

St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church

A Family Connecting in Christ



Pastor Kevin Raddatz
Principal Jon Woldt
501 West Park Avenue
Libertyville, IL 60048
847-362-4424
www.StJohnsLib.com

WELCOME TO ST. JOHN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

At this time our services are for people wearing masks and social distancing!

Please know that even as we experience this awkwardness, your Good Shepherd holds you close to his heart and goes with you to share his love!

To Our Guests

- We pray that you receive a warm welcome and are blessed by the message of God's Word in our lessons and hymns. If you have questions, please ask!
- Our service is designed to focus us on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit does that by exposing our need for Christ and by showing us the wonders of God's grace in Christ – forgiveness and peace, help and hope for life in this world, and life forever with God in heaven.

Our Communion Practice

We practice close communion, the Biblical and ancient practice of the church.

We invite our congregation members and visitors from sister WELS or ELS congregations to join us, but ask Christians from other denominations to kindly respect our practice. Further explanation is in the pew racks or from our pastor.

We Care about Your Children

We love to have children with us in worship.

- If your children are crying loudly, our nursery, Gathering Area (back of church), and downstairs Fellowship Hall are audio-equipped for you and your young children. When your children are ready, come back so we can worship together.

We Care about Your Special Needs

- **Large Print** Service Folders are available from an usher.
- **Hearing Assistance** for those with hearing aids is provided through our Hearing Loop or personal hearing devices available at the "sound table."
- A **wheelchair lift** is available for your assistance; please ask an usher.



Our Facilities

Restrooms are in our Fellowship Hall, downstairs and to the right of the kitchen.

Our Ministry

St. John offers an excellent preschool-8th grade school program. We are members of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) - www.wels.net.

February 7, 2021

DIVINE SERVICE II

IN OUR WORLD TODAY... it isn't always easy to recognize the difference between good and bad. For example, is a leech sucking the blood out of someone's arm a good thing or a bad thing? It depends.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we see how God uses events or conditions we might call bad to work for our good. Yes, even on our "bad" days, we get to thank our Lord!

OPENING HYMN

"Jesus, Lead Us On"

Hymn 422

Jesus, lead us on Till our rest is won;
And although the way be cheerless,
We will follow, calm and fearless.
Guide us by your hand To our fatherland.

If the way be drear, If the foe be near,
Let not faithless fears o'ertake us;
Let not faith and hope forsake us,
For through many a woe To our home we go.

When we seek relief From a long-felt grief,
When temptations come alluring,
Make us patient and enduring;
Show us that bright shore Where we weep no more.

Jesus, still lead on Till our rest is won.
Heav'nly Leader, still direct us;
Still support, console, protect us
Till we safely stand In our fatherland.

INVOCATION

M: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

CONFESSION

M: Dear friends, let us approach God with a true heart and confess our sins, asking him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to forgive us.

C: **Lord of life, I confess that I am by nature dead in sin.**
For faithless worrying and selfish pride,
For sins of habit and sins of choice,
For the evil I have done and the good I have failed to do,
I deserve to be cast away from your presence forever.
O Lord, I am sorry for my sins. Forgive me, for Jesus' sake.

ABSOLUTION

M: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. In his great mercy, God made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in our sins. Hear the word of Christ through his called servant: I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

LORD, HAVE MERCY (*Kyrie*)

M: In peace, let us pray to the Lord.
For the well-being of all people everywhere, that they may receive from you all they need to sustain body and life, hear our prayer, O Lord.

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: For the spread of your life-giving gospel throughout the world, that all who are lost in sin may be brought to faith in you, hear our prayer, O Christ.

C: **Christ, have mercy.**

M: For patience and perseverance in this life, that we may not lose the hope of heaven as we await your return, hear our prayer, O Lord.

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: Lord of life, live in us that we may live for you.

