



NORTH AMERICAN
LUTHERAN
CHURCH

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2023

LOVED *and* FREED



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INTRODUCTION

It is my great pleasure to introduce you to *Loved and Freed*, a 2023 collection of Lenten devotions from the North American Lutheran Church (NALC). As we enter the ancient season of Lent, we are invited to walk with Jesus through His journey of sacrifice and triumph, from His baptism to His crucifixion and finally to His resurrection on Easter Sunday, where we find ultimate *love* and *freedom*.

Lent has been a time of spiritual renewal for Christians for centuries. It is a time to reflect on our faith, repent of our sins, and grow closer to God through prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and service to others. This book of devotions offers daily reflections and prayers to guide you on this journey of spiritual transformation and death to self.

The theme of this book, *Loved and Freed*, is inspired by the opening verses of Revelation 1:5–6, which give us a beautiful picture of the incredible love and freedom we have through Jesus Christ. As we read through these devotions, may we be reminded of the love and freedom we have in Christ and be empowered to love and serve others in the same way.

This year's devotional was written by sixteen members of the NALC staff for each day from Ash Wednesday to the Resurrection of Our Lord. The readings each day are based upon the daily lectionary provided in the NALC *Devoted To Prayer* daily prayer and reading guide, which is also an adapted version of the daily lectionary in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. PDF copies of this devotional booklet are available for download from the NALC website for printing for individual use or distribution in congregations. For details on how to access the devotional electronically or to receive it as a daily email or text message, please visit thenalc.org/lent.

I encourage you to make the most of this Lenten season by setting aside time each day for reflection, prayer, and service. Allow yourself to be drawn closer to God through this season of sacrifice and renewal, death and life.

So, take a deep breath, open the pages, and allow yourself to embark on a journey with Jesus over the next forty-seven days, that you may experience the transformative power of His love and freedom in your life. May this season of Lent be a time of growth, renewal, and deeper intimacy with God as we prepare for His passion, death, resurrection, and beyond!

“...and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 1:5–6 NRSV).

With warmest wishes,



The Rev. Dcn. Andrew S. Ames Fuller, *Editor*

Director of Communications

North American Lutheran Church



ASH WEDNESDAY

*Beloved Lord, we give thanks that You have placed us in Christian community
and surrounded us with that great cloud of witnesses who share their faith and strengthen ours.*

*Help us to deny ourselves and follow Jesus, to turn away from sin and temptation,
and to live in righteousness and holiness all our days.*

You alone are the source of goodness and mercy.

Let us not grow weary as we journey with Jesus to the cross of Calvary this Lenten season.

We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



February 22, 2023 | ASH WEDNESDAY

Jonah 3:1—4:11; Hebrews 12:1–14; Luke 18:9–14; Psalms 5 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 27 & 51 (PM)

^{3:1} Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ² “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” ³ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth. ⁴ Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵ And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them... ¹⁰ When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

– Jonah 3:1–5, 10 ESV



Dear friends, greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus on this first day in the season of Lent, a day in which we are reminded that “from ashes we have come, and to ashes we will one day return.” Ash Wednesday is a reminder of our mortality — of the fact that the day will come when our lives on this earth will come to an end. Our days on this earth are numbered. Our years in this world are not as long, or as many, as we like to think. “Like a mist,” the Bible says. It all happens so fast, coming and going quicker than we’d like. When it’s over, it’s *over* — and our only hope for salvation and life eternal is found and given to us in Jesus Christ.

The passage we read today is a few verses from the third chapter of the book of Jonah. To understand what this book is about, and how it speaks to us today, it’s essential that you read the entire story. It’s the story of a man named Jonah who tried to run away from God. God had called Jonah to be His voice — to go to the city of Nineveh and tell them to repent and to change their ways. They were a sinful people that wanted to live life their own way apart from God. But God wanted them back. He loved them more than they knew. And so, He called Jonah to be His voice...in hopes that they would listen, and change their ways — and then God would forgive.

Jonah knew about God’s faithfulness to forgive, and he did not want that for the people of Nineveh. And so he ran away, got on a boat, and thought he could hide from God. What he found was that no one can hide from God.

Wherever you go, whatever you do, no matter what you try in this life, God sees and knows what you’re doing. He knows what you’ve done wrong. And He still loves you. He still cares for you. And He always will.

I encourage you to sit down later today and read through the story if you haven’t already. It’s only four chapters. Read through it and see what Jonah did, how God responded and how, ultimately, God always has His way. My guess is that there are lessons in there for all of us.

The story of Jonah is an archetype of all of life. We’re sinful and we’re disobedient. Often, we think we can hide from God, and that we have a better approach to life. But we’re wrong — because we can’t hide and there isn’t a better approach, apart from Christ.

During this Lenten season, let's not make the same mistake as Jonah and think we can hide. God knows your life. He knows your heart. And He loves you from the bottom of His heart, so much so that He was willing to give His Son, on a cross, so that you might live.

And so, come to Him in repentance. Acknowledge your sin, confess your faults, and trust that, just like He did with the city of Nineveh when they changed their ways, so He will do — so He has done — for you in Christ.

Prayer: Lord God, on this first day in the season of Lent, remind us of our mortality. Remind us, also, of the love eternal You have for us in Jesus. We thank You for Your love and for the forgiveness offered to us in Your Son. Use these forty days to humble our hearts, remind us of our deepest needs, and draw us closer to Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

February 23, 2023 | Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, Martyr, 156

Deuteronomy 7:6–11; Titus 1:1–16; John 1:29–34; Psalms 27 & 147:13–21 (AM); Psalms 126 & 102 (PM)

^{1:29} The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

– John 1:29–34 ESV



In today’s Gospel reading, John the Baptist provides a vital focus for Lent. John points to Jesus and announces, “Behold the Lamb of God.” What is Lent about? It is about looking to, and beholding, Jesus — who is the Lamb of God.

On this second day of Lent, let’s take another look at John’s announcement. John calls Jesus the Lamb of God. That is one of the great titles, one of the great images, for Jesus in the New Testament. It is an image we still use in the modern church. We have stain glass windows, pictures, songs, and proclamations declaring that same announcement: that Jesus is the Lamb of God.

And yet, if you think about it, isn’t that a strange image? The Son of God as a Lamb? We think of God in terms of power and might, and yet Jesus is revealed as a Lamb? It feels a bit jarring or strange. And then you have to ask, what does it mean to call Jesus the Lamb of God?

Let me suggest some things for us to keep in mind as we look to this image. First, the title “Lamb of God” should make us think of the Passover story way back in the Old Testament. In the book of Exodus, the people of Israel were looking to escape slavery in Egypt. In that event, lambs were slain and their blood was painted on doorposts to save the people of Israel from death. Calling Jesus the Lamb of God reminds us that Jesus’ blood was shed to save us.

The phrase Lamb of God has echoes of imagery from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. Centuries before Jesus, Isaiah spoke of how God would send a deliverer who would suffer for the people. Isaiah 53:7 says – “Yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter.” The phrase Lamb of God reminds us how Jesus fulfills this Old Testament prophecy by suffering and dying to deliver us.

This image of the Lamb of God helps us to think of all sorts of associations like humility, accessibility, gentleness, care. This beautiful image of the Lamb helps us to see and understand who Jesus is. What do you see in this image?

I was teaching a class on Revelation a while back and we were studying how Revelation 5 introduces Jesus as a lion, but then moves to imagery of Jesus as a lamb. The class talked about that. One of the members, a sweet elderly lady, thought about it then said, “I love this. When I’m in distress, I’m not going to go to a lion. But a lamb, that’s what I need. It tells me that Jesus is accessible, caring, that He will welcome me. This image invites me to Jesus.”

Jesus is the Lamb of God. Lent is a time to look to Jesus, just as John the Baptist directs us. Take time this Lenten season to reflect on who Jesus is. This Lamb of God is the one for us to seek and know.

Prayer: Holy Lord, You are the Lamb of God. Help us, this Lenten season, to grow in You and to discover more and more of who You are for us. Amen.

February 24, 2023 | Friday after Ash Wednesday

ST. MATTHIAS, APOSTLE

Acts 1:15–26; Philippians 3:13–21; John 15:1, 6–16; Psalms 15 & 148 (AM); Psalms 105 & 130 (PM)

^{15:12} “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

– John 15:12–15 ESV



There was a lot of wisdom literature floating around in Jesus’ time, and I wonder if He knew the apocryphal verse, “A faithful friend is an elixir of life, found only by those who fear the Lord. The person who fears the Lord keeps his friendships in repair, for he treats his neighbor as himself” (Sirach 6:16–17). What a wonderful word, “elixir!”

It seems to me that there is tremendous wisdom in friends and friendship; and thank the Lord Jesus for befriending and loving us.

One sage in my life was my mother. She told me a proverb when I was young. “Jess, if you have just one good friend that stays with you your whole life, count yourself very fortunate.” She said this shortly after her friend, Aleen, left from a visit. Even as a young child, I could see the love between them. They never gave up on each other.

I had an assigned friend in Army basic training. We were “battle buddies,” and our short time of friendship gave me some wisdom on friendship. An image that has stayed with me is our time of “fire watch” together. We sat on a stump in the middle of our camp, leaning back-to-back. Our mission was to stay awake through half the night to watch for fire—enemy or natural. The way we sat, we had a combined 360 view of the camp; nothing could happen to us or our comrades without our notice.

Indeed, a friend is safety, and an elixir to the befriended. A friend is also, along with other friends, a blessing to the community. Think how amazing it is that Jesus is our friend. He not only laid down His life for us, but He persists in having our back, and using us to bless our communities!

Prayer: O Lord Jesus, we thank You that You count us as friends and that You love us despite our failings. Teach and guide us through your Spirit to love others with the same love You have for us. Empower us to be good and loving friends to others. Make us elixirs of life so that our friends may also learn and live Your commandment of love. Amen.

February 25, 2023 | Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Elizabeth Fedde, 1921; Emma Francis, 1945; Deaconesses

Deuteronomy 7:17–26; Titus 3:1–15; John 1:43–51; Psalms 43 & 149 (AM); Psalms 31 & 143 (PM)

^{3,4} But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

– Titus 3:4–7 ESV



Some years ago, I came across this anonymous illustration.

Imagine: There is a bank that credits your account each morning with \$86,400. It carries over no balance from day to day. Every evening it deletes whatever part of the balance you failed to use during the day. What would you do? Draw out all of it, of course!

Each of us has such a bank. Its name is Time. Every morning, life credits us with 86,400 seconds. Every night it writes off, as lost, whatever of this we have failed to invest to good purpose. It allows no overdraft. Each day it opens a new account for you. Each night it burns the remains of the day. If you fail to use the day's deposits, the loss is yours. There is no going back. The clock is running. Make the most of today.

To realize the value of one year, ask a person who spent a year in jail. To realize the value of one month, ask a mother who gave birth to a premature baby. To realize the value of one week, ask the editor of a weekly newspaper. To realize the value of one hour, ask the lovers who are waiting to meet. To realize the value of one minute, ask a person who missed the plane. To realize the value of one second, ask a person who just avoided an accident. To realize the value of one millisecond, ask the person who won a silver medal in the Olympics. Treasure every moment that you have.

The value of time became more poignant to me when I was told by my oncologist that my cancer was stage four — so allow me to offer a specifically Christian application of the above illustration. Time is indeed precious, and it passes quickly. God's desire is we use His gift of time by striving to live lives of obedience to His teaching and commands.

How we use our time each day is vitally important. Through faith in Jesus Christ, which God has so graciously given us, He saves us according to His own mercy. Thus, we have the blessed assurance that our past is forgiven, our present has opportunities for real meaning and purpose, and our future is assured. Our joyous response to this Good News is that we get to devote significant time to helping those in urgent need, living fruitful lives of Christian good works.

So, the question for each of us today is, “How am I spending my time”?

Prayer: God of perfect love, You have freed us from sin, death, and the enemy, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to Your own mercy. By the power of the Holy Spirit, enable us to live out our baptismal faith. Make us faithful disciples of Christ who commit significant time to bearing fruit for your Kingdom by loving and serving the needs of others; through you Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



The **FIRST WEEK** *of* **LENT**

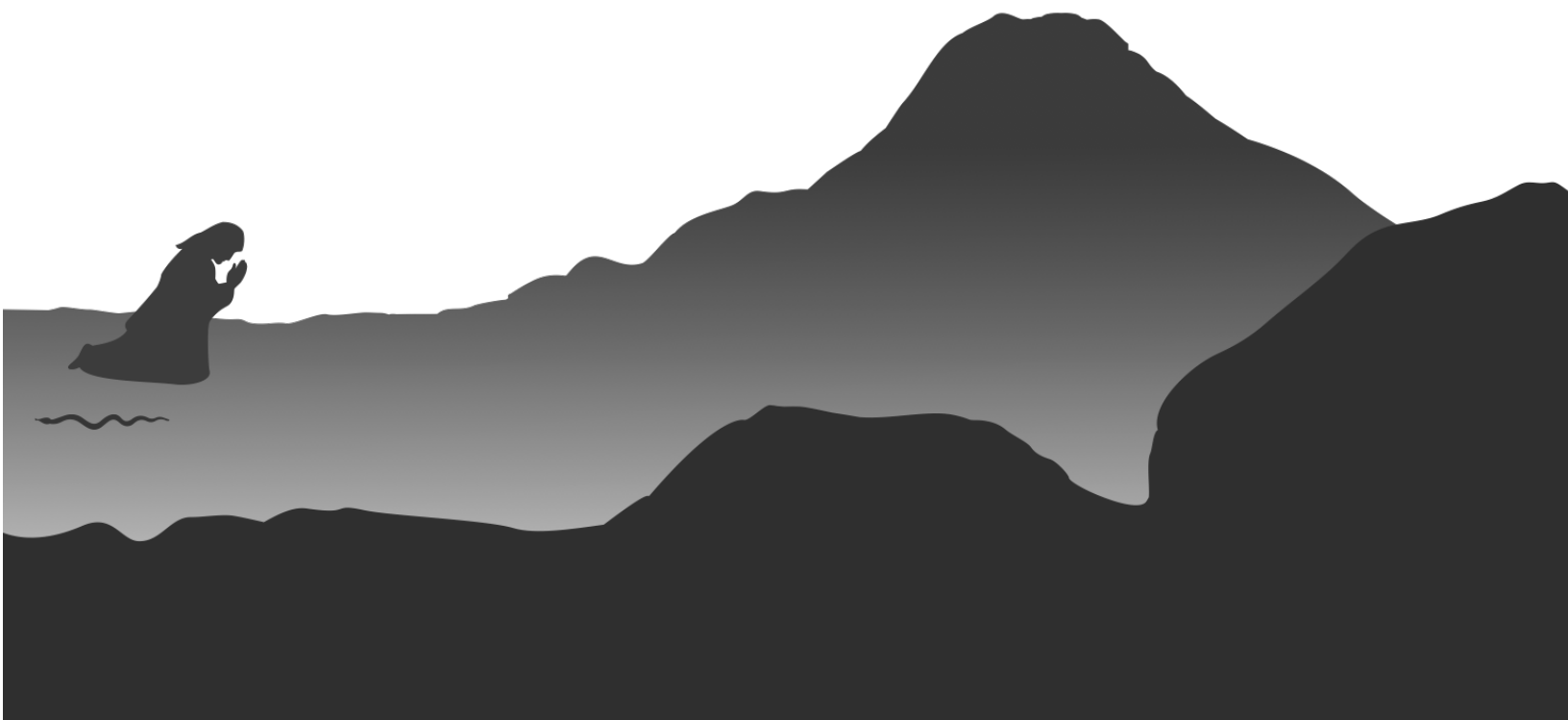
Holy Father, Jesus said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me."

