

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
January 31, 2021
Cross of Glory Lutheran Church
Brooklyn Center, MN

PRELUDE

WELCOME

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

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

Let us take a moment of silence to confess our sin, trusting in the abundant grace of God.

Holy God, **we confess that we are plagued by sin and are in need of you. We turn inward and fail to live your outward way of love. We ignore the needs of others. We fool ourselves into believing that we are God. Forgive us our sins—those we commit knowingly and unknowingly, individually, and communally, by our actions and by our inaction—and grant us your divine mercy. Amen.**

Through the power and promise of † Christ Jesus, our sins are forgiven and we are claimed as God's beloved children. In the wake of God's forgiveness, we are freed to live as beloved community, to work for justice, and to strive for peace in all the earth. **Amen.**

WELCOME SONG You Are Holy (Prince of Peace)

You are holy (You are holy)	I will sing to and worship
You are mighty (You are mighty)	The King who is worthy
You are worthy (You are worthy)	And I will love and adore Him
Worthy of praise (worthy of praise)	And I will bow down before Him
I will follow (I will follow)	And I will sing to and worship
I will listen (I will listen)	The King who is worthy
I will love You (I will love You)	And I will love and adore Him
All of my days (all of my days)	And I will bow down before Him
	You're my Prince of Peace
	And I will live my life for You

You are Lord of lords You are King of kings	You're my Prince of Peace
You are mighty God Lord of ev'rything	And I will live my life for You
You're Emmanuel You're the Great I Am	
You're the Prince of Peace who is the Lamb	
You're the living God You're my saving grace	
You will reign forever You are Ancient of Days	
You are Alpha Omega Beginning and End	
You're my Savior Messiah Redeemer and Friend	
You're my Prince of Peace	
And I will live my life for You	

GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

SONG OF PRAISE Holy is the Lord

We stand and lift up our hands
For the joy of the Lord is our strength
We bow down and worship Him now
How great how awesome is He

It is rising up all around
It's the anthem of the Lord's renown
It's rising up all around
It's the anthem of the Lord's renown

And together we sing
Ev'ryone sing

Holy is the Lord God Almighty
The earth is filled with His glory
Holy is the Lord God Almighty
The earth is filled with His glory
The earth is filled with His glory

PRAYER OF THE DAY The Lord be with you. And also with you.

Let us pray . . . **Holy Lord, you sent your Son to offer us life abundant. Bring healing to all that are hurt, hope to all that are despairing, and life to all in the midst of death, by the power and authority of your Son, Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Amen.**

READING: Psalm 111

- ¹Hallelujah! I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the assembly of the upright, in the congregation.
²Great are your works, O LORD,
pondered by all who delight in them.
³Majesty and splendor mark your deeds,
and your righteousness endures forever.
⁴You 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.

The Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

SPECIAL MUSIC

GOSPEL: Mark 1:21-28

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark.

Glory to you, O Lord.

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.”²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!”²⁶ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.²⁷ They 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.”²⁸ At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON Rev. Ali Tranvik

It was a rainy November day, and twenty women tossed their cigarettes on the wet parking lot ground as they headed into their afternoon class. The women represented a mix of ages, races, backgrounds (one was a lawyer, another a former drug dealer), but all of them shared three things in common: 1) They were either mothers or pregnant mothers-to-be, 2) They had a history of substance use—alcohol, drugs, or both, and 3) They were committed to their recovery, one day at a time.

“Today’s topic is spirituality,” I announced as the women filed through the door. This is Horizons, an addiction recovery program in NC where I worked as a chaplain during seminary. The women’s faces are tired, rough, and wise, and also just curious enough to keep listening. Many of the women were deeply skeptical of organized religion, but the notion of a “higher power” is important in the recovery process, and these women were there to recover, so they took their seats and the class began.

Let’s rewind a couple thousand years for another story. This one takes place in Capernaum. It’s the Sabbath, so like good Jews, Jesus and his disciples head to the synagogue. As Jesus was teaching there, suddenly a man with an “unclean spirit” confronts Jesus. “What do you have to do with us? Have you come to destroy us?” Jesus rebukes the spirit, which convulses, cries out, and leaves the man, causing all to be astounded at Jesus’ power and authority.

