

Order of Worship for February 8, 2026 8:30 AM

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you...

C: and also with you.

Opening Hymn: *"Listen, God is Calling"* – **Hymn #833** (soloist)

Order of Confession and Forgiveness

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

P: The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him.

C: "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in Him."

P: Sin began in a seed of doubt, and doubts continue to be planted in our lives. Let us confess our sins to the Lord.

(Silence for meditation and self-examination.)

P: Most merciful God,

C: We confess to You with contrite hearts that we have sinned. Our thoughts, our words, our deeds condemn us. We have failed--and refused--to bring forth the fruit which You desire. We have failed to plant and water Your word. We have taken credit for growth that belongs only to You. For the sake of the innocent sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, we plead for mercy. Forgive our sins that we may be able to stand before Your judgment seat, as those who have pleased You.

P: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end. For the sake of Jesus Christ your sins are forgiven. Grow, then, as God gives you strength and opportunity.

C: Thanks be to God! Amen.

Service of the Word

Hymn of Praise: *"Alabaré"* - **Hymn 799**

P: The Lord be with you...

C: and also with you.

Prayer of the Day:

P: Let us pray. Merciful Father, Your kindness caused the seed of the Gospel to be planted in us. Extend Your mercy now, we pray, to all people of the world who do not have hope in Jesus Christ, that Your salvation may be known to them also and that all hearts would turn to You; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord.

C: Amen.

Old Testament lesson: Isaiah 55:10-13

R: “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

“For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Epistle lesson: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

R: But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human?

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew the 13th chapter:

C: Glory to You, O Lord.

And Jesus told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

“Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the

cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to You, O Christ.

Children’s Message (8:30)

Sermon Hymn: *“Almighty God, Your Word Is Cast”*- Hymn #577

Sermon: *“God Brings the Increase”*- 1 Corinthians 3:6-9

The decline of churches has been very clear in what are called “mainline” churches—what are the traditional denominations like Catholics, Methodists, Presbyterians, and of course, Lutherans. This is not recent news. But we saw the growth of the “megachurches”—huge churches without an official connection to any denomination. But in the last five years “how the mighty have fallen!” Bill Hybel’s empire at Willow Creek, Illinois, Rick Warren’s in California, and Joel Osteen’s in Houston have all seen massive fall in attendance. The “Hillsong” movement based in Australia has seen its leader in New York go to jail and the leader in Sydney under charges of covering up sexual misconduct. One of the only groups that has seemed to have consistent growth are the Mormons, who if they truly follow what the group teaches, reject the message of Jesus. The largest growing segment of our population are called the “nones,” those saying they have no religious affiliation.

In that kind of world some sincere Christians face enormous pressure. All those people who reject or ignore Jesus are not going to be saved. That can make us think not only of all who are falling away now, but those in the past and in the future. Research claims that the vast majority of native Americans died from 1500-1600 of diseases introduced by people from the eastern hemisphere. Few of those people got to hear the Gospel of Jesus. Huge portions of the world population, where Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other pagan beliefs dominate, have little idea of who Jesus really is. When we think of all those who seem to be condemned to hell, it can leave us feeling overwhelmed or to just go on and concern ourselves to hanging on what we have.

That is what so many churches are dealing with now. Estimates are that every day churches close in this country. Every month a Lutheran congregation folds. Many churches survive financially only because of endowments that eventually will be used up. There is a shortage of pastors, but even more congregations that cannot afford the benefits, much less a salary, to pay for a pastor.

This is where we might expect to hear about how we need to go out into our world and bring people to church. That either causes us to wriggle in our pews or to tune things out. What can I do when so many seem to be leaving the church? How can we maintain in a world in which getting kids to a sporting event on a Sunday morning is more important than church, where we are taught that science and evolution have turned the Bible into a fairy tale, where the new ISU football coach introduces himself to the crowd at a basketball game with the “f” word,

where it is so easy to get hooked on things in our devices without having to leave the comforts of home, and our religion seems to have so little relevance to our daily lives?

But listen to what St. Paul, the great missionary has to say about that: “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God brings forth the increase.” Apollos was another Christian missionary. People in the congregation in Corinth were arguing over who was the better person to be baptized by—Paul, Apollos, Peter, or some other missionary. But Paul makes it clear to make things happen— “God brings forth the increase.”

In his explanation to the third article about the work of the Holy Spirit, Luther wrote, “I cannot by my own reason or strength come to the Lords Jesus or follow Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the one, true faith.” He goes on, “Even as He calls, gathers, and enlightens the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one, true faith.” We are not called by God to bring people to faith and save them from hell. We can’t do that for ourselves, much less the rest of the world. Coming to faith in Jesus Christ is described as being “born again.” Birth is not something we choose to do; it is something done to us. The only one that can give to a Christian is God, the Holy Spirit.

