

MINNESOTA VALLEY CHURCH; January 21, 2024
3rd Sunday after Epiphany; Singers: “youth” praise team

PRELUDE: Rebekah Olson

CALL TO WORSHIP: Psalm 62:5-8

PASTOR: Find rest, O my soul, in God alone;

ALL: My hope comes from him.

PASTOR: He alone is my rock and my salvation;

ALL: He is my fortress; I will not be shaken.

PASTOR: My salvation and my honor depend on God;

ALL: He is my mighty rock, my refuge.

PASTOR: Trust in him at all times, O people;

ALL: Pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.

HYMN #554 “In Times Like These”

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

PASTOR & CONGREGATION: *We confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. 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. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen*

CHILDREN’S MESSAGE: What does your mom and dad do?

READER: Diane Plait

EPISTLE LESSON: *Jonah 3:1-5,10 Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: 2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you." 3 Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city—a visit required three days. 4 On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned." 5 The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. 10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.*

GOSPEL LESSON: *Mark 1:14-20 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 "The time has come," He said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" 16 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." 18 At once they left their nets and followed Him. 19 When He had gone a little farther, He saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. 20 Without delay He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed Him.*

READER: Here ends the reading of God’s Word.

CONGREGATION SINGS: God be praised, for His glad Tidings!

CONFESSION OF FAITH: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; Was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; And is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting. Amen

GLORIA PATRI: *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is not, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.*

SANCTITY OF LIFE SUNDAY PRAYER

SPECIAL MUSIC: Mark and Ruth Antal

ANNOUNCEMENTS & PRAYER

PRAISE SONGS: 1 or 2 praise songs chosen by LUKE

SERMON: “HELP! I AM NOT MARRIED” 1 Corinthians 7:29-35, Pastor Tom Olson *Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen*

SINGLE: About 30 percent of adults in America are single. About 30 percent of the adults in our church are single. This number is rapidly growing in our land. That means that over 75 million adults are single in our country alone. That is a big group to consider.

BIBLE: The Bible has a high view of marriage and also a high view of being single. Today’s Epistle text teaches us the value of being a single Christian. I remember when I got asked to go to work at a rescue mission in Cordova, Alaska, my mother urged me to go and said this to me, “Go now when you are single because it is much harder to do something like that after you are married.” She was right. Today we look at 1 Corinthians 7:29-35 under the theme: **IT IS OK TO NOT BE MARRIED BECAUSE...**

I. THE TIME IS SHORT

1 Corinthians 7:29-31 What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; 30 those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; 31 those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

TIME: When you are young you think you have all the time in the world to do the things you want to do. That is not true. Life goes by a lot quicker than you imagine and soon you are old and tired and can’t do too much. Paul tells us here to hold on to the things of this world very loosely.

Ecclesiastes 12:1 “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, ‘I find no pleasure in them’-

EARTH: Not only are our lives short, but world history is short. Someday soon Jesus will return and wrap things up. This world is passing away. Peter puts it this way.

2 Peter 3:10 “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”

TODAY: Both Paul and Peter urge us to live our lives in light of this reality: **THE TIME IS SHORT.** The important thing is not our marital status but it is to use every day to the fullest. When I get up in the morning, I like to face my day with this thought, “Today may be my last day on earth so I need to live it well.” Time is short...do what you need to do, say what you need to say, go where you need to go. Don’t wait until tomorrow to start living, live today. A good life is a series of well-lived todays. It has nothing to do with marital status. **A SINGLE OR A MARRIED PERSON CAN LIVE TODAY WELL.**

CONSERVATORY: It is our custom to take a January day and go to the big glass conservatory at Como Park. I call it the “poor man’s trip to Florida.” We were there this past week, basking in the sun, and the warmth, surrounded by beautiful flowers and plants. Delightful yellow birds were flying around our heads.

READER: I noticed some single people were there by themselves. One girl sat on a bench in the midst of a warm room filled with colorful flowers. She was reading a book. This single person not only used time off to read a good book, but chose to do it in midst of warmth and beauty and nice people. She made her reading time extra special. She didn’t stay home and feel sorry for herself. She used her day well.

This reminds me of a Bible verse I read at most funerals. *Psalm 90:12 “Teach us to realize the brevity of life (to number our days), so that we may grow in wisdom.”*

IT IS OK TO BE SINGLE BECAUSE LIFE IS SHORT...also because...

II. THERE ARE LESS DISTRACTIONS

1 Corinthians 7:32-34 I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs-how he can please the Lord. 33 But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world-how he can please his wife- 34 and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world-how she can please her husband.

