

*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.

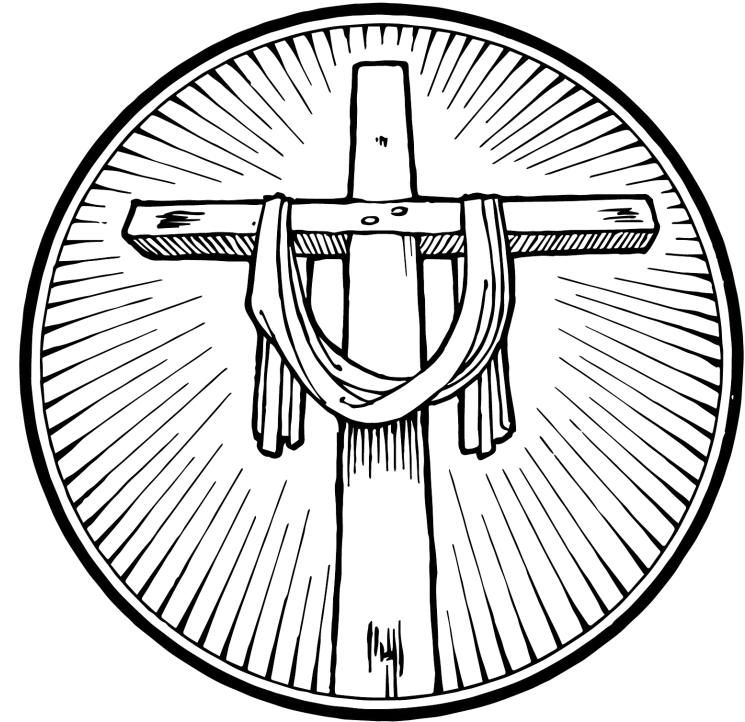
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REFLECTIONS

Lent - Holy Saturday

February 26th - April 8th, 2023



Lent - Holy Saturday
FEBRUARY 26TH - APRIL 8TH, 2023

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Holy Saturday

APRIL 8, 2023

Today's Reading: Matt 27:57-66

Daily Lectionary: Ex 13:17-14:9, Heb 7:1-22

Matthew 27:59-60: "And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away."

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Bible isn't much on the in-between. We have Christmas, then nothing until Jesus' Ministry. No teenage Jesus. We get the cross and resurrection. Then some stuff about the last day. But not much in the middle, where we spend every day. So people write books to try and fill in the gap. We're stuck in between Easter and the Last Day. And the in-between is where all my problems and sins and trials live. I think Easter vigil is for this.

Christ is dead and buried. He will rise tomorrow. But how do we feel today? Diet sad? Lowkey happy? What do we do in between? The Creed defines it for us in four words. He descended into hell. This was the in-between of the cross and resurrection. And even then, Jesus proclaimed the victory to the spirits in prison. Jesus kicked down the doors to hell. The cross was a real victory over the power of Satan, over the power of death. The reality was then, even before the triumph of Easter.

We live in the in-between, waiting, but the victory is already won. The devil still exists. But he lost. You still have sins, but they're forgiven. You still have trials, but you're a saint, a member of the host of heaven, waiting for the resurrection. You're tied to it today. Because Jesus who died is risen. Our Life is in between the already and the not yet, but we have the victory even now. Just as we know what's coming tomorrow, we know for ourselves too. Christ is risen. We will rise. The in-between is already answered. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

*Christ Jesus lay in death's strong bands For our offenses given; But now at God's right hand He stands And brings us life from heaven. Therefore let us joyful be And sing to God right thankfully Loud songs of alleluia! Alleluia!
(Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands (LSB 458:1))*

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 morning go to your work with joy, singing a hymn, such as the Ten Commandments, or what your devotion may suggest.

(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.

If it is evening, then go to sleep promptly and cheerfully.

Good Friday

APRIL 7, 2023

Today's Reading: John 18:1-19:42

Daily Lectionary: Ex 12:29-32, 13:1-16, Lam 5:1-22, Heb 6:1-20, Psalm 22

Psalm 22:5: "To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame"

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Everybody's made the joke about "Good" Friday. Good for us. Bad for Him. It's not just of boomers, but of the devil. Satan can never undo what was finished when Jesus died to save you. So he tries to twist it, whispering that this sacrifice might not be good in Jesus' eyes. That you should feel guilt when you look at the cross. Look at the suffering our Lord endured because you sinned. Could you really meet His eye there? Satan tries to work guilt from the cross Jesus willingly bore to bring you comfort. He didn't die on the cross so you would feel bad about it. He died to forgive you.

Yes. He hurt for you. He hurt because of you. Why's that bad? Not just good for us, but for Him too. He was willing to drink of this cup to the dregs for you. He rejoiced to see this hour where you were saved. If you want to feel guilt, look to the Law, look to the Word of God whom you say you love and then disregard so quickly, look to the people you hurt, look to the damage you do to yourself even though God calls you precious. See the damage your sin has done, the things you've broken. Sin is bad. It breaks stuff. Feel bad about that, but when you feel guilty that Jesus suffered and died for you, it's really only guilt that someone would dare to love you that much. That's a value question that you don't get to decide. God shows your value. More than silver or gold. Holy precious blood. Innocent suffering and death. This is what you are worth. This is how priceless you are. You are worth that much.

It was Love that put Him there for you, and yes it hurt, yes it's graphic, but He said it Himself, if this is how to save His beloved, He will go, not just against His will, but even gladly. Good Friday wasn't just good for you and bad for Jesus. It was good for Him too, because He got to do for His beloved that which He was given to do. He got to love you, because love looks like something. Not just a feeling. An expression. A sacrifice. Love looks like this. And Jesus loves you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Here we have a firm foundation, Here the refuge of the lost: Christ, the Rock of our salvation, Is the name of which we boast; Lamb of God, for sinners wounded, Sacrifice to cancel guilt! None shall ever be confounded Who on Him their hope have built. (Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted, LSB 451:4)

Maundy Thursday

APRIL 6, 2023

Today's Reading: Matt 26:17-30

Daily Lectionary: Ex 12:1-28, Lam 4:1-22, Heb 5:1-14, Psalm 31

Matthew 26:26-28: "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." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Communion is actually the true Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and drink. Like...really. Jesus' blood. Same blood that flowed down from His hands and side on the cross. For you. Drink it. Seriously. We have to admit that's off putting. When the funny looking pastor in funny clothes holds it up and says "the peace of the Lord be with you always" he's showing you where peace comes from. It's not in the air. It's not in each other. It's in the bread that is His body.

These words "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins" show us that in this Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. If you eat Jesus' Body and drink His Blood your sins will be forgiven and you will have life and salvation. Not symbolically. The cardboard-tasting thing called bread and bottom shelf wine are the most precious gifts in all of creation. Eat and drink them and you'll have everything God has to give you. It's so hard to believe that the Holy Spirit has to do it for you. It still leads people to recoil. It's ridiculous. Invite someone to church, and see how quickly the Communion talk feels like more of a burden than a gift.

But Communion is not an excuse. It's not a burden. It's not something we need to reason away or struggle to justify. It's an answer. A gift. A hope given for us to cling to in the darkest of days for the worst parts of us. This is for sinners. This is for you, full of jealousy, guilt, shame, rage, and sin. We don't get fixed by ignoring reality, cramming in a room for a meal and pretending everything is OK when it isn't. We're saved by the God who feeds us with His body and blood. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Be Thou my consolation, My shield, when I must die; Remind me of Thy passion When my last hour draws nigh. Mine eyes shall then behold Thee, Upon Thy cross shall dwell, My heart by faith enfold Thee. Who dieth thus dies well. (O Sacred Head, Now Wounded, LSB 449:4)

The First Sunday in Lent

FEBRUARY 26, 2023

Today's Reading: Matt. 4:1-11

Daily Lectionary: Gen. 4:1-26, Mark 2:18-28

The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (St. Matthew 4:3-4)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The meaning of the First Commandment says that "we should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." This can be hard to do. Especially when we think we know better.

Isn't that how it works? The Lord God speaks and we say, "Well, yeah God, BUT..." And away we go into sin and selfishness. It never ends well, does it? There are so many times we want God to do things our way. Or we try to tell God to do things our way so that we can triumph over some challenge all by ourselves, just like a grown-up!

The root of Satan's first temptation of Jesus is the desire to supplant God the Father for another authority. It isn't just about food and hunger, but who provides what you need to live. Satan wants Jesus to assert His power and authority as the Son of God over the power and authority of the Father.

After all, how does God the Father, who is spirit, know what it is like to be hungry? How can the perfect and Almighty Lord of all creation understand what life is really like here on earth?

In Jesus, of course! Jesus lives your life and suffers your pains and eventually dies your death so that he can sympathize with you and know exactly how rough your life can be. Because Jesus knows how difficult life can be, God the Father also knows. They understand your struggles and challenges more than you know, and can indeed hear your prayers with full knowledge of their implications.

When you aren't sure if God hears your prayers, or knows how rough you have it, remember Jesus in the wilderness—that He set aside His power and glory to walk in your shoes, to live your life for you, and to die your death so that you won't have to suffer without him for all eternity.

Jesus lived and was tempted for you so that all of these challenges you face might be washed away in his blood, buried in his death, and left behind in his resurrection. All of it is for you, that you may be at peace in him. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord God, You led Your ancient people through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. Guide the people of Your Church that following our Savior we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come; 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 Lent 1)

Monday the First Week of Lent

FEBRUARY 27, 2023

Today's Reading: Gen. 3:1-21

Daily Lectionary: Gen. 6:1-7:5, Mark 3:1-19

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:19)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Last Wednesday was a stark reminder of our future, wasn't it? "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Those are words no one likes to hear, especially if there has been a recent tragedy. It's hard to hear those words when they are so close to a raw, open wound.

Yet that's what Adam and Eve hear from their loving and eternal God and Father right after the Fall into sin. God doesn't give them time to process their grief, he doesn't wait for them to find a safe space or a Comfort Dog; He just unloads on them with all His might and fury.

Of all people, they had it all right before them. They knew life in Paradise. They knew what it was like to behold God face-to-face. They knew a peace we will never know in this life. And even so, they were led astray.

