

Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church
BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,
ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKY
21 January Third Sunday after Epiphany

HYMNS: 45 217 366 509

INTROIT: Psalm 62

My soul waits silently for God alone. My salvation comes from Him.
He alone is my Rock and my Salvation. He is my Stronghold. I shall not stagger greatly.

How long will you people attack a person? How long will all of you be intent on murdering him, as though he were a leaning wall or a tottering stone fence?

People are planning only to force him down from his high position. They take delight in lying. They are blessing with their mouths but inwardly they are cursing.

Wait quietly for God alone, my soul! For my hope comes from Him.
He alone is my Rock and my Salvation, my High Refuge. I shall not stagger.

My salvation and my glory rest on God, my strong Rock, and my refuge is in God.

Trust Him at all times, you people! Pour out your hearts in His presence!
God is our Refuge.

Surely the descendants of Adam are only breath. The sons of man are an illusion. When they go up on a pair of scales, they are altogether lighter than breath.

Do not trust in extortion or put false hope in robbery! If riches increase, do not set your hearts on them!

God has spoken once. I have heard this twice, that power belongs to God, and that mercy belongs to You, O Lord. For You repay a person according to what he has done.

COLLECT: Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities and stretch forth the hand of Your majesty to heal and defend us; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS: Jonah 3:1-5, 10 The city of Nineveh repents.
1 Corinthians 7:29-31 Living in the last times.
Mark 1:14-20 Repent, and believe the good news.

Welcome to all worshipping with us!

Pastor Ziebell can be contacted via phone/text at 0407 583922.

Email him at paziebell@gmail.com or to the church office at draelc@gmail.com.

Please notify pastor of anyone who is unwell or in need of a visit.

Pastor is usually in his office Tuesday-Wednesday for anyone who would like to call in. Other days of the week are set aside for visits.

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

¹ The Word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time. He said:

² “Leave at once for the large city of Nineveh! Announce to it the Message that I tell you!”

³ So Jonah got up and went to Nineveh, as the LORD had told him. Nineveh was a large city before God. It took three days to walk through it. ⁴ **Jonah** began to enter the city and walked for one day. He **proclaimed**: “There are still forty days until Nineveh will be overthrown!”

⁵ The **people of Nineveh** believed God. They proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them... ¹⁰ When God saw what they had done, that they had turned away from their wicked conduct, God relented from the calamity that He had threatened to send on them, and He did not do it.

1 Corinthians 7:29-31 (32-35)

²⁹ This is what I am saying, my fellow-Christians: the time has been shortened. From now on even those who have wives should be as if they had none! ³⁰ Those who weep should be as though they were not weeping! Those who rejoice should be as though they were not rejoicing! Those who buy should be as though they did not possess! ³¹ Those who use the world should be as though they were not using it! For the form of this world is passing away. ³² However, I want you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the affairs of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. ³³ However, he who has married is concerned about the affairs of the world, how he may please his wife, ³⁴ and his interests have been divided. The unmarried woman or the virgin is concerned about the affairs of the Lord, so that she may be holy

both in body and in spirit. However, the woman who has married is concerned about the affairs of the world, how she may please her husband. ³⁵ I am saying this for your own good, not to throw a noose on you, but with a view to good order, and that you may be devoted to the Lord without being distracted.

Mark 1:14-20

¹⁴ After John had been arrested, Jesus went to Galilee and preached the Good News of God: ¹⁵ “The time has come and the kingdom of God is near. Repent, and believe in the Good News!”

¹⁶ While He was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Simon’s brother Andrew casting a net in the sea. For they were fishermen.

¹⁷ Jesus told them, “Come and follow Me! I shall make you fishers of men.”

¹⁸ They at once left their nets and followed Him.

¹⁹ When He had gone on a little farther, He saw James, the son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were also in their boat, mending their nets. ²⁰ He called them at once; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed Him.

REPENT, BELIEVE, AND FOLLOW

Sermon for the Third Sunday after the Epiphany 2024

Mark 1:14-20

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel from before, Mark 1:14-20: **After John had been arrested, Jesus went to Galilee and preached the Good News of God:** ¹⁵ “**The time has come, and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe in the Good News!**”

¹⁶ **While He was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Simon’s brother Andrew casting a net in the sea. For they were fishermen.**

¹⁷ **Jesus told them, “Come and follow Me! I shall make you fishers of men.”**

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¹⁹ When He had gone on a little farther, He saw James, the son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were also in their boat, mending their nets. ²⁰ He called them at once; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed Him.

Dear friends in Christ,

Early in His ministry, as He went about Galilee, Jesus preached, taught, and healed many people. He also cast out many demons, all the while gathering disciples around Himself. Mark tells us that Jesus called Simon, Andrew, James and John to be His disciples.

More importantly today, however, we hear Jesus speaking to us, saying, *“Repent, believe, and follow.”* “Repent and believe” is a summary of Jesus’ preaching, while “follow” is Jesus’ call to discipleship. These three words lead to forgiveness, faith, and purpose in life for every one of us.

Let’s start with Jesus’ preaching. We read: **“After John had been arrested, Jesus went to Galilee and preached the Good News of God: ¹⁵ “The time has come, and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe in the Good News!”**

This preaching, the proclamation of the Good News, begins with an announcement: **“The time has come, and the kingdom of God is near.”** What does Jesus mean by these two statements?

“The time has come.” That is to say, everything that has been leading up to this moment and preparing for this moment has now come. These words led its first listeners back into the Scripture that they had heard in their synagogues and that some of them did understand in its proper religious sense. Already at the presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple, we become aware of that. Simeon is described as *“waiting for the Consolation of Israel”* (Luke 2:25), and Anna *“kept speaking about the Child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem”* (Luke 2:38). Their faith was based on the Old Testament promises of the Saviour, like Deuteronomy 18:15: *“The LORD, your God, will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among you, from your fellow-Israelites”* and Jeremiah 23:5-6: *“Look! The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I shall raise up for David a righteous Branch, who will reign wisely as King. He will establish justice and righteousness on the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will live in safety. This will be His name, which people will call Him, ‘The LORD Our Righteousness.’”* Think of what St. Paul says in Galatians, *“when the time had fully come, God sent out His Son”*

(4:4). This was that fullness of time. This was just the right moment for Jesus to come on the scene.

The time is fulfilled, “**and the kingdom of God is near.**” The kingdom of God: This is God’s gracious rule and reign among men. It is God’s end-time kingdom of grace and blessing. Jesus is the king who ushers it in. That’s why Jesus can say this kingdom is “**is near.**” It is right here among you. The kingdom arrives with the presence of Jesus. That’s how it works.

The Lord had promised this end-time kingdom in the prophecies of the Old Testament. The arrival of this kingdom would mark a time of marvellous abundance and blessing, of a sea-change in the affairs of men, a shift in the ages. God would visit His people to bless them and redeem them, the Lord coming in the end-time to act in salvation and in judgment is all wrapped up in Jesus’ announcement, “**the kingdom of God is near.**”

“**The time has come, and the kingdom of God is near.**” So now what? What does this mean for our lives? What is Jesus’ message to us in view of these things? It is this: “**Repent and believe in the Good News!**”

Repent and believe: The two go together like hand in glove. You don’t have one without the other. When Jesus calls you to repent, He also calls you to believe. Jesus calls you to believe in the Good News, so that repentance doesn’t leave you desolate and in despair.

“**Repent and believe in the Good News!**” What is Jesus saying to us when He says, “**Repent**”? Repent means “to have a change of heart as far as sin is concerned.” This means *to turn from your sins.* Turn away from them in sorrow and contrition, mourning how you have messed things up. Change your mind, change your way of thinking, from the world’s way of thinking and from the selfish desires of your flesh, which is turned in on itself. Recognise how you have broken God’s commandments, how you have not loved God with your whole heart, how you have not loved your neighbour as yourself. That’s what sin is. That’s what being a sinner is. Own it. Confess it. Don’t rationalise it or excuse your sins. Don’t compare yourself to other people, focusing on how bad they are. No, **look in the mirror.** See how you have sinned - in thought, word, and deed, in what you have done wrong and in what you have failed to do right. Admit you’re a sinner, lost without God’s mercy and forgiveness, having no righteousness in yourself that would avail before God. Recognise your need and your powerlessness before God’s righteous throne of judgment. The wages of sin is death. All that - yes, all of that - is packed into this one word of Jesus,

“**Repent.**” Do you hear this call to repent? Jesus is speaking to you today.

