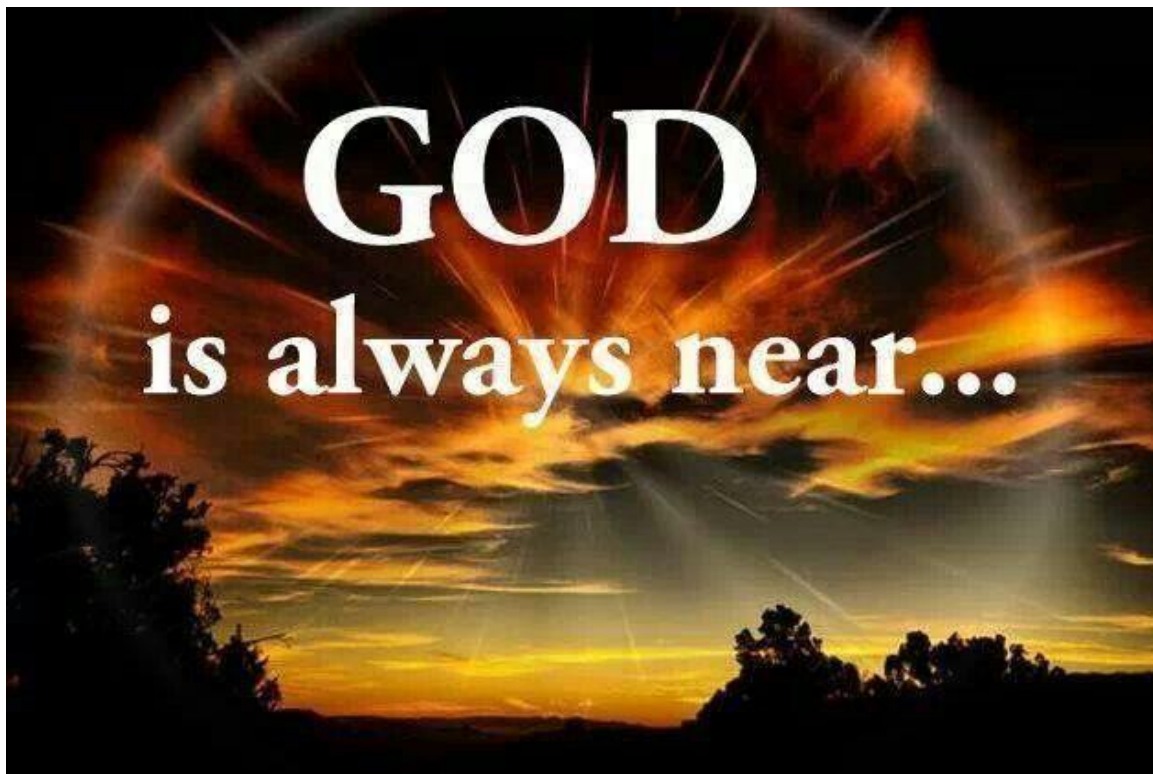


The Lutheran Church of the Covenant
“Reaching Out, Reflecting Christ, Renewing Lives”



Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
January 31, 2021



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

In Deuteronomy God promises to raise up a prophet like Moses, who will speak for God; in Psalm 111 God shows the people the power of God's works. For the church these are ways of pointing to the unique authority people sensed in Jesus' actions and words. We encounter that authority in God's word, around which we gather, the word that prevails over any lesser spirit that would claim power over us, freeing us to follow Jesus.

Prelude *Light Shone in Darkness* (HANSEN)

Confession & Forgiveness

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism, as we take time to recognize our shortcomings, while also remembering God's relentless grace.

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
whose voice is upon the waters,
whose mercy is poured out upon all people,
whose goodness cascades over all creation.

Amen!

Let us confess our sin, trusting in the abundant grace of God.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Holy God,
you search us and know us.
You are acquainted with all our ways.
We confess that our hearts are burdened by sin—
our own sins and the broken systems that bind us.
We turn inward, failing to follow
your outward way of love.
We distrust those who are not like us.
We exploit the earth and its resources
and fail to consider generations to come.
Forgive us, gracious God,
for all we have done and left undone.
Even before the words are on our tongues,
you know them;
receive them in your divine mercy.
Amen.

How vast is God's grace!
Through the power and promise of † Christ Jesus,
our sins are washed away
and we are claimed as God's own beloved.
Indeed, we are forgiven.
In the wake of God's forgiveness,
we are called to be the beloved community
living out Christ's justice
and the Holy Spirit's reconciling peace.
Amen!