In an act we will never understand this side of eternity, Adam and Eve turned from God to listen to the sweet, deceptive voice of Satan. It is something that we do all the time, too. Abandon or ignore God's Word to go our own way, because we somehow know better. Sometimes, it earns the wrath of our parents, our school authorities, or even law enforcement! This is not what God wants from his children. Yet, sin and Satan lead us astray over and over again.

But God the Father doesn't leave us there in that pain and wrath. He fixes it the only way he can; by sending his Son into our flesh to right what has gone so wrong. To fix what is so broken.

Even though Adam and Eve were cast from the Garden, God was with them every day of their lives and He had spoken a promise into their ears that echoed down the centuries until the time had fully come and God's only Son was born of woman to redeem, to buy back, to make right, to save everyone who suffered because of Adam and Eve's sin.

You can't out-sin God. He always has more forgiveness than you have sin. Even when you think there's no hope, his promise still stands. Jesus is still for you, and his love will never fail. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Now from that three of Jesus' shame Flows life eternal in His name; For all who trust and will believe, Salvation's living fruit receive. And of their fruit so pure and sweet, the Lord invites the world to eat, To find within this cross of wood The tree of life with ev'ry good. (The Tree of Life, LSB 561:4)

Wednesday of Holy Week

APRIL 5, 2023

Today's Reading: Luke 22:1-23:56

Daily Lectionary: Ex 10:21-11:10, Lam 3:1-66, Heb 4:1-16

Luke 22:46: "and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.""

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Garden of Gethsemane is where I brought every idea of what my life should be like, then stared dumbfounded as they were dashed to pieces in front of me. The Garden of Gethsemane is where I came to the painful realization that my life was not turning out according to plan. I think that's what it's there for. It forces us to be honest about our weaknesses. Peter wandered into Gethsemane with hopes of steadfastness, promising to never abandon, let alone deny his Lord. He came with a sword, ready to cut ears off for Jesus. Before the rooster crowed, that all fell apart. Judas came with schemes to profit. By the end of the weekend, he died broke and alone. Mark showed up just not wanting to do anything stupid to embarrass himself. He accidentally ran away naked. All of the disciples entered Gethsemane with zeal and daydreams of God's wonderful plan for their lives. They were ready to seize every great thing they were sure He had planned. Then they all fell asleep. Twice.

The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. The Garden of Gethsemane is where we find that out. But none of them came to the garden alone. Jesus was there all along, praying through sweat and tears of blood. "Thy will be done." God's will is done in Gethsemane. It always is.

God's will is done among us also. The Garden of Gethsemane isn't where God walks me from where I am to where I want to be. It's where my quest for power like Peter, love of money like Judas, sheer stupidity in the face of reality like Mark, and laziness like all the sleeping disciples are called exactly what they really are. Sin.

Yet, Jesus abides in the Garden of Gethsemane for sinners. For me, for you. For when everything falls apart, and for us who broke it. Christ willingly walked down the only path left to Him. He died for the sake of the people. For us. To forgive our selfish sins that condemn us. To bear God's wrath Himself in order to save us. He will drag us out of our sins, through Gethsemane to the cross, and all the way to the Resurrection on Easter morning. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

What language shall I borrow To thank Thee, dearest Friend, For this Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end? O make me Thine forever! And should I fainting be, Lord, let me never, never, Outlive my love for Thee. (O Sacred Head, Now Wounded, LSB 449:3)

Tuesday of Holy Week

APRIL 4, 2023

Today's Reading: Mark 14:1-15:47

Daily Lectionary: Ex 9:29-10:20, Lam 2:1-22, Heb 3:1-19

Mark 14:30-31: "And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." But he said emphatically, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." And they all said the same."

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. I don't know why, but we love the idea that God would test our faithfulness. Peter doesn't hear this as a sad statement of reality, a warning he's going to need some help. It's a challenge. A test. Peter would never do that. He responds. "Nuh uh." If I must die with you, I'll never deny you. Everyone else might fall away but I won't. I'll prove I'm better than them. I'll prove I deserve your blessing

First, He's God, He would know...but rather than learn from it, for some reason we have this desire to say, "if I were there I'd have never denied Him" sort of like arguments won later in the shower. We take our surroundings, and imagine ways we can prove to be steadfast. Heroes of the faith. We imagine the awfulness of the present day is a challenge to us. Society. Sin. Suffering. We'll prove we're faithful in the face of them.

Is this some sort of test? Do you think God just wants to make sure we're good enough? First, He's God, He would know....but second, you prove what you are all the time. It's called sin. You can measure it. Look to the Ten Commandments. How are you really doing? Hear the sad statement of reality from our Lord. Before all this is over, you'll make idols out of power and popularity. You'll be afraid. You'll doubt. You'll despair. It's a warning you're going to need some help that we insist is some kind of challenge. We respond. "Nuh uh."

Why do you want this to be on you? It's on Jesus, who bore the cross for Peter who denied, for you who were afraid. And He has not left you alone in your struggles. Breathe. Look to the cross. See Jesus there for you. Know who you are, not based on what you've earned, but based on what He's given. You are baptized. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered Was all for sinners' gain; Mine, mine was the transgression, But Thine the deadly pain. Lo, here I fall, my Savior! 'Tis I deserve Thy place; Look on me with Thy favor, And grant to me Thy grace. (O Sacred Head, Now Wounded, LSB 449:2)

Tuesday the First Week of Lent

FEBRUARY 28, 2023

Today's Reading: Romans 5:12-19

Daily Lectionary: Gen. 7:11-8:12, Mark 3:20-35

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:18-19)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Yesterday we talked about the wrath of God falling upon Adam and Eve because of their sin of listening to the serpent instead of God in the Garden of Eden. And that God's wrath falls upon us because of our own sin, too.

But we also talked about how that wrath doesn't end us. It doesn't cast us away from our God and Father, our Savior and Redeemer. He doesn't leave us alone to try and find our way back to Him in this world of darkness and despair on our own. Because there is no way we can manage that; we can't claw our way back to Him by ourselves. The gap is too wide.

One man (Adam) brought all of God's wrath down upon creation, but one man (Jesus) also repaired what was destroyed. Actually, He didn't repair it, he made it new, and He promised that newness to us, too.

We won't see it until the Last Day, but your Lord and God, made flesh in Jesus, took the rebellion and disobedience of every human being that ever lived (and ever will live) and soaked it up into himself to carry it to his cross on Golgotha. He wrestled that sin and death and disobedience and rebellion and back-talking and cheating into His grave and left it there when He rose again on Easter Sunday.

Just one sin from one man set all of humanity on this path of death and destruction. And all it took was for Almighty God to look at one man's perfect obedience to restore everything. And not just any man, but the God-Man; Jesus, the Christ. The Messiah, God made flesh. His only-begotten Son.

In our everyday struggles and sins, it's easy to forget the mercy and grace of God for you. But He always remembers. He always gives. He always blesses His children because of Jesus, who took all your sin from you, so that you could live forever with all the faithful. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

In Adam we have all been one, One huge rebellious man; We all have fled that evening voice That sought us as we ran. But Thy strong love, it sought us still And sent Thine only Son That we might hear His Shepherd's voice And, hearing Him, be one. (In Adam We Have All Been One LSB 569:1, 3)

Wednesday the First Week of Lent

MARCH 1, 2023

Today's Reading: Luther's Small Catechism - Table of Duties To: Widows
Daily Lectionary: Gen. 8:13-9:17, Mark 3:20-35

She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. (1 Timothy 5:5-6)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. For the last few centuries, the human lifespan has grown longer and longer. Even so, women still tend to live longer than men, as has been the case for most of history. Whether it was because of war or other more dangerous occupations, wives have outlived their husbands, regardless of nationality.

This leaves a pretty consistent group of widows in our world, many of whom need care and assistance as time passes and they age. St. Paul's words to the young pastor Timothy might seem to be a bit harsh, especially if we think about how we are to love our neighbors as ourselves.

But these words are both words of love and warning from St. Paul. Sometimes, widows will remarry after the death of their husbands; often, they will not. Losing that life-partner, that one to whom they were tied in the bonds of marriage, can be a very difficult and unsettling experience. Sometimes they aren't sure of their place in the world once the "other half" of their lives has died.

How should we love these women, then? And how should they see their lives moving forward in this world? According to St. Paul, should these women find themselves all alone, with no one else to care for them, they should set their hope and focus on their Lord and God, who will sustain them.

Should they forget that the Lord cares for them—even in their grief—and they go forth trying to live a life that fills a void that only their Loving Father can fill, this rejection of His mercy and grace is a terrible thing; rendering them dead inside, even though they may seem vibrant and alive.

These are the times when we can extend a hand of love to them, being that one who loves them even when they might feel alone. Jesus's Life, Death, and Resurrection was for them, just as it was for us, and they might need the reminder that their loving God has not forgotten them.

As you can, be Jesus for those around you, even the widows of your church. They need to hear that Jesus loves them just as much as you do, and your love for them might be the perfect antidote in this season of penitence and remembrance that helps them rejoice that Jesus is for them, as he is for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Visit, O Lord, the homes in which Your people dwell, and keep all harm and danger far from them. Grant that we may dwell together in peace under the protection of Your holy angels, sharing eternally in Your blessings; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Collect for Home and Family)

Monday of Holy Week

APRIL 3, 2023

Today's Reading: Matt. 26:1-27:66
Daily Lectionary: Ex 9:1-28, Lam. 2:1-22, Heb 3:1-19

Matthew 26:11: "For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me."

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. It's easy to question the LORD when He encourages expensive perfume being poured on his feet rather than sold to care for the poor. This is the thing that drove Judas to the chief priests for silver to betray Him. Jesus responds, "The poor you will always have with you". There will always be sinners who don't care for them. And it's unjust. It's not ok.

We sinners have learned to speak in polarity. Black or white. Full or empty. So on one side, Judas is just wanting to care for the poor. On the other, social justice has become a topic reserved for the ungodly. What we should see is the importance of God. And somehow we've found ourselves in a position where we turn our backs on either the least of these, which will end poorly on the last day according to Jesus, or Jesus, which...also will end poorly on the last day. Either we seek justice in the world or joy in our Lord, but both times come up wanting.

