

ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

P. O. Box 267, 201 Veterans Dr., Columbus, TX 78934

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January 21, 2024 Contemporary 11:05 AM

Third Sunday after Epiphany

Senior Pastor	Alan Kethan	<u>Home:</u> (979)-942-9060	<u>Cell:</u> (830)-708-1200
Youth & Family Specialist			Stephanie Polasek
Congregational Chair			Donna Maas
St. Paul Christian Learning Academy Director			Briana Bedford
Secretary			Elena Holub
Custodian			Tomas Rosales
Lighthouse Coordinator	lighthouse.splc@gmail.com		Elizabeth Smith
Parish Nurse Program Coordinator			DyAnn Lauzon

MISSION STATEMENT: Love God, Love Neighbor (Luke 10:27)

VISION STATEMENT: We will work to strengthen and grow closer in relationship to God and to one another.

- *As we enter into a sacred time and space, a friendly reminder to please set your cell phone to vibrate.*
- ***We want to welcome all of our guests today and thank you for worshiping with us. If you have any questions or would like more information regarding our services, programs, day care, or preschool programs at St. Paul, please visit our Welcome Center in the narthex immediately following our service, and an attendant will be more than happy to assist you. If this is your first time at St. Paul, we hope you will take a gift along with you. We also have a gift bag for children.***
- *Hearing Assist devices are available for those who need assistance in hearing worship service better. Please see a person in the Sound Room (Usher Room) to request the use of a device during worship.*

* **This symbol indicates that the congregation is invited to stand physically or in spirit.**

INTRODUCTION

As we continue through the time after Epiphany, stories of the call to discipleship show us the implications of our baptismal calling to show Christ to the world. Jesus begins proclaiming the good news and calling people to repentance right after John the Baptist is arrested for preaching in a similar way. Knowing that John was later executed, we see at the very outset the cost of

discipleship. Still, the two sets of brothers leave everything they have known and worked for all their lives to follow Jesus and fish for people.

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SIGNING OF ATTENDANCE PADS

(Ushers will be handing out Attendance Pads during the announcements. Please be sure to sign your name and contact information.)

* CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

P We are called to review the state of our spiritual lives, the wrongs we have done and the good we have failed to do. Recognizing we need God's help is the first step. Being truly sorry and realizing the changes we need to make are next. Then we are called to lean on the Holy Spirit to help us not only accept the invitation to be a follower of Jesus Christ, but to allow God to work through us to bring about His will. As we take a few brief moments of silence to confess these things and pray for help, then we will hear words from Scripture to hold onto.

(Silence for private confession.)

P “Comfort my people,” says our God. “Comfort them! Tell them they have suffered long enough and their sins are now forgiven. Come to me and you will live.” (Isaiah 40:1-2; Amos 5:12)

C **Amen.**

GOSPEL SONG: SEND ME

CHORUS:

*Send me, I will go! Send me, I will go... to this city, to this nation,
And to the nations of the world. Send me, I will go! Send me, I will go!
I will proclaim the truth: That Jesus Christ is Lord!*

We stand before you pleading from our hearts, that by Your Spirit you would set us apart. To bring Your good news to everyone else, to love our neighbors as ourselves. CHORUS

GOSPEL: Mark 1:14-20

Before Jesus calls his first disciples, he proclaims a message that becomes known as “the gospel” or good news from God. God is ready to rule our lives. Those who realize this will respond with repentance and faith.

A The holy gospel according to St. Mark, chapter 1, verses 14-20.

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” ¹⁶As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew

casting a net into the sea — for they were fishermen. ¹⁷And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” ¹⁸And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

GOSPEL SONG: SEND ME
I cry out for every family, you'd open blind eyes and set people free.
That our hearts will be focused on You, to serve with grace and glory, too.

