around Word and sacrament, the Spirit moves us to love and trust in God above all things. Moved by the cross of Christ, we bow down before our God. We commune with him. And that's exactly what God wants.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Exodus 20:1-17 – The Ten Commandments teach us that God is to be worshiped above all. Why? He is the God who brought us out of slavery.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 – Whatever it is you trust most, that is what you truly worship. Some worship intelligence. Others worship power. May we worship Christ for what he did on the cross.

*John 2:13-22 – Jesus restores his Father's house to what it was supposed to be: a place of worship for all people.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 912 Open, Lovely Doors |
| HOD | 558 Salvation unto Us Has Come |
| Third/Distr | 637 The Law of God is Good and Wise |
| Closing | 407 When I Survey the Wondrous Cross |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

912 is a new translation of an older hymn. However, the tune is very familiar.

**Fourth Sunday in Lent** **March 10, 2024**

***RETHINKING RELIGION***

# *RETHINKING THE SOLUTION TO SIN*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

While not every religion uses the word "sin," they all embrace the concept. Every religion acknowledges that mankind's flawed attitudes or misguided actions are a source of pain, both now and potentially in eternity. So, every religion offers a solution: a set of laws, a moral code, a path to more enlightened behavior. What do they have in common? We are to solve sin through human effort. *Be better! Try harder!* This is the heart of every false religion. Those who correctly understand they will never overcome their sin are crushed by guilt. Those who ludicrously believe they have defeated their sin are killed by pride.

True religion offers a better way—one that frees us from guilt and has no room for pride. Jesus teaches that the solution to our sin is not to work harder. It is to trust in the work he has done for us. Salvation comes through Spirit-wrought faith in Christ.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

*Numbers 21:4-9 – The LORD promised a solution for the bite of venomous snakes. That solution perhaps seemed nonsensical. Yet, all those who trusted God's promise lived.

Ephesians 2:1-10 – God's solution to sin is offered by grace and received through faith.

John 3:14-21 – Christ is the solution to sin. Whoever believes in Christ shall not perish but have eternal life.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 409 Jesus, Refuge of the Weary |
| HOD | 570 God Loved the World So That He Gave |
| Third/Distr | 822 Pass Me Not |
| Closing | 519 There Is a Redeemer |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

If 822 is new, consider having a cantor sing verses 1, 2 and the refrain, with the congregation joining in on verses 3, 4 and the final refrain. You could repeat this hymn in subsequent weeks to help teach it.

**Fifth Sunday in Lent** **March 17, 2024**

*RETHINKING RELIGION*

# *RETHINKING DEVOTED COMMITMENT*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Religious sociologists sometimes divide Christians into two groups: committed Christians and cultural Christians. The former are usually defined as those who are active in a congregation, who pray regularly, who read Scripture, etc. The latter are those individuals who call themselves Christian and perhaps have some Christian beliefs. Yet, they do not strive to live a Christian life. They are not interested in church involvement.

Those definitions are interesting when trying to understand shifts in American Christianity. However, they demonstrate a false assumption about the Christian religion. There is indeed a devoted commitment at the center of Christianity, but it is not man's commitment to God. Even believers will at times demonstrate lukewarm commitment at best. Instead, at the heart of Christianity we find God's devotion and commitment to us. It is a devoted commitment so strong that it put God on the cross.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Isaiah 43:1-7 – In devoted commitment the LORD promises his people that even if they need to pass through raging waters or walk through a wall of fire, he will be right there with them.

Hebrews 5:7-9 – Because he was truly human Jesus did not relish having to suffer for our salvation. Yet he submitted to the cross out of his devoted commitment to us.

*John 12:20-33 – Though the thought of the cross troubled his soul, Jesus was committed to glorifying his Father's name by winning eternal life for us.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 419 Sing, My Tongue, the Glorious Battle |
| HOD | 571 O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth |
| Third/Distr | 808 Drawn to the Cross |
| Closing | 813 He Will Hold Me Fast |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

571 is perhaps an unfamiliar tune to many. Consider using a cantor or choir on verse 1, and maybe verse 2 as well.

**Sunday of the Passion (Palm Sunday)** **March 24, 2024**

*RETHINKING RELIGION*

# *RETHINKING REAL STRENGTH*

---

**RECOMMENDATION: Observe the Sunday of the Passion.**

The theme for this day, Rethinking Real Strength, can be used either for Palm Sunday or for the Sunday of the Passion. The promotional text works either way. If the worship planner chooses to observe a normal Palm Sunday service with three readings, introductions for three readings are provided below.

However, the CW21 lectionary provides another option. It has reintroduced the 500-year-old practice of appointing the account of Jesus' Triumphal Entry as the Gospel reading for Advent 1. Why? It is not just because of tradition. Palm Sunday serves as a microcosm of the salvation story that unfolds during the Festival Half of the Church Year. We see the King of kings humbling himself and willingly riding to his death. Everything else—the angelic choir of Christmas Eve, the voice of the Father thundering at Christ's baptism, the signs and wonders, Christ's bold preaching, his Transfiguration—leads to this week. Reading the Palm Sunday account on Advent 1 reminds us where the path of the Church Year ends. This is why so many Advent hymns contain Palm Sunday references.

This shift in Advent 1 subsequently allows for the focus of the sixth week of Lent to be broadened into the Sunday of the Passion. The portions of the Gospels that tell of Jesus' suffering and death are typically read during midweek Lenten services. But if many in your congregation do not attend those, it is possible they never hear the passion story in its entirety. The Sunday of the Passion places the entire passion story in front of God's people in one service.

A possible pattern for worship this sixth Sunday in Lent:

- A procession of palms.
- Confession and absolution.
- The Palm Sunday Gospel (Mark 11:1-10).
- A hymn or psalm is sung.
- The Gospel of St. Mark, chapters 14 and 15. It could be read responsively with the congregation. The reading could also be broken into sections, with hymn verses sung in between.
- A sermon could be prior to the passion reading or at the conclusion. However, some congregations choose to simply let the passion story serve as the message.

This practice would mean worshipers would hear the whole account of Holy Week annually, in the voice of the evangelist for that year.

This also allows for the five midweek services after Ash Wednesday to be utilized differently. Instead of reviewing the passion story, they might be used to review a part of the Catechism.

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Most religions believe in a powerful God. It is assumed that God will use that strength for the benefit of his followers. That is a reasonable assumption, but it begs the question. What is real strength? It is easy to assume that real strength means exerting your will over another by using any means necessary, including force. But this week we see Jesus Christ demonstrate a different kind of strength.

We have come to Holy Week. It begins with Jesus humbly riding a donkey colt straight into the hands of his enemies. As the week progresses, it will appear that Christ's adversaries are the ones in a position of

power and Jesus is in a position of weakness. Yet what Christ does this holy week—setting his divine strength aside, being passive in the face of death—would change the world. To do what Christ did for us and our salvation took real strength.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS for the Sunday of the Passion

If the entire passion reading is read in one continuous reading, it could be introduced simply by saying, "The passion of our Lord, according to the Gospel of St. Mark." If it is broken up into sections, that sentence could be spoken prior to the first reading. Subsequent readings would not be introduced at all.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS for Palm Sunday *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Zechariah 9:9-12 – The prophet Zechariah foretold a king who is both infinitely strong and perfectly humble. He would enter Jerusalem riding on the colt of a donkey.

*Hebrews 12:1-3 – Jesus demonstrated strength by enduring the cross. He did so for the joy set before him: redeeming us from our sin.

Mark 11:1-10 – The almighty Son of God demonstrates real strength by humbly riding into Jerusalem knowing he will soon be put to death.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Processional | 412 All Glory, Laud, and Honor - v1,3,4 |
| Hymn | 542 To My Precious Lord - v1,2 |
| Hymn | 406 In the Hour of Trial - v1-3 |
| Hymn | 429 O Sacred Head, Now Wounded - v2,4,5 |
| Hymn | 414 No Tramp of Soldiers' Marching Feet - v1,3,4 |
| Hymn | 432 O Dearest Jesus, What Law Have You Broken - v3-6 |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

This worship plan assumes the passion history was still read in mid-week services. Our experience is that for those who attended midweek Lent (generally a smaller section of the congregation), they do not mind hearing the story again. *Service Builder* lays out options. Consider this flow: no opening hymn; the invocation and a brief introduction; the reading of Mark 11:1-10, with the congregation speaking 9b and 10; Hymn 412 (which could be a processional hymn); prayer of the day; the readings and corresponding hymn responses; holy communion using any setting; closing hymn. This worship plan assumes most of the readings will have no introduction. However, a sermonette could be inserted before any reading (sort of like an extended introduction). If the pastor is planning on preaching on the Gospel reading on Good Friday, perhaps the final reading for this day should not serve as the basis of the sermonette.

**Holy Thursday March 28, 2024**

***RETHINKING RELIGION***

# *RETHINKING OUR APPETITES*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

We use the word “appetite” to describe a powerful desire for something. So, what is it you crave the most? Where does your mind go in those quiet moments? What do you want? Power? What do you dream about? Prestige? For what do you hunger? Pleasure? Are our appetites healthy?

A truly healthy appetite is one that aligns with our deepest needs: forgiveness, salvation, communion with God, loving relationships with others. The believer is ravenous for such things! And all of those blessings are on the menu of the Lord’s Supper. Some view Holy Communion as just a religious ritual. Far from it! In this meal, Christ satisfies our greatest appetites.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Exodus 12:21-30 – Pharoah hungered for slave labor for Egypt. Israel was starving for salvation. The LORD satisfied that hunger through the Passover meal.

*1 Corinthians 10:16,17 – We thirst for loving fellowship with God one another. That thirst is quenched in the cup of thanksgiving.

Mark 14:12-26 – Judas’ appetite for money would lead him to betray Jesus. Jesus hungered for our salvation. So, on this night, he instituted the Lord’s Supper.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 416 When You Woke That Thursday Morning |
| HOD | 659 Jesus Christ, Our Blessed Savior |
| Third/Distr | 662 Draw Near |
| Closing | 930 Go, My Children, with My Blessing - v2,3 |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

*Service Builder* contains a Holy Thursday Confessional Rite that replaces the confession of sins and Kyrie. (The Gloria is traditionally omitted in Lent.) If one desires to add singing to the rite, you could insert 673, v1 ("O Lord, We Praise You") after the responsive dialogue. Every verse contains the cry of the Kyrie, so it is a fine liturgical insertion.

*Service Builder* also allows one to insert the Stripping of the Altar after or in place of the closing hymn. If this is done, a written explanation of the symbolism (in the worship folder or bulletin) would be helpful.

**Good Friday** **March 29, 2024**

***RETHINKING RELIGION***

# *RETHINKING SACRIFICE*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

In most religions the gods demand sacrifice. Followers are to surrender something of value to that god. Money. Time. Possessions. Some religions have even called for human sacrifice. Even people who think they aren't religious sacrifice to false gods. Take the man whose idol is success. What he wants most is to rise through the ranks at work. So, to pursue that idol, he sacrifices his family, spending little time with them. Throughout human history, false gods have expected you to die for them.

In Christianity you meet a God willing to die for you. Today we see that the true God does not make our relationship with him conditional on how much we sacrifice for him. Instead, we are at peace with God because he sacrificed himself for us. It is one reason why we call it "Good Friday."

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 – It was the LORD's will to sacrifice his servant so that we might be justified.

Hebrews 7:26-28 – Jesus is a superior high-priest, for he offered a vastly superior sacrifice.

John 19:17-30 – Jesus is sacrificed on the cross.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 430 Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted |
| HOD | 422 A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth |
| Third/Distr | 538 Jesus, My Great High Priest |
| Closing | 423 The Power of the Cross |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

*Service Builder* contains a special order - "Good Friday: Service of Remembrance of the Cross" - that is extremely adaptable. Another option is to use the rite of Corporate Confession and Absolution, perhaps including a penitential hymn after the responsive reading.

## Year B (2024) – Easter

# *RESURRECTION REALITY*

### SERIES EXPLANATION

St. Paul writes, "Christ has *indeed* been raised from the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:20). Big word: *Indeed!* Paul is stressing that we must not think of Jesus' resurrection like a happy ending to another epic fable. The resurrection is not legend. It really happened. Easter is not just a holiday. Easter is history. On time's infinite line, Jesus' resurrection is the punctiliar moment that defines reality for us all. If Christ remained dead, he is a fraud and failure. But *Christ has indeed been raised.* So, the reality: Jesus is exactly what he claimed to be—the Son of God, our Lord and Savior. If Christ remained dead, then the grave is the final, ugly, rotten end of us all. But *Christ has indeed been raised.* So, the reality is Jesus' resurrection proves that "all will be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). The reality of the resurrection does not just change our future, but the way we look at life now.

The greatest theologian of the early church, Augustine, called the season of Easter "a joyful week of weeks"—seven wonderful weeks, each seven glorious days long. In this glorious season, let us meditate upon the breath-taking implications of the resurrection reality.

Our worship follows this pattern.

| | |
|---|---|
| Easter Dawn | *Without the Resurrection Faith Is Futile* |
| Easter Day | *All Will Be Made Alive* |
| Second Sunday of Easter | *The Living Lord Gives Proof and Peace* |
| Third Sunday of Easter | *We Have a Meaningful Message to Share* |
| Fourth Sunday of Easter | *The Risen Savior Provides Good Shepherding* |
| Fifth Sunday of Easter | *The Living Lord Produces Active Faith* |
| Sixth Sunday of Easter | *Jesus' Business Is Love; Therefore, So Is Ours* |
| Ascension of Our Lord | *Christ's Ascension Means He Is Closer Than Ever* |
| Seventh Sunday of Easter | *We Will Overcome This Broken World* |
| The Festival of Pentecost | *Christ Has Not Left Us Alone* |

### RESOURCE REMINDER

CW21's *Altar Book* contains eight seasonal prayers of the church. These are spoken by the pastor, not responsive. *Service Builder* contains a wealth of additional prayers of the church. For the Easter season, there are prayers for Easter Sunday, Good Shepherd Sunday, and Ascension. Another responsive prayer is available for Mother's Day, May 12. Two responsive prayers and a dialogue are available for Pentecost, which is grouped with the Easter season.