C: **Amen.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O Lord, our God, govern the nations on earth and direct the affairs of this world so that your Church may worship you in peace and joy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

FIRST LESSON

Jeremiah 24

After Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and the officials, the craftsmen and the artisans of Judah were carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the LORD showed me two baskets of figs placed in front of the temple of the LORD. One basket had very good figs, like those that ripen early; the other basket had very poor figs, so bad they could not be eaten.

Then the LORD asked me, "What do you see, Jeremiah?"

"Figs," I answered. "The good ones are very good, but the poor ones are so bad they cannot be eaten."

Then the word of the LORD came to me: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Like these good figs, I regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I sent away from this place to the land of the Babylonians. My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.

"'But like the poor figs, which are so bad they cannot be eaten,' says the LORD, 'so will I deal with Zedekiah king of Judah, his officials and the survivors from Jerusalem, whether they remain in this land or live in Egypt. I will make them abhorrent and an offense to all the kingdoms of the earth, a reproach and a byword, an object of ridicule and cursing, wherever I banish them. I will send the sword, famine and plague against them until they are destroyed from the land I gave to them and their fathers.'"

VERSE OF THE DAY

Alleluia! And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Alleluia! (Romans 8:28)

GOSPEL LESSON

Mark 8: 31-38

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

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 fully 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.

HYMN

"God Moves in a Mysterious Way"

Hymn 420

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

2 Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He has a smiling face.

3 Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.

4 You fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy and will break
In blessing on your head.

Sermon-Based Bible Study - Jeremiah 24

February 7, 2021

There's an old Chinese story about a rice farmer who lived a very simple life. He had a small home and a few children, a small field of rice just enough to feed and provide for his family. Here's one version of the story -

One day a herd of wild horses come running through the village. They run into his rice field and get stuck in the mud and they can't get away. Now they're his! His neighbor comes running over: "This is good news! Such good fortune! You are rich, this is amazing!" And the rice farmer simply says: "Good news, bad news, who knows?"

A few weeks later his son, twelve years old, decides to take one of the wild horses for a ride. He jumps on and very shortly the wild horse throws him off, and the young son breaks his leg. The neighbor comes running over and says, "Oh no, this is such bad news!" And the farmer simply says, "Good news, bad news, who knows?"

A week later a Chinese general is marching through the farmer's village; he's marching with his army on the way to war. On the way, marching through the villages, they draft, they conscript, they take every boy over ten years old who is healthy - and off to war they go. In the farmer's village, all the healthy boys are taken - except the farmer's son because he has a broken leg. The neighbor comes running over and says, "Yes! This is wonderful news, how lucky are we!" And the father replies, "Good news, bad news, who knows?"

When you hear that story, what comes to mind for you?

The first time I read that story I thought: "Wow! I wish I had more of that wisdom, that patient perspective, that self-control." This last week reading the story again, I thought: "Oh. That's really sad." So which is it today? Maybe a bit of both. I wish I had more of the farmer's self-control, more of his patient

perspective in the face of bad news. At the same time though, that farmer's perspective is really sad. How so? More on that later.

First, I'd like to talk about this - what in our lesson made me think of this parable? It wasn't the figs. If Jeremiah saw the good figs as good and the bad figs as bad, I'll agree. What made me think of the parable was the people in the lesson and their lot in life. For example, if you were in Jerusalem and you were given the choice between, on the one hand, being chained up and forced to march some 900 miles, forced out of your home into exile in the homeland of the enemy, or, on the other hand, you could stay back home in Jerusalem, which would you choose? Free at home or forced march into exile? Most of us would choose to stay home, wouldn't we?

Which would you choose? What if God told you to surrender and go?

And if we were to see God at work, what would we see? We'd see God blessing those who got to stay home; we'd see God cursing, condemning those who were forced into exile, wouldn't we?

But the LORD said it was the opposite. Those forced out of their homes, forced into exile, they were the ones chosen by God to be blessed. And those who got to stay home, those who were able to escape, they were the ones condemned by God. Sounds so backwards, doesn't it?