That puts the pressure off us to bring people to faith. God doesn’t give us a command to do what we cannot do. People have tried. You can get people to church by having it be really entertaining or by having a lot of cute young girls or providing activities to keep kids busy. You can build an empire based on a charismatic leader who creates a megachurch and its daughter churches. But the only way that people can truly be brought to faith is by the work of the Holy Spirit bringing into the hearts of each individual.

We might think, “That leaves us off the hook. All I have to worry about is my own personal faith. I can mind my own business, and let others think what they want.” But knowing that God “produces the increase,” does make us complacent. Instead, it gives up hope when we otherwise would not have it. God produces the increase so it is worth our effort, as Paul said, to “sow the seed and water it.” Notice how he uses an illustration from agriculture. It is the same area that Jesus so often used in His parables. Things start as seeds, and then grow up. And it happens in ways we can’t understand.

I didn’t have to buy any pumpkins last fall. No, I saw something growing in my mulch box last summer. I let it go, not being sure what it was, even though I had to wait to harvest the mulch in it. Then as we got near fall, I could see the little pumpkins growing on it. But they were green. Fortunately, frost came late last year, so there was time for them to ripen and turn orange. What a volunteer! All that happened so slowly, so quietly, so without fanfare!

That is how Jesus describes the Kingdom of God. It works often without us seeing it, in ways we cannot imagine. How could the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and dragging God’s people Israel advance God’s Kingdom? It placed believers with their Old Testaments in places all over the near East, places where they formed synagogues which became the starting point of so many Christian congregations founded by people like St. Paul. How could the death of Stephen benefit God’s Kingdom? It scattered early Christians to other places where people could hear from them the Gospel of Jesus. How can the migration of poor people from the Middle East to European countries advance God’s Kingdom? By bringing them into contact with churches like our Lutheran churches in Germany where you find the churches now filled with former Muslims. The most Christian continent in the world is not

Europe or North or South America, but Africa. When Christian missionaries were expelled from China in 1949 by the communists, it was estimated that there were 5 million Christians in China. It looked as though the Church was doomed there. But in 1980's when China began to open up again, it was discovered that there were about 50 million Christians in China! God brought forth the increase!

We may try to grow God's kingdom by our efforts—politics, trying to compete with popular culture, using all kinds of “carrots” to lure people inside. But God has decided to grow His Kingdom by grace, not might. His Kingdom works when we drive an elderly person to a doctor's appointment, when we stay up to listen to a fellow student going through a rough time, when we befriend the person everyone wants to avoid, as we remember people in our prayers, as we refuse to spread gossip, as we ask someone if we can pray with him or for her.

The prophet Elijah thought in his despair that he alone worshiped the true God after he was marked for death by King Ahab and Queen Jezebel who worshiped the god Baal. But God came to him and assured him that there were 7,000 remaining in Israel who had not turned from God. Despite all who fell into idolatry God's people continued on until the coming of Jesus. And people will continue to become God's people until the time Jesus comes again. We do not always see that. But God does—and that's what counts!

The Prayer for Mission to All People

P: Lord, we pray that You will open our eyes to see how we can witness to the many people You have gathered here in our community from all over the world. Give us the attitude of Abraham who welcomed strangers into his tent with the words:

C: “Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed.” (Genesis 18:4-5)

P: We thank You for Your mercy which extends to all people, for You reach out to all the world with Your Kingdom as Jesus told us:

C: “People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the Kingdom of God.” (Luke 13:29)

P: Help us to see that the good news of Jesus is for all people and all cultures as Peter discovered when You sent him to Cornelius:

C: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts people from every nation who fear Him and do what is right.” (Acts 10:34-35)

P: Help us to be a part of how You break down the barriers that divide us through the unifying message of Jesus:

C: “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all.” (Romans 10:12)

P: Give us the courage of the young Hebrew slave girl who pointed her sick master Naaman, general of the Syrian army, to Your prophet with the words:

C: “If only my master would see the prophet Elisha who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.” (2 Kings 5:3)

P: Grant us the patience and the understanding to try to understand the many people in our community who are from different countries and cultures, so that we have the

attitude of St. Paul who said:

C: “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9:22-23)

(The pastor will continue with other petitions)

P: Make us thankful for the wonderful opportunities You give us to share our faith with people from all over the world so that we can join the hymn of praise:

C: “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:10-11) Amen.

Sharing Our Ministry

Hymn: “Greet the Rising Sun” – Hymn #871

The Lord’s Prayer:

The Closing Prayer:

ALL: Grant, O Lord, that the lips which have sung Your praise in the sanctuary may glorify You in the world, and that the tongues which have confessed Your name may ever speak the truth. Then we, with all whom You have made clean through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross will recount Your mighty miracles, proclaiming them freely-- spreading Your word to the whole world: "You are the Lord forevermore!" In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Blessing: (Pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: “Jesus Shall Reign” – Hymn #832

Postlude: