

Welcome to Worship at
Trinity Lutheran Church, Osceola, WI
Epiphany 4 - January 31, 2021

P: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer. Amen.

Hymn #395 - *“Seek Where You May to Find a Way”*

**Seek where you may to find a way
That leads to your salvation.
My heart is stilled; on Christ I build -
He is the one foundation.
His Word is sure; his works endure.
He will o’erthrow my ev’ry foe;
Through him I more than conquer.**

**Seek whom you may to be your stay;
None can redeem his brother.
All helpers failed; this man prevailed,
The God-Man and none other.
The Servant-Lord our life restored.
We’re justified, for he has died,
The guiltless for the guilty.**

**Seek him alone, who did atone,
Who did your souls deliver;
Oh, seek him first, all you who thirst
For grace that fails you never.
In ev’ry need seek him indeed;
To ev’ry heart he will impart
His blessings without measure.**

**My heart’s delight, my crown most bright,
Jesus, you are forever.
Not wealth or pride or aught beside
Our bond of love shall sever.
You are my Lord; your precious Word**

**Shall be my guide whate'er betide.
Oh, teach me, Lord, to trust you!**

Confession of Sins:

P: Beloved in the Lord, let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins to God our Father, asking Him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness.

C: Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we poor sinners confess to You that we are by nature sinful and unclean and that we have sinned against You in our thoughts, words, and actions. Therefore we flee for refuge to Your infinite mercy, seeking and imploring Your grace and forgiveness for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. O Lord, have mercy on us!

P: Upon this your confession, I as a called servant of Christ and His Word announce to you the grace of God, and in the place of and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

First Lesson: Deuteronomy 18:15-20

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brother Israelites. Listen to him. That is exactly what you asked from the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly. You said, "Do not let me hear the voice of the Lord my God anymore, and do not let me see this great fire again, or I will die." Then the Lord said to me, "They have done well by saying what they said. I will raise up a prophet for them from among their brothers, like you, and I will put my words in his mouth, and he will speak to them everything that I command him. Anyone who will not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. Any prophet who presumes to speak something in my name that I have not commanded him to speak or who speaks something in the name of other gods - that prophet shall die." (EHV)

Psalm 1

Refrain: Blessed are they who hope, who hope in the Lord.

**Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the 'wicked
Or stand in the way of 'sinners.**

But his delight is in the law 'of the LORD,

And on his law he meditates ‘day and night.

**He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yield its fruit in ‘season
And whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does ‘prosper.**

Refrain: Blessed are they who hope, who hope in the Lord.

**Therefore the wicked will not stand in the ‘judgment,
Nor sinners in the assembly of the ‘righteous.**

**For the LORD watches over the way of the ‘righteous,
But the way of the wicked will ‘perish.**

**Glory be to the Father and ‘to the Son
And to the Holy ‘Spirit,
As it was in the be’ginning,
Is now, and will be forever. ‘Amen.**

Refrain: Blessed are they who hope, who hope in the Lord.

Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone supposes that he knows something, he does not yet know the way he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this person has been known by him. So, concerning the eating of food from idol sacrifices, we know that an idol is not anything real in the world and that there is no God but one. Indeed, even if there are so-called “gods,” whether in the heavens or on earth (as in fact there are many “gods” and many “lords”), nevertheless for us there is one God - the Father, from whom all things exist and we exist for him - and one Lord - Jesus Christ, through whom all things exist and we exist through him. However, that knowledge is not in everyone. Instead some, who are still affected by their former habit with the idol, eat the food as something sacrificed to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. Food will not bring us closer to God. We do not lack anything if we do not eat, nor are we better off if we do. And be careful that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone sees you, a person who has knowledge, dining in an idol’s temple, will not the conscience of this man, weak as he is, be emboldened to eat food from an idol sacrifice? You see, the weak person is being destroyed by your knowledge - the brother for whose sake Christ died! And when you sin in this way against your brothers and wound their weak

conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food causes my brother to sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I do not cause my brother to sin. (EHV)

Verse of the Day: Alleluia. The Spirit of the Lord is on me; he has anointed me to preach good news. Alleluia.

