

A L E N T E N

# walk through the word

A SCRIPTURE-CENTERED DEVOTIONAL  
FOR MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF THE  
NORTH AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH

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## **Introduction**

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We are now preparing to step over the liturgical threshold of Ash Wednesday, into the holy season of Lent. We will all benefit from additional time, if brief, spent reading God's Word, meditating on it and responding to it. This is the aim of this Lenten devotional booklet — to stimulate regular, personal, daily time in the Scriptures in an easy to use format that encourages faithfulness. We also hope that these brief readings and meditations will help those not used to daily Bible reading, to begin, at least during Lent. Perhaps you will continue on with Scripture reading after Easter!

In 2018, we introduced, together with our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and Lutheran Church—Canada (LCC) sisters and brothers, a three-year daily Bible reading calendar. We worked together with our LCMS and LCC consultation because we all recognize a lack of knowledge of the Bible in our churches.

You can find the *Daily Bible Reading Guide* on the NALC website, [thenalc.org/readingthewordofgod](http://thenalc.org/readingthewordofgod). There are readings listed for each day, in a three-year cycle. If you complete the three years, you will have read through the entire Bible. Also posted on the website with the daily calendar are weekly readings from the book, *Luther on Scripture*, by Johann Michael Reu. Perhaps you will add those readings to your daily devotional time during Lent and Holy Week. It is meaningful and insightful to learn how Martin Luther understood Holy Scripture.

Although the daily readings during Lent and Holy Week come from several books of the Bible, I choose readings from both the Old Testament and New Testament. For the most part, the daily readings follow a continuous series, but they depart at times to fit special days, such as Ash Wednesday and Easter. You will also note that in a few instances, the assigned reading may be edited/shortened. This is for no other reason than to make the reading and devotion fit the allotted space. I trust you will read the entire passage in your own Bible.

As with all personal devotional practices and especially during the season of Lent, approach these readings with grace. If you miss a day or two, catch up when you have time. Bible reading, meditation and prayer are gifts of God to be enjoyed in freedom, not guilt or compulsion. Yes, we wish to be faithful in our devotional disciplines, but when we stumble, we get up, and by God's grace, we begin again. There is no prize or award for keeping your devotional routine pure and without blemish.



You may be reading these devotions in booklet form, provided by your congregation or printed on your own printer at home. The entire devotional is available at [thenalc.org/lent](http://thenalc.org/lent). Visit this page to learn about all the ways you can access this year's devotional. Our intention is to make your devotional time as convenient as possible, realizing it is all too easy for time in Scripture and devotion to be squeezed out of our busy days.

May our love for and knowledge of Holy Scripture grow, in some small way, as we take a Lenten walk together, through the Word!

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## Ash Wednesday | February 26, 2020

<sup>2:12</sup> “Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; <sup>13</sup> and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster... <sup>15</sup> Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly; <sup>16</sup> gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber. <sup>17</sup> Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep and say, “Spare your people, O Lord, and make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’” <sup>18</sup> Then the Lord became jealous for his land and had pity on his people. <sup>19</sup> The Lord answered and said to his people, “Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations.

—Joel 2:12-13, 15-19



Ash Wednesday is considered the threshold into which we enter the season of Lent. The focus of Ash Wednesday and Lent appears to be the call to individual followers of Jesus to “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and mourning.” We receive the ashen cross on our foreheads as a personal, visible reminder that without the cross of Christ, we are but dust and ashes. On the one hand, our journey through Lent is intensely personal, as you and I are called and encouraged to take stock of our lives, consider our sin and disobedience, availing ourselves of the opportunity, day by day, to “Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love...”

At the same time, our reading from the prophet Joel reminds us that Ash Wednesday and Lent also have a “communal” or corporate dimension. Here we mean “corporate” as in “corpus”—of the body. The prophet begins by warning the people that because of their sin, there would be a time of judgement, their nation would be laid waste by a foreign power, God’s instrument of wrath against disobedience. It is clear, however, that there is both an individual and a corporate aspect to both their sin and their need for repentance. Individuals are called to “rend your hearts” and return to the Lord, yet a trumpet is sounded in Zion calling the whole people of God, sanctifying a fast, consecrating the whole body of God’s people, for repentance and restoration.

The word of the Lord, through Joel, makes it clear — sin and disobedience affect more than the individual. The sins of the one person bring consequences upon the third and fourth generation (Ex. 34:7). Sin within a congregation, a community, a denomination or a nation affects the whole, hence the need, at times, for corporate repentance and returning to the Lord, as well as individual. As we enter into the season of Lent, consider how you are stepping over the threshold of Ash Wednesday, not alone, but together, with the whole congregation, with your family, perhaps, and yes, with the whole Body of Christ on earth.

**Prayer:** Lord God, create in us new and honest hearts, so that we may obtain from you full pardon and forgiveness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Ask a friend, family member or fellow church member to partner with you on your Lenten journey — offering each other support, encouragement and accountability.

## February 27, 2020 | Thursday after Ash Wednesday

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<sup>4:21</sup> Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? <sup>22</sup> For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. <sup>23</sup> But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. <sup>24</sup> Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. <sup>25</sup> Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup> But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. <sup>27</sup> For it is written, “Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor!” <sup>28</sup> Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup> But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. <sup>30</sup> But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.” <sup>31</sup> So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

—Galatians 4:21-31

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At the beginning of Lent, it is good to hear these words of Paul. The apostle is reminding the Christians in Galatia, and us, that we are not children of the law, but children of promise, sons and daughters of the Gospel freedom that has been won for us by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul indicates that he is speaking “allegorically,” but he uses Hagar and Sarah and their sons, Ishmael and Isaac to speak of the difference between living under the law and living under Gospel/promise. (see Genesis 16-21)

It is our human nature to want to return to life under the law, as our lives in the world are all about rewards and punishments. If you do good, you are rewarded — if you do evil, you are punished. This is the way of the world, and it must be so. The first use of the law is the so-called “civil use,” that God’s law serves as the foundation of ordered, lawful society. The problem is that we often carry that with us as Christians, living not in our Gospel freedom, but continuing to live as if God rewards and punishes us as under the old covenant, as if Christ has not died for the forgiveness of our sins. Under the law, we act not because Christ loves us and died for us, but because we are afraid of God’s wrath, burdened by our guilt and shame. Because Jesus took our sins upon Himself, having them nailed to the cross and buried with Him in the tomb, His resurrection signals our forgiveness and new life. We now live in freedom from guilt, fear and shame because we have been set free from the law, to live as children of hope and promise.

And why is this helpful for us at the beginning of Lent? Because we often approach our Lenten discipline legalistically. Whether we are giving up something or taking on an additional devotional practice, even the most faithful follower of Jesus can sometimes carry an extra burden of guilt when we fail in our Lenten discipline, whatever it may be. So, sisters and brothers, remember during this season of Lent — we are not children of slavery, but of freedom. Journey through Lent with joy and hope, not guilt and shame. When you “miss the mark” you have set for yourself, begin again and anew with each new day.

**Prayer:** Lord God, help me to live as a child of freedom, as Christ has set me free! Amen.

**Lenten response:** Make yourself a note to remind you, “Live as a child of Gospel freedom!”

## Friday after Ash Wednesday | February 28, 2020

<sup>65:17</sup> “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. <sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. <sup>19</sup> I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. <sup>20</sup> No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. <sup>21</sup> They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. <sup>22</sup> They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. <sup>23</sup> They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, or they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord, and their descendants with them. <sup>24</sup> Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. <sup>25</sup> The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,” says the Lord.

—Isaiah 65:17-25



How is it that Christianity in general and the season of Lent, in particular, have come to be painted in gray, sodden tones — as heavy, burdensome, full of pain and guilt? In medieval times, art in most of its forms aimed to remind people of the shortness and futility of life, driving them to their knees before paintings and sculptures showing skulls, skeletons and sinners at the foot of the cross. Martin Luther was raised in such an environment, and his fear of the judgement and wrath of God set him on a path that led him to the monastery, where he hoped he could find peace with an angry God, through prayers, devotions, fasting and mortification of his flesh — acts intended to “mortify” or “put to death” his sinful nature. And yet, this spiritual struggle finally drove Luther to Scripture and the writings of St. Paul, where Luther found, not fear and guilt but freedom and joy. Luther remembered this revelation, writing in Wittenberg in 1545:

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, “In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’” There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.” Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me.

God revealed the freeing, life-giving Gospel to Luther, through the Scriptures. Luther was born again and felt as if he had entered paradise, through this Good News. As in the words of the prophet Isaiah above, in Christ, God has created a new heaven and a new earth. Former sins and guilt “shall not be remembered or come to mind.” We are to “be glad and rejoice” in this new life God has created for us, in Christ Jesus.

**Prayer:** Lord God, in the midst of life and Lent, cause us to rejoice and be glad! Amen.

**Lenten response:** Is there a sin which troubles you? Write it on a slip of paper and light it on fire!

## February 29, 2020 | Saturday after Ash Wednesday

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<sup>5:16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,<sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,<sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,<sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

<sup>6:1</sup> Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. <sup>2</sup> Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup> For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. <sup>4</sup> But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. <sup>5</sup> For each will have to bear his own load.

—Galatians 5:16-6:5



Having talked recently about living, not as slaves of the law, but in Gospel freedom, we now hear Paul speaking about what it looks like to live in this Gospel freedom. Contrary to what many believe (and how many live!) it does **not** mean, “Do whatever you want.” We spoke before of the first use of the law, now we come to what is called by some, the “third use of the law” — the “call to obedience.” The second use of the law shows us our sin and our need for the Savior, Jesus Christ. In new-found freedom in Christ, we now ask, “How are we to live, freed by the Gospel?” The passage above describes the new life in Christ.

Simply put, St. Paul states that we are to walk by the Spirit, not by the flesh. He describes the works of the flesh in an exhaustive list, including, but not limited to: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, rivalries, dissensions, and divisions. Sadly, we stand convicted by Paul and Holy Scripture — as we are still sinful human beings. This list of works of the flesh drive us to our Savior, praying the common Orthodox “Jesus Prayer,” “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

More positively, Paul describes the works of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Paul goes on, however, exhorting us, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another...Keep watch on yourselves...Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” — which is, “love one another: just as I have loved you” (John 13:34). Our Lenten journey might very well focus on “walking by the Spirit” more fully and more care-fully!

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner! Amen.

**Lenten response:** Choose one “work of the flesh” and one “work of the Spirit” on which to focus during Lent.

## The First Sunday in Lent | March 1, 2020

<sup>6:6</sup> Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. <sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. <sup>8</sup> For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. <sup>9</sup> And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup> So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

<sup>11</sup> See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. <sup>12</sup> It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. <sup>13</sup> For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. <sup>14</sup> But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. <sup>15</sup> For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. <sup>16</sup> And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. <sup>17</sup> From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. <sup>18</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

—Galatians 6:6-18



Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia is one of his most significant. St. Paul had brought the Gospel to these Christians in a region of what is now Turkey. After he had continued on, false apostles arrived and influenced the believers, convincing many that to be a true Christian, one must first be a true Jew, keeping Jewish laws and commandments, including circumcision for males. Paul's epistle, then, is both a defense of the Gospel which he preached and a defense of his apostleship, called into question by the false teachers. The Epistle to the Galatians is a foundational book for all who would seek to understand and distinguish, properly, between Law and Gospel. Having made his arguments previously, Paul now continues his discussion of what life is to look like and be like for those justified by faith in Jesus Christ. And what does Paul say?

"And let us not grow weary of doing good," the apostle writes with his own hand, in boldface type, all CAPS we would say. "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith...It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised...that they may boast" of what they have caused you to do. "But far be it from me," Paul says, "to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...for neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."

This is the "rule" by which we are to walk, as those saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We are to boast of nothing except the cross of Christ — as new creations, because of His death and resurrection. "And as for all who walk by [His] rule, peace and mercy be upon them," Paul writes, "and upon the Israel of God."

**Prayer:** O Lord God, let me not grow weary of doing good, and especially to those of the household of faith! In Jesus' name, Amen.

**Lenten response:** "Boast" to someone about the loving, saving cross of Christ today!

## March 2, 2020 | Monday of the Week of Lent I

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<sup>1:1</sup> Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us,<sup>2</sup> just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us,<sup>3</sup> it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,<sup>4</sup> that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

—Luke 1:1-4

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In the three-year cycle of daily readings developed jointly with our brothers and sisters in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and Lutheran Church—Canada (LCC), our intention was to provide a plan for reading through the entire Bible, with two Scripture readings and a psalm each day. Our commitment, together in the NALC, LCMS and LCC is to encourage reading of the Bible, knowledge of Holy Scripture and biblical literacy among pastors and laity alike!

We have now completed Isaiah and Paul's Epistle to the Galatians and have turned to Micah and the Gospel of Luke.

Surely, many who are making use of these simple devotions will be familiar with Luke's Gospel. For those who are not so familiar, it may be helpful to point out that Luke was a physician and well educated, writing competently in Greek, in perfect style and form. Luke was a companion of Paul and was surely associated with the first disciples and Jesus' own family. He is traditionally considered the writer of the first icon, of Mary, mother of the Lord.

Writing for those already in the Church, both Jewish and Gentile converts, Luke's Gospel is intended to "compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us...having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus." Why did Luke want to write this orderly account? "That you may have certainty concerning the things which you have been taught." Luke continues his orderly account in his second book, "The Acts of the Apostles." The Gospel of Luke presents the birth, Baptism, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Luke begins Acts with the promise of the Holy Spirit, the Ascension and Pentecost.

What is always interesting to the reader of Luke's Gospel, is his intended reader, Theophilus. Although no one knows certainly about the identity of Theophilus, most believe he was a Roman of rank and position, as he is addressed as "most excellent," a formal title of respect. Luke intends to provide his orderly narrative account of the life of the Lord Jesus as "catechesis," teaching of the faith in such a way as to provide certainty, faith and trust in the reader.

At the same time, as *Theophilus* literally translated means, "lover of God," it is possible that Luke was writing to every lover of God, in his day and ours. In this way, you and I may be the intended recipient of Luke's Gospel, that we, too, may have certainty concerning these things.

**Prayer:** Lord God, help us, every day, to be *Theophilus* — loving you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Read the first and last chapters of Luke and Acts to gain a broader view.

## Tuesday of the Week of Lent I | March 3, 2020

<sup>1:5</sup> In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. <sup>6</sup> And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. <sup>7</sup> But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. <sup>8</sup> Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, <sup>9</sup> according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup> And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. <sup>11</sup> And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him.<sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.” <sup>14</sup> And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth,<sup>15</sup> for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. <sup>16</sup> And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God,<sup>17</sup> and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.” <sup>18</sup> And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” <sup>19</sup> And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. <sup>20</sup> And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.” <sup>21</sup> And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. <sup>22</sup> And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. <sup>23</sup> And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home. <sup>24</sup> After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying,<sup>25</sup> “Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”

—Luke 1:5-25

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It seems worthwhile to provide the entire reading from Luke in today's devotion. It is an important passage, as it tells the story of the birth of John, a prophet “in the spirit and power of Elijah,” sent to “turn the hearts” of people. The theme of Luke's Gospel could be stated as “promises made, promises fulfilled,” as God fulfills His promise to Zechariah and Elizabeth, as God fulfills the promise He made to Mary to give birth to a son who would be named Jesus, the Son of the Most High. Finally, God would complete the promised salvation of the world, through the death and resurrection of His only begotten Son.

This child, born to Zechariah and Elizabeth is still going before the Lord Jesus, seeking to turn the hearts of mothers and fathers to their children, turning the disobedient to godly wisdom, making ready for the Lord, a people prepared. May this Lenten season help us to hear, to turn and to prepare for the Lord Jesus Christ who comes to us every week in Word and Sacrament.

**Prayer:** Lord our God, thank you for fulfilling your promises to us! Amen.

**Lenten response:** Research the name “John.” Why did God want the child to be named “John?”

## March 4, 2020 | Wednesday of the Week of Lent I

<sup>1:26</sup> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" <sup>29</sup> But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> 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, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." <sup>34</sup> And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> 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. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God." <sup>38</sup> 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



We are so familiar with the visit of the angel Gabriel to Mary, that it can sometimes fail to impress us. If you can, consider this account from the perspective of one who has never heard it and is not a Christian. An angel comes to earth to bring a message from God — not to a king or ruler, but to a humble virgin. The promise is that she would conceive a child outside the normal biological processes which God Himself created — the child's birth would be supernatural. The angel proclaims that this child would be the Son of God, to take the throne of David and reign eternally. No wonder Mary was greatly troubled and afraid. And yet, the angel says, "Do not be afraid, Mary..." It was all so inconceivable. It was unbelievable! When the angel visited Joseph, it was in a dream — it seems Mary was wide awake. Maybe she wished she would awake and find it was only a nightmare. How could this be possible?

The angel Gabriel said, "For nothing will be impossible with God." Consider the words of Gabriel:

**Nothing — will be — impossible — with God.**

What seems impossible in your life, at this moment? Raising difficult children? Caring for infirmed parents? Finding a new job? Suffering through cancer treatments? Surviving serious illness? Enduring a military deployment? Healing a broken relationship? We have many challenges and struggles in life that seem impossible and insurmountable. The Good News in the account of Mary is that with God, nothing is impossible. We can be healed, we can be forgiven, we can begin again, and yes, we will be raised from death to new life in Christ. Nothing will be impossible with God.

**Prayer:** Almighty and life-giving God, do the impossible and unexpected in my life, in the name and by the power and presence of Jesus, amen.

**Lenten response:** Send a card, email or text to someone you know who is facing challenges. Write, "For nothing will be impossible with God!"

## Thursday of the Week of Lent I | March 5, 2020

<sup>1:39</sup>In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah,<sup>40</sup> and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.<sup>41</sup> And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit,<sup>42</sup> and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!<sup>43</sup> And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?<sup>44</sup> For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.<sup>45</sup> And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”<sup>46</sup> And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord,<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,<sup>48</sup> for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;<sup>49</sup> for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.<sup>50</sup> And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;<sup>52</sup> he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate;<sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,<sup>55</sup> as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”<sup>56</sup> And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

-Luke 1:39-56



Having recently participated in the NALC Life Ministries 2020 Conference, along with activities related to the annual March for Life on the national mall in Washington, D.C., it seems our respect for and celebration of life in the womb continues. And rightly so. It should never be dismissed or diminished how often God is at work in the womb. The first reading for the service of Holy Communion at the Life Ministries Conference (and for Epiphany II) included this verse, “The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name” (Isaiah 49:1). The point of this passage in Isaiah, and the interaction between John and Jesus, still in their mother’s wombs is this — God has a purpose and a plan for each of us!

It is right that we focus on the value and meaning of each human life, from conception to natural death. This includes care for the babe in the womb, but also care for the unwed teenage mother, the married couple struggling to conceive, the parents raising children and youth, the families displaced by conflict living in refugee camps, the victims of violence around the world, and yes, the forgotten elderly living alone and lonely. We dare not care for one life while ignoring the value of another. We want to uplift and cherish every life as a gift from God and have every home and congregation understand itself as a center for “life ministries.”

The Good News in this passage is that God turns our world upside down. Elizabeth, well past child-bearing years, conceives and bears the forerunner, John. Mary, betrothed but not married, conceives by the Holy Spirit and from her lowly estate, gives birth to the Son of the Most High God. The humble are raised up and the mighty are cast down. The hungry are fed and the rich are sent away empty. We can leap for joy at what God conceives in us and through us.

**Prayer:** My spirit rejoices in you, O God, my Savior!

**Lenten response:** Make a difference in one life today — through a simple word, prayer or deed.

## March 6, 2020 | Friday of the Week of Lent I

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<sup>3:1</sup> And I said: Hear, you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel! Is it not for you to know justice?—<sup>2</sup> you who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin from off my people and their flesh from off their bones <sup>3</sup> who eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them, and break their bones in pieces and chop them up like meat in a pot, like flesh in a cauldron. <sup>4</sup> Then they will cry to the Lord, but he will not answer them; he will hide his face from them at that time, because they have made their deeds evil. <sup>5</sup> Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who cry “Peace” when they have something to eat, but declare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths. <sup>6</sup> Therefore it shall be night to you, without vision, and darkness to you, without divination. The sun shall go down on the prophets, and the day shall be black over them; <sup>7</sup> the seers shall be disgraced, and the diviners put to shame; they shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer from God. <sup>8</sup> But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.

—Micah 3:1-8



While our readings from Luke’s Gospel deserve our attention in these devotions, the readings from Micah are worthy of mention.

Micah and Isaiah lived at the same time and were called to deliver a similar message. No wonder, as Israel and Judah were in a time of great idolatry and disobedience. The word of the Lord through both prophets was that of warning, judgement and exhortation. The first several chapters of the book of the prophet Micah foretell doom and gloom as a punishment for their abandonment of the one true Lord God. The passage above proclaims judgement against wicked rulers and prophets who “hate the good and love the evil.” Micah says “they will cry to the Lord, but he will not answer them; he will hide his face from them at that time, because they have made their deeds evil.”

Like Isaiah, however, Micah also prophesies a time of hope and restoration. He announces from the Lord, “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel...And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord...And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace” (Micah 5:2-5). For now, Micah is filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, declaring to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin. He is calling the people of Israel and Judah and their leaders and prophets to account, calling them to repent of their disobedience and evil. There would come a time when the Lord God would send a faithful and true Shepherd, but first, there is to be repentance and return to the Lord.

Martin Luther wrote of the ministry of Micah, “So, too, we now have to rebuke, denounce, comfort and preach, and then say, ‘Even though all is lost, Christ will yet come at the Last Day and help us...’” (quoted in the *Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH)

**Prayer:** O God, give me strength to love the good and hate evil, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Say a prayer for church leaders, that they are filled with the Spirit of the Lord.

## Saturday of the Week of Lent I | March 7, 2020

<sup>1:67</sup> And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, <sup>68</sup>“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people <sup>69</sup> and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, <sup>70</sup> as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, <sup>71</sup> that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; <sup>72</sup> to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, <sup>73</sup> the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us <sup>74</sup>that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, <sup>75</sup>in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. <sup>76</sup> And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, <sup>77</sup> to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, <sup>78</sup>because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high <sup>79</sup> to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” <sup>80</sup> And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

—Luke 1:67-80



It is unfortunate that most translations rightly introduce passages such as this with “Zechariah prophesied, *saying...*” while many scholars and historic tradition understands this as being something of a poetic verse chanted or sung by Zechariah. This is true also of Mary’s song, the Magnificat in Luke 1:46-55. Singing and chanting was common in Israel as they were a musical people. The Psalms of David, himself a musician, were intended to be sung/chanted, even as Moses led the Israelites in a song to the Lord and Miriam and the women sang a song and danced upon the deliverance from Pharaoh and his armies, crossing the Red Sea. The reality among God’s people seems to be, words are not enough to express the joy and thanks at safe deliverance. And truly, Zechariah chanted his poetic verse of praise upon the delivery of his son, John.

Martin Luther also highly prized music as a worthy form of praise and proclamation. He is famously remembered for saying, “Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise... But any who remain unaffected [by music] are clodhoppers indeed and are fit to hear only the words of dung-poets and the music of pigs.” He wrote hymns and songs as expressions of praise and thanksgiving, as well as prayers for strength and courage, such as in the beloved, “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word.”

Appreciation and love of music and singing is one of the great gifts of Luther and those who continue to bear his name in the world. With Zechariah, our spirits are lifted and soar in poetic verse upon the birth of a child, realization of the blessings of God, knowledge of the salvation we have in the forgiveness of our sins. When we consider the gift of God we have in Jesus, when we ponder “the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace,” how can we not join Zechariah, singing, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people.”

**Prayer:** O Holy Spirit, fill us with joy and let our voices soar in praise and thanksgiving. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Sing your favorite hymn today. And don’t worry who hears you!

## March 8, 2020 | The Second Sunday in Lent

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<sup>4:1</sup> It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, <sup>2</sup> and many nations shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide disputes for strong nations far away; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; <sup>4</sup> but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. <sup>5</sup> For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.

—Micah 4:1-5

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We return to the words of the prophet Micah today, as we hear his message foretelling hope and restoration. In the verse just before (3:12), Micah had warned that Zion would be "plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height." This is the law and judgement which would come upon Israel and Judah. In chapter 4, Good News is proclaimed and in the time of restoration, "the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, and many nations shall come, and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.'