Instead of contrasting helping the poor with time in church, justice and joy, let them both be found in Christ. He is our justice and our justification. He is our joy. Judas assumes he loves the poor more than the God who took flesh to die for them. Jesus refuses to let poverty imposed by other sinners divorce someone from the kingdom of heaven. There will be days when it is hard to find Jesus. There will be days when the poverty of this world is overpowering. On those days, the cross matters more, not less. Christ bore the cross for the oppressors and the oppressed. For the sinners and sinned against. We gather around His gifts because no matter what we build otherwise, justice will always be out of reach. No matter how hard we try, how much we give, there will always be more pain, but there is always enough Jesus. That doesn't mean don't try to care for the poor. It means make sure that above all else, the Gospel is the measurement of justice, because in Christ we are justified now. There, joy can endure all things. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O sacred Head, now wounded, With grief and shame weighed down, Now scornfully surrounded With thorns, Thine only crown. O sacred Head, what glory, What bliss, till now was Thine! Yet, though despised and gory, I joy to call Thee mine. (O Sacred Head, Now Wounded, LSB 449:1)

Sunday of the Passion

APRIL 2, 2023

Today's Reading: Matt. 27:11-66

Daily Lectionary: Ex 8:1-32, Heb. 1:1-14

Matthew 27:54: "When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!""

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Palm branches are for victory. Jesus rode into town on the palm leaves thrown down by the crowd who today yells hosanna, save us, but will yell crucify in a week. The first to lay them down were the apostles who couldn't be prouder to find him a donkey to ride only to deny Him three times like Peter.

Marching in the parade are the ones who fought each other over who the greatest is and wrote books with subtle snubs against their neighbor like John, or as he insists on calling himself, the apostle whom Jesus loved for the whole book just to annoy Peter. Like brothers and sisters in Christ who nurture petty grudges claiming superiority is more important than reconciliation in Christ.

I can't help but wonder if the insurrectionist Barabbas would have been there, prison notwithstanding, because the idea of a religion that addresses politics before souls is all too appealing in a world where you don't get your way, even if it does completely miss the point. The traitor Judas was there, and since he was introduced as "the one who would betray Him", we can save ourselves the trouble of having to be concerned for his fall. After all, there are sinners, and then there are sinners, and it's easier to just write those kinds of souls off as object lessons to the rest of us.

In case it escaped your notice, we're the same kind of sinners that populated Jerusalem years ago. This is the heavenly band for whom He rode into Jerusalem. His disciples did not understand these things at first. We still struggle with them too.

So we're shown Jesus glorified on the cross. It was for them. He died for Peter and Judas. He died so the criminal Barabbas could escape death. He died for the Pharisees. For all. For you. We lay down palms of victory. Palms are for winners. It doesn't look like much until you see them waved in heaven. Behold the glorious band. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, You sent Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon Himself our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of His great humility and patience and be made partakers of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Thursday the First Week of Lent

MARCH 2, 2023

Daily Lectionary: Gen. 11:27-12:20, Mark 4:1-20

"Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path...Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil...Other seed fell among thorns...And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain..." (St. Mark 4:3-8)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. This Gospel text tends to cause a lot of navel-gazing. It makes us look at ourselves too much; and sometimes, we use this text to judge others, too. We try too hard to figure out which kind of soil we (and the people around us) are. We look too much at ourselves and others and forget the whole point of what is happening here at the very heart of the text. So, let's focus on the sower.

Today's farmers are very meticulous. Soil analysis, moisture content, drainage, nutrient levels—these all contribute to a successful harvest. The sower seems a bit foolish when you look at things that way. We are all about harvesting the most produce with the least amount of input. But the sower is just foolish.

He throws the seed all over the place, flinging it all over the ground with not the least bit of care as to where it lands. Sure, he ultimately gets a good crop that produces thirty, sixty, and a hundred times more than he planted, but what about the wasted seed?

What about it, indeed? Later, Jesus says this seed is the Word of God, and the types of soil reflect the types of people who hear it. Yes, it is imperative to be the soil in which the Word grows, but you didn't make yourself that good soil, did you? The Sower has already plowed and prepared that soil to receive the Word.

Isaiah proclaims that God's Word never returns to him empty; it always accomplishes what He sets out to do. So also with you. God's Word has been landing in the soil of your ears for years. The Holy Spirit has been at work, creating and sustaining your faith. Plowing and turning the 'soil' within you so that you might reflect that faith to those around you.

The Word of God will continue to be scattered upon the earth, and there will be places and times when it lands on the road, between rocks, or among thorns. Thanks be to God that he, by the power of that same Word, can change even those hostile places into fertile ground to produce saving faith in the most unlikely places! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that, by patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. (Collect for the Word)

Friday the First Week of Lent

MARCH 3, 2023

Daily Lectionary: Gen. 13:1-18, Mark 5:1-20

As (Jesus) was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled. (St. Mark 5:18-20)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Sometimes people think that the best way to serve Jesus is to go overseas on a mission trip. Certainly, foreign missions are an integral part of spreading the Gospel, but they aren't for everyone. Our long-term missionaries make a tremendous commitment when they move to a foreign land to preach the Gospel. Thanks be to God for them!

Jesus stays local today. He heals the man possessed with demons and tells him to stay home and tell his friends and neighbors what Jesus had done for him. Sometimes, that's the hardest thing to do. You see these people all the time. They see you all the time. They know you inside and out.

Maybe you think they won't listen to what you have to say because they know your failures. Maybe you think they'll stop being your friends because of what you say. Not all of us have such a spectacular story to tell as this man: he went from living in a cave and wailing and breaking chains and cutting himself to ribbons with rocks to being a gentle, mild-mannered citizen once again.

He probably thought, much like we do, that the same thing would happen to him. That no one would listen, that no one would appreciate what Jesus had done for him, so it would be easier to run away to a far country with Jesus to where life had to be better.

But that's not what he was given to do. The strength of our faith is its mundane and plain nature. That so much of it is...normal and boring. The day-to-day experience of our faith doesn't have all the flash and magnificence that we often think it needs, and that's okay.

Because what you do have is Jesus. And he has done marvelous things in your life, even if you can't see them. You were rescued from sin, death, and demons in your Baptism. Jesus feeds you his very self in Holy Communion, even if it looks rather bland. He speaks salvation into your ears every week.

These are all magnificent and wonderful works, done for you. And you've been placed in exactly the right place to share that good news with others as Jesus has gifted you to do. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Saturday the Fifth Week of Lent

APRIL 1, 2023

Today's Reading: Introit for Holy Week Ps. 24:7-10; antiphon: Ps. 118:26
Daily Lectionary: Ex 7:1-25, Mark 16:1-20

Psalm 24:8: "Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle!"

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. I can see why the crowds who gathered to cry Hosanna missed it. Hosanna.. Save us. And He does. But we measure might differently than God does. The crowds went looking for war horses. Rebellion. Jesus rode a donkey into town to die. We know the schtick about strength being made perfect in weakness. But a little might now and then still sounds...not terrible.

These devotions are always the same. I love the forgiveness of sins, but it's still in the back of my mind. Why can't the LORD go do battle with Alzheimers and ALS and cancer and everything else wrong? He does. We just don't see it until the Resurrection. In Christ, cancer has claimed 0 lives. In the cross, God remembers us even where we forget. We are engraved on the palms of His hands. On the last day, we'll leap out of wheelchairs and tear out the oxygen tubes and run and not be weary. But today, the crowds cry Hosanna and still mean more than God intends to give. And it's heartbreaking to hear the words "not yet" in the face of the things that are killing us.

So Jesus rides into Jerusalem and doesn't address the crowds. There aren't words or explanations that will make the reasons behind our desperate prayers hurt less. Which is sort of why He rides into town, in might to die on a cross. Hurting is harder than not hurting. Jesus doesn't ride into town to not hurt. Instead, He is mighty enough to suffer for you. For your desperate prayers that defy "not yet", Jesus promises it is finished. He dares us to imagine the same. You are mighty because in Him you are now strong enough to suffer. You are already bound to the victory, so you don't need a path around the pain to get there. He makes you mighty. Might like the Lord's doesn't kneel to afflictions of today. It kneels to the God who drags us through them with all the same unstoppable force that drove Him through the crowds who cried Hosanna. Save us. He did. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Ride on, ride on in majesty! In lowly pomp ride on to die. O Christ, Thy triumphs now begin O'er captive death and conquered sin. (Ride On, Ride On in Majesty, LSB 441:2)

Joseph, Patriarch

MARCH 31, 2023

Daily Lectionary: ex. 5:1-6:1, Mark 15:33-47

Mark 15:34: "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?""

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. It's the commemoration of St. Joseph, but the Bible story is Jesus. It's the wrong story, except it's not. Joseph is a story about descent and then resurrection to save his people. It's Jesus. It's Jesus when He is turned on by His brothers and left for dead. It's Jesus when God works this for good. It's Jesus when Joseph points to a savior in dreams, because the dreams are about the real Savior, the Christ. It's Jesus when Joseph becomes a prisoner unrighteously. It's Jesus when he becomes a servant. It's Jesus when all this sin committed against an innocent man is somehow worked to save the same sinners. It's Jesus when he is at last restored.

The crucifixion is the story of all of scripture. It points to the redemption of sinners in so many ways. We remember Joseph, the Patriarch, because he was a forerunner of his Savior, our Savior, the Savior of all the world who was betrayed and mocked, condemned to bear the cross for you.

Where it looked as if God had forsaken Joseph, as years passed by, God was at work. Where it looks like God has forsaken you, remember. We are not the Christ anymore than Joseph was. Joseph was not forsaken. Jesus was. He is the fulfillment of the things Joseph's life only pointed to. When you feel far from God, abused, and cast aside, understand this is the image of your Savior, but God is not far off. He is very near, because it is here that He fulfilled all of these things and did them for you.

We have a God who not only works good out of evil, as He did in the life of Joseph, and chiefly in the suffering and death of His Son, but we have a God who promises not to be far off when evil is at hand. That's where He draws closest so that He can save. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Down through the realm of darkness He strode in victory, And at the hour appointed He rose triumphantly. And now, to heav'n ascended, He sits upon the throne Whence He had ne'er departed, His Father's and His own. (Christ is the World's Redeemer, LSB 539:3)

Saturday the First Week of Lent

MARCH 4, 2023

Today's Reading: Introit for Lent 2, Ps. 105:4-7; antiphon: Ps. 105:8

Daily Lectionary: Gen. 15:1-21, Mark 5:21-43

He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations. (From the Introit for the Second Sunday in Lent)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. God always remembers, even when we forget. That can seem terrifying, can't it? God our Father will never forget. He will always remember. And if you're stuck on thinking that he will always remember everything wrong you've done, every time you've messed up, every instance of back-talking and "massaging" the truth for your own purposes, you'll be terrified of him.

But here's the thing. God forgets because he remembers. It seems to not make sense, but look at what He says in His own words. In Psalm 103 the Holy Spirit inspires King David to write, "as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us." God remembers his covenant, and his covenant says that He forgives those who repent, and that repentance is made sure in the shed blood of Jesus.

That sin that has been bugging you for weeks, maybe months? Have you confessed it to God? Then He's forgiven it! He forgives and forgets it, because He remembers that Jesus bore that sin to His cross on Golgotha.

You should treat your sins the same way. Once you've confessed them, forget them. If God can't remember them, then why should you? Oh, I know. It was such a terrible sin. You hurt people so badly when you committed it. And for the longest time, you didn't really care. Then it started to bother you, so you still carry it around now as some sort of reminder about how bad a person you are.

But that is not how God remembers it, or you. When God looks at you, He has to look through Jesus to see you. And when He sees Jesus, he remembers that He has forgiven all of your sins, because Jesus took them all from you and died for them, left them in His grave, and rose without them.

Jesus doesn't carry those sins anymore, so God can't remember them. What God does remember is His promise that He forgives you, He has made you His child, and life everlasting is yours, because He has washed you in Jesus's blood and taken all that sin away to the point that not even God remembers them.

God remembers that you are His child, washed white in the blood of the Lamb. He remembers that He's made a place for you with Him forever. Thanks be to God that He remembers, even when we forget. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Second Sunday of Lent

MARCH 5, 2023

Today's Reading: John 3:1-7

Daily Lectionary: Gen. 16:1-9, 15:17-22, Mark 6:1-13

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." (St. John 3:1-2)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Remember the last time the power went out? Unless you had a flashlight or your cell phone handy, you likely stumbled around for a bit trying to find your way without tripping or banging your shins into the furniture.

Being lost in the darkness can be a big deal, especially when you have no idea where you are going. Nicodemus was in the dark, both literally and metaphorically. St. John says he came to Jesus "by night," which makes sense. After all, he doesn't want the other Pharisees to find out he's hanging out with this guy they've spent so much time trying to cancel.

But Nicodemus is in the dark in another way. St. John uses darkness again and again in his gospel to show us how people come to understand who Jesus is by moving from darkness into light. From not believing that Jesus is God, to understanding and believing His divinity. From the darkness of sin and death into the light of Christ, the certainty that Jesus has come for you and your salvation.

Nicodemus admits that both he and his fellow Pharisees know that Jesus is a teacher from God, but they just can't connect the last of the dots, they can't get the cord plugged in to turn the light on. Actually, they refuse to plug it in, because they prefer the darkness. And so they stumble, they trip, they bash their shins against the cornerstone, the "stumbling block," the scandal, that is God in the flesh.

Thankfully, it isn't up to us to plug in the cord, or to come to an understanding about Jesus on our own. This is the power and the might of the Word of God. He does it all for us. He plugs in the light, turns it on, focuses its power and brightness upon us, warms us with its glow, and makes sure it never goes out again.

Jesus is able to do these things not because God is with Him, but because He himself is God. God in the flesh, for you, working to do what you cannot to bring you to faith and salvation in His mighty works. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Thursday the Fifth Week of Lent

MARCH 30, 2023

Daily Lectionary: Ex 4:19-31, Mark 15:16-32

Exodus 4:21-23: "And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.'"

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. This is somehow more uncomfortable than the next verses where Moses' wife throws a child's foreskin on his feet. God told Moses he was going to harden Pharaoh's heart and kill firstborn kids. It leaves us struggling to find goodness in God. It seems to lend the attacks of internet atheists that much more credibility. God kills people.

A lot of the problem is that we start the same way Pharaoh does. With ourselves. We see ourselves in this world in terms of what's ours. We see the world in terms of our rights. Rights are a government word rooted in the Law. God doesn't give rights. He gives gifts. He promises to Moses, a sinner, not only forgiveness of sins, but freedom. It's not that He chooses some and condemns others. It's that He chooses and refuses to let anyone lay claim to His redeemed. The LORD takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but He will not let the life of the wicked rob you of His promises.

Right and wrong seem to have different flavors depending on what side of the argument you're on. Not just here. Always. So instead, look to the nature of God. He simply IS good. The gifts that He gives are good too, because they're of Him. Even in the midst of terrible and painful realities, God does not turn back, but bears it Himself for us. He gave His own Son to fulfill even this demand. God gives good gifts to sinners. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, but everything He does is a gift. Even when these gifts are abused. Even when they eventually break. But even your life is a gift from God. And when He takes you in death, that's a gift too, because He gave His Son upon the cross to grant you resurrection. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

What God ordains is always good: He never will deceive me; He leads me in His righteous way, And never will He leave me. I take content What He has sent; His hand that sends me sadness Will turn my tears to gladness. (What God Ordains Is Always Good, LSB 760:2)

Wednesday the Fifth Week of Lent

MARCH 29, 2023

Today's Reading: Luther's Small Catechism – Ten Commandments - Third Commandment

Daily Lectionary: Ex 4:1-18, Mark 15:1-15

Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy.

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. God wasn't tired after making everything. The Sabbath isn't a chance to parrot God catching His breath. The focus on abstaining from work on the Sabbath day misses the point. The point of the Commandment is in the word holy. You will not be holier by sitting on the couch eating junk food. Jesus insists the Sabbath was created for man, not man for the Sabbath because this day was not given as a measuring stick for you to prove yourself to God by...doing nothing. It only serves to prove how sinful we are that we somehow fail at even doing nothing to the point that the Pharisees would pick at each other and even our Lord. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. So instead of looking to your works, look to something actually holy. Look to Jesus.

The Sabbath day won't become holy to you who are unholy in your sins. There's nothing you can do to make the day holy. It's like trying to clean a table with a dirty rag. The Sabbath day becomes holy for you when you're exposed to something holy. The Sabbath day becomes holy to you when you do not despise preaching or God's Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it. Go to church. Receive God's gifts. He insists a day be set aside to make you holy. The reason God set aside the seventh day wasn't because He was tired. It was so God could spend time with you. Our rest is found in receiving the Word and Sacraments that take away our sins and leave us holy.

It's also why we celebrate the Sabbath on the first day, not the seventh. This is the day Jesus rose from the grave. This is the day a holy God conquered unholy sin and death. It isn't about the day. It's about the gifts. He gives you His Body and Blood to eat and drink. He gives you His Word, promising peace, forgiveness, and joy. He sets aside time and insists you join Him so that you would not remain in your unholiness and sin, but that He would dwell with you to cleanse you and bring you with Him to the last great day when the sabbath rest will be unending. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

"You shall observe the worship day That peace may fill your home, and pray, And put aside the work you do, So that God may work in you." Have mercy, Lord! ("These are the Holy Ten Commands" LSB 581:4)

Monday the Second Week of Lent

MARCH 6, 2023

Today's Reading: Gen. 12:1-9

Daily Lectionary: Gen. 18:1-15, Mark 6:14-34

Now the LORD said to Abram...“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:1-3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. God always blesses His children, even when it doesn't seem like it. Abram messes up. A LOT. Yet God is faithful to His promise and watches over and guides him so that He may fulfill the promise He made.

Abram leaves Ur and goes on this journey to what will become the Promised Land, within which the Messiah will eventually be born. Along the way, Abram's journey takes him through trouble in Egypt, God renames him Abraham (because of the promise), he prays for his nephew Lot's safety in Sodom, he is faced with the unbelievable decision to sacrifice Isaac, his only son... The challenges he faces are incredible.

Yet, through all of them, and even in the times when Abraham and Sarah wrest the decisions away from their gracious God and go their own way (always into deeper trouble than if they'd followed God's direction!). The Lord is faithful to His promise.

Remember that, dear baptized child of God. Your Lord and God is the same God of Abraham, the same God who guided and directed His people down through the ages until the time had fully come, and His Son was born of woman, in the same flesh as Abraham, and lived for you, and for Abraham, and for all the faithful.

One of Abraham's blessings is that billions and billions of people on earth still know his name and hold him in esteem as a great hero of the faith. No, he wasn't perfect, and I'm sure he'd be the first to call you out for making him more than he is, but he was faithful, and that is enough.

Your life might not take the same number of twists, turns, surprises, or tragedies; but I'm sure this world will cause you enough grief to wonder some days if the Lord still remembers His promises to you. Be assured that He does; He remembers you and His promise because His one and only Son, your risen Lord Jesus, intercedes for you before the Father. He does it always, because you've been washed in His blood, marked with his holy cross, and named in his Book of Life, just like Abraham. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Tuesday the Second Week of Lent

MARCH 7, 2023

Today's Reading: Romans 4:1-8, 13-17
Daily Lectionary: Gen. 21:1-21, Mark 6:35-56

For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. (Romans 4:13)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Yesterday, we looked at how Abraham was blessed by God through a promise that he would father a great nation, that all the faithful would be able to trace their lineage back to him.

It is important to remember how that happened, and who was in charge. As I always like to ask, "Who's running the verbs here?" Who was doing the blessing and promising? It was God the Father, of course, the Great I Am, who would later promise to Moses that He would guide God's people back to the ancestral lands promised to Abraham.

All of those things happened through the work of God on behalf of his people. Sure, along the way, He gave Moses the Law, the Ten Commandments, the moral and ceremonial rules for life as God's people until the Messiah's coming. But none of those promises came based on Abraham's behavior or gumption.

