

Sermon followed by Service - October 19, 2025 - Christ THROUGH Us!

Jesus could have snapped his fingers. He could have snapped his fingers, and instead of starting with three pastors and three congregations in Milwaukee, he could have started with churches built and congregations growing all across the country, all singing out - "The Church's One Foundation is Jesus Christ Our Lord." He could have snapped his fingers, and instead of college and seminary classes too small to fill a one-room school, he could have snapped his fingers and started with colleges and seminaries filled with future pastors and teachers singing out - "Here am I, send me, send me." He could have snapped his fingers, and started with a church that deserved a bigger, better name than Wisconsin, or Minnesota, or Michigan, or even Illinois. Some of us might remember those awkward years when we named ourselves the "Federation of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States."

Jesus could have found some straighter shooters, stauncher Lutherans. Those first three pastors - they didn't found the Wisconsin Synod to be staunch Lutheran holding tight to Jesus' Word, but loose Lutheran, willing to be wishy-washy with Jesus' Word.

Jesus could have found leaders who weren't so territorial, better team players. You know why Martin Luther College is in New Ulm, Minnesota? Because in the 1880s, the Minnesota Synod's president was pastor in New Ulm, Minnesota, and he got his congregation to build Old Main on the hill before his Minnesota Synod could choose someplace else.

Jesus could have found people with better focus. In 1918, the president of our Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm got caught up in politics and peace protests - a German town of German neighbors protesting the politics of war against their German homeland. With a heavy hand, the State of Minnesota threatened to shut us down if we didn't shut up our protesting president. There's a reason our congregations don't get involved in politics - we have a better kingdom to advance.

Jesus could have found people with a bigger vision of bigger churches. Mission tradition says that the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod agreed to get along this way - Missouri could have the big cities, Wisconsin would go to the small towns. Some people complain about that. Not me. Small town Minnesota is where Jesus gathered my family into the Wisconsin Synod. But what do we all know? Jesus could have found better than me.

He could have. He could have done so much more and so much better. Without even the snap of a finger, with just a word God created the whole universe. Without even the snap of a finger, he created an army, no, he created armies of angels who can do what he wants done and say what he wants said - without our human foibles. Without even the snap of a finger, he could raise up a church and work his mission and ministry without the likes of me getting in his way.

He could have. But he didn't and he doesn't.

Why? God loves to work through people. Now, I should be clear on this. This isn't about God looking to avoid work or avoid getting his fingers dirty. Look what Jesus was willing to do. He got his fingers dirty; he put his whole self into this world. He faced the worst of this world; he reached out to the most rejected in this world; he called to himself the most hated in this world; he helped the neediest in this world; he took on himself the worst of this world. He didn't just face the worst of this world; he took on himself the worst evil, the worst shame, the worst wickedness, the worst guilt. He made the greatest sacrifice in this world - he offered himself. Not just the life of a carpenter's kid; he offered himself, the life of the Son of God. Why? To take our place as sinners; to take our place as damned. So that freed from our sin and shame, freed from our guilt and God's judgment - we can be the people of God, the family of God; God's way to show his love, God's way to show off his grace and glory.

God loves to work through people - not those who think themselves high and mighty, but God loves to work through people - people who need grace, people who need mercy. He loves to work for the small, through the small. He loves to work for the broken, through the broken. He loves to work for the hurting, through the hurting. He loves to work for those who can't get their act together, through, you guessed it - through those who struggle to get their act together.

And so sometimes, his church looks and acts small; sometimes we look and act broken; sometimes his church looks and acts not so much like saints, but - you guessed it - like sinners.

So why? Why would God work through the small and the broken? Why would God work through sinners? To show off His Son. To show off Jesus. To show what Jesus can do. To show the difference Jesus makes. Not just in the power that Jesus brings to the table, but most of all to show off his grace, to show off the glory of God's grace in Jesus - that God's love is for the small and the broken, the hurting and the struggling, that God's grace is for you and me.

And there's another reason, another reason God works through the small and the broken. Why? God loves giving and sharing privilege. He loves giving and sharing power. He loves giving and sharing promise and hope. He loves giving and sharing himself in you and through you.

It's amazing, isn't it? The God who has created armies of perfect angels - ready, willing, and able to do what he wants done and say what he wants said, ready, willing, and able to show off his glory - that God wants you to have the privilege of representing him in this world. The God who can whatever he wants without even having to snap his finger, that God wants you to have the privilege of exercising his power. The God who sacrificed himself to make his promise true; that God entrusts to you the privilege of sharing that precious promise. The God who

has the keys to heaven; that God wants you to have the privilege of loosing the locks so you can open the way to heaven.