This is a wild story—a demon-possessed man, an exorcism, an “astounding” miracle. At best, this story seems a bit stuck-in-its-times. At worst, it reads as completely irrelevant, even *embarrassing* in our scientific age. I’m just going to tell you upfront that I have no clue what the spirit actually *is*. No amount of theological education can clear this one up. But theories abound. Some suggest that demon-possession was more common in biblical times. Others claim demons are just as widespread today but we don’t name them as such, because using a medical or scientific term to describe things that possess us makes it more understandable or controllable (Bolz-Weber). So some people recast the demon as a mental illness, or medical condition like epilepsy. Still others argue that spirits are metaphors for anything that might “possess” or “control” us—fear, greed, hatred, envy, etc. (Thomas).

But maybe the question of what the spirit *is* is less important than what it *does*. “According to Mark’s account, the man had no voice of his own—the spirit spoke for him. He had no control over his body—the spirit convulsed him. He had no community—the spirit isolated him. He had no dignity—the spirit dehumanized him” (Thomas).

If we look more at the *effect* this spirit had on the man, then perhaps this story becomes a bit less foreign to us. Maybe we know what it’s like to feel like we have no voice, no control, no community, no dignity. Maybe there are forces that have taken hold of us, making us do things that are destructive to ourselves or to others. If having a demon means being taken over by something that is life-denying or life-destroying, then maybe demons are more common than we thought—or than we’d like to think.

Demons can affect us on a communal, societal, even global level. One person in Bible Study this week named Covid-19 as a demon, a huge, powerful force that has robbed us of life, connection, community. Our collective demons may manifest as racism, homophobia, poverty, sexism, war, hunger, hedonism, greed...any force that draws lines between “us” and “them,” trap us in

ourselves, cut us off from others or relegate us to the margins (Charles); any force that tries to deny or destroy our life together.

But as we know, demons can also torment us individually. They get personal. They may take the form of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, a crushing sense of inadequacy. The women at the recovery center bore the demon of addiction (they often bore others' individual demons too; many of the women I worked with had turned to substances as a result of being physically, emotionally, or sexually abused).

Regardless of the form these demons take, we tend not to talk much about them. Maybe that's because of the shame and stigma often attached to them. We live in a world where the norm is "wellness" (and where there's a multi-billion-dollar industry quick to convince that wellness is achievable and to treat us when we inevitably fall short). We live in a profoundly un-well world, but a world that nonetheless tells us that if we are un-well, something is wrong. We live in a world tends to tell us that if we have demons, we are a moral failure (that we aren't "strong" enough to overcome them)—or worse, that we are merely reaping the fruits of our mistakes.

No, we don't talk much about demons. And especially not in church! Demon-possession may be a conversation topic for a doctor's office or a therapist's couch, but not for the pews of a church. Church, we tend to think, is a place to put on our best clothes, be on our best behavior. A place where we're told that because God loves us things are more or less OK, and so we should be more or less OK, and if we're not, then maybe we need to clean ourselves up a bit first.

Let me be clear: I am *not* saying we shouldn't talk to our doctors or therapists about our demons. As your pastor who loves you and cares about you, I encourage you to seek out these resources as well. But what I *am* saying is that if our places of worship have become places where we can't bring our most tormented, damaged, suffering selves, then we've missed something. Because in today's story (which takes place in a place of worship, by the way) Jesus shows us that demons are not shunned or shamed—they are acknowledged and addressed. In Mark's story, the demon addresses Jesus, and Jesus addresses it in return. Here, evil is not an abstract force; it has a *particular* shape and sound. It is real, tangible, concrete. Not something skimmed over to keep conversation light, but something that is looked at, listened to, *named*. Reminding us that if we are to experience the force of life that Jesus gives us, then we too must get very specific about the forces that seek to deny or destroy it (Florer-Bixler).