But thank God, Jesus has another word to speak to you today. And it is this: “**believe in the Good News.**”

The Good News is the glad tidings of God’s undeserved favour toward sinners like you and me. This is something to rejoice over, that God does not have only words of judgment to speak to us, but that He also speaks words of salvation and grace, words of comfort and consolation. And this Good News is not just some vague pronouncement of “Everything’s OK. God’s a nice person. He won’t hold your bad stuff against you.” No it goes much deeper than that. It has more specific content than that. The Good News of God’s grace and forgiveness comes to us absolutely free, and at the same time, it comes at a great cost. For Jesus Christ is the heart and centre of this Good News. His person, His work - the person and work of Christ is the specific content of this Good News. Who Jesus is and what He has done - this is what makes the Good News.

This man, Jesus, who is going about Galilee, preaching and teaching and healing, is the very Son of God come in the flesh, come down to earth to bring salvation to lost sinners. True God and true man, He is our brother and our Saviour. As our brother, He fulfils the law on our behalf, always doing the right thing the way man was meant to do it. And Jesus is our Substitute also in taking the punishment that the Law requires for sinners. Even though He had no sins of His own, Jesus bore our sins in His body on the cross. He shed His holy blood for our forgiveness and our cleansing, and because He is the holy Son of God doing these things, His sacrifice is sufficient for all of us, for all men everywhere. Jesus’ righteousness is enough to cover the entire world. God pronounces us righteous for His sake. *It’s a free gift.*

This gift, then, is received through faith. That’s why Jesus says, “**Believe in the Good News.**” To believe, biblically speaking, is not just to know about something in your head with no connection to life. No, rather, to believe is to trust, to entrust yourself to this Good News of Jesus, to know in your heart that this is your only hope of righteousness before God. “**Believe in the Good News,**” that is to say, Trust in Jesus as your Saviour. Take refuge in Him. He will save you. He will save you from your sins. He will save you from death and eternal damnation. He will save you by the power of His resurrection unto eternal life, so that you will share in His resurrection on the last day. This is the content of our faith.

And this faith is worked by the Holy Spirit, creating faith and nurturing faith through the means of grace, Word and Sacrament. The fact that you trust in Jesus as your Saviour - this is itself a gift from God. The Holy Spirit gave you this gift of faith in Holy Baptism, and He continues to strengthen your faith as you receive Christ's body and blood in the Holy Supper. Yes, God's mighty Word creates and awakens the very faith it calls for. "**Repent and believe in the Good News.**"

Now, one more word that Jesus has to say to us today: "**Follow Me!**"

This is the word that Jesus spoke to those fishermen, way back when He called them to be His disciples. To be a disciple of Jesus is to follow Him in faith and to learn from Him. It is a learning that is personal and practical. It is to grow in wisdom and in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is to learn what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus in your daily life.

The call of Jesus to "**Come and follow Me!**" may even mean a change in your vocation, as it did for those fishermen of old. At the very least, it is the transforming of your vocation, to see yourself as Jesus' person in every aspect of your life, as a member of the church, as a citizen in society, as a family member, and in your relationship to husband or wife, parents or children. It includes your job, your workplace, your life as a student - in all these spheres of life, Jesus is calling you to learn the life of love. Love for your neighbour, caring for one another, forgiving one another when someone has wronged you. It includes taking the initiative to seek reconciliation where relationships have been strained. This is the living out of witness, mercy, and life together in Jesus. All of this is packed into the words of Jesus, "**Follow Me!**"

Dear friends, Jesus comes to us today, here, into this place, proclaiming the Good News of God, and saying, "**The time has come, and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe in the Good News!**" Hear His voice and heed His call. Jesus comes to us today, to our Galilee, to our fishing boats, summoning us to the new life of adventure He has for us as His disciples, speaking to each one of us His powerful words of life, "**Follow me!**" Hear the voice of Jesus saying to you today, "Repent, believe, and follow." Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we praise You for wanting all people to worship You in spirit and in truth, and for making that possible by the light of Your Word. We, Your people, who have gathered to worship and praise You, now offer You our thanksgiving, praise, and prayer.

