

Holy Eucharist

Rite II



Third Sunday after the Epiphany

**The Rev. Robert Odom, Celebrant
January 25, 2026**

*The altar flowers are given by John Bridges & Jeremy Cole
in celebration of Jeremy's birthday.*

**See the end of this bulletin for the Order of Service for
LITURGY OF THE WORD**

The Word of God

Opening Hymn

Christ for the world we sing 537

1 Christ for the world we sing! The world to
2 Christ for the world we sing! The world to
3 Christ for the world we sing! The world to
4 Christ for the world we sing! The world to

Christ we bring with low - ing zeal; the poor, and
Christ we bring with fer - vent prayer; the way - ward
Christ we bring with one ac - cord; with us the
Christ we bring with joy - ful song; the new - born

them that mourn, the faint and o - ver - borne,
and the lost, by rest - less pas - sions tossed,
work to share, with us re - proach to dare,
souls, whose days, re - claimed from er - ror's ways,

sin - sick and sor - row - worn, whom Christ doth heal.
re - deemed at count - less cost from dark de - spair.
with us the cross to bear, for Christ our Lord.
in - spired with hope and praise, to Christ be - long.

Words: Samuel Wolcott (1813-1886). Music: *Moscow*, melody Felice de Giardini (1716-1796); harm. *The New Hymnal*, 1916
based on *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, 1875, and Lowell Mason (1792-1892).

The Opening Acclamation

People **Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
And blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever. Amen.**

The Collect of Purity

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name, through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Gloria

Hymnal S-280

1. Glo - ry to God in the high - est, and
peace to his peo - ple on earth. 2. Lord God, heaven - ly
King, al - might - y God and Fa - ther, we wor - ship you, we
give you thanks, we praise you for your glo - ry. 3. Lord Je - sus
Christ, on - ly Son of the Fa-ther, Lord God, Lamb of God, 4. you
take a - way the sin of the world: have mer - cy
on us; 5. you are seat - ed at the right hand of the Fa-ther: re -
ceive our prayer. 6. For you a - lone are the Ho - ly One,
you a - lone are the Lord, 7. you a - lone are the Most



Music: Robert Powell (b. 1932), rev. Setting: Copyright © Church Publishing Inc.

The Collect of the Day

Celebrant The Lord be with you.

People And also with you.

Celebrant Let us pray.

Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Lesson

Isaiah 9:1-4

There will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness--on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

After the reading, the lector says

The Word of the Lord.

People Thanks be to God.

Psalm 27:1, 5-13

1 The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom then shall I fear? *
the Lord is the strength of my life;
of whom then shall I be afraid?

5 One thing have I asked of the Lord;
one thing I seek; *
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life;

6 To behold the fair beauty of the Lord *
and to seek him in his temple.

7 For in the day of trouble he shall keep me safe in his shelter; *
he shall hide me in the secrecy of his dwelling
and set me high upon a rock.

8 Even now he lifts up my head *
above my enemies round about me.

9 Therefore I will offer in his dwelling an oblation
with sounds of great gladness; *
I will sing and make music to the Lord.

