



Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church

1187 C.R. 128 & U.S. Rt. 20

Fremont, Ohio 43420

Pastor Tim Miller

93.1FM

Church: 419-332-6820

faithchurch@amplex.net

www.faithfremont.org

Seventh Sunday after Epiphany

February 23, 2025

Setting 3 with Holy Communion

*Congregation please stand as you are able.

Introduction

Mercy. Mercy. Mercy. Joseph lives it in Egypt. Jesus preaches it in the gospel. The Spirit guides us into merciful lives with the power of forgiveness to reconcile what is fractured and divided. Such merciful living is the baptismal blessing of having put on Christ. It is the gift of the life-giving Spirit. It is a reflection of God's glory revealed in Christ.

Prelude:

*Little Rondo
Softly and Tenderly*

**R. Blake
W. Stockton**

Welcome & Announcements: Joys and Concerns
Signing of the Pew Register by all present.

***Opening Hymn:** *All Creatures, Worship God Most High!* ELW 835

GATHERING

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

***Greeting**

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

C: **And also with you.**

***Confession and Forgiveness**

P: Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
our creator,
our protector,
our wellspring of life.

C: Amen.

P: Trusting that God receives our words and the meditations of our hearts,
let us confess our sin.

Silence is kept for reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: you speak blessing and compassion into the world.

**Forgive us for the ways we act
with judgment, cruelty, or indifference.**

**We ignore the needs of our neighbors;
we resist your call to oppose injustice;
we give in to scarcity and fear;**

we assume the worst about one another.

**Cleanse us from our faults
and release us from their grasp.**

Show us your lovingkindness.

**Restore our hearts and repair your world,
that we may live in Christ's ways.**

Amen.

P: God proclaims these words of assurance:

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you.

I have called you by name. You are mine.”

In † Christ, you are forgiven.

In the Spirit, you are made free.

Refreshed by the waters of mercy,

live anew as beloved children of God.

C: Amen.

*Canticle of Praise

Assisting minister



Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's peo - ple on earth.



Lord God, heav - en - ly King, al - might - y God and Fa - ther,



we wor - ship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glo - ry.



Lord Je - sus Christ, on - ly Son of the Fa - ther, Lord God, Lamb of God,



you take a - way the sin of the world: have mer - cy on us;



you are seat - ed at the right hand of the Fa - ther: re - ceive our prayer.



For you a - lone are the Ho - ly One, you a - lone are the Lord,



you a - lone are the Most High, Je - sus Christ, with the Ho - ly Spir - it,



in the glo - ry of God the Fa - ther. A - men.

***Prayer of the Day**

P: Let us pray.

C: **O Lord Jesus, make us instruments of your peace, that where there is hatred, we may sow love, where there is injury, pardon, and where there is despair, hope. Grant, O divine master, that we may seek to console, to understand, and to love in your name, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

WORD

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

First Reading:

Genesis 45:3-11, 15

Many years after being sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, Joseph reveals himself to them. Now the second-in-command in Egypt, Joseph reassures his brothers that God has used their evil intentions for good to preserve life during a devastating famine, and Joseph forgives them.

R: A reading from Genesis, the 45th chapter.

³ Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me.” And they came closer. He said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.

⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. ¹⁰ You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹ I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.’ ” ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and

wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

The word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Responsive Reading:

Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40

- ¹ Do not be provoked by evildoers;
do not be jealous of those who do wrong.
- ² **For they shall soon wither like the grass,
and like the green grass fade away.**
- ³ Put your trust in the LORD and do good;
dwell in the land and find safe pasture.
- ⁴ **Take delight in the LORD,
who shall give you your heart's desire.**
- ⁵ Commit your way to the LORD; put your trust in the LORD,
and see what God will do.
- ⁶ **The LORD will make your vindication as clear as the light
and the justice of your case like the noonday sun.**
- ⁷ Be still before the LORD and wait patiently.
Do not be provoked by the one who prospers, the one who succeeds
in evil schemes.
- ⁸ **Refrain from anger, leave rage alone;
do not be provoked; it leads only to evil.**
- ⁹ For evildoers shall be cut off,
but those who hope in the LORD shall possess the land.
- ¹⁰ **In a little while the wicked shall be no more;
even if you search out their place, they will not be there.**
- ¹¹ But the lowly shall possess the land;
they will delight in abundance of peace.
- ³⁹ **But the deliverance of the righteous comes from you, O LORD;
you are their stronghold in time of trouble.**
- ⁴⁰ You, O LORD, will help them and rescue them;
you will rescue them from the wicked and deliver them, because in
you they seek refuge.