What a stark contrast between these two verses! In one verse we hear warning of judgment and desolation, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, in the next, we hear not only that the mountain of the house of the Lord (the temple in Jerusalem) would now be the highest of all mountains, but that peoples and nations would come to it to learn the ways of God and to walk in His paths. Before, Israel and Judah had turned aside from God's ways — now, they would be a light to the nations, shepherded and guided by the True Shepherd who was to come, initiating a time of peace, harmony and justice.

It would seem we are not yet in that time. Conflict continues in the middle east and Jerusalem is at the heart of the tension. There is not yet peace among nations and peoples, not yet harmony or justice. Jesus has come and the victory is assured by His death and resurrection. The time foretold in Micah will come with Jesus' return in power and glory. In the meantime...

Let us continue to go up to the house of God, that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths. Is this not what we do every Sunday, as we ascend God's holy mountain, to be in the presence of the Word made flesh to dwell among us — in worship, an experience of heaven on earth?

**Prayer:** Lord God, teach me your ways, that I may walk in your name forever and ever. Amen.

**Lenten response:** If possible, go up to the house of the Lord today, to worship!

## Monday of the Week of Lent II | March 9, 2020

<sup>22</sup>And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup>(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) <sup>24</sup>and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” <sup>25</sup>Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.<sup>26</sup> And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. <sup>27</sup>And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, <sup>28</sup>he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, <sup>29</sup>“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup>for my eyes have seen your salvation <sup>31</sup>that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup>a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” <sup>33</sup>And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup>And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed<sup>35</sup>(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

—Luke 2:22-52



Because we heard the account of Jesus, twelve years old in the temple, just a few weeks ago in Sunday worship, we have not included that passage here. Rather, we are focusing today on Jesus and Simeon in the temple.

Our reading for today includes the *Nunc Dimittis*, traditionally known for the first words of the hymn in Latin, translated, “Now, Lord, you dismiss...” Simeon, in the temple, is waiting for the fulfillment of the revelation, by the Holy Spirit, that he would not see death, would not depart this world, until he had seen “the Lord’s Christ.” Now that Simeon has seen Jesus, held him in his arms and blessed God, he is ready to “depart in peace.”

This canticle from Scripture has been used in Christian worship in general and in Lutheranism in particular for centuries. It is sung on the festival of the Presentation (Candlemas, Feb. 2), as we remember Jesus’ “presentation” in the temple and Simeon’s song at that time. It is chanted during Compline, or Night Prayer, as a fitting way to close the day, going to sleep in peace. It is also sung, chanted or spoken during the Burial of the Dead, as the casket or urn is carried from the church, as the deceased departs in peace. Most familiar in Lutheran churches, however, is the singing of the *Nunc Dimittis*, “Lord, now you let your servant depart...” at the end of the Holy Communion service. Although sometimes replaced by the LBW “Thank the Lord,” the *Nunc Dimittis* is biblical and traditional, acknowledging that as we have been in the “temple,” we too have seen the Lord, in Word and Sacrament, and we may now depart in peace. It is a wonderful embodiment of the experience of Simeon and Jesus in the temple in Jerusalem!

**Prayer:** Lord God, I have seen Jesus and know Him. I have held Him in my arms and hands, in your Word and in the Lord’s Supper. Let me live and die in peace. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Make the first line of Simeon’s canticle your prayer today, as you leave your home, your office, or go to your bed at night. “Lord, let your servant go in peace...”

## March 10, 2020 | Tuesday of the Week of Lent II

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<sup>3:1</sup> In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar... the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>4</sup> As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. <sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways,<sup>6</sup> and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'" <sup>7</sup> He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. <sup>9</sup> Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."<sup>10</sup> And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" <sup>11</sup> And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise."<sup>12</sup> Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"<sup>13</sup> And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do." <sup>14</sup> Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

—Luke 3:1-14

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Those of us who follow the liturgical calendar in worship are used to hearing this passage about John the Baptist in Advent. Usually, two Sundays in Advent are dedicated to hearing about John and his call to "Prepare the way of the Lord..." It fits well in our time of preparation for Christmas and our annual celebration of Christ's birth.

The reading also fits well into Lent, as John's call to prepare is first and foremost a call to repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John invites all the people in the region around the Jordan river to come, be baptized and repent. And then, he exhorts them to "bear fruit in keeping with repentance." It is a rather harsh reality that John says the tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. And yet, repentance necessarily leads to amendment of life — change, transformation, good fruit. To repent of our sins and then commit them again and again suggests a failure to truly repent and turn away from our disobedience. Thankfully, the Lord Jesus Christ came to forgive sinners, and we know we are in need of continual repentance and forgiveness. Still, we are called to bear good fruit, because we are forgiven. Living in God's mercy and grace, we are to live lives of charity, generosity, honesty and justice. These, John says, befit repentance.

It is appropriate for us to spend a moment now, in the second full week of Lent, to consider again that this season is for reflection, which leads to repentance, which leads to forgiveness and renewal, through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

**Prayer:** Lord God, give us ears to hear and heed the call of John, to repent and prepare. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Pray a prayer of confession and repentance today, for the sake of absolution.

## Wednesday of the Week of Lent II | March 11, 2020

<sup>3:15</sup> As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, <sup>16</sup> John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”<sup>18</sup> So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. <sup>19</sup> But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, <sup>20</sup> added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison. <sup>21</sup> Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, <sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

—Luke 3:15-22



It was a few short weeks ago when we observed the festival of the Baptism of our Lord. It is always a temptation to want to focus on and bring to mind our own Baptisms — and even better if there is a Baptism in our congregation that day. But preachers will do well to point out that it is the festival of the **Baptism of our Lord!** We hear about the Baptism of Jesus in the midst of the season of Epiphany, which means “manifestation.” Each Sunday during this season manifests, reveals something to us about who this Jesus is who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. And what is revealed in the passage above in Luke’s Gospel?

First, it is revealed that while John was a great prophet, he was simply the forerunner. As people were wondering whether John might be the Christ, the baptizer made it clear that Jesus would come with mighty power, bringing the Spirit and fire.

Second, this passage announces that while Jesus would come to purify and cleanse the corrupted people of Israel, this would indeed be “good news.” Luke tells us, “with many other exhortations (John) preached good news to the people.” It may not sound like good news, but the coming of the Messiah, the Christ was truly good news for the people and for the nation. Crowds came to John because they saw the need for repentance and renewal in their land — beginning with their own lives, as they entered the water to be baptized by John. And then...

Third, in this passage, it is revealed that Jesus, the one who was without sin, took our sin upon Himself, submitting to baptism to “fulfill all righteousness” as it says elsewhere. Our Lord led the way for us to follow, as He was washed in the waters of baptism, declared the only Son of the Father, with whom the Father God was well-pleased. Now, we are reminded that as Jesus was baptized, we too, are to be baptized. It isn’t optional. We are baptized into Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, to draw strength and comfort, when our sins or conscience oppress us, as Luther says in the Large Catechism.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, because I have been baptized as you were baptized, help me to draw strength and comfort when my sins and conscience oppress me. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Light a candle today in remembrance of Jesus’ and your Baptism!

## March 12, 2020 | Thursday of the Week of Lent II

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<sup>3:23</sup> Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, <sup>24</sup>the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, <sup>25</sup>the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, <sup>26</sup>the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, <sup>27</sup>the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, <sup>28</sup>the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, <sup>29</sup>the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, <sup>30</sup>the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, <sup>31</sup>the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, <sup>32</sup>the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Sala, the son of Nahshon, <sup>33</sup>the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, <sup>34</sup>the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, <sup>35</sup>the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, <sup>36</sup>the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, <sup>37</sup>the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, <sup>38</sup>the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

-Luke 3:23-38

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Well, today I have chosen as our devotional reading the passage from Luke, which is probably skimmed over by most readers. It is one of two genealogies in the Gospels, one here in Luke, the other in Matthew. I have heard preachers dismiss the genealogies as unimportant, and in some ways, that's true. In other ways, the two genealogies serve a very particular purpose, in accordance with the intention of the author.

Matthew's genealogy (Matthew 1:1-7), for example, is presented at the beginning of his Gospel, while Luke's genealogy appears at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, after His Baptism. Luke sees his genealogy as important for Jesus' identity, while Matthew uses his genealogy to connect Jesus as Jewish Messiah, with the Old Testament and Jesus in the lineage of Abraham. For this reason, Matthew begins with Abraham, and works toward Jesus, while Luke begins with Jesus and works toward Adam. Why does Luke connect Jesus with Adam? Abraham was the father of Judaism, and Matthew intended to show that Jesus was the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham. Adam was the father of all of humanity, of all nations and peoples. As Luke was possibly a Gentile or Greek-speaking Jew, he is writing for Gentiles as much as Jews, wanting to announce that Jesus is not only the Jewish Messiah, but Savior of the world.

In this sense, then, it is true that rather than stumbling over the many difficult pronunciations in the Bible, you can discover the purpose of the genealogy by looking at the first and last persons in the lineage. Where does the author begin and end? Who is connected to whom? Genealogies are important in the Bible and almost always communicate a theological as well as a historical message.

**Prayer:** Almighty God, thank you for Jesus who is both Messiah and Savior of the world. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Read and compare Matthew's and Luke's genealogies.

## Friday of the Week of Lent II | March 13, 2020

<sup>4:1</sup> And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness <sup>2</sup> for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup>The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” <sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’” <sup>5</sup> And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, <sup>6</sup> and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. <sup>7</sup> If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” <sup>8</sup> And Jesus answered him, “It is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.” <sup>9</sup> And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, <sup>10</sup> for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ <sup>11</sup> and “On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.” <sup>12</sup> And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” <sup>13</sup> And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

—Luke 4:1-13

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The Gospel reading for the First Sunday in Lent is always one of the Gospel accounts of the temptation of Jesus. Our Sunday lectionary readings are in Matthew this year, and you would have heard Matthew's account in worship on March 1. Our daily readings bring us to the account in Luke, and in the season of Lent, you can't hear this too often.

Why? Because the forty days of our Lenten observance (excluding Sundays which are “in” Lent but not “of” Lent) take their shape from Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness, being tempted by the devil. For the Lord, this time of testing was a direct challenge to Jesus as beloved Son of God, declared so at His Baptism just before. As Jesus rose up out of the baptismal waters, full of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit led him into the wilderness.

The devil tempted Jesus with basic human need (hunger), authority and glory and finally, the devil used Scripture to try to trick Jesus into testing God — but in each instance, the Lord responded with the words of Scripture to resist temptation. And though Jesus remained faithful and obedient, the devil departed from Him until “an opportune time.”

And how are your forty days in the wilderness of Lent going? Is the devil tempting you? If you've decided to abstain from something throughout Lent, are you being tempted mightily to eat of the forbidden fruit? If you've chosen to add a daily Bible reading or devotional time to your Lenten journey, are you keeping your discipline faithfully? Or are you finding the devil tempting you at every turn? The Good News is that our Savior and Lord is faithful and obedient, though we are yet sinners. Should you stumble in your Lenten observance, get up, turn around and head off again in the right direction, trusting, knowing that for Jesus' sake, we have a God of “beginning again!”

**Prayer:** Lord God, what a friend we have in Jesus — all our sins and griefs to bear! May we find mercy and forgiveness in the embrace of the sinless one. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Make yourself a Lenten calendar, and mark a cross on each day as its done.

## March 14, 2020 | Saturday of the Week of Lent II

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<sup>1:1</sup> Solomon the son of David established himself in his kingdom, and the Lord his God was with him and made him exceedingly great. <sup>2</sup> Solomon spoke to all Israel, to the commanders of thousands and of hundreds, to the judges, and to all the leaders in all Israel, the heads of fathers' houses. <sup>3</sup> And Solomon, and all the assembly with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon, for the tent of meeting of God, which Moses the servant of the Lord had made in the wilderness, was there. <sup>4</sup> (But David had brought up the ark of God from Kiriath-jearim to the place that David had prepared for it, for he had pitched a tent for it in Jerusalem.) <sup>5</sup> Moreover, the bronze altar that Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, had made, was there before the tabernacle of the Lord. And Solomon and the assembly sought it out. <sup>6</sup> And Solomon went up there to the bronze altar before the Lord, which was at the tent of meeting, and offered a thousand burnt offerings on it. <sup>7</sup> In that night God appeared to Solomon, and said to him, "Ask what I shall give you." <sup>8</sup> And Solomon said to God, "You have shown great and steadfast love to David my father, and have made me king in his place. <sup>9</sup> O Lord God, let your word to David my father be now fulfilled, for you have made me king over a people as numerous as the dust of the earth.<sup>10</sup> Give me now wisdom and knowledge to go out and come in before this people, for who can govern this people of yours, which is so great?" <sup>11</sup> God answered Solomon, "Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked for possessions, wealth, honor, or the life of those who hate you, and have not even asked for long life, but have asked for wisdom and knowledge for yourself that you may govern my people over whom I have made you king,<sup>12</sup> wisdom and knowledge are granted to you. I will also give you riches, possessions, and honor, such as none of the kings had who were before you, and none after you shall have the like."

