Higher Things Reflections

Transfiguration and Pre-Lent

February 2-25, 2020
2020 Reflections
Transfiguration and Pre-Lent

This season’s Reflections were written by Rev. Kent Schaaf, pastor of Mount Olive Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

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A Short Form for Daily Reflection
Adapted from Luther's Small Catechism

Make the sign of the holy cross and say

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Read the Psalm for the Day (A table of daily psalms can be found in Lutheran Service Book, page 304).

Read “Today's Reading” if there is one listed.

Read the Daily Lectionary selections.

Read the Reflection for the Day.

Say the Apostles' Creed.

Pray the Lord's Prayer.

Pray one of these little prayers:
In the Morning:

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray Thee to keep me this day also from sin and all evil, that all my doings and life may please Thee. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

In the Evening:

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast graciously kept me this day, and I pray Thee to forgive me all my sins, where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

In the morning go to your work with joy, singing a hymn, as the Ten Commandments, or what your devotion may suggest. If it is evening then go to sleep promptly and cheerfully.
The Transfiguration of Our Lord
February 2, 2020

Today's Reading: Matthew 17:1-9

“This is my beloved Son...listen to Him.” (Matthew 17:5)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Listening is hard, really hard, especially when you aren’t the one doing the talking. It’s hard enough for us to listen to others today, let alone to what our Lord would tell us by His Word. The Transfiguration of Jesus shows us the immense importance He places on the Word of God. Forget the radiance and the glory, forget Moses and Elijah, alive and speaking with Jesus, forget the cloud and the man-made plans Peter had to keep the experience going. “Listen,” says the Father, “listen to Him.”

Listen to Him as He says to Peter, James, and John, “rise and have no fear” (Matthew 17:9). Have no fear because the Lord of Life has come for you. He descends the mountain in order to ascend Calvary where His time for glory would be revealed for the life of the world.

On the Cross Jesus continues speaking the words of eternal life to you and the whole world. Not even a parched and stricken mouth can stop Him from telling you those blessed words. “Forgive them for they know not what they do…” “It is finished…”

Risen and victorious from the grave, He speaks to us today, “Peace to you.” This peace reminds us that whether we live or die, we are with the Lord, who on the last day will say, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34). In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

-Rev. Kent Schaaf

O God, Who in the glorious transfiguration of Your only-begotten Son confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the fathers and Who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, did in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons, mercifully make us co-heirs with the King of His glory and bring us to the enjoyment of our inheritance in heaven; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for The Transfiguration of Our Lord)
The Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Our Lord

February 3, 2020

Today's Reading: Luke 2:22-32
Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 14:1-21; Titus 2:7-3:15

Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD”). (Luke 2:22-23)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus obeyed the Law perfectly, even though He had no need to abide by the Law. He Himself wrote the Law, that same Law that is inscribed in the hearts of mankind. None are without excuse. We cannot abide by the Law, nor do we desire to fulfill it. We have made ourselves unclean and unredeemable through our thoughts, words, and deeds that are diseased by sin.

Because of this, Jesus must obey and abide by the Law perfectly for you. As He was presented in the temple, you were presented in the Temple, so that you might have the fullness of His redemption paid for you. In His life, He keeps the commandments perfectly, and you receive all the credit. Ultimately, He would be presented in Jerusalem at the end of His life and be counted as sinful, unclean, and guilty, so that you would be set free.

He suffers the judgment and curse of the Law, dying the death you deserved. He lived your life and died your death. In doing so He showed His love for both God and for you as His neighbor. Because of this you are now presented in that heavenly Jerusalem before God, and you are declared pure and redeemed by Him who continues to bless you each day with His grace. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

Jesus, by Your presentation, When they blessed You, weak and poor, Make us see Your great salvation, Seal us with Your promise sure; And present us in Your glory To Your Father, cleansed and pure. (In His Temple Now Behold Him, LSB 519:3)
Tuesday of the Week of Transfiguration
February 4, 2020

Today’s Reading: Exodus 34:29-35
Daily Lectionary: Job 1:1-22; John 1:1-18

Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. (Exodus 34:29)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Moses came down from the mountain with the Law, which he received in the presence of the eternal glory of God. We often think of this story as being just about the giving of the Law, but the very fact that Moses was in the presence of the Almighty, able to speak with Him, is purely Gospel.

When God sets things in order with His Law it is for our benefit, to draw us into repentance, that there might be the Gospel for us as well. The Gospel is given to you freely through Jesus, who fulfilled and credited to you the Law on the tablets of testimony.