CHORUS:
*Send me, I will go! Send me, I will go... to this city, to this nation,
And to the nations of the world. Send me, I will go! Send me, I will go!
I will proclaim the truth: That Jesus Christ is Lord!*

BRIDGE (x2) :
As we humble ourselves, and seek Your face, we fall on our knees,
we turn from our ways.
As we humble ourselves, and seek Your face, we fall on our knees,
we turn from our ways.

As we humble ourselves, and seek Your face, we fall on our knees,
we turn from our ways.
You will hear our cry, wipe our sins away. Come and heal our land, we pray! **CHORUS**

TAG END:
I will proclaim the truth: That Jesus Christ is Lord.

CCLI Song #3178144 Words and Music by Same Evans and Henry Seeley
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CHILDREN'S SERMON

SERMON

*** SERMON SONG: FOLLOW YOU**
You live among the least of these, the weary and the weak.
And it would be a tragedy for me to turn away.
All my needs, You have supplied. When I was dead, You gave me life.
How could I not give it away so freely?

CHORUS:
*And I'll... follow You into the homes of the broken. I'll follow You into the world.
I'll meet the needs for the poor and needy, God. I'll follow you into the world.*

Use my hands, use my feet to make Your kingdom come.
To the corners of the earth until Your work is done, yeah!
'Cause faith without works is dead, and on the cross Your blood was shed.
So how could we not give it away so freely?

CHORUS:
*And I'll... follow You into the homes of the broken. I'll follow You into the world.
I'll meet the needs for the poor and needy, God. I'll follow you into the world.*

BRIDGE:
I give all myself. I give all myself. I give all myself... to You.
And I give all myself. Yes, I give all myself.
And I give all myself... to You, yeah.

LAST CHORUS (x2):
*I'll follow You into the homes of the broken. I'll follow You into the world.
I'll meet the needs for the poor and needy, God. I'll follow you into the world.*

CCLI Song #5484544 Words and Music by Leeland Mooring, Jack Mooring and Ed Cash
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*** APOSTLES' CREED**
A With the whole church, let us confess our faith.
C 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. Amen.

(The congregation may be seated during the prayers.)

PRAYERS
A As we celebrate Christ embodied in human form, we pray for God's blessing on the church,
the world, and all of creation.

A brief silence.
A We pray for peace in all the world, especially in war-torn areas of Ukraine, Sudan, Niger,
Israel and the Middle East. Bring an end to wars and the destruction of lives and your
creation.

A brief silence.

- A We pray for the families and friends of Troy McQueen and Billy Schobel who passed away this past week. Be with them and comfort them during this difficult time.

A brief silence.

- A We pray for all those in need of healing and whose needs are diverse and known to you including:
Beatrice Jasek; Debra Sandell; Troy & Karen Scarbough; Shayne Chumchal; Dorothy Poncik; Ruth Poncik; Wayne Henkes; Tammy Pugh; those on our Prayer Team's list; and those we name in our hearts before you.

A brief silence.

- A We pray for all those battling cancer that they may know comfort and strength. *(Pause for those we are praying for.)*
Shirley Trahan; Kristen Downing; Ashley Roberts; Traci Edman; Michael Yancey; Amanda Aramijo; Zachary Schulke; Herbie Kollatschny; Tom Russell, Jr.; Melda Coleman; Al Gene Canik; Larry Bookout; Mike Wostarek; Elizabeth Frisby; Kristina Acevedo; George Krennek; Anne Dimas; Carl Geisler; Laura Walla; Randy Wendt; Heather Deviney; Paul Casinger; Dr. Tom Hancher; Leonard Kahlden; and Bob Loy.

- A We pray for all expectant mothers and especially for:
Jamee Albert; Kristen O'Leary Bridges; Abegail Gatzke; Chelsea Gilstrap; Calli Guthmann; Dhara Comans; Nelma Grace Weathers; Rosalinda Rosales; and Kelsey Page Bakken that they have healthy terms and deliveries, and if not, may they find comfort and peace.

A brief silence.