So what was up? Good figs, bad figs. King Zedekiah of Jerusalem, his officials, and so many of the survivors of Jerusalem had shown themselves to be bad figs. They had shown that they weren't willing to listen to the LORD or to Jeremiah. They had shown they were going to do their thing, live their way, no matter what God said. So God saw them as bad figs. They would be left behind, as good as thrown out. If they stayed home, trouble and judgment would find them at home. If they tried to escape to Egypt, trouble and judgment would find them there. They had tested God's patience to the point that God was done with them. They had shown themselves to be done with God, and now God was done with them, just like any of us would be done with bad figs.

How do you reconcile God's loss of patience (and judgment) with his promise of grace and forgiveness?

And the good figs ... there were some in Jerusalem who had shown themselves to be good and godly. I'll drop some names - Ezekiel, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Who were they? Ezekiel was the priest and prophet who wrote the Bible book of Ezekiel. Daniel became a ruler in Babylonian empire; he survived a night in the lion's den; he wrote the Bible book of Daniel. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego - they stood up to King Nebuchadnezzar; they wouldn't bow down to his idol; we know them as the three men in the fiery furnace. Yes, among those taken into exile were some good and godly people.

But the LORD doesn't say those taken into exile were taken because they were good figs. The LORD says they were taken into exile because he would make them good figs. He would work their time in exile to be good for them. He would watch over them and bring them back home, not just home to Jerusalem, but back home to him. He would plant in them a new life; he would grow in them a new heart. They would get to live a new life connected with the LORD - "I will be their God and they will be my people." God would take and make his people to be good and godly again, in the words of our lesson - good figs.

Taken into exile, or allowed to escape - which is good? Which is bad? Things aren't always the way they look, are they? I'm sure we can think of some good days that weren't as good for us as we thought. And I know you've had some very hard days that God has worked for your good. Good days, bad days - things aren't always the way they look. But that's no surprise to us, is it?

Do you have any examples you would like to share of good days that weren't as good as you thought or bad days that God worked for your good?

Why not? We remember a special holiday, a day when families would get together and celebrate - "We have a God who saves." But the celebrating that day was off; the sky turned dark and the earth quaked; people were left with an off feeling - "What's going on?" Why? That day the finest person in the history of the world was railroaded by a religious mob, tortured, and nailed to a cross. That day the holy Son of God himself was cursed by God. That day justice and rightness looked to be completely turned on their head. That day looked so

wrong, felt so wrong. But on that day, all the wrong of the world, your wrong, my wrong, all the wrong of the world was put on Jesus. All God's anger for all the wrong this world has ever done, for all the hurt this world has ever perpetrated, all God's anger, all God's judgment was taken out on Jesus. It didn't look right; it looked all wrong. Except in the courtroom of God, something beautiful happened. All the judgment we deserved was judged to be done - finished; all the evidence against you and me was thrown out; and instead of being counted guilty before God, God now judges you as right by him. Right for life with him, right to be blessed, right for heaven forever.

Imagine all the evidence against you were still waiting for your trial, and all the judgment you deserve were still ahead of you. What would that mean for the way you live today?

Imagine all the evidence against you thrown out, all the judgment you deserve "done." What does that mean for the way you live today?

Things aren't always the way they look, are they? An ugly, awful Friday can be a Good Friday. And an empty grave on Sunday If we were to go to the cemetery to have a little visit, and we found the grave we intended to visit empty, we wouldn't think that a good thing, would we? But the empty grave of Easter Sunday is so good and beautiful. Our Jesus lives! He keeps his promises! He works the impossible! Things aren't always the way they look, are they? With Jesus we get to know that God is always working a "Yes!" to his promises. With Jesus we get to know that God is always working for our good.

