

REFLECTIONS

Transfiguration of Our Lord-
Holy Saturday

March 2, 2025 - April 19, 2025



MARCH 2 - APRIL 19

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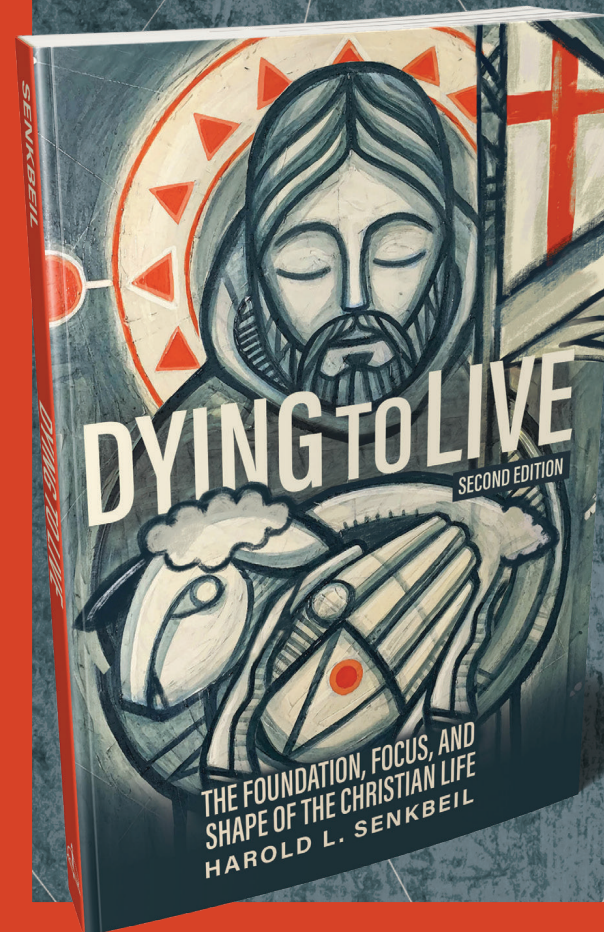
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A Short Form for Daily Reflection

ADAPTED FROM LUTHERAN SERVICE BOOK

Make the sign of the Holy Cross and say:

In the name of the Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit. 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 You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil 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 You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me.

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

Holy Saturday

APRIL 19, 2025

Today’s Reading: Matthew 27:57-66

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 13:17-14:9; Hebrews 7:1-22

“Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last fraud will be worse than the first.” (Matthew 27:64)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

The church leaders go to great lengths to make sure that there will be no confusion about the death of Jesus. Jesus died and is buried. Saturday is a day of silence. Nothing is written about what transpires from Friday evening until Sunday morning other than the placing of the guards at the tomb of Jesus. Silence covers the world. The Son of God is silent. The Son of Man, The Son of God, rests on the seventh day. He rests on the Sabbath. He will rise from the dead on the eighth day, finalizing His work of conquering death.

On this day, Christians all around the world are reflecting on the time of Christ in the tomb. Vigils are held, and Scriptures are read in the sanctuaries. In Christian homes, there is silence as the death of the Son of Man is remembered. In the midst of our silence, there is a lot of noise. Noise from sin, satan, and the world. The noise of a fallen creation is the complete corruption of God’s Holy creation. The chaos we experience in life. The reality of broken homes. The struggle with broken relationships. The confrontation of death at any age. The Old Adam in us reminds us that we are tired from all the chaos. Satan still lays out his temptations before us as we are drawn into secular activities surrounding Easter. We feel as if the world is against us, and we are flailing in the deep end of the pool of life. The desire for silence consumes us, but it does not come.

On this day, many of our sanctuaries are preparing for the Easter Services. As post-pentecost churches, we know the rest of the story. We know that the silence is not permanent. The tomb will be opened, and Christ will rise from the dead. Death is conquered. No longer is there silence in the world as the gates of the grave are burst open. All of Christ’s words come to fruition. He will suffer, He will die, and on the third day, He will rise from the dead. His rest in the tomb on the Sabbath is the final rest He takes. Today, as we enter into His Sanctuaries, He works while we rest and receive the Gifts He gives to us in His Means Of Grace. We receive the promise that we, too, will rise from the grave on the Last Day.

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O God, creator of heaven and earth, grant that as the crucified body of Your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with Him the coming of the third day, and rise with Him to newness of life, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for Holy Saturday)

Good Friday

APRIL 18, 2025

Today's Reading: John 19:17-30

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 12:29-32; 13:1-16; Lamentations 5:1-22, Hebrews 6:1-20, Psalm 22

"he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!'" (John 19:26b-27)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Dying is very deadly. Dead is dark. The light of the world is no longer shining. Darkness has covered the world. The curtain in the temple is torn. The clothes of Christ have been divided up between the pagan Roman soldiers. The disciples have all fled but one. Peter has denied knowing the savior. Jesus hangs naked between two thieves in the local landfill with only one disciple and His mother nearby. He entrusts His mother to John and declares that His father has forsaken Him. He drinks and breathes His last. Dying is very deadly.