And now what? Instead of 3 pastors with three congregations in Milwaukee, we're hundreds of congregations and schools across the country with hundreds of pastors and teachers sharing Jesus. Instead of going back to Germany and Russia begging for pastors and money, we have mission connections supporting missions and ministry in 49, soon to be over 50 countries around the world. Instead of being loose with God's Word, we are known around the world for faithfulness to Scripture - which is why people around the world look to us for Jesus.

I don't say any of this to pat ourselves on the back, but to thank and praise God for all that he has done for us and through us - in Jesus. Amen.

THE SERVICE

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we are surrounded by change - some good and some not so good. But just as some things change, some things do not. One of the things that does not change is our need for God's mercy and grace.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we see how wonderfully privileged we are - for years in our past, through our present, into the future - God loves to meet our world's need and share his mercy and grace - through us!

OPENING HYMN

"O Church, Arise"

Hymn 870

O Church, arise and put your armor on; hear the call of Christ our captain.
For now the weak can say that they are strong
in the strength that God has given.
With shield of faith and belt of truth we'll stand against the devil's lies;
an army bold whose battle cry is love, reaching out to those in darkness.

Our call to war—to love the captive soul, but to rage against the captor;
and with the sword that makes the wounded whole
we will fight with faith and valor.
When faced with trials on ev'ry side, we know the outcome is secure,
and Christ will have the prize for which he died—an inheritance of nations.

Come see the cross, where love and mercy meet,
as the Son of God is stricken;
then see his foes lie crushed beneath his feet, for the Conqueror has risen!
And as the stone is rolled away, and Christ emerges from the grave,
this vict'ry march continues till the day ev'ry eye and heart shall see him.

So Spirit come, put strength in ev'ry stride, give grace for ev'ry hurdle,
that we may run with faith to win the prize of a servant good and faithful.
As saints of old still line the way, retelling triumphs of his grace,
we hear their calls and hunger for the day
when with Christ we stand in glory.

INVOCATION

In the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves
and the truth is not in us.

**If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just
and will forgive us our sins
and purify us from all unrighteousness.**

Let us confess our sins to the Lord.

Holy God, gracious Father,

I am sinful by nature

and have sinned against you in my thoughts, words, and actions.

I have not loved you with my whole heart;

I have not loved others as I should.

I deserve your punishment both now and forever.

But Jesus, my Savior, paid for my sins

with his innocent suffering and death.

Trusting in him, I pray: God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Our gracious Father in heaven has been merciful to us. He sent his only
Son, Jesus Christ, who gave his life as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of
the whole world. Therefore, as a called servant of Christ and by his
authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the T
Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

LORD, HAVE MERCY - SUNG

In peace let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.**

For the peace from above and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord.
Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God,
and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.**

For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise, let
us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.**

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord. **Amen.**

GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST

CW 176

Glo - ry to God in the high-est, and peace to his
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. Glo - ry to God in the high-est, and
peace to his peo - ple on earth.

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.
 Glo - ry to God in the high - est, and peace to his
 peo - ple on earth. 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. A - men.
 Glo - ry to God in the high - est, and peace to his



PRAYER OF THE DAY

God, our refuge and strength, have mercy on your church as we come in prayer to thank you for 175 years of blessings on WELS. Continue to speak the peace and forgiveness of Christ through us as he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING

Deuteronomy 6:1–9

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 100A

Refrain



En - ter his gates with thanks-giv - ing.

Tone



Shout for joy to the LORD, / all the earth.

Worship the LORD with / gladness;
come before him with / joyful songs.

Know that the / LORD is God.

It is he who made us, and / we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his / pasture. *Refrain*

Enter his gates with thanks- / giving

and his / courts with praise;
give thanks to him and / praise his name.

For the / LORD is good

and his love endures for- / ever;
his faithfulness continues through all gener- / ations.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy / Spirit,

**as it was in the be- / ginning,
is now, and will be forever. / Amen. *Refrain***

SECOND READING

2 Corinthians 5:18–21

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

1 Corinthians 12:27

Alleluia. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. Alleluia.