Because of Jesus’ work on the Cross the temple curtain is torn in two. No veil is needed anymore to shield us from God’s presence or His glory. The veil is lifted for you, and now each time you gather in the Divine Service, your sins are forgiven and you are able to speak with God. You receive His glory in the preaching and in the Lord’s Supper, where we see Jesus. In these means you are given the words of eternal life and the foretaste of the eternal glory which Christ has prepared for you.

This is all for you with the guarantee that as you are in Christ, His face shines on you. Together we can all truly say, “We have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. - Rev. Kent Schaaf

Here, O my Lord, I see thee face to face; here would I touch and handle things unseen, here grasp with firmer hand th’eternal grace, and all my weariness upon thee lean. (Here, O My Lord, I See Thee Face to Face, LSB 631:1)
We should fear and love God that we may lead a chaste and decent life in word and deed and each love and honor his spouse. (The Small Catechism: Sixth Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. This commandment is often seen as awkward for Christians to bring up. Whether it’s upholding the biblical view of marriage between one man and one woman or the fact that the Bible calls divorce a sin, what are Christians to do in a day and age when our world champions the breaking of the Sixth Commandment?

God has called us to be faithful with the gift of marriage and human sexuality. With all the temptations around us and the popular views of marriage and sexuality, it is sometimes difficult to remain faithful to those given to us by God.

Jesus is the one who has come for you, His Bride, the Church, and you are a member of Her by Baptism and faith. He lived the perfect, chaste, and decent life, and promises that by His blood we have the forgiveness of all our sins, including those sins against the Sixth Commandment. Jesus Christ is faithful to you. He forgives and will strengthen you and keep you from temptation.

Your Baptism is a guarantee in all of this, for, “Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for Her, that He might sanctify Her, having cleansed Her by the washing of water with the Word, so that He might present the Church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that She might be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25-27). In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

The voice that breathed o'er Eden, That earliest wedding-day, The primal marriage blessing,--It hath not passed away. Still in the pure espousal Of Christian man and maid The Triune God is with us, The threefold grace is said. (The Voice that Breathed o'er Eden, The Lutheran Hymnal 622:1)
And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place. (2 Peter 1:19)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Peter, James, and John were there on the mountain top with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. They saw Jesus transfigured, and they were enveloped by the cloud and the glory of God. They saw all of this and did not die. They heard the voice proclaim Jesus as God’s own Son and heard that in Him the Father is pleased.

It often seems that Peter, James, and John might have had an advantage over us. Where do we see the glory of the Lord around us? Why can’t we get a glimpse like they did?

Peter makes it very clear to us that we have Holy Scripture, which brings to us the blessings and work of God for us and our salvation. Peter saw and experienced it all. What he saw and heard would lead him to tell others and to write it all down. Throughout the history of the world, Peter's message has been handed down and is now given to you.

You do not need a mountain or a cloud or Moses and Elijah to experience the presence and glory of the Lord. Each time you gather at the Divine Service you are given the fullness of God’s grace and glory. In your Baptism, the Father proclaimed that He is pleased with you and that you are His beloved child. In the Lord’s Supper you gather with Moses, Elijah, Peter, James, and John and all the company of heaven as Jesus feeds you with the Bread of heaven that will never perish. In the Word and Sacraments you are given the new creation, the sure and certain hope that you will never die, but will live in Him who was transfigured, crucified, and risen from the dead, all for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

This is God's beloved Son! Law and prophets sing before Him, First and Last and only One. All creation shall adore him! Alleluia! (Jesus on the Mountain Peak, LSB 415:4)
And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” (John 2:4)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The first miracle that Jesus performs is all about pointing us from the Law to the Gospel. We all know about the six stone jars that held water for the Jewish rites of purification. The water supplied for this miracle was anything but clean. It was hand-washing water! It definitely would not be the type of water anyone would voluntarily drink. The funny part? Christ commanded the waiters to give it to the headwaiter, their boss.

When the headwaiter tasted it, he proclaimed it as the best wine of the feast. John tells us that he did not know where it came from, although the servers who had drawn the water knew (John 2:9). One can almost wonder what the waiters were thinking as they handed the water to their boss. They were simply following Jesus’ command, a simple Word spoken over creation.