That is important to remember in our day, as well. God blesses His people. He makes promises to His children. And none of these things are based on us. God never says, "If you behave well enough, then I'll save you." No, He says instead: "This is my promise to you: Jesus is for you!"

That's the thing about the power of the creative and performative Word of God. It does what it says, even without your input! The living Word of God bounces off your eardrum and travels into your brain where the Holy Spirit creates faith in a mysterious way.

God declares you righteous by the work of his Son, Jesus, speaks that righteousness upon you while wetting you with the water of Baptism, and when your pastor proclaims your absolution, and when that Word is tied to bread and wine made Body and Blood.

In none of these things are you driving the narrative; it is all God, all the time. He declares you His child. He makes you righteous. He instills faith in you. All of it by His power and might, for you, so that you (like Abraham) would trust that He has you in His hands, safe for all eternity. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Tuesday the Fifth Week of Lent

MARCH 28, 2023

Today's Reading: Hebrews 9:11-15
Daily Lectionary: Ex 2:23-3:22, Mark 14:53-72

Hebrews 9:15: "Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant."

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. A covenant is a promise God makes with us. Is the first covenant made in the garden with two trees? Eat from one, not the other? Is it made with Abraham, who believed and it was counted to him as righteousness? Moses, who gave the instructions for the shedding of the blood of goats and calves for the forgiveness of sins? The text talks about dead bulls so I can take a guess, but the last verse leaves options. There just hasn't been a promise God has made to a people who haven't turned around and sinned.

And for what it reveals to us about Him, I'm grateful. It isn't just that all the dead bulls pointed to a dead Jesus. It's that Jesus died for us. The ones who have been given the promise who turned around and transgressed against the Lord. Like Adam. And Abraham. And Moses. And Peter. And every other saint until the last great day when sins are left behind as we enter the resurrection.

Ours is the God who makes promises to sinners, then fulfills what we are unable to do. A covenant isn't a two party deal when it comes to God. He keeps both ends. So when we find a church full of sinners, a generation of Christians who look like they tear down more than they build, a label that fits all too well on the Christians that leave you frustrated, understand that Jesus makes them promises too. He shed His blood for them, and for you too. For forgiveness for every place we transgressed in the first place. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

But Christ, the heav'nly Lamb, Takes all our sins away; A sacrifice of nobler name And richer blood than they. (Not All the Blood of Beasts, LSB 431:3)

Monday the Fifth Week of Lent

MARCH 27, 2023

Today's Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14
Daily Lectionary: Ex 2:1-22, Mark 14:32-52

Ezekiel 37:4: "Then he said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD."

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. This story isn't just Ezekiel. It's every pastor of every church, called out into a valley full of sinners cut off from one another. Addicts with secrets and not-so-secrets. Monsters. Victims. Bones. You see it in the gossip that runs rampant in churches, in anxiety and anger, depression and fear, suffering and death. We are the valley of dry bones. And someone told us that Christian soldiers are supposed to march. The hymn might be lying.

So your pastor preaches sermons. A few of us are actually good enough to make you feel better for an hour or two after church. But does it really get better? Can these bones live? O Lord, You know. I don't. I can tell you what His word says, but can't make you believe it. I can tell you a sin is wrong, but can't break your addiction to it. I can give names to every sin in Ten Commandments, but it won't make them hurt less. But God tells the prophet, unsure of what to do or say that it's really pretty simple. Preach the Word.

Know who your God is. He is Jesus, who opens your grave and makes you live. That's a promise given to dry bones whether or not they're afraid, whether or not they're sinners, whether or not they even draw breath. God's Word still preaches and the dying still live. Because it's measured in Him, not the Valley. Peace isn't a lack of problems or a perfect church. Peace isn't a handle on your life and a morality that doesn't look at the Ten Commandments and find only hypocrisy. Peace is a present God, speaking life to the dying, speaking hope to you. The church doesn't call us simply to strive to climb out of the valley where the bones are. It promises Jesus joins us and makes us, even us, live. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Like a mighty army Moves the Church of God; Brothers, we are treading Where the saints have trod. We are not divided, All one body we, One in hope and doctrine, One in charity. Onward, Christian soldiers, Marching as to war, With the cross of Jesus Going on before. (Onward Christian Soldiers, LSB 662:2)

Wednesday the Second Week of Lent

MARCH 8, 2023

Today's Reading: Luther's Small Catechism - Table of Duties: To Everyone
Daily Lectionary: Gen 22:1-19, Mark 7:1-23

For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Romans 13:9)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Back at the beginning of catechism class, and maybe even well before then, most kids don't love the Ten Commandments. In fact, it's usually the opposite, isn't it? Between memorizing them and their meanings, many catechumens develop a hostile relationship with the Ten Commandments.

Rather than looking at the Commandments as a list to be wrestled into submission though, see them instead as a guide for loving your neighbor. I always ask my catechumens "who is your neighbor?" and they eventually learn the right answer: "anyone who isn't me!"

Realizing who your neighbor is and how your relationship with all of your neighbors is affected by how you live out your faith and life is essential. It's pretty easy to say that you've never murdered anyone or robbed a bank. It isn't so easy to say you haven't wished someone harm or pocketed something that wasn't yours to take.

The key in all of this is remembering the First Table: Commandments 1-3, which deal with our relationship with God our Father. When we get that straight, when we love the Lord our God and gather together for worship and the study of his Word, that sets us on the path of loving our neighbor. It gets us in the right frame of mind.

Then, knowing how to love our God informs our love for our neighbors. The Golden Rule (which isn't in the Bible, by the way) does help: treat others the way you want to be treated. In theory, this makes the Christian life easy—all the rules are there. All the possible ways to treat everyone are laid out in the open.

In reality, though, sin makes it a lot more difficult to love our neighbors as ourselves. Their sin against us, and our sin against them complicates things. Thanks be to God that our Lord Jesus has already kept these Commandments perfectly for us, that His Death and Resurrection forgives our failures, and His Holy Spirit guides us in the way to go.

How do you love Jesus? By loving your neighbors. And when you fail to love them as you should, Jesus loves you through them; especially parents and pastors who remind you that we love because Jesus first loved us. Thanks be to God that His love never fails! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Thursday the Second Week of Lent

MARCH 9, 2023

Daily Lectionary: Gen 24:1-31, Mark 7:24-37

And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. (St. Mark 7:33–36)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever seen an old-time Bible movie about Jesus? They really bother me, because Jesus is always so clean and well groomed, wearing white and floating through the movie as if he was almost not even really there.

We see a different Jesus in the gospels, especially today. This is the Jesus we really need to keep in our minds. This is the Jesus who lives among His people, bearing their burdens, sharing their pain, and healing their infirmities. This is the Jesus who laughs and cries, because He knows exactly what it is like to live on earth, with sin and evil around every corner; and with family and friends by your side.

Jesus pulls the deaf man aside so he knows Jesus is focused on him and his needs. Sure, this isn't very hygienic by today's standards (what, no hand sanitizer?!?), but this is the Son of God we're watching. Fingers in ears that don't hear; fingers on a tongue that can't speak. Looking to the heavens from which our help comes, and a deep sigh.

All of these actions show the deaf man that Jesus is here for him. Specifically to help him and to show His might and power to those nearby. Touching, sighing, and speaking, Jesus restores what was broken. He heals what caused pain.

You might not be deaf or mute, but you are afflicted by sin and death every single day. Jesus breaks into your world on a regular basis and restores you, ever so briefly in this world, but for all of eternity in the Divine Service. There, He puts his Word into your ears, and He touches your tongue with His Body and Blood to restore you. To forgive you. To grant you everlasting life and eternal salvation.

You may not always understand what is happening, but Jesus sees you in your struggles, and He speaks directly to you, touches you, and assures you of His mercy, now and forever. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Sunday the Fifth Week of Lent

MARCH 26, 2023

Today's Reading: John 11:1-45

Daily Lectionary: Ex. 1:1-22, Mark 14:12-31

John 11:21: “Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. I think John made sure to get this in the story not to leave us with a bad impression of Martha marked on one of the hardest days of her life. I think it's to give us the words to speak on our own. Its bitterness and genuine anger rolled up in a confession of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. It isn't just an accusation. It's a recognition. It doesn't ignore the problem because of Jesus. But it doesn't dismiss it either.

Something wrong happened. God could have stopped it. There will be a resurrection someday. But today, hope feels far off. Because we tend to root hope in the answer to prayers, not the God answering them. Hope is a Lazarus who didn't die. Hope is a Lazarus who will rise on the last day. But that leaves hope very far away when he's four days in the tomb and rotting.

It might be worth noting that throughout this entire story, every time the followers of Jesus presume to know His plans, they're wrong. Every time they put their hope in something He can control, but not in Him, it falls apart. Because hope is not found in God answering prayers. Hope is found in God.

Where God is, there is hope. And Jesus draws near to dead Lazarus. He could have stopped it. He could have chosen not to go into Jerusalem to die. He could have chosen to punish sinners for insolence and impoliteness...and you know...sin. Instead, His will is done as absolutely done, confounding the imaginations of everyone. So maybe hope in Jesus, not what you think He'll do.

Hope is not measured in anything other than the presence of Jesus. Everything else is turned upside down. The body should never have died. The dead body should stink. And in all of it, hope is measured in something else. Jesus is near.

Which may be why He gives us His Body and Blood in church. So that hope can be measured in more than “Did I get what I wanted?” or “Did I die and go to heaven and on the last day rise?”. It's measured in “Is Jesus here for me?” and the answer is Yes. Amen. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

The Annunciation of Our Lord

MARCH 25, 2023

Today's Reading: Luke 1:26-38

Daily Lectionary: Gen 49:29-50:7, 14-26, Mark 14:1-11

Luke 1:28-29: "And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be."

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Two angels visited young women. One was evil. The other good. Both made promises of greatness. One promised a life of freedom, hidden knowledge, and independence. The other promised a cross. One pointed to something that would be so easy to take. The other spoke of something all but impossible. One offered options. The other never gave the young woman a choice.