There are also dialogues for Easter and Ascension that may be used to begin the service. To find these, "Insert / Rite." Then find the dialogues in the drop down at the top left under Seasonal Inserts.

**Resurrection of Our Lord – Easter Dawn** **March 31, 2024**

***RESURRECTION REALITY***

# *WITHOUT THE RESURRECTION FAITH IS FUTILE*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

It would not be productive to look for help in a cemetery. A corpse can do only one thing—rot. This is the source of the crushing sorrow Jesus' followers felt. He was the one in whom they had placed all their hope for a better reality. Now he was dead, so they thought. They were overwhelmed with sorrow, not just because they missed their friend. It now all seemed so pointless: the years and miles following Jesus, witnessing his miracles, listening to him. He was dead! And a corpse can only do one thing.

The resurrection changed everything. The disciples saw clearly that Jesus is who he said he was and did what he said he'd do. They realized their faith rested on a rock-solid foundation. Here is the resurrection reality. If Christ had not been raised, our faith in him would be futile. He could do nothing to help us. But Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the lesson)*

Isaiah 25:6-9 – The prophet foresees the resurrection reality. The LORD would destroy the shroud of death and dry every tear from the faces of his people.

1 Corinthians 15:12-20 – St. Paul explains that if Christ has not been raised our faith is useless.

*John 20:1-18 – The women and the disciples were crushed, because a dead savior is no savior at all. Christ's resurrection changed everything.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 470 Like the Golden Sun Ascending |
| HOD | 443 Awake, My Heart, with Gladness |
| Third/Distr | 675 At the Lambs High Feast We Sing |
| Closing | 460 Alleluia, Alleluia, Hearts to Heaven |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

This worship plan follows a common pattern in many congregations. The "Easter Dawn" service (where visitors are unlikely) includes Holy Communion. The later "Easter Day" service (hopefully full of many non-member guests) does not. In this pattern, members are encouraged to attend both services: dawn to receive the Lord's Supper; the latter to bring their unchurched acquaintances. Please adapt the plan to fit your local practices. If that pattern is used, the suggestion would be to use any setting of The Service for the sunrise service. (The Gloria will be sung for the first time in weeks.) One might consider metrical canticles, some of which share the tunes of Easter hymns.

**Resurrection of Our Lord – Easter Day** **March 31, 2024**

***RESURRECTION REALITY***

# *ALL WILL BE MADE ALIVE*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

The film director Woody Allen once said, "I'm not afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens." Studies have shown that most people fear death to varying degrees. This fear is so common, there is even a field of psychological study called thanatology. It examines human reaction to death and dying. One of the biggest reasons people fear death is the perception of its permanency. In the normal realm of human existence, dead is dead. Someone dies, and all you have are pictures and memories. That is the way people typically think, but it is far from reality. Today, Christ proves to us that death is *not* final at all!

Easter teaches us that Christ is the first fruits of those who have died. Just as Christ rose, "so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). That changes everything: the way we grieve the death of a Christian loved one, the way we feel when our health fails, the way we look at the purpose of life right now. Let us rejoice in this resurrection reality: All will be made alive!

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the lesson)*

*Job 19:23-27 – By faith Job knew that because the redeemer lives, even though Job would die and his body would decay, he would see his God with his own eyes in the resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:19-26 – Christ gives us hope in this life. But Christ's resurrection gives us hope also for the eternal life that is to come.

Mark 16:1-8 – Early Easter morning, an angel explains to the women why they won't find Jesus' corpse in the tomb.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 438 Jesus Christ Is Risen Today |
| HOD | 440 Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands |
| Third/Distr | 441 I Know that My Redeemer Lives |
| Closing | 451 See, What a Morning |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

*Service Builder* includes two Easter Dialogues which replace the confession of sins and Kyrie. The rubric suggests singing a doxological Easter hymn after. An excellent option is the first two verses of 471, "Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds."

Both 440 and 441 have many verses. Additionally, 440 and 451 may be somewhat new to some. Consider using a choir/small group to introduce some hymns and/or to take some of the verses on

longer hymns. Multiple choir arrangements are available for 440 and 441. Having the choir sing some verses alleviates any "need" to have a choral anthem, breaks up the singing of longer hymns for the congregation, and adds artistic variety to a hymn.

**Second Sunday of Easter** **April 7, 2024**

***RESURRECTION REALITY***

# *THE LIVING LORD GIVES PROOF AND PEACE*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

In most world religions, the alleged foundational event was experienced by only one person. A self-proclaimed prophet would allege he alone had some special encounter with God. "*No really! Just trust me. It really happened."* The resurrection reality is so very different. In the Great Resurrection Chapter (1 Corinthians 15), St. Paul writes an entire paragraph listing all the people to whom Jesus appeared after he rose, including a group of over five hundred at one time. It is like St. Paul is telling skeptics, *"You don't need to take my word for it. Hundreds of us saw Jesus back from the dead."*

The proof of Jesus' resurrection brought peace and strength to those early believers. They knew there was more to their existence than just their time on earth. They knew the reality that eternal life was theirs, a gift from their living Lord. It gave them incredible joy and courage. May the resurrection reality give us the same.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the lesson)*

Acts 18:1-11 – The promised presence of the living Lord gave Paul the courage to keep on speaking the gospel, even when Paul was facing harsh persecution.

1 John 1:1-4 – St. John reminds us that there were witnesses who saw and touched Jesus raised from the dead. This resurrection serves as proof that eternal life is ours.

*John 20:19-31 – The risen Savior offers proof and peace to his disciples.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 449 This Joyful Eastertide |
| HOD | 456 O Sons and Daughters of the King |
| Third/Distr | 830 We Walk By Faith |
| Closing | 511 Crown Him with Many Crowns - v1-3 |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

If using *Service Builder*, consider inserting the Paschal Greeting (M: Christ is risen. ALL: He is risen indeed!) after the invocation in every service of the Easter season.

830 may be new. Consider having a cantor sing the first verse or two.

457 is a fine alternative to 456, with a familiar tune. However, it probably requires a brief verbal announcement where the presiding minister asks the congregation to note how the verses are sung in groups of three, followed by the refrain.

**Third Sunday of Easter** **April 14, 2024**

***RESURRECTION REALITY***

# *WE HAVE A MEANINGFUL MESSAGE TO SHARE*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

A platitude is a statement aimed at helping sooth some sort of emotional unease. *"What doesn't kill you makes you stronger."* Or *"Life is a mystery."* Or *"Good things come to those who wait."* While platitudes may be well-intentioned, at best they come off as trite. And since platitudes provide no real help, they can actually make a situation worse. Tell the one whose heart is shattering, "*Life is a mystery."* They won't appreciate your platitude or you.

The resurrection gives believers the ability to offer more than platitudes. We have a meaningful message to share—of repentance, of forgiveness, of peace, of power. The reality is we have something important to say to every single person that God brings into our sphere of influence. And our risen Savior gives us the courage and power to share that meaningful message.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the lesson)*

Acts 3:11-20 – Peter healed a crippled beggar, drawing a large crowd. Peter used that opportunity to share a meaningful message about the one the people of Jerusalem asked Pilate to crucify.

*1 John 1:5–2:2 – St. John summarizes the meaningful message we have heard and been called to declare: God is light.

Luke 24:36-49 – The risen Savior gives us peace. He also gives us a mission. We are to share the message of repentance and forgiveness.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 453 The Tomb Is Empty |
| HOD | 459 Christ the Lord Is Risen Again |
| Third/Distr | 713 I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light |
| Closing | 746 I Love to Tell the Story - v1,6,2 |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

713, a newer hymn, was sung on Transfiguration. This is used again intentionally.

**Fourth Sunday of Easter** **April 21, 2024**

***RESURRECTION REALITY***

# *THE RISEN SAVIOR PROVIDES GOOD SHEPHERDING*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Scripture frequently pictures spiritual care in terms of a shepherd watching over sheep. Even folks unfamiliar with shepherding are able to grasp the meaning. Sheep are helpless animals—an easy meal for predators. For sheep to survive they needed a shepherd who not only leads them to sources of food, but who also is willing to tangle with a pack of wolves. Jesus is such a shepherd. He proved he is willing to lay down his life for his sheep.

The word "pastor" comes from the Latin word for "shepherd." Today, there are plenty of people—pastors, religious leaders, etc.—who claim they can provide healing for your soul. Yet, Scripture warns that "many" of these are "false prophets" (1 John 4:1) who "distort the truth" (Acts 20:30). Many! But the resurrection reality is that our Good Shepherd is faithful. He will raise up true sub-shepherds who know Christ and proclaim the truth of his gospel.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the lesson)*

Acts 20:28-32 – The good shepherd asks his sub-shepherds to keep watch over the flock.

*1 John 4:1-6 – St. John encourages us to test all those who claim to have a spiritual message. Not all such individuals have been sent by God.

John 10:11-18 – Jesus explains why he is the good shepherd.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 551 Jesus, Shepherd of the Sheep |
| HOD | 552 The King of Love My Shepherd Is |
| Third/Distr | 554 The Lord's My Shepherd |
| Closing | 804 I Am Jesus' Little Lamb |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

554 is a newer hymn that paraphrases Psalm 23. If utilized, it will require a cantor to introduce. There are various options. The cantor could do verses 1 with the congregation joining on 2 and 3. The cantor could do all the verses, with the congregation joining only on the refrain. If Holy Communion is observed, perhaps consider either a) having a small group sing the entire hymn during distribution or b) switching to another hymn, one more familiar.

**Fifth Sunday of Easter** **April 28, 2024**

***RESURRECTION REALITY***

# *THE LIVING LORD PRODUCES ACTIVE FAITH*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Generally, our actions are shaped by our beliefs. People who eat low-carb diets do so, probably not because they hate pasta, but because they believe it healthiest. If a man buys stock in a company, it probably is because he believes in their business plan. Our beliefs shape our behavior. This is true of Christians' belief in the resurrection. We believe that Christ's resurrection means our resurrection to a glorious eternal life is guaranteed. That inevitably shapes how we will act now.

However, it is not simply the facts of the resurrection that shape our behavior. It is the person of the resurrection. Jesus is not some wise, dead sage whose advice is contained in dusty books. Jesus lives! Therefore, through his Word, he is able to work on our minds and hearts, molding them to his perfect will. Here is a resurrection reality. Jesus fills us with his Spirit, not only so that we have faith, but also so that we produce the fruits of faith he seeks.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the lesson)*

Acts 4:32-37 – In the early church, as the apostles preached the resurrection of Christ, the living Lord produced the fruits or unity and generosity.

1 John 3:18-24 – St. John encourages us to demonstrate living faith in loving words and actions.

*John 15:1-8 – Jesus is the vine who gives us, his branches, the ability to produce fruits of faith.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 709 Christ the Vine |
| HOD | 469 Welcome, Happy Morning |
| Third/Distr | 595 Fruitful Trees, the Spirit's Sowing |
| Closing | 454 Alleluia! Jesus Is Risen - v1-3 |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

709 is not particularly difficult; however, it is new and would thus benefit being introduced by a cantor or small group. It was chosen as the opening hymn because it is directly based on the sermon text.

595 is also new, but it's a very familiar tune.

454 is also new, but it's a very familiar tune. Ending with verse 3 ties the theme of vine/branches up nicely.

**Sixth Sunday of Easter** **May 5, 2024**

***RESURRECTION REALITY***

# *JESUS' BUSINESS IS LOVE; THEREFORE, SO IS OURS*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

The entirety of God's Word can be summed up in one word: love. God's Law is all about love. *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart…"* and *"Love your neighbor as yourself"* (Matthew 22:37,39). The gospel is all about love: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son…"* (John 3:16). From his compassion for the sick and broken, to his sacrificial death on the cross, to the peace he provided after his resurrection, Jesus was the perfect embodiment of love. Love is his business.

Therefore, love is our business too. The resurrection reality is that with the same supernatural power by which God raised Jesus from the dead, God now enables us to live a new life—one marked by radically selfless love. The motivation and ability to do this comes from seeing the endless love Christ has for us. We love only because he first loved us.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the lesson)*

Acts 9:36-42 – Because Tabitha loved Jesus, she was always helping the poor in the town of Joppa. Because Jesus loved the people of Joppa, he had Peter raise Tabitha from the dead.

1 John 4:7-11,19-21 – Friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

*John 15:9-17 – The living Lord gives us this command. Remain in his love so that we might also love each other.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 728 This Is My Will |
| HOD | 557 Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice |
| Third/Distr | 523 How Deep the Father's Love for Us |
| Closing | 697 May We Your Precepts, Lord, Fulfill |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

557 is a Lutheran classic. It is extremely easy for newcomers to pick up and sing. It poetically shares the salvation story, i.e., that God's business is love! It is, however, quite long. Consider breaking up the verses by different groups, e.g., men, women, left side, right side. Or consider having a choir/small group sing select verses. There are countless arrangements.

**Ascension of Our Lord** **May 9, 2024**

***RESURRECTION REALITY***

# *CHRIST'S ASCENSION MEANS HE IS CLOSER THAN EVER*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Conventional wisdom would say if Christ has ascended into heaven, he is further away from his followers than when he was visibly on earth. The resurrection reality is that it is the other way around. Now that Christ has ascended, he is closer than ever. The living and ascended Savior has reassumed full use of all his divine power. So if you need Christ's help, you don't need to hunt for him in Galilee. You call to him in prayer, wherever you are, whenever you want, and he hears and acts. You want to hear Jesus speak? You don't need to chase him down. Open his Word and listen to his powerful, life-giving voice.

The ascension marks the completion of Jesus' earthly mission, but it does not signify the end of his work. Christ ascended to exercise his limitless authority for the Church as we carry out our mission to be Christ's ambassadors of grace to the world. Therefore, the Festival of the Ascension is one of the oldest and most joyful celebrations in the Christian Church. It will be observed by Christians until Christ returns to take us to be with him.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the lesson)*

Acts 1:1-11 – Before Jesus ascends, he promises to send his disciples the Holy Spirit so that he could continue to carry out his saving work through the Church.