Second Reading:

1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50

In the Apostles' Creed, we speak of the "resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." Using the metaphor of a planted seed and the story of Adam, Paul preaches passionately about the mystery of following Christ's perfect life into eternity.

R: A reading from 1 Corinthians, the 15th chapter.

³⁵ But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" ³⁶ Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.

³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

⁴² So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵ Thus it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

⁵⁰ What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

The word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

***Gospel Acclamation**



Jesus continues to address a crowd of his disciples. He invites his followers to shower radical love, blessing, forgiveness, generosity, and trust even on enemies and outsiders. Living in harmony with God's intent brings the reward of overflowing blessing.

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, the 6th chapter.

C: Glory to you, O Lord.

P: [Jesus said:] ²⁷ "But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³² "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

³⁷ "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

The Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to you, O Christ.

(8:00) S.S. Children's Choir:

Jesus Loves Me

Anna Bartlett Warner/arr. John Riggio

Children's Sermon

Sermon

***Sermon Hymn:**

Forgive Our Sins As We Forgive

ELW 605

***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.**

***Prayers of Intercession**

R: With the Spirit of Christ shining upon us, let us boldly pray for the church, the world, and all of creation.

A brief silence.

R: Surprising God, you call us to love our enemies and to show kindness in the face of cruelty. Let our actions be a shining witness of your overwhelming grace for all. God of grace,

C: hear our prayer.

R: As animals hibernate and fields lay dormant, let them be a reminder that life and faith are not static but always changing and growing. May we, with all creation, trust that the ending of one thing promises life in a new way. God of grace,

C: hear our prayer.

R: We pray for leaders and policymakers who work to reduce violence in our nations, cities, and towns. Give your wisdom and discernment amid heated arguments and differing viewpoints. God of grace,

C: hear our prayer.

R: We pray for the victims of abuse and violence. Provide safe shelter and new beginnings to those experiencing domestic violence and dangerous situations. Enfold with love all who seek your healing care, *especially those we name at this time (Pause for people to be named)*.
God of grace,

C: hear our prayer.

R: Empower our faith communities to be signs of your gracious love. Bless the local ministries of parish nursing and caregiving, that they will be a voice for those in need in our communities. God of grace,

C: hear our prayer.

R: We give thanks for the enduring witness of those who have died before us. May their lives in you provide a witness of your everlasting grace.
God of grace,

C: hear our prayer.

R: We entrust our prayers to you, O God, in the sure and certain hope that your promise is revealed among the people.

C: Amen.

MEAL

God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.

*Sharing of the Peace

P: The peace of Christ be with you always.

C: And also with you.

(10:30) Sr. Choir:

Where Charity and Love Prevail

H. Livingston, Jr.

Offertory

Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;

Praise him, all creatures here below;

Praise him above, ye heav'nly host;

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

*Offering Prayer

P: God of grace, your love reaches to the heavens,
and your abundance to the depths of the seas.

Bless what we offer to your service:

our gifts, our abilities, and our hearts.

Let us overflow with gratitude and generosity,
now and always.

C: Amen.

***The Great Thanksgiving**

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

P: Lift up your hearts.

C: We lift them to the Lord.

P: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

C: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

P: It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
that we should at all times and in all places
give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,
through our Savior Jesus Christ.

By the leading of a star he was shown forth to all nations;
in the waters of the Jordan you proclaimed him your beloved Son;
and in the miracle of water turned to wine he revealed your glory.
And so, with all the choirs of angels,
with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of pow'r and might,



heav-en and earth are full of your glo - ry. Ho - san - na. Ho -



san-na. Ho - san - na in the high - est. Bless-ed is he who



comes in the name of the Lord. Ho-san - na in the high - est.