And that's what makes that Chinese story, the life of the Chinese farmer so sad. Good day, bad day, all he had was - "Who knows?" With Jesus, we know! With Jesus, we know the confidence of David - "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me." With Jesus, we know - "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever! Yes, with Jesus and Jeremiah, we know the plans God has for us: "plans to give you peace and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future!" Yes, with Jesus, we know - a better day, a better life is coming! Amen.

On your dark days, how do you remind yourself of the hope you get to have in Jesus?

HYMN

“What God Ordains is Always Good”

Hymn 429

What God ordains is always good; His will is just and holy.
As he directs my life for me, I follow meek and lowly.
My God indeed In ev'ry need Knows well how he will shield me;
To him, then, I will yield me.

What God ordains is always good; He never will deceive me.
He leads me in his righteous way And never will he leave me.
I take content What he has sent; His hand that sends me sadness
Will turn my tears to gladness.

What God ordains is always good; He is my friend and Father.
He will not let me suffer harm Though many storms may gather.
Now I may know Both joy and woe; Some day I shall see clearly
That he has loved me dearly.

What God ordains is always good. Though I the cup am drinking
Which savors now of bitterness, I take it without shrinking.
For after grief God grants relief, My heart with comfort filling
And all my sorrow stilling.

What God ordains is always good; This truth remains unshaken.
Though sorrow, need, or death be mine, I shall not be forsaken.
I fear no harm, For with his arm He will embrace and shield me;
So to my God I yield me.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

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.)

M: The Lord be with you.

C: **(Spoken) And also with you.**

M: Lift up your hearts.

C: **We lift them up unto the Lord.**

M: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

C: **It is good and right so to do.**

M: 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 rose from the dead in glorious triumph to bring forgiveness to the world and everlasting life to all who believe.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

M: 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 † 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 † 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."

M: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: **Amen.**

LAMB OF GOD

Agnus Dei

Lamb of God, you take a - way the
sin of the world; have mer - cy on us.

Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the
world; have mer - cy on us. Lamb of God,
you take a - way the sin of the world;
grant us your peace. A - men.

BEFORE COMMUNION PRAYER

Lord, I am not worthy to be a guest at your holy table. But you are the friend of sinners, and you will not cast me out. This bread is your body, which bore my sins upon the tree. This wine is your blood, which purifies me from all guilt. At your invitation, I come rejoicing. Receive me, my Savior.

AFTER COMMUNION PRAYER

Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, for nourishing me in this sacrament with your body and blood. You have given me forgiveness, life, and salvation. Let me always remain in you as a branch remains in the vine. Send me out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.

DISTRIBUTION HYMN

"Be Still, My Soul"

Hymn 415

Be still, my soul; the Lord is on your side;
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
Leave to your God to order and provide;
In ev'ry change he faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul; your best, your heav'nly friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Be still, my soul; your God will undertake
To guide the future as he has the past.
Your hope, your confidence, let nothing shake;
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul; the waves and winds still know
His voice who ruled them while he lived below.

Be still, my soul, though dearest friends depart
And all is darkened in the vale of tears;
Then you will better know his love, his heart,
Who comes to soothe your sorrows and your fears.
Be still, my soul; your Jesus can repay
From his own fullness all he takes away.

Be still, my soul; the hour is hast'ning on
When we shall be forever with the Lord,
When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
Sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.
Be still, my soul; when change and tears are past,
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

CLOSING PRAYER

M: We give you thanks, O Lord, for the foretaste of the heavenly banquet that you have given us to eat and to drink 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

M: 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

“Children of the Heavenly Father”
Hymn 449

Children of the heav’nly Father safely in his bosom gather;
Nestling bird or star in heaven such a refuge ne’er was given.

God his own doth tend and nourish; in his holy courts they flourish.
From all evil things he spares them; in his mighty arms he bears them.

Neither life nor death shall ever from the Lord his children sever;
Unto them his grace he showeth, and their sorrows all he knoweth.

Though he giveth or he taketh, God his children ne’er forsaketh;
His the loving purpose solely to preserve them pure and holy.

OFFERING

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