*Ephesians 4:7-16 – St. Paul explains the power and purpose of Christ's ascension. Jesus left this world for our good. He ascended so that he could give gifts to his people and build up his Church.

Luke 24:44-53 – The risen Savior ascended, and his disciples responded with joyful worship.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 476 On Christ's Ascension I Now Build |
| HOD | 472 A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing |
| Third/Distr | 747 Christ High-Ascended |
| Closing | 474 Hail the Day That Sees Him Rise |

*(continued)*

## SERVICE OPTIONS

*Service Builder* includes an opening dialogue for Ascension. It replaces the confession of sins and Kyrie. The rubric calls for it to be followed by a doxological hymn. The suggestion would be 511, versus 1 and 4, “Crown Him with Many Crowns.”

Ideally, the Festival of Ascension is observed on its proper day. However, in some congregations, a Thursday evening service is poorly attended and the message of Ascension therefore unheard. If the local practice is to move the observation of Ascension, the suggestion would be it replace the Seventh Sunday of Easter. This places the Festivals of Ascension and Pentecost back-to-back, bringing the Festival Half of the Church Year to an end. In this case, on Thursday, the pastor could send an email devotion to members about Ascension and encourage them to prepare for the celebration that weekend.

**Seventh Sunday of Easter** **May 12, 2024**

***RESURRECTION REALITY***

# *WE WILL OVERCOME THIS BROKEN WORLD*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

This world is broken. Oh, certainly, we still see beauty in nature. By God's grace, we have plenty of happy moments. But that does not change the fact that this world does not function the way God designed it to. It is dangerous, especially for God's children. Jesus once promised that those who live for him will be hated (just as Christ was hated) by those who live for the world. The even greater danger: the priorities prompted by this broken world tempt the careless Christian to devalue that which truly matters. This world is very broken.

For that reason, our gracious, living Lord promises that one day soon enough, he will take us to a better world. More, he promises that until that time, his Father will protect us, preserving our faith through the truth of his Word. This is the resurrection reality. By God's grace, we will overcome this broken world.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the lesson)*

*Acts 6:1-9,7:2a, 51-60 – Simply for proclaiming Christ, the Sanhedrin wanted to kill Stephen. Christ used their murderous intent to enable Stephen to overcome this broken world.

1 John 5:1-6 – St. John explains that everyone born of God overcomes the world.

John 17:11b-19 – Jesus, our great high priest, prays that his Father would sanctify us with his truth and enable us to overcome the world.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 717 What Is the World to Me |
| HOD | 446 Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense |
| Third/Distr | 892 By All Your Saints Still Striving - v1,7,3 |
| Closing | 839 Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me |

**Day of Pentecost** **May 19, 2024**

***RESURRECTION REALITY***

# *CHRIST HAS NOT LEFT US ALONE*

## *The Festival of Pentecost*

---

### EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Jesus told his disciples that, though he was going to ascend into heaven, he wasn't going to leave them alone. He was going to send "the Advocate," a title for the Holy Spirit. But Jesus wasn't sending the Spirit just to keep us company. Jesus would have the Advocate give us spiritual power so that we might participate in Christ's saving work. Here is the final resurrection reality. The Spirit gives us the ability to raise the spiritually dead to life.

We see this happen on Pentecost. The festival of Pentecost was held fifty days after the Passover. (Pentecost is Greek for "fifty.") It was a time to thank God for the harvest. But on that day, through the Church at work, the Holy Spirit gathered another harvest, a harvest of souls. Therefore, Pentecost is the third great festival of the Church, along with the Nativity and the Resurrection. With the Festival of Pentecost, the festival half of the Church Year comes to a close.

### READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the lesson)*

Ezekiel 37:1-14 – The Lord allows Ezekiel to see that the Spirit would give that prophet's words the power to raise the dead to life.

Acts 2:1-21 – The Day of Pentecost was the fulfillment of God's promise to pour out his Spirit.

*John 15:26-27,16:4b-11 – Jesus promised he would not leave us alone but would send us the Spirit of truth to give us the courage and power to testify to the world.

### HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 479 God's Holy Spirit Came |
| HOD | 585 Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord |
| Third/Distr | 593 Holy Spirit, Light Divine |
| Closing | 592 Holy Spirit, Ever Dwelling |

### SERVICE OPTIONS

*Service Builder* includes an opening dialogue for Pentecost which replaces the confession of sins and Kyrie. The rubric calls for it to be followed by a doxological hymn. The suggestion would be 962, verses 1 and 5, "Hail Thee, Festival Day" (Pentecost Version) OR 590, verses 1 and 2, "O Holy Spirit, Enter In."

## Year B (2024) – Season after Pentecost, Series 1

# *A TOP-DOWN FAITH*

***(Truths about God Too Good to Make Up)***

---

**NOTE TO THE PREACHER**

A *textual* preacher obviously expounds upon his text, not simply an idea referenced in the text. A *liturgical* preacher expounds upon the thread that runs through all the texts. If someone is only a textual preacher, the adage that, "There are a hundred sermons in every text" is probably true. For the liturgical preacher, that adage overstates things. The other readings and the placement within the Church Year will highlight a central theme for that day which the liturgical preacher will attempt to highlight.

This worship plan attempts to encourage liturgical preaching, drawing the theme of the day from the connection that exists between the three readings. For a fuller explanation, see comments at the beginning of Season after Pentecost, Series 2.

**SERIES EXPLANATION**

The phrase "from the top down" is often used to denote a hierarchical system of management or governance. The will and beliefs and directives of those "at the top" are imposed—sometimes aggressively, sometimes even oppressively—on those below. From the top town.

We have entered the second half of the Church Year, the half that focuses on the teachings of the Christian faith. We will see that Christianity is very much a top-down faith. Christian teachings come "from the top down," but not in the sense that those teachings are oppressively imposed on us. When we call Christianity a "top-down faith," we mean that it tells us things about God that are so beautiful and good—teachings that couldn't possibly have originated from human thinking. The Christian faith contains teachings that are so wonderful that we would never even believe them unless God himself revealed their truthfulness to us. So, God sent his Spirit from heaven to earth—from the top down—to empower his children to believe that which would otherwise be totally unbelievable.

Our worship follows this pattern.

| | |
|---|---|
| Holy Trinity – First Sunday after Pentecost | *Only a Triune God Can Deliver What Only a Triune God Can Offer* |
| Second Sunday after Pentecost | *Rest Is a Gift, Not Something to Be Earned* |
| Third Sunday after Pentecost | *The Devil Does His Worst, Yet Jesus Always Wins* |
| Fourth Sunday after Pentecost | *From the Tiniest Seed Grows the Largest Kingdom* |
| Fifth Sunday after Pentecost | *Our Gracious God Is with Us through All the Storms of Life* |
| Sixth Sunday after Pentecost | *The Living Lord Completely Changes Our View of Death* |

**Holy Trinity – First Sunday after Pentecost May 26, 2024 (Holy Trinity B)**

***A TOP-DOWN FAITH***

# *ONLY A TRIUNE GOD CAN DELIVER WHAT ONLY A TRIUNE GOD CAN OFFER*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

No Christian teaching demonstrates that we have a top-down faith more than the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Scripture teaches that there is only one God. Yet that God exists as three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Incomprehensible! It is the type of teaching about which the psalmist declares, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain" (Psalm 139:6). We believe in the Triune God without fully comprehending his existence, simply because the Spirit has given us the gift of faith. Our belief in the triune God came from the top down.

Not only is the concept of the Trinity itself something unique to the Christian faith, but what the triune God does for us and offers us is also completely unique. Our triune God invites us into the blessed relationship that is part of his very nature. The members of the Trinity share with us an intimacy that they have enjoyed with each other from eternity. Our triune God makes us not servants or subjects but blessed members of his family.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Isaiah 6:1-8 – The triune God delivers Isaiah from guilt and sin and offers Isaiah lofty purpose.

*Romans 8:12-17 – The triune God gifts us the right to speak to our Father, the comfort of our Brother, and the indwelling of the Spirit.

John 3:1-17 – Jesus teaches a Pharisee named Nicodemus about the kingdom of the triune God, who rules in the heart of all those who are born again.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The second reading was chosen as the sermon text because of how well it reflects the theme of the day, discussing various gifts the triune God offers: the loving care, provision, and protection of a perfect Father, an older Brother who was willing to do all that which was necessary to make us his co-heirs, and the power to believe and to live for God which comes from the indwelling of the Spirit.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 483 Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty |
| HOD | 586 Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest |
| Third/Distr | 480 Sing Praise to Our Creator |
| Closing | 617 Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow |

*(continued)*

## SERVICE OPTIONS

*Service Builder* includes a dialogue for Holy Trinity that would replace the confession of sins, Kyrie, and Gloria. The rubric calls for it to be followed by a hymn. One option would be the one verse version of 482, “Triune God, O Be Our Stay,” if that is familiar to your congregation. Another would be 953, “Holy God, We Praise Your Name” (a metrical Te Deum), verses 1 and 5.

480 ties closely with the sermon text. It is a simple yet unfamiliar tune. Consider having a cantor/choir sing at least the first verse.

**Second Sunday after Pentecost** **June 2, 2024 (Proper 4B)**

***A TOP-DOWN FAITH***

# *REST IS A GIFT, NOT SOMETHING TO BE EARNED*

---

**EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY**

After a long day of work, you have earned the right to sit down in your favorite chair, put your feet up, and watch your favorite program. After a hard week on the job, you have earned the opportunity to relax a bit that weekend. After doing your job well for many months, you have earned those two weeks of vacation at the beach. This is how everyone thinks: rest is something you earn through hard work. We even teach that to our kids: no gaming until homework is done, no playing with friends until chores are complete.

Since that concept of rest being earned is so deeply engrained in us, to properly understand *spiritual* rest requires a top-down faith. God needs to send us the Spirit so that we can grasp this truth. True spiritual rest cannot be earned. In fact, the harder you try, the more restless and the less peaceful you become. Spiritual rest is a gift that God gives. The rest we need most—from guilt, from worry, from shame, from hopelessness—is graciously given to us by the Lord of the Sabbath.

**READING INTRODUCTIONS** *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 – The LORD commanded that the Sabbath day be observed so that we might rest and remember all that he has done for us.

Colossians 2:13-17 – All God's commands about religious festivals and the Sabbath day were meant to point us to the spiritual rest found in Christ.

*Mark 2:23–3:6 – The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

**NOTE TO THE PREACHER**

All texts talk about the Law and how it was given for our good. However, a careful read demonstrates that there is a narrower focus than the entire Law. The word Sabbath comes up eleven times in the three readings. In the Prayer of the Day, we ask Christ for Sabbath rest. That is why the theme of the day focuses on rest. The Gospel was chosen as the sermon text because it provides ample opportunity for the textual preacher to discuss the rest that only Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath, can provide. (What a fantastic example of the sinful heart's condition that the religious leaders had turned rest into work!)

*(continued)*

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 818 My Soul Finds Rest in God Alone |
| HOD | 703 I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say |
| Third/Distr | 913 Come Away from Rush and Hurry |
| Closing | 927 Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

818 may require introduction, a cantor singing verse 1. Likewise, 913 is new. It is slotted as the third hymn. If holy communion is observed, it could be sung entirely by a cantor/choir during distribution. Or, members could join in on verse 2 and 3.

**Third Sunday after Pentecost** **June 9, 2024 (Proper 5B)**

***A TOP-DOWN FAITH***

# *THE DEVIL DOES HIS WORST, YET JESUS ALWAYS WINS*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Look at our lives—the problems, the pains—and it's easy to conclude that we are losing. Look at the world—the brokenness, the bedlam—and it's easy to believe that the devil is winning. It all can lead us to despair. Yet this turmoil is exactly what God said would happen already in the Garden. There God declared that until the end of time enmity would prevail between the devil and mankind. But God promised more than that. He promised that from humanity would rise one who would completely defeat the devil.

We need a top-down faith to understand that things are definitely not what they seem. Yes, the devil and his allies are constantly doing their worst. Their work always brings pain. Yet, ultimately, Jesus always wins. And his victory is our victory. Jesus' victory is so complete that even when Satan continues to cause chaos, Christ uses it to reveal his glory and grace to those gifted with top-down faith.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

*Genesis 3:8-15 – The devil did his worst, but a gracious God promised that from Eve's descendants would come one who would defeat the serpent for us.

Revelation 20:1-6 – God had promised victory in the Garden. Jesus allows St. John to see that victory in his Revelation.

Mark 3:20-35 – Jesus came to oppose Satan and his allies and undo all their work.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The first reading is chosen as the sermon text because of how simple it is to connect it to the theme of the day which is echoed in the Prayer of the Day. *The devil does his worst.* He had done that right before the first reading, leading Adam and Eve to question the tenderness of God's love and the truthfulness of his word. In this reading, we see what the fruit of the devil's "worst" is. Man is now terrified of God and divided (blaming) one another. Still today this is the devil's "worst"—dividing us from God and from each other. *Yet Jesus always wins*. God promises it shall be so. The victory would come at a cost—blood. No matter what the species, if a serpent tags you in the foot, there will be blood. But Jesus was going to do more than just spill the serpent's blood. It would be a crushing defeat (literally) for the devil and a resounding victory for Christ.

The other readings can then be used to expound upon the fact that "Jesus always wins." It wasn't just at the cross that Jesus defeated Satan. He is doing it daily. The second reading makes it clear that Satan's power is finite and under the complete control of Christ. The gospel explicitly teaches that Jesus came to "oppose" all that the devil tries to do.

*(continued)*

**HYMNS**

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 556 All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall |
| HOD | 871 Rise! To Arms! With Prayer Employ You |
| Third/Distr | 574 The Tree of Life |
| Closing | 863 A Mighty Fortress - v3 |

**Fourth Sunday after Pentecost** **June 16, 2024 (Proper 6B)**

***A TOP-DOWN FAITH***

# *FROM THE TINIEST SEED GROWS THE LARGEST KINGDOM*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Usually, a kingdom advances and is secured through things like military might or political force or worldly wealth. It can be tempting to believe the same holds true in the kingdom of God. Perhaps we think churches would flourish if we had the right rulers passing and enforcing the right laws. Or we believe that for a church to do good requires a robust budget. Political force. Worldly wealth. This way of thinking is breathtakingly wrong.