Gospel: Mark 1:21-28

Then they went into Capernaum. On the next Sabbath day, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. They were amazed at his teaching, because he was teaching them as one who has authority and not as the experts in the law. Just then there was a man with an unclean spirit in their synagogue. It cried out, "What do we have to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy One of God!" Jesus rebuked the spirit, saying, "Be quiet! Come out of him!" The unclean spirit threw the man into convulsions, and after crying out with a loud voice, it came out of him. Everyone was so amazed that they began to discuss this with each other. They said, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He even commands the unclean spirits, and they obey him!" News about him spread quickly through all the region of Galilee. (EHV)

The Apostles' Creed:

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

I believe in Jesus Christ, His 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 into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Hymn #287 - *"The Law of God Is Good and Wise"*

**The law of God is good and wise;
It sets his will before our eyes,
Shows us the way of righteousness,
But dooms to death when we transgress.**

**The law is good, but since the fall
Its holiness condemns us all;
It dooms us for our sins to die
And has no pow'r to justify.**

**Its light of holiness imparts
The knowledge of our sinful hearts
That we may see our lost estate
And seek relief before too late.**

**To Jesus we for refuge flee,
Who from the curse has set us free,
And humbly worship at his throne,
Saved by his grace through faith alone.**

**The Sermon: Deuteronomy 18:15-20
“An Alternative To God’s Law”**

*“The law of God is **good** and **wise**; it sets His will before our eyes, shows us the way of **righteousness**, but dooms to death when we transgress.”* So wrote the pastor and hymn-writer, Matthias Loy over a century ago, in the hymn which we just sang - and he was **right**. The Law of God **shows** us the way of **righteousness** - it shows us how we can be **right** with God again. God says, *“Be **perfect**, for I the LORD your God am perfect.”* But we **can’t!** We’re **human!** We know that we are conceived and born in **sin**, and all too often we don’t even rise above **mediocrity** when it comes to following God’s commandments. Pastor Loy knew that too, and so he continued his hymn, *“The law is **good**, but since the **fall** its holiness **condemns** us all; it dooms us for our **sins** to **die** and has **no power** to justify.”* If we could be **perfect**, the Law could **save** us. But since *“All have **sinned** and come **short** of God’s glory,”* the Law is **not** a message of **life**. It’s a message of **death** - a message which strikes **terror** in the hearts of all - a message which shows us our **depravity**, and which offers us **no solution**. Therefore, we desperately need **An Alternative To God’s Law**.

In today’s sermon text that alternative is clearly presented. God would send a **Prophet** - the Prophet - the **only** one who is capable of **fulfilling** the requirements which God demanded in His Law, and therefore, the only one who could provide us with **An Alternative To God’s Law**. Let’s take a look at how this all came about.

God gave His Law to the people through **Moses** on Mt. Sinai. It was an **awesome** and **spectacular** showing of God's power. The people had prepared themselves to come into the presence of God by **washing** themselves and their clothes. Then they gathered around the foot of the mountain as God spoke to Moses, and gave him His **commandments** inscribed on two slabs of **stone**. What the people saw for 40 days, was **thunder** and **lightning** in the midst of **fire** - and thick, smoky **darkness**. The mountain itself **trembled**, and as **it** shook, so did the **people**. They were **scared** - scared to **death**. There they were, standing in the presence of the Almighty **God**, and they didn't know what He was going to **do!** From every indication - from all the **commotion** on the mountain - He certainly **appeared** to be very **angry!**

The people were totally **overwhelmed** by this display of God's majesty, and they didn't want Him to speak to them **that** way anymore. It was just too **taxing** for their nervous systems. So, Moses told the Lord that people were saying, "*Do **not** let me hear the voice of the Lord my **God** anymore, and do not let me see this great **fire** again, or I will **die**.*" They weren't refusing to **hear** God, they just didn't want Him to use that **tone of voice**. They wanted to hear Him in a **different** way - one which wasn't so **intense**. And God **responded** to their request. He replied, "*They have done **well** by saying what they said. I will raise up a **prophet** for them from among their brothers, **like you**.*" Certainly a prophet **like Moses** - a prophet they were **familiar with** - would be much less **foreign**, and much less **frightening** for the people.