- A We pray for all those who reside in care facilities and the homebound that they receive your caring and compassion. *(Pause for those we are praying for.)*
Clemons Venghaus; Joey Denby; Paul Minar, Sr.; Adrian Fritsch; Coy Dell Schindler; Madeline Menke; Doris Horndt; Helen Perrard; Jane Booker; Pat Brasher; Walter Glaeser, Jr.; Dolores Hoelscher; Jesse Grabow; Donna Dehmer; Cherie Moore; Lauren Lamb; and Lydia Rojas.

- A We pray for all law enforcement officers and especially for Charles Jobb; Joseph Smith; Todd Jacobs; Troy Neisner; Jacob Gorman; Nancy Gorman; Johnny Kovar; Abigail Weido; Dustin Lattimore; Zane Weido; Josh Jones; as well as Donnie Templeton and Jason Templeton who are also fire fighters. For all fire fighters, first responders, healthcare workers and 9-1-1 dispatchers, especially Brent Gorman, Sr.; Brent Gorman, Jr.; Reid Brasher; Dusty Dittmar; John Maertz; Ron Luedke; Pastor Alan Kethan; Kristi Weyand; Eric Weyand; Bradley Berger; Jon Berger; James Chollett; Edward Thraen, Jr.; Kyle Burris; Dylan Walcik; Travis Neuendorff; Nathan Bookout; Brenda Henkes; Jan Willette; and Terri Neunendorff, as well as those active duty military members including Kyle Appelt; Montana Appelt; Douglas Neuendorff; Scott Cherniss; Kameron Page; Dalton Kapel; Kevin Gonzalez; Evelyn Rojas; Nelson Beettner; and Hugh & Katie Hajdik that they are protected and kept safe.

A brief silence.

- A We pray for the church throughout the world. May we all proclaim the good news of your love effectively. We ask, especially, that you would bless the ministry of our sister congregations Cristo Rey and their Pastor Armando Capcha and Iglesia Cristiana Camino de Santidad and their leaders Pastors Gumer and Naomi Anton in Peru, all Missionaries, especially St. Paul's supported missionary, Dina Anton de Espinoza, and our companion synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic.

A brief silence.

- A Knowing the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, we offer these prayers and the silent prayers of our hearts in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

C Amen.

*** PEACE**

- P As Jesus shared peace, let us also share His peace with one another. *(Share the "Peace of the Lord" with your neighbors.)*

(We will be collecting offerings before and after worship each week. This includes Power of One dollars.)

OFFERING and POWER OF ONE

"Power of One" is a ministry sponsored by your Stewardship Team. We are asking each and every one of our members to give \$1.00 above what your normal giving would be. We are asking each member to place this \$1.00 bill or change in the offering plate each week. The team is also inviting all children to participate to develop the habit of giving as part of their worship experience. Parents, a penny, nickel, dime, quarter, or dollar bill, any of these will do to help your children develop a habit of giving. These "Power of One" dollars will be used to support local ministries and ministries abroad. The purpose of this ministry is to demonstrate that something as small as one dollar can be used to make a difference in the lives of others.

*** OFFERING PRAYER**

- P Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things. Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts: our selves, our time, and our possessions. Use us, and what we have gathered, in feeding the world with your love, through the one who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C Amen.

*** REMEMBERING JESUS' WORDS, PROMISES, AND COMMANDS**

*** LORD'S PRAYER**

- P Lord remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

**C 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.

* INVITATION TO COMMUNION

P Here is the good news. Come and receive Jesus Christ.
C Amen.

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION (Continuous with Individual Cups)

{Distribution will be continuous. All are welcome for communion. Please come down the center aisle starting from the front. Follow directions of the ushers, coming up one side at a time. Pastor will hand you the bread. If you wish to have a gluten-free wafer, please tell Pastor “Gluten-free, please.” Afterward, you will choose either wine or white grape juice from the individual cups in the tray – white grape juice in the center with wine surrounding. Place the empty cups in the baskets located off to the side. Although communion is continuous, you are welcome to kneel at the rail in prayer after receiving communion. Please return to your seat by the side aisles.}

* PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

P Giver of every gift, Christ’s body is our food, and we are Christ’s body. Raise us to life by your power for the benefit of all and to your glory, now and forever.
C Amen.