Grant us faith to trust in Your Son, who leads us in all truth to see You and know You.

*May our witness to Christ's love and mercy be a beacon of hope for all to see
in this world that desperately needs a Savior.*

Send us to places known and unknown, as faithful disciples, trusting in Your guidance and care.

We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



February 26, 2023 | FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg, Missionary to India, 1719

Florence Li Tim-Oi, First Female Priest in the Anglican Communion, 1944

Jeremiah 9:23–24; 1 Corinthians 1:18–31; Mark 2:18–22; Psalms 84 & 150 (AM); Psalms 42 & 32 (PM)

^{42:1} As a deer pants for flowing streams,
so pants my soul for you, O God.
² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?
³ My tears have been my food day and night,
while they say to me all the day long,
“Where is your God?”
¹¹ Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my salvation and my God.

– Psalm 42:1–3, 11 ESV



We live by a creek. It is not unusual while sipping my morning coffee to see a deer out my front window drinking from the flowing stream. The stream that flows past my front window is, in part, fed by a flowing artesian well on our farm. It is really hard water that makes it very good at quenching thirst. I grew up drinking from the stock tank, but I had to teach my kids that water from a flowing artesian well that arises from the deep is good, but stagnant water is bad. A flowing well is living water.

Sometimes, we can spend much time and effort speaking *about* God or about Jesus, as though such a concept is the same as the Gospel. We can do the same thing with theological concepts such as “justification.” But, as a deer pants for flowing streams, so too I find that I don’t just want to hear about God, about Jesus, about justification — as good and helpful as those descriptions are to a faith seeking understanding. Along with the psalmist, I thirst for the living God and His living Word. This drives us beyond philosophy, or even theology, to hear a living word from a living God.

The psalmist writes, “My soul thirsts for God,” but quickly adds, “for the living God.” And then the psalmist goes on to lament not being able to come to worship: “When shall I come and appear before God?” Or, more graphically, “come and see the face of God.” So we have some clues about how this thirst for the living God is quenched.

It is quenched by a living Word that we hear addressed to us — most often in hearing the Word proclaimed and preached and promised. “Where is your God?” In heaven, behind the atom, in my neighbor? They all seem so hidden. In water, bread, wine? Yes, but with the Word! A word for *you*! “You are forgiven, I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine” (Isaiah 43:1).

The baptismal font in the chapel at the college I attended has always inspired me. It appeared to well up from the depths to flow over the sides of the font, reminiscent of the words from Revelation 21, “To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.” The flowing nature of the water reminds me that faith is never stagnant because the mercies of God are ever flowing. The water is life and gives life, and quenches thirst.

Psalm 42 continues with this evocative image, “Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.” Deep calls to deep. Perhaps that is the call of Lent in this discipline of devotions.

And so, I will close with one of my favorite songs from our youth gathering here in Canada back in 2015 under the theme, “Deeper.” It is by Bebo Norman and Jason Ingram entitled, *Bring Me to Life*. If you know it, let it be a sung prayer.

Prayer: “I am a barren land and it’s all I can do to stand. I am thirsty, I am thirsty. Father, reach out your hand. I have given all that I can, still I’m sinking, I’m still sinking. I want to run into the deep and let the deep call out to me. I want to lose myself in your love. So let it rain down over me as I fall down to my knees. Let the ocean rise to meet me, I need you to bring me to life.

Well of eternal things, endless is all the life you bring. Be the water that I long for. And show me your kingdom come, Father, and let your will be done here in me as it is in heaven. I want to run into the deep and let the deep call out to me.”

Thank you, Lord, for the gift of Baptism and those who proclaim your Word. Amen.

February 27, 2023 | Monday of the First Week in Lent

Deuteronomy 8:1–20; Hebrews 2:11–18; John 2:1–12; Psalms 119:73–80 & 145 (AM); Psalms 121 & 6 (PM)

^{2:1} On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴ And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

⁶ Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. ⁹ When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

– John 2:1–11 ESV



Once, by some stroke of luck, I was able to attend discussions with the late philosopher and author Dallas Willard. Between his talks and his book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, I gathered a wealth of guidance and encouragement.

However, one conversation in particular has always stuck with me. He recalled, as chair of the philosophy department at the University of Southern California, how he was challenged by the chair of the chemistry department to defend Christ’s first miracle — the one performed at the wedding at Cana in today’s reading.

“It’s just not possible,” the chemist insisted. “The heat generated by changing water to wine would have melted those clay pots.” Dr. Willard simply and eloquently answered, “If Jesus knows how to change water into wine, He can handle the pots too.” That is what we can reflect on today. Rather than look at the multi-faceted nuances of this passage, the first miracle John records, we should instead look at how Christ knows how to change us too.

Martin Luther put it this way: “So the movement is from the Law to the Gospel, as the Lord made wine out of water” (*LW* 11:286).

The law of this world presented Jesus with a seemingly impossible problem: to supply an enormous amount of wine when all that was available was water. He solved that problem with divine grace and power from above. At this wedding party, the Law was replaced with the Gospel.

We as broken sinners can focus too much on the Law in our hearts and minds—but Christ comes to us too with the promise of the Gospel. By faith we believe His promise and can answer our doubting hearts by reworking Dr. Willard’s quote a bit, “If Jesus knows how to change water to wine, he can handle my sin too.”

Prayer: Gracious Lord, I pray today for my hope to be in the One who changed water to wine. While the Law surrounds and convicts me, I trust in Jesus to transform me as well — not by the same Law, but by the Gospel He promises. In the name of Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

February 28, 2023 | Tuesday of the First Week in Lent

Deuteronomy 9:1–12; Hebrews 3:1–11; John 2:13–22; Psalms 34 & 146 (AM); Psalms 25 & 91 (PM)

^{3,1} Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, ² who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. ³ For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. ⁴ (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) ⁵ Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, ⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

⁷ Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, ⁹ where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. ¹⁰ Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.’ ¹¹ As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’”

– Hebrews 3:1–11 ESV



Before I became a pastor, I worked in toxicology research as a histotechnologist. If you've never heard the term “histology” before, it's the study of tissues and is connected to the field of pathology. Basically, a histotechnologist is the lab technician who takes the tissue from a biopsy and prepares it to be seen under the microscope so that the pathologist can make a diagnosis from what he sees of the cells. If you've ever had anything removed from your body during surgery — like your appendix, a lesion, or a cancerous growth — then you know how important those lab results are!

Here's the thing: I did that for five years and never felt like I was doing anything important for the Kingdom of God. You see, when I was growing up in the church, no one ever said to me, “Amy, did you know that you share in a heavenly calling with all the baptized?” Not once did anyone encourage me to think about how I might use my particular gifts and talents or my life in service to God and my neighbors. No one ever mentioned that there was a call God had put on my life, or that it would be sacred and holy and pleasing to God if I served, somehow, in the name of Christ and for the glory of God.

The author of Hebrews says this plainly: we should recognize the heavenly calling that is placed on our lives and that it's one we share with our brothers and sisters in the faith. This calling was modeled to us by Jesus himself. The author goes on to compare the worthiness of Jesus as compared to Moses, who was one of the most faithful and dedicated servants in God's house—but, Christ was even more faithful because He served *over* God's house as a son.

I love how the author of Hebrews says, “Every house is built by someone!” I see that all around me in Dallas, Texas, where new construction seems to be going up everywhere. Someone is building those new neighborhoods. Someone is fashioning those condominiums, high rises, and single-family homes. But, “the builder of all things is God.” The house is worth a lot, but the builder is worth more than the house!

As those who are “God's House,” we are called to be faithful to the master builder. He built us! As St. Peter said in his first letter, “you yourselves [are] like living stones being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).

Friends, God has indeed put a heavenly and holy call on each of our lives! If, like me, no one ever mentioned this to you, let me be the one to say it! “You have been called!” You are precious and beloved. Now, what are you going to do with that?

Prayer: Heavenly, holy, loving Father, You have gifted us with a blessed calling to be Your followers in this world that needs us. Grant us the gift of kindness so that we might share Your love with others. Grant us the grace to speak freely about our faith so that others will come to know You, and know the heavenly calling You have put on their lives. We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

March 1, 2023 | Wednesday of the First Week in Lent

George Herbert, Priest, 1633

David, Bishop of Menevia, Wales, c. 544

Deuteronomy 9:13–21; Hebrews 3:12–19; John 2:23—3:15; Psalms 5 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 27 & 51 (PM)

^{3:15} As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

– Hebrews 3:15 ESV

Today is the commemoration of George Herbert, a Welsh-born English poet, orator, and priest of the Church of England. His poetry is associated with the writings of the metaphysical poets, and he is often recognized as “one of the foremost British devotional lyricists.”

After the death of King James, he gave up his secular ambitions in his mid-thirties and took holy orders in the Church of England, spending the rest of his life as the rector of the rural parish of Fugglestone St. Peter, just outside Salisbury. He was noted for unfailing care for his parishioners, bringing the sacraments to them when they were ill and providing food and clothing for those in need, dying himself of consumption at the age of only 39.

As a man of words, there are many works from which to quote George Herbert, but perhaps it is most timely to reflect on his poem “Lent,” in which he notes that the Lord begs us in this holy season to “improve our fast” by “starving sin.” And yet, Herbert makes it clear that we are only able to spring forth (Lent) new life through the power of Christ, and not by our own might. In honor of George Herbert, I have prepared a poem/hymn below based on our Hebrews passage today and set to a Gaelic tune in recollection of both Welsh-born saints we commemorate today.

Take Heed, Oh Heart, Of What the Lord Has Said (based on Hebrews 3:12–19)

Andrew S. Ames Fuller,
in the style of George Herbert

BUNESSAN,
a Gaelic folk melody

The musical score is written for a single melodic line in treble clef, 2/4 time. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The melody consists of 12 measures, grouped into six pairs. Above the staff, the chords for each pair are: C, Am, Dm, G, F, and G. The lyrics are written below the staff, aligned with the notes. The lyrics are: 1 Take heed, Oh heart, of what the Lord has said, 2 Oh, may we not al - low our hearts to hard'n, 3 For our God is faith - ful, ev - er watch - ful, 4 We must not be like those of long a - go, 5 Let's not wav - er, nor let us ev - er stray, 6 Oh, may we find the cour - age to be true,

3 C Em Am Em F G

For in His Word He speaks with care;
 Nor let a spir't of doubt take hold;
 A - waits to an - swer our re - quest;
 Who turned a - way from His em - brace;
 But keep our eyes on God's com - mands;
 And keep our faith in Him so strong;

6 C Am F C/G Am G

He shows us paths, in which we should be led,
 Lest chos'n of us a path of wick'd - ness,
 But if we heed not His ev' - ry war - ning,
 Keep - ing our faith in Him, our hearts still bold,
 He is faith - ful, and He will al - ways stay,
 For in His love, a new hope will re - new,

9 C G/B Am G7 C

That we may seek His pres - ence near.
 And nev - er seek His mer - cy told.
 We re - ly on His pure right - eous - ness.
 That we may seek His last - ing grace.
 To bring us joy and peace in hand.
 And peace will last e - ter - ni - ty long.

Prayer: Almighty God, you who promises eternal peace and joy to our unbelieving hearts, give us the strength and dedication to “live by faith and holy meditation, so that we can make our hearts a heavenly mansion, where Christ is Lord and King” (adapted from a prayer from George Herbert). Amen.

March 2, 2023 | Thursday of the First Week in Lent

John Wesley, 1791; Charles Wesley, 1788; Renewers of the Church

Chad, Bishop of Lichfield, 672

Deuteronomy 9:23—10:5; Hebrews 4:1–10; John 3:16–21; Psalms 27 & 147:13–21 (AM); Psalms 126 & 102 (PM)

^{3:16} “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

— John 3:16–21 ESV



Today, so early in the season of Lent, we commemorate John and Charles Wesley, who died 1791 and 1788 respectively. As founders of “Methodism,” they were sometimes accused of a kind of legalism with regard to Christian observance. They advocated for a more intentional spirituality and life of discipleship, rejecting what they perceived as formal, life-less religion in England focused on outward forms, rites and rituals rather than a heart-felt, lived life of faith, obedience and practice. Both received what they described as an “inner conversion,” which John described as his heart, “strangely warmed.” The established church of England rejected the Wesley brothers, although through their lives and ministries they are regarded today as renewers of the Church.

Oddly, Martin Luther was accused not of legalism, but of making the Gospel “cheap,” by proclaiming that we are saved by grace, through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus — not by works, as Paul asserts (read Romans 3:21–31). The established Church responded to Luther, charging that salvation by faith alone would cause Christians to become lazy and lukewarm without faith *and* good works! As the Wesleys were accused of making salvation a matter of works and “method,” Luther was accused of doing away with good works by focusing on faith!

It has been argued that the Wesleys were not advocating for a works-based righteousness, even as Luther believed and taught that good works of love and mercy flowed from, and were a response to, faith in Jesus Christ. These great renewers of the Church lived the good news that “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him!”

In the season of Lent, let our focus be on God’s great love for us, manifested in the gift of His Son, who gave His life for us on the cross and was raised to new life, that we too, might live! And let our response be lives filled with love and good works, toward God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and our neighbor in need!

Prayer: Almighty God, we praise You for the men and women You have sent to call the Church to its tasks and renew its life, such as Your servants John and Charles Wesley, Martin Luther and others. Give us strength to love and serve You with new lives in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

March 3, 2023 | Friday of the First Week in Lent

Deuteronomy 10:12–22; Hebrews 4:11–16; John 3:22–36; Psalms 22 & 148 (AM); Psalms 105 & 130 (PM)

^{3:27} To this John replied, “A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.’ ²⁹ The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. ³⁰ He must become greater; I must become less.”

– John 3:27–30 NIV2011



John declared to his disciples saying, “...he must become greater I must become less.” This strikes such an amazing chord in human thinking. Most of the time, people are striving to become great, greater, and if possible, the greatest of all. But in the Christian paradigm we are called and expected to do the opposite. Giving the greatest place in our human imagination to Jesus Christ is what we are called to do. Jesus was always humble and lowly in the way He operated. He never pushed or coerced people to attain the greatest possible position in his generation.

He did not wear flashy clothes, or hang around those who were high and mighty, or go around showing His divine identity. He was truly comfortable in accomplishing the mission He came for — which was serving the purpose and the plan that God prepared to save humanity.

That’s why people were somewhat confused as they were comparing him to John the Baptist. But, through God’s amazing grace, John was also such a humble servant of Jesus Christ. Even before John was born, while he was still in his mother’s womb, he was witnessing to the greatness of Jesus Christ — by jumping in his mother’s womb to acknowledge the One who was in Mary’s womb. As soon as he started his ministry of baptizing people and calling them to repentance, he saw Jesus on the other side of the river Jordan. He openly declared things like, “this is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world” and “I must decrease and he must increase.” This is the clearest depiction of humility.

In this day and age with everything that we see or hear, we deal with the temptation to aspire to some kind of greatness. However these words of John remind us that greatness is serving the will and purpose of God, *in spite of* this day and age.

When we become humble and show Jesus Christ to the world, we clearly declare that our mission is not to be seen but to show the One who deserves to be seen. When people see us, they gain nothing from that experience. But when they see Jesus, they can gain salvation and eternal life. May God grant us the grace to completely understand that our mission is not to be seen — but to show Jesus Christ; the truly suffering servant of God.

Prayer: Dear God, please grant us the grace and the wisdom and the knowledge to be humble enough to understand that our mission is not to be seen, or to show ourselves to others, but to see and share you to the world! Amen.

March 4, 2023 | Saturday of the First Week in Lent

Deuteronomy 11:18–28; Hebrews 5:1–10; John 4:1–26; Psalms 43 & 149 (AM); Psalms 31 & 143 (PM)

^{4,7} A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” ⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” ¹¹ The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?” ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.” ¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” ¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” ¹⁷ The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.” ¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.” ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” ²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.”

– John 4:1–26 ESV



The woman in today’s text had been divorced five times and was currently living with another man to whom she was not married. She was an adulteress. Her personal life was a mess. Or, to keep with Jesus’ metaphor, she was a woman dying of thirst. Her life was dry, dusty, difficult, destitute, dreary, and disordered. She probably felt damned. One could say that her real problem was that she was divorced from her true Husband. Remember that.

In some ways, this anonymous Samaritan woman is symbolic of humanity as a whole. That is, humanity separated from God’s covenant and promise. This is why the Jewish people are so important in the history of salvation. A remnant of Israel always remained faithful to the covenant of God’s promise. They worshiped and prayed in the Temple of Jerusalem. They tried to keep the Law and persevered in the cities of the Roman Empire. Still, there was a deep thirst — a longing for the Messiah to come with living water to make the desert of their lives bloom. This is why Jesus says, “salvation is from the Jews.” They kept faith alive.

Jesus chose to come to this fallen woman living in adultery. Although she was shunned by her own people, compromised ethically, ethnically, and religiously, He came to her and said, “Give me a drink.”

Here we may miss the significance of Jesus' question. He, a Jewish man, is asking a Samaritan woman for a drink. This was scandalous because by asking for a drink, Jesus was asking for her hand. Wives drew water for husbands, *not* for strange Jewish men.

It gets even more scandalous. Like a loving and forgiving husband, Jesus wants to give life-giving water to this adulterous bride! Jesus wants her to live, being cleansed and freed — free to offer praise and thanks to God in spirit and in truth. This is what our Lord wants for His Church — the Bride of Christ. That includes you and me.

As we make our Lenten journey, I encourage all of us to pray for the life-giving Spirit of God to fill our hearts, minds, and bodies. Jesus is not stingy with His Bride. He wants to pour out His Spirit upon both saints *and* sinners! He pours out abundantly. Let's ask the Holy Spirit to enable us to worship in spirit and in truth as the faithful bride of Christ. This is what God desires.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, fill us, the bride of Your beloved Son, with the Holy Spirit. Grant us the water of life. Cleanse us from every spot and wrinkle of sin, and cause praise and thanks to flow from our hearts — even in this dry and dreary Lenten land. Come Holy Spirit! Amen.



The **SECOND WEEK of LENT**

God, our Creator, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Your Son Jesus, through You.

Grant that we would trust Your grace so deeply that we would submit our whole lives to Christ.

*Renew our hearts and minds for the work of Your Holy Church,
that we would share in our neighbors' joys and sorrows and serve others in humility.*

We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



March 5, 2023 | SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Jeremiah 1:1–10; 1 Corinthians 3:11–23; Mark 3:31—4:9; Psalms 84 & 150 (AM); Psalms 42 & 32 (PM)

- ^{84:1} How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
² My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.
³ Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.
⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!
⁵ Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.
⁶ As they go through the Valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it
with pools.
⁷ They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion.
⁸ O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob!
⁹ Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed!
¹⁰ For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the
house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.
¹¹ For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he
withhold from those who walk uprightly.
¹² O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!

– Psalm 84 ESV



This beautiful psalm from today's reading is a prayer of comfort. Here, the psalmist conveys his deep spiritual longing for God's presence. It is a prayer of someone separated from God's dwelling place. Depending on which scholar's dating of this psalm you agree with, the psalmist could either be referring to the Jerusalem Temple or the Tabernacle that preceded it.

The Psalmist says he would rather be a “doorkeeper,” or a servant, in the house of God than live in “tents of wickedness” — or in other words, the homes of evildoers — because one day with God is better than a thousand elsewhere.

In today's context, this psalm could be a prayer of a person who is separated from the sanctuary, or the prayer of a person who longs to experience God's Word and Christ's Body and Blood in community because the Lord has promised to be there. It is important for the Body of Christ, His people, to join together and offer thanks and praise.

It was not that long ago that many of our churches had to close their doors to in-person worship due to COVID restrictions, and some churches were closed longer than others. During that time, many yearned to “taste and see that the Lord is Good,” and had to find alternative ways to worship together — some outdoors in parks, and others in cars in parking lots. Even now, some are shut-in or in hospitals due to health reasons, and unable to worship and commune together — and so they currently yearn.

It is normal to long for hymns, prayers, fellowship, preaching of the Word, and Holy Communion. It is normal to want to join together. Thankfully, we can trust that “no good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11).

Jesus Christ offered the perfect worship by sacrificing His own sinless life for us on the cross, freeing us from sin, death, and the devil and granting us eternal life where we will worship together and glorify God our Father for all eternity. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: Gracious Lord, we give You thanks for the ability to worship Your holy name. We give You the glory and honor that is due to You, for You are our King and our God and we will ever sing Your praise, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

March 6, 2023 | Monday of the Second Week in Lent

Jeremiah 1:11–19; Romans 1:1–15; John 4:27–42; Psalms 119:73–80 & 145 (AM); Psalms 121 & 6 (PM)

^{4:39} Many from the Samaritan village believed he was the Messiah because of the woman's report: "He told me everything I ever did!" ^{40–41} When they came out to see him at the well, they begged him to stay at their village; and he did, for two days, long enough for many of them to believe in him after hearing him. ⁴² Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe because we have heard him ourselves, not just because of what you told us. He is indeed the Savior of the world."

– John 4:39–42 TLB



There is some way in which we get introduced to Jesus. For many of us, it could have been parents or grandparents who brought us to Him. Or perhaps it was a friend who told you about the impact of Jesus on their life and invited you to worship. Maybe your introduction was through a radio station, Gideon Bible, or a barber.

For the people in the Samaritan village, it was the woman who had been at the water well, going about her business, when she first encountered Jesus. She then ran to tell the rest of the villagers, who had to come and see Him for themselves. These villagers put their trust in Jesus after they heard Him for themselves. It was His words that changed them, and made them confess that Jesus must be the Savior of the world. Jesus came to the Samaritans, the people who were cast out of Jewish society, and shared the truth of God's mercy and forgiveness.

When I was younger, my parents shared Jesus with me and took me to Sunday school and worship each week. But it was at summer Bible camp that I encountered Jesus personally through his Word in Romans 3:23. It was my camp counselor, Kimba, who asked us to read Romans 3 while we were in our cabins for quiet time. It was there that Jesus made Himself known through His word that all people sin — even me — and that Christ's salvation and forgiveness is for each person, even me. I realized Jesus was the only way, that His truth was for me, and that life came only from Him. His Word changed the direction of my life.

May Jesus does the same for you, changing you through His word to save you. It is Jesus who shares His truth with you through any means possible.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank You for the means by which You have introduced us to Jesus. We praise You that Your Word of salvation, mercy, forgiveness, and truth have come to us through our encounters with Jesus, Your living Word. Aid us in growing closer to You through Your Word, in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

March 7, 2023 | Tuesday of the Second Week in Lent

Perpetua and Her Companions, Martyrs at Carthage, 202

Jeremiah 2:1–13, 29–32; Romans 1:16–25; John 4:43–54; Psalms 34 & 146 (AM); Psalms 25 & 91 (PM)

⁴⁴ After the two days he departed for Galilee. ⁴⁵ (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.) ⁴⁶ So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.

⁴⁷ So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. ⁴⁸ When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. ⁴⁹ So Jesus said to him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” ⁵⁰ The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” ⁵¹ Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. ⁵² As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. ⁵³ So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” ⁵⁴ The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” And he himself believed, and all his household. ⁵⁵ This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

– John 4:43–54 ESV



While in Cana, in Galilee, Jesus encountered an official of the city whose son was deathly ill. He begged Jesus to heal his son, probably hoping that Jesus would go with him to his house and perform a miracle. Instead, Jesus simply says to him, “Go, your son will live.”

The text then informs us that the man “believed the word that Jesus spoke to him” and went on his way. The New International Version of the Bible translates this line as, “he took him at His word.” The irony in this statement is that Jesus *is* the Word of God made flesh. The creation story in the first chapter of the book of Genesis shows us the power of God’s Word.

God didn’t create the world and all that is in it with hammers and chisels, He simply spoke and it was. When God said, “Let there be light,” there was light (Genesis 1:3). When God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation,” flowers bloomed and trees grew. There is power in the Word of God and Jesus is the living word with the same creative power. When He speaks it happens.

He told the blind to see and the lame to walk and they did. He told His disciples to feed 5000 people with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish and no one went hungry that day. Jesus the living Word of God is still with us today, speaking power into our lives.

Like the city official in today’s Gospel text we can take Jesus at His word. When He says to us, “Your sins are forgiven,” we can walk away assured that we have been made clean. When He proclaims, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life,” we can take Him at His Word and live our lives without fear.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, just as You spoke the world into existence, speak into my life today. Help me to live as a person who has been forgiven and set free to live in a way that brings honor to you. Help me this day to look, act and speak a little more like Jesus, trusting in His word and obeying His commands. I pray this in the name of Jesus, the living Word made flesh. Amen.

March 8, 2023 | Wednesday of the Second Week in Lent

Jeremiah 3:6–18; Romans 1:26—2:11; John 5:1–18; Psalms 5 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 27 & 51 (PM)

^{5:9} Now that day was the Sabbath. ¹⁰ So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.” ¹¹ But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’” ¹² They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’” ¹³ Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. ¹⁴ Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” ¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. ¹⁶ And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. ¹⁷ But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

– John 5:9–17 ESV



Jesus healed in His day, and He still heals today.

I was once working with a church council and we were reading through the Gospel of Mark. When we finished going over the portions where Jesus healed and cast out demons, one of the council members looked at me and said, “Pastor, do you really believe this stuff?”

“Absolutely,” I emphatically replied. I told him I had personally witnessed the healing power of Christ, just like it was written in God’s Word.

In John 5, we read about others who questioned Jesus healing the paralyzed man during the Passover. The Jews were visibly upset that Jesus had the audacity to tell this guy to “get up, take up your bed, and walk” on the Sabbath. Since no work was supposed to be done on this day, they believed that Jesus was blatantly breaking God’s Law, which meant He could not possibly be the Son of the living God.

Unfortunately, they were not able to see that this paralyzed man, who could not walk for thirty-eight years, was now healed. They could not see that Christ had forgiven this man’s sins, which many believed were the cause of his physical ailment. They could not see that God was extending mercy to one of His beloved children who was hurting, suffering, and ostracized from the community. Their eyes could not see, and hearts could not see nor believe.

When the miraculously healed man told the Jews that Jesus had helped him, they continued to persecute the Lord. But Christ did not stop healing people. He said, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” Let us believe that Christ continues to free people from bondage, and can heal our bodies, minds, and spirits.

Prayer: Father, as Jesus healed the paralyzed man, let us believe that we can still be healed in the name of Christ today. May our hearts always be open to You freeing us from our sins, and bringing strength and wholeness to our physical bodies, emotions, and our relationship with Your Son, our Savior. Let us always be dependent upon You, Jesus, who can heal us on any day, at any hour. Amen.

March 9, 2023 | Thursday of the Second Week in Lent

Jeremiah 4:9–10, 19–28; Romans 2:12–24; John 5:19–29; Psalms 27 & 147:13–21 (AM); Psalms 126 & 102 (PM)

¹⁹ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.” ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. ²¹ For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. ²² For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

²⁵ “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

– John 5:19–25 ESV



Do you ever get ahead of God? I know I do. Sometimes I make decisions, gather resources, create programs, recruit volunteers, and *then* ask the Lord to bless what I’ve already done. How much easier and more appropriate it would be to join God in the work that He is already doing! Jesus did nothing of His own accord, but only what He saw His Father doing. This was Christ’s way of asserting that He was the Son of God.

Jesus sought first God’s will and kingdom, and then joined the Father in His restorative work, by the power of the Holy Spirit. This way of praying and obeying led Jesus to the cross, where His sacrifice became the means of our forgiveness, life, and salvation. In this passage, Jesus is giving us an example of true sonship, which always involves carrying out the will of the Father.

The pattern of discernment that Jesus describes here simplifies our callings as baptized believers, who are sons of God ourselves (John 1:12). We don’t need to rely on our limited insight, creativity, power, or resources in order to serve our neighbors and make disciples. When we ask God to show us what He’s up to, and then join Him in the work that He is already doing, the outcome is no longer our burden to bear. God is always initiating and acting. In fact, the resurrection of the dead only happens because the deceased hear His voice and are raised!

“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain,” Psalm 127:1 reminds us. Any effort that is not God-initiated will eventually fail. As we move toward Easter, are you willing to set aside your own agenda and ask God to order your steps?

Prayer: Holy Spirit, would you show me where the Father is at work today in the lives of those around me? Give us all courage to die to our own wisdom, plans, and desires, so that we may join You in Your work of proclaiming release to the captives and good news to the poor. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

March 10, 2023 | Friday of the Second Week in Lent

Jeremiah 5:1–9; Romans 2:25–3:18; John 5:30–47; Psalms 22 & 148 (AM); Psalms 105 & 130 (PM)

^{5:31} If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. ³² There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. ³³ You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. ³⁴ Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved.

³⁵ He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. ³⁶ But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me.

– John 5:31–37a ESV



Dear friends, greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus as we draw closer, each day, to remembering the final events of our Lord's life.

When it comes to understanding and determining the truth, it is often the testimony of witnesses that plays a key and decisive role. A jury in a court room, for example, is not expected to give credence to what is often called “hearsay.” There has to be something more authentic and reliable to determine what is true.

The people of Jesus' day faced a real problem in determining the truth of what He said. They had to answer for themselves, individually, whether the claims Jesus made for Himself and about Himself were true. And so, they looked for witnesses. They wanted to have more than a “hearsay” basis upon which to render a decision.

It's interesting, as you read the Gospels, that Jesus never discouraged such a search. In fact, He invited people to weigh the evidence. He encouraged people to test what He said, and to try it out for themselves. He even challenged them to summon whatever witnesses they could find. Not surprising, in our day, that He invites you and me to do the same.

Three witnesses were called, by Jesus, to testify to the truth of what He said. The first was John the Baptist. He was the one called by God to prepare the way for the Messiah. It was John's mission to point people to Jesus, and he did what he was called to do well. He tied the coming of Christ into the long redemptive history of the nation of Israel. He baptized Jesus, even though he hesitated to do so because of his own unworthiness. And he said to all who would listen, “I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God” (John 1:34).

The second witness Jesus called is that of His own works. The people had already seen Him perform miracles of healing. They had already witnessed with their eyes the powerful things Jesus was able to do. His challenge to them was to let His works speak for themselves. The lame walked. The blind could see. If they wanted another witness to testify, they could ask the officer at Capernaum whose son was healed, or the man who was lowered through the roof by his friends. If you don't believe Me, Jesus was saying, then let my works become My witnesses.

The third witness Jesus called was that of the Scriptures themselves. In doing so, He was talking to people who were students of the Scriptures. He was talking to those who should have already known that what He

claimed and did was true. Every prophecy in the Old Testament about the coming Messiah was fulfilled in Christ. Every word spoken by the prophets about God's promises had become real and true in Jesus. For us today, the ultimate fulfillment is the death and resurrection of Jesus that has, and will always have, the final say.

Toward the end of the Gospel of John, from which our text is taken, the apostle says this about what he has written. He says, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). May these three witnesses — John the Baptist, the works of Jesus, and the Word of God revealed to us in Scripture — along with the faith instilled in us by the Holy Spirit, continue to guide us and lead us as we seek to live in the truth.

Prayer: Lord God, as we draw closer to remembering the final events of Jesus' life, may the witness you have given us in your Word, and through your Son, keep us always and forever in the truth. In His name we pray. Amen.

March 11, 2023 | Saturday of the Second Week in Lent

Jeremiah 5:20–31; Romans 3:19–31; John 7:1–13; Psalms 43 & 149 (AM); Psalms 31 & 143 (PM)

^{7:13} Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him.

– John 7:1–13 ESV



Because of fear, “no one spoke openly” of Jesus. Does that sound like our modern day or modern church? Or, closer to home — us? Have you ever had a time where fear kept you from talking about Jesus? I have. I’ve had opportunities where I could have talked about Jesus with people. But something in me, I’d have to say fear, kept me from doing so. What happened back in John’s Gospel still happens today. I will confess, out of fear there have been times I haven’t talked about Jesus.

I’ll list some examples of things that have held me back in the past.

- I didn’t want to risk opening up about something deeply personal to me. I was afraid of ridicule or how people would react.
- I grew up in a church that didn’t encourage us or show us how to talk about faith.
- I’ve heard people talk about faith in unhelpful ways, I don’t want to make the same mistakes. My most extreme example: I had a would-be evangelist knock on my door, and when I answered asked me, “If you died tonight, where would you go?” That didn’t help me encounter Jesus.
- I just didn’t have the courage or the comfort to be open about my faith.

I suspect most of us have had times where we held back from talking about our faith. But here is some good news. We can learn! One of the great focuses in the North American Lutheran Church is discipleship. It is assisting people to live out, and deepen, their faith walk. And part of discipleship is learning how to talk about Jesus.

I’m working on this, and even better, the Holy Spirit is working on me. I’m getting better at it. And in the grace of our Lord, I’m going to keep growing!

I’ve learned to just be honest. I find hope and joy in Jesus, and I can tell people that. I don’t have to give people long theological discourses or faith testimonials. In fact, those long speeches usually aren’t helpful. It is better to just acknowledge the obvious, my life is given in and made richer by my walk with Jesus. I’ve also learned that the Holy Spirit really is active, and helps us in our growth! Part of my faith journey is learning to trust that!

And to put in a plug here, the discipleship materials that the NALC is sharing are marvelous in showing us how to talk about and share our faith. We don’t have to learn this on our own!

We can grow in our ability to live and talk and share our faith. In fact, that is discipleship and a great focus for Lent. Let’s talk about this Jesus we know!

Prayer: Jesus, give us boldness. Help us and show us how to speak of You! Amen.



The **THIRD WEEK** *of* **LENT**

*God of life, You are the source of all things living, the maker of all that exists.
Help Your people to hear your voice and to live fully into the life You have given us.*

*Let us always seek the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life —
the One who put an end to death so that all who believe may live eternally.*

Give us eyes to see and ears to hear Your call on our lives.

We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



March 12, 2023 | THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Gregory the Great, Bishop of Rome, 604

Jeremiah 6:9–15; 1 Corinthians 6:12–20; Mark 5:1–20; Psalms 84 & 150 (AM); Psalms 42 & 32 (PM)

^{6:19} Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

– 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 ESV



It was only a few months ago that my wife Cindy and I sat in a nice outdoor restaurant, eating wonderful Greek food, and looking out over the market square of ancient Corinth. It was not hard to imagine the ancient Corinthians, the people Paul was trying to shepherd, busily moving about the city. Walking along, they would have mused at the various markets of fish, fruits, clothing, hardware, etc. In their walking about they would have also seen, as frequently as we see drug stores mix into retail areas today, temples! So, when Paul talks about temples in his letter to the Corinthians, he's lighting up in their minds the temples they are familiar with—but probably not the Jerusalem Temple. It seems that a key function of temples in Paul's day was to bring glory, not only to the god/goddess it was dedicated to, but also to the city where they were located. Temples put cities "on the map."

I think Paul says several things in these two short verses of 1 Corinthians 6 that give meaning to our Lenten journey. One is that we need to remember that we are not our own! Our whole being, including our body, belongs to the Lord. And this goes against the creeping influence of sin in our lives, to think we own ourselves.

Another point Paul makes is that we are now inhabited by the Holy Spirit. We are temples that can travel, part of God's purpose to go after humanity with saving grace!

But, the hardest point for me to get my mind around is that of "glorifying God" with my body. I'm not sure there's much there to work with. But then again, Paul's probably not telling folk to use good looks to say something about God. From the context, he's pointing to how we have a physical presence in this world — which Paul and the ancient Corinthians no longer have.

What we do with that presence matters a lot. Hands can be used to caress or punch; feet can be used to fetch things or to kick; mouths can be used for evil or to glorify God!

Prayer: Dear God, forgive us for however we may misuse or neglect our bodies. Remind us in our Lenten journey that You have made us in Your image, but more than that, we our wonderful temples You reside in. Help us this week to be Your hands, feet, and mouth; to bring Your Kingdom into the lives of those we touch. Amen.

March 13, 2023 | Monday of the Third Week in Lent

Jeremiah 7:1–15; Romans 4:1–12; John 7:14–36; Psalms 119:73–80 & 145 (AM); Psalms 121 & 6 (PM)

^{7:16} So Jesus answered them, “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. ¹⁷ If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. ¹⁸ The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood. ¹⁹ Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?” ²⁰ The crowd answered, “You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?” ²¹ Jesus answered them, “I did one work, and you all marvel at it. ²² Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. ²³ If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man’s whole body well? ²⁴ Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”

– John 7:16–24 ESV



Some 20 years ago, my wife Cheryl and I were walking through a shopping mall when I noticed a young woman walking toward us at a rapid pace. Today I probably would not have given her a second glance, but back then her strange appearance caught my attention. She was dressed very differently than all the other women in the mall. As I recall, her hair was pink and slicked upward forming a spike pointing out over her forehead. She wore futuristic-looking silver platform boots, lots of jewelry, and a multi-colored outfit that I am confident her peers would have described as awesome. As she strode by, I leaned over and whispered in Cheryl’s ear, “How would you like to see our son bring someone like *her* home?”

That evening we attended a Christian rock concert with our congregation’s youth group. When the featured band came onto the stage, who do you think was the lead singer?

This dedicated Christian musician and singer, who throughout the concert did a wonderful job witnessing to our youth, was the same young lady I had seen earlier at the mall, the one I had mocked, judged to be obviously immoral, and not worthy of being welcomed in our home! Of course, our youth thought she was awesome and looked really cool. Let me assure you; Jesus spoke to me during that concert!

Our gracious Lord wants us to know we are not to judge others by their outward appearance or by our assuming the way they are acting is not what God desires.

This is clear in John 7:24a, “Do not judge by appearances.” But what does Jesus mean in John 7:24b when He says to “judge with right judgment?” It means at those times when the situation calls for us to make a judgment of others we must do so in the context of God’s love and mercy, seen most clearly at Golgotha’s cross. Our judgment of others must not use God’s Law superficially, nor should our judgment differ from the righteous judgment of Christ. In other words, to judge with right judgment is to judge as Christ judges.

Remember, in this life we never become righteous by our own efforts. Rather, we simply participate in the righteousness of Christ by faith. At our baptism Jesus clothed us with His righteousness; we did nothing. I invite you to spend some time today meditating on the implications for your daily life of Jesus’ instruction to judge with right judgment.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, by Your Son's suffering and death on the cross You have loved us with perfect love and freed us from eternal condemnation under Your Law. Grant us Your Holy Spirit's wisdom and power that when called upon to judge, we will do so in accord with Christ's righteous judgment; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

March 14, 2023 | Tuesday of the Third Week in Lent

Jeremiah 7:21–34; Romans 4:13–25; John 7:37–52; Psalms 34 & 146 (AM); Psalms 25 & 91 (PM)

^{91:1} He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

² I will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”

³ For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence.

⁴ He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

– Psalm 91:1–4 ESV



Every family needs a theme hymn. Ours began at my sister’s wedding. We have sung “You Who Dwell in the Shelter of the Lord” at weddings, baptisms, confirmations, installations, funerals, and ordinations.

I suppose I was first drawn to this hymn because of the shared experience with my sister hiking in the Rockies with other Lutheran youth on an outdoor ministry called “Escape Week.” It was always an arduous backpacking experience complete with soaring eagles and a multitude of stones to dash one’s foot upon. We learned quickly that “even youth shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted.” But we also learned to wait upon the Lord who shall renew strength and, for a week, we ate and lived and worked and had our being in “the shelter of the Most High.”

The mountain image of dwelling in the shelter of the Lord, our refuge and fortress, continued to follow us into our subsequent lives and callings. We sought to pass on the faith to our children and to abide in the shadow of the Almighty for life.

Psalm 91 seems to accurately describe the reality of life in the valley. While perhaps at times this psalm may seem a little dark, I always found comfort in the fact that no matter how deep the shadows, God is there as shelter and refuge and fortress. My grandfather described it as the “watch care” of the Most High.

And yet the psalmist provides a corrective to what might be considered a “distant” God in verse 4. When the shadows grow too deep, or when we succumb to the terrors of the night, or when we are overwhelmed by our own weariness, we are gathered under His wings. Those wings are our refuge. Now, the wings of a majestic eagle may not seem as cuddly as a hen that gathers her brood, but there sure is a sense of refuge under the wings of an eagle. This sense of refuge is magnified by the comfort and trust in the very One who is faithful, whose very faithfulness toward us is our shield. Such mindfulness sustains us on our journey.

In this season of Lent, as we reflect upon our sin that drove Christ to the cross, there might arise some challenges for us in the imagery of the psalm with respect to “abiding in the shadow of the Almighty.” How shall we flee to, and not away from, the shadow of the Almighty? How shall we find refuge under the wings of the majestic eagle, under the pinions so close to the talons?

I am reminded of the words of a wise professor: “when God points his finger, don’t run away, flee to him.” So are the words of the old liturgy, “Wherefore we flee for refuge to thine infinite mercy, seeking and imploring thy grace...”

Finally, the psalm points us to Christ, “the serpent you will trample underfoot.” By His death for us, in His infinite mercy, Christ has indeed trampled the serpent who bruised His heel, and ours.

Prayer: O God, our refuge and strength, when the shadows of life overtake us, reminds us that we also abide in Your shadow for life. As we are awed by Your majesty, help us also to learn to draw near for refuge under Your wings. Bear us on the breath of dawn, make us to shine like sun, and hold us in the palm of Your hand; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

March 15, 2023 | Wednesday of the Third Week in Lent

Jeremiah 8:4–7, 18–9:6; Romans 5:1–11; John 8:12–20; Psalms 5 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 27 & 51 (PM)

^{5:1} Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

– Romans 5:1–11 ESV



Because of Christ, we are at peace with God and peace with one another. Although the sharing of the peace in our Sunday worship can seem at times to be more of a “Holy Howdy,” the intent is to share with each other the same simple blessing Jesus gave His disciples the night of His resurrection; “Peace be with you” (John 20:19). Nothing can replace the simple blessing, “the peace of the Lord be with you.”

St. Paul affirms this blessed promise in today's passage. We are at peace with God through Jesus Christ. This is not an idle condition, like a ‘get out of jail free’ card to be securely locked away until needed. Paul remarks that we will have daily struggles in this present life because of our faith in this promise. As one church father said, “Tribulations are, for those well prepared, like certain foods and exercises for athletes which lead the contestant on to the hereditary glory.”

Paul writes in Romans 3:11, “None is righteous, no, not one.” God knows there are only sinners in this world. You and I are in this group. We have no right or ability to approach an all righteous and holy God, but Paul lays out the good news — “But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

God looked at you and I and saw sinners. But, by His grace and good pleasure, He reconciled the division between Him and us with the blood of His Son. Because of this tremendous sacrifice we are at peace with God and can share this simple but powerful blessing, “the peace of the Lord be with you.”

Nothing more powerful can be announced than having no sin, failings, nor temptations come between God and we, His people. They are all washed away with the blood of Jesus.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, because of your Son I can come before You and call You “Father.” I pray for You to strengthen Your gift of faith and trust in the promise of reconciliation Your Son. It is only by Your gift of faith through grace that peace has been established between us. Help me see and live in this peace. Through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

March 16, 2023 | Thursday of the Third Week in Lent

Jeremiah 10:11–24; Romans 5:12–21; John 8:21–32; Psalms 27 & 147:13–21 (AM); Psalms 126 & 102 (PM)

^{5:12} Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— ¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. ²⁰ Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

– Romans 5:12–21 ESV



You might not think that using logic when reading the Bible would be beneficial, but it really is. If you can work a sudoku puzzle, then you can think logically! When you solve a riddle, you're thinking logically. You use logic every day in conversations, solving problems, and even when doing devotions.

In the Bible there are rhetorical devices that were used and recorded by the biblical writers. At least one of them was a form of logic called “קל וחומר/*qal waḥômer*” in Hebrew, which translates “light to heavy.” To give you an example of this, take Jesus' words to the Pharisees who pushed Him to explain healings done on the Sabbath, “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out?” He follows that statement with, “How much more valuable is a person than a sheep!” Jesus moves from the smaller example — a sheep in trouble — to a larger example — a human being who is in trouble, and who is more valuable than a sheep.

We see other examples of this in the Scriptures as the question is posed, “How much more?” In Paul's letter to the Romans, the apostle uses this technique repeatedly to remind humans of what Christ has done for us.

Sin came into the world through the first man Adam, but Jesus brought the free gift of grace for all who believe. One man brought death —which is no small thing — but one man brought new life, which is *definitely* a bigger, more heavier thing! One man committed a trespass which led to the condemnation for all humanity. But one man, through a single act of righteousness brought justification and eternity! One person's disobedience created a world of sinners. But one person's obedience created an alien righteousness. That is, a righteousness that is not our own.

All of this is both a reality check *and* the good news. St. Paul wanted the Roman Christians to know just how much Jesus loved them. He promises a new life for all who trust in Him, and He has put an end to our last enemy — death. Our loving Savior has destroyed the power of death and thereby has loved and

freed us through His self-giving sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. An action that happened over 2,000 years ago has lasting effects for us today. Not only that, Christ's saving power extended not only to those who knew Him personally — that's the small part — but also to believers throughout all time and place — which is the bigger part!

Prayer: Gracious heavenly Father, we give You thanks for the incredible gift of grace and mercy You have given us through Jesus Christ. It's no small thing, but rather something for which we stake our lives on. Help us to always trust in Your love that frees us from sin and death so that we might live and serve in your holy name. We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

March 17, 2023 | Friday of the Third Week in Lent

Patrick, Bishop, Missionary to Ireland, 461

Jeremiah 11:1–8, 14–17; Romans 6:1–11; John 8:33–47; Psalms 22 & 148 (AM); Psalms 105 & 130 (PM)

^{6:5} For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

– Romans 6:5 ESV



The Lenten season is a time for reflection and spiritual growth. We are encouraged to draw near to God and to be mindful of His presence in our lives. One way to do this is to explore the writings and lives of spiritual leaders like St. Patrick, especially meditating on the powerful prayers they left behind.

St. Patrick's Breastplate is one such prayer that has been used for centuries to draw the faithful closer to God. It is a beautiful *lorica* (a Latin word for "body armor") prayer—a "binding" prayer of protection—in which the petitioner invokes all the power of God as a safeguard against evil in its many forms. Thus, St. Patrick's *lorica* also acknowledges God's power and presence in all aspects of life. The prayer speaks of seeking God's guidance and protection in moments of danger and difficulty. It is a reminder of the power of faith and the importance of relying on God's strength in all things—particularly relevant when battling the evils of the world, the flesh, and the devil during this forty-day Lenten season.

While there are many *loricae* throughout history, St. Patrick's is unique for his time in that it specifically calls upon the Triune God, rather than pagan deities, petitioning for true communion with and participation in Christ and his power (reminiscent of the reminder Paul gives us in our New Testament passage today)—it also serves as a form of creed. One translation renders the beginning of the prayer: "I arise today through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity. Through belief in the Threeness, Through Confession of the Oneness, Of the Creator of Creation." This is a powerful reminder that we are called to draw closer to God during Lent, to rely on His strength and guidance as we journey toward Easter.

St. Patrick's Breastplate is a beautiful reminder of the power of faith and prayer. It encourages us to seek God's protection and guidance in times of difficulty and to trust in His power and strength. As we reflect on this powerful prayer during the Lenten season, may we remember the importance of drawing close to God, seeing His presence as "God-with-us," and relying on His strength and guidance.

There are many musical adaptations of St. Patrick's Breastplate. An excellent paraphrase of the first half of the prayer by Cecil F. Alexander can be found as "I Bind Unto Myself Today" in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (#188). However, there are other modern adaptations as well, most notably "Christ Be With Me" by David Gungor and John Arndt (collectively known as the band "The Brilliance"), and "The Lorica" by Steve Bell, a friend to the NALC and musical performer at several NALC Convocations.

Prayer on following page.

Fáeth Fiada, or "The Lorica of Saint Patrick"
Literal Translation by James Henthorn Todd (1864)

1. I bind to myself to-day,
The strong power of the invocation of the Trinity:
The faith of the Trinity in the Unity
The Creator of the elements.

The Host of God to defend me,
Against the snares of demons,
Against the temptations of vices,
Against the (lusts) of nature,
Against every man who meditates injury to me,
Whether far or near,
With few or with many.
2. I bind to myself to-day,
The power of the Incarnation of Christ,
with that of his Baptism,
The power of the Crucifixion with that of
his Burial,
The power of the Resurrection, with the
Ascension,
The power of the coming of the Sentence of
Judgement.
3. I bind to myself to-day,
The power of the love of Seraphim,
In the obedience of Angels,
(In the service of Archangels,)
In the hope of Resurrection unto reward,
In the prayers of the noble Fathers,
In the predictions of the Prophets,
In the preaching of Apostles,
In the faith of Confessors,
In purity of Holy Virgins,
In the acts of Righteous Men.
4. I bind to myself to-day,
The power of Heaven,
The light of the Sun,
(The whiteness of Snow,)
The force of Fire,
The flashing of lightning,
The velocity of Wind,
The depth of the Sea,
The stability of the Earth,
The hardness of Rocks.
5. I bind to myself to-day,
The Power of God to guide me,
The Might of God to uphold me,
The Wisdom of God to teach me,
The Eye of God to watch over me,
The Ear of God to hear me,
The Word of God to give me speech,
The Hand of God to protect me,
The Way of God to prevent me,
The Shield of God to shelter me,

6. I have set around me all these powers,
Against every hostile savage power
Directed against my body and my soul,
Against the incantations of false prophets,
Against the black laws of heathenism,
Against the false laws of heresy,
Against the deceits of idolatry,
Against the spells of smiths and druids,
Against all knowledge that binds the soul of
man.
7. Christ, protect me to-day
Against poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against wound,
That I may receive abundant reward.
8. Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me, Christ within me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ at my right, Christ at my left,
(Christ in the fort,
Christ in the chariot-seat,
Christ in the mighty stern.)
9. Christ in the heart of every man who thinks
of me,
Christ in the mouth of every man who
speaks to me,
Christ in the eye of every man that sees me,
Christ in the ear of every man that hears me.
10. I bind to myself to-day,
The strong power of an invocation of the Trinity,
The faith of the Trinity in Unity
The Creator of the Elements.
(Salvation is the Lord's,
Salvation is the Lord's,
Salvation is Christ's,
May thy salvation, Lord, be always with us!
Amen.)

March 18, 2023 | Saturday of the Third Week in Lent

Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, 386

Jeremiah 13:1–11; Romans 6:12–23; John 8:47–59; Psalms 43 & 149 (AM); Psalms 31 & 143 (PM)

^{6:12} Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. ¹⁵ What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. ²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

— Romans 6:12–23 ESV



St. Paul's discussion of our bondage to sin as over-against our freedom in Christ can be somewhat difficult for us to hear and understand today. Bible translations approach this differently, some having "slaves" as in the ESV, others using "bond-servant" or simply "servant." As with so many biblical, theological concepts, Paul is trying to help his readers — you and me, as well as Christians in ancient Rome — to understand how it is that while we were once committed to and living in bondage to sin, now, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are free to live new lives.

Paul says, "I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations." In other words, he's using the slavery/freedom language to make clear how our relationship with God, the Law and the Gospel has changed because of Jesus Christ. Paul's concern, however, is that though we have been set free by the free gift of God in Jesus Christ, we continue to live as those in slavery to sin!

I recently completed a biography of U.S. Grant. In current jargon, once Grant had won the war, he found it more difficult to win the peace! While slavery as an institution was ended, our nation continued to live, in many ways, as if still engaged in the evil of slavery! And that is Paul's point, with regard to our sin and freedom. We are set free from sin, but often we live as if we are still in bondage to, controlled by, obedient to, our sinful selves.

Lent is that season of the church year when we, again, receive and cling to the Good News that by God's grace, we have been set free from sin — free to live new lives and eternal life in Jesus Christ!

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, because we have been set free, make us to be obedient from the heart, living lives of love, joy, peace and service. Amen.



The **FOURTH WEEK** *of* **LENT**

*Holy Father, Giver of all good things, help us to work for the food that endures to eternal life,
rather than wasting our time and effort on things that are perishable.*

May our eyes always be fixed on the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Savior.

*Let our lives be sustenance for a world in need,
that Your love would pour through us and into the world You love.*

We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



March 19, 2023 | FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

ST. JOSEPH, HUSBAND OF MARY AND GUARDIAN OF OUR LORD

Jeremiah 14:1–22; Galatians 4:21—5:1; Mark 8:11–21; Psalms 84 & 150 (AM); Psalms 42 & 32 (PM)

^{8:17} Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? ¹⁸ Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember? ¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” “Twelve,” they replied. ²⁰ “And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” They answered, “Seven.” ²¹ He said to them, “Do you still not understand?”

– Mark 8:17–21 NIV2011



Jesus always instructed his disciples about vision for ministry, and also about provision for mission.

Although the current day Church is engaged in the mission work of Jesus Christ, we often struggle with the subject of provision. Where is the next paycheck going to come from? Are we going to have enough money or enough resources for the work we are called to do? What are we going to eat? What am I going to wear? Where are we going to live? These are pertinent questions in life. However, if they are not properly answered or settled, they continue to be matters of burden for the missionary, minister of the gospel, or layperson.

In this text, Jesus points to the fact that for every mission, He gives the church the provision to accomplish it. In particular, he reminds them of when he provided food miraculously to thousands of people. The reason he was reminding them was to raise up faith to believe that if he can provide food for so many people, out of such small and meager resources, their needs can also be met miraculously.

Throughout scripture, the Lord has called individuals, families, nations, and religious institutions for different kinds of assignments. Throughout scripture we do not see any moment where people fail for lack of resources because God always provides. The same promise is still with us. He has never called us to let us down. He has never sent us without preparing the ground, or without putting the seed in the ground for us.

Everything that is needed to fulfill the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ is already provided. We have to believe that our God is our provider, and we have to march with undivided vision to fulfill his great commission.

However, as human beings, there are moments in time when we doubt more than we believe. When doubt dominates our lifestyle, we have to go back to the stories and scriptures — just like Jesus did — and uplift our spirit by looking at examples where Jesus is at the center. That way, we lift up our faith, and we start to look and talk to our mountains. We are mountain-moving believers. We are called not to run away from challenges, but to run into challenges — and change those challenges into opportunities for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Satan usually puts fear in us by pointing to all kinds of shortages and lack that surround our lives. But we are also called by Jesus Christ not to look at what we are lacking, but to focus on the overflowing power and provision of Jesus Christ. May God grant us the grace not to take our eyes away from Jesus.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, thank you so much for the opportunity to serve you. We are deeply grateful for the continuous provision that you give us to enhance the vision of the ministry that you've called us to do. As we remember the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, please help us not to take our eyes from what He has done for us, but to focus on His provision and run after that vision that you've given us. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen!

March 20, 2023 | Monday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Cuthbert, Bishop of Lindisfarne, 687

Jeremiah 16:1–21; Romans 7:1–12; John 6:1–15; Psalms 119:73–80 & 145 (AM); Psalms 121 & 6 (PM)

^{6:1} After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ² And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. ³ Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. ⁵ Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷ Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.” ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ⁹ “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?” ¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.” ¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”

— John 6:1–14 ESV



Jesus rarely made suggestions — He often issued orders. For example, “Do not be afraid,” “Follow me,” “Forgive others” and “Sit down!” Some of you may be wondering about that last one. Where did Jesus command us to sit down? I’ll get back to that question.

Most of us have had times when we ask, “What does God want me to do?” or “What is my calling in life”? In a general way, these are easy questions to answer, because our Lord Jesus calls each of us to be His disciples. There are no exceptions to this universal Christian vocation.

A few years ago I served as chair of the NALC Life-to-Life Discipleship initiative. During those years, I read lots of books and articles on discipleship. Generally, those books focused on what we should do as disciples. We should read our Bibles, pray, journal, give, share our faith, be part of a small group in which others hold us accountable, etc.

You probably noticed that sitting down is not on that short “to do” list. But let’s think about today’s text — the story of the feeding of the five thousand. The disciples are frantic. They do not know what to do. They did not have enough food or money.

So, Jesus takes control and issues an order — a command. This command comes out more clearly in the King James Version, which in this case better reflects the Greek. Jesus literally says to “make” them all sit down. Sitting down does not seem to be the necessary first step in a food crisis. The disciples wanted action, and Jesus orders a nap. Then Jesus takes their meager resources into His hands and gives thanks — *eucharist* — and starts distributing until all are satisfied.

What does God want us to do? Sometimes He tells us to go, to work, to be active. At other times He tells us to sit down, be still, and be fed. The journey of discipleship is a long obedience in the same direction.

We can grow weary, so Jesus prepares a supper for us. Sometimes the most important thing we need to do is to sit down and eat. Jesus commands it.

Prayer: “We do not presume to come to your table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in Your manifold great mercies. We are not worthy to gather up the crumbs under Your table. But You are the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy. Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ, and so to drink His blood, that we may evermore dwell in him and he in us. Amen” (*Lutheran Book of Worship*).

March 21, 2023 | Tuesday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Thomas Ken, Bishop of Bath and Wells, 1711

Jeremiah 17:19–27; Romans 7:13–25; John 6:16–27; Psalms 34 & 146 (AM); Psalms 25 & 91 (PM)

^{6:16} When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷ got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸ The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. ²⁰ But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” ²¹ Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going. ²² On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. ²³ Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴ So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. ²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” ²⁶ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.”

— John 6:16–27 ESV



It's all about trust.

When our son Hans was four years old, he followed his grandpa onto a frozen lake. Both in boots and warm winter coats, they crossed the ice of Big Cedar Lake to Penny Island. When describing this event to others, especially from warmer climates, the listeners are often afraid that those two might have gone through the ice. Even after being assured that trucks could drive on that foot-thick ice, they couldn't believe Hans and his grandpa would traverse a lake to get to Penny Island.

Along with that excursion came the gift of a rock that read, “I walked on water to Penny Island.” Hans had to trust his grandpa that he would not fall through the ice, and his grandpa had to trust that Hans would be able to use his little legs to get across the frozen lake and back home again.

It is about trust. In today's text, the disciples couldn't believe what they were seeing — Jesus walking on the water — and had to trust that it was beyond human ability and that they were in the presence of the divine.

When the crowds gathered, they were excited about Jesus' ability to feed the crowds and they sought Him to see what else He might do. Yet it was Jesus who said that trust is not just about the miracles, but trusting Christ as the provider, Savior, Lord. Trusting that the One who created you will care for you and save you for eternity. Trusting that when Christ Jesus says you are forgiven because of His great sacrifice and His glorious resurrection, you have exactly what He says. That is a promise you can take home.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we love to see miracles and great performances so that we may believe in You—yet it is by Your very power, through the Holy Spirit's work, that You call us to faith through Your promises. Let us rest assured, daily, that we have peace and forgiveness in You. Grant this, Father, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

March 22, 2023 | Wednesday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Jonathan Edwards, Teacher, Missionary to the Native Americans, 1758

James De Koven, Priest, 1879

Jeremiah 18:1–11; Romans 8:1–11; John 6:27–40; Psalms 5 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 27 & 51 (PM)

^{51:1} Have mercy on me, O God,
 according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
 blot out my transgressions.
² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
 and cleanse me from my sin!
³ For I know my transgressions,
 and my sin is ever before me.
⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
 and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
 and blameless in your judgment.
⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
 and in sin did my mother conceive me.
⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
 and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.
⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
 wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
 let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
⁹ Hide your face from my sins,
 and blot out all my iniquities.
¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
 and renew a right spirit within me.
¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence,
 and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
 and uphold me with a willing spirit.

– Psalm 51:1–12 ESV



In today's reading, David explains clearly what sin is. He tells us where it comes from, what damage it does, and how we can be freed of it. Today's psalm is an amazing example of repentance, forgiveness, and God's grace and mercy from start to finish.

I think it's safe to say that we all want to progress. We all want to move forward. When we get in our vehicles to go somewhere, we want to get to the destination we have in mind. But all of us make wrong turns from time to time, even when we use GPS. This is true not only when we are driving a car, but is true in *life*. God has given us the ultimate GPS, to follow in life — His Word. Yet, we often fail to follow it and make wrong turns. Those wrong turns are sin.

As David says, “against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (Psalm 51:4a). All wrong turns, all sin, is against God. Why? Because God is the One who has decided what is right and what is wrong. He decides when we have made a wrong turn. Thankfully, He is also the One who made us His own in our Baptism and decided our final destination, granting us eternal life.

So, what happens when we still make those wrong turns? God has given us the ability to repent and ask for forgiveness of our sins. He’s also given us the knowledge that when we ask for forgiveness, even though we don’t deserve it, forgiveness will be given.

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (Psalm 51:7). When that forgiveness is given, God will wash away our inequities and create in us a clean heart because of His wonderful mercy and grace.

When you are on the road of life and make a wrong turn — as we all do — repent, and turn around to God. Know and trust that because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, even your worst sin is blotted out, and you will be restored to your right relationship with God. Paul tells us in Romans that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God. Nothing!

Prayer: Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Lord God, help us to remember that even when we sin against you by making a wrong turn in life, we can always come to you and repent, knowing that our sins will be forgiven for the sake of Jesus Christ who gave His life for us. In His mighty name, we pray. Amen.

March 23, 2023 | Thursday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Gregory the Illuminator, Missionary Bishop of Armenia, c. 332

Jeremiah 22:13–23; Romans 8:12–27; John 6:41–51; Psalms 27 & 147:13–21 (AM); Psalms 126 & 102 (PM)

^{6:41} At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” ⁴² They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven?’”