If you were to ask the world which was good and which was evil, the answer would be near unanimous, but it was the evil angel Satan who spoke lies to Eve promising independence from God, knowledge of good and evil, and whispered of "free will" right within her grasp. Gabriel told the truth.

You shall conceive and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus – He shall save His people from their sins. As crazy as it sounds, nothing will be impossible with God. There is no choice. No free will. This is your blessing. 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.

The Annunciation marks just one pregnancy until Christmas, almost always in the middle of lent. They're as joined together in the grand narrative as the two angels. The tree of the garden revealed sin. It was always meant to be answered by the tree of the cross that reveals salvation. The cross lets us call evil, evil and good, good. It lets us acknowledge our sin, and in repentance, be not afraid.

Nothing is impossible with God. That's not for you to do. It's for Christ to do for you. Even the part where we acknowledge our sin, and in repentance, be not afraid. He will descend from heaven to become a fetus, born of a virgin and walk the road to the cross to undo death itself and then rise again just to save you. This isn't just an arbitrary connection. It's the presence of hope among so much that seems strange, terrifying, and upside down. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, as we have known the incarnation of Your Son, Jesus Christ, by the message of the angel to the virgin Mary, so by the message of His cross and passion bring us to the glory of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Friday the Second Week of Lent

MARCH 10, 2023

Daily Lectionary: Gen 24:32-52, 61-67, Mark 8:1-21

And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?" (St. Mark 8:16-18)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. It's easy to give the disciples grief. Today we have the benefit of hindsight and we are absolutely positive, 100% certain, without a doubt in our minds, that we would have been better and more perceptive disciples. Except not. We'd be just as bad, if not worse.

Jesus had just fed 4,000 people with seven loaves of bread and a few fish. He and His disciples crisscrossed the Sea of Galilee dodging inquisitive Pharisees and their sign-seeking. Jesus is trying to make a point (as usual), and all the Twelve can think about is dinner. They're arguing about who forgot to pack the ice chest, and Jesus has to be the parent and calm them down and try to focus their attention. They are so worried about the right now, that they have completely forgotten that the sun will rise tomorrow, whether or not they have enough to eat today.

Do you see yourself in the Twelve now? It's easy to get wrapped up in the despair and disaster of everyday troubles. Admit it, your mind has wandered during church more times than you can remember, other things have suddenly become more important than the Word of God.

And that's what Jesus is trying to get the disciples to understand; that he fed the 4,000 and had seven baskets of food left over, that he fed the 5,000 before that and had twelve baskets of food left over, that wherever He goes, abundance and healing abound.

The Pharisees and Herodians were only thinking about the now, living day-to-day on the hope that they had just enough power and authority to stay in charge of things, and the disciples are getting dangerously close to that attitude.

He wants them to remember that when He is with them, they will always have plenty. And that's true today as well. Jesus is with us, providing what we need most in abundance: His Word and gifts. Along the way, He provides for our earthly needs, too, through our families and occupations.

Even when we think about and focus on the wrong things, Jesus is with us to bring us back to reality; to the certainty of his presence with us to sustain, guard, and keep us always in the one true faith. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Saturday the Second Week of Lent

MARCH 11, 2023

Today's Reading: Introit for Lent 3 Ps. 84:1-4; antiphon: Ps. 84:5
Daily Lectionary: Gen 27:1-29, Mark 8:22-38

How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. (From the Introit for the Third Sunday in Lent) ‘

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Churches come in all shapes and sizes. The massive and beautiful cathedrals of Europe, The climate-controlled and cushioned-pew buildings many of us know, and the rickety lean-tos often seen in disadvantaged nations.

But all of these buildings have something in common: the altar. The place upon which the elements of the Sacrament are placed for the assembled saints to receive in Holy Communion. It might be a massive and ornate slab of marble, it may be a card table, but that altar is the place where the Lord God sits in glory when we gather in worship.

The presence of God is what truly makes his dwelling place lovely. Reality gets very thin around altars. Eternity begins to bleed through into our world around those places where God sits.

You see it happen to Isaiah in the temple (Isaiah 6). Zechariah has a close call, too (Luke 1). No, there is no Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies at your church, or any church on earth. But the altar functions in the same way. It is the Mercy Seat, the place where our Eternal God sits to bestow his gifts upon us.

And when the Lord God is present among us, He doesn't come alone. We proclaim it every time we celebrate the Sacrament: "therefore with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name."

The indescribable beauty that is the eternal throne room of God shines into our world in a mystical way as Jesus is physically present in the Sacrament. You can joyfully sing in a cavernous building, in the room of a nursing home, around a kitchen table, or in your own pew because God himself is present there, for you.

Tomorrow, when you walk into your church, look closely at the altar and take note of what makes it special. The wood or stone, the fabrics or candlesticks that adorn it, the flowers that bring it color, the Bible resting upon it.

All of those things are there to remind us of God's presence, but the biggest and most glorious clue is the communion ware set there ready for you to receive from the ever-present God of salvation Jesus, given for you. It is lovely, indeed! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

God Himself is present: Let us now adore Him And with awe appear before Him. God is in His temple; all within keep silence; Humbly kneel in deepest reverence. He alone On His throne Is our God and Savior; Praise His name forever! (God Himself Is Present LSB 907:1)

Friday the Fourth Week of Lent

MARCH 24, 2023

Daily Lectionary: Gen 47:1-31, Mark 13:24-37

Mark 13:37: "And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Stay awake. It's ominous. It reads like a threat that isn't even all that veiled. It leaves us looking to the Lord returning on the last day to catch us, not to save us. It's actually not because of how it's written. It's because of us. It's because when we hear the Lord is near, it brings to the surface everything we don't want Him to be around to confront. We expect the Lord to show up to judge the living and the dead in great power. But there's a missing word there.

But He promises to come in great glory too. So remember the hour in which the Son of Man was glorified. It was the cross. Jesus bore it for you to forgive you all your sins. The Lord returns on the last day with the same glory. It's mercy in action, applied to save you. He shows up with great power, the ability to rescue you from all that is in decay down here, even yourself, and glory as of the Son of God who loves to save sinners.

So stay awake. It's not a call to avoid being caught off-guard, but to remain faithful. Hopeful. And even that He does for you. In Word and Sacrament, God calls you out of sleep. Awake o sleeper. Rise from death, and Christ will shine on you. The last day is not a trap, but a blessed hope of all Christians, because here we join our Lord, at last, to fully see our freedom from sin and death. He has already delivered us in our Baptism.

He has promised to keep us to that last great day. To remain awake is to cling to these promises. To pray, come Lord Jesus, with all the Church, and to know our future, and count it as a joy. Why would we flee that to hide from the pains of this world in vice and sin and darkness? We are called to stand firm against them knowing we don't need to hide. We don't need to self-medicate. We are given, every week, the medicine of life in the Body and Blood of Jesus. Stay awake. Gather around the gifts. It's a call God makes to all. Let more sinners join us in the mercies of Christ made new every day. Let more find peace that endures to the last. Stay awake, because even now you have Christ. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

For us Christ lived, for us He died, And conquered in the strife; Awake, arise, go forth in faith, And Christ shall give you life (Awake, O Sleeper, Rise from Death (LSB 697:4)

Thursday the Fourth Week of Lent

MARCH 23, 2023

Today's Reading: Ephesians 5:8-14

Daily Lectionary: Gen 45:1-20, 24-28, Mark 13:1-23

Ephesians 5:14: "for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.""

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Shine light on everything. If it's of the light, it will reflect. If it's of darkness, it will flee. It's a simple approach to life that will guide so many decisions. If you feel like you have to hide what you're doing, you probably shouldn't do it. If you feel like it needs to be a secret, what are you afraid of? If it is good and of the light, it will be known for what it is. It sounds so simple. It gets so messy.

Because the world hides their sins. Honestly, we do too. We hide so much in the words, "I a poor miserable sinner" we want nobody to know. We bury so much in our pasts. In our secrets. In our hearts. I understand why.

But Paul promises that the thing that becomes visible in light isn't just our misdeeds. It's Christ. He calls the sleeper to wake. He promises to shine, even on those who sleep under death, which only comes from sin.

Shine light on everything. Because Jesus forgives your sins. All of them. The hidden ones are not yours to keep secret. They're Christ's to leave buried under the cross. For every burden we shelter in our hearts that should belong to the light, Paul implores us, not simply to behave and not drink too much. He calls us to let the Light of the World confront our sins because He does so in order to call us out of the burdens they bring. It doesn't mean shouting your secrets from the rooftops. But it means we have a place to bring the darkness in us. Expose it to the light and watch it flee. Our sins are brought to the Light of the World and forgiven where the Light of the World conquers death even as the sun is blotted from the sky. Light shall dwell in darkness, and the darkness shall not overcome it. Let the light shine even where we hide our sins. Let them be forgiven. Not hidden. Not excused. Atoned for. Walk as children of light. That means take your sins to Jesus. It is pleasing to the Lord. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lo, on those who dwelt in darkness, Dark as night and deep as death, Broke the light of Thy salvation, Breathed Thine own life-breathing breath. Alleluia, alleluia! Praise to Thee who light dost send! Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia without end! (Thy Strong Word, LSB 578:2)

Sunday the Third Week of Lent

MARCH 12, 2023

Today's Reading: John 4:5-26

Daily Lectionary: Gen. 27:30-45, 28:10-22, Mark 9:1-13

John 4:10: "Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.""

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. This lady's a sinner. She has to work herself up every time she goes out in public. She hears what she is whenever she goes out. She's not Jewish enough. Not married enough. She would rather not go out to that well anymore. How can I not come back here anymore? She actually confesses it. Give me the water so I don't have to get more. I don't want to have to come here anymore. I don't want to be what they stare at. I don't want to be what they talk about. I don't want to be the object lesson to nice little boys and girls anymore.

Jesus asked for water and never got any. He asked after her husband and never got an answer either. Jesus asks after everything she needs and never gets it. She can't give it. Sin is still sin. It breaks stuff. Salvation did come from the temple of the Jews, but Jesus is there to do more than correct her about her church-going habits and get her married. He's there to give. He doesn't wait until she feels appropriately sorry. Her biting answers toward Jesus say plenty about how she really saw herself. He just starts promising living water to bitter sinners. He's so blunt that the rest of us get uncomfortable too. There's no condition. It's here. It's free. We'd like to imagine it's because Jesus isn't being as polite as we imagine, but really it's deeper. The whole conversation points out a truth we'd rather not see.