* BLESSING

P God who names you, Christ who claims you, and the Holy Spirit who dwells in you, ☩ bless you and remain with you always.
C Amen.

* CLOSING SONG: ONLY JESUS

Make it count, leave a mark, make a name for yourself. Dream your dreams,
Chase your heart, above all else. Make a name the world remembers.
But all an empty world can sell is empty dreams. I got lost in the light
When it was up to me, to make a name the world remembers.
But Jesus is the only name to remember. . .

CHORUS:

And I – I – I, I don’t want to leave a legacy. I don’t care if they remember me, only Jesus.
And I – I – I, I’ve only got one life to live. I’ll let every second point to Him, only Jesus.
(SECOND TIME TO BRIDGE)

All the kingdoms built – all the trophies won – will crumble into dust
When it is said and done. ‘Cuz all that really matters: Did I live the
Truth to the ones I love? Was my life the proof that there is only one
Whose name will last forever? CHORUS

BRIDGE:

Jesus is the only name. Jesus is the only name. Jesus is the only name to remember.
Oh, Jesus is the only name. Jesus is the only name. Jesus is the only name to remember.

LAST CHORUS:

And I – I – I, I don’t want to leave a legacy. I don’t care if they remember me, only Jesus.
And I – I – I, I’ve only got one life to live. I’ll let every second point to Him, only Jesus.
And I – I – I, I don’t want to leave a legacy. I don’t care if they remember me, only Jesus.

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* DISMISSAL

P Go in peace. Fish. C Thanks be to God, and we will.

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USHERS: Bethany Guthmann; Sandy Cherniss; Fay & Thomas Ulbricht

LAY READER: Courtney Busselman

ACOLYTE: Hattie Post

STREAMING: Chase Brasher

POWER POINT: Dinah Jacobs

SOUND: Sydney Eaton and Todd Jacobs

ALTAR GUILD: Peggy Geisler

WELCOME: A warm welcome to all! May you know the fire of God’s love as we worship in the name of Jesus, who showed us how to love.

COLLECTION OF OFFERING: Offering for the worship services is collected before and after worship. Offering bowls are placed in the back entrance and inside the side sanctuary door for you to place your offering in. This includes “Power of One” dollars.

Amount needed for average weekly budgeted expenses: \$8,405.00

Attendance: January 13 & 14, 2024 – 171

Contributions: Jan. 13 & 14 – \$7,876.59

Power of One: January 13 & 14, 2024 – \$31.00

Building Fund: Jan. 13 & 14 – \$206.44

Thank you to those who contributed to last week’s offerings. Loving God/Loving Neighbor.

Wednesday Night Attendance: – Wed., Jan. 17 – 100 Total

BLAST/Confirmation: 82

Support Staff: 18

ATTENTION: *Names on the prayer list in the bulletin will be printed for 2 weeks. After 2 weeks, the names will be removed from the bulletin unless the church office has been notified to keep them.*

► **Children's Activity Bags** are available for use by our young members and guests! You can find them on the coat hooks in the coat area of the narthex. After worship, **please place the used activity bags and their contents in the receptacle in the narthex.**
Thank you! ☺

• The **Annual Congregational Meeting** will be held **Sunday, January 28, 2024 following the 10:00 AM worship service.** This will be a one-service Sunday. There will be regular worship service Saturday, January 27th at 7:00 PM. **Sunday, January 28th** Adult Sunday School and confirmation class will meet at 9:00 AM; **only one worship service at 10:00 AM.** It is **VERY IMPORTANT** that all voting members attend this annual meeting! Following the meeting, there will be a stew lunch in the Lighthouse. Please sign the sign-up sheet in the narthex (foyer) if you plan to attend the stew lunch.