***Thanksgiving at the Table**

P: Holy One, the beginning and the end, the giver of life:
Blessed are you for the birth of creation.
Blessed are you in the darkness and in the light.
Blessed are you for your promise to your people.
Blessed are you in the prophets' hopes and dreams.
Blessed are you for Mary's openness to your will.
Blessed are you for your Son Jesus,
the Word made flesh.

In the night in which he was betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

P: Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:

**C: Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.**

P: With this bread and cup
we remember your Word dwelling among us,
full of grace and truth.
We remember our new birth in his death and resurrection.
We look with hope for his coming.

C: Come, Lord Jesus.

P: Holy God, we long for your Spirit.
Come among us. Bless this meal.
May your Word take flesh in us.
Awaken your people.
Fill us with your light.
Bring the gift of peace on earth.

C: Come, Holy Spirit.

P: All praise and glory are yours,
Holy One of Israel,
Word of God incarnate,
Power of the Most High,
one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

*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: The joy of the Lord is our strength.
Come, eat this meal of gladness.

Lamb of God



Distribution of Communion

Communion will be continuous. The ushers will invite you to come forward by the center aisle. You will be handed the bread with the words, "The Body of Christ given for you." You may respond with "Amen" or "Thanks be to God!". Step to the Communion Assistant and take the cup. They will speak the words, "The Blood of Christ shed for you." You may respond with "Amen" or "Thanks be to God!" Empty cups may be placed in the basket as you return to your seat by the side aisle.

If you prefer gluten- free bread, please let the Pastor know. If you prefer grape juice, please let the Communion Assistant know. If you prefer not to receive or have children who have not yet received, please let the Pastor know and he will offer a blessing.

Communion Hymns:

ELW 482 *I Come with Joy*

ELW 656 *Blest Be the Tie That Binds*

***Post Communion Blessing**

P: May the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace.

C: Amen.

***Prayer After Communion**

P: Nourishing God,
at this table you have refreshed us
with holy gifts of food and drink.
Strengthen us for service,
and send us out to embody your good news
of liberation and healing for the sake of the world.
In the name of Christ we pray,

C: Amen.

SENDING

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

***Blessing**

P: The Spirit of the triune God
✠ bless you with joy,
anoint you with compassion,
and send you in love.

C: Amen.

***Dismissal**

P: Go in peace. Live in hope.

C: **Thanks be to God.**

***Postlude:**

Allein Gott in der Hoh sei Her
(All Glory Be to God on High)

F. Marpurg

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AS DAYS GROW LONGER and we continue to celebrate your light this Epiphany season, dear Jesus, help us spread kindness and compassion in ever-widening circles as testimony to you.

WE WARMLY WELCOME THE FREMONT FFA as they worship with us this morning.

ALTAR FLOWERS today are given in loving memory of my husband, Dick, and my father by Alta Jean Olmstead.

THE YOUTH & GROWTH COMMITTEE is in need of a Sunday School Teacher for the 1st thru 3rd grade class. Thank you.

REMINDER... *When Sandusky County is under a Level 3 Snow Advisory the church will be closed. This includes Sunday services as well as all weekday events, meetings and activities for that day. If we are under a level 1 or 2 snow emergency, the church will be open and if it's on a day of worship, we will have worship.*

TOLEDO WALLEYE GAME TICKETS

The Mission and Outreach Committee is setting up a trip to a Walleye game next month. The game will be held on **Sunday, March 9, 2025**, and the Toledo Walleye will take on the Atlanta Gladiators. Faith and Family Night game is scheduled to begin at 5:15 p.m.

A final count is **due by February 27** so **please sign up in the next few days**. I have reserved 20 tickets for our group. Our seats will be located in Section 111. A sign-up is available on the bulletin board in the narthex area. General admission ticket prices are \$17 per person and food vendors will be located in various areas. No money is due until the tickets are received and distributed.

If you have any questions, please contact Randy Brown at 419-680-8386.