This points to Jesus’ authority in heaven and on earth as the author of all creation. He fulfills the Law in our place and leaves us with the gladness of the Gospel. As we live out our lives here and now, we are making our pilgrimage toward heaven, where we will partake of the Supper of the Lamb, which we will enjoy with Christ at the end of time. But Jesus does not leave us empty-handed in the meantime. He comes to us with His Word and changes bread and wine into His Body and Blood at His command and for our benefit. The Eucharist brings to us the fulfillment of Jesus’ hour where He was crucified for us and for our salvation. The fruits of His Cross are placed into your mouth each time you come to the Lord’s Table. That wondrous feast shows you that the Law has been fulfilled, and the Gospel is given to you as you participate in the foretaste of that great marriage feast that is to come. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

Almighty and everlasting God, who governs all things in heaven and on earth, mercifully hear the prayers of Your people and grant us Your peace through all our days; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the LORD, He heard my voice from His temple. (From the Introit for Septuagesima)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The psalmist reminds us that death and destruction are not simply with us, but that they surround us and even confront us. No one likes being surrounded by despair and destruction and we certainly don’t like being confronted by death. We can try and cover it up, we can try to act like we are full of life and have all things figured out, but death and destruction will always rear their ugly heads. You’ve seen them, you may have experienced them, and you and your family and friends have all been impacted by them.

This is why Christ has come for you. He is the One who was surrounded by those who would mock Him, deny Him, and crucify Him. He confronts your death at the Cross and hears our cry of distress. As He is dying He pleads to the Father on your behalf, “Forgive them for they know not what they do.”

As He breathes His last and succumbs to death’s demands, He destroys your curse of sin and death. As He walks out of the tomb that glorious Easter morning He promises that death no more has the victory over Him or you. Sheol and death may still surround us and confront us, but they have lost their power. They have no sting. Christ has won the victory for you and He now stands to hear your cry of distress, your cry for mercy, and He will act on your behalf. His Word of eternal life surrounds you and comforts you in the forgiveness, life, and salvation that He has won for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

It is God who arms me with strength, and makes my way perfect. Therefore I will give thanks to You, O LORD, and sing praises to Your name. Amen. (From the Introit for Septuagesima)
Today's Reading: Matthew 20:1-16

For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. (Matthew 20:1)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The kingdom of God is never fair in the world’s eyes. The master of the house seems like he’s cheating people out of a proper salary. Today’s workers would demand equal pay, equal benefits, and might even form a union to make sure the master is fair with his employees.

With the eyes of faith, we see that the kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of grace and joy. It is headed by a master who is willing to give graciously to all, regardless of how much or how little they have done.

This parable reminds us that in heaven there will be all kinds of people. There will be the seemingly religious success stories: the ministers, the choir members, the little old ladies who attended every Bible study for 75 years, along with those whose presence might shock us, or even dare offend us. You might see your classmates there who thought you were dumb for believing in Jesus. You might see your family members who rarely darkened the door of a church, but still had faith. You might even see someone you think is the worst person in the world.

This doesn’t seem fair, but it is God who does the calling of all to repentance and faith. Receive this good news with joy and rejoice that the invitation has come. God’s grace and mercy and heaven are yours at the expense of Jesus, who labored on the Cross for you and paid the price for your sins. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

O Lord, we implore You favorably to hear the prayers of Your people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Your goodness, for the glory of Your name; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Septuagesima)
“He must increase, but I must decrease,” (John 3:30)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. John the Baptist’s short little sentence in John 3:30 sets the standard for those who would follow Christ. Silas would walk in those same steps of humility in order to make sure that Christ would increase. Paul and Silas were beaten, imprisoned, and never knew what would happen to them the next day. “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:25). Singing and praying in jail with your back bleeding and your life hanging by a thread doesn’t seem to make sense.

In our culture of instant gratification and constant amusement, it’s hard to understand the suffering the apostles endured for the sake of the Gospel. We’ll do anything to avoid pain. But in our attempts to keep anything uncomfortable from touching us, we often miss the very thing God wants to use to lead us to greater joy in Him. In the midst of all our troubles, there is God and His gifts of life and salvation for you.

This doesn’t mean we are to deny or disguise our feelings. Nor does it mean we can or should shrug off pain or disappointment. It means that no matter what you face, Jesus has come for you and He will never decrease in His love and mercy for you. Every time you walk by the baptismal font, be reminded that you are an heir of everlasting life. Confess your sins, your doubts, and fears and let Jesus Himself heal you in Absolution. Come to His altar and partake in the Supper where He forgives and strengthens you by faith so you can meet each day. In these Gifts you can be sure that Jesus has freed you from your sins. Your chains have been loosed and you have been set free. Like St. Paul and Silas, let us pray and sing hymns to God in gratitude for all the benefits He gives to us. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

O Lord, graciously hear the prayers of Your people that we, who justly suffer the consequence of our sin, may be mercifully delivered by Your goodness to the glory of Your name; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Silas)
“The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:14)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. It’s all about the water. From the Spirit hovering over the waters of creation, to Noah and his family being saved from the waters of the flood in the ark, to Israel crossing the Red Sea on dry ground, God has used water to save His people.