—2 Chronicles 1:1-17

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The daily reading plan now moves from Micah to 2 Chronicles, beginning just after the death of King David in 1 Chronicles 29:26-30. The first act recorded, then, is Solomon's gathering of all Israel, all commanders, judges, rulers and heads of houses. King Solomon gathered them at the "high place" that was at Gibeon, where the Tent of Meeting was, the ark of God and the bronze altar. And Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings upon it. His first act was to gather the Lord God's people for worship and to make an acceptable gift to the Lord.

What follows is a moving account of a visitation by God, to Solomon, in a dream. The story of the kings so far in the history of God's people has been one of rebellion, sin, judgment and finally restoration and peace. The Lord God asked, "What shall I give you?" Would Solomon ask for possessions, wealth, worldly honor or the death of his enemies? What king wouldn't? Instead, realizing the heavy burden of rule, Solomon asks for wisdom and knowledge, for the sake of God's people. And that he was given, as well as riches, possessions and honor.

What do we value most in life? Wealth? Position? Power and control? Career? God's wisdom and knowledge seem to have fallen out of favor in our day. Perhaps church leaders might ask a portion of that as well, today.

**Prayer:** Lord God, bless us with wisdom and knowledge, to know and do what is right. Amen.

**Lenten response:** What would you choose? Great wisdom and knowledge or riches and power?

### The Third Sunday in Lent | March 15, 2020

<sup>2:1</sup>Now Solomon purposed to build a temple for the name of the Lord, and a royal palace for himself. <sup>2</sup>And Solomon assigned 70,000 men to bear burdens and 80,000 to quarry in the hill country, and 3,600 to oversee them. <sup>3</sup>And Solomon sent word to Hiram the king of Tyre: “As you dealt with David my father and sent him cedar to build himself a house to dwell in, so deal with me. <sup>4</sup>Behold, I am about to build a house for the name of the Lord my God and dedicate it to him for the burning of incense of sweet spices before him, and for the regular arrangement of the showbread, and for burnt offerings morning and evening, on the Sabbaths and the new moons and the appointed feasts of the Lord our God, as ordained forever for Israel. <sup>5</sup>The house that I am to build will be great, for our God is greater than all gods. <sup>6</sup>But who is able to build him a house, since heaven, even highest heaven, cannot contain him? <sup>7</sup>So now send me a man skilled to work in gold, silver, bronze, and iron, and in purple, crimson, and blue fabrics, trained also in engraving, to be with the skilled workers who are with me in Judah and Jerusalem, whom David my father provided. <sup>8</sup>Send me also cedar, cypress, and algum timber from Lebanon... <sup>11</sup>Then Hiram the king of Tyre answered in a letter that he sent to Solomon, “Because the Lord loves his people, he has made you king over them.” <sup>12</sup>Hiram also said, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who made heaven and earth, who has given King David a wise son, who has discretion and understanding, who will build a temple for the Lord and a royal palace for himself. <sup>13</sup>Now I have sent a skilled man, who has understanding, Huram-abi, <sup>14</sup>the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre. He is trained to work in gold, silver, bronze, iron, stone, and wood, and in purple, blue, and crimson fabrics and fine linen, and to do all sorts of engraving and execute any design that may be assigned him, with your craftsmen, the craftsmen of my lord, David your father... <sup>16</sup>And we will cut whatever timber you need from Lebanon and bring it to you in rafts by sea to Joppa, so that you may take it up to Jerusalem.”

—2 Chronicles 2:1-18



Today, we hear of King Solomon, preparing to build the Temple in Jerusalem. What a magnificent place it would be. Solomon needed all kinds of building materials and laborers to complete the work, which would stand on the mountain — in Jerusalem. To this day, we marvel when we see depictions of Solomon’s Temple, where he built a house for the Lord God. Of course, Solomon would also build himself a palace.

And where are these great structures today? You can see remnants of them, excavated now in the archeological digs in Jerusalem, but they are no longer standing. It is a reminder and a proclamation to us of the temporal nature of life, of human structures and institutions. Even the great temples in Jerusalem were thrown down. And yet, “the word of our God will stand forever” (Isaiah 40:8). This is a worthwhile message as we struggle in North America with an increasingly secular culture, shrinking worship attendance and challenges to keep and maintain our church buildings. What truly matters? Our buildings? Our institutions? Or the Word of God?

**Prayer:** Lord God, keep us focused on you, our great God and King, and your Word, and not on bricks, mortar and worldly, human institutions and structures. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Read Isaiah 40, the great chapter which reminds us that “All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field...but the word of our God...”

## March 16, 2020 | Monday of the Week of Lent III

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<sup>4:42</sup> And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, <sup>43</sup> but he said to them, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.” <sup>44</sup> And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea. <sup>5:1</sup> On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, <sup>2</sup> and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. <sup>4</sup> And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” <sup>5</sup> And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” <sup>6</sup> And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. <sup>7</sup> They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup> But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” <sup>9</sup> For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, <sup>10</sup> and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” <sup>11</sup> And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

—Luke 4:42-5:11



In our dealing with congregations which may be in conflict, experiencing tension or are simply “stuck” and stagnant, the first question we ask is, “What is your current reality?” It’s not helpful to ignore or dismiss the reality of one’s situation. The second question is, “What do you believe is God’s intended future for you?” Does God intend you to decline and finally close your congregation? Does God intend for you to unite with another congregation nearby to strengthen both ministries? Does God intend for you, as individuals and as a whole to become mobilized for mission and ministry, to revitalize your congregation through the Word and Holy Spirit at work among you? And then the next step is to ask, “How are we going to get to God’s intended future? What are the actions steps we need to take to move forward?”

Without a doubt, our current reality in North American Lutheranism is that we have lost the urgency our Lord exhibits in our reading for today. The people would have detained Jesus, wanting Him for themselves, but He said to them, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.” He then gave to the fishermen, a sign, as He directed them to put out into the deep, for one more catch — and the haul was so great that the boat began to sink. And then He called Simon (Peter) and James and John to follow Him, participating in His ministry of “fishing” for men and women and people of all ages.

Somehow, someway, we became “church members,” rank and file members of the institutional church, rather than followers of Jesus, concerned always with the spread of the Good News. What are the action steps we need to take to get back to the simple mission — of being disciples and making disciples? It’s a worthwhile question, as we seek a turnaround in this season of Lent.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, make of us, again, your disciples and followers. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Learn more about Life-to-Life Discipleship at [nalcifetolife.org](http://nalcifetolife.org).

## Tuesday of the Week of Lent III | March 17, 2020

<sup>4:1</sup> He made an altar of bronze, twenty cubits long and twenty cubits wide and ten cubits high. <sup>2</sup> Then he made the sea of cast metal. It was round, ten cubits from brim to brim, and five cubits high, and a line of thirty cubits measured its circumference... <sup>4</sup> It stood on twelve oxen, three facing north, three facing west, three facing south, and three facing east. The sea was set on them, and all their rear parts were inward. <sup>6</sup> He also made ten basins in which to wash, and set five on the south side, and five on the north side. In these they were to rinse off what was used for the burnt offering, and the sea was for the priests to wash in. <sup>7</sup> And he made ten golden lampstands as prescribed, and set them in the temple, five on the south side and five on the north. <sup>8</sup> He also made ten tables and placed them in the temple, five on the south side and five on the north. And he made a hundred basins of gold. <sup>9</sup> He made the court of the priests and the great court and doors for the court and overlaid their doors with bronze. <sup>10</sup> And he set the sea at the southeast corner of the house. <sup>11</sup> Hiram also made the pots, the shovels, and the basins. So Hiram finished the work that he did for King Solomon on the house of God... <sup>18</sup> Solomon made all these things in great quantities, for the weight of the bronze was not sought. <sup>19</sup> So Solomon made all the vessels that were in the house of God: the golden altar, the tables for the bread of the Presence, <sup>20</sup> the lampstands and their lamps of pure gold to burn before the inner sanctuary, as prescribed; <sup>21</sup> the flowers, the lamps, and the tongs, of purest gold; <sup>22</sup> the snuffers, basins, dishes for incense, and fire pans, of pure gold, and the socket of the temple, for the inner doors to the Most Holy Place and for the doors of the nave of the temple were of gold. <sup>5:1</sup> Thus all the work that Solomon did for the house of the Lord was finished. And Solomon brought in the things that David his father had dedicated, and stored the silver, the gold, and all the vessels in the treasuries of the house of God.

-2 Chronicles 4:1-5:1

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There may be readers now wishing we would stick with the New Testament readings and not spend so much time in 2 Chronicles. The danger is that we will only read in the New, dismissing the Old as boring, ancient history, irrelevant to what happens in the Gospels and Epistles. Nothing could be further from the truth. In our Old Testament reading for today, we learn of the commitment of King Solomon and the people to building a beautiful place for the worship of the Lord God, with prayer and sacrifice. The sacrificial system in Judaism was elaborate and extensive, as it was an essential part of redemption and atonement. It's amazing to consider how everything that was done in the building of the Temple was aimed at sacrifice — the offering of appropriate gifts to the Lord God.

Luther writes, now, however, “it is certain the Christ himself is the sacrifice—indeed, even the altar—who sacrificed himself with his own blood. Now whereas the sacrifice performed by the Levitical priest took away only artificial sins...so our high priest, Christ, by his own sacrifice and blood, has taken away the true sin, that which in its very nature is sin. He has gone in once for all through the curtain to God to make atonement for us. Hebrews 9:12” (Luther’s Works, American Edition). As we read about the completion of the temple, we see prefigured the saving work of Christ Jesus, who is sacrifice, temple and altar.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, we give thanks for your sacrifice, for forgiveness and new life. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Search “Solomon’s Temple” on the internet for a video explanation.

## March 18, 2020 | Wednesday of the Week of Lent III

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<sup>5:27</sup> After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me." <sup>28</sup> And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. <sup>29</sup> And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. <sup>30</sup> And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" <sup>31</sup> And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>32</sup> I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." <sup>33</sup> And they said to him, "The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink." <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said to them, "Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? <sup>35</sup> The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days." <sup>36</sup> He also told them a parable: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old." <sup>37</sup> And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. <sup>38</sup> But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. <sup>39</sup> And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, 'The old is good.'"

—Luke 5:27-39

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Today, we hear of the call of Levi/Matthew and Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees and scribes as they challenge His understanding of the laws and commandments of Judaism.

The three traditional Lenten disciplines are almsgiving, prayer and fasting. These were traditional spiritual disciplines even in the time of Jesus, as He speaks of them in His Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:1-18. His problem with the exercise of these disciplines is that they are often done for show, rather than spirit. The Lord criticizes those who practice their piety before others, making a public display of giving their offerings, praying publicly so that they may be seen praying long and showy petitions, heaping up empty phrases, looking dismal while fasting that others may see and take notice of their piety. When one is keeping spiritual disciplines, according to Jesus, its aim should be internal renewal and spiritual growth, not outward recognition. We would do well to take heed to Jesus' guidance in our Lenten observance.

What do Jesus' words about old and new wineskins say to us about spiritual disciplines today, in our daily lives? Is Jesus dismissing fasting as a useful practice in the new Kingdom? Given Jesus' comments, are we to lay aside almsgiving and prayer, because truly, we have the Bridegroom, Jesus, with us always, even to the close of the age? The point of Jesus' comments is that we no longer need such practices to justify ourselves before God. The old understanding was that keeping laws, commandments and ordinances, holding to strict observances of washing, eating, prayer and fasting would make one acceptable before God. With the coming of Christ, there is new life in Him. With the coming of Christ, salvation is through faith in Him. Spiritual practices and disciplines now are a response to the gift of God's love and mercy — freely observed and joyfully undertaken.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, give me joy and gladness in my Lenten observance. Amen.