His final words on the cross are comforting. His final words on the cross are words that draw our attention to the garden of Eden when God gave us the gift of marriage. In Genesis 2:24, God gives us the fundamental premise of marriage when He says, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." From the cross, Christ separates himself from His earthly mother in John 19:26-27: "...he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!..." Christ has left His mother. In Matthew 27:46, Christ calls from the cross, "...My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Christ is separated from His Father. The son leaves His father and mother and holds fast to his wife. In the death of Christ, a marriage vow is fulfilled. The groom has loved His bride to the point that He dies for her. Scripture is fulfilled in the final sacrifice. When His side is pierced, blood and water pour from His side. In the first Adam, his wife comes from his side. Adam stands by as she eats from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Death is ushered in through their disobedience. The marks of the church in word and sacrament come from the side of the second Adam, Jesus, as water and blood pour out. He is bound to His bride, the church, in the fulfillment of Scripture. Where Adam failed to die for his bride, Christ has fulfilled the debt owed by us in His death on the cross.

All our sins went to the cross on Good Friday. All our sins went to the tomb when He was buried. He who knew no sin became sin for us. Sin is buried. All your sins are covered in the blood of Christ. All your sins are atoned for in His deadly dying on the cross. All your sins went to the grave on Good Friday and were buried. The covenant is complete; the atonement for the sins of the world is finished. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, graciously behold this Your family for whom our Lord Jesu Christ was willing to be betrayed and delivered into the hands of sinful men to suffer death upon the cross; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for Good Friday)

Transfiguration of Our Lord

MARCH 2, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 9:28-36

Daily Lectionary: Job 33:19-34:9; John 11:1-16

"...His clothes became dazzling white." (Luke 9:29b)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. In the beginning, there was no need for clothes. Adam and Eve didn't have them, and nobody seemed to mind. At least, at first. Ever since, there has been a difference between the clothes that we wear for ourselves and the clothes that our Lord provides. Rebekah clothed Jacob in Esau's clothes. They were worn to deceive—worn in order to sin. Joseph's brothers would dip his robe in blood in order to deceive their father. Joseph's clothes would again be taken from him by Potiphar's wife. She covered her own sinful desires with those clothes in order to deceive.

When we ourselves dress up our sin, we claim that there's nothing wrong. That we have no shame at all. It's all lies. It's all deception. That sin is still there. We should be shamed by the fact that we sin. We need to be clothed in something else. We need repentance.

Something different happens when God clothes us. The covering that our Lord provides doesn't deny our sin. It acknowledges that it's there and that it's shameful. Yet we don't hide it ourselves. We don't lie about it and say it's good. Instead, our Lord takes our shame and provides His modesty for it. After all, the clothing our Lord provides gives us the honor that rightly belongs to Him.

When Joseph was called out of prison, Pharaoh gave him the clothes he would need to enter the court, covering up the shame of Joseph's imprisonment with pardon. After Joseph's brothers finally found out Joseph was in charge of all Egypt, Joseph sent them back with new clothes to their father. Covering up the shame of their years of lies with forgiveness and the promise of deliverance from the famine.

The clothes that Jesus gives are His own. They cover our sin with His forgiveness. This is why the clothing of Jesus is so important. For our sake, Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. From Jesus' clothes came power to overcome sin, as some went to touch even the hem of His garments. Jesus' clothes shine brightly forth at the Transfiguration in today's Gospel lesson. Jesus is clothed so that He may properly bear your sin and your shame. And that we may wear His righteousness. And in Baptism, Jesus wraps you in His clothes. He gives them away to you and takes up your clothing instead.

Jesus doesn't always wear the clothes of the Transfiguration. It's from here that He goes down to be crucified. What should have been our shame was His alone. He wears the sin of the entire world, including your sin and mine. All of it is taken away from us, and Jesus carries it all, bearing it before the entire world. And we are left washed, cleansed, forgiven, and clothed. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Monday of the Week of Transfiguration

MARCH 3, 2025

Today's Reading: Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Daily Lectionary: Job 34:10-33; John 11:17-37

"...and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel." (Deuteronomy 34:12)

In the Name of ✠ Jesus. Amen. What is the First Commandment? You shall have no other gods. What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

Sometimes, a well-meaning person will teach that fear here means respect. We should respect God, well and true, but trust means respect. Fear means fear.

When Israel sinned against God in the wilderness, they had very good reasons to be afraid. They sinned, and God sent a plague. They sinned, and God sent poisonous snakes. They sinned, God opened up the ground, and the earth swallowed them whole. It is a fearful thing to stand before God in your sin.

God worked these terrifying deeds through Moses. And even though, in our reading today, Moses is now dead, the Lord is still the one to be feared, even as they enter into the promised rest.

Likewise, we need to fear the Lord in our sin. We need to know God gets angry when we hurt the people He loves. Even when that person is yourself. If He didn't get angry, then that would show that He didn't care. So fear is an appropriate response when we start thinking that maybe our sin is okay after all.

But how far does that fear go? If God is angry over sin, how can I possibly stand before Him when I have sinned? But remember the whole explanation of the First Commandment. We fear, love, and trust in God above all things. We fear because of our sin. We trust because Our Lord has poured out all His anger on someone else.