We need God to give us the top-down faith that grasps the fact that kingdom of God advances in ways that are imperceptible. Through something that seems insignificant to most—the gospel—the King of kings establishes his reign in human hearts. Even Jesus himself taught that the gospel seems unimpressive, for he often compared the gospel to a tiny seed. Yet within a seed is hidden life. As the seed of the gospel is planted, the largest of all kingdoms grows.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Ezekiel 17:22-24 – Through the prophet Ezekiel, the LORD promised that the kingdom of God would grow large and strong and provide safety and shelter for God's people.

Colossians 1:3-8 – We thank God that the seed of the gospel is producing fruit throughout the whole world.

*Mark 4:26-34 – The kingdom grows when the seed is sown. The Word works.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The Gospel reading is chosen as the sermon text for several reasons. Perhaps better than the others, it addresses the malady of believing there is something for us to do in God's kingdom beyond proclaiming the gospel. The farmer doesn't even understand *how* the seed produces life! So, what is there to do beyond sowing it? Additionally, the two parables Jesus tells provide abundant opportunity for application: the need to understand that growth is not instantaneous, the wonderful truth that the growth God effects is greater than we'd ever imagine, etc. *The Commentary on the Propers: Year B* delineates these in detail.

Finally, note how yet again the Prayer of the Day intersects with the theme of the day and the talking points of the gospel reading.

*(continued)*

**HYMNS**

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 644 Almighty God, Your Word Is Cast |
| HOD | 859 Your Kingdom, O God, Is My Glorious Treasure |
| Third/Distr | 981 In This Place Your Word Is Planted |
| Closing | 925 On What Has Now Been Sown |

**Fifth Sunday after Pentecost** **June 23, 2024 (Proper 7B)**

***A TOP-DOWN FAITH***

# *OUR GRACIOUS GOD IS WITH US THROUGH ALL THE STORMS OF LIFE*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

A powerful tornado rolls through your neighborhood. A massive hurricane heads straight for your city. A bolt of lightning sends 300 million volts to earth. The raw power and unpredictability of storms can inspire both awe and terror. We cannot stop storms from coming. We can only hope to survive them. However, we know the Almighty God can stop storms. He can calm literal storms. He could remove metaphorical storms, other types of troubles and trials. So, if he can, why doesn't he?

Well, would you rather have a God who was distant from you but removed all the storms of life? Or would you rather have a God who allowed some storms to come but promised to be right there by your side within them, holding you close? May God give us the top-down faith that sees that the latter is by far the better option. God promises to be with us through all the storms of life. Sometimes he removes them. But when he doesn't, it's only because he has plans to use even storms for our eternal good.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Job 38:1-11 – Job questioned why God had allowed trouble to befall him. Out of a storm the LORD spoke to Job, explaining that no mere man has the capacity to understand the wonderful ways God works.

Acts 27:13-26 – St. Paul and others were on a boat in the middle of a hurricane. God did not calm the storm. Yet, he was with them in the storm, accomplishing his good and gracious work.

*Mark 4:35-41 – Even the winds and the waves must obey Jesus Christ.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The gospel reading is chosen as the sermon text because it explicitly states the breathtakingly obtuse question we ask when life gets stormy. "God, don't you care?" They asked that of Jesus, who left the throne of heaven to come to the storms of earth precisely because all he does is care. He's dead asleep in a violently rocking boat because he's completely exhausted from helping the multitudes. He cares. He's going to go to the cross. He cares. We ask that question—don't you care?—when we look to the wrong things for evidence of God's love. What's ironic is the things we look for—a perfect life, perfect comfort, no problems—are things that Jesus, in time, is also going to provide. Because he cares. The other readings can be alluded to as the preacher drives home related points. The first reading illustrates that we cannot possibly hope to understand how God works through trouble. Thus, when storms come, there is little point in asking "Why?" If God were to explain, we couldn't grasp what he was saying. So instead, we ask "Does God care?" while looking at the cross and empty tomb, and that is sufficient. The second reading demonstrates how God accomplishes good things when he doesn't remove the storms.

*(continued)*

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 504 We Sing the Almighty Power of God |
| HOD | 501 Evening and Morning |
| Third/Distr | 805 Eternal Father, Strong to Save - v1, 2 (original text in Service Builder), 4 |
| Closing | 874 Preserve Your Word, O Savior |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

*Service Builder* includes an option to use the original verse 2 of 805, which best fits the Gospel reading. Another *Service Builder* option is 984, verses 1-4,6, which perfectly fits the recommended sermon text. If your congregation subscribes to *Service Builder*, 984 could be slotted in as the third hymn or even the HOD. You would then likely pick a different hymn than 805 to avoid using the tune MELITA twice.

**Sixth Sunday after Pentecost** **June 30, 2024 (Proper 8B)**

***A TOP-DOWN FAITH***

# *THE LIVING LORD COMPLETELY CHANGES OUR VIEW OF DEATH*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Most people fear death to some degree. Some fear death because they assume it is the end. Others fear death because they assume it isn't the end at all, but that there is some sort of reckoning after death which might not go well for them. And have you seen what happens to a dead body? It is far from pretty. So, it is understandable that most people would fear death.

Not so for those to whom God has given a top-down faith. Christianity teaches that for God's children death is not discipline but deliverance. The living Lord gives Christians such a radically different view of death that they can have confidence to face death in their effort to give Christ glory. They understand that death does not cut us down, but only raises us up. Finally, the Christian has been given the top-down faith that believes Jesus can wake us from death as easily as we can wake a sleeping child from his nap.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Lamentations 3:22-33 – God's people were suffering. But the prophet Jeremiah knew that suffering and impending death can focus our attention on what matters—the LORD's compassion and salvation.

2 Corinthians 4:7-15 – St. Paul knew that serving Christ might result in death. But he also knew the one who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise us.

*Mark 5:21-24a,35-43 – Jesus raises the young daughter of a synagogue leader from the dead as easily as you would wake a sleeping twelve-year old from a nap.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The Gospel reading is chosen because of the phrase, "Don't be afraid." That phrase allows the speaker to address all the fears that surround death: the fear of "losing" a loved one, the fear that death is punishment, etc. Jesus takes all these fears away. There is a wonderful opportunity here for the preacher to explore the fear we have, not of dying ourselves, but of *others* dying, those we love. Jesus clearly understands and relates to that fear. Jairus calls the girl "my little daughter" and Jesus echoes him, "Little girl." And Jesus holds her hand! Jesus is perhaps the only person on earth who loved that girl more than her father.

The other readings can easily be referenced. The first acknowledges that suffering and death bring grief. Yet, the child of God faces these things with the Spirit-wrought faith that the Lord is compassionate and works salvation. With the second reading, pastors love to talk about the treasure/jar comparison. Man's role in gospel ministry and the efficacy of the Word is *not* the main point today. (That was covered in Proper 6B.) But the second reading does illustrate that since Christ's death and resurrection remove our fear of death, we are empowered to be bold witnesses, even if that brings persecution.

**HYMNS**

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 846 I Know of a Sleep in Jesus' Name |
| HOD | 831 Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me |
| Third/Distr | 444 Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won - v1-3 |
| Closing | 835 Precious Lord, Take My Hand |

## Year B (2024) – Season after Pentecost, Series 2

# *MEANINGFUL MINISTRY*

**NOTE TO THE PREACHER: Liturgical Preaching and Planning**

This series on Meaningful Ministry allows us to continue the philosophical discussion about a key question. What determines the main thrust of the sermon? (Addressing this question gives us—WELS Congregational Services—the opportunity to share our philosophy behind the production of the *Foundation* resources.) It's a discussion about the difference between *textual* and *liturgical* preaching, as well as what is considered in *liturgical* preaching.

We all know that preachers (perhaps ourselves in an overwhelming week!) sometimes latch onto a phrase in the sermon text and expound on it, even if what is said in that phrase isn't the main point of the text. What the preacher says in that sermon might be doctrinally accurate and perhaps even helpful. Yet, the sermon probably could not be called *textual*.

Then there are those preachers who do careful exegesis of the entire sermon text. They search for the specific law in the text. They preach the gospel, not in cliché fashion, but in the terms and pictures provided by that text. They make the applications the text itself suggests. It is a *textual* sermon. Hearers gain a better understanding of what that text has to say to them. They are blessed by that. Their faith has been fed; their conscience eased; their motivation to live for Christ empowered. However, it is possible that the preacher's message is not easily connected to the other two readings. There are some preachers who might say, "Who cares if the sermon's message didn't align with the other readings? I wasn't preaching on them." And, let's be honest, the way the pericope was set up often made it extremely challenging to find a common thread running through the readings, due to the *lectio continua* sections.

The new *Christian Worship* lectionary pivoted away from *lectio continua* precisely so that each week would have three readings that carry a common theme. This encourages preaching to be not just *textual,* but also *liturgical.*

When we speak of a sermon being *liturgical*, we mean that in considering the messaging of the sermon, the preacher looks at more than just the sermon text. He looks at other aspects of the liturgy: the other readings of the Proper, the Prayer of the Day, the placement within the Church Year, and *even the framework of the other Proper readings that surround that weekend* (i.e., readings that come the weeks prior and after, which form the basis of a series).

This series on Meaningful Ministry is illustrative. The theme for this series obviously indicates it's about ministry. Why? Simply because many of the readings for Year B, Proper 9 through Proper 13, focus on ministry. <u>Sometimes, the connection is obvious</u>.

For example, in all three readings for Proper 9B, we see that gospel ministry is always going to invite opposition.

- First Reading: The Lord tells Ezekiel most won't listen to him.
- Second Reading: Paul writes to Timothy while in chains but assures him the gospel cannot be chained.

- Gospel: Jesus himself is rejected in his hometown as he does ministry.

In Proper 10B, the readings all revolve around the fact that believers are sent out to do ministry with God's own authority.

- First Reading: Amos admits he was just a shepherd and arborer, yet he also was called by the LORD to prophecy.
- Second Reading: The worker's authority is rooted in the fact he holds to God's Word and proclaims sound doctrine.
- Gospel: It specifically says Jesus gave authority to the Twelve when he sent them out.

<u>However, other times, the connection isn't quite as obvious</u>. We see that in Proper 12B.

- First Reading: The Lord promises Moses he will rain down food to provide for Israel.
- Second Reading: Paul assures us that God provides "all things at all times."
- Gospel: St. Mark's account of the feeding of the multitude.

If one looked *just* at those three readings and didn't look at the readings of the weekends prior or after, one could decide that the focus for that day would be on God's gracious provision. Yet, this series deals with ministry. So, that broader context could shape the preacher's message. It's a slight pivot FROM a more general message about God's provision TO a more pointed message about the purpose of that provision. FROM: "Our gracious God is the giver of all good things. Everything we have comes from him." TO: "Our gracious God provides generously for us *so that we might have what we need to serve him and others in love*." Throughout the previous weeks, "ministry" will have been repeatedly defined as "service." And that narrower focus even fits the Prayer of the Day, in which we thank God that he "[provides] for all our needs of body and soul." Why? That we might "serve you (and others) in willing obedience."

That concept could be shared, no matter what reading was chosen for the sermon. The Gospel ultimately is about a need that arose <u>while Jesus and the disciples were carrying out gospel ministry</u>, i.e., the crowds were hungry. The reading demonstrates the compassion of Jesus, that he cares for the whole man, both soul and body. It also shows that God will provide whatever we need in our service of him and our fellow man. (If he *hasn't* provided something, it's because our ministry doesn't really need that something.) Or consider the Second Reading where Paul explains that the reason God provides for us abundantly is "so that you can be generous on every occasion." The preacher can share that the reason God provides generously is so that we might serve others, both their physical and spiritual needs, as the Lord provides opportunity.

The miracle of Jesus feeding the multitude is recorded in all four gospels. When you look at where it falls in the lectionary in other years, there definitely are times when the main focus of that day is simply on the fact that God provides daily bread. It falls in a collection of Propers in Year A that lend themselves to a series about God's provision, as that topic is touched on for several weeks in a row. But in Year B, it falls in a series of Propers which keep referencing ministry. Thus, the focus this week in our worship plan is more about how God provides the physical resources we need to minister, i.e., to serve God and others. (This is also how Proper 12 is handled in *Commentary on the Propers: Year B*, which has Proper 9B through 13B comprising a series titled "Jesus Prepares Disciples to Share the Gospel." For the *Foundation* we've distilled that down to Meaningful Ministry.)

Please do not read any of the above to mean that if, on Proper 12, the preacher focuses more on God's gracious provision without mentioning ministry, he's done something amiss. Not at all! All three readings speak to that topic of God's provision. It is simply that his sermon wouldn't align with the

overall theme of this series, which comes not just from Proper 12, but from things seen in the Propers in weeks prior and after.

Again, this Note to the Preacher is simply meant to explain the thought process that went into CW21, *Commentary on the Propers*, and the *Foundation* suite of resources.

Jon Hein, Coordinator of Congregational Services

## Year B (2024) – Season after Pentecost, Series 2

# *MEANINGFUL MINISTRY*

**SERIES EXPLANATION**

"Ministry" is one of those churchy words that is often used, yet perhaps not fully understood. Ministry comes from the Latin word for "service." Ministry involves serving others with love, compassion, and empathy. Helping someone with physical needs is sometimes called "compassion ministry." Helping someone with their spiritual needs, sharing the good news of Christ, is generally called "gospel ministry." We misunderstand ministry if we think of it as something only ministers do. While pastors are called to perform gospel ministry on behalf of others, ultimately every believer is called by God to reflect Christ-like love and share the message of salvation as God provides those opportunities.

