

February 21, 2024  
In Community With Creation, Vespers Service  
6:30 p.m.

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*St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, ELCA*

**Reverend Maggie Westaby**

**5304 N 44<sup>th</sup> Ave**

**Wausau, Wisconsin 54401**

**Web Address: [stjohnwausau.org](http://stjohnwausau.org)**

**E-mail: [pastor.maggie.westaby@gmail.com](mailto:pastor.maggie.westaby@gmail.com)**

**Email: [stjohnwausau@msn.com](mailto:stjohnwausau@msn.com)**

**Office: (715) 675-6950**

## WELCOME

### CALL TO WORSHIP

Blessed be the Holy Trinity † one God, who journeys with us these forty days, and sustains us with the gift of grace.

**Amen.**

### OPENING DIALOGUE

Behold, unveiled the vesper skies: the evening has begun.

**Let prayer and praise like incense rise as sets the golden sun.**

How blest are you, all loving God, who weaves both day and night.

**A starry mantle for our road, the shadow and the light.**

Stay with us, Christ, our rest prepare as labor ebbs with night.

**And holy dreams woven with prayer till dawns the splendid light.**

### CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

God desires truth in our inward being, receiving us as we are, broken and flawed. Seeking God's mercy, let us confess our sins before God.

*Silence is kept for reflection.*

Gracious God,

**Have mercy on us. We confess that we have turned away from you,**

**knowingly and unknowingly. We have wandered from your abundant life. We have strayed from your love for all people. Turn us back to you. Give us new hearts and right spirits, that we may find what is pleasing to you, and dwell in your house forever. Amen.**

Receive this good news: God turns to you in love. Your sins are forgiven in the name of † Jesus Christ.

**Thanks be to God.**

## God, Who Made the Earth and Heaven

1 God, who made the earth and heav-en, dark-ness and light:  
 2 And when morn a-gain shall call us to run life's way,  
 3 Guard us wak-ing, guard us sleep-ing, and, when we die,  
 4 Ho-ly Fa-ther, throned in heav-en, all-ho-ly Son,

you the day for work have giv-en, for rest the night.  
 may we still, what-e'er be-fall us, your will o-bey,  
 may we in your might-y keep-ing all peace-ful lie.  
 Ho-ly Spir-it, free-ly giv-en, blest Three in One:

May your an-gel guards de-fend us, slum-ber sweet your mer-cy send us,  
 From the pow'r of e-vil hide us, in the nar-row path-way guide us,  
 When the last dread call shall wake us, then, O Lord, do not for-sake us,  
 grant us grace, we now im-plore you, till we lay our crowns be-fore you

ho-ly dreams and hopes at-tend us all through the night.  
 nev-er be your smile de-nied us all through the day.  
 but to reign in glo-ry take us with you on high.  
 and in wor-thier strains a-dore you while a-ges run.

Text: Reginald Heber, 1783-1826, st. 1, alt.; William Mercer, 1811-1873, sts. 2, 4, alt.; Richard Whately, 1787-1863, st. 3, alt.  
 Music: AR HYDY NOS, Welsh traditional; arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872-1958  
 Outside USA: Arr. from *The English Hymnal*, © Oxford University Press 1906.

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## PRAYER

Gracious Creator,

You fashioned us in your image in the midst of a world beyond our knowledge and understanding. Continue to weave us together in community with all created things, and deepen our awareness of the ways you connect us to the earth. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**



## GOSPEL: Mark 4:35-41

The holy gospel according to Mark.

### Glory to you, O Lord.

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." <sup>36</sup> And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. <sup>37</sup> A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. <sup>38</sup> But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion, and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" <sup>39</sup> And waking up, he rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Be silent! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. <sup>40</sup> He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" <sup>41</sup> And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

The Gospel of The Lord.