THE CHOSEN, SEASON 3

- The viewing of *The Chosen, Season 3* will begin in the Faith Lutheran Church **Sanctuary Wednesday, March 12th at 5 p.m.** and will continue Wednesdays at 5 p.m. through Lent (March 12, 19, 26, April 2, 9, 16, 23rd (after Easter)).
- These episodes are longer therefore, there will not be time for a discussion.
- If you are interested in *The Chosen, 40 days with Jesus, Book Three* devotion, sign up on the bulletin board by Sunday, March 2nd. If you are interested in covering the cost, \$8.04 (as of 2/18/25) on your offering envelope line item to Christian Education.
- You can find *The Chosen* at a library or stream through Chromecast, Amazon Firestick, Apple TV, and Roku or TheChosen.tv/app for more information.
- Questions should be directed to Cheryl Paeth at 419-205-3659.

A CHICKEN & BISCUIT DINNER will be held at St. John Lutheran, 450 N. Rocky Ridge Rd., Oak Harbor, **TODAY, February 23rd**, serving from 11:30 – 1:30 p.m. or until sold out. Free Will donations will be accepted and it is Dine In. See bulletin board for menu. Proceeds to benefit LWR Southern California Wildfires Mission.

FAITH'S MISSION AND OUTREACH PROJECT FOR ATKINSON SCHOOL

TESTING WEEKS - We are continuing our partnership with Atkinson Elementary this year as the students in grades 3-5 approach state testing. The testing begins the last week in March and extends through the first week of May. The Faith Mission and Outreach Committee is again asking our congregation to help by purchasing snacks for the students during those testing weeks.

During the school day, many students eat their lunches earlier in the day and then require a snack later in the afternoon. Mr. Ward, the principal, said that the teachers often provide a small snack for the students to eat. Some of the snacks may include **PRETZELS, LANCE PEANUT BUTTER CRACKERS, GOLDFISH CRACKERS, FRUIT SNACKS, CHEEZ IT CRACKERS, and GRANOLA BARS**. These treats need to be in **single prepackaged units** for sanitary reasons.

A display will be set up in the narthex of our church showing the variety of items needed. A basket for monetary donations is also available if you would like us to do the shopping. Our committee is hoping to make its first delivery of items near the middle week of March.

I hope you will prayerfully consider joining us in this endeavor to support the staff and students of Atkinson Elementary. Thank you.

In Christian Love,

Randy J. Brown/ Project Coordinator

PRAYING DAILY



For healing and hope: Pat Copley, Connie Diekman, Della Humbarger, Denny Krumnow, Bill Leutenegger, Kathy McClain, Stan Moyer, Nancy Mylander, Gary Overmyer, Letty Rusch, Bob Schneider, Bill Seibert, Janet Tressler, Carnetta Weber, Linda Woessner. Lucas Boltz, Marlene Johnson, Marty Koch, Judi Krumnow, Kathy Gerber Rogers, Christine Tabbert.

For the Family of: Dorothy Swedersky, Rick Borton

For our Military: Noah Egbert, Troy Halfhill, Jade Kayser, Daniel Linder, Tony Rozzi, Christopher Templeton, & Joshua Tooman.

For our Bishops: Bishop Christian Ndossa, Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, and NWOS Bishop Daniel Beaudoin and Staff

For our partner congregation in Bumila, Tanzania

And its pastor: Pastor Peter Magasi

HERMAN FUNERAL HOMES GRIEF SUPPORT, 900 North Street, Fremont. Grief 101 with Stein Hospice will offer a bereavement support group free of charge to the public where you can find a safe space to explore your grief, engage in discussions, or simply listen to shared experiences related to the loss of an adult loved one. Meetings are quarterly this year and will be held **Thursday, March 20, 2025 from 4-6 p.m.** RSVP by calling 419-332-7391 by March 17, 2025. Refreshments provided.

NEW ADDRESSES:

Linda Woessner, Apt. 202, Otterbein Assisted Living, 20311 Pemberville Rd., Pemberville, OH 43450.

Minnie & Jamie Weber, 507 Brentwood Drive, Gibsonburg, OH 43431.

ASSISTING TODAY

Pastor: Rev. Tim Miller **Organist:** Darla Brown

Sr. Choir Director: Darla Brown

8:00 a.m.

10:30 a.m.

Greeter: Lillian Harder Greyson Tooman

Lector: Greyson Tooman Ken Walker, Jr.