In this worship series we will see our efforts to meet the needs of those God brings into our sphere of influence as meaningful ministry. In our service to them, those people see God's love and God sees our faith. Our worship follows this pattern.

| | |
|---|---|
| Seventh Sunday after Pentecost | *Not Glee and Gratitude, but Rejection and Resentment* |
| Eighth Sunday after Pentecost | *Sent with God's Own Authority* |
| Ninth Sunday after Pentecost | *Jesus Models a Compassionate Shepherd's Heart* |
| Tenth Sunday after Pentecost | *God Meets Our Needs to Meet Others' Needs* |
| Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost | *Fear Not, for the Lord Is with You* |

**Seventh Sunday after Pentecost** **July 7, 2024 (Proper 9B)**

***MEANINGFUL MINISTRY***

# *NOT GLEE AND GRATITUDE, BUT REJECTION AND RESENTMENT*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

If ministry involves serving others with love and compassion, you would think that people would respond only with glee and gratitude for the help they received. Sometimes, but not always. If you offer to help a family member who is having trouble paying his bills, he might be offended, wondering if you are implying that he is not a good provider. Likewise, if you try and share the gospel with someone, he might resent the message that he is a sinner in need of salvation. You are trying to minister to this man's greatest need. Your intentions are loving. Yet he responds with rejection and resentment.

When our ministry efforts are met not with glee and gratitude but rejection and resentment, we are in good company. The prophets, apostles, and even Jesus himself all had those who responded negatively to their ministries. When that happens to us, it doesn't mean our ministry is no longer meaningful. For if others do not appreciate our efforts to serve them, God still appreciates our efforts to serve him.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

*Ezekiel 2:1-7 – The LORD sends Ezekiel to prophesy to the Israelites, knowing that most will not be grateful for the prophet's message but resentful.

2 Timothy 2:1-13 – St. Paul's ministry resulted in him being chained like a criminal. Yet God's Word cannot be chained.

Mark 6:1-6 – Many in Jesus' hometown rejected his ministry.

### Note to the Preacher

The first reading was chosen for the sermon text because it does such a wonderful job of illustrating our primary goal when engaging in gospel ministry—*not* the salvation of souls (which only the Spirit can do) but the glorification of our gracious God. Why would the Lord send Ezekiel to the Israelites if so many were going to reject his message? *"Whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious people—<u>they will know that a prophet has been among them</u>"* (2:5). Even those who rejected Ezekiel would admit one day that God, in his grace, had tried to help them by sending his spokesman. God would ultimately be glorified, proven good and gracious. Likewise, churches engage in gospel ministry not because it always results in many coming to faith but because that ministry gives glory to the Savior who served us (and who himself suffered rejection). A believer attempts to share his faith with those God brings into his sphere of influence even if that believer sees zero individuals reached by his witnessing efforts. That doesn't matter. His ministry is still meaningful because it gives glory to God both now, as God sees us serving under the cross because of our love for Christ, and in the future, when those individuals realize that God sent his spokesperson to them.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 895 Preach You the Word |
| HOD | 639 God Has Spoken by His Prophets |
| Third/Distr | 900 Lift High the Cross |
| Closing | 774 God Bless Our Native Land |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

Another "Nation" hymn could be slotted into the third hymn slot if desired. Also note that *Service Builder* contains two responsive versions of the Prayer of the Church that focus on the nation.

**Eighth Sunday after Pentecost  July 14, 2024 (Proper 10B)**

***MEANINGFUL MINISTRY***

# *SENT WITH GOD'S OWN AUTHORITY*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

When a child asks a sibling to do something there isn't much certainty as to the results. The sibling might simply ignore the request. However, if that same child goes to a brother or sister with "Dad said so," it's a very different story! Now the father's authority is behind the child's request.

As believers carry out gospel ministry, encouraging others to turn to Christ in repentance, people might push back. "What gives you the right?" Maybe we ask that question ourselves. "I'm far from perfect. So, what gives me the right to talk about things like sin?" This week we are given the answer to that question. "Dad said so." When our God calls us to do ministry, he also gives us authority. In calling us to ministry, God isn't asking us to share our advice or our opinion or even our values. We are sharing God's own authoritative Word. Gospel ministry is conducted by believers but with God's own authority behind the effort.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Amos 7:10-15 – Wicked Amaziah questions the prophet's right to rebuke the king. Amos explains that he has authority only because the LORD told him to speak on God's behalf.

*Titus 1:5-9 – St. Paul establishes qualifications for those who serve in public ministry and stresses that their authority comes from holding firmly to God's Word.

Mark 6:7-13 – Before Jesus sends the Twelve out to do ministry, he gives them his authority.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The second reading was chosen for the sermon text because it provides perhaps the best opportunity within this series on Meaningful Ministry to describe the relationship between public/representative ministry and the ministry to which all believers are called, including the Ministry of the Keys. They are simply two sides of the same coin—gospel ministry. The preacher might note that the qualifications for public ministers delineated here are not ethical characteristics which God only wants to see in called workers. Ultimately, God would have *no believer* be given to "drunkenness" or "violent" or "pursuing dishonest gain." Both the average member and the called worker are to live as salt and light, letting others see the power of the gospel within them.

Obviously, the heart of this reading is verse 9. It shares from where the authority for gospel ministry derives. Whether it's a pastor preaching in a pulpit or a member of the universal priesthood witnessing across a fence, their authority is derived from the fact they are sharing "the trustworthy message as it has been taught." That is part of the relationship between clergy and members. When the overseer shares God's Word with members, Christ's intent isn't to absolve members from that responsibility but to empower them to do the same.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 897 Lord Jesus, You Have Come |
| HOD | 898 Send, O Lord, Your Holy Spirit |
| Third/Distr | 901 O Christians, Haste |
| Closing | 640 God's Word Is Our Great Heritage |

## SERIVCE OPTIONS

*Service Builder* has a responsive Prayer of the Church for the mission of the Church that would fit well this Sunday.

**Ninth Sunday after Pentecost July 21, 2024 (Proper 11B)**

***MEANINGFUL MINISTRY***

# *JESUS MODELS A COMPASSIONATE SHEPHERD'S HEART*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

In the ancient Middle East, a shepherd needed certain skills to do his job well: knowledge of edible grasses, ability to trim hooves, capacity to fend off predators, competency to birth lambs. However, the greatest qualification of a shepherd is much simpler. A good shepherd needed to care for his sheep. Without that, none of those other skills would be fully utilized.

In Scripture meaningful ministry is often pictured as a compassionate shepherd caring for his sheep: Jesus' care for us; a spiritual leader's care for his "flock." Certainly, gospel ministry requires specific skills: ability to actively listen to people, aptitude for applying the gospel to someone's situation, etc. But ultimately, meaningful ministry requires a compassionate heart—a profound caring for others. An individual might know God's Word backwards and forwards. But if they lack compassion, they will not fully perform meaningful ministry. Today, we ask the Spirit to see how Jesus models a compassionate shepherd's heart so that we might be filled with that same compassion.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Jeremiah 23:1-6 – The LORD chastises spiritual shepherds for not bestowing care and compassion on their flock and promises to raise up good shepherds who would tend God's people.

Hebrews 13:7-8,17-21 – In the first reading, the Lord promised to raise up faithful shepherds. That promise is kept when the Lord provides spiritual leaders who point us to the great Shepherd.

*Mark 6:30-34 – Jesus is filled with compassion for those who go through life like sheep without a shepherd.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The first two readings really slant toward application about public ministry. Not only was that discussed to some degree the previous week, it's also hard to preach about in one's own congregation! (It is perhaps better for a pastor to show his heart is full of compassion for his people Monday through Saturday than to describe it in a sermon on Sunday.) The gospel reading certainly has applications for public ministry, but it can also be applied to all Christians, who are just little Christs. Let people see Jesus' heart here! He and the apostles are exhausted, having worked long hours without food or rest. They try to pull away, but the people are desperate and follow. Jesus feels a love for them that is profoundly emotional; he can't *not* help no matter how tired he may be. There's application here for the lay person who is exhausted dealing with work and kids and life in general, but a neighbor is desperate for spiritual help (without perhaps knowing their true condition). What moves that lay person to expend time and emotional energy to help? It will take Christ-like compassion. Ministry (service) flows from compassion. And that compassion is produced in us when we see Christ's compassion for us.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 554 The Lord's my Shepherd |
| HOD | 551 Jesus, Shepherd of the Sheep |
| Third/Distr | 766 Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service |
| Closing | 736 Lord, You Call Us As Your People - v1-3 |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

If 554 has not been previously/recently utilized, consider having a cantor sing verse 1 to introduce the melody.

**Tenth Sunday after Pentecost July 28, 2024 (Proper 12B)**

***MEANINGFUL MINISTRY***

# *GOD MEETS OUR NEED TO MEET OTHERS' NEEDS*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

King David explains, "The earth is the LORD's and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1). That word "everything" doesn't leave any wiggle room, does it? That word "everything" means that your home and all its furnishings, your vehicle and all that's in the trunk, your bank account, the twenty-eight dollars in your wallet, the wallet itself, and the pocket in which you carry your wallet *all* belong to God. Everything you have was given to you by your good and gracious Father. We need to understand that.

But it is just as important that we understand *why* God provides for our physical needs. As we have seen throughout this worship series, God has called us to ministry. He asks us to reflect his love in meeting the physical and spiritual needs of others. Believers *want* to serve others in those ways. By providing for us, God meets our need to meet others' needs. This week Jesus promises that he will provide the resources necessary to conduct meaningful ministry.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Exodus 16:1-15 – The LORD graciously and miraculously provides for the physical needs of the children of Israel.

*2 Corinthians 9:8-11 – Paul teaches that God blesses us abundantly so that we have the resources to abound in every good work, generously helping others in all their needs.

Mark 6:35-44 – Jesus ministers to people by sharing the good news of salvation and by providing for their physical needs.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The second reading was chosen as the sermon text because of how well it connects the concepts of God's provision to the purpose of God's provision. "God is able to bless you abundantly, <u>*so that*</u> in all things and at all times, having all that you need, you will about in every good work." Then, "You will be enriched in every way <u>*so that*</u> you can be generous on every occasion…." It is also a wonderful text to proclaim the grace God shows in his provision. We think we have what we have because of our skills and/or hard work, failing to acknowledge that if God had us be born in a different time or place or to a different family, we'd live in abject poverty. It's all due to God's grace! As an application, the preacher might choose to use this reading to talk about how compassion ministry and gospel ministry can intersect. It gives God glory when a believer simply meets some physical need of another. However, as we share physical blessings with others, God often provides the opportunity to share spiritual blessings as well. Take the practice of hospitality. As believers intentionalize spending time with unbelievers that God brings into their sphere of influence, those believers will eventually have the opportunity to speak the truth in love. Such encounters would be included in the "every occasion" Paul references in this reading. God provides physical resources so we can do such things.

**HYMNS**

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 749 God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending |
| HOD | 827 Rejoice, My Heart, Be Glad and Sing |
| Third/Distr | 506 For the Fruits of His Creation |
| Closing | 507 Let All Things Now Living |

**Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost** **August 4, 2024 (Proper 13B)**

***MEANINGFUL MINISTRY***

# *FEAR NOT, FOR THE LORD IS WITH YOU*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Shortly before he ascended, Jesus told his followers they were to engage in meaningful ministry—to work their way through the world, sharing the good news of salvation. Our loving Lord knew that was a big and often intimidating task. So, his next words were a promise. "Surely I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). God's people still need to hear that promise.

For several weeks, we have been discussing the reality that the Lord of the Church has called all believers to meaningful ministry. Ministry will come with challenges. It can cause fears to arise: the fear of rejection, the fear of inadequacy, the fear of persecution. So, listen again to your Savior. "I am with you always." We conclude our series on meaningful ministry empowered by that gracious promise.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

2 Kings 6:8-17 – Elisha's ministry had resulted in Elisha and his servant being surrounded by an enemy army. But they didn't need to fear, for the LORD and his mighty army of angels were with them.

2 Timothy 4:6-8,16-18 – Paul knows that soon he will be executed for performing gospel ministry. Yet he is not afraid, for he knows the Lord Jesus has always been by his side.

*Mark 6:45-56 – Before engaging in ministry at Gennesaret, Jesus comes to the disciples, dispelling their fears with his comforting and powerful presence.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

While the first reading certainly fits the theme of the day (that God's presence provides courage as we do ministry), it is the recommended sermon text for the Festival of St. Michael and All Angels in late September. The gospel reading was chosen because it allows the preacher to address all the various things that can cause us to fear. Some would seem rational, like being on the sea in a storm. Others are objectively irrational, like the fear of ghosts. Jesus, in his grace, addresses them all. The imperative "Take courage!" is enabled by his presence.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 820 O God, Our Help in Ages Past |
| HOD | 803 Day by Day |
| Third/Distr | 533 Jesus, Lover of My Soul |
| Closing | 549 Across the Lands |

*(continued)*

## SERVICE OPTIONS

549 is an easy tune to pick up. However, if it is new, consider having a cantor sing the first verse. Another option is to have the musician play only the melody line in its entirety.

## Year B (2024) – Season after Pentecost, Series 3

# *I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE*

**NOTE TO THE PREACHER: The Challenges of the Bread of Life Discourse**

The Bread of Life discourse is clearly a profound message. The profundity is apparent from the fact that it marks the beginning of the end of Jesus' widespread popularity. After this discourse many left Jesus. The reasons they left are still reasons why people stumble or walk away from Christ today. So, it's an important series. And it presents a double challenge to the preacher.

First, there is simply the challenge of expounding a text that has several esoteric elements: the parallel between earthly and heavenly food; the provision of manna and how the Israelites viewed that; what it means to "eat" the bread of life; the need for the Father to "draw" people in. None of these are necessarily complicated. It just takes time to explain them.

Second, there's the challenge of preaching on the same discourse three weeks in a row (which is the recommendation of this series) without being redundant. There is much circling back throughout this chapter. For example, manna is first brought up by Jesus' followers in verse 30. Jesus then references manna multiple times, citing in both verse 49 and verse 58 how those who ate it still died. Verse 30 is in the gospel reading for week 1; verse 49 in week 2, and verse 58 in week 3.

Obviously, these challenges are met with careful, prayerful textual study. However, the exegesis of John 6:24-69 probably needs to be done *en toto* before writing the first sermon. It's as if the preacher is outlining a sermon that will cover three weeks.