The entire fiery wrath of God is poured out upon Jesus at the cross. The greatest deed of terror in all history. Everything that should have gone to you and me has instead fallen upon Christ. And He willingly went there for the forgiveness of all our sins. Remember, if God is not angry, He does not care. But if His anger falls upon us, then we are lost. God shows His great care for us by both His anger and His self-sacrifice. He gave up all to save you from your sin. We are able to love Him because of His great love for us given first. And given at His cross. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Oh what blessing to be near You And listen to Your voice; Let me ever love and hear You, Let Your Word be now my choice! Many hardened sinners, Lord, Flee in terror at Your Word; But to all who feel sin's burden You give words of peace and pardon. (LSB 589:2)

Holy Thursday

APRIL 17, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 22:7-20

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 12:1-28; Lamentations 4:1-22; Hebrews 5:1-14; Psalm 31

"Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed." (Luke 22:7)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The meal is ready. The week is coming to a close around the table of the Lord. Lazarus is resurrected from the dead. The temple is cleansed. The disciples have been taught about the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. Judas betrays Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Jesus is anointed by Mary. The disciples' feet are washed. The table is set; let us break bread together. The Passover is at hand. It is time for the lamb to be sacrificed.

A lot of preparation has taken place this week to get us to the table of the Lord. The work of Christ is not complete. Today, a New Covenant is instituted—a covenant between God and His people, a covenant that requires the shedding of blood. Covenant-making is very bloody. The blood of Jesus will be the blood of the Lamb, which is the final shedding of blood for the sins of the world.

In the Words of Institution, a New Covenant is brought forth that nullifies the Old Covenant. No longer will the sacrifice of bulls, lambs, and goats be necessary. The words are spoken, and the covenant is established. Christ declares himself to be in, with, and under the bread and wine. His words, "take and eat, this IS" and "take and drink, this IS" are words of comfort for us today.

Today, we receive the Body and Blood of Christ in His blessed sacrament. We receive forgiveness of sins in His sacrament. We come to the altar beaten down. We come to the altar covered in our sins. We come to the altar with illnesses and life struggles. Our shame, our guilt, our sins are all exposed.

In preparing to come to the altar, we sing the Sanctus, reminding us that a three-times-Holy God that comes to us. As we approach the altar, it is the Agnes Dei that we sing as we prepare to receive the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. He has mercy on us! He gives to us His Body and Blood of the New Covenant for the forgiveness of sins. Your sins are covered by the blood of the Lamb. All your sins are removed before God. No longer does God see your sin. He sees only the blood of Jesus over you.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, in this wondrous Sacrament You have left us a remembrance of Your passion. Grant that we may so receive the sacred mystery of Your body and blood that the fruits of Your redemption may continually be manifest in us; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for Thursday of Holy Week)

Wednesday in Holy Week

APRIL 16, 2025

Today's Reading: John 13:16-38

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 10:21-11:10; Lamentations 3:1-66; Hebrews 4:1-16

"So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night." (John 13:30)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The time is drawing near for the Son of Man to be lifted up. His betrayal is imminent. The betrayer has dipped his hand with Christ. He has put on a facade of friendship and loyalty, but underneath, the "cha-ching" of the 30 pieces of silver is echoing in the background. He sold the savior of the world, the Son of God, the Son of Man, for 30 pieces of silver. John writes, "And it was night."

As we approach the beginning of the Passion of Christ, John draws us back to the tension between day and night. When Judas left the disciples and Jesus, night was setting in. Darkness was coming in the form of a crucifixion. The Son of God was going to be handed over and killed. Darkness was going to prevail. Night was going to cover the world, and mankind's hatred of his creator was going to come to fruition in the death of Christ.

Sin loves the night. Throughout the scriptures, and especially in John, we hear repeatedly the use of night. Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night in John 3, and in the opening chapter of John, darkness is used to show the condition of the world on account of sin. Our lives are filled with darkness, and we live in the night each day. We struggle with chaos all around us. We desire order, but uncertainty prevails. Families are in chaos. Friendships are unpredictable. Finances are tumultuous. We may feel that our church life and walk with Christ is even in want.

Christ sends Judas out to do what needs to be done at night. In the darkness of the pending crucifixion, there is light. The light of the world will be lifted up. Darkness will come, but it will not prevail. Satan's work of bringing death into this world is going to be overcome. Christ is going to the cross as the final sacrifice for the sins of the world. He is going to the cross for your darkness. He turns night into day. In the Revelation to St. John, the New Jerusalem is described as having no sun as the Glory of God and the Lamb of God are its light (Revelation 20:23). Now, we live in the light of Christ, waiting for His return.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Merciful and everlasting God, You did not spare Your only Son but delivered Him up for us all to bear our sins on the cross. Grant that our hearts may be so fixed with steadfast faith in Him that we fear not the power of sin, death, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Wednesday of Holy Week)

Tuesday of the Week of Transfiguration

MARCH 4, 2025

Today's Reading: Hebrews 3:1-6

Daily Lectionary: Job 36:1-21; John 11:38-57

"But Christ is faithful over God's house as a Son. And we are His house if we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in hope." (Hebrews 3:6)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. I will spare you from asking whether or not we're a building (The answer is yes: 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 1 Peter 2:4-5.), but there's another way this term can be understood. The House of Israel is all the descendants of Israel. The House of David is all the family of David through the generations and their servants. That's important. Because Moses is part of the house of God. It's as a servant, but he is part of the house nonetheless.

Moses is a servant. Jesus is the Son. And being the Son comes with more honor and glory. And to the people of Jesus' day, this is big news. Because in all the Old Testament, there was no one apart from God who was worthy of more glory and honor than Moses. He was the Lord's chosen prophet who led them out of Egypt. He was the one through whom the Lord fed His people manna in the wilderness. He was the greatest of all the prophets, and there was no one like Him.