### Praise to you, O Christ.

## SERMON

## Great Is Thy Faithfulness

1 Great is thy faith-ful-ness, O God my Fa-ther; there is no  
 2 Sum-mer and win-ter and spring-time and har-vest, sun, moon, and  
 3 Par-don for sin and a peace that en-dur-eth, thine own dear

shad-ow of turn-ing with thee; thou chang-est not, thy com-  
 stars in their cours-es a-bove join with all na-ture in  
 pres-ence to cheer and to guide; strength for to-day and bright

pas-sions they fail not, as thou hast been, thou for-ev-er wilt be.  
 man-i-fold wit-ness to thy great faith-ful-ness, mer-cy, and love,  
 hope for to-mor-row, bless-ings all mine, with ten thou-sand be-side!

*Allegretto*

Great is thy faith-ful-ness! Great is thy faith-ful-ness! Morn-ing by

morn-ing new mer-cies I see; all I have need-ed thy

hand hath pro-vid-ed; great is thy faith-ful-ness, Lord, un-to me.

Text: Thomas O. Chisholm, 1868-1960  
 Music: FAITHFULNESS, William M. Runyan, 1870-1957  
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## **PRAYERS**

Let our prayers rise up like incense before you, the lifting up of our hands as an offering to you.  
*Silence is kept for reflection.*

Holy God, you are with us both day and night, in twilight, sunrise, and sunset. With your watchful eye and loving heart, comfort all your creation this night. Tend your ailing ones, sooth your suffering ones, hold your grieving ones, guard your little ones. Rest your weary ones, heal afflicted ones, raise your fallen ones, and guide your searching ones. Watchful God,

**Hear our prayer.**

You set stars in their places and direct the course of planets. You robed this earth with a thin garment of air and made it a haven of beauty, flourishing with life. In places now struggling for clean air, bring relief. Guide policies, inspire stewardship, until all of creation has good and clean air. Creator God,

**Hear our prayer.**

Your Spirit moves through creation with sighs too deep for words. Open our hearts to listen to the cry of the earth. Speak through your church to rebuke the forces that exploit your planet.

Spirit of God,

**Hear our prayer.**

You fashioned a world in which lands and waterways, plants and animals, together meet the needs of all that you made. We pray that such vitality may blossom around the globe. Bless those who work the soil and who manage animals. Uphold their cities, towns, and villages. Nurture bees and other pollinators. Protect farmlands and ranches from drought and flood. Free children from forced labor in the fields. Grant an economy that can sustain those families who treasure rural life. Teach us how to share with everyone the benefits of each harvest, and accept our gratitude for all the sustenance you provide. Gather us together now through the power of your Holy Spirit, and teach us to pray, how Jesus taught.