⁴³ “Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. ⁴⁴ “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. ⁴⁶ No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

— John 6:41–51 ESV



One of the reasons bread has been called the “staff of life” is because it is a basic food in just about every culture. Like a shepherd’s staff it can be a source of comfort, support and defense. Yet even though bread is universally common, it can also be extremely diverse. If you walk into a bakery and simply say, “Give me bread,” you might go home with biscuits or brioche, croissants or croutons, pizza or pretzels. All help sustain life, since they provide at least some level of nutrition. All can stave off hunger and quiet the grumbling in our stomachs.

None, however, can satisfy our inner hunger or grant eternal life. Only Jesus can do that. In the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel, Jesus declares that He is the bread of life that has come down from heaven. In the minds of the people gathered that day, the only heavenly bread was the manna God provided in the wilderness. Jesus reminds these grumblers that He is much more than manna. Manna can feed the stomach but cannot satisfy the soul.

The manna the Israelites ate during their wilderness wanderings fed them for a time but they all eventually died. The bread of life that Jesus offers leads to eternal life. Whenever we gather for worship we pray that our Heavenly Father will, “Give us this day our daily bread.” In Luther’s Small Catechism, brother Martin instructs that we ask in this prayer that God cause us to recognize what our daily bread is, and to receive it with thanksgiving. Our daily bread includes all the things we need to sustain us in this life — but we must also remember to thank God daily for the Bread of Life, our Lord Jesus, who is the only One who can truly satisfy our souls and lead us to eternal life.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, You are the true bread from heaven who satisfies the soul and gives eternal life to all those who believe and trust in You. I confess to You my own inner grumblings. Forgive me when I become so focused on what I lack today, that I forget to thank You for the abundance that awaits me in heaven. I ask You this day to guide me with Your wisdom, sustain me with Your love and feed me with the bread of life. I pray this in the name of Jesus, my Savior and Lord. Amen.

March 24, 2023 | Friday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Óscar Arnulfo Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, Martyr, 1980

Jeremiah 23:1–8; Romans 8:28–39; John 6:52–59; Psalms 22 & 148 (AM); Psalms 105 & 130 (PM)

^{6:52} The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” ⁵⁹ Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

– John 6:52–59 ESV



During my growing years, I ate a lot of bread. Whether it was toast in the morning, sandwiches, toasted cheese on Saturday nights, or other rolls and pastries, bread was a staple in my diet. This food always seemed to fill my stomach — temporarily. After a while I was hungry again, wanting more. In John 5:52–59, Jesus reminds us that only the bread from heaven, His body and blood, will truly satisfy us, and allow us to live forever.

When the Jews were told by Christ that He was living bread, they could not understand what he meant. While they were used to animal sacrifice, they struggled to comprehend that life forever would only come through Jesus’ flesh and His blood. As it is written, “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks of my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

The Lord tried to show them the difference between the manna God had supplied to the Hebrews in the wilderness and His own body and blood, but they could not comprehend. They could not believe that He was the Messiah, their deliverer. But the Jews were not alone. As the early Christian Church began to meet in Rome, the pagans thought that the believers were cannibals! Imagine that!

Thankfully, as we focus upon the body and blood of Jesus today, we are drawn into the scriptural understanding of Holy Communion. As we receive this Sacrament, a visible sign of God’s love, we are assured that Christ is present in, with, and under the bread and wine through the Holy Spirit. We are assured of the forgiveness of our sins. And we are assured of God’s saving power through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Through a free gift of faith, let us cling to the flesh and blood of Jesus. It is only through Him alone that we can live forever.

Prayer: Father, thank you for sending Jesus to be our Savior. As we partake in His flesh and blood, the true food and the true drink, help us to realize that He abides in us and we abide in Him. Christ is the “Living Bread” sent down from heaven to save us from our sins and provide us life forever. Through faith, let us feed on His body and blood, knowing that He has risen from the dead, and given us life. I pray all these things in the Name of Jesus. Amen!

March 25, 2023 | Saturday of the Fourth Week in Lent

THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LORD TO THE VIRGIN MARY

Isaiah 7:10–14; Hebrews 10:4–10; Luke 1:26–38; Psalms 40:1–11 & 149 (AM); Psalms 31 & 143 (PM)

^{1:26} In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

– Luke 1:26–38 ESV



If the virgin Mary had a Facebook page, her status on the day of the Annunciation might have been, "Highly favored and greatly troubled."

We too, often live at this intersection of two competing realities. We know what God has declared about us in our baptism, but we fear that we fall short, that we don't measure up, that we are not enough. And it's true. Yet in these busy weeks, as the unchecked tasks on your "to-do" list and the unresolved tension in your relationships accuse you, "the Lord is with you" no less than He was with Mary.

"The Lord is with you." These words are a clue as to the sort of greeting Gabriel is bringing. Mary didn't know what we know — that just as God's presence once dwelt in the temple and tabernacle, her womb would soon become the new temple, tabernacle, and ark of the covenant where the Lord's presence would dwell. She would be the vessel bearing God's Son to the world!

"Don't be afraid," the angel reassured her, as he explained what was about to happen by the Spirit's power. Somewhere between "How can this be?" and "Let it be," Mary wrestled with the implications of Gabriel's words, wrestled with what they will require of her, before coming to terms with the impossible possibility.

Have you come to terms with the impossible possibility that you are more undeserving than you fear, and more loved than you ever imagined? Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, Mary's Son has made it so, highly favored ones. Through His Word proclaimed, through His body given and His blood outpoured, Jesus has made it so. Rejoice!

Prayer: Lord, like Mary, we are called to be bearers of Your presence to a confused, and confusing, world. How can this be? You don't choose us because we are worthy. We are worthy because You have chosen us. Give us favor in our mission to be, and to make, disciples for You. Let it be to us according to Your Word. In Jesus' name. Amen.



The **FIFTH WEEK** *of* **LENT**

*God of all glory and might, You grant new life through Your Son, Jesus,
who gave His life for all who trust in Him.*

*Help us, as followers of Christ, to keep His Word and to live according to His holy will.
May we be willing to risk scorn, rejection, suffering and trials for the sake of the Gospel message,
trusting that we will never be alone, but that our lives are securely in Your hands.*

*May we reach out with Your love to the ends of the earth,
giving our very best in service to the lost, alone and in need.*

We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



MARCH 26, 2023 | FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Jeremiah 23:16–32; 1 Corinthians 9:19–27; Mark 8:31—9:1; Psalms 84 & 150 (AM); Psalms 42 & 32 (PM)

^{8:31} And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” ³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.

– Mark 8:31–35 ESV



Dear friends, greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus as we draw closer to remembering the final events of our Lord’s life — His suffering, death, and resurrection from the dead, and the hope and promise that are given to us in Him.

Today’s passage is one of those in which we are given as concise and comprehensive a statement of the Christian faith and life as anywhere in all of Scripture. In these few verses the essentials of our faith are laid out. In fact, I would dare to say that if the three elements of the Christian faith noted in the text are not included in one’s understanding of what Christianity is all about, then it is no longer the Christian faith being understood.

Those three are: (1) the person of Christ — who He is; (2) the work of Christ — what He has done; and (3) the nature of the Christian life — for us, as His followers. If you are clear on those three essential elements, then you have it straight. Not that you understand all there is to know, and not that you have fully grasped everything Jesus taught. But the basics of the Christian faith are clear. And the basics are spelled out in those three.

First, the person of Christ. When asked by Jesus who the crowds said that He was, the answers were many. Some said Elijah. Some said one of the prophets. Still others said John the Baptist raised from the dead. When asked what he thought, Peter confessed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

To understand the Christian faith, one needs to know who Jesus is. In our world today, the answers to that question are as many and varied as they were back then. A good man. A good teacher. A miracle worker. A person who lived what He taught. All are good answers and part of what we believe and confess. But without Jesus as the Son of God, as the One sent from the Father, who came into this world to save, those other claims are no different than the claims we might make about many others. The truth is the Christian faith stands or falls on the fact that Jesus was, is, and will always be the Christ, the Messiah, the one sent by God to save the world.

The second element is the work of Christ. Mark tells us, “Jesus then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.” Nearly one out of three chapters in the four gospel accounts are dedicated to the final week of our Lord’s life.

His suffering at the hands of the religious leaders, His death on the cross, and His resurrection from the dead – these are at the heart of what we believe and confess. They are, as the apostle puts it, of “first importance.” Jesus died on the cross for our sin. He was raised from the dead to give us the promise of eternal life. All of our sin was given to Him. All of His righteousness was given to us. As a result, we are forgiven in the sight of God and we have life eternal when we die.

The third element is that, until that day, we have been called and claimed and commissioned to live for Him. Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, 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.”

As we move through this season of Lent, leading to the remembrance of those final events of our Lord’s life, let us not forget the essentials of our faith. The person of Christ, the work of Christ, and the call of the Christian life to *live* for Christ. All three are important. All three are at the heart of what we believe and confess. And all three are found and given to us in Christ.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we thank You for the life You lived and the life You gave, and for the calling we now have in You. Help us to never lose sight of who You are, what You have done for us, and what that means for our lives. In Your most holy name, we pray. Amen.

March 27, 2023 | Monday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Charles Henry Brent, Bishop of the Philippines and of Western New York, 1929

Jeremiah 24:1–10; Romans 9:19–33; John 9:1–17; Psalms 119:73–80 & 145 (AM); Psalms 121 & 6 (PM)

^{9:1} As (Jesus) passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ² And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud ⁷ and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some said, “It is he.” Others said, “No, but he is like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” ¹⁰ So they said to him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹ He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹² They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” And there was a division among them. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.”

– John 9:1–17 ESV



It seems to me that there are basically two kinds of people in this world when it comes to sin: those who are hung up on sin, and those who pretend that sin isn’t a thing. For some, pointing out the sins of others is easy to do, easier than seeing our own sinfulness. For others who deny the reality of God, sin is not a factor. This group would readily tout, “I’m a good person!”

In our gospel lesson for today the disciples posed a question to Jesus about a man whom they noticed begging on the street. Perhaps he had been there for so long that the citizens of that area ceased to actually notice him. That happens when we are confronted by the realities of poverty, illness, and homelessness on a regular basis. We aren’t quite sure what we can do to help the situation so we often times look away and move on with our daily routine.

The disciples wondered aloud, “Who sinned? This man or his parents?” The implication is that someone had to be responsible for him being born blind. In ancient days it was believed that sin was the root cause of illness and human suffering. The “neighbors” in this story were hung up on sin. They wanted answers! “Who should be held accountable for this man’s condition?” “How were his eyes opened?” “Is this the man who was blind from birth?”

Jesus’ answer turns everything upside down. “No one sinned,” He said. Not the man and not his parents. Rather, this situation is for the purpose of displaying God’s mighty works. Imagine the shock as Jesus spits on the ground and makes some mud with His saliva and the dirt. Then He rubs the mud on the man’s eyes and tells him to go and wash in the nearby pool of water, and lo and behold the man returns fully sighted! Jesus has enacted a miracle on the man and he can see for the first time in his life! Those who witnessed

the miracle though were more interested in sin, blame, and concrete answers rather than rejoicing with this fellow who now had the gift of sight. God was glorified indeed — but many were focusing on the wrong thing.

We can be blind to God's goodness quite often, actually. We can find things to fuss and fume about, laying blame on whoever or whatever is convenient. But Jesus shows us a better way, and He opens our eyes to see His love and mercy in ways we could never imagine.

Prayer: Loving Lord, help us not to get hung up on sin, or to dismiss the reality of our blindness. Instead, grant us the grace to see clearly Your great love for us, that You have freed us from bondage to sin and death and have opened our eyes to see Your glory. We give You thanks for Your mercy and tender care for Your beloved children. We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

March 28, 2023 | Tuesday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Jeremiah 25:8–17; Romans 10:1–13; John 9:18–41; Psalms 34 & 146 (AM); Psalms 25 & 91 (PM)

^{25:8} “Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, ⁹ behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the Lord, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. ¹⁰ Moreover, I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp. ¹¹ This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. ¹² Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the Lord, making the land an everlasting waste. ¹³ I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations. ¹⁴ For many nations and great kings shall make slaves even of them, and I will recompense them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.”

¹⁵ Thus the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: “Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. ¹⁶ They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them.”

¹⁷ So I took the cup from the Lord’s hand, and made all the nations to whom the Lord sent me drink it.

—Jeremiah 25:8–17 ESV



God’s grace is something we should never simply take for granted. However, just as His grace is indeed “costly” — as Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us — we can also be assured that grace is at the very center of God’s character. Today’s passages remind us of God’s continued faithfulness to His people, even amid trials and tribulations. God’s mercy and grace are unceasing, and He desires only our good. We can always rely on His promises, no matter what hardships come our way.

In the book of Jeremiah, we read time and time again of the Lord’s warnings of judgment against those who refuse to turn from their wicked ways. In this case, Jeremiah warns the nations of their own wickedness, as well as God’s own people who have constantly rejected Him—and we read that God’s judgment is severe! But even in the midst of His wrath, He still desires that all humanity would turn to Him. His mercy is greater than His justice, and He desires to bring salvation to all. Fast forward 700 years, and God’s people have once again conspired with the ungodly nations and rejected Him by sending His own Son to death on the cross on their behalf.

In Jesus, we find the ultimate example of God’s grace. Through His life and death, He showed us the power of sacrificial love and unconditional forgiveness. As we reflect on what Jesus has done for us, we can find great inspiration, motivation, and power to press on in our faith.

Jesus’ sacrifice is the ultimate example of God’s mercy. By laying down His own life, Jesus offered us a path from our sin and into restored life with Him. Through Jesus, we are able to receive God’s grace despite our imperfection and shortcomings. We can be filled with hope and joy, knowing that Jesus has covered our sins and given us a new life.

Let us never forget the power and beauty of what Jesus has done for us. He has taken away our sin and given us a new life in Him. Even in our inability to be faithful to Him, He is always calling and inviting His people back to Himself, showing us what true grace and faithfulness look like.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we come before You humbly and earnestly seeking Your mercy and grace. We thank You for Your unfailing love and abundant provision. We acknowledge that we are not worthy of Your blessings, and yet You are faithful to give them to us. We ask You to look upon us with Your compassion and kindness, as You did when You spoke to Your people through the prophet Jeremiah. You promised Your people that although Your judgment was at hand, You would not abandon them and that You would restore them to a place of honor and glory. We ask You to show us Your mercy and grace in the same way. We ask that You would forgive our sins and heal our brokenness. We look to You for strength and courage as we walk through the difficult times of life. We thank You for giving us new hope in You. We ask You to pour out Your grace and mercy on us and on all people. We pray these things in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

March 29, 2023 | Wednesday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Hans Nielsen Hauge, Renewer of the Church, 1824

John Keble, Priest, 1866

Jeremiah 25:30–38; Romans 10:14–21; John 10:1–18; Psalms 5 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 27 & 51 (PM)

^{10:1} “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶ This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁷ So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

– John 10:1–18 ESV



Most years, I provide “End of Life” seminars for my parishioners, always encouraging them to spend time arranging their affairs, including providing guidance for others at the time of one’s death. At one point, my wife, Susan asked, “Have you done the same?”

I was convicted, so I took some time to consider how I might organize things in my life to make it easier, a bit, for my family at the time when the Lord calls me from this earthly existence, to the Church Triumphant. This includes guidance for my family regarding funeral service and burial! Far from being a morbid or troubling exercise, it brings a certain peace for me, my wife and my children. I have chosen the Good Shepherd theme for my funeral, with the Gospel reading above to be read and every Good Shepherd hymn to be sung. There are few themes in Holy Scripture more comforting and encouraging than to hear that our Lord, Jesus, is the good shepherd who not only lays down his life for the sheep, but “takes it up again!”