GOSPEL

Luke 5:1–11

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

HYMN OF THE DAY

"O Christ, Who Called the Twelve"

Hymn 716

O Christ, who called the Twelve to rise and follow you,
forsaking old, familiar ways for ventures bold and new:
grant us to hear your call to risk security
and, bound in heart and will to you, find perfect liberty.

O Christ, who taught the Twelve the truth for ages sealed,
whose words and works awakened faith, the ways of God revealed:
instruct us now, we pray, by your empow'ring Word.
True teacher, be for all who seek their light, their life, their Lord.

O Christ, who sent the Twelve on roads they'd never trod
to serve, to suffer, teach, proclaim the nearer reign of God:
send us on ways where faith transcends timidity,
where love informs and hope sustains both life and ministry.

O Christ, th' _apostles' Lord, the martyrs' strength and song,
the crucified and risen King to whom the saints belong:
though generations pass, our tribute still we bring,
our hymns a sacrifice of praise, our lives an offering.

SERMON

NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

OFFERING

If you prefer to give online, the code at the right will take you to our Online Giving page. We invite our online givers to join in our offering with an "I Give Online" card in the pew racks.



PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Gracious God, you have brought us together in a church body in which your Word is proclaimed faithfully, the message of reconciliation through Christ is the central focus of ministry, and the mission is to reach the lost and strengthen the saved. For this gift of your grace, we give you thanks. Work in us by your Holy Spirit to rekindle our zeal for the work you have set before us. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Lord, you have given us opportunities to proclaim your Word in our nation and throughout the world. Move the hearts of more young people to prepare for the teaching and preaching ministry. Help us view them as your precious gifts. Bless the work of our schools that prepare them for ministry and provide the opportunities for them to serve in your kingdom. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Lord, you have brought us together as a church body that we may proclaim your praise. Inspire us by your grace to let our light shine so that more people may be led to glorify you. Forgive us when we fall short of living and working together as your people. Renew in us an godly determination to serve you and one another in love. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Lord, you have preserved our synod and blessed its ministry for the past 175 years. We thank you for the faithful ministers of the gospel throughout our history who have taught your truth and proclaimed your Word. Bless us in the future as you have in the past so that our synod, its congregations, and each of us may boldly confess your name for the salvation of precious souls. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

Silent prayer

Hear us, help us, and hold your guiding hand over us that in all our service your saving name may be glorified; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

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

THE SACRAMENT

(Guests, please see our communion practice on page 2.)
(Gluten-free wafers are available; ask Pastor.)

Preface - Sung

CW 183

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give him thanks and praise.**

It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who promised that wherever two or three come together in his name, there he is with them to shepherd his flock until he comes again in glory. Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY - SUNG

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power, God of might. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest, hosanna in the highest!

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my τ body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my τ blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The peace of the Lord be with you always. **Amen.**

JESUS, LAMB OF GOD - SUNG

Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.
Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.
Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; grant us your
peace.

CHOIR SONG

“When God Dips His Love in My Heart”

DISTRIBUTION HYMN

“The Church’s One Foundation”

Hymn 855

The Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord;
she is his new creation by water and the Word.
From heav’n he came and sought her to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.

Elect from ev’ry nation, yet one o’er all the earth;
her charter of salvation: one Lord, one faith, one birth.
One holy name she blesses, partakes one holy food,
and to one hope she presses, with ev’ry grace endued.

The Church shall never perish. Her dear Lord, to defend,
to guide, sustain, and cherish, is with her to the end.
Tho’ there be those that hate her and strive to see her fail,
against both foe and traitor she ever shall prevail.

Tho’ with a scornful wonder the world sees her oppressed,
by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed,
yet saints their watch are keeping; their cry goes up, “How long?”
and soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song.

Mid toil and tribulation and tumult of her war
she waits the consummation of peace forevermore
till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blest,
and the great Church victorious shall be the Church at rest.

CLOSING PRAYER

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his mercy endures forever.

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup,
we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for the foretaste of the heavenly banquet you have given us in this Sacrament. Through this gift you have fed our faith, nourished our hope, and strengthened our love. By your Spirit, help us to live as your holy people until that day when you will receive us as your guests at the wedding supper of the Lamb, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

"God's Word Is Our Great Heritage"

Hymn 640

God's Word is our great heritage and shall be ours forever;
to spread its light from age to age shall be our chief endeavor.
Through life it guides our way, in death it is our stay.
Lord, grant, while worlds endure, we keep its teachings pure
throughout all generations.

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