God had given them **An Alternative To His Law**, but this would be their **only** alternative. Either they had to listen to His **Law**, or they would have to listen to His **Prophet**. Now, who **is** this great Prophet whom the Lord would raise up? God tells us that He would come **from** that nation, He would live **among** them, and He would be sent **to** them. That description could apply to **lots** of individuals, yet the people only found **One** who showed them by His **miracles** that He **was** this special Prophet sent from God - and that was **Jesus**. After Jesus had miraculously fed the 5,000, the people said, "*Surely, **this is the Prophet** who is to come into the world.*" Peter also directly applied those words to Jesus in his great Pentecost sermon. The alternative was **there** - either listen to God in His **Law**, or listen to God through His **Son**, the Prophet.

Either choice would **potentially** accomplish the same end, but only **one** makes **practical** sense for sinful human beings. The Law **doesn't** make it. It **frightens** us, or at least it **should**. Thinking about the temporal and eternal

punishment which we justly deserve from God because of our sins, is enough to make your skin crawl. The Law of God is **flawless** in all its points, and it stands before us full of **majesty** and **terror**. We know that we can't live up to its standards. So, we **too** turn to God for an **alternative** - and we **find** it in Jesus Christ. Jesus is **not** full of majesty and terror. He is full of **grace** and **truth**.

How could the people be sure that this **less frightening** alternative would be **effective**? How did they know that Jesus had the **authority** to be **An Alternative To God's Law**? What were His **credentials**? In today's world credentials, training, schooling, accreditation, and certification are all very **important**. Such things help to mark the **experts** - the **authorities** in any given field. The people of the **1st century** were no different. They were looking for those things **too**, and they definitely **found** them in **Jesus**. When they saw the **miracles** which Jesus performed, they were absolutely **sure** that His **authority** came from **God**.

God also speaks to **us** very clearly through His **Son** - in fact, He speaks just as clearly **now**, as when the people witnessed His **miracles** first-hand. Jesus speaks to us as the **Light** of the world - the Light which shines forth brightly on this sin-darkened earth - the **bright** and morning Star - the Light which leads us to an ever deeper **knowledge** and **understanding** of the decrees and promises of God - the Light which leads us on the paths of **truth**. We **can't** keep such a Light **hidden** under a bushel basket, because over and over again God speaks to us through His **Word**, **proving** that Jesus is our Savior. Therefore, we set that Light of the world on the **highest** candlestick, so that His Light may shine into the hearts of **all** people - showing them that they are saved **not** by the deeds of the **Law**, but rather by the **grace** of **God**, through **faith** in Jesus.

We know from the first chapter of John's Gospel that God speaks to us through His **Son** who is the **Word** of God made **flesh**. As the incarnate Word of God, Jesus **is** truth, and He always **speaks** the truth. God promised to put **His words** into the mouth of His Prophet, so when Jesus speaks He tells us **all** of God's Word, and He speaks **only** God's Word. That's **important** for us, because we **need** something and Someone on whom we can always **depend** - Someone who will remain **consistent** in a world of **change**.

Therefore, God exhorts us to "*Listen to **Him**.*" When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, the voice of the Father from heaven said, "*This is My Son whom I love. Listen to **Him**.*" And if we don't listen to **Jesus**, to whom **will** we listen? All of the **false prophets** in our world will lead us to **ruin**. God says, "*Any prophet who presumes to speak something in my name that I have **not** commanded him to*

*“speak or who speaks something in the name of **other** gods - that prophet shall **die**.”*
There are certainly **many** such prophets in the world today - people who make a **mockery** out of religion - people who play on the **feelings** and **emotions** of devout Christians, in order to make themselves **wealthy** and **famous**. But how **different** is **God’s** Prophet! Jesus Christ made Himself **poor**, so **we** would become rich. He **gave up** His life, so that **we** would live **eternally**.