While visiting the Holy Land last summer, we saw many shepherds, still in Israel and Jordan, tending their flocks. Our guide told us of a time when a tourist saw someone walking behind the sheep, driving them on. “I thought the shepherd walked in front, leading the sheep,” the person asked. “Yes,” responded the guide. “But that’s not the shepherd—that’s the butcher, and he walks behind the sheep, driving them to slaughter!” The message ought not be lost on we who are the Lord’s sheep today! Are we following the Good Shepherd, or are we being driven to slaughter by thieves, robbers, false teachers, butchers?

May Lent be a time of hearing and listening to the voice of our Shepherd, Jesus—as He leads us to abundant life and eternal life!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for being our Good Shepherd. Lead me and guide me through this season of Lent and the times and seasons of life, that I follow You always. Amen.

March 30, 2023 | Thursday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Jeremiah 26:1–24; Romans 11:1–12; John 10:19–42; Psalms 27 & 147:13–21 (AM); Psalms 126 & 102 (PM)

^{10:24} The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

²⁵ Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.” ³¹ Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, ³² but Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?”

³³ “We are not stoning you for any good work,” they replied, “but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.”

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are “gods”’? ³⁵ If he called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be set aside— ³⁶ what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’? ³⁷ Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. ³⁸ But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.” ³⁹ Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.

– John 10:24–39 NIV2011



In today’s reading, it says that the Jews gathered around Jesus, asking how long they would keep them in suspense. “If you are the Messiah,” they said, “tell us plainly.”

It feels like that same question is still lingering in this day and age throughout the world. The question of Jesus’ divinity seems to be one of the biggest controversial subjects in the religious and philosophical worlds today. People ask questions like, is He a human being? Is He divine? Or is He both human and divine? People are always wrestling with the identity of Jesus. We who are believers in Jesus Christ declare that Jesus is fully human, fully God, and fully divine! That is why we worship Him and follow Him as our Lord and Savior.

In this passage, the Jews seem to blame Jesus by point out that He was keeping them “in suspense” for a long time. They more or less saying, “We want to know the truth and we want to know the truth now! We’re not going to wait!”

This tells us that it was not very easy for them to attain complete understanding of the identity of Jesus Christ. On one hand they could not dismiss Him as an ordinary teacher or prophet because He was doing extraordinary things. Most of His sayings and actions were truly supernatural, extraordinary and beyond what they had seen in their lifetimes.

On the other side, He was also doing things done by a very humble human being. He was walking around with fishermen, having dinner with sinful tax collectors, and was adored and exalted by sinners and prostitutes. He ate and drank just like any other human being. He grew up in Nazareth, walking on foot through the desert between Judea and the region of Galilee. Therefore, they were questioning whether He

was a human being or God. They wanted Him to come out and openly declare with an unequivocal statement and say “I am God.”

But Jesus chose not to do that. He wanted to depict and unveil His identity through His supernatural words and through His extraordinary actions. He was telling them listen, look, and study scripture. He was telling them to examine the word of God, because there He would be found.

Our relationship with the word of God — examining scriptures and learning and listening to his words through his voice — is the way to find out who Jesus is.

Prayer: Dear God please help us to see You clearly and to show You clearly to the world. There are so many people who are confused about your identity — confused because they are blinded by their own pride or by the many conflicting messages around them. Please help us to clearly see You and to clearly show You to the world. In Jesus’ name. Amen!

March 31, 2023 | Friday of the Fifth Week in Lent

John Donne, Priest, 1631

Jeremiah 29:1–14; Romans 11:13–24; John 11:1–27; Psalms 22 & 148 (AM); Psalms 105 & 130 (PM)

¹⁷ Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰ So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” ²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” ²⁴ Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” ²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷ She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

– John 11:17–27 ESV



Memento mori is a Latin phrase that means, *remember death* or *remember that you will die*. It is good to remind ourselves of this fact—that we will die, and everyone we know and love. Let me explain.

The story of the raising of Lazarus is a meditation on death. The story is one of the most emotionally-charged stories in the Bible. Worry, anxiety, fear, courage, doubt, anger, hope and grief are all implicitly or explicitly on display. In verses that are difficult to capture in translation, Jesus is described as “being deeply moved in his spirit,” “greatly troubled,” and then He weeps (11:34–35). Every grieving person understands these emotions.

As we meditate on death, the vitally important question is whether or not death will have the last word. Will everything and everyone be consumed and forgotten in the eternal darkness of death? Is Lazarus lost forever?

I am sure that many of you reading or listening to this meditation are grieving in some way. For some, that grief is recent and raw. You are feeling the emotional anguish of the death of a loved one. Or, perhaps you personally are going through a serious and life-threatening illness. The questions surrounding the reality of death can no longer be avoided. *Memento mori*.

So, without trying to sugarcoat the bitterness or place a religious band aid on a broken heart, can we look into death’s darkness without falling into what Martin Luther called, “the great and shameful” sin of despair? In the darkness, can we begin to see the eternal Light of God because we have come to know that God’s love is stronger than death?

The story of Lazarus is a meditation on death. But, it is also a meditation on the love of God revealed in Jesus. In Christ Jesus we see the light of divine love which is stronger than the darkness of death. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life” — and everything is changed when we meditate on darkness of death in the light of Jesus. *Memento mori*.

Prayer: “O eternal and most gracious God, You permitted darkness to be before light in the creation, and yet in the making of light so multiplied it that it enlightened even the night: Grant that by Your light we

may see that no sickness, no temptation, no sin, no guilt can remove us from the determined and good purpose which You have revealed in Your Son and sealed by Your Holy Spirit; who live and reign with You, one God, forever and ever. Amen” (Philip H. Pfatteicher, from prayers by John Donne, *Devotions XIV and VII*).

April 1, 2023 | Saturday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Amalie Wilhelmina Sieveking, *Renewer of Society*, 1859; Frederick Dennison Maurice, *Priest*, 1872

Jeremiah 31:27–34; Romans 11:25–36; John 11:28–44; Psalms 43 & 149 (AM); Psalms 31 & 143 (PM)

^{11:25} Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”; ²⁷ “and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

²⁸ As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. ²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰ For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. ³² For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”

³⁵ “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”

³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

– Romans 11:25–36 ESV



Have you ever experienced how difficult it is to love a child who is disobedient, disruptive, naughty, ornery, or disrespectful? Perhaps, as a teacher who loves teaching a classroom full of energetic children, you may find it hard to love that child who seems to make life miserable for everyone else or is the bully in the room. Or, as a parent, you may have a child who is disobedient, disrespectful, sullen, or contradicts you in every way possible. Do you find it difficult to love them?

When I asked a mother who her favorite child was of three, she responded, “The one who needs my love the most that day.” A wise woman of faith, she knew that the one whose behavior was the most disruptive needed her love and attention the most that day. After all, it is God’s Word in 1 Peter 4:8 that says, “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.”

As we draw nearer to Holy Week, we can often wonder how the Jewish religious leaders could accuse Jesus of blasphemy and treason — how they could not see the Messiah in their very midst. Yet it is the apostle Paul, a Jew by birth, who explains the ways of our Heavenly Father. It is by His great mercy that He loves the disobedient and offered His only Son, Jesus, so that those who put their trust in Him could experience the mercy of the Father, feel His great love, and witness His eternal grace.

This is true for both His chosen people, Israel, and those of us who have been grafted in through faith in the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Your parents/spouse/children may love you much and forgive you often, but Jesus Christ loves you even more. For His love, there is no repayment. Thanks be to God for His indescribable glorious merciful love for you and me.

Prayer: Almighty Father, You show Your love for Your creation through Your Son. Help us to share Your words of love and mercy to those who do not yet trust Jesus as Savior. Work faith in all, by Your Holy Spirit, to bring us to the Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.



HOLY WEEK

Most gracious Father, You know the deepest needs and desires of our hearts.

It is our desire to walk with Jesus in faithfulness, and yet when life gets rough, we often fail.

Help us to run this race of faith with perseverance, clinging to Your strength rather than relying on our own.

*This week, may we refrain from all the busyness and slow down
so we can hear Your voice amidst the clatter that is all around us.*

Help us to dwell in silence so that it is only Your Word we hear.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



April 2, 2023 | SUNDAY OF THE PASSION: PALM SUNDAY

James Lloyd Breck, Priest, 1876

Zechariah 9:9–12; 1 Timothy 6:12–16; Matthew 21:12–17; Psalms 84 & 150 (AM); Psalms 42 & 32 (PM)

^{6:12} Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, ¹⁴ to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

– 1 Timothy 6:12–16 ESV



Most believers struggle with doubts about God and faith from time to time. However, it is important to remember that doubt and unbelief are not the same. Unbelief is to live your life as if God does not exist. Unbelief is to reject Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Doubt is different. It is something that happens within the framework of faith. It is a questioning, an insecurity, or a deep desire to be sure of something we trust in.

In our passage today, Paul says, “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called” (1 Timothy 6:12a). The key to overcoming that doubt is that one little word — “called.”

In our Baptism, God in His grace chose us as His children. Each of us has been “called,” chosen and elected by God, not because of something we have done, not by our own merit or worth, but purely by God’s grace, mercy, and faithfulness. It is God alone who does the choosing, according to His plan and purpose.

As we begin Holy Week, let us remember we are children of God. Let us meditate on how, because He loved us enough to send His Son Jesus to die on the cross, we are freed from sin. We are made spotless and blameless in the sight of God — thus giving us life in His kingdom forever and ever.

As Luther’s “Explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed” says, “The Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies each of us, and the whole Christian Church, preserving us in unity with Jesus Christ, who daily forgives our sins and, on the last day, will raise us and all who believe — giving us eternal life.”

It is comforting to know that in our humanness, when we have times of doubt, our faith and our identity as children of God are not dependent on anything we can or will do. He has done it all. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, through Your Son’s death on the cross You brought Your reign of righteousness, peace, and freedom to all. Draw us to You through His cross and keep us faithful to Your reign until He comes again; through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

April 3, 2023 | MONDAY IN HOLY WEEK

Richard, Bishop of Chichester, 1253

Jeremiah 11:18–20; 12:1–17; Philipians 3:1–14; John 12:9–19; Psalms 119:73–80 & 145 (AM); Psalms 121 & 6 (PM)

^{12:9} When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

¹² The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” ¹⁴ And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,

¹⁵ “Fear not, daughter of Zion;
behold, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey’s colt!”

¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. ¹⁷ The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. ¹⁸ The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. ¹⁹ So the Pharisees said to one another, “You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.”

– John 12:9–19 ESV



The Gospel writer John begins his account of the events of Holy Week with a not-so-subtle warning. We are told that people were coming to Jerusalem not just to see Jesus, but also to see Lazarus, who Jesus had raised from the dead. We were told in the previous chapter that the Pharisees and chief priests were already plotting Jesus’ death but now, seeing that many people were believing in Jesus because of Lazarus, the chief priests decided that Lazarus must die also. This is shocking on many levels.

Many people were present at the raising of Lazarus who could confirm the miracle. The fact that someone who was dead had come back to life at Jesus’ command was undeniable. Yet, the chief priests refused to be swayed by facts. They were so resistant to the possibility that Jesus was the Messiah that they would rather commit murder than change their minds.

Lazarus had committed no crime, but he was seen as a threat simply because he was a living witness to the revelation of Jesus Christ.

This plot against Lazarus is a reminder to those who would follow Jesus that there is a cost to discipleship. We do not merely observe Jesus carrying His cross, but we pick up our own and follow. As we enter into Holy Week, let us be ever mindful that, as people who have been given new life by Jesus, we are to live each day as living witnesses to the death and resurrection of our Lord.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, in our Baptisms You welcomed us into Your family and gave us new life. We pray that You would shine the light of Your love into our lives so brightly that, like Lazarus, we would become living witnesses to Your saving grace. Give us the courage to follow You wherever You may lead, and the faith to know that even death cannot separate us from Your love. We pray this in the name of Jesus the Christ, our Savior, Lord, and God. Amen.

April 4, 2023 | TUESDAY IN HOLY WEEK

Martin Luther King, Jr., *Renewer of Society*, 1968; Benedict the African, *Friar*, 1589

Jeremiah 15:10–21; Philippians 3:15–21; John 12:20–26; Psalms 34 & 146 (AM); Psalms 25 & 91 (PM)

^{12:20} Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. ²¹ So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

— John 12:20–26 ESV



“It’s all dependent upon God.” These were the words of my Grandfather Hales, a life-long farmer. He believed that he was just the steward of the land — but when it came to growing, harvesting and dying, that’s when the Lord was involved. Even in the midst of droughts, hail storms, and low yields, he believed that his job was to ready the field, plant the seed, and the Father would take care of the rest.

In the Gospel text for today, Jesus reminds us that the seed in the ground must die in order for there to be growth and new life — a reference to His own upcoming death and resurrection. After His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, He begins the Passover celebration with His disciples, which would culminate into His death and rising.

Then some Greeks, or gentiles, approach Philip about wishing to see Jesus. In this text, Christ reminds us why He is in town — to be glorified on the cross, where He will ultimately save the world from death, darkness and Satan.

Those Greeks seeking Jesus are really no different than many people we experience in the world today. There are so many who don’t know the Lord. But they are seeking, they are hungry, and they are looking for contentment in their lives. Are we helping them to “see” Jesus?

When I was on my pastoral internship, I clearly remember a young woman wandering into the church. And I will never forget her first question: “Who is this Jesus?” How are we making Christ known to others?

As Jesus sacrificed his own life, as His followers, we are also being called to sacrifice and serve, willing to give our own lives for the sake of the Gospel; because even from death, there is always the opportunity for new life.

Prayer: Father, please give us the courage and strength to reach out and invite others to see Jesus. Through the Lord’s death and resurrection, new life will be coming to the world. Help us to serve and to be willing to give up our own lives for the Gospel. There has to be death in order for new life to spring forth. Compel us to die of this world so we can experience everlasting life in the Name of Christ. Amen.

April 5, 2023 | WEDNESDAY IN HOLY WEEK

Jeremiah 17:5–10, 14–18; Philippians 4:1–13; John 12:27–36; Psalms 5 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 27 & 51 (PM)

^{4,4} Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. ¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

– Philippians 4:4–13 ESV



Have you ever wished that you were somewhere other than where you are now? Or dreamed of a different life from the one you have? Maybe you've wondered what it would be like to have *their* life (whoever *they* are). These thoughts are particularly deceptive temptations designed to cheat us out of the joy in the present moment.

Whenever we dwell on what we don't have, and what the future would be like if we had it, we miss the blessings of here and now. Whenever we dwell on a bad decision we made, and what today would be like if we had made a better choice, we also miss the blessings of today.

The best way to combat these tempting thoughts is to repent. Rethink your thinking, and in so doing, gain a biblical perspective.

Last week, when I was at a stoplight, I saw a bumper sticker that read "God is my co-pilot." *If that's true*, I thought, *please swap seats immediately!* The reality is, there is no "co" about it. We are not in control. We're just along for the ride that has been planned for us by the Creator of the universe, with unfathomable love and attention.

As you read these words, all things are working together for your good (see Romans 8:28). You've been died for. You can trust the One who sent His only begotten Son to take your regrets and "if onlys" upon Himself. They've been nailed to the cross. This is the secret of contentment, which is really no secret at all.

Prayer: "Almighty God, I surrender my worries to you. I have asked, You will supply. Thank You for Your steadfast love and saving power. Thank You for grace upon grace. Please guard my heart and mind today with peace that surpasses all understanding, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen" (excerpt from Lisa Ann Moss Degrenia's *Focus Me*, 2017).