We thank You, Father, for sending Your Son Jesus Christ, and for making known through Him Your loving purpose that all who believe in Him may have everlasting life. We give You thanks for our redemption through His cross, for the forgiveness of our sins, for deliverance from all evil, and for the sure hope of eternal glory. We praise You for the gift of Your infallible Word, through which Your Spirit has given us saving faith. Send forth Your Word with power so that many may come from east and west and rejoice in Your saving mercy. May Your kingdom be filled with believers from every nation and tribe though they are sinners like ourselves, so that heaven and earth together may ring with praise for Your great salvation in Christ.

Renew our minds. Cleanse us from every sin. Lead us along the path to eternal life. Grant that we may trust Your love and power. As we live out our short spans of life, make us spiritually wise, so that in humility, forgiveness, and love, even to those who hate us, we may reflect Your grace. Help us so that we may not be conquered by evil, but may rather conquer all evil with good. Grant that we may use well the charismatic gifts that You have provided for the good of all. Heal us of every disease. Uphold those who face the test of sickness or other suffering. Guard our loved ones wherever they may be. Shield us from the powers of wickedness. Give us each day our daily bread, and make us contented in every circumstance.

Watch over Your Church. Give it pastors who are true shepherds and faithful teachers of Your people.

Give wisdom and understanding to those who are entrusted with the responsibilities of governing our country. Grant them a concern for Your will, and the desire to rule in such a way that all people may live in quietness and peace.

These things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Redeemer who loved the Church, and gave Himself up for it. Amen.

Article: The Divine Service is where God gives us His Gifts

Lutherans, like the early Christians, believe that Christ is bodily present through Word and Sacrament, offering His people the gifts of heaven. The liturgy is, first and foremost, the activity of God, who is serving us with the gifts. But it is also the Christian assembly whose right and privilege it is to stand in God's presence and receive His gifts for the sake of the world. Christians are agents of God in the world, for no one else in the world could do this service! And as Christians respond to the Word and Sacraments, they respond in Christ, that is, their songs of praise, their prayers, and their confession of faith are not their own, but they are from the Christ who is in them, responding back to the Father through Him. And so both the gifts given and the gifts responded to are in Christ.

Here we see the origin of Luther's word for worship, *Gottesdienst* - God serving the world with His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation through Word and Sacrament. The liturgy is the context in which God acts to save His people and in which God's people respond. First, they receive the gifts God pours upon the world through the Christian liturgy; then, as representatives of the world, they respond to the gifts in acts of worship. The liturgy is where God is present in Christ to save us from sin, death, and the devil. This definition of liturgy may well have been endorsed by Luther, whose sole principle in renewing the liturgy was justification by grace through faith.

Luther's reforms could also be described by the criteria of faith and love. Here is expressed the two different perspectives on worship. When described in terms of justification, it is from God's perspective, what God has done for the world in Jesus Christ, His objective acts that are present and proclaimed in the liturgy. The supreme expression of justification is in the liturgy. If our liturgies are to be Lutheran, they must be understood in the context of justification and justification in the context of the liturgy. God's solution to the fallenness of creation is now present in the Christian assembly. The end is here and celebrated because Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom, is present offering the gifts of the wedding feast for His Bride, the Church, through His teaching at the table and His presence in the meal. God proclaims to the world that the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ is present among us through Word and Sacrament.