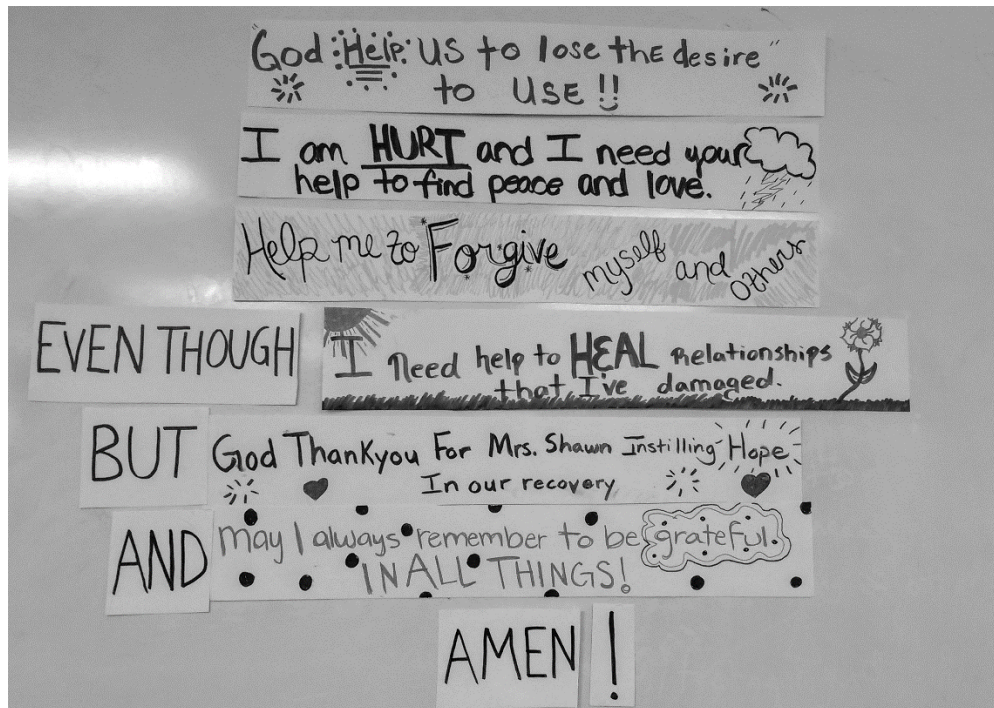
Yes, the church must talk about demons. If we don't, then we lose the capacity to name cruelty. The cruelty done in our world—the Middle Passage, the Holocaust, the murder of George Floyd. The cruelty done in or to ourselves—disease, addiction, abuse.

In today's story, Jesus shows us that church is a place where these demons are named (and condemned). *And* Jesus shows us that it's a place where we encounter a power *greater* than these demons—a power *greater* than our own ability to overcome them. At the recovery center, I was often reminded that the first step of the 12-step program is to "admit we were powerless over our substance." This is a big confession. No one wants to admit they are powerless! No wonder recovery is so hard...

But this first step of recovery is really what today's Gospel story is all about. It's about a God whose power meets us in our powerlessness. A God whose gift of life finds us in our daily deaths. A God who comes to us not in our "wellness" but steps directly into our pain and shame and suffering. A God who doesn't keep a comfortable distance but who confronts directly the forces that seek to deny or diminish or destroy the lives of those he loves for the sake of life, and life abundant. A God who listens to what our demons are telling us—that we can't recover, that we aren't worthy, that we're not smart, or attractive, or successful, or lovable, or whatever—and says "BE GONE!"

"What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?" the demon asks. There's only one answer to that question: "*Everything. I have everything to do with you.*" God has everything to do with us, even and maybe especially when we're at our worst. "When the shadows overwhelm us, when the demons shriek the loudest, when the hope of liberation feels like nothing more than fantasy—that is when Jesus brings the walls down" (Thomas).

The spirituality class I taught at the recovery center that rainy day a few Novembers ago focused on prayer methods from various religious traditions. We tried a breathing prayer, a body prayer, silent meditation, at the end, we wrote our own group prayer. Each woman wrote one prayerful phrase on a sheet of paper, and then we taped them to a whiteboard, shuffled the order, and added a couple transition words to make it flow. We then read our group prayer aloud together, some of us through smiles, some through tears, some through both. This was not a prayer any one of us could have written or prayed on our own. It was a shared prayer, a "prayer of the people," of sorts. A prayer that depended on the voices of a whole community naming our demons together, and naming a Higher Power that we believed had the power to defeat them. The women gave me permission to share that prayer with you today:



Amen!