If you own *Commentary on the Propers: Year B*, you will note how closely this worship outline follows the three weeks in that resource. The *Foundation* series and weekly promotional comments have (hopefully) distilled the voluminous information in the commentary down to something more viable for a worship folder or as a social media promo. But reading everything in the commentary for these weeks will certainly aid the preacher. The *Preacher Podcast* contributors also have carefully tried to demonstrate the distinctions in each of the weeks. Here's a summary:

- Week 1 deals with the malady of the human heart craving temporal blessings more than eternal. The connection to the feeding of the multitude is obvious. People liked that Jesus could provide a full stomach. They were not fully aware he could give them so much more.
- Week 2 builds upon week 1 by stressing the superiority of spiritual blessings above temporal ones. It allows the preacher to contrast an eternal life in glory to a very short seven or eight decades in a world that is so fundamentally broken that it is destined to be incinerated. However, week 2 also builds upon the fact that the "eating" Jesus is calling for (faith in him) is something that fallen man would never do of his own volition. Jesus speaks of the Father drawing in the elect. The other readings talk about spiritual wisdom being a gift.
- Week 3 provides opportunities for application. If Jesus is the only bread that offers eternal life, what does that mean for how we prioritize him and his Word in our temporal lives? Note that the "hard" part of Jesus' teaching isn't understanding what he is claiming. It's accepting what it means for our lives.

## Year B (2024) – Season after Pentecost, Series 3

# *I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE*

**SERIES EXPLANATION**

"From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (John 6:66). What happened?! Jesus had recently fed many thousands of people. Everywhere he went, he was mobbed by a multitude looking for the hope and healing Jesus provided. In the first part of Jesus' ministry, he was extremely popular. That changed so quickly. At this time many followers walked away from Christ. What had Jesus done that was so bad? He said, "I am the bread of life." That statement seems, at worst, to be cryptic. It doesn't seem offensive. But as the crowd grasped what Jesus was claiming, they decided they no longer wanted anything to do with him.

Bread is a staple food, something people eat every day (especially in Jesus' day). Scripture will sometimes refer to bread and water as all one needs to sustain physical life. In this worship series we will examine what Jesus is teaching when he calls himself "the bread of life." We will discuss why people would abandon Jesus for making that claim. And we will wrestle with whether we would ever do the same. Our worship follows this path.

| | |
|---|---|
| Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost | *Spiritual Food for Those Focused on the Earthly* |
| Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost | *The Bread that Gives Wisdom and Life* |
| Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost | *The Only Food We Really Need* |

**Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost August 11, 2024 (Proper 14B)**

***I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE***

# *SPIRITUAL FOOD FOR THOSE FOCUSED ON THE EARTHLY*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Physical food is a blessing from God without which we would literally wither away and die. That is why Jesus lovingly and miraculously fed thousands of followers with only five loaves of bread and two fish. Yet, while physical food is a good thing, it is far from the greatest thing God provides us. The greatest blessing God provides is spiritual food. The best thing God gives us is his Son, the bread of life. Without that spiritual food, we wither and die in a much worse way.

This week we see the multitudes coming to Jesus looking for two things: ever more temporal blessings—full bellies, healthy bodies—and an explanation of how to gain them. Jesus explains the greater need for spiritual food. He assures us that there is nothing we do to earn it. Our Father urges us to come to him for our daily bread, asking him to provide for our temporal needs. But may we hunger most for our greatest need: spiritual food that Christ freely gives.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Exodus 16:15-31 – In sending manna, a bread that stayed fresh for a short time, the LORD not only cared for Israel's physical well-being but also fortified trust that God would continue to provide.

1 Corinthians 10:1-5,11-13 – The Israelites had spiritual food in the wilderness. The pre-incarnate Christ was with them! Yet some cared more about physical blessings than spiritual ones.

*John 6:24-35 – Jesus is the bread of life.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The gospel reading serves as the sermon text throughout this series. This week the preacher may remind his people that the way God provides for our physical needs only proves how well he will meet our spiritual needs. The old *Planning Christian Worship* referenced a common teaching of St. Augustine, that God often chooses common visible things to point to something more important that is invisible. For example, God chooses water as the earthly element in baptism, so that when we daily see water sluice away visible grit and grime, we might remember the water and the promise of baptism, in which something invisible—sin and guilt—was washed away.

The first reading supports this concept. It shows that the way God provided for the physical health of Israel was also his way of fostering spiritual health. Israel needed to trust God to provide on a daily basis, because manna lasted only one day (except for the Sabbath).

The second reading is a warning that one can have spiritual food and partake of it on occasion, and yet still be lost because of disdain for that food, preferring the temporal to the eternal.

*(continued)*

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 544 I Am the Bread of Life |
| HOD | 923 Guide Me, O Though Great Jehovah |
| Third/Distr | 591 O Holy Spirit, Grant Us Grace |
| Closing | 509 Feed Your Children, God Most Holy |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

Hymn 544 obviously captures the theme of this worship series. It is challenging, as the verses are all different. Consider having a cantor/choir sing the verses, with the congregation joining in on the refrains. It could also be used each week, with the congregation hopefully being able to sing it all eventually.

**Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost August 18, 2024 (Proper 15B)**

***I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE***

# *THE BREAD THAT GIVES WISDOM AND LIFE*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

There are many different theories about the healthiest way to eat. There's the old food pyramid, built on a foundation of whole grains. There's the Mediterranean diet, the Atkins diet, the Paleo diet, and many others. We can debate which is best, but what is undebatable is that whatever your diet, you are going to die. Perhaps a vegetarian diet is indeed easier on your heart. Still, your heart is going to stop eventually. But in his Bead of Life discourse, Jesus offers food that enables us to live forever.

There are foods you might never have tasted without someone working hard to convince you to try them. Likewise, this spiritual food that Jesus describes is something no one finds appealing at first, but distasteful. And so today Jesus explains that we need God to work within us, so that we have the wisdom to see that this food gives life and the faith to find this bread most delicious.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Proverbs 9:1-6 – In this poetic reading, spiritual wisdom is personified as a kind woman. Lady Wisdom invites us to dine on the spiritual food that empowers us to truly live.

1 Corinthians 2:6-16 – St. Paul explains that we need a wisdom that only the Spirit can give, a wisdom that understands that in Christ we have the bread of life.

*John 6:35-51 – Jesus declares that anyone wise enough to eat the bread of life will live forever.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

Note how the explanation of the theme of the day attempts to tackle the two points that could be made in the Gospel reading. Why is our relationship with Jesus to be of highest priority? Jesus is the only food that grants eternal life. It is a message about the simultaneous inclusivity and exclusivity of the gospel. No one is saved except through Christ. Everyone who has faith in Christ will be saved. Yet, the second paragraph of that explanation touches on the fact that no one perceives the value of that spiritual food unless they've been given the gift of faith, i.e., spiritual wisdom.

The first reading supports that message through the personified Lady Wisdom encouraging us to eat the meal she has set. The second reading simply makes the poetry of the first reading concrete.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 528 Christ, the Word of God Incarnate |
| HOD | 633 Speak, O Lord |
| Third/Distr | 581 Lord, 'Tis Not That I Did Choose You |
| Closing | 521 Christ the Eternal Lord - v1,2 |

**Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost August 25, 2024 (Proper 16B)**

***I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE***

# *THE ONLY FOOD WE REALLY NEED*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

As Jesus concluded his Bread of Life discourse, many said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" and walked away. Read carefully. They did not say the teaching was hard to understand. The meaning was clear enough. Jesus was teaching that the only chance to enjoy eternity in heaven is through a close connection to him. He is the only bread that gives eternal life. That isn't hard to understand, but it is hard to accept. Eating this bread means reordering our lives so that Jesus is by far our highest priority. It means loving the Blesser infinitely more than his earthly blessings. It means realizing that Jesus is the only thing we really need. If we had nothing but him, we would not lack anything that ultimately matters.

Jesus watches the multitudes walking away from him. He turns to the Twelve—he turns to us this week—and he whispers, "You do not want to leave me too, do you?" May the Spirit give us the wisdom to answer, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Joshua 24:1-2,14-18 – Joshua asks the Israelites to remain faithful to God who had brought them out of Egypt. The LORD was the only God they needed or wanted.

Hebrews 11:24-28 – In faith Moses chose to be part of the people of God rather than remaining an Egyptian prince. Being with Christ in the true Promised Land was all Moses needed or wanted.

*John 6:51-69 – When many left, the Twelve stayed with Jesus, who had the words of eternal life. The Holy One of God was all they needed or wanted.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

*Commentary on the Propers: Year B* describes how this week is all about making a choice. It is careful to detail that this is not decision theology. In all three readings, the people discussed are believers who came to faith entirely through the gracious working of the Spirit. So the choice, empowered by faith, is to continue craving spiritual food, to nourish our faith through the Means God had provided. St. John does not refer to those who left Jesus as hypocrites. He calls them disciples. They genuinely wanted to follow Jesus, but when Jesus explains what that entails, they leave. This is a temptation for many today. The commentary notes how Luther paraphrased the attitude of these disciples: "To be sure, we will let You give us food and drink, but we cannot tolerate that You try and teach us and pose as our Master" (LW 23, p30). It really gets to the question of why people are following Jesus at all. Do they want the blessings or the Blesser?

The other readings support this thought, for both describe a Spirit-wrought choice made by believers: the Israelites choosing to follow the Lord rather than other gods, and Moses choosing to be part of God's people rather than a prince in Egypt.

*(continued)*

**HYMNS**

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 606 Alleluia! Sing to Jesus |
| HOD | 631 Speak, O Savior, I Am Listening |
| Third/Distr | 826 From God Can Nothing Move Me |
| Closing | 932 Sent Forth by God's Blessing |

## Year B (2024) – Season after Pentecost, Series 4

# *THE NEED FOR FOLLOWERSHIP*

**SERIES EXPLANATION**

"We need better leadership!" Have you ever said that? Perhaps you were frustrated with the direction being taken by some elected official or by management at your workplace or by the coach of your favorite team. You were frustrated because you know that no matter how many resources an organization has, it will flounder if leaders do not lead well: providing direction, training, motivation, coordination, encouragement, and even grace. Leadership is extremely important. And so, there are times we lament, "We need better leadership!"

Jesus Christ is the leader of our congregation, our home, our lives. And his leadership is perfect in every way. Therefore, when things are amiss in any of those arenas, what is needed is not better leadership, but better followership. In this series, we ask Christ to empower us with his Spirit so that we might better follow his lead. May we better reflect the beauty of his life, better make his priorities our own, and better serve our God and neighbor. Our worship follows this path.

| | |
|---|---|
| Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost | *Followers of Christ Obey His Law from the Heart* |
| Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost | *Followers of Christ See the True Purpose of His Power* |
| Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost | *Followers of Christ Are Armed for Battle* |
| Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost | *Followers of Christ Are Humble Servants* |
| Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost* | *Followers of Christ Have Powerful Allies* |
| Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost | *Followers of Christ Know How to Love Their Families* |
| Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost | *Followers of Christ Maintain Proper Priorities* |
| Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost | *Followers of Christ Make Selfless Sacrifices* |

* St. Michael & All Angels

**Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 1, 2024 (Proper 17B)**

***THE NEED FOR FOLLOWERSHIP***

# *FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST OBEY HIS LAW FROM THE HEART*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

A loving father gives his son and daughter a list of rules and regulations. Chores, curfews, civilities, dress code—the father makes his will clearly known. The son strives to follow the rules for two reasons. 1) He wants to get his allowance. 2) He is afraid that if he breaks the rules, his father will punish him. The daughter strives to follow the rules, also for two reasons. 1) She believes her father established those rules not to control her but for her safety and blessing. 2) She wants to demonstrate how much she loves and trusts her father. Those two children's actions might look almost identical. Their hearts are very different!

Likewise, following Christ is not simply a matter of outward observance of laws. It is a matter of the heart. The Law was given so we could see God's heart and demonstrate how his heart has affected our own. The followership Christ seeks flows from hearts that have been radically transformed by God's law and gospel. Christ wants his followers to be less like the son described above, and more like the daughter. This week we see that followers of Christ obey his law from the heart.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Deuteronomy 4:1-2,6-9 – God is serious about his law because he knows that when his children follow the law carefully, the result is blessing and honor.

Romans 9:30–10:4 – Followers of Christ obey the law, not to attempt to become righteous, but to show heartfelt love to the God who declares us righteous through faith in Jesus.

*Mark 7:1-8,14,15,21-23 – The Pharisees established traditions which they thought safeguarded obedience to God, but they missed God's desire for heartfelt love.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The gospel serves as the sermon text because it directly references the heart, both as to what God wants ("heart" as a metonymy for "love") and as the true source of uncleanliness. Note the parallel to the topic of Proper 4 where Jesus taught, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." There the primary emphasis was on the law given for the mankind's blessing, not as some sort of divine power-play or attempt to control us. This week, the emphasis is more on the fact that as we realize God's goodness—goodness evident in the blessings provided by his law and especially demonstrated by the gift of his Son—our hearts are transformed. In turn, we view the law entirely differently.

*(continued)*

**HYMN**

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 697 May We Your Precepts, Lord, Fulfill |
| HOD | 740 O God, My Faithful God |
| Third/Distr | 626 My Heart Is Filled with Thankfulness |
| Closing | 705 Oh, That the Lord Would Guide My Ways |

**Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 8, 2024 (Proper 18B)**

***THE NEED FOR FOLLOWERSHIP***

# *FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST SEE THE TRUE PURPOSE OF HIS POWER*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Power is neither inherently good nor bad. Fire is powerful. The chef uses fire to create meals. But the arsonist uses fire to destroy homes. Nuclear fission is a powerful force. The engineer harnesses it, producing abundant electricity. The tyrant harnesses it, threating others with nuclear weapons. What matters is the purpose of the one who has that power.