10 Hearken to my voice, O Lord, when I call; *
have mercy on me and answer me.

11 You speak in my heart and say, "Seek my face." *
Your face, Lord, will I seek.

12 Hide not your face from me, *
nor turn away your servant in displeasure.

13 You have been my helper;
cast me not away; *
do not forsake me, O God of my salvation.

Second Lesson

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

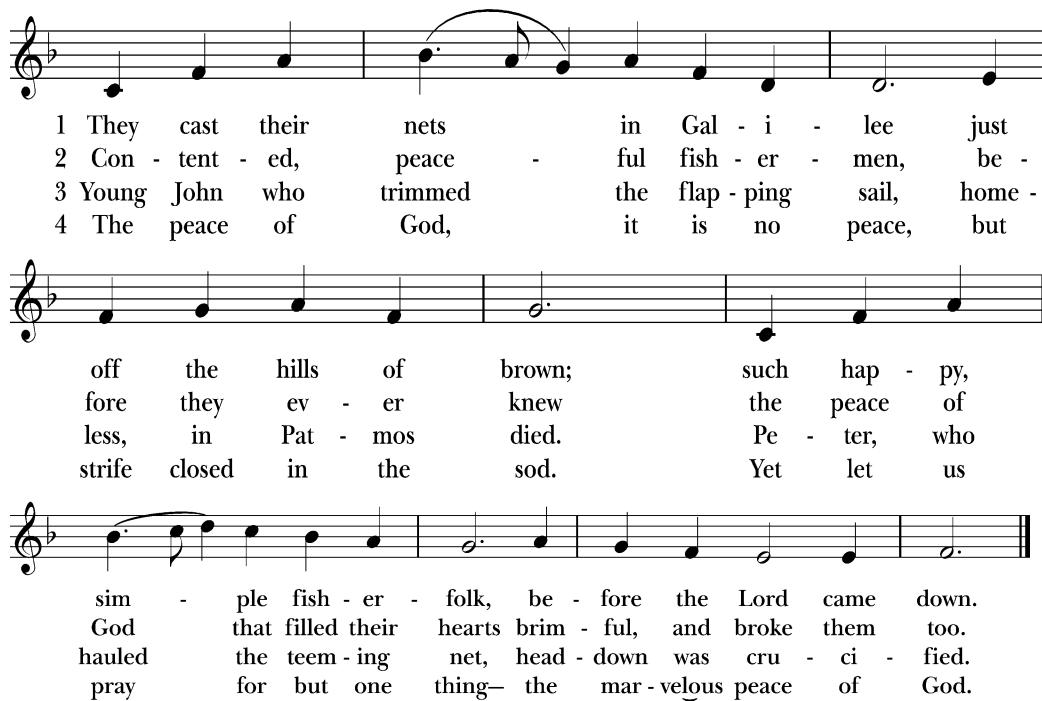
After the reading, the lector says

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

Sequence Hymn

They cast their nets in Galilee 661

Vs. 1-3, Gospel, vs. 4



1 They cast their nets in Gal - i - lee just
2 Con - tent - ed, peace ful fish - er - men, be -
3 Young John who trimmed the flap - ping sail, home -
4 The peace of God, it is no peace, but

off the hills of brown; such hap - py,
fore they ev - er knew the peace of
less, in Pat - mos died. Pe - ter, who
strife closed in the sod. Yet let us

sim - ple fish - er - folk, be - fore the Lord came down.
God that filled their hearts brim - ful, and broke them too.
hauled the teen - ing net, head - down was cru - ci - fied.
pray for but one thing— the mar - velous peace of God.

Words: William Alexander Percy (1885-1942), alt. Copyright by Edward B. Marks Music Corporation. Used with permission.
Music: Georgetown, David McKinley Williams (1887-1978). Copyright © The Church Pension Fund.

Then, all standing, the Deacon or Celebrant reads the Gospel, first saying

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew.
People *Glory to you, Lord Christ.*

The Gospel Lesson

Matthew 4:12-23

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.” From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

After the Gospel, the Deacon or Celebrant says

The Gospel of the Lord.
People Praise to you, Lord Christ.

The Sermon **See the end of the bulletin for *Sermons That Work* for the 3rd Sunday after the Epiphany**

The 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:
 by the power of the Holy Spirit
 he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
 and was made man.
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.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic 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.

Prayers of the People VI

The Leader and People pray responsively

In peace, we pray to you, Lord God.

Silence

For all people in their daily life and work;

For our families, friends, and neighbors, and for those who are alone.

For this community, the nation, and the world;

For all who work for justice, freedom, and peace.

For the just and proper use of your creation;

For the victims of hunger, fear, injustice, and oppression.

For all those who are in danger, sorrow, or any kind of trouble;

For those who minister to the sick, the friendless, and the needy.