**Lenten response:** In your Gospel freedom, try a day of fasting and prayer.

## Thursday of the Week of Lent III | March 19, 2020

<sup>6:1</sup> On a Sabbath, while he was going through the grainfields, his disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands. <sup>2</sup> But some of the Pharisees said, “Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?” <sup>3</sup> And Jesus answered them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: <sup>4</sup> how he entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those with him?” <sup>5</sup> And he said to them, “The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.” <sup>6</sup> On another Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered. <sup>7</sup> And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him, to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him. <sup>8</sup> But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man with the withered hand, “Come and stand here.” And he rose and stood there. <sup>9</sup> And Jesus said to them, “I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?” <sup>10</sup> And after looking around at them all he said to him, “Stretch out your hand.” And he did so, and his hand was restored. <sup>11</sup> But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

—Luke 6:1-11



As our North American culture no longer keeps the Sabbath, it seems most Lutherans have lost “Sabbath-keeping” as well. It is a sign of our increasingly secular culture, as secularism continues to squeeze religion and religious observance out of home, family and society. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *secularism* as “indifference to or rejection or exclusion of religion and religious considerations.” Pope Benedict XVI spoke often of “aggressive secularism,” pointing to the fact that secularism is not benign, but aggressively at work to contain or remove “religion and religious consideration.”

The truth of the matter is that many of us within the Body of Christ have misunderstood the words of Jesus in Scripture. While the Pharisees practiced Sabbath-keeping in a hyper-legalistic, self-justifying manner, Jesus affirmed, finally, that the Sabbath was made for humanity, not humanity for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). Jesus was free to provide food to the hungry or healing to the infirmed, even on the Sabbath. After all, He, “the Son of Man, is lord of the Sabbath.”

It sometimes seems in our culture that we believe we are Lord of the Sabbath. This is the mind and will of secularism. We need no God, no religion and no religious observance, according to the secular mindset. And Christians readily and easily buy into such thinking because always, always we are ready to place ourselves over God and His will for our lives. It is much easier to relax and recreate on Sunday, so we excuse ourselves from the commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” After all, aren’t we “lord of the Sabbath?” Wasn’t the Sabbath created for me, and not me for the Sabbath? Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we live in Gospel freedom. We are not working to save or justify ourselves before God by our own religious observance or perfection. Still, a commandment is a commandment...

**Prayer:** Lord God, create in me and our church a hunger for Sabbath worship! Amen.

**Lenten response:** If you are able, make Sunday worship and Sabbath-keeping a priority.

### March 20, 2020 | Friday of the Week of Lent III

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<sup>6:12</sup>In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. <sup>13</sup> And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: <sup>14</sup> Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, <sup>15</sup> and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, <sup>16</sup> and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. <sup>17</sup> And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, <sup>18</sup> who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. <sup>19</sup> And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all.

-Luke 6:12-19



As pastor of Saint Luke's Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado for 25 years, we had three building programs and five capital stewardship campaigns to get the buildings out of the ground and paid for over time. Such focus and growth take a lot of planning, much work and willing volunteers. Even more, it takes great and intensive **prayer!** Prior to our first capital stewardship campaign, it was decided that we would engage in a 24-hour prayer vigil. The financial needs for our modest sized congregation to be able to expand our church facility were great — out of proportion, it seemed, to our middle-class membership. But we needed space as we were growing and to allow us to continue to grow, so we turned to God in prayer.

We had a sign-up sheet available for several weeks, so that members and friends of the congregation could sign-up for 30-minute increments of prayer. Prayer materials were provided, with hosts keeping watch over the church through the night as prayers prayed. We prayed for our congregation, for our ministry, for each other, for needs in our community and world, and anything else we could think of. After that first prayer vigil, we made it a regular practice whenever we were facing a great challenge in our ministry. I heard two comments over and over after the 24 hour prayer vigils: "I was surprised how quickly the time went when I focused on God and my prayer," and "I've never spent 30 minutes in prayer in my whole life — it brought me to tears!" Wow! It was a powerful experience for a congregation.

I think of these prayer vigils, as I read, "In these days [Jesus] went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God." We are still in the Gospel of Luke, at the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry. Much has happened, but the Lord is continuing to call the Twelve, continuing to preach and heal crowds and multitudes as they gathered and hoped to touch Him, to draw from His power and healing. Yet, Jesus took time to go out to the mountain to pray, and all night He prayed to God. Martin Luther is reported as saying the busier his day, the more time he must spend in prayer. For many of us, the busier we are, the more easily prayer and devotional time are laid aside. Again, a meaningful consideration during these busy days of Lent.

**Prayer:** Lord God, help me to learn to pray unceasingly, a prayer with every breath. And may my every prayer be in the name of Jesus. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Take time, make time today to pray!

## Saturday of the Week of Lent III | March 21, 2020

<sup>6:20</sup> And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. <sup>21</sup>“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. <sup>22</sup>“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! <sup>23</sup>Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets. <sup>24</sup>“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. <sup>25</sup>“Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. “Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. <sup>26</sup>“Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets. <sup>27</sup>“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup>bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup>To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic<sup>l</sup>either. <sup>30</sup>Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. <sup>31</sup>And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. <sup>32</sup>“If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup>And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup>And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. <sup>35</sup>But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. <sup>36</sup>Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

—Luke 6:20-36



In a way, all of human life is addressed in Jesus' words above. There are blessings and woes in every life. We are hungry, we weep, we are hated and reviled, we are rich, we are full, we mourn. In all of this we find blessing and woe. And then, there are those who are our “enemies.” There are those who may curse us or strike us, even when we have had the best of intentions. And what does the Lord require of us?

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also...Give to everyone who begs from you...As you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.”

And where do we find the strength, the courage, the will to do these things? “Be merciful,” the Lord says, “even as your Father is merciful.” We love our enemies, pray for others, do good, in response to God’s love, mercy and goodness. Everything we do in life is simply our response to what God our Father has already done for us, through Jesus Christ our Lord and His Holy Spirit!

Does that make it any easier? Not really. It does make it easier to bear our own sinful humanity, our own inability to forgive and love and pray, knowing that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus, and not through our own actions or inaction. And maybe the love of God will keep working in us, to create in us greater love and mercy.

**Prayer:** O God, thank you for your Son, Jesus, in whom we find forgiveness and strength. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Are you at odds with someone? Pray for them today.

## March 22, 2020 | The Fourth Sunday in Lent

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<sup>7:1</sup> As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house.<sup>3</sup> When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever." <sup>4</sup> Then the king and all the people offered sacrifice before the Lord. <sup>5</sup> King Solomon offered as a sacrifice 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. So the king and all the people dedicated the house of God. <sup>6</sup> The priests stood at their posts; the Levites also, with the instruments for music to the Lord that King David had made for giving thanks to the Lord—for his steadfast love endures forever—whenever David offered praises by their ministry; opposite them the priests sounded trumpets, and all Israel stood. <sup>7</sup> And Solomon consecrated the middle of the court that was before the house of the Lord, for there he offered the burnt offering and the fat of the peace offerings, because the bronze altar Solomon had made could not hold the burnt offering and the grain offering and the fat. <sup>8</sup> At that time Solomon held the feast for seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great assembly, from Lebo-hamath to the Brook of Egypt. <sup>9</sup> And on the eighth day they held a solemn assembly, for they had kept the dedication of the altar seven days and the feast seven days. <sup>10</sup> On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people away to their homes, joyful and glad of heart for the prosperity that the Lord had granted to David and to Solomon and to Israel his people.

—2 Chronicles 7:1-10



I love the account of the building of Solomon's Temple and its dedication. How moving to hear that as soon as the king finished his prayer of dedication, "fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple."

Some who claim to have particular spiritual insight in our day are able to experience the glory and presence of God in worship and in daily life. I guess I'm not so spiritual and attuned. I appreciate the beauty that God has created around us and offer thanks and praise, but I pretty much shuffle through life putting one foot in front of the other.

The one time in my life when I have a sense of God's majesty and glory, is in worship. The priests in Jerusalem couldn't enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled it. We can enter the Lord's house every week to behold the glory of the Lord, in our midst, in our presence, as the Lord our God becomes incarnate among us, full of grace and truth, in Jesus Christ, who comes to us in Word and Sacrament. I love soaring cathedrals, Gothic churches, stained glass windows, beautiful carved altars — but without these, we will still behold God's glory, whenever there is the Word and the Sacrament. For God's glory and presence are not in wood and stone, but in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh to dwell with us. Let us, with the Israelites, bow our faces to the ground, worshiping and giving thanks, to the Lord, saying, "For He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever!"

**Prayer:** Lord God, we behold the glory of your presence, in Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Receive the glory of Christ's presence today in worship.

## Monday of the Week of Lent IV | March 23, 2020

<sup>7:1</sup> Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him...  
<sup>3</sup> When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. <sup>4</sup> And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, <sup>5</sup> for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue." <sup>6</sup> And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. <sup>7</sup> Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. <sup>8</sup> For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." <sup>9</sup> When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." <sup>10</sup> And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well. <sup>11</sup> Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. <sup>12</sup> As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. <sup>13</sup> And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." <sup>14</sup> Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." <sup>15</sup> And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. <sup>16</sup> Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" <sup>17</sup> And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

-Luke 7:1-17

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Our reading today includes the healing of the centurion's servant and the raising of the son of the widow of Nain. Both focus on the power and authority given to the Lord Jesus by His Father in heaven. The centurion who lives his life under the authority of the Roman empire recognizes and respects authority when he sees it. As the centurion can speak a word and command others, he knows the authority and power which Jesus can exercise with just a word. A man of faith, supportive of the Jewish nation and religion, having built the people a synagogue, he has the respect of the elders of the Jews. Still, the centurion is humbled by the prospect of Jesus entering His pagan, Roman home. Unworthy, He sends servants to ask Jesus to simply "say the word" and He knows His servant will be healed. And indeed, hearing these things, marveling at the faith of the Roman centurion, Jesus heals the servant from afar.

In the same way, as Jesus is drawing near to the gate of the town of Nain, encountering the son of a widow being carried, in death, out of town, in His compassion, He stops the procession and speaks to the dead man, "Young man, I say to you, arise." And the dead man was restored to life and given back to his mother. Again, we see the power and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, over sickness and death. Let us have no doubt that at that time when we rest in death, our Lord will again speak and say, "I say to you, arise!" And we will be raised!

**Prayer:** Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be raised to new life. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Pray the above prayer every time it crosses your mind today.

## March 24, 2020 | Tuesday of the Week of Lent IV

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<sup>7:18</sup> The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John,<sup>19</sup> calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”<sup>20</sup> And when the men had come to him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’”<sup>21</sup> In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight.<sup>22</sup> And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.”<sup>23</sup> And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.<sup>24</sup> When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?<sup>25</sup> What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings' courts.<sup>26</sup> What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.<sup>27</sup> This is he of whom it is written, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.”<sup>28</sup> I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”<sup>29</sup> (When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John,<sup>30</sup> but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.)<sup>31</sup> “To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like?<sup>32</sup> They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.”<sup>33</sup> For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’<sup>34</sup> The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’<sup>35</sup> Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.”

—Luke 7:18-35



Clearly, there were those in Jesus' time who struggled with the identity of this holy man. John the Baptizer, himself, questioned at times. “Are you the chosen Messiah?” John wants to know. He is impatient and it seems he is confused. Luke tells us the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected Jesus, not having been baptized. Yesterday, we heard of the Roman centurion whose faith Jesus had not seen in all of Israel. Today, John and the Jewish religious leaders are still wondering, “Who is this rabbi, Jesus?” Wouldn't it seem those who saw Jesus and heard Jesus and witnessed His healings and miracles would acknowledge Him as Son of God? No more so than those who question and reject Jesus today.

Having never lived in another age, we can't make comparisons, but today, there seems to be great confusion over the identity of Jesus. Many so-called “progressive” Christians view Jesus as wise sage, but not physically resurrected Lord. Others consider Jesus as one son of God among many. Still others revere Him as great teacher, spiritual guru or anointed prophet, but not Son of God and only Savior of the world. We have a great task before us — the ongoing proclamation of Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life!