**** Church Council Nominations:** If you are interested in serving on the Church Council, please **email a brief bio of yourself** to Elena Holub at admin@splctx.org **as soon as you can.** Your bio should include, but not be limited to, how long you have been a member of St. Paul, ministry teams you have served on, the reason you want to serve and a brief background description. If you have any questions, please contact Judy Sirois (979-732-1920), Shelley Janik, Bradley Polasek, Lora Kuenstler, or Edna Bergfeld. ******

► **Offering Envelopes:** 2024 Offering Envelopes are ready to be picked up in the narthex (foyer). They are in **alphabetical order**. If you want a box of offering envelopes and do not see your name, please notify the church office, and we will have a box for you next week. ◀

▲ **HABITAT FOR HUMANITY:** *To all that can help – skilled or unskilled:*
Something for everyone! Group efforts are invited. Contact Ruth Bedford at (281)-703-3124 for any additional information or contact information. Or, just show up! We can also use a hands-on Co-Leader to help Ruth on our Habitat for Humanity Outreach Team.
A message of request for help from the Colorado County Habitat Director, Charmaine:
“We are starting construction on our 30th house Fridays and Saturdays from 8:00 AM till whenever you prefer – 12:00 PM or 2:00 PM. We need help December 15 & 16 and then January 5 & 6 and so on.” *Thank you Charmaine and Ruth for all you do for this very worthwhile endeavor of love.* ☺

► **The Mowing Team** is looking for more people to help mow the interior church lawn. Typically it takes an hour and a half, or less, to mow and edge. Please call John Brasher at 979-253-1448 if you are interested or if you have any questions.

♪♪♪ **Musicians Wanted for Praise Band!!** The St. Paul Praise Band is in need of a keyboard player. They would also like to add at least one guitarist, a bass guitarist and singers. If you are interested or have any questions, please contact Tracy Baker at 713-516-8017. ♪♪♪

• **Women of JOY Bible Study:** The Women of JOY Bible Study group meets on Mondays to cook and have interesting Bible study and discussions. The **first Monday** of the month we **meet in the Lighthouse to cook** for BLAST. The **2nd and 4th Mondays** of the month we meet in the **high school room (old choir room) for Bible Study.** If you are interested or would like more information, please contact Gerri Hackfeld at 979-732-4711.

♥ **Grief Support Group:** The Grief Support Group is for anyone who has lost a loved one, either recently or a few years ago. We share and support each other. Come join us and get support from others walking this journey. We meet at **5:30 PM** in the youth room (formerly the choir room) the **third Thursday of the month.** **NOTE:** You do not have to share or talk until you are ready! If you have questions, please contact Peggy Geisler at 979-732-0350.

LIGHTHOUSE COORDINATOR: The coordinator for the Lighthouse is **Elizabeth Smith.** If you wish to rent the Lighthouse for an event, you will need to contact her. You can email her at lighthouse.splc@gmail.com or call or text her at (713)-799-3484. Also, ***if you are interested in opening and closing the Lighthouse whenever the Lighthouse is rented out for various events, please contact Liz.***

<u>SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:</u>	
Mon., Jan. 22 –	9:00 AM – Staff Meeting 6:00 PM – Women of JOY Bible Study (old choir room)
Tues., Jan. 23 –	9:00 AM-12:00 PM – Quilters (Lighthouse) 12:00 PM – Noon Bible Study (library) 12:00 PM – Pastor Alan has Zoom Meeting 6:00 PM – CLA Board
Wed., Jan. 24 –	9:00 AM – CLA Chapel 10:00 AM – Nursing Home Team to Columbus Oaks 2:00 PM – Nursing Home Team & Pastor Alan to The Oaks 5:00 PM – Meal 5:30 PM – BLAST, Confirmation and HS Youth
Thurs., Jan. 25 –	10:00-11:30 AM – Manna for Moms (Lighthouse) 5:30 PM – Operation Prom Dress (Lighthouse)
Sat., Jan. 27 –	7:00 PM – Holy Communion Worship