Jesus continues to use water in order to save His people. He did not come for the healthy, but rather for the sick. He did not come for the clean, but for those who are filthy with all manner of sin. No sin is too dark, too deep, or too severe for Him to wash away. He meets the woman at the well in her sins, and rather than sentencing her to death, He promises her water that brings forth eternal life.

Jesus met you in your sins at the font, where the Spirit hovered over the waters of your Baptism, and He placed you into His death in order to raise you to eternal life in Him. You are kept safe in the ark of the Church. The flood of Baptism washes away your sins just as the flood of the Red Sea washed away Pharoah’s armies. It’s all in the water AND the Word! No matter what happens, your Father will keep you safe, sustained, and enlivened in Jesus—the fountain of all goodness. You are baptized, you are a child of God. It’s all there in the water, attached to God’s promise. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

Death, you cannot end my gladness: I am baptized into Christ! When I die, I leave all sadness to inherit paradise! Though I lie in dust and ashes faith’s assurance brightly flashes: Baptism has the strength divine to make life immortal mine. (God’s Own Child, I Gladly Say It, LSB 594:3)
We should fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor’s money or possessions. (The Small Catechism: Seventh Commandment Explanation)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. We love it when we talk about God’s giving gifts to us. He gives us gifts that impact us physically and spiritually. One look at the first six commandments will show you just how many gifts our Lord gives to you.

When we get to the Seventh Commandment we see a large stop sign in front of us concerning God and His gifts. The Seventh Commandment suddenly says that you aren’t the only one who receives gifts, but your neighbor does as well. “We should fear, love, and trust in God so that we do not take our neighbor’s money or possessions…but help him to improve and protect his property and business.”

The world around us is full of envy and greed, and the idea of stealing our neighbor’s stuff seems okay because it will supposedly make our lives better. When we steal from our neighbor we are telling God that His gifts are not good enough for us. The devil loves to fool us into thinking, “Did God really say” that He will “daily and richly provide for all your wants of body and soul”?

This is why you need Jesus. Jesus is your Savior, Redeemer, and neighbor, who willingly and openly gave Himself as the greatest gift for you and your salvation. He forgives us when we take for granted all the gifts that He gives. He promises to still give us all that we need, especially the gift of serving our neighbor. In Christ we now see our neighbor’s gifts and we desire to uphold and protect those gifts for our neighbor’s benefit.

This is why St. Paul says, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:3). In Christ you receive all of Jesus’ gifts of body and soul that strengthen and preserve you until life everlasting. In turn you now become a gift to your neighbor so that they may receive the gifts Christ freely gives through you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

The gifts Christ freely gives He gives to you and me To be His Church, His bride, His chosen, saved and free! Saints blest with these rich gifts Are children who proclaim That they were won by Christ And cling to His strong name. (The Gifts Christ Freely Gives, LSB 602:1)
Thursday of Septuagesima
February 13, 2020

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 9:24-10:5
Daily Lectionary: Job 9:1-35; John 4:46-54

Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. (1 Corinthians 9:25)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Almost every sport requires you to run. Run, run, and run some more. Running is painful at times, and it’s hard, but it can also be very good for you. Do not be fooled by this passage from Paul. This not a passage that deals with your exercising your faith in order to attain some sort of eternal prize. That would make this all about you and have nothing to do with Jesus.

The Corinthian church felt they were the expert runners in the Christian faith. They were simply following their Old Testament ancestors, the Israelites, who felt the same way. God was on their side, they could do whatever they wanted, and in the end God would give them their victor’s crown. But that would have nothing to do with Jesus, either. We, too, think the same way. At times we feel that since we are Christians, we can do whatever we want and God will have to forgive us. Be warned: “What then will we say? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Never may it be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” (Romans 6:1-2)

Instead, repent and know that Jesus has run the race for you. He ran from heaven above to earth for you. He ran to the Cross and died your death. He walked out of that empty tomb so that you may receive the crown of everlasting life. Yours is the victory. Indeed, Paul tells us to run, but don’t run for yourself, run to where Christ is found. Run to the font, where you were crucified and risen with Christ. Run to the Absolution your pastor speaks as the Word of eternal life. Run to the Supper where Jesus gives you Himself so that you are forgiven and strengthened in the one true faith that promises you the imperishable wreath of Christ’s salvation for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Post Communion Collect, LSB)
In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. It’s odd to be reading Job on a day like Valentine’s Day. The day is full of sugary-sweet candy, chocolates, flowers, fine dining, and romance. Today we read from Job, “I loathe my life; I will give free utterance to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul” (Job 10:1). Happy Valentine’s Day, Job? Chapter 10 is a recipe for disaster if you decide to read it to your sweetheart today. There isn’t much sugary happiness in Job’s words. This is life under the cross. Despite what this day may bring, with our efforts to show love and affection, we still suffer from broken hearts. Hearts that are broken by lust, envy, and greed. Hearts that bring out the worst of us in our thoughts, words, and deeds. In our sin we have no love, no affection, and no care for what God would give to us. In our sin we are left with nothing but death.