**Prayer:** Lord God, give us hearts to believe and mouths to proclaim that Jesus is Lord! Amen!

**Lenten response:** If you send an email or text today, end it with post-script, “Jesus is Lord!”

## Wednesday of the Week of Lent IV | March 25, 2020

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<sup>9:1</sup> Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to Jerusalem to test him with hard questions, having a very great retinue and camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones. And when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. <sup>2</sup> And Solomon answered all her questions. There was nothing hidden from Solomon that he could not explain to her. <sup>3</sup> And when the queen of Sheba had seen the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, <sup>4</sup> the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, and their clothing, his cupbearers, and their clothing, and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the Lord, there was no more breath in her. <sup>5</sup> And she said to the king, “The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom, <sup>6</sup> but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it... <sup>8</sup> Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and set you on his throne as king for the Lord your God! Because your God loved Israel and would establish them forever, he has made you king over them, that you may execute justice and righteousness.” <sup>9</sup> Then she gave the king 120 talents of gold, and a very great quantity of spices, and precious stones. There were no spices such as those that the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. <sup>10</sup> Moreover, the servants of Hiram and the servants of Solomon, who brought gold from Ophir, brought al gum wood and precious stones. <sup>11</sup> And the king made from the al gum wood supports for the house of the Lord and for the king's house, lyres also and harps for the singers. There never was seen the like of them before in the land of Judah. <sup>12</sup> And King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all that she desired, whatever she asked besides what she had brought to the king. So she turned and went back to her own land with her servants.

–2 Chronicles 9:1-12

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Allow us to dive into some interesting history, given our reading today from 2 Chronicles. Because of our close relationship with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, the largest Lutheran church body in the world, we have had the chance to send visitors to Ethiopia regularly. It is interesting to learn the history of the Solomonic dynasty in Ethiopia which lasted from Menelik I in the 10th century B.C., for 3000 years uninterrupted. How did Solomon exert such an influence in Sheba/Ethiopia?

In our reading about the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon, “to test him with hard questions,” it ends that Solomon gave her “all that she desired, whatever she asked...” However it happened, she returned pregnant with Solomon’s son. He became Menelik I, first emperor of Ethiopia. According to tradition, when Israel was threatened, Menelik, with divine assistance, brought the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia for safekeeping, with a forgery left in Jerusalem. To this day, it is said that the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia keeps the Ark in the Church of Our Lady of Zion in Axum. Why share this as our Lenten daily devotion? First, it relates to our reading for the day. Second, it’s interesting historically. Third, it reminds us of the mystery of the Lord God’s will throughout history.

**Prayer:** O Lord our God, keep our eyes on Jesus and Jesus only, giving thanks for the great history of our salvation! Amen.

**Lenten response:** Pray today for our brothers and sisters in Ethiopia, for stability and peace.

## March 26, 2020 | Thursday of the Week of Lent IV

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<sup>8:1</sup> Soon afterward (Jesus) went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, <sup>2</sup>and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, <sup>3</sup>and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means. <sup>4</sup>And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, <sup>5</sup>"A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. <sup>6</sup>And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. <sup>7</sup>And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. <sup>8</sup>And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold." As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

—Luke 8:1-8

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Our passage today manifests the width and breadth of the kingdom of God, and God's intention that all are welcomed into the Church regardless of their gender, social class or ethnicity.

First, we hear of the twelve men following Jesus through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the Good News. With them, however, are some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities. This would have been not only unusual, but inappropriate, as women would not have traveled with unrelated men, nor would women have followed Jewish rabbis, nor would a rabbi have allowed women to be disciples. Yet, here are a number of women who are not only traveling with the Lord and the Twelve but providing financial support for them. Without a doubt, from the beginning, women were deeply connected to the Lord and His mission and ministry, leading finally to women being the first witnesses of the resurrection.

The intention that the Gospel is for all comes through loudly and clearly in the parable of the sower, sowing seeds liberally, freely — some falling along the path, some on the rock, some among the thorns, some in good soil. The image is of a sower scattering seeds with the goal of having the Good News reach as many people as possible, even those who may not be considered "good soil," ready to receive the Word and take it to heart. As disciples and followers of Jesus, our task is to spread the seed of God's Word far and wide.

Is this the notion of the sharing of the Gospel in most of our congregations today? Is that the understanding of spreading the Word of God in your congregation? And if you reach someone from the proverbial "other side of the tracks," will they be welcome if they show up for worship on a given Sunday? The NALC, surprisingly and thankfully, reflects the "catholicity" of the Body of Christ — the universality of the Body — with Ethiopian congregations, Chinese congregations, Spanish-speaking congregations, churches in Puerto Rico and now a mission in Mexico — urban, suburban, rural, serving rich and poor, farmers and college faculty. This is what the Church of Jesus Christ looks like. Is that what your congregation looks like?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, give us courage to share your Word boldly, and to all people. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Make a commitment to speak to people at worship you don't know, welcoming them regardless of their background, appearance or Lutheran "credentials."

## Friday of the Week of Lent IV | March 27, 2020

<sup>8:9</sup> And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant,<sup>10</sup> he said, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’<sup>11</sup> Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.<sup>12</sup> The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.<sup>13</sup> And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.<sup>14</sup> And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.<sup>15</sup> As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.<sup>16</sup> “No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light.<sup>17</sup> For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.<sup>18</sup> Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.”

—Luke 8:9-18



Although I grew up spending lots of time on my grandparents' farm outside Mt. Auburn, Indiana, I would never presume to be a farmer. The only time my Grandpa Barker let my brother and I drive his tractors, was when he needed help spreading rich, healthy manure on the fields. He would never let us drive the tractor when spreading seed on the fields, as seed was valuable, and he didn't want us wasting it. I understand modern technology and GPS in the tractor cab makes spreading seed even more precise, taking into consideration soil condition, moisture, location in the field, etc. Modern farming doesn't sound at all like the sower in the parable. Which doesn't matter because Jesus isn't giving agricultural advice, anyway. Rather, the Lord explains in our passage above how the seed in the parable is the Word of God — the seed which disciples of Jesus are to spread far and wide, without concern for where it will fall or how it will be received. While we wish every heart and life would be “good soil,” the truth of our human nature is that some hearts are like the hard-packed earth, others are cold as rock, while other lives are so full that they are already being choked out. Bottom line — whether the Word of God germinates and takes root and grows is not the responsibility of the disciple sowing the seed. Our task is to sow the seed of God's Word liberally and freely. God takes care of the rest.

A word should be said about the second section of our reading, where Jesus speaks to His disciples about the need for their behavior to be worthy and reflective of the Word of God in them. No one lights a lamp and covers it — instead, it is placed in a prominent place where it will shine light into every dark corner. The follower of Jesus will want to keep that in mind, that our thoughts, words and deeds be above reproach. And when that is not the case, then we will confess, repent and seek forgiveness.

**Prayer:** Lord God, give us many opportunities to share the seed of your Word! Amen.

**Lenten response:** Consider printing Scripture verses on slips of paper that you give to others or leave in conspicuous places throughout your day.

## March 28, 2020 | Saturday of the Week of Lent IV

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<sup>8:19</sup>Then [Jesus'] mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. <sup>20</sup>And he was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you." <sup>21</sup>But he answered them, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it." <sup>22</sup>One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they set out, <sup>23</sup>and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. <sup>24</sup>And they went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. <sup>25</sup>He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?"

—Luke 8:19-25



There are times when it seems Jesus is a bit insensitive to his family. At the wedding at Cana in Galilee, when His mother, Mary, asks Him to help with the wine shortage, He responds, "Woman, what has this to do with me?" In our account above, the Lord seems to dismiss His mother and His brothers, asserting that only those who hear the word of God and do it are His mother and His brothers.

Of course, what Jesus says here is true, and elsewhere, we are told that His mother and His brothers are sometimes looking for Him to save Him from Himself — to rein Him in, perhaps, before He runs afoul of the Jewish or Roman authorities. If that is their goal, then Jesus will have none of it, as He is all about sharing the Good News of the Kingdom. If Jesus' family were afraid for Him because of His preaching, teaching and healing, then surely, it was a sign of a lack of faith or trust in Jesus and the Father's will for Him. They would, then, be acting contrary to the Word of God.

In the next instance, we see that the disciples, themselves, are sometimes fearful and lacking faith. It is an all too common human response, when we are beset by storms in life, by illness, loss, uncertainty, difficulty of any kind, that we assume Jesus must be asleep in the boat, or not with us in the boat of our lives at all. We cry out, "Lord, don't you care that I am perishing?" And His reply, "Oh ye of little faith!" Though we all face trials and challenges in life, the Lord is with us and will finally calm our frightened hearts and minds. With a word, He rebukes the wind and the waves and brings calm. This is truly the peace of God which passes all human understanding (Philippians 4:7). It is the peace that Christ gives that is not like the world's peace (John 14:27). It is not the absence of wind and waves in life, but the ability to have peace and calm in the midst of it, because Jesus Christ, Lord of life and death is with us always.

Are you, even now, beset by storms in your life? Are you or your loved ones dealing with sickness, grief, addiction, lack of faith? Does it seem, at times, that the Lord has abandoned you — leaving you alone in a sinking boat? The Lord says, "Peace be with you!"

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, grant me peace and calm in the midst of the storms of life. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Share the peace of the Lord with someone who needs it today.

## The Fifth Sunday in Lent | March 29, 2020

<sup>8:26</sup> Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. <sup>27</sup> When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs.<sup>28</sup> When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.” <sup>29</sup> For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.) <sup>30</sup> Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Legion,” for many demons had entered him. <sup>31</sup> And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. <sup>32</sup> Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. <sup>33</sup> Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned. <sup>34</sup> When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. <sup>35</sup> Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. <sup>36</sup> And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. <sup>37</sup> Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. <sup>38</sup> The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, <sup>39</sup> “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.

-Luke 8:26-39

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Today's reading is a powerful and moving account of an exorcism by Jesus. There are many significant details to note. Because there was a herd of pigs, and pigs were considered unclean by Jews, this was surely a Gentile community. The man possessed wore no clothes and dwelt among the tombs in a cemetery. If you have been to Israel, you may have seen what barren locations cemeteries often are — rocky, hard-packed dirt, not the serene, grassy, park-like garden cemeteries in most North American areas. The demons recognize Jesus for who He is before humans do. Knowing His power and dominion over them, they beg Jesus not to cast them into the abyss of hell. The people who saw it and heard about it were seized with fear, asking Jesus to leave them. Most of all, once the man has been exorcised of his demons, he sits at the feet of Jesus, a disciple, calmly restored, back among the living. Is it any wonder that the man wanted to stay with Jesus, begging that he might remain? His whole life had been one of isolation, pain and death. Jesus has given the man life — truly, this was a resurrection. But Jesus has other plans: “Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you.” Isn’t that His request of us, as well? After we receive God’s healing, forgiving gifts of grace in worship, we are to return to our homes, families and neighborhoods to simply declare how much God has done for us!

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you daily exorcise our demons and restore us to life. Give us courage to boldly tell others how much you have done for us. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Tell someone else today something God has done for you!

## March 30, 2020 | Monday of the Week of Lent V

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<sup>8:40</sup> Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him.<sup>41</sup> And there came a man named Jairus, who was a ruler of the synagogue. And falling at Jesus' feet, he implored him to come to his house,<sup>42</sup> for he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying. As Jesus went, the people pressed around him.<sup>43</sup> And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone.<sup>44</sup> She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased.<sup>45</sup> And Jesus said, "Who was it that touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!"<sup>46</sup> But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me."<sup>47</sup> And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed.<sup>48</sup> And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."<sup>49</sup> While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler's house came and said, "Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more."<sup>50</sup> But Jesus on hearing this answered him, "Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well."<sup>51</sup> And when he came to the house, he allowed no one to enter with him, except Peter and John and James, and the father and mother of the child.<sup>52</sup> And all were weeping and mourning for her, but he said, "Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping."<sup>53</sup> And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead.<sup>54</sup> But taking her by the hand he called, saying, "Child, arise."<sup>55</sup> And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given her to eat.<sup>56</sup> And her parents were amazed, but he charged them to tell no one what had happened.

—Luke 8:40-56

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The focus of these two healings could be "faith" — and of course, faith in Jesus. The first healing, as Jesus is along the way to Jairus' daughter is of the woman who had a discharge of blood for 12 years. Jesus heals her, but the Lord points out that the healing was received by faith. She, too, is described as a "daughter," as Jesus bids her "go in peace." As Jesus continues on His way, someone comes to tell Him not to bother — Jairus' daughter is dead. But Jesus answers, "Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well." And rather than believe or trust in Jesus, the people laughed at Him. Jesus had the last laugh, so to speak, as He did indeed speak to the girl, commanding, "Child, arise." And she got up at once.