**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.**

## **PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

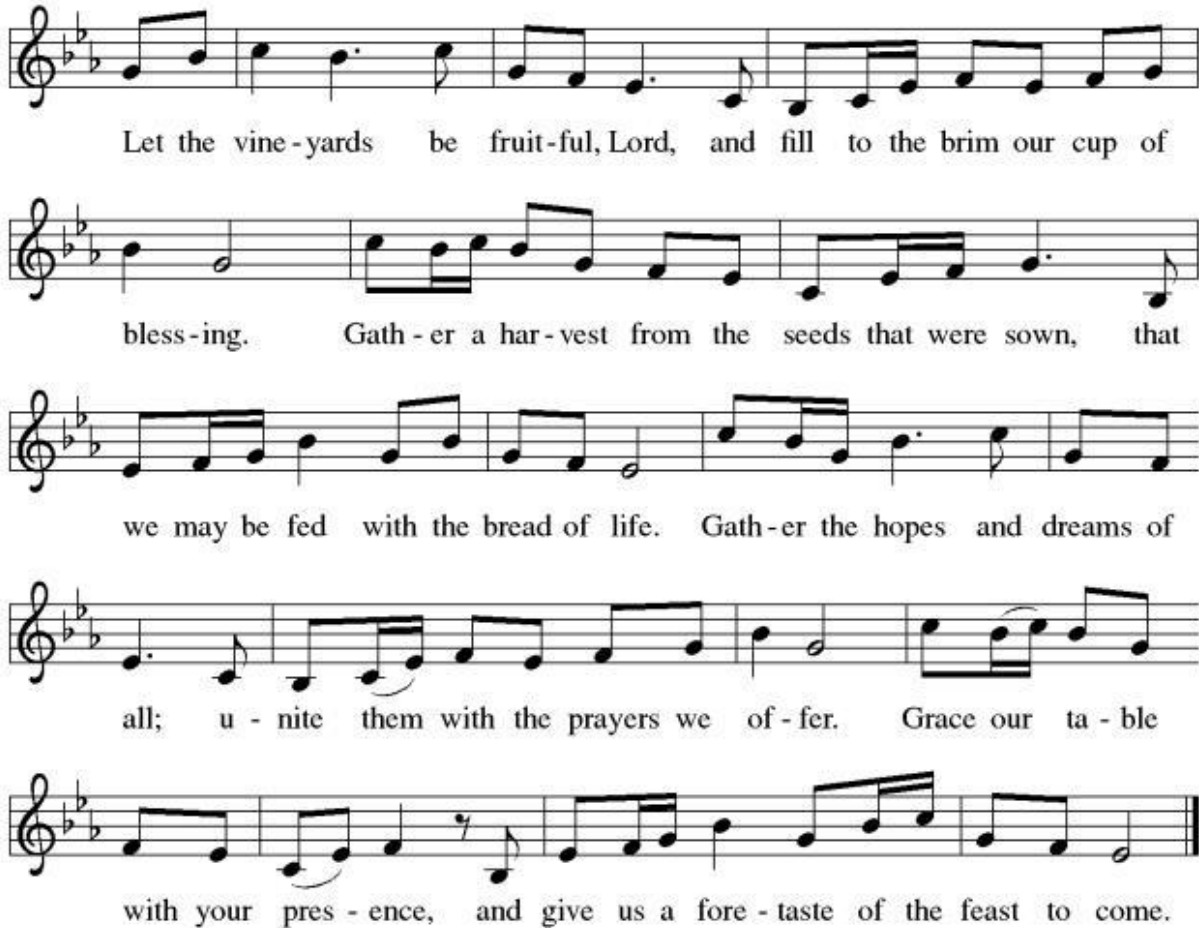
**And also with you.**

## **INVITATION TO THE OFFERING**

The God who speaks and summons the earth into being now speaks to us, calling us to offer of ourselves.

## Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful

### *Offering Song*



Let the vine-yards be fruit-ful, Lord, and fill to the brim our cup of  
bless-ing. Gath-er a har-vest from the seeds that were sown, that  
we may be fed with the bread of life. Gath-er the hopes and dreams of  
all; u-nite them with the prayers we of-fer. Grace our ta-ble  
with your pres-ence, and give us a fore-taste of the feast to come.

Text: John W. Arthur, 1922-1980

Music: Ronald A. Nelson, b. 1927

Text and music © 1978 *Lutheran Book of Worship*, admin. Augsburg Fortress.

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### **OFFERING PRAYER**

Gracious God,

Our treasures come only from you. It is only through your goodness, that we have received so much. We came into this life with nothing, and we leave the same way. Guide us, and inspire us, to share ourselves and the resources we have. May these offerings be used for the goodness of your creation.

**Amen.**

**BLESSING**

May God wrap you in love each night, providing you peace and rest,  
And while you sleep may God weave strength & courage into every breath.  
May you meet the morning with resilient vigor, ready for come what may,  
And may the light of Christ fill your heart with joy every single day.  
May the Spirit shine on you with favor, love, and never-ending grace  
And may the Three In ✝ One, bless you on this Lenten journey,  
And in every single place.

**Amen.**



## Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of three systems, each with a vocal line in the treble clef and a piano accompaniment in the bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are as follows:

1 Lord, dis - miss us with your bless - ing, fill our hearts with joy and peace;  
2 Thanks we give and ad - o - ra - tion for your gos - pel's joy - ful sound.  
3 Sav - ior, when your love shall call us from our strug - gling pil - grim way,

let us each, your love pos - sess - ing, tri - umph in re - deem - ing grace.  
May the fruits of your sal - va - tion in our hearts and lives a - bound.  
let no fear of death ap - pall us, glad your sum - mons to o - bey.