But there was a promise that there would one day be a prophet like Moses. But Jesus was greater than Moses. Jesus didn't have to go see God; Jesus is God. Jesus didn't need someone else to cause the miraculous to happen; Jesus caused the miraculous to happen. Moses died, but Jesus did not stay dead. He rose on the third day. And to the people of Jesus' day, this was a big deal.

Then Jesus did something amazing for us. He made us His house. We're of His household. However, Jesus didn't make us mere servants in the house of God. Jesus adopts us as sons and daughters of God. As a baptized Christian, you've been given a higher rank than Moses had when he was alive. You're a child of God, for Jesus has given you His place as heir of the kingdom of God.

This adoption happens by Jesus' death on the cross and His rising again on the third day. He did that for you. This adoption happens at your Baptism, where you are baptized into His death in order to have His life. This adoption happens as your every sin is forgiven by His ultimate sacrifice. This adoption happens as He speaks His saving Word into your ears. This adoption happens as He brings you to His table and sets you a place. This adoption happens as He gives you His own body and His own blood. You are a beloved child of God. You are an heir in His house. And the kingdom of heaven is made yours. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

We are God's house of living stones, Built for His habitation. He through baptismal grace us owns Heirs of His wondrous salvation. We we but two His name to tell, Yet He would deign with us to dwell With all His grace and His favor. (LSB 645:3)

Ash Wednesday

MARCH 5, 2025

Today's Reading: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21
Daily Lectionary: Genesis 1:1-19; Mark 1:1-13

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 6:1)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. It's always fascinating that the Gospel reading for Ash Wednesday, the day we put very visible ashes upon our foreheads as a sign of our repentance, is the one in which Jesus says not to let your good works be seen by others. So what did we just do then?

Don't we want to be seen? Don't we want the good works, carried out in faith, to be seen by the world? Just a few verses earlier, Jesus does say, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16) Don't our good works at least get people to ask why anyone would do these things? At least start a conversation?

They may. But remember, Jesus is criticizing those who do things in order that they might be praised for them. And that's a far more present danger than putting some ashes on in public. Who doesn't love praise? Yes, please thank me for helping others in need. Shower me with gifts to show how much you appreciate my awesome praying skills. Maybe those aren't your go-to works. But when we start expecting rewards for doing the right thing, then our hearts are far from being in the right place.

It is better to do good with no praise at all than to do good in order to get something for me out of it. This is how Christ does His greatest work of all. There isn't anyone patting Him on the back for going up on that cross on the day He goes. They're all telling Him that they'll pat Him on the back if He comes down. There's no one telling Jesus how awesome He is for bearing the sins of the world. They're scoffing at His inability to do anything for Himself.

However, by Jesus' very public work of dying on that cross and paying for all our sin, He saved us all. Our sins are forgiven. Our shame has been carried. Our death has been overcome. And we're made God's children, clothed in His righteousness, and given a seat at His table.

As far as the ashes go, ask what they're there for. I mean, it's possible you might do it for praise. But probably, the response of the world will be, "What did you do to your forehead?" However, if they're there to remind you of your repentance, then they are well and good. For in repentance, we turn from our sinful hearts and look forward to the sure and certain hope of Christ's forgiveness and the resurrection that He has for us. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Death you cannot end my gladness: I am baptized into Christ! When I die I leave all sadness To inherit paradise! Though I lie in dust and ashes Faith's assurance brightly flashes: Baptism has the strength divine To make life immortal mine. (LSB 594:4)

Tuesday in Holy Week

APRIL 15, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Third Commandment
Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 3:12-27; Ezekiel 4:1-11:25; Romans 2:1-16

"Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." (John 12:25)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"If you are going to love someone, you first must love yourself." The saying is popular among relationship gurus in our world today. The focus on yourself must be first if you are to give love. It is a profound thought to think of yourself first, but in the world of humanism, that is exactly what is advocated. The first-person personal pronouns reign supreme. The "I," the "me," the "my," the "myself" all take precedence over everyone else. It is how we are taught and even wired on account of sin. Love yourself first.

Jesus' words to those in His midst were certainly contrary to their way of thought. We must hate our lives in order to keep it. Those words certainly did not make sense to the audience listening to Jesus. Christ's words were counter-cultural. No one is to hate their life and, in doing so, gain eternal life. The Jews in His midst have reminded Him that they are children of Abraham and that they are set apart as God's people. They are the chosen people of God. Hating our lives would be a ridiculous thought. On account of their hardness of heart, they did not hear the true meaning behind Christ's words.

Our own sin deafens our ears to the Good News of Christ. We hear over and over the words of the world and how we are to place ourselves first and pursue our own desires. Christ's words address our own pride and self-centeredness by taking the focus off of the things of this world and pointing them to God's work in Christ. Every day, we are encouraged in this world to pursue the desires of the flesh. In the Scriptures, we are pointed to the works of Christ. It is Christ who gave His life so that we have life eternal in His name.