Jesus has limitless power, as the numerous accounts of his miracles demonstrate. Those who witnessed those miracles understood that Jesus used his power for good. That *doesn't* mean they all understood Jesus' true purpose. Some thought Jesus' purpose was to make this temporal life better. And while Jesus did that at times, his ultimate purpose was to save us from sin and give us the gift of eternal life. Followers of Christ see the true purpose of his power.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Isaiah 35:4-7a – Through the prophet Isaiah God promised that he would come, making the blind see and the lame leap. But the ultimate purpose of his coming was to save us.

Acts 3:1-10 – Christ gave his follower Peter the power to heal a man who was lame from birth. When healed, the man does not go first to family and friends but to the temple to praise God.

*Mark 7:31-37 – Jesus uses his power not to elicit praise from the crowd but to demonstrate his love for a man who was deaf and mute.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The gospel serves as the sermon text. It addresses a common question. *"If Jesus has all this power, why does he allow _____?"* The devil would have us think that the purpose of Jesus' power is to make our lives better right now. So, Jesus pulls the man aside not only to show this man how much he was loved as an individual but also so that there were not more witnesses. Jesus instructs those who saw what he did not to tell others. He knows the people would be perfectly content to have Jesus remain among them as a healer of physical ills, a provider of material blessings, one who could solve today's problems. Yet Jesus had come to do so much more. Would they also want that?

Ultimately, all these readings have this truth underneath. Christ's demonstrations of power prove that he's the almighty Son of God. That means that when he laid his power aside and submitted to the cross, his sacrifice was valuable enough to redeem the world. The love proven in his saving work enables us to trust that however Jesus uses his power now—to heal or not to heal, to provide or not to provide—is good and right. "He [does] everything well."

*(continued)*

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 765 O Son of God, in Galilee |
| HOD | 769 Your Hand, O Lord, in Days of Old |
| Third/Distr | 537 Word of God, Come Down on Earth |
| Closing | 520 Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

While this week contains multiple new hymns, they are set to familiar tunes.

**Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost September 15, 2024 (Proper 19B)**

***THE NEED FOR FOLLOWERSHIP***

# *FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST ARE ARMED FOR THE BATTLE*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

What is the worst war in human history? One might point to World War II, which has the highest death toll of at least 90 million people. Or consider the Three Kingdoms War, which not only resulted in over 40 million deaths but also lasted for most of the third century. There is no end to the sad list of nominations: the Thirty Years War, the Taiping Rebellion, the American Civil War, World War I.

None of those is the correct answer. The worst war in human history began when the first shot was fired in Eden. It has been raging since. It is a war against "spiritual forces of evil" (Ephesians 6:12). This is not a war over land or resources. It is a war for souls. The reality is that there are demonic forces that want to do more than kill you; they want to claim you for all eternity. The good news: Christ has already called you his own and equipped you for this war. Followers of Christ are armed for the battle.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

1 Kings 18:21-39 – In a showdown between Elijah and the prophets of the idol Baal, the LORD makes it clear that all the combined forces of hell are nothing compared to the almighty power of God.

*Ephesians 6:10-18 – So that they might be ready for the battle, followers of Christ put on the full armor of God.

Mark 9:14-27 – As we fight spiritual battles, Jesus assures us that "Everything is possible for the one who believes," that is, the one who relies on Christ, who has already won the war.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The second reading serves as the basis for the sermon. It provides great opportunity for the preacher to explain how we prepare ourselves for spiritual war. It includes being rooted in the Word, which is truth and which creates the faith through which we receive the righteousness of Christ. In includes "[praying] in the Spirit on all occasions…"

There are timely applications. As the preacher prepares this sermon, many of his people will have the upcoming elections on their mind. Many see recent elections as part of a larger culture war. How many of our people see the cultural war as being almost identical to the spiritual war? If so, they might see electing the right individuals or passing the right laws as an integral part of spiritual warfare. Yet, Paul mentions nothing about such tactics! Not laws and rules, but Word and prayer. This, of course, does not mean Christians are disinterested in government and elections. But our theme says that "Christ's followers are armed for battle." Christians need to understand what their resources are in the spiritual war… and what are *not* resources. The Gospel Reading illustrates what happens when Jesus' followers attempt to fight evil spiritual forces relying on something *other* than Christ—failure (Mark 9:18).

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 870 O Church, Arise |
| HOD | 517 Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness |
| Third/Distr | 872 Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus |
| Closing | 869 Onward, Christian Soldiers - v1,4 |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

If 870 is new to your congregation, consider having a cantor or choir sing the first two verses. A Google search will turn up multiple SATB arrangements.

**Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 22, 2024 (Proper 20B)**

***THE NEED FOR FOLLOWERSHIP***

# *FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST ARE HUMBLE SERVANTS*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Humility and pride are polar opposites. Pride exalts self at the expense of God and others. Humility exalts God and others at the expense of self. Pride is the essential vice, for it increases one's hunger for all other sins. Humility increases one's hunger for the forgiveness and healing found in Christ. The one who is proud demands to be served. The one who is humble is not content unless serving others. St. Augustine described it this way: "It was pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes men as angels."

As we see all Christ did to serve us, our hearts melt. Within us grows a Christ-like obsession to serve others, without counting the cost, without any desire to be repaid. Those who are in positions of Christian leadership understand that their leadership can only be achieved through service. For followers of Christ are humble servants.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Numbers 12:1-15 – The pride of Aaron, the high priest, and Miriam, a prophetess, led them to bad-mouth humble Moses and belittle Moses' wife, simply for being of another race.

James 3:13-18 – St. James teaches that ambitiously pursuing greatness is not just prideful but also demonic. True greatness in Jesus' kingdom is acting toward others in ways that are humble.

* Mark 9:30-37 – The greatest in Jesus' kingdom is the one humble enough to gladly serve a little child who could not possibly repay that favor.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The gospel reading serves as the sermon text. It provides the opportunity to address the truth that pride is the root of all other sin. Consider that Jesus is trying to explain for a second time his suffering, death, and resurrection. The disciples still do not understand, but they also don't ask for clarification because they "were afraid to ask him." They are too proud to admit they need Jesus to explain. Despite this, they are arguing about who is the greatest. (The *Commentary on the Propers: Year B*) notes that "the three" had recently come down from the mount of Transfiguration, which could have kickstarted the conversation.) When Jesus inquires what they are talking about, again they do not speak up. They know that their conversation about greatness is improper, but pride keeps them from admitting it to Jesus. Pride prevented them from seeking greater depth within the gospel, from confessing their sin. Pride is the mother of all vices. (The First Reading could be brought in as pride leading to a sense of superiority over others, and for something as superficial as race.) The disciples missed that Jesus was talking about having to die—for all people! Christianity addresses pride by showing us how we are all equally in need of saving. When we realize we have a Savior who was willing to humble himself to the point of death, it makes us willing to "be the very last," to put ourselves out in humble service of others even if there is no possibility of them ever repaying our service, just like a little child cannot repay.

**HYMNS**

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 737 Lord, Help Us Walk Your Servant Way |
| HOD | 767 Lord of Glory, You Have Bought Us |
| Third/Distr | 704 Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus |
| Closing | 735 Before You I Kneel |

**Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 29, 2024**

***THE NEED FOR FOLLOWERSHIP***

# *FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST HAVE POWERFUL ALLIES*

## *(THE FESTIVAL OF ST. MICHAEL & ALL ANGELS)*

***Foreword***

*In The Foundation we typically follow the Propers, allowing the local pastor to choose if he'd rather observe a minor festival. However, if a minor festival falls a Sunday, particularly if it fits well with the flow of a series (not always the case since minor festivals typically have readings that do not connect with the weeks before or after), we incorporate it. Just two weeks ago the readings stressed that we are in the middle of a spiritual war. This week, we celebrate that in that war, there are elite special forces on our side.*

### EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Green Berets. Rangers. SEALs. Delta Force. These special forces groups are part of the United States military. They are elite: highly trained with unique skill sets. Many of their important missions are carried out in total secrecy.

Two weeks ago, we acknowledged that we are in the middle of a massive spiritual war. Today, we thank God that we fight this war with the protection of special forces. Since the fifth century, Christians have observed the Festival of St. Michael and All Angels. We commemorate that God has sent Michael, one of the great archangels described in Scripture, and countless of his fellow angels to protect and serve mankind. Let us rejoice that followers of Christ have powerful allies!

### READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

*2 Kings 6:8-17 – As Elisha fulfilled his mission to proclaim the word and will of God, the angels fulfilled their mission by providing Elisha with protection.

Revelation 12:7-12 – When war broke out in heaven, Michael and his angels defeated Satan and his demons.

Luke 10:17-20 – We rejoice that Christ enables us to overcome the work of demons. We rejoice even more that our names are written in heaven.

### NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The Old Testament reading serves as the sermon text, providing the preacher a wonderful opportunity to vividly share this remarkable narrative. It provides a good illustration of the roles played in the great spiritual war. Man shares the Word of God. Angels have done that in the past, Gabriel, for example. But now, that responsibility falls to us. Luther said, "When God wants to speak and deal with us, he does not avail himself of an angel, but of parents, or the pastor, or our neighbor." The angels protect us, certainly at all times, but especially when the demons would want to silence our proclamation of the gospel.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 499 Christ, the Lord of Hosts, Unshaken |
| HOD | 500 Lord God, to You We Give All Praise |
| Third/Distr | 836 I Walk in Danger All the Way - v1,4,5 |
| Closing | 924 Abide, O Dearest Jesus |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

*Service Builder* contains a special Prayer of the Church for St. Michael and All Angels.

**Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost October 6, 2024 (Proper 22B)**

***THE NEED FOR FOLLOWERSHIP***

# *FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST KNOW HOW TO LOVE THEIR FAMILIES*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Love can cause harm. Consider the wife whose husband wants little to do with church. She loves him and does not want to upset him. So, when her husband wants her and the children to stay home Sunday morning, she complies without protest. That wife's love for her husband hurts him, her children, and herself. Or consider the father who loves his child so much that he gives the child everything that child asks for. That father's love is toxic. It is shaping that child to be a selfish, entitled adult.

In our families, it is not enough that there is love. We need to *rightly* love, to love in a way that leads to blessings for those we claim to love. This illustrates the need for followership. In Jesus we see perfect, self-sacrificial love. Jesus loves us as we are. He also loved us too much to leave us as we are. So, in love he gave his life up so that we might be holy and blameless. His love for us shapes the way we love our spouse, our children, our parents. Today we see that followers of Christ know how to love their family.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Genesis 2:18-25 – The family is the foundation of society, and marriage is the foundation of family. Marriage is not a social construct or custom but an institution of the Creator God.

*Ephesians 5:21-6:4 – St. Paul describes the various roles and responsibilities God has given to different people within a family, ways for them to demonstrate love not only for each other but also for Christ.

Mark 10:2-16 – Jesus explains that husbands and wives are to retain the bond of love, existing as one flesh. Jesus also teaches that God craves a loving relationship with children.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The Second Reading serves as the sermon text. The theme of the day talks about how followers of Christ know how to love their family. This reading demonstrates the Christian understanding of love, that it is more than sentiment. Note that Paul only uses the imperative "love" when speaking to husbands. Yet, he immediately describes it in terms of action, specifically self-sacrifice. While Paul doesn't use the word "love" when speaking to wives, he describes the actions that demonstrate love. The same holds true as he addresses parents and children. So, this reading really details the "how" in "how to love their family." Obviously, not a single family member has fulfilled their role perfectly. Fortunately, Christ has washed us all, so that he sees only blameless spouses, parents, and children.

*(continued)*

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 505 For the Beauty of the Earth |
| HOD | 760 Oh, Blest the House |
| Third/Distr | 759 When Training Up a Child |
| Closing | 731 Oh, How Good It Is |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

*Service Builder* contains a special responsive Prayer of the Church for marriage/family that would fit well this day.

**Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost October 13, 2024 (Proper 23B)**

***THE NEED FOR FOLLOWERSHIP***

# *FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST MAINTAIN PROPER PRIORITIES*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

People think that establishing priorities is about ranking things in order of importance. But it is more than that. We do not have unlimited time and energy. So, establishing priorities enables us to say "no" to things which might be good yet not truly important. Without proper priorities, one inevitably will pursue *that which is nice* while downplaying *that which is needed.*

Throughout Scripture believers are urged to prioritize. It is the heart of the First Commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). Jesus calls for prioritization when he says, "Seek *first* his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). Good news: followers of Christ maintain proper priorities. Even better news: followers of Christ receive his forgiveness for all the times their priorities have been improper.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

2 Kings 5:14-27 – The prophet Elisha's servant, Gehazi, prioritized riches over his walk with God.

Hebrews 4:12-13 – God's Word is like a sword. It cuts through our pretentions and pride and exposes our true priorities.

*Mark 10:17-27 – Jesus helps a young man see a problem deeper than his failure to keep God's law perfectly—that he prioritized his wealth above the call to follow Christ.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The gospel serves as the sermon text. Certainly, the alure of money and its ability to twist priorities is a relevant topic. It's referenced also in the first reading. However, for some the improper priority won't be money. It might be a romantic relationship that has progressed to areas that are improper before marriage. It might be one's work. It might be one's children. There is *something* in *every* human heart about which, if Jesus said, "Give that up and follow me" causes sadness. It is why Jesus speaks so inclusively: "With man this is impossible…"

The young man thought we are saved by doing something. "What must I do…?" That is not how it works. Thus, achieving proper priorities is not the thing we do to "inherit eternal life." Our hearts are too hard to ever achieve proper priorities. Thus, salvation must be a free gift. "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." And so we follow Jesus, not so much to learn how to better prioritize, but to receive grace and forgiveness for our improper priorities.

*(continued)*

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 753 My Worth Is Not in What I Own |
| HOD | 560 Your Works, Not Mine, O Christ |
| Third/Distr | 828 Where Your Treasure Is |
| Closing | 717 What Is the World to Me |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

If 753 is new to the congregation, considering having a cantor sing v1,2 and the first refrain. It is also beneficial to have the presiding minister briefly note that the refrain is sung only after v2,4, and 5.

**Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost October 20, 2024 (Proper 24B)**

***THE NEED FOR FOLLOWERSHIP***

# *FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST MAKE SELFLESS SACRIFICES*

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

"What's in it for me?" It's easy to look at life through the lens of that question, to make decisions based on perceived personal benefit. Perhaps at times we look at Christianity through that lens, wondering what we will gain from following Christ. "What's in it for me?" Jesus first disciples asked that question. They hoped that following Christ would bring prestige and honor. They assumed following Christ would make life easier. But it doesn't work like that. Followers of Christ are called to sacrifice for the well-being of others.

"What's in it for me?" Everything! Because of Christ's ultimate sacrifice, followers of Christ have the peace of his forgiveness. Followers of Christ have the joy of meaningful purpose. Followers of Christ look forward to an eternity of glory in Christ's heavenly kingdom. In Spirit-wrought gratitude, followers of Christ make selfless sacrifices with joy.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Isaiah 53:10-12 – The prophet Isaiah foretold that the coming Messiah would make the ultimate sacrifice to pay for our sin.

*1 Corinthians 9:7-12,19-23 – St. Paul shares his willingness to make great sacrifices in his effort to share the gospel of Christ.

Mark 10:32-45 – To disciples who sought glory and honor, Jesus taught that his followers would make selfless sacrifices for others just as he would be sacrificed for our sins.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The second reading is the basis for this week's sermon. Most listeners will be familiar with the second half. They are perhaps unaware of the wider context. In the first part of our text, Paul explains he has every right to ask to be compensated for his work. Even the Law of Moses stipulated that. He opens with three questions that illustrate it would be odd for someone to labor at some effort and expect not to have some sort of return. Yet, that is what Paul and his coworkers did. "We put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ." The good news about Christ moved Paul to make selfless sacrifices.

So, the more well-known paragraph is simply an extension of that concept. Paul was willing to sacrifice his upbringing (which would shape personal preferences) in order to bring the gospel to different people groups. Note the parallel between the end of verse 12 and verse 23. It all comes down to Paul being moved and motivated by the gospel. What mattered to him now? Just like Christ, only others mattered, not Paul. Thus, the repetition: "to win the Jews," "to win those under the law," "to win those not having the law," "to win the weak." May the preacher help the hearer to see that the gospel's healing includes healing from self-absorption.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 854 Church of God, Elect and Glorious |
| HOD | 540 O Jesus So Sweet, O Jesus So Mild |
| Third/Distr | 748 Brothers, Sisters, Let Us Gladly |
| Closing | 930 Go, My Children, with My Blessing |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

If 854 is new, consider having a cantor sing verse 1.

## Year B (2024) – Season after Pentecost, Series 5

# *LIVE LIKE YOU'LL LIVE FOREVER*

**SERIES EXPLANATION**

"Live each day like it's your last." You have probably heard that advice. It sounds wise—an encouragement to take advantage of the time you have. However, that advice is completely backwards. Because the reality is, thanks to Jesus, we have an unending amount of time. Let that sink in. *Really* think about it. Jesus has given you the gift of eternal life. You are going to live forever.

If you really thought it was your last day, that belief would shape how you lived that day. In this series, let us consider how the gift of eternal life shapes how we live each day. Live like you'll live forever!

| | |
|---|---|
| Reformation Day | *Live a Life of Fearless Witness* |
| All Saints' Day | *Live Knowing Life Only Gets Better* |
| Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost | *Live a Life of Startling Generosity* |
| Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost | *Live Free from the Fear of Judgment* |
| Last Sunday after Pentecost | *Live with Your Eyes on the Skies* |

**Reformation Day observed October 27, 2024 (Year B)**

***LIVE LIKE YOU'LL LIVE FOREVER***

# *LIVE A LIFE OF COURAGEOUS WITNESS*

***(Reformation Day)***

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Jesus repeatedly told his followers that living as his disciples would bring hardship. Living life according to God's Law is going to make one appear odd in the eyes of the world, perhaps even evil. Sharing a message of mankind's sin and God's gracious salvation can cause offense. So why not just stay silent if that makes life easier? Why not keep our faith private? Answer: because we are going to live forever. In gratitude for Christ saving us and giving us eternal life, we share the gospel with others, hoping that they will believe and be saved too. Since we know we are going to live forever in the perfection of heaven, we don't worry if being a witness for Christ brings hardship or even death.

Martin Luther wanted to reform the false teaching of the church. He stood firm in the truth of the gospel, knowing it might cost him his life. But Luther knew that, thanks to Christ, he would live forever. So will we. Therefore, like Luther, let us live a life of courageous witness.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

*Daniel 3:16-28 – In response to an evil command offered by a pagan king, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego lived lives of fearless witness.

Revelation 14:6-7– St. John sees God's messenger proclaiming the true gospel to all people. In 1546, this reading served as the text for the funeral of Dr. Martin Luther.

Mark 13:5-11 – Jesus encourages and empowers us that we might be bold in sharing the gospel in these end times.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The first reading was chosen for the sermon text. It provides a parallel to the life of Dr. Luther. He, like the three men, had to decide if God was worth dying for. This text also provides the preacher an opportunity to share that witnessing goes beyond sharing a law/gospel presentation of some sort or explaining what Jesus did. It includes living in a way that is countercultural. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego provide a witness, and initially they didn't even say a word. They simply refused to bend the knee to an idol. *That* then provided them the opportunity to speak about the glory of their God.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 875 What Threat of Harm Can Hinder Me |
| HOD | 863 A Mighty Fortress Is Our God |
| Third/Distr | 877 Reformation Song |
| Closing | 862 Lord, Keep Us Steadfast In Your Word |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

Reformation is a good service to include a choir. So, if 875 is new, consider having a cantor or choir sing verse 1 to introduce it. The same with 877, which has the potential to become a Reformation favorite. NPH's *Musician's Resource* contains resources for 877. If it is sung during distribution, it could be done entirely by the choir. Or, have the choir sing the verses and the congregation join in on the refrain.

Note that *Service Builder* contains two different versions of the Prayer of the Church for Reformation.

**All Saints' Day observed November 3, 2024 (Year B)**

***LIVE LIKE YOU'LL LIVE FOREVER***

# *LIVE KNOWING LIFE ONLY GETS BETTER*

***(All Saints' Day)***

---

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

"It will get better." We say that to try to comfort someone who is having a bad day (or maybe a whole string of bad days). Perhaps tomorrow will be better. But perhaps it's worse. In this life, there really are no guarantees that things will get better. That isn't the case with the life that is to come. That life isn't just going to be better. It will be perfect.

Since the seventh century, Christians have marked a day to celebrate those who have died in faith and now realize the perfect joys of heaven. It is called "All Saints' Day." We thank God for bringing our Christian loved ones out of the troubles and turmoil of this world and into eternal bliss and glory. And we ask God to preserve us in our faith so that we might one day join the saints in that place where life is far more than better.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

*Isaiah 25:6-9 – The Lord Almighty promises his saints, all those who trust in him, that he will destroy the shroud of death.

Revelation 20:4-6 – St. John sees those who had been killed because of their faith in Christ now living and reigning with him in glory.

John 11:32-44 – Jesus demonstrates his power over death.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

Care needs to be taken to avoid redundant main messages in the upcoming weeks, as multiple weeks have texts that reference the resurrection of the dead and judgment day. This worship plan helps the preacher to make the following distinctions in his sermons.

- All Saints' Day focuses on the joy of the saints in heaven. That is why the first reading is chosen. It talks about the Lord removing all the things that make life in this world hard: things that cause tears, disgrace (of sin), and impending death. (Albert Camus' *The Stranger* makes the point that it is hard to enjoy anything good in life with death hanging over you if you believe that is all there is.) This reading also alludes to how the Lord would remove those things by repeatedly referencing "this mountain," i.e., Mount Zion. The *Commentary on the Propers* references various historical events where the shroud of death was present on that mountain.
- Then, on the Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost, the preacher's main focus is on Christ's return to judge, particularly the basis on which Christ makes that judgment.
- Then, on the Final Sunday after Pentecost, the preacher talks about the importance of being ready for Christ's return.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 891 In Our Day of Thanksgiving |
| HOD | 880 For All the Saints |
| Third/Distr | 883 Behold a Host Arrayed in White |
| Closing | 884 Lord, When Your Glory I Shall See |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

If 891 is not well known, consider having a cantor sing at least verse 1 to introduce the hymn.

*Service Builder* has a responsive Prayer of the Church for All Saints Day. It has a slot where the names of the members who have died since the last All Saints Day could be read.

**Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost November 10, 2024 (Proper 27B)**

***LIVE LIKE YOU'LL LIVE FOREVER***

# *LIVE A LIFE OF STARTLING GENEROSITY*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Perhaps you have heard the axiom, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." In other words, while you still can, use what you have in order to enjoy life to the fullest. If this life is all there is, St. Paul agrees that would be a good philosophy. Paul wrote, "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'" (1 Corinthians 15:32). However, note the "if." Paul was saying that the epicurean approach to life makes sense only if this life is all we have. But it isn't. Jesus will raise us from the dead and take us to live in his home, a place of perfect comfort and beauty. Knowing that, we are set free from the need to live a self-indulgent life now. Instead, we can be generous people, using the wealth that God has given us to serve both him and others. We can live a life of startling generosity.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

1 Kings 17:8-16 – A widow generously offers up the last bit of food she has to serve the prophet Elijah.

2 Corinthians 8:1-9 – The believers in Macedonia demonstrate startling generosity in collecting an offering to help fellow Christians in need.

*Mark 12:38-44 – Jesus points to a poor widow as an example of startling generosity.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

All three readings capture the theme of the day well and stress that gratitude for God's grace and confidence in his continued providence enable generosity. The gospel was chosen as the sermon text. The widow demonstrates childlike faith. Children aren't sensible with money. Many Christian children, upon receiving $20 in a birthday card, would be quick to throw all $20 into an offering plate or to spend it all on something nice for mom. Why? A child doesn't believe he needs the $20, because he knows he has loving parents who will take care of him. That is the mindset of this poor widow. This can be our mindset, as we know we have a loving Father, because he gave "all [he] had," his only Son, to make us his own.

This text also provides opportunity for application when comparing the amount of the widow's offering to that of the "rich people."

*(continued)*

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 695 Take My Life and Let It Be |
| HOD | 807 All Depends on Our Possessing |
| Third/Distr | 752 Gracious God, You Send Great Blessings |
| Closing | 750 We Give Thee But Thine Own |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

752 is new, but set to the familiar tune HOLY MANNA.

**Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost November 17, 2024 (Proper 28B)**

***LIVE LIKE YOU'LL LIVE FOREVER***

# *LIVE FREE FROM THE FEAR OF JUDGMENT*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) affects many millions of adults. It is more than shyness. SAD includes an acute fear of being judged. An individual with SAD struggles with everyday tasks like talking to people at work or school because he is terrified that he is constantly being evaluated. Even if you don't have that disorder, perhaps you have experienced that uncomfortable feeling that others are watching you, trying to find something to criticize. We don't want others judging us. It is bad enough listening to the voice inside our own head, whispering that we aren't worthy.

How do we overcome the fear of judgment? It begins by realizing that there is only one person whose opinion ultimately matters—*the* Judge. Everyone is going to live forever in one of two very different places. Where you spend eternity depends on a judgment that Jesus will render. This week we see why his judgment need not trigger any sort of anxiety. Judgment day is something we can joyfully anticipate. We can live free from the fear of judgment.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Daniel 12:1-3 – The prophet Daniel foretells that the world will get worse and then judgment day will come. All whose names are written by Christ in his book of life need not fear that judgment.

*Hebrews 9:24-28 – We can live free of the fear of God's judgment because of the sacrifice our high priest made.

John 5:25-29 – God the Father has given Jesus Christ the authority to judge.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The second reading was chosen as the sermon text since it provides in vivid, straightforward language the reason we live free from the fear of God's judgment. It clarifies what is meant when Jesus says, "Those who have done what is good will rise to live. The "good" is not avoiding sin. That, we cannot do. The "good" is trusting in our high priest who made the sacrifice "once for all… to do away with sin."

*(continued)*

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 495 The King Shall Come |
| HOD | 485 Day of Wrath |
| Third/Distr | 546 Since Our Great High Priest, Christ Jesus |
| Closing | 819 If God Himself Be for Me - v1-4 |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

546 was sung earlier in the year. It might still be good to have a cantor introduce verse 1.

**Last Sunday of the Church Year November 24, 2024**
**(Proper Last Sunday – Year B)**

***LIVE LIKE YOU'LL LIVE FOREVER***

# *LIVE WITH YOUR EYES ON THE SKIES*

## EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

"Eyes on the prize." That axiom stresses that when pursuing some good goal, focus is important. You don't want distractions or a lack of self-discipline to keep you from obtaining whatever that prize might be. "Eyes on the prize." You summon the willpower to fixate on that good thing. You let nothing divert your attention from obtaining the prize.

The prize that we want most is spending eternity with Jesus. As the Church Year comes to a close, Jesus promises that he will come again "in clouds with great power and glory" to give us that prize. That prize will be so unbelievably good, it is worth fixating on. It merits our striving to set aside all that would distract us from Christ. Let us be ready. Let us keep watch. Let us live with our eyes on the skies.

## READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Isaiah 51:4-6 – The Lord encourages his people to live in joyful expectation of salvation, with eyes lifted up to the skies.

Jude 20-25 – St. Jude explains how we live in anticipation of Jesus' return—by doing the things that build up our faith and by showing mercy to our neighbor.

*Mark 13:26-37 – You do not know when Jesus will come again. So be alert, with your eyes on the skies.

## NOTE TO THE PREACHER

The gospel reading was chosen to be the sermon text. The two pictures Jesus uses—the fig tree and the servants waiting for the owner of the home to return—emphasize different aspects of a state of watchfulness.

## HYMNS

| | |
|---|---|
| Opening | 487 Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending |
| HOD | 488 The Day Is Surely Drawing Near |
| Third/Distr | 493 Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers |
| Closing | 491 Come, You Thankful People, Come |

## SERVICE OPTIONS

*Service Builder* contains a special Prayer of the Church for the final Sunday of the Church Year.