Oh, re - fresh us; oh, re - fresh us, trav - 'ling through this wil - der - ness.  
Ev - er faith - ful, ev - er faith - ful to your truth may we be found.  
May we ev - er, may we ev - er reign with you in end - less day.

Text: attr. John Fawcett, 1740–1817, sts. 1–2, alt.; Godfrey Thring, 1823–1903, st. 3, alt.  
Music: SICILIAN MARINERS, Sicilian, 18th cent.

## DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Share your bread.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Reflection questions for our focus: in community with creation:**

- What is one way you are dependent on creation in your daily life?
- What is one way you are in danger from creation in your daily life?
- What is one way our lives endanger creation?
- What is one way our lives enrich creation?

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**Lenten Devotional, from ELCA World Hunger (taken from)**

[https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/ELCA World Hunger Lent Study 2024.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/ELCA_World_Hunger_Lent_Study_2024.pdf)

*Devotional on Reconciliation*

This week’s recommended readings: Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Peter 3:18-22 Mark 1:9-15

During Advent we reflected together on what it means to encounter God. We contemplated the spaces where God is revealed to us, the invitation to be part of God’s work in history, the vocation to which the church is called today and what it means to be grasped by the proclamation of Christ’s birth. Now, during Lent, we return to this journey, exploring the many ways we encounter God as we respond to hunger, poverty and need today. In this first session we will explore the act of reconciliation, the restoration of wholeness to relationships and to people when injustice makes the fullness of life in community impossible.

Jerri Eliano de Quevedo and his wife, Sirlei Eloí, live in the Kilombo Monjolo, a community in the municipality of São Lourenço do Sul in Brazil. Like many kilombola — descendants of the 4.5 million enslaved Africans brought to Brazil between 1570 and 1857 — they support themselves and their children principally through farming a plot of land in the kilombo. The plot is small, about 2 hectares. Given the frequent droughts, inadequate infrastructure and insufficient legal or political protections, making a living in this community can be incredibly difficult. In the past Jerri and Sirlei have tried to find work in urban centers outside the kilombo, but they have no access to education, so few jobs are available to them.

For Jerri, finding a way to stay on the land while feeding his family is not just a matter of finances but also of kilombola cultural identity. “The kilombolas always had to grow their food in small spaces, all together, because they didn’t have much land,” he explains. “This, for us, is cultural, and working in another way is out of our custom.”

A cultural relationship with and ecological knowledge of the land are central to kilombola history. From Africa the kilombola brought seeds and extensive knowledge of crops, which helped some of them to develop sophisticated agroforestry and farming systems. Yet access to sufficient land has always been a challenge for kilombolas, whose communities sprang from their resistance to slavery. As Edward Shore describes in the *Texas Law Review*, “Wherever there was slavery, there was also resistance — which assumed many forms. One such form of resistance was the formation of communities by [people who had escaped enslavement], known in Brazil as mocambos and kilombolas, demononyms of Kimbundu (Angolan) origin that signified ‘hideouts’ and ‘encampments.’”<sup>1</sup> Kilombolas in Brazil are similar to maroon communities in the United States, where self-liberated enslaved people formed isolated or hidden settlements.

These communities quickly became an important and visible part of Brazilian life but remained frequent targets of vilification and violence, both during and after slavery. Kilombolas were often forcibly removed from their land, and laws were passed in the 19th century that prevented them from owning land without official government titles, something most kilombolas were unable to obtain. In the century after Brazilian slavery ended in 1888, kilombolas faced significant obstacles to legal protection, education and economic opportunities.