How can we not notice that Jesus is lifting up the need for faith in these miracles? Obviously, it is by the presence and power of the Lord Jesus that the healings/restoration takes place — but they are received through faith, which we learn in catechism class is the channel through which God's grace and mercy come to us. Martin Luther described faith in many ways, but once he referred to it as "Letting God be God!" Our faith is not a work, an achievement, an accomplishment — but that by which we receive justification — "by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

**Prayer:** Lord, I believe — help thou my unbelief! Amen. (Mark 9:24)

**Lenten response:** Read Romans 3:21-31, to hear the Good News that we are justified by faith.

## Tuesday of the Week of Lent V | March 31, 2020

<sup>9:1</sup> And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, <sup>2</sup> and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. <sup>3</sup> And he said to them, “Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. <sup>4</sup> And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. <sup>5</sup> And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them.” <sup>6</sup> And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere. <sup>7</sup> Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, <sup>8</sup> by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen. <sup>9</sup> Herod said, “John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?” And he sought to see him.

—Luke 9:1-9



What does it look like to have total reliance upon God? Jesus sends His disciples out in this passage, giving them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, proclaiming the kingdom of God and healing. As they go, they are to totally and completely rely on God to provide.

The urgency of the Gospel message should compel the disciples to be able to move quickly and lightly. No staff, no bag, no extra snacks. Don't take money but rely on others to provide for you along the way. Don't even take a change of clothes (two tunics). And don't be going from house to house looking for the best accommodations, but when you enter a house, stay there until you leave. And if they won't receive you in a particular place, once you have proclaimed the nearness of the kingdom of God, move on. Always, keep moving on, and if the message is rejected, shake the dust off your feet and move on.

If only we, today, would share just a measure of that urgency and commitment to sharing Good News with anyone and everyone who would listen. There was a time when our forebears in the old countries sent pastors and laity together to evangelize North America. There was a time when Lutherans planted congregations on every crossroads to provide the Gospel proclamation in every community. In a culture where secularism has convinced many that all roads lead to God and that there is no one true path, there is little urgency any more for the spread of the Gospel. Surely, the world says, love will win, and all will be saved by a gracious God who cares little how you come to Him.

How do we reconcile such an attitude with Jesus words, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). In a time when some in Islam seek to create a world caliphate; in a time when darkness envelopes homes and families through mental illness, PTSD and addiction; in a time when Satan is working through aggressive secularism to lead people away from God, urgency is needed, once again. Go, therefore and proclaim the kingdom of God! Make disciples and baptize and teach them all that Jesus commands.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, as you send us out, give us courage to speak and mouths to proclaim. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Talk with your spouse, friend or church group about the urgency of the Gospel.

## April 1, 2020 | Wednesday of the Week of Lent V

<sup>9:10</sup> On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. <sup>11</sup> When the crowds learned it, they followed him, and he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing. <sup>12</sup> Now the day began to wear away, and the twelve came and said to him, “Send the crowd away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions, for we are here in a desolate place.” <sup>13</sup> But he said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” <sup>14</sup> For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” <sup>15</sup> And they did so, and had them all sit down. <sup>16</sup> And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. <sup>17</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces. <sup>18</sup> Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” <sup>19</sup> And they answered, “John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.” <sup>20</sup> Then he said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, “The Christ of God.”

—Luke 9:10-20



Many events in Scripture “prefigure” what comes later. When we see the later happening, we understand it in light of what came before. This is true with regard to the miracle of the feeding of the 5000.

Anytime we read about meals, feasting or feeding early in the Gospels, we can't help but consider how they prefigure the Lord's Supper. In this instance there is much that speaks to the meaning and message of the meal Jesus shared with His disciples on Maundy Thursday in the Upper Room.

The description of Jesus taking the loaves and fish, looking up to heaven and saying a blessing over them sounds “sacramental.” Then, Jesus broke the loaves, in the same way that Jesus broke the bread at the table with the Twelve. And all 5000 ate and were satisfied, a rare occurrence in a time when food was often scarce, and many went hungry. Yet, the message of the miracle is two-fold. First, with Jesus' presence and blessing, there is food enough for all. Second, there is enough, not just for the 5000, but for all who would come after as the leftovers filled twelve baskets. We should never miss numerical references, as twelve is always a significant number. It reminds us of the Exodus and the feeding of the twelve tribes of Israel in the wilderness with manna from heaven. It also points to the Church to come, twelve being a symbol of the New Israel, those who would come to the Church in the future through the ministry of the twelve Apostles. In the Lord's Supper, there is enough for all, whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, and all will be satisfied, spiritually, filled with the presence of Jesus incarnate. And then, there will be even more for those yet to join the Body of Christ!

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for feeding us with your incarnate presence. Amen.

**Lenten response:** As you have mealtimes today, bless your food in remembrance of the 5000.

## Thursday of the Week of Lent V | April 2, 2020

<sup>9:21</sup> And (Jesus) strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, <sup>22</sup> saying, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” <sup>23</sup> And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. <sup>25</sup> For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? <sup>26</sup> For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. <sup>27</sup> But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.” <sup>28</sup> Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup> And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup> And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, <sup>31</sup> who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup> Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. <sup>33</sup> And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. <sup>34</sup> As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup> And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!” <sup>36</sup> And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

—Luke 9:21-36

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If you haven’t noticed so far in the Gospel of Luke, it becomes clear in these verses that the ongoing question is, “Who is this Jesus?” In the last verse of our reading yesterday, Peter confesses for the first time, “You are the Christ of God.” We know that Peter wavers, however, as time goes on, denying Jesus three times. Immediately after Peter’s confession, the Lord Himself explains the kind of Messiah He would be, saying, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” Jesus then went on to explain that as He would go to the cross, so also His followers were being called to take up their cross daily and come after Him. This is the kind of Messiah Jesus was — the kind who would give up His life willingly and expect His disciples to do the same!

The Lord then takes Peter, James and John to the mountain to pray, and there, again, His identity is confirmed, as His appearance is altered, His clothes become dazzling white, and He is seen with Moses and Elijah, proclaiming Him the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets, but even more, the voice from heaven, out of the cloud, anoints Jesus, again, as Son of God, His Chosen One, to whom they should listen. Again and again, the disciples and the world are seeing who Jesus is, and why He came. As we draw near to Holy Week, let us ponder and listen to this Son of God.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, open our ears that we may hear you as you speak to us. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Sit silently, briefly, today...what words of Jesus from Scripture come to you?

## April 3, 2020 | Friday of the Week of Lent V

<sup>9:37</sup> On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him.<sup>38</sup> And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child." <sup>39</sup> And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him. <sup>40</sup> And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." <sup>41</sup> Jesus answered, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." <sup>42</sup> While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy and gave him back to his father. <sup>43</sup> And all were astonished at the majesty of God. But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples,<sup>44</sup> "Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men." <sup>45</sup> But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying. <sup>46</sup> An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. <sup>47</sup> But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side <sup>48</sup> and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great." <sup>49</sup> John answered, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us." <sup>50</sup> But Jesus said to him, "Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you."

—Luke 9:37-50

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"Who is this Jesus?" In spite of all that Jesus has said and done, it appears the disciples still don't understand. He casts out an evil spirit after the disciples could not — and all were astonished at the majesty of God at work in Jesus. While they were all marveling at everything He was doing, it is clear the disciples, impressed by the miracles and wonders in their midst, do not yet grasp what Jesus is really all about. He says, "Let these words sink into your ears" ... I am not here to impress you with healings and exorcisms. "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men." But they didn't understand this saying and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask Him what He meant by this saying.

Luke explains that the truth about Jesus must have been concealed from the disciples, because they continued to lack understanding. Jesus has spoken plainly about His approaching arrest, suffering and death, yet they did not understand, and they were afraid to ask. How could the disciples be so dull and unwitting? How could they fail to understand who Jesus is and why He came? Could the same be said of us, Jesus' disciples and followers today?

While the daily reading guide wasn't prepared to follow the liturgical year, it is helpful that these passages come as we are just steps away from Jerusalem, Palm Sunday and Holy Week. They challenge us to ask, who is this Jesus, and what does His death and resurrection mean for me?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, let the words you speak sink into my ears. Open my ears and my heart. Amen.

**Lenten response:** Plan now to attend Holy Week services. What needs to be adjusted so that you are able?

## Saturday of the Week of Lent V | April 4, 2020

<sup>9:51</sup> When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup> And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. <sup>53</sup> But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. <sup>54</sup> And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" <sup>55</sup> But he turned and rebuked them. <sup>56</sup> And they went on to another village. <sup>57</sup> As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." <sup>58</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." <sup>59</sup> To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." <sup>60</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." <sup>61</sup> Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." <sup>62</sup> Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." <sup>10:1</sup> After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. <sup>2</sup> And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. <sup>3</sup> Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup> Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. <sup>5</sup> Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' <sup>6</sup> And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup> And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. <sup>8</sup> Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. <sup>9</sup> Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' <sup>10</sup> But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup> 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' <sup>12</sup> I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

-Luke 9:51-10:12



At this point in His ministry, already, Jesus' face "was set toward Jerusalem." This might seem a simple comment, but throughout the Gospels, it indicates not just geographic orientation, but that Jesus' entire life and ministry was headed toward Jerusalem and the cross. It is ironic then, that someone along the way offers to follow Jesus, and others say they will come follow, if only they can take time to tie up personal matters at home first. Jesus' journey to the cross won't allow such distractions and diversions. Once again, we are struck with the immediacy and urgency of Jesus' mission. The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. And Jesus has little time left to reach those living in darkness and the fear of death. He needs followers who are willing to step out in faith quickly, passionately, concerned for the sick and the sinful, ready to proclaim that the kingdom of God has come near. Perhaps this Holy Week and Easter will be a time of renewal in each of us, that we may indeed be laborers in the harvest.

**Prayer:** Lord, send out laborers into the harvest. Here am I, send me, empower me, use me! Amen.

**Lenten response:** Offer a prayer today for all pastors and seminarians who labor in the harvest.

## April 5, 2020 | Sunday of the Passion / Palm Sunday

<sup>12:20</sup> Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup> So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus. And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified... <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ But for this purpose I have come to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” <sup>29</sup> The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” <sup>30</sup> Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. <sup>31</sup> Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. <sup>32</sup> And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” <sup>33</sup> He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. <sup>34</sup> So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” <sup>35</sup> So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. <sup>36</sup> While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. <sup>37</sup> Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, <sup>38</sup> so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” <sup>39</sup> Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, <sup>40</sup> “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.” <sup>41</sup> Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. <sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; <sup>43</sup> for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

—John 12:20-43



Our rather long reading today follows immediately after Jesus' Palm Sunday procession into Jerusalem. If you were not in worship today, read John 12:20-19. What a mixed reaction upon Jesus arrival in Jerusalem. The Pharisees said to one another (verse 19), “Look, the world has gone after him!” Jesus then announces that His time has come — the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. And He will be glorified, after His painful suffering and death. Luke then tells us, “Though He had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him.” The miracles, signs and healings were interesting in and of themselves, but they didn't lead people to faith. It was as the prophet Isaiah foretold it. Jesus' resurrection from death will be the final and ultimate sign. And have all come to believe? Do we believe? Do you?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, give us grace as we walk with you to the cross and tomb. Amen.

**Holy Week response:** Talk a prayerful walk around your neighborhood in remembrance of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and His journey through Holy Week.

## Monday in Holy Week | April 6, 2020

10:13 “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>14</sup> But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. <sup>15</sup> And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades. <sup>16</sup> “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” <sup>17</sup> The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” <sup>18</sup> And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. <sup>19</sup> Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. <sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” <sup>21</sup> In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>22</sup> All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” <sup>23</sup> Then turning to the disciples he said privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! <sup>24</sup> For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

—Luke 10:13-24

Having just sent out the seventy-two on their mission to heal the sick and proclaim, “The kingdom of God has come near you,” the Lord now reflects on those who will not receive the Gospel message, remain unrepentant and reject the missionaries. They will suffer judgement and may be “brought down to Hades,” be cast into hell. For receiving those who speak for Jesus is to receive Jesus, while rejecting them is to reject Him who sent them. It is a terrible condemnation but a biblical reality that as God is a god of mercy and forgiveness, He will not force those who reject Jesus to come to Him. We have, by God’s grace, the freedom to receive Jesus or reject Him. At this point, the seventy-two return and are overjoyed at their ability to combat evil in their spiritual warfare. Demons, spirits, serpents and scorpions are subject to the laborers in the harvest, yet more than that, they are to “rejoice that [their] names are written in heaven.”