Prayer of the Day

Compassionate God, you gather the whole universe into your radiant presence and continually reveal your Son as our Savior. Bring wholeness to all that is broken and speak truth to us in our confusion, that all creation will see and know your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen!**

First Lesson

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Today's reading is part of a longer discourse in Deuteronomy, an updating of the law for the Israelite community as the people wait to enter the promised land. Here Moses assures the people that God will continue to guide them through prophets who will proclaim the divine word.

[Moses said:] ¹⁵The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. ¹⁶This is what you requested of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: "If I hear the voice of the LORD my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die." ¹⁷Then the LORD replied to me: "They are right in what they have said. ¹⁸I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. ¹⁹Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. ²⁰But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak—that prophet shall die."

Word of God, word of life!

Thanks be to God!

Psalm

Psalm 111

¹Hallelujah! I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the assembly of the upright, in the congregation.

²**Great are your works, O LORD,
pondered by all who delight in them.**

³Majesty and splendor mark your deeds,
and your righteousness endures forever.

⁴**You cause your wonders to be remembered;
you are gracious and full of compassion.**

⁵You give food to those who fear you,
remembering forever your covenant.

**⁶You have shown your people the power of your works
in giving them the lands of the nations.**

⁷The works of your hands are faithfulness and justice;
all of your precepts are sure.

**⁸They stand fast forever and ever,
because they are done in truth and equity.**

⁹You sent redemption to your people and commanded your covenant forever;
holy and awesome is your name.

**¹⁰The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all who practice this have a good understanding. God's praise endures forever.**

Second Lesson

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Paul is concerned about the way some Corinthian Christians use their freedom in Christ as license to engage in non-Christian behavior that sets a damaging example to other, impressionable believers. Christians have a responsibility to each other that their behavior does not cause another to sin.

¹Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. ²Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; ³but anyone who loves God is known by him.

⁴Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.” ⁵Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—⁶yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

⁷It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸“Food will not bring us close to God.” We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? ¹¹So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. ¹²But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

Word of God, word of life!

Thanks be to God!

Gospel

Mark 1:21-28

Forces that would bring death and disease have taken hold of a man, yet they recognize Jesus and know what his power means for them. Jesus commands these forces to leave and people are amazed at his authority.

²¹[Jesus and his disciples] went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught.²²They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. ²³Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, ²⁴and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” ²⁵But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” ²⁶And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” ²⁸At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

This is the holy Gospel of our Lord!

Praise to you, O Christ!

Sermon

Hymn of the Day *He Comes to Us as One Unknown*

#737



1 He comes to us as one un-known, a breath un - seen, un -
2 He comes when souls in si - lence lie and thoughts of day de -
3 He comes to us in sound of seas, the o - cean's fume and
4 He comes in love as once he came by flesh and blood and
5 He comes in truth when faith is grown; be - lieved, o - beyed, a -



heard; as though with - in a heart of stone, or shriv - eled seed in
part; half - seen up - on the in - ward eye, a fall - ing star a -
foam; yet small and still up - on the breeze, a wind that stirs the
birth; to bear with - in our mor - tal frame a life, a death, a
dored; the Christ in all the scrip - tures shown, as yet un - seen, but



dark - ness sown, a pulse of be - ing stirred, a pulse of be - ing stirred.
cross the sky of night with - in the heart, of night with - in the heart.
tops of trees, a voice to call us home, a voice to call us home.
sav - ing name, for ev - 'ry child of earth, for ev - 'ry child of earth.
not un - known, our Sav - ior and our Lord, our Sav - ior and our Lord.

Text: Timothy Dudley-Smith, b. 1926

Music: REPTON, C. Hubert H. Parry, 1848-1918

Text © 1984 Hope Publishing Company, Carol Stream, IL 60188. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us offer to God both our praises and our petitions for all in need, responding to each prayer with the words, “hear us and help us.”

A brief silence.

Faithful God, we praise you for sustaining the church during this difficult time. As the Holy Spirit, sustain all her leaders, that their words will proclaim the comfort and challenge of Christ. Lead to yourself all those who have become captive to false prophets and empty promises; free them and embrace them in your mercy. O faithful God, **hear us and help us.**

Bountiful God, we praise you for continuously creating the earth and nourishing its creatures. Restore lands and waters that have been harmed by human misuse. Raise up advocates for an ecological way of life, and guide us in preserving the earth’s natural resources. O bountiful God, **hear us and help us.**

Loving God, we continue to yearn for days free from violence and marked by hope. Give wisdom to our elected and appointed officials and to grassroots organizers, that in all things they endeavor to serve the common good. Guide our nation out of the ways of prejudice and into equality and justice for all. O loving God, **hear us and help us.**