But Christ has come for you. He knitted you in your mother’s womb and He has promised you His unconditional love. No matter how unfaithful you have been toward God and others around you, be reminded of these words from Job: “You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit” (Job 10:12).

Jesus is your steadfast and faithful love. His love goes to the point of death on the Cross for you. His love covers the multitude of your sins and presents you as holy, innocent, righteous, and blameless in His sight. In Jesus, the prophet Ezekiel’s words come true for you: “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” No matter where life takes you, whether your heart rings for joy this day or is utterly broken, Christ gives you life and promises you His steadfast love, now and forever. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

O grant that nothing in my soul may dwell, but Thy pure love alone! O may Thy love possess me whole, my Joy, my Treasure, and my Crown. All coldness from my heart remove; my ev’ry act, word, thought, be love. (Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me, LSB 683:2)
Saturday of Septuagesima
February 15, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Job 11:1-20; John 5:19-29

*We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us the deeds You did in days of old.* (From the Introit for Sexagesima)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Tomorrow morning in the Divine Service you’ll speak and sing the words and promises of God that have been passed down to you. Christianity is very, very old, and in a time when everyone wants things shiny and new, we confess that God has been saving His people for more generations than we can count.

It’s easy to get caught up in the here and now of life. It’s easy to want things to be fresh and relevant and maybe not so “historic” and “old.” But there is value in what has been passed on to you from of old. In the liturgy you speak, sing, and echo the ancient words that people like Abraham, Moses, Elijah, David, Jesus, Peter, James, Martin Luther, and others have spoken and sung. “You have saved us from our enemies, and have put to shame those who hated us. In God we boast all day long, and praise Your name forever.” These old, ancient words speak of the new creation that God the Father has given to you in Christ Jesus. Paul says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Jesus has triumphed over sin, death, and the devil, and He has given you new life. On the Last Day, all that has been passed down to us will be fulfilled and God will proclaim for the final time that His deeds and His salvation have been accomplished for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

*God has spoken by His prophets, Spoken His unchanging Word; Each from age to age proclaiming God the one, the righteous Lord. In the world's despair and turmoil One firm anchor holds us fast: God is king, His throne eternal; God the first, and God the last.* (God Has Spoken by His Prophets, LSB 583:1)
In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus is the sower, who sows His seed, the Word of God. What is this Word? “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

The Word of God is in your hearing today in the Divine Service, and it is sown recklessly. Whether your heart is as hard as an asphalt path or whether your heart has been plowed up into the good soil through repentance, Jesus will sow His Word to all. To the world it doesn’t make sense. This is wasteful! No one would sow seed on a parking lot or amidst thorns and weeds, but Jesus is the sower.

The Word has been sent for that which it will accomplish, to seek and save the lost. Jesus has died your death and risen again to declare you innocent and pure. His Word was sown in your Baptism. It is sown in bread and wine as you partake of the fruits of His Cross in the Eucharist.

Jesus speaks from the Cross, “It is finished.” The seed has been planted now. This Word declares to you the forgiveness of all your sins. This Word declares to you that you are perfect, lush, and fertile in His grace. He has placed His Word into you and soon He will bring the harvest home, to complete what He has begun in you. He who has ears to hear, let him hear, for blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

O God, the Strength of all who put their trust in You, mercifully grant that by Your power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Sexagesima)
“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.” (Isaiah 55:10-11)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. God’s primary action is to speak. He speaks this world into creation in Genesis. He speaks to Adam and Eve after their fall into sin of His promise to send a Savior. He speaks of Abraham’s being the father of many nations, and Moses’ bringing about Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. God speaks His Word through the angel Gabriel, telling Mary that the Holy Spirit has conceived Jesus in her womb. Jesus speaks and the sick are healed, the blind see, and dead are raised. Jesus speaks and the loaves and fish are multiplied and a widow who has lost her only son sees her son alive again. Jesus speaks to the world from the Cross, “Forgive them for they know not what they do.” And, “It is finished.” After hearing that Word, people like a Roman centurion are brought to faith, and an Ethiopian eunuch asks for and receives Baptism for the remission of sins.