In your Baptism, you have been separated from the world. You are in the world, but you are not of the world. You are in Christ and of Christ through the washing and renewal in the waters of Holy Baptism. As you arise each day, the sign of the cross is made, reminding you of your Baptism. No longer does the world prevail in your life. It is Christ who has delivered you out of this world and into life everlasting.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, grant us by Your grace so to pass through this holy time of our Lord's passion that we may obtain the forgiveness of our sins; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for Tuesday in Holy Week)

Monday in Holy Week

APRIL 14, 2025

Today's Reading: John 12:1-23

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 9:1-28; Lamentations 1:1-22; Hebrews 2:1-18

"When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well," (John 12:9-10)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"He is Risen! He is Risen, indeed! Alleluia! Amen!" is a common response that we proclaim regarding the resurrection of Christ. Usually, this response is reserved for Easter Sunday and the seasons following Easter, and when the Sunday of Transfiguration arrives, we bury the Alleluias until Easter Sunday.

The Monday of Easter draws our attention to another resurrection—the resurrection of Lazarus. Three times in John 12:1-23 Lazarus' resurrection is mentioned. Lazarus' resurrection was problematic. Everyone knew Lazarus had died and had been dead for four days in the tomb. He was not just dead but dead, dead, dead, dead. He was four days dead. Now, Lazarus is alive. He is alive and eating, and speaking, and living! The local church leaders had a problem with the resurrection of Lazarus. The chief priests need to kill Lazarus, too. He needed to die again.

Our world around us does not want the resurrection. In sin, the world pursues the desires of the flesh. Philosophies advocate that we have one life and only one life, so we had better get out of it all we can before we die. The world teaches us to pursue the desires of the flesh. The world teaches you to serve yourself. The world teaches you that you are your own god. The Old Adam in us relishes those temptations and wages war with the New Man in Christ daily.

You, too, have already died and will die. The old Adam is drowned daily in the waters of Baptism, and you will breathe your last breath of air at some point. You, too, have already been resurrected and will be resurrected from the dead. In Your Baptism, the New Man in Christ is resurrected. When Christ returns in all of His glory, you will be resurrected from the dead just as Christ came out of the tomb. We live in that tension of being dead and resurrected each day. On the Last Day, we know that just as Lazarus was called from the tomb, we, too, will rise from the dead. We will rise from the dead like Lazarus because Christ conquered death in His resurrection.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, grant that in the midst of our failures and weaknesses we may be restored through the passion and intercession of Your only-begotten Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for Monday of Holy Week)

Thursday of the Week of Transfiguration

MARCH 6, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: Table of Duties - To Widows (1 Timothy 5:5-6)

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 11:1-12:6; 2 Peter 2:1-22

What does God say about all these commandments?

He says, "I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments." (Ex. 20: 5-6)

What does this mean?

God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore, we should fear His wrath and not do anything against them. But He promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore, we should also love and trust in Him and gladly do what He commands.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Why does God give His Commandments? It's not because He has some spare commandments lying around and wants to keep us busy. It's not that He needs something for us to do to show how much we like Him. God commands us to do (or not do) because He doesn't want those He loves to be hurt.

Coveting our neighbor's stuff and relationships causes hurt. Taking away our neighbor's life, family, things, and reputation causes hurt. Rejecting authority causes hurt. Rebelling against God causes hurt. And our Lord isn't happy when we hurt those whom He loves, even when we hurt ourselves.

Jesus loves you. That's not just some Sunday School song. The creator of all things cares so much for you, His creation, that He will give His life for your sake. He sacrifices Himself to pay for your sins. And He does all this before you've even done anything yet. His love is not earned. It is given freely to you.

Breaking those Commandments is to throw away God's Gifts of love, of life, of forgiveness and to cling instead to sin and death. There are consequences for that. And those consequences do last for generations. I think of the things screwed up in my own family, and I see them passed down to my kids. And I don't want that for them. But I also see the faith that has been passed down from generation to generation. And maybe you're the very first generation in your family to trust Christ. There is His promise; hold tight to it.

For we do not keep the Law of God as we ought. But Christ keeps it for us. And the faith He gives to us wants to keep those Commandments. We're both sinner and saint at the same time. And that saint wants to respond to Christ's Gifts with thanksgiving. Keeping that Law is a response to those Gifts. Even though the daily struggle is real, hold tightly to Christ's promises. He made them for you. And he keeps them all. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Friday of the Week of Transfiguration

MARCH 7, 2025

Today's Reading: Mark 1:29-45

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 2:4-25; Mark 1:29-45

"That evening at sundown they brought to Him all who were sick or oppressed by demons." (Mark 1:32)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Why did they wait until evening to bring people to Jesus? Turns out, back in verse 21, we find out it was the Sabbath Day until the sun went down. And even though Jesus had already driven out a demon in the synagogue, and healed Peter's mother-in-law's fever on the Sabbath, they were worried that getting healed on the Sabbath might count as work and that would get them in trouble.

Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. It's the Third Commandment. But our Sabbath rest doesn't come from inactivity. Our Sabbath rest is Jesus. Our Lord doesn't stop taking care of our needs, just because it's between Friday Sundown and Saturday sundown.

And our greatest needs are the forgiveness of our sins, the covering of our shame, the destruction of death, and the conquering of the devil. Jesus keeps the Sabbath in our place by doing that work. On Good Friday (Thursday sundown to Friday sundown), Jesus was betrayed and arrested and denied and had false witness bore about Him. On Good Friday, Jesus was beaten and whipped and mocked, and sentenced to death. On Good Friday, Jesus was nailed to a cross, lifted up, suffered, and died. On Good Friday, Jesus was taken down, placed in a tomb, and had the opening closed.