Children's Message:

Do you remember the story of Jonah? God instructed him to go to Nineveh, but then he got on a boat and went the opposite direction! Where did he end up? Yes, in the belly of a fish! Then the fish spat him out after three days, and he was on land once again.

That brings us to today's reading. See, Jonah wasn't off the hook. God still expected him to go to Nineveh and share a very important message with the people there. But it wasn't an easy message. Jonah was to tell the people of Nineveh that they



needed to repent, which means to turn from their sin and instead fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

Have you ever been asked to share news with someone that they may not like to hear? Maybe your mum or dad asked you to call your brother or sister to the dinner table right when they're in the middle of playing a computer game. Or maybe you had to tell them it was time to help with chores or to leave for an errand. Maybe they didn't want to hear.

No one likes to be told they're a sinner and that they should stop sinning! Even Jonah would rather be in the belly of the fish than share a hard message with people. This time, though, Jonah listened to God and was brave. He knew that God's Word needed to be shared with these people, no matter how much they wouldn't want to hear it.

Like Nineveh, we, too, need to hear God's hard Word that we're sinners and need to repent, to turn away from our sin. So He sends men like Jonah to us to remind us of God's Law. Who are those men? Right! Pastors!

What do you think the people of Nineveh did when Jonah finally came and shared God's news? The people repented! They believed Jonah, and believed God, and they were sorry for their sin! God was merciful to them.

He shows love and mercy to us too! He reminds us of our sin so that we won't get all cozy in that sin. Because of the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus, who was in the tomb for three days like Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days, we have the Good News that we are forgiven!

Let's pray. *Dear Jesus, You send pastors and people to share Your Word with us even when it's hard to hear. Thank You for Your commandments and for the wonderful Gospel that we are forgiven in Jesus. Amen.*

WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

28 January 4 Epiphany	4 February 5 Epiphany	11 February The Transfiguration
8.30am OAK HC 9.00am TMBA LR 9.30am AUB LR (student Patrick leading) 10.15am GRN HC 9.00am MARBURG LR	8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA HC 9.00am GRN LR 10.45am AUB HC 9.00am LOWOOD LR	8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am MARBURG HC
Sunday, 28 January		
READINGS: Deuteronomy 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28		
HYMNS: 47 239 409 (789 286) 822		
Sunday, 4 February		
READINGS: Isaiah 40:21-31; 1 Corinthians 9:16-27; Mark 1:29-39		
HYMNS: 308 16 796 (839 292) 241		

The next confirmation class for the Darling Downs congregations is set to begin in February. These classes will be held at Bethlehem Toowoomba. Parents of these children – please let pastor know which days of the week would suit so he can prepare a day and time.

The confirmation class below the Range is also set to recommence in February.

Congregation AGM dates:

St John's Aubigny: Sunday, January 28, 7.30pm.

St Paul's Greenwood: Sunday, January 28, after service.

Trinity Oakey:

Bethlehem Toowoomba: Sunday, February 18, 2.00pm.

Trinity Marburg:

Our Saviour Lowood: Sunday, March 3, after service.

Trip to America

Pastor is still planning a trip to the USA later this year, working between the dates of August 7 and 18. It is still early days yet in the organising, but the following is a rough time frame, to give you some idea. We can begin to work out a schedule as soon as we have numbers.

We hope to leave Australia on Wednesday, the 7th of August, arriving in the USA on the same date. We shall visit the Ark Encounter and the Creation Museum over two days and then travel to Decatur, where we can worship with our brothers and sisters of the ULMA on Sunday, 11 August. The following week is still unplanned, but we can set aside a few days for sightseeing, etc. Pastor will talk with the ULMA people about ideas.

Return flights are hovering around \$1900.00, and plan around \$150.00 a night for accommodation. Tickets into the Ark and Creation Museum are around \$135.00 for dual entry into both attractions and can be purchased here before we go. I suggest you work on a budget of around \$5000.00 as the minimum for the trip. However, this does not include food, souvenirs, transport, etc. There is the possibility that some ULMA members may put us up while in Decatur, or drive us around, saving a little more money.

So, anyone interested in coming along, **please let pastor know by the end of February.**