Sources:

- Gary W. Charles, "Mark 1:21-28: Exegetical Perspective," *Feasting on the Word*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008).
- Melissa Florer-Bixler, "The Forgotten Christian Discipline of Loving Your Enemies," *Sojourners*, Oct 2019.
- Javen Swanson, "Confronting the Powers, Casting Out Demons," *sermon preached at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church*, Jan 28, 2018.
- Nadia Bolz-Weber, "Demon Possession and Why I Named My Depression 'Francis,'" *Patheos*, June 25, 2013.
- Osvaldo Vena, "Commentary on Matthew 1:21-28," *Working Preacher*, Jan 31, 2021. Debie Thomas, "Astounded," *Journeying with Jesus*, Jan 24, 2021.

HYMN OF THE DAY #673 God, Whose Almighty Word verses 1, 2, 3

1 God, whose almighty word
chaos and darkness heard
and took their flight:
hear us, we humbly pray,
and where the gospel day
sheds not its glorious ray,
let there be light.

2 Christ, who once came to bring,
on your redeeming wing,
healing and sight;
health to the troubled mind,
sight where illusions blind;
oh, now to humankind
let there be light.

- 3 Spirit of truth and love,
life-giving, holy dove,
speed forth your flight;
move on the water's face
bearing the lamp of grace,
and in earth's darkest place
let there be light.

CONFESSION OF FAITH Apostles' 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. Amen.

OFFERTORY

Offering can be mailed to the church (5929 Brooklyn Blvd, Brooklyn Center, MN 55429), or to given electronically via the "Give" button at the bottom of our website (www.crossofglory.us). Thank you for your continuing to support God's work here at Cross of Glory!

OFFERTORY RESPONSE #629 Abide with Me verses 1, 3, 4

- 1 Abide with me, fast falls the eventide.
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
help of the helpless, oh, abide with me.
- 3 I need thy presence ev'ry passing hour;
what but thy grace can foil the tempter's pow'r?
Who like thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine,
oh, abide with me.
- 4 I fear no foe, with thee at hand to bless;
ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if thou abide with me!

OFFERING PRAYER

O God, receive these gifts as you receive us: like a mother receives her child, with arms open wide.
Nourish us anew in your care, and empower us in faithful service to tend to others with this same
love, through Jesus Christ, our saving grace. **Amen.**

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE

*Like the group prayer mentioned today's sermon, this week's prayer petitions are written by the
Cross of Glory Bible Study Group - thanks to members of Bible Study for leading us in this week's
prayers.*

Life-giving God,
We pray that you would be with us in the midst of all the demons we face. We pray especially for
those struggling with addiction. Bless us with your power and heal us with your love. Lord in your
mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who are hurting in body or mind. Lord, consider your children--our family, friends, neighbors who suffer and are in pain. Let them trust in You and open themselves to your everlasting healing power. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for healing and peace in our afflictions. We pray especially for Gordon Nelson, Mavis Wold, Gil Hartlage, Terry Stejskal, Vicky Jacobson, Jeannie Kuzmich, Nick, nephew of Lori Balzer, Nancy Hengel and Nancy and Dave's daughter Cindy, and the loved ones of Geri Ingvaldson who passed away last week. Grant healing, comfort, and peace. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We give you thanks for the beauty of your creation. We pray that you would empower us to preserve it. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We give you thanks for the experience of sharing God's power and love here at Cross of Glory, for the wisdom of others who help interpret your word in worship services and bible studies. We give you thanks for giving us the opportunity to help others in our community of many faiths and races. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Be with our church community, especially through these difficult times of being physically apart. May we feel your presence and love as always. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Thank you, Lord, for inviting us to ask for your help through adversity. You have told us to expect that our prayers will be heard. So hear our prayers now. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

And now let us pray together the prayer that Jesus taught us...

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.

BLESSING

May God the Father bless you,

May Jesus the Son silence all the demons that plague you,

✠ May the Holy Spirit enliven you and give you peace. **Amen.**

SENDING SONG

#665 Rise, Shine, You People!