For the peace and unity of the Church of God;

For all who proclaim the Gospel, and all who seek the Truth.

For Sean, our Presiding Bishop, for Andy, Jeff, Kai, Hector, and Brian, our bishops, for our supply priests, and for all bishops and other ministers,

For all who serve God in his Church.

For the special needs and concerns of this congregation.

Silence

Hear us, Lord;

For your mercy is great.

We thank you, Lord, for all the blessings of this life (including the birthdays of

[_____] and the anniversaries of [_____].)

Silence

We will exalt you, O God our King;

And praise your Name for ever and ever.

We pray for all who have died, [especially _____,] that they may have a place in your eternal kingdom.

Silence

Lord, let your loving-kindness be upon them;

Who put their trust in you.

We pray to you also for the forgiveness of our sins.

Silence may be kept.

Leader and People

Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father;

In your compassion forgive us our sins,

Known and unknown,

Things done and left undone;

And so uphold us by your Spirit

That we may live and serve you in newness of life,

To the honor and glory of your Name;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Celebrant concludes with an absolution or a suitable Collect.

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. *Amen.*

The Peace

Celebrant The peace of the Lord be always with you.
People And also with you.

The Announcements

Sunday, 1/25	9:45a	Adult Lectionary Discussion Children's Sunday School on request
Wednesday, 1/28	12:00p	Morning Prayer Service 12:30p Bible Study 2:00p Grief Support Group 7:00p Choir Practice
Thursday, 1/29	5:30p	Handbell Practice
Friday, 1/30	6:00p	SUBSTITUTE DAY IF 1/23 CANCELLED DUE TO BAD WEATHER Serendipity Dinner – Parish Hall
Saturday, 1/31	8:30a	Breakfast for All
	9:00a	Men's Group Meeting
	10:00a	Church Under a Bridge Lunch Prep

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sunday, 2/1	Undesignated Offering to Discretionary Fund	
	9:45a	Adult Lectionary Discussion Children's Sunday School on request
Monday, 2/2	6:30p	Book Club
Wednesday, 2/4	12:00p	Morning Prayer Service 12:30p Bible Study 2:00p Grief Support Group 7:00p Choir Practice
Thursday, 2/5	5:30p	Handbell Practice
Saturday, 2/7	9:00a	DOK Meeting
	11:00a	Vestry Retreat

SAVE THE DATE

Sunday, 2/8	12:00p	Conversations exploring Cultuaal Perspectives
Monday, 2/16	6:30p	Book Club

Tuesday, 2/17	11:30a	Out-to-Lunch Bunch
		Pancake Supper
Wednesday, 2/18		Ash Wednesday
Saturday, 2/21	6:00p	Thrive
Wednesday, 2/25	12:00p	Lenten Healing Service and Luncheon begins

Prayer for a New Rector

Almighty God, giver of every good gift: look graciously on St. Francis and so guide the minds of those who shall choose a rector for this parish, that we may receive a faithful pastor, who will care for your people and equip us for your ministries; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer 51. For a Birthday

Watch over thy child, O Lord, as *his* days increase; bless and guide *him* wherever he may be. Strengthen *him* when *he* stands; comfort *him* when discouraged or sorrowful; raise *him* up if *he* fall; and in *his* heart may your peace which passes understanding abide all the days of *his* life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Prayer for St. Francis

Heavenly Father, we come to you at this time, seeking your perfect plan for St. Francis. We seek your wisdom, discernment, and guidance as to how we may serve you best and to your glory. Make us a church where your Son, Jesus, is lifted up as Lord and Savior and where the healing power and presence of the Holy Spirit is known. Even as your people trusted in you to bring them to the Promised Land, we look to you as God and Father to lead us in all things. We trust you to bring to us the people and resources to help us accomplish your work. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

The Holy Communion

The Offertory

Doxology

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow.
Praise him all creatures here below.
Praise him above ye heavenly hosts.
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen*

The Great Thanksgiving

Eucharistic Prayer A

The people remain standing. The Celebrant faces them and sings or says

People The Lord be with you.
 People And also with you.
 Celebrant Lift up your hearts.
 People We lift them to the Lord.
 Celebrant Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
 People It is right to give him thanks and praise.