In 1988 a new constitution in Brazil promised to protect Afro-Brazilians’ rights, especially the right to land. Shore writes, “Brazil, the last country in the Americas to abolish slavery (in 1888) became the first country to constitutionally guarantee the collective land rights of the descendants of enslaved people.” Though there is work to be done to fully guarantee kilombola rights, kilombolas across Brazil have joined together to grow local economies and defend their constitutional right to land. The oppression of kilombolas testifies to the need for full reconciliation, to bring full opportunity for dignity and life to a people the world actively marginalizes.

The Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil (IECLB) and its diaconal arm, the Fundação Luterana de Diaconia (FLD), have journeyed with Jerri, Sirlei and the Kilombo Monjolo in this work, in partnership with the Center for Support and Promotion of Agroecology (CAPA) in the southern region of the Rio Grande do Sul state. This work is supported in part by ELCA World Hunger. Through the project, kilombola farmers joined together in cooperatives to gain access to seeds, training and new opportunities. “The community started to change,” Jerri says. Over time, other entities, including universities, began working with the community. “We began to have support, and life got better.”

“The work of CAPA within the community is about accompaniment, partnership and joint construction, and with open dialogue, creating the farming projects and other activities,” Jerri says. The kilombola communities, which practice their own ancestral spirituality, have worked with CAPA/Lutheran Foundation of Diakonia for decades.

In addition to the farming projects, the partnership has helped as the kilombola market handicrafts, share technical advice, and acquire legal documentation, housing and access to spaces for public policy advocacy.

The most important work, though, according to Jerri, has been winning recognition of the community as a kilombola. “In my understanding,” he says, “the work of CAPA so that we were recognized as a kilombola community was fundamental, so that today we could be in spaces of discussion, commercialization and seeking our rights.”

The project has helped Jerri and Sirlei diversify their crops, access markets and increase their income. Through it all they have been recognized for their identity, dignity and rich history. “When we came to Brazil, it was not to be merchants but to be traded,” says Jerri. “So this has brought us a big change, bringing respect and visibility.” Jerri and Sirlei’s story shows how historic and ongoing injustices leave families vulnerable to hunger. Hunger is not incidental or accidental. In the case of Brazilian kilombolas it is the direct result of oppression and injustice — slavery, racism, discrimination, inequity, violence. Yet their story also reveals their witness of courage, strength and resilience as we work together toward a just world where all are fed.

In the Bible readings for this first week of Lent, the author of 1 Peter reminds us of Jesus’ death and resurrection, the cost of the sacrifice and the consequences. Jesus, who was executed by an unjust occupying political power in Jerusalem, gives his life and, in doing so, makes possible our reconciliation with God. Whereas sin estranges us from God and one another, Jesus restores us to fellowship with God, so that we may be restored in fellowship to one another. This reconciliation is more than just a good feeling, more even than the experience of forgiveness. It is a radical restoration of relationship with the One who knows us. Reconciliation has its roots in a Latin term meaning “to overcome feelings of distrust or hostility” or, in another form, “to bring together, unite in feelings, make friendly.” To be reconciled is to overcome conflict and transform a broken relationship — to be restored, often in a new way. For the writer of 1 Peter, this is the work of Christ.

As the author writes of baptism, this is not merely the removal of offending “dirt from the body” but a more profound transformation of relationship.

As we are reconciled to God, God calls us to reconcile with one another. Lent invites us to think more deeply about what that means.

Grace assures us that we need not worry about our relationship with God; Christ has reconciled us. But grace also impels us into the world, to be witnesses of reconciliation in every relationship. This is not easy work. It will take confronting the brokenness in relationships marred by racism, oppression, exclusion and injustice. Nor is it quick work. To be reconciled isn’t merely to apologize and be forgiven for past wrongs but to do the work of building

together a new, shared world where each of us will be recognized and respected for the fullness of dignity we have from God, who created us.

**Reflection questions:**

- What does it mean to be reconciled? Where have you experienced reconciliation through your own faith?
- How can hunger ministry be seen as an expression of our reconciliation to God, the world and each other?
- How does the story of kilombolas in Brazil demonstrate that reconciliation must mean more than apology and forgiveness?
- What relationships in society, the church and the world need to be transformed to end hunger?