

Welcome to Lord of Life as we worship online!

The Lord be with you, dear siblings in Christ! Welcome to worship! I've adapted our typical order of worship as we gather in a different way. If you'd like to follow along, click on the PDF document on our website and you'll find the full text of today's worship including my sermon. Pause this at any time and go to www.lordoflifeak.com – it's on our front page.

It is our practice to begin worship with a moment of quiet. This gives us a chance to quiet our minds and hearts, to be fully present in worship, and to join as a community in one spirit. I invite you to take a few deep breaths and to rest as we join our hearts together in worship. (1 minute of silence)

As we gather in God's name, we remember who our faith is founded on through what God has done and what God is still doing. So we confess our faith in the words of the Apostle's Creed:

I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Take a moment to be centered in today's prayer of the day:

Bend your ears to our prayers, Lord Christ, and come among us. By your gracious life and death for us, bring light into the darkness of our hearts, and anoint us with your Spirit, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, amen.

We typically read four Scriptures each Sunday, but in this format, I'll just read the Scripture that my sermon is based on.

The four readings are: 1 Samuel 16:1-13, Psalm 23, Ephesians 5:8-14, and John 9:1-41. To be honest, I'm torn between the Psalm and the Gospel – so who knows, maybe you'll get a bonus sermon later this week.

For today, I'll read Psalm 23. Although it's familiar, listen. Hear it with the ears of your spirit.

¹The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

Sermon

In its most familiar version we hear "yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," and remember all our loved ones who have died. It has become a funeral reading for many, bringing the pang of grief and loss each time we hear it.

There are in fact, many valleys where death overshadows us. Whether it's disease, fighting with loved ones, unemployment, loss of ourselves, or vulnerability – there are so many ways we can walk through those darkest valleys. They exist. And those shadowy places can surely knock us down.

But even in those times, those who trust in God know where to look. The very center of the psalm after naming the frightening place in the valley: "I will fear no evil; for you are with me..." You are with me.

We are not alone down here. The whole Gospel is that God is *with* us. At his birth, Jesus was called "Emmanuel," which means "God *with* us." Through diseases and healings, Jesus' actions showed God's presence. In his last moments with his disciples, Jesus promised "I will not leave you as orphans."

It's those promises that give us confidence to live with hope. It's the because of the promise that God will never abandon us that we can have peace. It's the care of the shepherd that allows us to lie down and rest, to eat a feast when our enemies are surrounding us. It's the love of God that not only follows us, but chases us down all the days of our lives.

So please stop running. Stop running to the news channels every hour for an update. Stop busying yourself so you can ignore the fear. Stop drinking to pass the time. Stop planning every moment, and just be. Another Psalm, actually, our theme for Lenten Wednesdays from Psalm 46 tells us to "cease striving and know that I am God."

In God's presence, you are being invited to rest in a way that not only protects your body, but restores your soul. And as we walk through the valleys of these days, may we walk with confidence knowing we do not go alone.

May the peace of God which surpasses all our understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord, amen.

Prayer of God's People

Gathered in spirit, we pray as one for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Almighty and loving God, we thank you for your work within us and around us. Give us the insight to see your glory in the things happening around us. Surrounded by despair, help us trust in you.

We pray for your creation, groaning with us as we wait for the day when you make all things right. Protect all species and restore environments as almost all humanity takes a break. May we delight in the wonder that is around us.

Send your Spirit to your church to renew and transform its ministries. In our time apart, strengthen believers as disciples who seek after you and bring a word of hope and peace to our hurting world. May our witness of your goodness extend beyond our communities.

Bring healing and comfort amid the fears of those who are hurting. Draw near to those who have lost loved ones and were unable to be with them in their final hours. Protect medical workers as they risk themselves and their families to care for those who are sick. We pray for the people in our lives who need your care... Hear us God, for your mercy is great.

Keep our hearts secure from despair, give us hope in your promises, and help us have faith in this chaos. Guide us through the wilderness of Lent, and prepare us to rejoice in your resurrection life.

Lord's Prayer

We pray together with confidence the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us to pray, Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever, amen.

As we come to the end of worship, filled with the things of God, we turn toward the world in our Offering.

Online Worship for March 22, 2020

We live our lives in response to God's grace poured out on us. Keep offering good works on behalf of your neighbors, get creative in extending care to strangers like paying for the person behind you in the drive-thru, and continue to support your church and community with financial gifts to ensure our ministries have a future.

You may mail your offering to our locked mailbox at 1005 St. Nicholas Drive, North Pole, AK 99705. You may give securely on our website, lordoflifeak.com by clicking the "Giving" tab and "I'd like to give" button. You may give securely from your phone using the "Give Plus Church" app, just search by our zip code of 99705 and choose Lord of Life, and follow the easy instructions. Feel free to pause this as you give.

Let us pray, Holy and generous host, you set a table where we feast as friends. Prepare us to witness to your goodness with every gift you have given us to share, that all people may know your peace through Jesus Christ, now and forever, amen.

Thank you for your generosity, especially in uncertain times.

Announcements

If part of your offering is to continue caring for one another, writing cards, draw pictures, calling each other, we are happy to send you our church directory. Just send a request for one to office@lordoflifeak.com, and we'll send it to you.

Also, send us an email if you'd like to get updates about what's happening with your church. I will be working on creating a digital gathering place,

Follow our Facebook page or check in on our website each afternoon for updates and encouragement. On Wednesday, our Lenten worship will be about praying the daily hours – intentionally setting time aside each day to acknowledge God's presence. It is especially grounding to keep the hours when we're out of the typical rhythms of life.

Finally, we've been asked by St. Jude to be the pick-up place for Tuesday's food boxes as well as our typical Wednesday. If you're interested in volunteering for that 30-45 minutes, send us an email or call or text Pastor Amanda at 322-2065.

Blessing

Our blessing is one of my favorites from Romans 15:13. Through whatever may await you this week: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Go in peace and share the good news. Thanks be to God!
Make it a great week!