All the work of Good Friday Jesus did for you. He did it to heal you. To drive away your demons. To forgive you. To take away your shame. To destroy death. To conquer the devil forever. And from that work, He rested. On the Sabbath, from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown, to Sunday before the break of dawn, Jesus rested in that tomb. Jesus rested in death. And then, He got up in the morning to start the week anew. To start the week with your salvation.

Our rest isn't found in inactivity. Our rest is found in Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

I heard the voice of Jesus say, "Come unto Me and rest; Lay down, thou weary one, lay down thy head upon My breast." I came to Jesus as I was, so weary worn and sad; I found in Him a resting place, and He has made me glad. (LSB 699:1)

Palm Sunday

APRIL 13, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 22:1-23:56 or Luke 23:1-56 or John 12:20-43

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 8:1-32; Psalm 118; Hebrews 1:1-14

"So Jesus said to them, 'The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.'" (John 12:35-36)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Spelunking is a unique activity. Inside a cave, where the light of the world cannot reach, pure darkness exists. No light. The only light present is the temporary light that humans bring into the darkness by means of a headlamp, a light dependent upon batteries, or some other form of stored energy. If you lose your light while spelunking, you will get lost.

In our lives today, it may seem like we are lost. We feel that we are aimlessly wandering through each day, unsure of what tomorrow will bring. We struggle in family relationships, friendships seem superficial, our bodies do not look the way we want them to, and our lives seem really dark.

The Gospel of John teaches us about a tension between light and darkness. The darkness that has overcome the world is sin. God's creation no longer walks in the light as Adam and Eve did at the beginning of creation. Now, man walks in darkness. We try hard to create our own light in this world of darkness, but in the end, it is only temporary and leaves us lost in this world of sin.

Christ came into this world of darkness as the light of the world. His light is not temporary but eternal. It shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not (and cannot) overcome it. In your Baptism, you are connected to Christ. You are connected to the light of the world. Sin, satan, and the world want you to believe that the darkness is permanent in your life, but Christ gives to us the defeat of darkness. His ride into Jerusalem was the beginning of the end for darkness.

Today, you can boldly and confidently say, "I am baptized into Christ!" Darkness tries to prevail, but Christ has already overcome it. In your Baptism, you walk in the light of Christ.

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. (Collect for Palm Sunday)

Saturday of the Fifth Week in Lent

APRIL 12, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Palm Sunday - Psalm 24:7-10; antiphon: Psalm 118:26
Daily Lectionary: Exodus 7:1-25; Mark 16:1-20

Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. (Psalm 24:7)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever taken the time to notice the posture of someone who is struggling with death? As we mourn the loss of loved ones, friends, parents, grandparents, we have a tendency to bow our heads. We might bow our heads in reverence of the life lost, from utter despair, perhaps even from guilt and shame over unresolved conflict. It is not uncommon for this to happen. In His human nature, before He breathed His last and gave up His spirit, even our Lord bowed His head.

But the reading today, which is the Introit for tomorrow, Palm Sunday, turns the posture of death on its head! Although we bow our heads and mourn, especially this next week, as we remember that it was for our sins that our Lord went to the cross, the Psalmist David tells us to do the opposite! He says to us, "Lift up your heads..." (Psalm 24:7). Lift up your heads, for "Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he" (Zechariah 9:9).

We must fix our focus outside of ourselves to see what happens. If, in our grief and shame, we look solely to ourselves for strength and comfort, we will be lost forever. Rather, strength, comfort, and salvation happen extra nos, that is, outside ourselves. In Christ, who has been lifted up for us on the cross of Calvary, death has been turned to life for His Children!

Even our Lord, as He journeyed closer to His death, continued to lift His eyes to heaven! At the beginning of His high priestly prayer in John 17, it is written, "When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.'" (John 17:1)

In my church, we have the tradition that our midweek Lenten services always end with the same hymn, Abide with Me. The final stanza of that hymn will be the last thing we hear on Good Friday.

We will sing: Hold, Thou, Thy cross before my closing eyes;/ Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies./ Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;/ In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

What are we praying for in this stanza? We are praying that our Father would lift up our eyes, point them to the heavens, that we would see the Lord coming to us now, in the hour of our death, and on the Last Day. For in Him, the Lord of Life, we have our Salvation. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Hold, Thou, Thy cross before my closing eyes; Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies. Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee; In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me. (LSB 878:6)

Saturday of the Week of Transfiguration

MARCH 8, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Lent 1 - Psalm 91:9-13; antiphon: Psalm 91:75-16
Daily Lectionary: Genesis 3:1-24; Mark 2:1-17

"He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways." (Psalm 91:11)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Coming up tomorrow is the Temptation of Jesus. We will hear the devil tempt our Savior three times. In one of those temptations, Satan will quote Psalm 91, part of which will be the Introit tomorrow morning. He will argue that Jesus should throw Himself down because the Lord "will command His angels concerning you." But the devil leaves out what the command will be, skipping forward to just the results.

But the command is important. It is "to guard you in all your ways." Stepping off of the pinnacle of the temple is the epitome of an unguarded way. But ways are more than just a footpath you might take your feet on. The 'way' in which you live is also meant. That presents us with a problem and Satan with an opportunity. Because we sin. We fall short. We fail when faced with temptation. And for those few short moments where we thought, maybe, that we succeeded, the temptation grows only stronger the next time we face it. Then evil befalls us, and plagues come near our tents.