Compassionate God, we praise you for each day of health and well-being, but we also lift up all who are sick or suffering. Comfort those with mental illness or emotional distress, those institutionalized, or living on the streets, or residing in our homes. We praise you for the development of COVID-19 vaccines, and we hope for their fair and prompt distribution. Increase in our land a commitment to limit contagion to others. Visit all who have contracted the coronavirus and all who are experiencing the long-term effects of COVID-19. Strengthen medical workers and home health aides. O compassionate God, **hear us and help us.**

Reconciling God, we praise you for your wisdom and concord. Watch over all who make ethical decisions, whether in homes, in churches, or in organizations of any kind. Instruct us when to preserve the past and when to institute change, when to maintain our own preferences and when to yield to others. O reconciling God, **hear us and help us.**

Eternal God, we praise you for your servants of time past whose words and actions have inspired our lives. We mourn those who have died of COVID-19. Unite us with all our beloved dead now through our memories and at the end of time in your presence. O eternal God, **hear us and help us.**

Into your hands, merciful God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your loving care, for the sake of the one who dwells among us, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen!**

Music Interlude *Sonata #5 in C: Larghetto* (HANDEL)

Ann Droste

Please use this time to meditate or pray for those dear to your heart.

Thanksgiving for the Word

Holy God,
Light of the universe, Teacher of truth, Giver of goodness,
we hear your Word in the scriptures,
proclaiming to us your wisdom
and inviting us to follow your call.
For speaking this Word, we thank you, O God.
We thank you, O God!

Your Word came among us in Jesus, our brother,
who preached your righteousness, healed the sick,
and revived the brokenhearted.
For giving us this Word, we worship you, O God.
We worship you, O God!

Holy Spirit, bless all who receive this Word,
that upheld by the mystery of the body of Christ,
we may be light for the world,
revealing the brilliance of the Messiah.
For sustaining us with your Word, we praise you, O God.
We praise you, O God!

Blessed are you, holy God,
around us, with us, and in us,
now and forever. **Amen!**

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

Blessing

God the creator strengthen you;
Jesus the beloved fill you;
and the Holy Spirit the comforter ✠ keep you in peace.
Amen!

Sending Hymn *Rise, Shine, You People!*

#665



- 1 Rise, shine, you peo - ple! Christ the Lord has en - tered
- 2 See how he sends the pow'rs of e - vil reel - ing;
- 3 Come, cel - e - brate; your ban - ners high un - furl - ing,
- 4 Tell how the Fa - ther sent the Son to save us.



our hu - man sto - ry; God in him is cen - tered. He comes to
he brings us free - dom, light and life and heal - ing. All men and
your songs and prayers a - gainst the dark - ness hurl - ing. To all the
Tell of the Son, who life and free - dom gave us. Tell how the



us, by death and sin sur - round - ed, with grace un - bound - ed.
wom - en, who by guilt are driv - en, now are for - giv - en.
world go out and tell the sto - ry of Je - sus' glo - ry.
Spir - it calls from ev - 'ry na - tion God's new cre - a - tion.

Text: Ronald A. Klug, b. 1939, alt.
Music: WOJTKIEWICZ, Dale Wood, 1934–2003
Text and music © 1974 Augsburg Publishing House, admin. Augsburg Fortress.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Be the light of Christ!

Thanks be to God!

Postlude *Hail to the Lord's Anointed* (GERIKE)

Praying Together

... for those who are homebound, ill, hospitalized or recuperating: Gayle Agg, Bob Buettner, Alexis Carr, Joan Clarke John Crawford, Nicole Crawford, Barbara Fossa, Carolyn Frajter, Ken Frajter, Nealie Gage, Barb Gaglione, Michelle Garnett, Rosa Garnett, Judy Jones, Dylan King, Jason Lanese, Andrea Lanzalaca, Sara Mendes, Phyllis Nemeth, Bernice Novak, Don Rusher Jr., Arlene Stoltz, Tim Susaneck, Tom Susaneck, Phyllis Treichel, Phyllis Welker, Linda Wright, Wilma Dancy, Bill Helmick, Nancy Helmick, Robert Lambrecht, Kim (Novak) Leonhardt, Laura Mele, Judy Morgan, Kris Sandor, Bill Wilkens, Eugene Winfrey, the Copeland/Lane Family

LAST WEEK

General Fund receipts for week ending 1/24/2021: \$497

Lectionary Blog: Sharing with Family



Image: [iStock.com/tein79](https://www.iStock.com/tein79)

At the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, the author is quick to establish Jesus' uniqueness. Jesus does two distinctive things at the Capernaum synagogue: he teaches *as one with authority* and he drives an unclean spirit out of a man. The responses of the people in the synagogue are important to pay attention to since they help us understand how remarkable Jesus' actions were: "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him" (Mark 1:27). The thing that was truly noteworthy in first-century Galilee was the way Jesus taught with authority. And, as only a secondary thought, the crowd was impressed that he commanded unclean spirits and they obeyed him.