God is still speaking today through His Holy Word. Your pastor continues to let the Word of God rain down on you so that your sins are forgiven. His Word drenches you in the Divine Service as you are reminded of the baptismal grace given to you. The Word drenches you as you hear the words of Absolution and hear, “Take eat, take drink, for the forgiveness of all your sins.” This Word is sent for you and to the farthest reaches of the world to accomplish that for which it was sent: forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation.

The Word is not bound by man. It is not held back by “cleverly devised myths” (2 Peter 1:16), or even the unbelief of others. It has been sent to accomplish your salvation so that you may “go out with joy and be led forth in peace.” In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

O Comforter of priceless worth, send peace and unity on earth; support us in our final strife, and lead us out of death to life. (Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word, LSB 655:3)
Martin Luther, Doctor and Confessor
February 18, 2020


“Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.” (John 13:16)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Luther dedicated his life to reintroducing the one, holy, Christian and apostolic Church back to the freedoms found in the Gospel. He wanted that Gospel to be given freely to all people not only in Germany but throughout the world, so he dedicated his life to serving the Lord as a messenger of that Gospel.

Martin Luther would not want us to set aside a day to commemorate his work as a servant of the Lord. Luther was a sinner just like the rest of us, and he would rather we focus on Jesus and His work for us and our salvation. Whenever we commemorate the 95 theses or the translation of the Bible into German, we remember that it was all about Jesus. Luther saw himself as a servant of Jesus and he found comfort in knowing where Jesus is found. Luther pointed to Jesus in the Word connected to simple water. He knew that in the waters of Baptism Jesus connected us to His death and resurrection. No greater words could be heard from Luther than when he simply reminded himself, “I am baptized.”

You receive the same promises that God made to Luther and which are proclaimed to you through your pastor, who is the called and ordained servant of the Word. This is a Gospel that is only for sinners, the Gospel which promises to you the will of the Father for you: “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise Him up on the last day” (John 6:40). In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

Amen, Lord Jesus, grant our prayer; Great Captain, now Thine arm make bare, Fight for us once again! So shall Thy saints and martyrs raise A mighty chorus to Thy praise Forevermore. Amen. (O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe, LSB 666:4)
In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Scripture says, “A man who bears false witness against his neighbor is like a war club, or a sword, or a sharp arrow“ (Proverbs 25:18). Think about that the next time someone tells you something really scandalous about one of your classmates or friends. Think about how much harm can be done as you get on social media and let the words, pictures, memes, and everything else chop down the reputations of those around you. Repent of all of this and realize that the Eighth Commandment isn’t about your reputation, it’s about your neighbor’s.

We do enough to keep our own reputation clean and spotless but we rarely take note of our neighbor and his reputation. Christ, your best neighbor, has come for you to take on your sins against the Eighth Commandment, even when you have spoken slander and gossip about Jesus Himself. He came and took on the lies and jeering that everyone threw at Him on Good Friday, in order to speak words of love, peace, hope, and forgiveness to you, His neighbor.

You are forgiven for Jesus’ sake, and in Baptism you are assured that on the Day of Judgment Jesus will stand before the Father and speak only good and pleasing things about you, His neighbor, His friend, His brother and sister. You are His beloved child, and through His forgiveness He will never bear false witness to condemn you, but will only speak words of pardon and peace so that you may have life. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

"Bear no false witness nor defame Your neighbor nor destroy his name,
But view him in the kindest way; Speak truth in all that you say."
Have mercy, Lord! (These Are the Holy Ten Commands, LSB 581:9)
Thursday of Sexagesima
February 20, 2020

Today's Reading: 2 Corinthians 11:19-12:9
Daily Lectionary: Job 15:1-23, 30-35; John 6:60-71

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. No one likes to be called weak, let alone seen as weak. It’s not in our nature. People want to look strong, mighty, and as if they have things all under control.

Paul is one of those people we often look to as a “strong Christian.” He preached in season and out of season and suffered all manners of rejection, beatings, and imprisonment on account of the Gospel. He is so widely appreciated that we even tend to name our churches after him.