But the devil accidentally points something out to us. This Psalm is about Jesus. Because it's Jesus who treads on the adder. It's Jesus who tramples the young serpent underfoot. Jesus crushes the devil's head, that ancient serpent, while Satan bruises His heel. Jesus' feet nailed to a cross. Crucified to overthrow the accusations of the accuser forever.

In doing that, all those sins have been taken away. All those failed temptations have been forgiven. Jesus has become your way, and He's the one who keeps you on His path. He has forgiven you. He has given you repentance. He has given you hope. He has given you resurrection. He has given you eternal life.

And now, when temptation's hour comes, you have an advocate. You have Jesus fighting by your side. You don't need to face these things alone. You have Christ, who has overcome your temptation already right here with you. And with Him He brings His Church. You have brothers and sisters in Christ who have also faced those temptations, fallen to those temptations, and have been likewise rescued by Christ. Do not forget their wisdom and experience, for they didn't get through it alone, either.

Jesus Christ has overcome temptation for you. He has won life, forgiveness, and salvation for you. And He walks with you even now on your way. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Christ, You walked the road Our wand'ring feet must go. Stay with us through temptation's hour To fight our ancient foe. (LSB 424:5)

First Sunday in Lent

MARCH 9, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 4:1-13

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 4:1-26; Mark 2:18-28

"The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.' And Jesus answered him, 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" (Luke 4:3-4)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Did you catch that? It's subtle, but it says a world about how the thoughts of the devil and Jesus are fundamentally and diametrically opposed. The devil says to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." He appeals to Jesus' divinity and His almighty power to turn a stone into bread. Of course, Jesus could command the stone to be bread just as easily as God commanded light to shine in the darkness or fish to swarm the sea. But that's not why He's wandering in the wilderness. The truth is that the Son of God does not live on bread, let alone any other form of physical food. By summoning the power of His divine nature, Jesus could have continued to fast for 40 years as He wandered through the wilderness. But that is not His concern.

"Though he was in the form of God, [He] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped," St. Paul writes (Philippians 2:6). In response to the devil's taunt, Jesus does not identify with His divine nature nor muster His divine power. Instead, He identifies with His human nature. "And Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone.'" Even as a man, it's not bread that He needs. "Man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord," says the Law (Deuteronomy 8:3).

The devil's first temptation of Jesus rhymes with his first temptation of man. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). "Be like God, and eat," says the devil. But to this, God says, "Listen, and be like God." For God's Word restores His image and likeness by forgiving our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness. To be good and holy and right is the image and likeness of God.

Having made us like Him once again, God invites us to eat. Man does not live by bread alone, but the Lord has found it good to give us His Word with bread to eat and wine to drink. Thanks be to God for this bread and for the bread that sustains us every day.

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. (Collect for the First Sunday in Lent)

Friday of the Fifth Week in Lent

APRIL 11, 2025

Today's Reading: Exodus 5:1-6:1

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 5:1-6:1; Mark 15:33-47

"Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'" But Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.'" (Exodus 5:1-2)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

If you are old enough or well-versed in classic "Biblical" cinema, you cannot hear these words from Exodus 5 without hearing the voice of Charlton Heston saying, "Let my people go." Maybe you hear a really slow, confident "Let my Cameron go" from Ferris Bueller's Day Off.

What a privilege we have to prepare for what is to come by looking back at previous accounts of Scripture. Exodus 5 is a beautiful foreshadowing of what of what we will remember next week. God's people were stuck in actual, physical slavery in the land of Egypt, and they longed for freedom.

Forget Charlton Heston. Forget Ferris Bueller. What matters is that next week, we will relive and remember our Lord's silent plea to the one who holds the Children of God captive. Don't forget the words of the prophet Isaiah. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).

Our Lord cried out upon the cross. He prayed for His enemies. He said, "I thirst" to fulfill the Scripture. But nothing was as powerful or as important as the final words He spoke.

Unlike Moses, our Lord was not going to the cross to plead with the Devil to release His children from bondage to sin and death. Jesus wasn't asking permission from anyone. He was silently taking back what was rightfully His, and His final words signaled that the fight was over. While hanging upon the cursed tree, right before giving up His spirit, Jesus cried out, "It is finished."

Prepare your heart well to remember the day. That day of victory is your day of victory. That was the day the Devil lost the fight over your soul. The Devil doesn't have a choice in our release. Our Lord has put him in his place. Marked with the sign of the cross, you are HIS!

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus, send Your angel legions, When the foe would us enslave. Hold us fast when sin assaults us; Come, then. Lord, Your people save. Overthrow at last the dragon; Send him to his fiery grave (LSB 521:6)

Thursday of the Fifth Week in Lent

APRIL 10, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Lord's Prayer - The Introduction
Daily Lectionary: Exodus 4:19-31; Mark 15:16-32

"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." (1 John 3:1-3)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

It is no small thing that Luther is teaching us in the Introduction to the Lord's Prayer. Read again what he writes in the explanation to the Introduction. "With these words (Our Father Who Art in Heaven) God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father" (Luther's Small Catechism).

Being able to call someone "father" is not insignificant. It doesn't matter if we have a biological or adopted father; it is something we all need. Whether you have an earthly father or not, we all have a heavenly one! And oh, what our Heavenly Father does and how He cares for you. Think of all the things He does for you. Remember the First Article of the Apostles Creed? He gives you clothing, shoes, food, drink... well, you know the list. That is how God, your Father, provides for you.