Then, facing the Holy Table, the Celebrant proceeds

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

Here a Proper Preface is sung or said on all Sundays, and on other occasions as appointed.

Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name:

The Sanctus

S-130

The following is sung or said, all standing.



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of power and
 might,
 Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord,
 God of power and might,
 hea - ven and earth are
 full, full of your glo - ry. Ho -

Music: From *Deutsche Messe*, Franz Peter Schubert (1797-1828); arr. Richard Proulx (b. 1937). Copyright © 1985 GIA Publications, Inc.

The people stand or kneel. Then the Celebrant continues

Holy and gracious Father: In your infinite love you made us for yourself; and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all.

He stretched out his arms upon the cross, and offered himself in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

At the following words concerning the bread, the Celebrant is to hold it or lay a hand upon it; and at the words concerning the cup, to hold or place a hand upon the cup and any other vessel containing wine to be consecrated.

On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, “Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.”

After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, “Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me.”

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:

Celebrant and People

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

The Celebrant continues

We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, O Father, in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts. Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him. Sanctify us also that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace; and at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom.

All this we ask through your son Jesus Christ. By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever.

AMEN.

And now, as our Savior
Christ has taught us,
we are bold to say,

People and Celebrant

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,
for ever and ever. Amen.

The Breaking of Bread

The Celebrant breaks the consecrated Bread. A period of silence is kept.

Then may be sung or said

[Alleluia.] Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;
Therefore let us keep the feast. [Alleluia.]

Cantor or Choir

My flesh is food in - deed, and my blood is drink in -
deed, says the Lord. My Lord. Those who eat my
flesh and drink my blood dwell in me and I in them. My
flesh is food in - deed, and my blood is drink in - deed, says the Lord.

Music: Ray W. Urwin (b. 1950). Copyright © 1984 by Ray W. Urwin. Used by permission.

Facing the people, the Celebrant says the following Invitation

The Gifts of God for the People of God.

and may add Take them in remembrance that Christ died for
you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

*The ministers receive the Sacrament and then immediately deliver it to the people.
The Bread and the Cup are given to the communicants with these words*

The Body of Christ, the bread of heaven. [Amen.]

The Blood of Christ, the cup of salvation. [Amen.]

Communion Hymns

My God, thy table now is spread 321

1 My God, thy ta - ble now is spread, thy cup with
2 O let thy ta - ble hon - ored be, and fur - nished
3 Drawn by thy quick-en ing grace, O Lord, in coun - less
4 Nor let thy spread - ing Gos - pel rest till through the

love doth o - ver - flow; be all thy chil - dren
 well with joy - ful guests; and may each soul sal -
 num - bers let them come and gath - er from their
 world thy truth has run, till with this Bread shall
 thith - er led, and let them thy sweet mer - cies know.
 va - tion see, that here its sa - cred pledg - es tastes.
 Fa - ther's board the Bread that lives be - yond the tomb.
 all be blessed who see the light or feel the sun.

Words: Sts. 1-3, Philip Doddridge (1702-1751), alt.; st. 4, Isaac Watts (1674-1748), alt. Music: *Rockingham*, melody from *Second Supplement to Psalmody in Miniature*, ca. 1780; adapt. Edward Miller (1731-1807); harm. Samuel Webbe (1740-1816).

Post Communion Prayer

After Communion, the Celebrant says

Let us pray.

Celebrant and People

Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Priest may bless the people.