Verses 1, 2, 3

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1 Rise, shine, you people!
Christ the Lord has entered
our human story; God in him is centered.
He comes to us, by death and sin surrounded,
with grace unbounded.</p> | <p>2 See how he sends the pow'rs of evil reeling;
he brings us freedom,
light and life and healing.
All men and women, who by guilt are driven,
now are forgiven.</p> |
| <p>3 Come, celebrate; your banners high unfurling,
your songs and prayers against the darkness hurling.
To all the world go out and tell the story
of Jesus' glory.</p> | |

DISMISSAL

Go in peace and live in Christ.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

The Order of Service is from Evangelical Lutheran Worship which is commended for use in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

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Worship Leadership:

Lead Pastor: Rev. Ali Tranvik

Pianist, vocalist, worship team director: Mark Trease

Vocalist, choir director: Keith Williams

Lector: Dawn Bailey

Acolyte: Earl Simons

Tech Director: Ryan Bailey

Ministers: The people of Cross of Glory

Congregational Support as of 12/31/2020

Annual Budget: \$225,000.00

Year to Date Budgeted: \$225,000.00

Year to Date Received: \$225,853.63

Difference: \$853.63

Immediately following today's Zoom worship service (approx. 10:30 am), please join us for the Annual Meeting. To join by phone, dial 312-626-6799, enter 802-502-5123 when asked for Meeting ID (press # if asked for Participant ID) and enter 433131 when asked for a password. To join by computer, visit www.zoom.us and enter Meeting ID 802-502-5123 and password 433131.

Community Announcements:

- Due to the today's Annual Meeting, there will be no Virtual Coffee Hour this week. Please join us for the meeting as you're able!
- For questions about how to take part in today's Annual Meeting or how to access the Annual Report, please see the Annual Report Summary included in last week's bulletin or visit www.crossofglory.us.
- If you were unable to take part in last week's Pre-Annual Meeting but would like to view a recording, please reach out to the church office for a link.
- If you have not yet had the chance to pick up your 2021 offering envelopes, please stop by the church office M-W 9am-3pm. To request home delivery, please call the church office at 763-533-8602.
- Cross of Glory remains in Level 1 of our Covid-19 Preparedness and Response Plan. All gatherings will continue to be virtual with the exception of essential personnel and building

maintenance. A full copy of this plan is available electronically and in-print. If you have any questions, please reach out to the Task Force.

- All are welcome to take part in Bible Study this Tuesday morning at 9:30 am on Zoom.
- Pastor Ali is thrilled to share that she and Isak are expecting a baby at the end of June. More information about her maternity leave was sent out in last week's letter to the congregation. Ali and Isak are grateful for your prayers and look forward to sharing more in the coming months!
- Reach out to Pastor Ali with any other announcements or pastoral care concerns by email (atranvik@crossofglory.us) or phone (763-533-8602).

ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING OPENING LITURGY

L. O God of all power and love ...

C. ... we give thanks for your unfailing presence.

L. O God of all power and love, we give thanks ...

C. ... for the hope you provide in times of uncertainty and loss.

L. O God of all power and love ...

C. ... we ask you to send your Holy Spirit to enkindle in us your holy fire.

L. O God of all power and love, we ask you ...

C. ... to revive us to live as Christ's body in the world.

L. O God of all power and love, we ask to be ...

C. ... a people who pray, worship, learn, break bread, share life, heal neighbors, bear good news, seek justice, rest and grow in the Spirit.

L. O God of all power and love, we ask you to be with us ...

C. ... wherever and however we gather. Unite us in common prayer and send us in common mission, that we and the whole creation might be restored and renewed, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

Song: Build Us Up, Lord

Verse 1 Build us up, Lord, build us up; set in us a strong foundation.

Lead us to do your holy will; form and shape your new creation.

Build us up, Lord, build us up; as we guide and teach each other,

help us to share your love with the world: ev'ry sister, ev'ry brother.

Refrain: Growing in Christ, we plant seeds for the kingdom; we follow in faith what's begun!
Lord, set in our hearts the power of your word to spread the news of your Son!

Verse 2 Build us up, Lord, build us up; let our lives reflect your glory.

Cast away all our doubts and fears; help us tell the world your story.

Build us up, Lord, build us up; help us bear good fruit for you, Lord,

Give us vision and keep us sure. Grant us faith that's steadfast and true.

Refrain

Let us pray: Lord, may we embrace the reconciling power of Christ. May it guide our congregation as we live into the new realities of these times. As we meet new partners in ministry, may we take time to get to know them with patience, humility and love. Help us to see how sharing our gifts will make your work easier and more fulfilling while bringing all of us closer to Christ. May the blessings you give each day strengthen us to a living, daring confidence in your grace. **Amen.**