Paul would have none of us view him this way. He clearly says, “If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness” (1 Corinthians 11:30). Paul knew what it meant to take up his cross and follow Jesus, but he would never boast about it, because boasting in his abilities has nothing to do with Jesus or His grace. Paul received a “thorn in the flesh,” a “messenger from Satan.” Some have tried to figure out what this thorn was, but that’s not the point, either. The point is that because of this thorn he would plead to the Lord for relief. But the relief was not found in having the thorn removed. The Lord told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Jesus’ Cross looks weak. It looks as if He utterly failed. But the Cross of Jesus shows you the mighty power of God to destroy death for you, and to raise you up again to new life. God’s power is made perfect as He takes simple and weak-looking things like His Word, water, bread and wine and brings forth His power to wash you clean of all your sins, to forgive even the more gruesome and selfish sins, and to feed you with Himself so that your faith may be strengthened until life everlasting. In the Name of Jesus + Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

O God, by the preaching of your apostle Paul you have caused the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world: Grant, we pray, that we, having his wonderful conversion in remembrance, may show ourselves thankful to you by following his holy teaching; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
“My time has not yet come, but your time is always here.” (John 7:6)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. It appears here in the Gospel of John that the movement Jesus started is falling apart. Jesus’ brothers give him some family advice: He should go back to Judea and do some miracles, “so that your disciples may see the miracles you do (John 7:3). Maybe the people would give Jesus a second chance if He just performed another sign.

This might look like a great statement of faith by Jesus’ brothers, but John sets us straight: “For even his own brothers did not believe in him” (John 7:5). Recognizing Jesus as a miracle worker does not make one a believer. And it’s never our job to offer the Son of God some way to make His work easier and more believable.

Those around Jesus assume He wants to be well-liked and have a large following. We behave the same way with Jesus at times. We ask in our prayers for the things that we selfishly want. We bargain with Him, saying that if He helps us or relieves us of our problem, we will believe in Him more. We even dumb down Jesus’ own words so that He might seem more acceptable or relevant to those around us.

Jesus does not need suggestions from others, even those closest to Him in His family. His plan is set in motion and His hour will be brought according to the Father’s plan. His hour is the hour of the Cross. Jesus says, “When I am lifted up, I will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32). Jesus draws us into His Cross. For there His wounds and His death provide healing and forgiveness for us. What we see in the Cross is God’s plan of action for us and our salvation. Taking on our unbelief, our doubts and fears, our own selfish ways, Jesus crucifies them and puts them to death so that we may know that God’s time is now for salvation. Jesus isn’t simply a “good man,” and He will never lead you astray. His time is now your time. He will never remain silent concerning you, but He will always speak to the Father on your behalf as He invites you to His feast. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

Drawn to the Cross, which Thou hast blessed With healing gifts for souls distressed, To find in Thee my life, my rest. (Drawn to the Cross, Which Thou Hast Blessed, LSB 560:1)
**Saturday of Sexagesima**

**February 22, 2020**

**Daily Lectionary:** Job 17:1-16; John 7:14-31

*Into your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O Lord, God of truth. (From the Introit for Quinquagesima)*

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. When you hear that word “commit,” what comes to mind? Do you think of someone who commits a crime or maybe an athlete who makes a commitment to play sports at a particular university? What about a husband and wife and the commitments they make to each other on their wedding day? Crimes are committed but often denied. Athletes commit to a university and then change their minds. Husbands and wives make the big commitment on their wedding day but then end up unfaithful or in divorce. What does it mean to commit? Our sense of commitment is flawed and stained with sin. We may say that we are “committed” Christians and yet we act completely unfaithful to our Lord and to our neighbors around us.

Jesus uses this word “commit” from Psalm 31 as He is gasping for air and dying on the Cross. What lovelier words could there be from one who has been mocked, ridiculed, spat on, beaten, and crucified? Jesus could easily have said, “I’m not going to the Cross, let them save themselves.” He could easily have hopped down from the cross as the crowds jeered at Him to do. But through all the pain and agony and sorrow, in the midst of all the shame and guilt He bore on the Cross, He prays Psalm 31. “Into your hand I commit my spirit.” He prays this not to be an example, but to show that His very eyes are locked directly onto you.

You are the one whom Jesus loves so much that He would bear the pain and punishment of the Cross in order to claim you as His own. He is committed to you as He commits His will, His body, and His Spirit into His Father’s hands. In response as we see Jesus on the Cross, by faith we can simply say, “You have redeemed me O Lord, God of Truth.” In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

*Your soul in griefs unbounded, Your head with thorns surrounded, You died to ransom me. The cross for me enduring, The crown for me securing, You healed my wounds and set me free. (Upon the Cross Extended, LSB 453:5)*
In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The disciples of Jesus spent over three years with Him during His ministry. For over three years they were called, they heard, and they saw all that Jesus was doing. From the preaching, to the healing, to the discourse with the chief priests and Pharisees, the disciples had a front row view of who Jesus truly is as the Son of God. Yet they did not understand the depth and magnitude of Jesus and His Cross.