April 6, 2023 | MAUNDY THURSDAY

Albrecht Dürer, Painter, 1528; Lucas Cranach the Elder, Painter, 1553; Matthäus Grünewald, Painter, 1528;

Michelangelo Buonarroti, Artist, 1564

Jeremiah 20:7–18; 1 Corinthians 10:14–17; 11:27–32; John 17:1–26; Psalms 27 & 147:13–21 (AM); Psalms 126 & 102 (PM)

^{126:1} When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

² Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for them.”

³ The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad.

⁴ Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negeb!

⁵ Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!

⁶ He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

– Psalm 126 ESV



Maundy Thursday is one of my favorite days to worship in the whole church year. The focus on the Last Supper with the footwashing always stirs my heart to thankfulness. The final action of the evening, the stripping of the altar that signifies the last hours of Jesus’ earthly life — how He was beaten and stripped of His clothes while experiencing the depth of human despair — brings me to great sorrow. The whole range of emotions are evoked during the *Mandatum* service that takes its name from Jesus’ commandment to the disciples to love each other as He has loved them. We worship on this night knowing that death is lurking, but that Sunday is coming. We experience the destruction of the Savior but we know the end of the story too. We are not left hopeless. We trust in the One who broke the bonds of death and freed us from all that holds us captive.

American novelist David Foster Wallace (1962–2008) once said in a graduation commencement, “There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships.”

The question is, what or who do we worship? Do we worship someone or something that cannot give life, such as money, power, beauty, or success? Do we worship our own abilities and independence or even our own bodies? Wallace points out that often the thing we worship is done rather unconsciously. We are not fully aware that we are engaging in some sort of worship. The reality is that all of these things leave us worse off — more empty, more dejected, more ashamed, feeling more worthless.

There is only One who is real and true and life-giving.

When we worship the Savior of the world, we find our worth, we are filled with joy, and we come to understand that we are not living for ourselves.

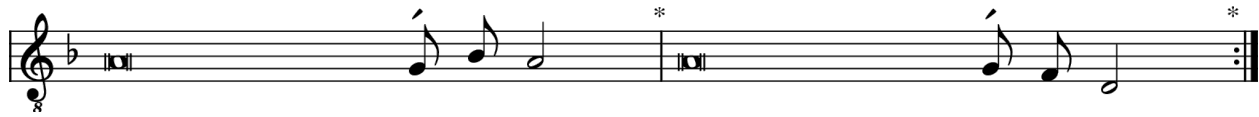
Our worship during this Holy Week draws us back into the very reason why we worship Jesus Christ. Our Lord is the only one who can break us out of our captivity to sin, death, and idolatry. Our Lord Jesus is the one who restores our lives so that we have a future we can look forward to. His love for us grants us joy and laughter, and we come to recognize what the psalmist said, “The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad.”

On this Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and even Holy Saturday when we sit and wait for the promised resurrection, we come to understand the ways in which we “sow in tears” but will soon “reap with shouts of joy!” God has done this for us through His precious Son who, as St. Paul wrote about long ago, “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6–8). We are restored and have been granted a new life in the One who went to the cross for our sake. We will feel the sorrow of this holy night as well as the pain of Good Friday, but we will not be left there. We who go out weeping shall come home with shouts of joy!

Prayer: Lord God, call Your children to worship You in truth and great devotion. Let us not wander away from Your presence in our lives but rather help us to trust Your saving grace that brings us from weeping to joy. On this holy night, may we dwell in the beauty of Christ’s love for us and may our hearts draw closer to You. We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

April 7, 2023 | GOOD FRIDAY

Wisdom 1:16—2:1, 12–22; 1 Peter 1:10–20; John 13:36–38; Psalms 22 & 148 (AM); Psalms 105 & 130 (PM)



^{22:1} My God, my God, why have you forsaken me*
and are so far from my cry, and from the words of my distress?

² O my God, I cry in the daytime, but you do not answer;*
by night as well, but I find no rest.

³ Yet you are the Holy One,*
enthroned upon the praises of Israel.

⁴ Our forefathers put their trust in you,*
they trusted, and you delivered them.

Refrain:



⁵ They cried out to you and were delivered;*
they trusted in you and were not put to shame.

⁶ But as for me, I am a worm and no man,*
scorned by all and despised by the people.

⁷ All who see me laugh me to scorn,*
they curl their lips and wag their heads, saying,

⁸ "He trusted in the LORD; let him deliver him;*
let him rescue him, if he delights in him."

Refrain

⁹ Yet you are he who took me out of the womb,*
and kept me safe upon my mother's breast.

¹⁰ I have been entrusted to you ever since I was born;*
you were my God when I was still in my mother's womb.

¹¹ Be not far from me, for trouble is near,*
and there is none to help.

¹² Many young bulls encircle me;*
strong bulls of Bashan surround me.

Refrain

¹³ They open wide their jaws at me,*
like a ravening and a roaring lion.

¹⁴ I am poured out like water; all my bones are out of joint;*
my heart within my breast is melting wax.

¹⁵ My mouth is dried out like a pot-sherd; my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;*
and you have laid me in the dust of the grave.

¹⁶ Packs of dogs close me in, and gangs of evildoers circle around me;*
they pierce my hands and my feet, I can count all my bones.

Refrain

- ¹⁷ They stare and gloat over me;*
they divide my garments among them; they cast lots for my clothing.
¹⁸ Be not far away, O LORD;*
you are my strength; hasten to help me.
¹⁹ Save me from the sword,*
my life from the power of the dog.
²⁰ Save me from the lion's mouth,*
my wretched body from the horns of wild bulls.

Refrain

- ²¹ I will declare your name to my brethren;*
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.
²² Praise the LORD, you that fear him;*
stand in awe of him, O offspring of Israel; all you of Jacob's line, give glory.
²³ For he does not despise nor abhor the poor in their poverty; neither does he hide his face from them;*
but when they cry to him he hears them.
²⁴ My praise is of him in the great assembly;*
I will perform my vows in the presence of those who worship him.

Refrain

- ²⁵ The poor shall eat and be satisfied, and those who seek the LORD shall praise him.*
"May your heart live forever!"
²⁶ All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD,*
and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.
²⁷ For kingship belongs to the LORD;*
he rules over the nations.
²⁸ To him alone all who sleep in the earth bow down in worship;*
all who go down to the dust fall before him.

Refrain

- ²⁹ My soul shall live for him; my descendants shall serve him;*
they shall be known as the LORD's forever.
³⁰ They shall come and make known to a people yet unborn*
the saving deeds that he has done.

Refrain

Psalm Prayer

Father, when your Son was handed over to torture and felt abandoned by you, he cried out from the cross. Then death was destroyed, and life was restored. By his death and resurrection save the poor, lift up the downtrodden, break the chains of the oppressed, that your Church may sing your praises; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

— Psalm 22 LBW



On this Good Friday, we meditate on the words of Psalm 22, a prayer of lament and despair, but ultimately one of hope and joy. The psalmist begins by pouring out his anguish and despair to God, describing his suffering and asking why he must endure such pain. He feels forsaken, and his cries reach the heavens as he calls out to God.

Yet, in the midst of his despair, he remembers the goodness of God and the hope that comes with trusting in Him. He acknowledges the faithfulness of God and knows that even in his worst moments, God is still with him. He finds comfort in the promise of redemption and renewal, and knows that God will bring joy and peace to his life.

As we reflect on this psalm, we can take comfort in the knowledge that God is with us in our struggles and sorrows. He hears our cries and will bring us joy and peace, even in the midst of the dark moments of life. We can also remember that although we may experience suffering, we can still have hope and joy in God. He is faithful and loving and always willing to restore our lives.

We can also find hope and joy in the fact that Jesus, the Son of God, suffered and died for us on this day. His death was the ultimate sacrifice, and through it, He brought us salvation and redemption. His suffering was for our benefit, and it reminds us of God's great love for us. We can take comfort in knowing that Jesus understands our pain and suffering and that He will always be with us.

As we remember this Good Friday, let us meditate on the words of Psalm 22 and be encouraged by its message of hope and joy. These words were on the lips of our Lord and Savior in His darkest hours. May we find comfort in knowing that God is with us in our struggles and sorrows, may we be filled with hope and joy in knowing that Jesus died for us and brought us salvation and redemption, and may we be reminded of God's great love for us and of His ultimate faithfulness and provision. Amen.

Prayer: O Lord, our God, You are holy and mighty; we praise You for the wonders of Your creation. You are the Lord of hosts, the King of Heaven; Your name is exalted above all. You are our refuge and our strength; in times of trouble we turn to You. We cry out to You, O Lord; in our distress, You answer us. You deliver us from our fears and anxieties; Your loving-kindness and compassion sustain us. You are the source of our hope and peace; Your love surrounds us in our darkest hours. We will praise Your name forever; for You are our deliverer and redeemer. Amen.

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April 8, 2023 | HOLY SATURDAY
THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD: EASTER VIGIL

William Augustus Muhlenberg, Priest, 1877

Job 19:21–27a; Hebrews 4:1–16; Romans 8:1–11; Psalms 43 & 149 (AM); Psalms 23 & 114 (PM)

^{19:21} Have mercy on me, have mercy on me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me! ²² Why do you, like God, pursue me? Why are you not satisfied with my flesh? ²³ “Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! ²⁴ Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! ²⁵ For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. ²⁶ And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, ²⁷ whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

– Job 19:21–27a ESV



What is the proper mindset, orientation and activity, for Holy Saturday? Liturgically, we are between the services of Good Friday and our celebration of Easter — whether at the Great Vigil of Easter on Saturday after sundown (when the liturgical Sabbath begins) or at Sunday services, perhaps sunrise service or later in the morning. It is something of an “in-between” time — waiting, pondering — not yet at the Festival of the Resurrection of our Lord, but through the suffering and dying of the Passion. Certainly, altar guilds will be preparing the church for the Easter celebration, but how do we prepare? So close to Easter, yet still so far away.

Martin Luther provided guidance in his essay during Lent of 1519, “A Meditation on Christ’s Passion.”

He wrote, “He who is so hardhearted and callous as not to be terrified by Christ’s passion and led to a knowledge of self, has reason to fear...you should pray God to soften your heart and let you now ponder Christ’s passion with profit to you. Unless God inspires our heart, it is impossible for us of ourselves to meditate thoroughly on Christ’s passion....You must first seek God’s grace and ask that it be accomplished by his grace and not by your own power. That is why the people we referred to above fail to view Christ’s passion aright. They do not seek God’s help for this, but look to their own ability to devise their own means of accomplishing this. They deal with the matter in a completely human but also unfruitful way....Nevertheless we should neither despair nor desist. At times this happens because we do not pray for it as God conceives of it and wishes it, for it must be left free and unfettered...” (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 42).

For Luther, meditation on the Passion of our Lord serves to help us see that His suffering and death are the consequences of our sin. He has died in our place, bearing our sins on His cross, and His death and resurrection become ours. On Easter morning, we celebrate His new life as ours, that with joy, we know that “because we have died with the Lord, we will also live with Him” (Romans 6:8).

This Holy Saturday, we seek God’s grace that He will soften our hearts. We ask Him to lead us to a knowledge of our sinful selves, that we may meditate on Christ’s passion in such a way that His death and resurrection will bear fruit in us. Today, we affirm, with Job, that in the midst of and in spite of the trials and tribulations of life, “I know that my Redeemer lives and at the last He will stand upon the earth...and I shall see God.”

Prayer: Almighty God, grant me grace, this Holy Saturday, to have a softened heart, to mediate fruitfully on my Lord’s suffering, passion and death, to celebrate joyfully His resurrection! In Jesus’ name, Amen.



The **SEASON** *of* **EASTER**

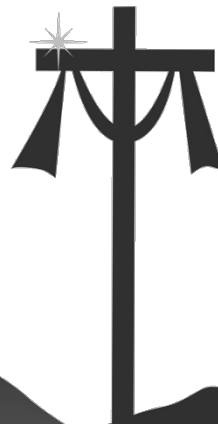
God of life and light, we rejoice this day of Your promise of being made new.

The stone is rolled away, the tomb is empty, and Jesus is alive!

*Grant that we may live every day as if it's the day of resurrection —
without fear, without regret, but with open hearts and joyful minds.*

He is risen! Sin and death cannot hold us captive!

We bless You and praise You, O Lord, for Your mighty works. We praise the holy name of Jesus. Amen.



April 9, 2023 | THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD: EASTER DAY

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Teacher, Martyr, 1945

Exodus 12:1–14; Isaiah 51:9–11; Luke 24:13–35; Psalms 93 & 150 (AM); Psalms 136 & 117 (PM)

^{24:13} That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. ¹⁶ But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.... ²⁸ So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹ but they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight.

– Luke 24:13–16, 28–31 ESV



Dear friends, greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus on this day when we remember and celebrate His resurrection from the dead! Easter Sunday is the day to which all of the Old Testament promises were ultimately pointing, and the day in which all of God's promises to us were fulfilled. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we can be certain in our hope of eternal life when we die; we can be confident in our witness in this life to what He has done and accomplished for us.

Today's passage is one of several accounts of Jesus' appearing to His followers during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension. It comes on the afternoon of that first Easter. Two men were walking from the city of Jerusalem to the small village of Emmaus. One of them was a man named Cleopas. The other is not named, although some of conjectured that it might have been Luke, the writer of this account. We don't know for sure.

It says, while they were traveling, they were talking about the things that had just happened in Jerusalem, about how Jesus had been killed on a cross, and, on the third day, had raised from the dead. Jesus was with them while they were talking, but they were kept from recognizing who He was. When they arrived at Emmaus, they convinced Jesus to stay with them, and so He did. While they were eating, Jesus blessed the bread, broke it, and gave it to them. And when He did, Luke tells us, He suddenly disappeared from their sight.

Now, there is much in this resurrection account to which we could devote our attention. Allow me to share just a few thoughts from one verse. In verse 31 it says, “Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him.”

As it was with those two men on the road to Emmaus, so it is possible today, as well, that Jesus walks along the path of life, known to some, but unrecognized by many. Proclaimed in the Scriptures, witnessed to by the body of believers known as the Church, signs of His goodness and grace and love for this world all around, and yet people still fail to see who He is, what He has done for them, and how much they are loved by Him.

Luke tells us that Jesus, as He walked, “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself...” Does that not make it clear that hearing the Word of God in our daily lives is important? Does that not make it obvious that learning from the Word and

following it in life are key to knowing and understanding who Jesus is, and what life on this earth is all about?

“Their eyes were opened,” it says. When He blessed and broke the bread and gave it to them, “they recognized Him.” As is true in His Word, so it is true in the Sacrament. When we gather together and share that blessed meal, we hear His word of promise and how His death on the cross has paid the price for, covered, and erased all of our sin. Our eyes are opened, and we recognize Him for who He is and for what He has done for us.

Just as it was with the early disciples, so it continues to be in the fellowship of believers that our knowledge of Jesus is nourished and strengthened and grows to maturity. Whether the two on the road to Emmaus, the eleven gathered in Jerusalem, the 3,000 on the Day of Pentecost, or the millions of believers who have come to faith ever since, eyes continue to be opened, and Jesus continues to make Himself known in His Word, in the Sacrament, and in the fellowship of the Church.

May what happened to those two on the road to Emmaus, on that first Easter Sunday, be said on this Easter Sunday of us.

Prayer: Lord God, on this day when we remember and celebrate our Lord’s resurrection from the dead, we find ourselves living in a world where eyes continue to be closed to Him. Help us to live with open eyes, with receptive hearts, and with a willingness and readiness to speak His Word that others might begin to see. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