Acolyte: Greyson Tooman Evan McBride

Communion: J. Seibert/M. Fought C. Trick & G. Walker

Counters: Ann Waggoner* & Anne Gerner

Fellowship Time Host: The Jim Seibert Family

Altar Guild: Judi Neill, Heidi Tooman, Ann Waggoner

ASSISTING NEXT WEEK

Pastor: Rev. Tim Miller **Organist:** Darla Brown

Sr. Choir Director: Darla Brown

8:00 a.m.

10:30 a.m.

Greeter: Jackson Fought Randy Brown

Lector: Robert Fought Dave Kocsis

Acolyte: Robert Fought Rachel Wasserman

Communion: M. Fought/K. Paeth Randy Brown & Barb Kocsis

Counters: Dave Kocsis* & Judi Neill

Fellowship Time Host: Adult II Sunday School Class

Altar Guild: Brianne Harder & Ginger Walker

SPAGHETTI DINNER to benefit St. Paul Veterans Memorial will be held, Saturday, March 15th, from 4-6 p.m. at St. Paul Lutheran Church, 541 S. Church Rd., Marblehead, OH. Dine in or carry-out for \$12 each. Dinner includes Spaghetti/meat sauce, Salad, Bread, Dessert and Drink. Raffle basket (\$2 per ticket or 6 for \$10), craft and bake sale tables, fellowship and fun!! Call the church office at 419-734-1662 for more information.

FAITH ACTIVITIES FOR THE WEEK OF – Feb. 23 to March 2

Sunday

Feb. 23----- 8 & 10:30 a.m. Worship with Holy Communion
 9:15 a.m. Sunday School & Fellowship Time
 1-3 p.m. Hall reserved – 4-H – Jackie Seibert

Monday

Feb. 24-----8 a.m. Men’s Group in Fellowship Hall
 10 a.m. Valley View Tea Time with God
 7:30 p.m. Dartball – Home vs. St. John’s

Tuesday

Feb. 25-----7 p.m. Esther Circle – Sermon on Mount #6

Wednesday

Feb. 26-----6:30 p.m. Bell Choir
 7:30 p.m. Praise Choir
 7:30 p.m. Sr. Choir

Thursday

Feb. 27----- 3 p.m. Christ Care

Friday

Feb. 28-----

Saturday

Mar. 1-----9:15 a.m. Christ Care

Sunday

Mar. 2----- 8 & 10:30 a.m. Worship with Holy Communion
 9:15 a.m. Sunday School & Fellowship Time

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2025: ATTENDANCE: 99 – OFFERING: \$6,064.52
 NOISY OFFERING, SUNDAY, FEB. 16, 2025: \$83.89

GOSPEL MESSAGE
February 23, 2025
SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Countercultural Love

In today's gospel reading, Jesus offers us a vision of a different way of living, one rooted in God's endless mercy. People of God are to love others, do good, and share their possessions—in abundance, in extravagance, to the point that our generosity seems foolish by the world's standards.

This lavishness is possible only through the power of Jesus, who first heals us and invites us to taste and see God's mercy for ourselves. We witness this mercy in scripture through stories of God's profound love and compassion. We experience it as we join in song and prayer in worship, engaging in ancient practices that draw us beyond ourselves and closer to God and neighbor. We remember the mercy we've experienced in the waters of baptism and taste Christ's abundance in holy communion. We practice generosity in our offerings and share God's peace with our fellow worshippers with whom we are bound together, even though we might never have chosen them as neighbors.

With Christ in us, we are able to practice this abundant love today and tomorrow, in our worship and beyond, returning to the font and table again and again to be reminded of the love that dwells within us and surrounds us, making us bold in our love for others.

To try to practice this kind of countercultural love on our own would likely lead to discouragement. But we are given the gift of community—with one another, those who have come before us, and hope for the ones who will come after us. Together, we form one body in Christ, strengthened by God's Spirit. Together, we remind one another of God's promise of unending love and forgiveness and encourage each other to follow Jesus' example. And together, we focus our minds and hearts to catch glimpses of God's kingdom among us, even as we wait for the world Jesus envisions to be made complete on earth as it is in heaven.