Jesus will tell them plainly that He is going to Jerusalem in order to die and to accomplish the salvation of the world. The disciples’ response? “But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said” (Luke 18:34). Despite the front row seat the disciples had of Jesus, they were utterly blind as to why He came for us.

A blind man is found sitting on the roadside. Sitting in the dust, dirty, as so many walk by without a care for him or his needs, he inquires as to what is going on. Immediately upon hearing the Name of Jesus of Nazareth, the eyes of the blind man are opened and faith speaks that best sentence that fully understands who Jesus is and what He has come to do: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” The Lord’s disciples were blind but this blind man had clear vision as to who Jesus truly is.

Without Jesus’ passion, suffering, and death, Jesus will never be seen. We echo the words of the blind man, “Lord have mercy.” Have mercy on us sinners, sinners who need your forgiveness, your salvation, and eyes that are opened to the many blessings you give to us through your Cross and resurrection. As we sing the Kyrie in church, all of heaven and earth stop and the Son of God hears our request and gives us His grace and mercy in the forgiveness of sins. The Divine Service looks blind and dull to the world, but for us it opens up our eyes of faith to taste and see that the Lord is good. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

O Lord, mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of our sins, deliver us from every evil; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Quinquagesima)
In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Lord was not pleased with having only eleven disciples. Judas, who betrayed Jesus, went his own path, which ended with his taking of his own life. He was gone. Out of chaos, disorder, and death, the Gospel still be needed to be preached. But who would replace Judas? Who would be worthy enough to be called one of the Twelve? Someone well-versed in Scripture? Someone with great speaking skills? Someone relatable? No.

The Holy Spirit would put things into order, through prayer and a roll of the dice, and Matthias was selected. It is really that simple, and yet so very profound. We don’t know much about Matthias, but we know everything we need to know. He went out as a witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus. He went out preaching to, baptizing, and communing people with the wondrous gifts of Jesus. This is all that made Matthias worthy, not his background, his personality, or his charming good looks. Jesus is all that makes a pastor worthy to be called. As you hear your pastor preach and teach, as you receive from him what Jesus wants to give you, keep in mind that he isn’t worthy to do this work on his own. He needs Jesus just as much as you do: Jesus to forgive him, Jesus to strengthen him, and Jesus to go with him just as Jesus went out with Matthias.

The work of a pastor is hard, and sometimes we may not always find our pastors to be effective, relatable, or even worthy, but remember that it’s not about your pastor. It’s about Jesus. Pastors will come and they will go, but Jesus will still continue to shepherd His Church through others who are called into this Office. Say a prayer for your pastor, and encourage him from time to time, not because he is special or worthy, but because he is tasked to give you Jesus. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

Almighty God, You chose Your servant Matthias to be numbered among the Twelve. Grant that Your Church, ever preserved from false teachers, may be taught and guided by faithful and true pastors; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Lord always seems to work in opposites. What we think is best for us usually is not. We don’t see things the same way the Lord does. Not only do we see things differently, but we are also quick to turn perceptions based on appearances into judgments. Thankfully, God does not operate this way. To Him, our appearance neither defines us nor dictates our value.

The Lord sends Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint a king from Jesse’s sons. Based on appearance, it is likely that Jesse’s older sons would have been prime candidates for king. One by one, Jesse’s sons pass before Samuel but God rejects them all.

Samuel and Jesse were both likely baffled. These sons looked the part! Samuel admits to being afraid. But the Lord explains to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). As Jesus was on trial He was mocked and soldiers beat Him and hailed Him as “King of the Jews.” Pilate would put the same inscription over Jesus’ Cross as He was dying. Isaiah says that Jesus “was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces” (Isaiah 53:4). To the world Jesus has no attractive qualities to cause us to claim Him as king. “But the Lord sees not as man sees.” The Father sees Jesus’ heart and finds favor in Him as the King of the Universe. That same heart was pierced for you and your salvation, so that you now may be declared holy, innocent, righteous, and yes, even beautiful through the forgiveness of all your sins. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. -Rev. Kent Schaaf

My Savior paid the debt I owe And for my sin was smitten; Within the Book of Life I know My name has now been written. I will not doubt, for I am free, And Satan cannot threaten me; There is no condemnation! (The Day Is Surely Drawing Near, LSB 508:5)
Martin Luther’s Morning and Evening Prayers taken from the Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther

Unless otherwise noted, Biblical quotations are from the ESV.

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