FREEDOM: There is a freedom to serve the Lord whole-heartedly if you are single. A married person has to please their spouse, they have to raise their children, they have to earn more money, they have to stick close to home.

PAUL: The Apostle Paul was single at this point in his life. Some scholars feel that he likely was formerly married as a member of the Sanhedrin and his wife likely left him when he became a Christian. At this point in his life, he was single. He didn't have to fear death as a martyr because he was not leaving an unsupported family behind. He had freedom to travel in his gospel work as no married man could.

FLEXIBILITY: If you are single, you have a lot of flexibility you don't have if you are married. You can go places and try things easier. Mission trips are easier. Getting higher education is easier. Serving the Lord in remote places at smaller salaries is easier.

1988: When I graduated from seminary there were two small churches with tiny salaries that needed a pastor, Eugene, Oregon and Cumberland, Wisconsin. Craig Johnson and I were single and could live on very little money so we each agreed to consider those calls since the married pastors could not afford to live there. It was an opportunity made possible by being single. It set the stage for the rest of my life, including marriage and family and even my burial plots in a cemetery near Cumberland.

MADAGASCAR: When Lutheran free church missionaries went to Madagascar 80 years ago, it was not uncommon for them to get malaria and die. This was a great hardship for the spouse and for the children. Single people were really needed in those dangerous days since the risk of dying was so high.

HYMNAL: When I was single, I had the time to be the chairman of the Ambassador Hymnal project which took much of my free time for a period of five years. I could do it because I was single. Pastor Brian Davidson was single and he moved into the parsonage to help, along with widower Norwegian missionary. We called the parsonage “the Lutheran monastery.” It was a very productive time of my life and I am glad we all were single so we could take on that project.

DO IT: If you are single and not distracted by the cares of marriage and family, take advantage of it to serve the Lord and have some adventures and take risks that married people cannot do! **IT IS OK TO BE SINGLE BECAUSE THERE ARE LESS DISTRACTIONS.**

III. IT OPENS UP SPECIAL OPPORTUNITIES

1 Corinthians 7:35 I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

CLERGY: I am sure that this verse is one strong reason why the Catholic Church requires Orthodox church encourages their ministers to be single.

BENEFITS: Marriage has many benefits in serving the Lord. My wife and children have been great fellow workers in the work of the ministry. They have blessed the churches we have served.

SINGLE: But on the other hand, when I was single, I remember devoting many more hours to my ministry. I was gone all the time on visitation, teaching Bible classes and reaching out to lost souls because there was no point in staying home in that lonely parsonage.

LIBERIA: When Sharon was single, she was able to be a missionary school teacher in Liberia, West Africa. She could live on a tiny amount of money. A few weeks ago, we attended a very special service. One of her youth group young men from Africa was installed as a pastor of a Missouri Synod Lutheran Church in Cottage Grove, Minnesota. His walk with God was greatly influenced by Sharon's devotion to the Lord as a single person.

OTHERS: Many of the teachers, nurses, Bible translators, children's workers and missionaries that Sharon knew were single women who dedicated their lives to serving the Lord around the world. These missionaries had little money or savings for retirement. Anthony Rossi, the founder of Tropicana Orange Juice, in Bradenton, Florida built them a village of houses to live in freely during their retirement years.

HEAVENLY: When we visited Bradenton Missionary Village, it was a foretaste of heaven because they all had such of deep love for God. They were single on earth but united closely in a profound relationship with the Lord. They were not lonely. They were deeply fulfilled with their life calling.

UNAPOLOGETIC: So don't apologize for being single, widow, widower, or formerly married but now alone. Perhaps God has "singled" you out, even for a season, like he did for me and for Sharon, to serve him in a way that would not work if we were married. **IT IS NOT MERELY OK TO BE SINGLE.** It is an **OPPORTUNITY** that you may not have later in life if you marry. You are free from distractions and have opportunities that us married people can't participate in.

TRUST: Put it in God's hands. Say, "Here am, I send me." And trust the Lord to open and close doors. Proverbs 3:5&6 is for all of us, single or married: ***"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."***

HELP: Don't say to God, "Help! I am not married." But say, "Here I am Lord, send me on an adventure." And if you ever want to get married or have the opportunity, **THAT IS THE TIME** to cry to God and say, "HELP! I am thinking of getting married. Don't let me make a big mistake." **IT IS OK TO BE SINGLE.** Amen

Now may the peace of God, that surpasses all human comprehension, guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen

HYMN #451 "Lead On, O King Eternal"

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 that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen*

BENEDICTION: The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and grant you peace. Amen

DOXOLOGY AND THREE-FOLD AMEN

POSTLUDE: Rebekah Olson