Next Sun., Jan. 28 – 9:00 AM – Adult Sunday School and Confirmation
 10:00 AM – Holy Communion Worship
 11:00 AM – Annual Congregational Meeting
 12:00 PM – Stew Lunch (Lighthouse)
 4:00 PM – Meals to Heal & God's Gals Cook Session (Lighthouse)
 6:00 PM – God's Gals & Meals to Heal to Los Cabos, Columbus
 6:00-8:00 PM – The Gathering

UPCOMING COMMEMORATIONS
Sunday, January 21, 2024 Agnes, martyr, died around 304

Agnes was a girl of about thirteen living in Rome. The details of her martyrdom are not clear, but she gave witness to her faith and was put to death as a result, most likely by the sword. The church has honored her as one of the chief martyrs of her time.

Thursday, January 25, 2024 Conversion of Paul

The week of prayer begun by the remembrance of Peter's confession now comes to an end as we recall the pivotal moment in the life of the other pillar of the early church, the apostle Paul. His encounter with the risen Christ turned him from persecutor of the followers of Christ to one of their leaders.

Friday, January 26, 2024 Timothy, Titus, and Silas, missionaries

These three early Christian men were missionary companions of the apostle Paul. Timothy became bishop of Ephesus, Titus bishop of Crete, and Silas was imprisoned with Paul at Philippi until they were delivered by an earthquake.

Saturday, January 27, 2024 Lydia, Dorcas, and Phoebe, witnesses to the faith

Women as well as men were important Christian leaders from the beginning, as demonstrated by these coworkers of the apostle Paul. Lydia, a seller of purple goods, lent her home for a church; Dorcas was known for charitable works; and Phoebe was a deacon in the church at Cenchrae.

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OTHER READINGS: Jonah 3:1-5, 10
The book of Jonah is a comedy starring a reluctant prophet who is given a one-sentence message: Nineveh will be destroyed in forty days. Much to Jonah's dismay, the people of Nineveh repent. The point of the story is to get the reader to wrestle with the question "On whom should God have mercy?"

The reading begins:
¹The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, ²"Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." ³So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. ⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days

more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. ¹⁰When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

PSALM: Psalm 62:5-12
⁵For God alone I wait in silence; truly, my hope is in God. ⁶God alone is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold, so that I shall never be shaken. ⁷In God is my deliverance and my honor; God is my strong rock and my refuge. ⁸Put your trust in God always, O people, pour out your hearts before the one who is our refuge. ⁹Those of high degree are but a fleeting breath; those of low estate cannot be trusted. Placed on the scales together they weigh even less than a breath. ¹⁰Put no trust in extortion; in robbery take no empty pride; though wealth increase, set not your heart upon it. ¹¹God has spoken once, twice have I heard it, that power belongs to God. ¹²Steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord, for you repay all according to their deeds.

OTHER READINGS: 1 Corinthians 7:29-31
Paul does not disapprove of marriage or other human social institutions. He does, however, want Christians to live in the present in fervent anticipation of God's future, which even now has dawned through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The reading begins:
²⁹Brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, ³⁰and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, ³¹and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

SERVICE OVERVIEW: WHEN SAYING YES REQUIRES SAYING NO
Saying yes to one thing often requires saying no to something else. Jonah - after fleeing from the mission to which God was calling him (and three days and nights in the belly of the fish!) - now says "No!" to his former urges and "Yes!" to God as he sets out as God's prophet to Nineveh. Paul invites us to say "No!" to trivial matters and "Yes!" to the things of God that have serious and eternal consequences. Jesus calls the disciples to say "No!" to their boats and nets and families and much of everything else they have known and to say "Yes!" to his "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

Jonah struggles. So do we. Like Jonah, we sometimes run away from God's call. Simon, Andrew, James, and John make it all seem so easy. One little word of invitation from Jesus and these men turn in an instant from fishers to disciples. Most of us live somewhere in the middle, not resisting God's call with the vigor of Jonah but certainly responding more slowly and ambiguously than the disciples. So a question for today is: *To what is God calling us?*

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION:

The word “Epiphany” means “the showing forth of God.” The readings during worship after Epiphany, and our participation in the sacrament, continue to show forth Jesus to be our God. Welcome to worship! Today, Jesus calls the disciples – and us – to repent, believe, and follow him.

The Gospel of Mark is a fast-moving narrative. In this passage, we see Jesus quickly call Simon, Andrew, James, and John while they are fishing. Immediately they leave what they are doing to follow Jesus. They don’t pause to think about what Jesus is asking them to do. They don’t go through a discernment period with their elders, friends, family, and church. They don’t say, “Wait, Jesus, I need to finish this thing first.” No. They hear Jesus’ call and follow immediately. How many times have we felt or even known what God wanted us to do, but resisted? What might God be calling us to right now that we think is impossible? What might God want to do through us? Through you? Reflect on a time when you felt God wanted you to do something. Did you do it immediately? Did you hesitate, run away, or never do it at all?

When Jesus calls us to believe in the good news and follow him, our lives are “immediately” altered by the proclamation of the word. The adverb “immediately” appears twice here and 27 times in the NRSV translation of Mark’s gospel, not counting all the use of “at once.” So it is that we rise to our feet, ready to follow.

The gospel describes the first disciples as fishermen. Though a common profession at the time, it establishes the early Christian imagery of baptism as water, believers as water-dwellers, the net as the gospel, and the boat as the church. The ceiling of our sanctuary, in fact, is the shape of a boat’s hull. Have you ever seen the fish symbol for Christianity? It comes from the Greek of the early Christian creed, “Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior,” which presents the acronym *i - ch - th - u - s*, the Greek word for fish.

KID STUDY:

Who do you follow? A favorite Youtube channel? An influencer? Think of all the different things and people you are constantly invited to follow on commercials, television and mail. School clubs and sports teams also want your time and work. Today, Jesus invites two sets of brothers - Simon and Andrew, and James and John - to follow him. They leave their fishing nets and their families and follow him immediately, without question! Jesus had a very important message to deliver, and back then there was no email or post office. Jesus traveled all around Galilee, delivering the good news of God. "The time has come," Jesus said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

That message is just as important just important today as it was then. There are still many people who need to hear the good news of God's love for them. How is the message going to be delivered? Jesus has called disciples, or followers, to deliver the good news. Who are those disciples now? You and me! We are all different shapes, sizes, and colors, but we are called for the same purpose - to carry the message of God's love.

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION:

Beloved, you have today put on Christ, and you march under our direction. You are raised up by the word of God, like a fish on a hook, from the ocean of the world. With us, normal life is transformed, for fish die as soon as they are taken from the seas of this life, yet we sinners, although dead, return to life. As long as we were in the world, we remained in the depths, and our life was submerged in the mire. Since we have been rescued from the waters, we have begun to see the sun; we have commenced to look on the true light. We cry to the Lord; and let us interpret the profound mysteries of the Scripture by other witnesses of the Scripture. - Jerome [Jerome, in The Paschal Mystery: Ancient Liturgies and Patristic Texts, ed. A. Hamman, OFM (Staten Island, NY: Alba, 1969), 141]
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Next Week's Theme (Jan. 27 & 28): Jesus' authority and power are recognized as he taught and drove out unclean spirits

Next Week's Scriptures (Jan. 27 & 28):

First Reading: Deuteronomy 18:15-20
“The prophet speaks with God's authority.”

Psalm: Psalm 111
“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” (Ps. 111:10)

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13
“Limits to liberty: the case of food offered to idols.”

Gospel: Mark 1:21-28
“The healing of one with an unclean spirit.”