Jesus is God’s own **Alternative To His Law**. He shows us that we can’t be **saved** by the Law, but through **His** perfect **obedience** to that Law of God, Jesus now offers us an **option** which **will** bring us salvation. If we **don’t** or **can’t** listen to the Law perfectly, then we **must** listen to **Jesus**. And that brings us back again to the hymn of Matthias Loy. It would be a terribly **dismal** hymn - a hymn which tells us how **perfect** the Law is and how far we fall **short**, **except** for the fourth and final verse: *“To **Jesus** we for **refuge** flee, who from the **curse** has set us **free**, and **humbly worship** at His throne, saved by **His** **grace** through **faith** alone.”* Friends, flee to **Jesus** for your eternal salvation, and for **help** in all the trials of **this** life as well. He is **equal** to them **all** - because He is the Lord’s special **Prophet**, who brought the Light of God’s Word into the world, and who now lives on **eternally** as a saving **Alternative To God’s Law**. Amen.

Prayers:

Lord Jesus Christ, in great love You kept Your promise and came to give Your life as a ransom for sinners, offering us **An Alternative To God’s Law**. Look on us with **patience**, and keep us **close** to You. You are the **Searcher** of our hearts, and **know** whenever we have begun to turn **away** from You. When that happens, **restore** our sagging faith through Your Holy Spirit. **Bless** the confessions of **faith** which we make before others, and **save** us from the hypocrisy of mere **outward** worship. Let ours be a **sincere** and **honest** faith - a faith which worships You in **spirit** and in **truth**. Train **us** to search our hearts and lives **diligently**, to discover the **flaws** which are there, and help us to **correct** them. In order that our faith may be daily **nurtured** and **strengthened**, make us deeply devoted to Your **Word**. Give us each a childlike faith which **trusts** what it cannot understand, and **believes** what it cannot see.

May we all desire to **show** our faith and love by **striving** to keep Your commandments, and by refusing to **yield** to temptation. Make our New Man **strong** through Your Word and Sacrament, that we may be **victorious** over every evil thought, desire, word, and deed. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name;
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
But deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever.
Amen.**

Hymn #541 - *"Lord Jesus Christ, with Us Abide"*

**Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide,
For round us falls the eventide,
Nor let your Word, that heav'nly light,
For us be ever veiled in night.**

**O God, how sin's dread works abound!
Throughout the earth no rest is found,
And falsehood's spirit wide has spread,
And error boldly rears its head.**

**In these last days of sore distress
Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness
That pure we keep, till life is spent,
Your holy Word and sacrament.**

**Lord Jesus, help, your Church uphold,
For we are sluggish, thoughtless, cold.
Oh, prosper well your Word of grace,
And spread its truth in ev'ry place.**

**Oh, keep us in your Word, we pray;
The guile and rage of Satan stay!
Oh, may your mercy never cease!
Give concord, patience, courage, peace.**

**The cause is yours, the glory, too,
So hear us, Lord, and keep us true.
Your Word alone is our defense,
The Church's glorious confidence.**

**Oh, grant that in your holy Word
We here may live and die, dear Lord,
And when our journey's ending here,
Receive us into glory there.**

P: Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit! As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

The Blessing:

P: The Lord bless you and keep you,
The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace.

C: **Amen.**

Hymn #286 - "The Law Commands and Makes Us Know"

**The law commands and makes us know
What duties to our God we owe,
But 'tis the gospel must reveal
Where lies our strength to do his will.**

**The law uncovers guilt and sin
And shows how vile our hearts have been;
The gospel only can express
Forgiving love and cleansing grace.**

**What curses does the law pronounce
Against the one who fails but once!
But in the gospel Christ appears,
Pard'ning the guilt of num'rous years.**

**My soul, no more attempt to draw
Your life and comfort from the law.
Flee to the hope the gospel gives;
The one who trusts the promise lives.**