During this time, many healers and false messiahs were combing the countryside, performing healing miracles (Honi and Hanina stand out as particularly famous wonder-workers, according to *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* by Géza Vermes). But Jesus taught with authority. What does this authority mean?

In Jewish thinking, there is an unbroken chain of authority to teach and interpret the words of God stretching back to Moses at Sinai. The last tractate of the Mishnah—a collection of Jewish law that was codified near 200—lays out the chain of the authority to teach: "Moses received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua, Joshua to the elders, the elders to the prophets and the prophets to the men of the great assembly (Sanhedrin) ..." (Pirke Avot 1:1). According to tradition, this "Torah from Sinai" that was passed on to Joshua was *not* the Bible/Pentateuch/Written Torah. That was given to Aaron, the congregation leaders and all of Israel (Exodus 34:31-32). Pirke Avot addresses the Oral Torah, the interpretive principles and, later, the collection of interpretations for understanding, explaining and expounding on the written words. This was explicitly *not* given to Aaron, the priests or the people. The authority was kept for Joshua, the elders and the prophets to help interpret God's words for the people.

The best way I've heard this concept explained is Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish's interpretation of Deuteronomy 33:2 (the New Revised Standard Version unhelpfully pivots to Greek here and renders תשׁא as "a host of his own" instead of the traditional "fiery law") to say that the Torah is black fire that is written on white fire. The black ink preserves the written text, and the white page under it preserves the space for authoritative interpretations. The chain of interpreters with authority revealed the white fire of interpretation under the black fire of text.

We Christians understand that Jesus was, among other things, the fulfillment of the prophesy in Deuteronomy 18 that there would come another prophet like Moses who would arise from the Israelites and speak truthfully the words of the Lord. People asked John the Baptizer if he was the promised prophet (John 1:21), which he didn't claim to be. Jesus, on the other hand, doesn't claim to be the prophet. But he does fulfill the requirement to only speak what he heard from God when he said, "I did not speak on my own, but only what I was commanded to say by the Father" (John 12:49).

What the people in the Capernaum synagogue were reacting to, then, was Jesus' teaching on the text with the authority of one who knows what is behind the words. Jesus revealed the white fire behind the black fire, and God's heart behind God's words. The Gospels preserve many of Jesus' miracles, and we are grateful to know how God's power breaks out into this world. What we can't lose sight of is that Jesus' earthly ministry was largely about teaching.

We are left to wonder what Jesus told the people gathered in the synagogue that sparked such awe. We know what he taught on other occasions, such as the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and the sermon on the plain (Luke 6:17-49). Jesus certainly had authority to teach and offer interpretations of the biblical text. What we know from Mark's Gospel is that Jesus didn't teach as a mere scribe or someone who had learned to repeat the Bible. Jesus fulfilled the prophesy of a prophet like Moses arising to explain God's heart behind God's word.

This, and other resources for the journey of faith, available at LivingLutheran.org.



Cory Driver is a minister of word and service, and the director of the Transformational Leadership Academy in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod. He earned his doctorate in Jewish religious cultures from Emory University, Atlanta. Cory lives with his family in Indianapolis.

Who's In Control?

The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him." Mark 1:27

Based on Mark 1:21-28



L W U O F Y R U E K L N B T Q
A U T H O R I T Y O T R I D U
O I W C D M P E J C R R N K I
L F J W G G E E C E I D E X E
N U A M A Z E D O P S I E F T
S A B B A T H X S P R U Y R N
N E V A Z Y K Y R H L S S O S
Q Y Y K H Z X L S Q S E I V V
S G A L I L E E H K S G I P Y
P S Y N A G O G U E E P E O Z
R V P O K N E W S R K Y R D H
E I H B Q L I O O O L T D C G
A G O E H K A H O I S L A L W
D G L Y I Y D H V E N E R P H
W K Y N P X S E D Q T A R B D

REGION	SPREAD	JESUS	PEOPLE	NEWS
SHRIEK	SYNAGOGUE	SHOOK	DESTROY	AMAZED
QUIET	HOLY	GALILEE	ORDERS	SABBATH
AUTHORITY	OBEY	EVIL	TEACH	SPIRIT