We sometimes forget that our names are written in heaven. Life in the world causes us to question and doubt our salvation. Our sinfulness, ever with us, causes us to think our disobedience is so great, even the blood of Jesus may not cover us. With the disciples, we are blessed to have seen and know the events of Holy Week — that Jesus, who was crucified, has been raised. Our sins were nailed to the cross and buried in the tomb with Him, so that now, we may lead new lives in Him.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, we thank you that our names are written in heaven, with your own life-giving blood as the ink. Amen.

**Holy Week response:** Take time to pray for those who may reject Jesus and His word, that ears may be opened to hear and heed the Gospel message.

## **April 7, 2020 | Tuesday in Holy Week**

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<sup>10:25</sup> And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>26</sup> He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”<sup>27</sup> And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>28</sup> And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.” <sup>29</sup> But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” <sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.<sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> And the next day he took out two denarii<sup>[4]</sup> and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ <sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” <sup>37</sup> He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

—Luke 10:25-37

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Like the Jewish lawyer, always wanting to justify ourselves, we often think we can be the Good Samaritan, loving God and neighbor perfectly, thinking we are actually able to “go and do likewise.” Martin Luther rejected this, always understanding this parable not as an exhortation to justify ourselves by keeping the Law, but as a description of Jesus. In a sermon on this parable, Luther wrote:

This Samaritan, of course, is our Lord Jesus Christ himself, who has shown his love toward God and his neighbor. Toward God, in that he was obedient to him, came down from heaven and became man, and thus fulfilled the will of his Father; toward his neighbor, in that he immediately after his baptism began to preach, to do wonders, to heal the sick. And in short, he did no work that centered in himself alone, but all his acts centered in his neighbor. And this he did with all his powers, and thus he became our servant, who could have well remained in heaven and been equal to God, Phil. 2:6. But all this he did because he knew that this pleased God and was his Father’s will. This is the Samaritan who came uninvited, and fulfilled the law with his whole heart. For only he fulfilled the law, and no one can deprive him of this honor. He alone merits it, and well maintains it all alone. But Christ, the true Samaritan, takes the poor man to himself as his own, goes to him and does not require the helpless one to come to him; for here is no merit but pure grace and mercy; and he binds up his wounds, cares for him and pours in oil and wine, this is the whole Gospel from beginning to end.

This Holy Week, let us focus only on Jesus, our Good Samaritan. Let us lay aside thoughts of our own goodness, righteousness, or striving and see Jesus and Jesus only.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you for being our Good Samaritan — for giving your life for us. Amen.

**Holy Week response:** Tell a family member, friend or acquaintance about your Good Samaritan.

## Wednesday in Holy Week | April 8, 2020

<sup>10:38</sup> Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. <sup>39</sup> And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. <sup>40</sup> But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." <sup>41</sup> But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, <sup>42</sup> but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." <sup>11:1</sup> Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." <sup>2</sup> And he said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. <sup>3</sup> Give us each day our daily bread, <sup>4</sup> and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.'" <sup>5</sup> And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, <sup>6</sup> for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; <sup>7</sup> and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? <sup>8</sup> I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. <sup>9</sup> And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

—Luke 10:38-11:13



We often don't know what to do with the account of Mary and Martha. Certainly, we would all like to sit at the feet of Jesus, listening to His teaching. We would like to go away with Him to a special place, devoting ourselves to prayer. But with Martha, we are anxious and troubled about many things. You may be currently worried about getting the house clean, food prepared and work completed before Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Maybe you have company coming. Who wouldn't be anxious and bothered with things which need to be done. And we're supposed to sit with Mary at the feet of Jesus listening? The story of Mary and Martha may be one of the most relevant in all of Scripture, as it reflects the reality of our lives. Do we spend our time in Bible study and prayer, or do we take care of the many tasks which need to be handled to accommodate gatherings of family and friends? It is obviously an age-old dilemma, creating "bad blood" at times between siblings. And Jesus gives no easy answer. He doesn't condemn Mary for choosing the "needful thing, the good portion," neither does He criticize Martha for her hospitality and care. He does go from His visit in their home, to a certain place for prayer.

And maybe Jesus' simple prayer helps us a bit. Sometimes, we may not have time to enter our prayer closet and spend an hour in prayer. We almost always have time for the "Lord's Prayer;" simple, yet profound — not full of empty phrases, but direct, to the point. We can't do better than to use the prayer of our Lord as our own. No wonder we Lutherans love ending our Bible studies, meetings and gatherings with the prayer our Lord taught us.

**Prayer:** Jesus, Lord, thank you for teaching us to pray, as yourself would pray. Amen.

**Holy Week response:** Holy Week is a time for putting aside our anxiety over many things to attend to the one thing that is necessary. Make time for worship on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

## April 9, 2020 | Maundy Thursday

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<sup>26:17</sup> Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?” <sup>18</sup> He said, “Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’” <sup>19</sup> And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover. <sup>20</sup> When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve.<sup>21</sup> And as they were eating, he said, “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” <sup>22</sup> And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, “Is it I, Lord?” <sup>23</sup> He answered, “He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. <sup>24</sup> The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.” <sup>25</sup> Judas, who would betray him, answered, “Is it I, Rabbi?” He said to him, “You have said so.” <sup>26</sup> Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” <sup>27</sup> And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you,<sup>28</sup> for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>29</sup> I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” <sup>30</sup> And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

—Matthew 26:17-30



It is heart-breaking to hear Jesus say point-blank — “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” The Twelve are cut to the heart, as they are sorrowful and ask Him, “Is it I, Lord?” On the one hand, we know that it is Judas who would betray the Lord. On the other, doesn’t Peter betray Jesus as well? Not once, but three times? And before we are too quick to criticize Judas and Peter, don’t we betray our Lord, as well?

In John’s account of the Lord’s Supper, Jesus gives a new commandment. The old commandment was, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus turns it upside down when he commands, “Love one another, as I have loved you.” That is a whole different commandment, isn’t it? How does the Lord Jesus love you and me? Completely, sacrificially, in such a way that he empties Himself of Himself, as He takes our sin upon Himself, dying on the cross, that we might have new life. And, do we keep this commandment faithfully? Or do we betray Jesus, daily, unable to love one another as He loves us? We are, in a way, betrayers of Jesus, as were Judas and Peter. To acknowledge this is to remind us of our need for a Savior, our need for the New Covenant Jesus came to inaugurate, and our need for the forgiveness of our sins, which we receive through His blood poured out for us! We ought never to hear the accounts of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, thinking, “how shameful of those twelve disciples, and Judas and Peter especially, who betrayed the Lord.” We are always to understand that we are with them, sitting at table with Jesus, His betrayers one and all, yet eating and drinking His body and blood of the New Covenant, forgiven, transformed, made new, through His crucifixion, death and resurrection.

**Prayer:** O Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Grant us peace. Amen.

**Holy Week response:** If physically able, receive the Lord’s Supper today.

<sup>4:14</sup> Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. <sup>5:1</sup> For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. <sup>2</sup> He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. <sup>3</sup> Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. <sup>4</sup> And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. <sup>5</sup> So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”; <sup>6</sup> as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.” <sup>7</sup> In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. <sup>8</sup> Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. <sup>9</sup> And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him...

—Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:1-9

Many are aware that Martin Luther (and other medieval scholars) had a number of questions regarding Hebrews, as well as James and Revelation. Nevertheless, Luther never removed them from his translations. They were and still are part of the canon of Holy Scripture. Thanks be to God for this wonderful book that is both sermon and exhortation.

For Hebrews speaks to us powerfully of Jesus being both sacrifice on the cross and High Priest making the sacrifice, in obedience to the will of the Father. The author of Hebrews aims to connect Jesus' death on the cross with the required blood sacrifice practiced under the old covenant. Now, He who was without sin, took our sin upon Himself, an unblemished Lamb, a worthy sacrifice to atone for the sins of the world.

*“Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard...Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.”*

Because Jesus, the High Priest and the worthy sacrifice was obedient to the Father and gave His life as a ransom for all, we may, with confidence, draw near to the throne of grace, finding mercy and grace to help in time of need. Before, we sinful people were not worthy to approach the all-wise, all-holy God. Now, by Jesus' blood and righteousness, we are made holy and may with confidence, with confidence, draw near to God and find the help and mercy we so desperately need. Are you in need of divine help and mercy? Draw near to God confidently.

**Prayer:** We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, for by your cross you have redeemed the world. Amen.

**Holy Week response:** Read the entire account of the Lord's Supper and Passion, Luke 22-23.

## April 11, 2020 | Holy Saturday

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<sup>11:14</sup>Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. <sup>15</sup>But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons,” <sup>16</sup>while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. <sup>17</sup>But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. <sup>18</sup>And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. <sup>19</sup>And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. <sup>20</sup>But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. <sup>21</sup>When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; <sup>22</sup>but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. <sup>23</sup>Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. <sup>24</sup>“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ <sup>25</sup>And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. <sup>26</sup>Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first.”

—Luke 11:14-26

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These words of Jesus about demons and Beelzebul, the prince of demons, seems alien to most of us. While we believe in the reality of Satan, demons and evil, thankfully, most of us have not witnessed possession or exorcism. What then, is the relevance of this passage to our observance of Holy Saturday? We have observed Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, we are anxiously awaiting the first light of Easter morning. Why now this text from earlier in Luke, bringing to mind Satan, demons and the “house” from which they came?

It brings to mind the Creed when it mentions we believe in Jesus, who, after crucifixion and burial, descended to hell. What did Jesus do after His body was laid in the tomb? Traditionally, the Church has believed and taught that Jesus went to hell to proclaim victory over sin, death and the devil. Certainly, no one was there to see such a descent or the presumed exchange between the Lord Jesus Christ and the prince of demons. Was it a battle? Did Jesus attack the strong man, Satan, protecting his own palace? We can’t know the details, but from early on, this was the understanding, whether literally or figuratively, when Jesus, on Holy Saturday, “descended into hell,” declaring, proclaiming, asserting that the kingdom of God had come upon the forces of evil, and the victory now was won.

Do you sometimes worry about the reality of Satan, demons and evil in our world and in our lives? Never, never fear! Christ, the crucified and risen one has overcome death and hell and Himself, announced His victory over the prince of demons. Thanks be to God we have hope and promise of new life now and eternal life with the Lord Jesus, forever.

**Prayer:** On this Holy Saturday, Lord God, give us courage and strength in the face of evil, sin and death, in the name and by the power of Jesus’ name! Amen.

**Holy Week response:** Turn on every light in your home tonight and give thanks for the Light of Christ which overcomes all darkness!

## Easter Sunday / The Resurrection of Our Lord | April 12, 2020

<sup>28:1</sup> Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup> And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.<sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup> And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.” <sup>8</sup> So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup> And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

—Matthew 28:1-10

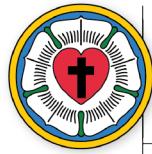


Martin Luther wrote of resurrection:

This article has suffered and still suffers the most opposition and is most difficult to believe...The reason for this is that no article so contradicts experience as this one does. For our eyes see that all the world is swept away by death and dies. Emperors and kings, high and low, young and old, and in a word, all children of men, one after the other, are laid in the grave and buried...Hence it is difficult to believe that man, who dies and perishes in so many different ways, is to live again; that his members, so widely scattered, reduced to dust and ashes in fire, water, and soil, are to be gathered again; that his soul is again to live in the same body in which it lived before; and that he is to have the same eyes, ears, hands, and feet, except that the body...is to have a different manner of existence...Therefore it is necessary for every Christian to have before him the testimony of Holy Scripture concerning the resurrection of the dead and then also the resurrection of the Lord Christ, proved and attested by certain revelation; that he must rest firmly on these and abandon outward appearance and the experience of reason.” (*Luther's Works*, Weimar Edition, 44, 429 ff)

On this Easter Sunday, it is always a challenge to hear and grasp the women visiting the tomb, the great earthquake, the angel of the Lord like lightening, white as snow, the guards trembling and then finally, the Lord Jesus resurrected, alive, greeting them as if nothing had happened these last few days. He tells the women not to be afraid — yet, how could it be otherwise? Who can so easily believe that He who was crucified, dead and buried according to all-natural laws and expectation, could be alive again? We believe it because the testimony of Holy Scripture proclaims it. We believe it because Mary Magdalene and the other Mary saw Jesus and told us about it. We believe it because the apostles and 500 others saw Jesus alive, resurrected from death. And His resurrection causes us to rest our fears and doubts firmly on these, so that we believe, by faith. May His resurrection give us new life and hope day by day, all our lives.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!



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