Closing Hymn

The people who in darkness walked 126

1 The peo - ple who in dark - ness walked have seen a glo - rious light;
 2 To hail thy ris - ing, Sun of life, the ga - thering na - tions come,
 3 To us the prom-ised Child is born, to us the Son is given;
 4 His name shall be the Prince of Peace for ev - er - more a - dored,
 5 His power in - creas-ing still shall spread, his reign no end shall know;

1 on them broke forth the heaven - ly dawn who dwelt in death and night.
 2 joy - ous as when the reap - ers bear their har - vest trea - sures home.
 3 him shall the tribes of earth o - bey, and all the hosts of heaven.
 4 the Won - der - ful, the Coun - sel - lor, the might - y God and Lord.
 5 jus - tice shall guard his throne a - bove, and peace a - bound be - low.

Words: John Morison (1749-1798), alt.; para. of Isaiah 9:2-7. Music: *Dundee*, melody *The CL Psalms of Davis*, 1615; harm. Thomas Ravenscroft (1592-1635?), alt.

The Deacon, or the Celebrant, dismisses them with these words

People Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.
Thanks be to God.

The Holy Eucharist Rite II Liturgy of the Word

Processional Hymn

Confession of Sin

The Officiant says the following

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.
Silence may be kept.

Officiant and People

Most merciful God,
 we confess that we have sinned against you
 in thought, word, and deed,
 by what we have done,
 and by what we have left undone.
 We have not loved you with our whole heart;
 we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
 We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
 For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
 have mercy on us and forgive us;
 that we may delight in your will,
 and walk in your ways,
 to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Gloria

The Collect of the Day

The Lessons

Sequence Hymn

The Gospel

The Sermon *from Sermons That Work*

The Nicene Creed

The Prayers of the People Form VI

Offertory

Doxology

The Lord's Prayer

The Peace

The Announcements

The Prayer for St. Francis

Closing Hymn

Sermons That Work - The Third Sunday After Epiphany (A)

A Poor Church for the Poor

The Rev. Dr. Adam Shoemaker, Rector of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in downtown Charleston, South Carolina.

The calling of the first disciples in the Gospel of Matthew can seem unrealistic or even fantastical. Jesus walks along the Sea of Galilee and calls two sets of brothers, Peter and Andrew, James and John, as they go about their daily routine as fishermen. In both instances, the response to Jesus' call is immediate. All four men "immediately" drop what they are doing, leave their previous lives behind, and follow after Jesus. James and John make such a quick and hasty departure that they leave behind their no doubt dumbstruck father Zebedee without even saying goodbye. The whole scene can feel intimidating to most who have come to their faith in Christ in a far more gradual and halting way.

It does not take a reader long, however, to come to understand that the immediacy with which these four fishermen answer the call does not mean that life as a disciple of Jesus is any easier for them. James and John—sometimes dubbed “the sons of thunder”—are frequently quarrelsome and routinely vie for prominence amongst the disciples. Jesus, tired of their ambitions, chastises them for their request to sit at his side in glory. And Peter denies Jesus three times when he needs him the most. The gospels repeatedly testify to the fact that, however readily the disciples initially respond to the call of Jesus, they are just as flawed, fallible, and full of fear as anyone else. They struggle to follow Jesus and struggle to live in community with one another. There are frequent moments of division and discord.

This dynamic is also lifted up in St. Paul’s first letter to the church in Corinth, as he writes to an early Christian community rife with division. Paul writes to these Corinthians with deep concern at reports he has heard of the community quarreling with one another and separating themselves into factions. In Paul’s absence, the faith in Christ has devolved into a battle for control, as one group seeks supremacy over the others or tries to elevate one leader over another. Petty squabbles increasingly dominate the landscape. This, for St. Paul, diminishes not only the unity of the body of Christ but also the proclamation of the gospel of Christ crucified. “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

It is an understatement to say that the present times challenge the whole church with deep divisions. Political polarization, social media echo chambers, and constant distrust out in the world not only challenge the church to respond beyond its walls, but also continue to challenge the church from within. The church is always called to unity if not uniformity so that, as St. Paul puts it, the church may remain of the same mind and purpose. And yet, divisions and disagreements of all sorts persist.