Nobody's saved by measuring their shortcomings, whether they be the sins acceptable by the public or not. We're saved by Jesus, the rock. We're saved by the living water that comes from His pierced side. He shows up. He dies. He saves. And it's for you too. There are no conditions. It's free.

For the sins you hide away, for the statistics you've become on purpose or on accident, for your guilt, for you, peace. Jesus died for you. Your sins are forgiven. You are baptized. You have the living water promised. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy, be gracious to all who have gone astray from Your ways and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast to the unchangeable truth of Your Word; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Monday the Third Week of Lent

MARCH 13, 2023

Today's Reading: Ex. 17:1-7

Daily Lectionary: Gen. 29:1-30, Mark 9:14-32

Exodus 17:7: "And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?""

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Moses is tired of the people complaining and fighting. So the Lord tells him to hit a rock with a stick to shut them up. The Bible is full of uncomfortable things about Jesus. He rose from the dead. It's easier to paper over the miracles and teachings that don't jive with common morals today. But when you take Jesus out of the book, it gets even weirder. Nobody tells the story of water from a rock to prove a political point or win an argument online. This doesn't demonstrate kindness unless you squint.

It's easier to complain about the world that's falling apart than recognize they're only asking the same questions Israel did of old. Is the LORD among us or not? Because it doesn't really look like He is. They asked that to the guy who ripped the sea in half and marched them through on dry ground while a pillar of fire watched. They saw. Society asks it surrounded by death and tragedy. And we ask because people won't stop being sinners. It's funny how we want their miracles, and they want our comforts, but we both manage to ask the same questions about God. It's almost like the real problem isn't how the world looks, but the sinful state of our hearts. So Jesus answers. Not in temper tantrums but in promises. The Bible makes more sense if Jesus is always in the center of it.

There is a rock, from whose side comes living water, struck to put an end to the sinful rebellion of God's people, and that rock was Christ. He was struck. He was beaten. He was crucified and pierced for you, and from His side comes life giving water. The Lord was among His sinners to save them. It hasn't changed. It's been fulfilled. It answers the worry of the people not by setting them apart from the things they're afraid of, but by forgiving their sins, our sins, so that life can be more than just an escape from the thing that isn't the real problem. There can be hope in Him who has already saved. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Yet, O Lord, not thus alone Make me see Your passion, But its cause to me make known And its termination. Ah! I also and my sin Wrought Your deep affliction; This indeed the cause has been Of Your crucifixion (Jesus, I Will Ponder Now LSB 440:3)

Wednesday the Fourth Week of Lent

MARCH 22, 2023

Today's Reading: Luther's Small Catechism – Ten Commandments: Second Commandment

Daily Lectionary: Gen 44:1-18, 32-34, Mark 12:28-44

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Ask ten strangers what they think about Christianity. They'll tell you. You'll hear some heartbreaking stuff. You'll hear about a hateful God who despises the sinners who don't sin like the rest of us. You'll hear about a deadbeat God who abandoned His kids to a world of suffering. Worse, you might just hear about a perfect God, who reserves Himself for the ones who earn His love. The Almighty who answers the prayers of the popular kids who get strangers to pray for them or the rich kids who give money to church. This is what happens when we break the Second Commandment.

The Second Commandment isn't chiefly about what bad words you say when you stub your toe. Those are still bad, but worse still is when we teach falsely about who our God is. When we attach lies to His name. It's called false doctrine. It matters. Millions of people know the name Jesus. They just think He's a liar. When we attach God's favor to our works, it's a sin. When we teach about a far away God, it's a great evil. Every single time, the cross is diminished. The mercy won there for you and for all the world there is hidden behind lies. God calls us not to misuse His name.

God doesn't give you His name only to tell you not to use it. Don't misuse it. He wants you to have it. Pray. Praise. Give thanks. Remember who your God is. Remember what He's done for you. For all. Pray as if it were true. Praise Him for never being far off, but always being in the midst of suffering to bear it Himself upon the cross. Give thanks that He would not save only the wealthy or the popular, but the least of these, the sinners. Us. The Second Commandment matters because it's actually worth knowing you have a God who loves you. You have a God who won't stand back from your misery or from your sin. He wants you to use that name. Call upon me in your day of trouble, and I will rescue you", says your God. "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." That's worth remembering rightly. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

"Do not My holy name disgrace, Do not My Word of truth debase. Praise only that as good and true Which I Myself say and do." Have mercy, Lord! (These are the Holy Ten Commands, LSB 581:3)

Tuesday the Fourth Week of Lent

MARCH 21, 2023

Today's Reading: Isaiah 42:14-21
Daily Lectionary: Gen 43:1-28, Mark 12:13-27

Isaiah 42:21: "The LORD was pleased, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify his law and make it glorious."

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Everyone always talks about God's patience like it has no end. We want things now. He's content to wait until the right time. Isaiah disagrees. He paints a picture of the LORD so eager to act that, like a pregnant woman, He can hold back no longer so He screams, gasps, and pants. It isn't just a picture of God's eagerness to punish the wicked. It's an image of His need to forgive you. Each day of creation that passed by before the Lord bore the cross for the world was not time spent reading a book or whatever patient people do. It's time. It's now. The LORD is so ready to forgive He angry screams.

Because He sees what it looks like down here. He's not content with the suffering, the dying, or the sin and the evil that brings it. He's not content to see a few carve out relatively comfortable lives in a world this dark. He's not content to see the faithful strive with morality only to fall ill and die. It's because our best isn't good enough. It isn't good enough to fix what's wrong down here. The law doesn't show us how to behave. It shows us how things are supposed to be. And they're not.

So the LORD magnifies the law. Shows us what things are supposed to look like. Jesus. Because anything less than Jesus' perfection isn't enough. The law upheld outwardly by the most moral isn't enough. He magnifies the law on His servant, Jesus. The law is shown, finally, in its fulfillment. Jesus is glorified. He dies on the cross undoing sin's wages. Forgiving you. The Father sees the cross and becomes deaf and blind to your sin. It's on Jesus now. It has to be, because the LORD can't stand to see it on you. So, with a cry of pain mingled with joy and relief, even as a pregnant woman screams. It is finished. Darkness is turned to light. Your sin is forgiven. The death of the faithful is undone. And we can look at how things are supposed to be as a promise of God to restore them, not a standard to live up to. We can look to Jesus and find hope. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Gospel shows the Father's grace, Who sent His Son to save our race, Proclaims how Jesus lived and died That we might thus be justified. (The Gospel Shows the Father's Grace, LSB 580:1)

Tuesday the Third Week of Lent

MARCH 14, 2023

Today's Reading: Romans 5:1-18
Daily Lectionary: Gen 35:1-29, Mark 9:33-50

Romans 5:8: "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Spiritual warfare is easier when it's us against the devil, but I am a sinner. The problem is me. It's the devil who would have you think the only enemies are outside of yourself and outside of our walls. In true spiritual warfare, there is no us against them. There is only Jesus for sinners. WE were the enemies of God. Not the world. Not the devil. US. So Jesus died for you. Your sins are forgiven. So are your enemies'. The devil lost.

Now, the battleground is your conscience. It's more than "this isn't how it's supposed to be". It's "I'm not how I'm supposed to be." I haven't done enough. I haven't trusted enough. Spiritual warfare is the devil pointing away from the cross where Christ already won the victory for you. Christ was crucified. Christ is risen. But I'm still scared. I'm still struggling. I'm still sinning. Even if all the problems in the world went away, I'd still be stuck with me. This is where the devil fights.

So Jesus wages war for your conscience and your soul both. He fights back against the accusations of the evil one. "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." For you. The free gift is not like the trespass. The free gift is not found in the Law that accuses and shows what's wrong. It's in the Gospel that reconciles enemies. "Now you are reconciled to God through the death of His Son."

I am a sinner Jesus died for. No, I haven't done enough. I haven't trusted enough. I haven't fought hard enough. But Jesus has. Now there is grace given to sinners that reconciles us to God and so reconciles us to each other. If you can't see past the picture the law would paint of your enemies and of yourself, your spiritual warfare is simply to receive the Gospel. Receive pardon and mercy. Receive forgiveness, life, and salvation that unite us to the victory already won when Christ burst from the tomb. That unites us even to each other. We are the enemies that were reconciled to God together. We are the sinners Jesus died for. We are the baptized. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Preserve Your Word and preaching, The truth that makes us whole, The mirror of Your glory, The pow'r that saves the soul. Oh, may this living water, This dew of heav'nly grace, Sustain us while here living Until we see Your face. (Preserve Your Word, O Savior LSB 658:4)

Wednesday the Third Week of Lent

MARCH 15, 2023

Today's Reading: Luther's Small Catechism – Ten Commandments: First Commandment

Daily Lectionary: Gen 37:1-36, Mark 10:1-12

We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Idols are good things. The money you love more than God isn't evil. The love of it is. The people we value more than God are the neighbors He gave you. The power you trust more than God isn't sinful to have. It's sinful to use it selfishly. It's foolish to think it will save you eternally. That's the point. An idol is a part of creation we worship instead of the creator. That stuff isn't God. It can't save you.

Not even when you put the name Jesus on it. That's my favorite trick. I name all my idols Jesus. Jesus wants me to be successful. Happy. Rich. At least that's what I tell myself. You can see it go wrong in two ways. First, the Scriptures never promise Jesus wants you to have those things. Second, if Jesus is only a means to an end, the end is your real god. Not Jesus.

Idolatry is like getting a Christmas present and saying thank you to the present instead of the person who gave it to you. It's not just rude. It misses the greatest thing about presents. Someone loves you enough to give you something. That's the real gift. Idolatry takes for granted the love of the Savior and trades it in for things that moth and rust destroy. None of the things we fear, love, and trust in will be around for eternity. None of them can get you to eternity either. But Jesus already has.