The witness and work of the church are all too often diminished by such divisions that can reflect the same kinds of quarrels the early church experienced in Corinth. Even with shrinking numbers, decaying properties, and threats to viability, the witness to the Gospel is continually hindered by posturing for power; by the temptation to act out of a loss of control; and by internal tensions of every shape and flavor.

Amid these divisions within the church and the world, the answer must lie in the persistent call of the seemingly “foolish” message of the cross of Christ. What might it look like to embrace this cruciform faith amid the divisive landscape of today? How might a reassertion of the centrality of the cross help guide the way to

resurrection and new life? And where is the good news to be found in the challenges of this present moment?

Pope Francis seems to have responded to such queries when he made a “poor church for the poor” a central theme at the outset of his papacy. Inspired by the life and witness of his namesake, the 13th-century saint, Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis’ thematic focus was grounded upon a call for a humble and austere church that focuses itself on ministry to those on the margins, following in the footsteps of Jesus. As Pope, Francis quickly ruffled feathers with this focal point, because embodying this call for a church that is poor offers an invitation to a way of life radically different from the ways of this world.

A “poor church” is a church that does not exist to assert itself—not the grandeur of its sacred spaces, not the pomp and circumstance of its cherished ways of worship, not the authority it believes it should have in society—but rather exists “to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might be emptied of its power.” For Pope Francis, this meant laying down some of the trappings of papal ceremonial authority. It meant repurposing church property or financial resources for ministry to the poor, and it meant a willingness to sometimes even transgress long-held assumptions of who was welcome into the household of God. To some, such actions seemed foolish, but they bear witness to the power of God made perfect in weakness.

An embodied example of a “poor church for the poor” within the Episcopal tradition, is the transformation that occurred decades ago at the Church of the Holy Apostles in lower Manhattan. This parish, by the late 1970s, had fallen into hard times and was struggling to keep the doors open. A young priest arrived at just that time to be a chaplain of sorts to what was then a dying congregation. In relatively short order, however, the priest and people of Holy Apostles chose to empty themselves out in service of the large homeless population that surrounded them. They chose to lean into a sense of mission to the poor, as opposed to clinging to the vestiges of what they had been up to that point. And slowly but surely, what began as a small group handing out sandwiches just beyond the church doors soon turned into a large feeding program. When a fire damaged the church property, the congregation repurposed their nave to allow the place where the congregants were fed at God’s table be the very same place where the homeless and hungry of New York could be fed during the week. Today, the Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen is one of the largest continuous feeding programs in the country, sustained by a parish community who continues to worship and praise God each and every week.

Jesus begins his ministry in the Galilee during a dark and difficult time. His cousin, John the Baptist, had been arrested. Many of the impoverished and oppressed

people around him occupied a land that seemed shrouded in darkness and despair.

In that context, Jesus begins his ministry by promising a great light through the inbreaking kingdom of God. The church exists to carry forward that ministry by, as Matthew's Gospel puts it, being "salt" and "light" for the world. The church exists to illuminate the darkest of places by proclaiming the good news of the gospel and following in the footsteps of Jesus. In other words, the church exists for just such a time of this; a time full of division, doubt, and despair.

The invitation is to repeatedly embody the good news of the gospels by claiming this calling not for our own sakes, but for the welfare and well-being of the world that God has made and loves so very much. This requires a way of life that may look and feel foolish, given the ways of this world. This great and wondrous calling demands the church remain united in prayer and worship, grounded in love, and ever committed to the cruciform way of Jesus.

A "poor church for the poor" offers a way when it may seem like there is no way. The way of humility, austerity, and simplicity of life—embodied by that poor man from Assisi—may just be the key for the church of the 21st century, amid all the darkness and divisions of our world. The cruciform way may not only offer a path to transcend our divisions, but also to guide all God's people—and indeed the whole human family—towards resurrection and new life.



Sermons that Work and Bible Studies that Work are a joint offering of Forward Movement and The Office of Communication at The Episcopal Church.

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/bible-study/>

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons-that-work>