It's the other side of the First Commandment coin. If God says, "You shall have no other gods", what He also means is that He insists on being God to you. For you. He insists on being the one you trust in above all because He is trustworthy. He insists on being the thing you fear above all because His wrath consumes in a way nothing in this world can express. He insists on being what you love above all things because to see God is to see the source of all good things, and know He insists on giving them to you. Idols aren't bad things. They're good gifts from God that blind us to the giver. He insists you have good things so fiercely that He gives them even to idolaters like you, then forgives you, saves you from your idols, and even from yourself by the cross that becomes our treasure. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

"I am alone your God, the Lord; No other gods shall be adored. But you shall fully trust in Me And love Me wholeheartedly." Have mercy, Lord! (These are the Holy Ten Commands, LSB 581:2)

Monday the Fourth Week of Lent

MARCH 20, 2023

Today's Reading: John 9:1-41

Daily Lectionary: Gen 42:1-34, 38, Mark 12:1-12

John 9:2: "And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?""

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The disciples find a man born blind. They ask a reasonable question. Whose fault is it? There has to be someone to blame. Sometimes you can find fault. The Ten Commandments paint a picture of how things are supposed to be. All of us fall short of this standard. Sin breaks stuff. Sometimes that's my fault. Sometimes it's yours. Sometimes the sin that breaks stuff is just so ground into the dust that there's no way to figure out who to blame, short of Adam. He brought sin into the world. He passed it through DNA to the blind man and his parents, to you and me. If you want to assign blame for misery, there's no shortage of it. But there's no help there either.

So when the disciples ask Jesus who to blame, He doesn't answer the way they want. He answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him." Jesus wants more for us than wandering around in darkness finding blame to sling on each other like mud. There's no help in that pit. There's no comfort. There's nothing but darkness, dust, and death. There's wisdom here. The law shows us our sin. Sometimes we can learn from that and aim for better, but when we can't find a commandment being broken, stop. If you can't find a place to learn, leave. Don't play in that pit. You only get covered in the same darkness.

He points to Himself. He doesn't explain this man's blindness in a way that makes us feel better about it. There is no feeling better about it. Even knowing who to blame doesn't fix anything. He points to Himself, and in doing so He addresses the real problem the disciples have. They called him Rabbi. Teacher. That's what folks call Jesus in the Bible when they want to make clear they don't think He's the God He claims to be.

Where is God visible in all this? They wanted a teacher to explain away what's wrong and learned nothing. Rather, Jesus heals the man and shows where God really makes Himself known. In the darkness, working mercy. It's ugly, but God reveals Himself in the darkness, in the spit and the mud. In the suffering and death. On the cross. For the sinners and the ones marked by it. For you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O LORD GOD, let us ever find you working in darkness to bring us light, mercy, and healing, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

St. Joseph, Guardian of Jesus

MARCH 19, 2023

Today's Reading: Matt. 2:13-15, 19-23

Daily Lectionary: Gen 41:28-57, Mark 11:20-33

Matthew 2:13: "Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.""

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Joseph's fiancé was pregnant. He knew it wasn't his child. People talked about it. Legend puts him a lot older than Mary. Old enough people talked about that, too. I wonder what he dreamed about before God-given warnings took over his nights. "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." "Rise, flee to Egypt. Remain there until I tell you. Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him." I'm guessing "abandon everything and flee to Egypt to protect the kid someone else fathered with your wife" might not have been on the 5 year plan. Joseph disappears before Jesus begins His ministry.

It would be easy to remember him for his patience, selflessness, and sacrificial care for Mary and Jesus. It would even be possible to mark him as one taken advantage of by those looking for a patron saint to represent their own feelings of insecurity and insufficiency. It might be best, though, to remember him only so far as the Scriptures do. He was the guardian of Jesus. The Husband of Mary. Faithful.

In worry, he was near Jesus. In trial, near Jesus. Until death, near Jesus. Immanuel means God with us. Joseph is marked as one who was near to Jesus because Jesus was near to him. There are plenty of fathers and husbands marked for doing the right thing, and plenty more for feeling bitter about not getting enough attention. Joseph is simply the one near Jesus, and being near Jesus is enough. We remember Joseph as we can now see each other. Near to Jesus, hearing His promises and believing them, that even if we disappear from the story, we will ever be near Jesus in eternity. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, from the house of Your servant David You raised up Joseph to be the guardian of Your incarnate Son and the husband of His mother, Mary. Grant us grace to follow the example of this faithful workman in heeding Your counsel and obeying Your commands; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Thursday the Third Week of Lent

MARCH 16, 2023

Daily Lectionary: Gen 39:1-23

Genesis 39:23: "The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed."

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Whatever Joseph did, the Lord made it succeed. Joseph, of course, being the guy wrongfully imprisoned. But, like, really successfully. I wonder if Moses smirked as he wrote this stuff. If it wasn't for this verse, we could have an inspiring "when life gives you lemons" peptalk. Roll with the punches. Make the best of it. But this happened because the LORD was with Joseph. This is the Lord's definition of success, too. I'd rather be a normal guy lots of people ignore than the second most important person in prison.

It might be something to consider before quoting an out-of-context Bible verse about God having a plan for your life. I'm not saying He doesn't. I'm saying you might not like it. The Lord doesn't measure success by power over this world, but by salvation within it. The Lord measures success by the cross. Joseph isn't a story of rolling with the punches, but of a son being cast down and raised up to save His people.

Joseph's story begins with a robe, a pit, and jealous betrayal and ends with a meal that sustains a people dying in a world of not enough. Success isn't measured in power, but in the Lord moving among sinful people to work mercy and salvation where there should be none. It looks like Christ coming down from heaven to walk the road to the cross to bear your sins and die, only to rise and send forth the Holy Spirit to deliver this salvation to you in a meal of Holy Communion. Jesus being in control of the nation of Israel without bearing the cross for her is no success at all.

And for you, the Lord doesn't mark success in wealth or power or the things of this world that pass away, but by keeping you in faith now, through death, and unto the same resurrection. Look to the Word for that. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Come, Thou incarnate Word, Gird on Thy mighty sword; Our prayer attend. Come and Thy people bless, And give Thy Word success, And let Thy righteousness On us descend. (Come, Thou Almighty King,, LSB 905:2)

Patrick, Missionary to Ireland

MARCH 17, 2023

Today's Reading: Mark 10:32-52

Daily Lectionary: Gen 40:1-23

Mark 10:45: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Patrick tends to get belittled. Faithful teaching about the Holy Trinity is truncated to a 3 leaf clover or maybe a satirical youtube video in select circles. His time in Ireland is reduced to fables and jokes about snakes being driven into the sea.

In reality, Patrick was kidnapped when he was 16 and enslaved for 6 years before escaping the country of Ireland where he was brought only to return to preach the forgiveness of sins in Christ Jesus to the very nation that took Him from His family and made him a slave. He was a fierce defender of the Triune God to a culture set against the idea.

Somehow, it's easier to imagine a God who helps the faithful drown snakes than a God who is glorified in suffering. James and John want to sit at either side of Jesus in the hour of triumph. They don't know what they're asking for. That hour is the cross. Those seats are reserved for two thieves.

Sinners go looking for power. Jesus reveals Himself in mercy. The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve. Patrick not only confessed the Triune God, but preached to the sinners Christ died for, assuming the role of servant even to those who held him captive. There's a reason. Stories of glory only help the powerful, and I guess the ones who hate snakes. There's no help for the sinners or the ones without a great escape story. When we go looking for power, only the devout end up glorified, never the sinners. When Jesus works mercy, even thieves can be saved, and all of us join Christ in the humility of the cross that we would be raised with Him in glory. This is a Christianity with room for sinners, with room for the lowly, with room for you. Your faith is not measured in the great works you accomplish but in the sins Christ forgives. All of them. The snake's head was crushed at the foot of the cross where your salvation was won, whether or not you chased the rest out of a country. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

I bind unto myself today The pow'r of God to hold and lead, His eye to watch, His might to stay, His ear to hearken to my need, The wisdom of my God to teach, His hand to guide, His shield to ward, The Word of God to give me speech, His heav'nly host to be my guard. (I Bind unto Myself Today, LSB 604:3)

Saturday the Third Week of Lent

MARCH 18, 2023

Today's Reading: Introit for Lent 4 Ps. 27:4-6; antiphon: Ps. 25:15

Daily Lectionary: Gen 41:1-27, Mark 11:1-19

Psalm 25:15: "My eyes are ever toward the LORD, for he will pluck my feet out of the net."

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. As a pastor, when the Lord promises rescue, I secretly get scared. I've been around cancer that isn't healed. Paralytics that still can't walk. Addicts who relapse. I've heard poor sinners' desperate words and joined them in their litanies. God still said no. And I'm afraid He'll do it again. I'm embarrassed. Of my lack of faith. But also, a little bit of Him.

It's easier to preach about a God who's miracles work more like a vending machine. The 27th Psalm is for my fear and shame. David shows us where to look in days of trouble. We look for rescue in the things of this world. God promises it in His house. The shelter is in the House of the Lord. The victory is given where the sacrifices are.

It isn't just a "look on the bright side, one day you'll go to heaven" platitude. It's a question of which is stronger. The prayers I've wanted to be answered were rooted in a fear God wouldn't help. He already has. The temple is where He gives the victory. Forgiveness that relapse can't undo. Salvation that isn't measured in remission. Resurrection that accident and age can't cripple.

The things we're so afraid of can't actually hurt us here. We are gathered in a fortress that stands as a shield against everything else. It's a question of where God works. Of how He answers prayers. The desperate litanies are met by a Jesus already risen from the grave, promising us the same. Look at where Jesus is, not where you're afraid He won't be. He's in your church, giving good gifts of victory over all you're so afraid of.

In a world where everything falls down, David pleads to be found in the house of the Lord. Because it will be left standing afterwards, even as Christ is risen. Sometimes I'm afraid God will say no. Joy isn't found in the fear and the shame of it. So God lifts me up out of it and sets me on the rock, that is Christ. In Him, in His death and resurrection, I have a yes already given for me, and for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Why spend the day in blank despair, In restless thought the night? On your Creator cast your care; He makes your burdens light. (Rejoice, My Heart, Be Glad and Sing, LSB 737:3)