But there is so much more. These words of St. Paul are such a great reminder when talking about this. He writes, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:31-32)

This is the love John is talking about in 1 John 3. This love is shown in sending His own Son so that you would have all things. And what is meant by "all things?" It is more than those wonderful and important First Article Gifts. He gives us the forgiveness, life, and salvation, which our Lord won for us. He gives us the inheritance of the Son, eternal life in the kingdom of Heaven. We have a seat at the banquet table of the marriage feast of the Lamb.

Rejoice, for the Father loves you so much that He sent His Son to die to give you all that you need.

In the name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

God loved the world so that He gave His only Son the lost to save, That all who would in Him believe Should everlasting life receive. (LSB 571:1)

Monday of the First Week in Lent

MARCH 10, 2025

Today's Reading: Deuteronomy 26:1-11
Daily Lectionary: Genesis 6:1-7:5; Mark 3:1-19

"And you shall rejoice in all the good that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you." (Deuteronomy 26:11)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. God is, by nature, a gift-giver. The wandering Aramean who went down into Egypt and sojourned there became a great, mighty, and populous nation because of the Gift of God. And after He brought them out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, great deeds of terror, and not a few miracles, He continued to give Gifts. In the wilderness, it was bread from heaven, quail for meat, water from a rock, and countless other blessings. He gave unexpected military conquests and ultimately the fulfillment of the promise He had made long ago to that wandering Aramean's family.

Now this great and mighty nation was on the doorstep of the land that the Lord God was giving them. It would not be long before they would plant and harvest more than milk and honey. In response to these many great Gifts, the Lord expected a response. A Gift received without a thank-you is theft. Robbery. The Lord God Himself defined the return Gift—an offering of firstfruits. But it wasn't just the first of the fruit that God required. He also required a confession of faith. "And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O Lord, have given me" (Deuteronomy 26:8-10).

God doesn't just establish a principle for stewardship. The firstfruits offering was a liturgical offering connected to the great feasts of Israel. The liturgy, which Israel enacted year after year, was in anticipation of what God Himself would do—offer a Gift of His first and best.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God did not hold back and give us His second-best. He gave His one and only Son, the firstborn of creation (Colossians 1:15), begotten of His Father before all worlds. He gave Him up as an offering on the cross. But then, on the day following the Sabbath in the week of Unleavened Bread, as the priest waved an offering of firstfruits at the altar, Jesus rose from the dead.

"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20). By giving your first and best to God, you are not just demonstrating sound finances and good Christian stewardship. You are confessing the resurrection. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

We give Thee but Thine own, Whate'er the gift may be; All that we have is Thine alone, A trust, O Lord, from Thee. (LSB 781:1)

Tuesday of the First Week in Lent

MARCH 11, 2025

Today's Reading: Romans 10:8b-13

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 7:11-8:12; Mark 3:20-35

"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart." (Romans 10:8b)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

St. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 30:14 to remind us of our proximity to the Word of God. "It is not in heaven," Moses writes. "Neither is it beyond the sea." Though it is indeed a heavenly Word and a foreign Word, that does not make it inaccessible. "The word is very near you." (Deuteronomy 30:11-14).

How did this Word get so close? St. Paul gives a parenthetical remark: "'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim)." The Word comes near by proclamation. The heavenly, foreign Word of God comes to us on earth from preachers sent by God to every nation. The prophets of old brought the Word of God near to His people of old, and now His Word is brought to every nation by the apostolic ministry of the Church.

But the center of it all is Jesus Christ. He is the Word made flesh (John 1), the one to whom the prophets pointed and the one who sends out His chosen apostles and their successors. In Christ, the Word has come very near to humanity by joining Himself with our humanity. No matter where He went or what He did, it was always accompanied by a Word.

When someone speaks, his words usually land in the ear, but with this Word, it's different. "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart," writes St. Paul as Moses had written before him. This Word lands not only in the ear but also in the mouth because this is the Word made flesh. "For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink" (John 6:55).

Since you can't eat a word (even a Word made flesh) like other bread, Jesus gives us bread along with this word: "Take, eat, this is my body." In the Sacrament, He puts His Word in our mouths. And since this is no ordinary food, it does not travel to the stomach only to be expelled; it travels to our hearts and plants a new creation.

From a new heart, then, comes new words from our own mouths. He puts His Word in our mouths to speak sanctified words of our very own. The Word is near you, very near indeed.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, open now my heart to hear, And through Your Word to me draw near; Let me Your word e'er pure retain; Let me Your child and heir remain. (LSB 908:1)

Wednesday of the Fifth Week in Lent

APRIL 9, 2025

Today's Reading: Mark 15:1-15

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 4:1-18; Mark 15:1-15

"What evil has He done?" (Mark 15:14)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. It was a fair question. In fact, it is THE question that needs to be answered at every single trial that has ever been held or ever will be held. Everyone needs to know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, whether the accused is guilty of the crime in question or not. The trial of Jesus should have been no different. Unfortunately, by the time Pilate was able to ask this question, the trial of Jesus was fully off the rails, a political spectacle at that point. It had lost all sense of what was fair and just. Jesus was arrested in the night and tried at a time when no trials were supposed to happen. Nothing was as it should be.

It had become so unfair and one-sided that when it came time to fulfill the tradition of releasing one criminal and sparing them from the bitter agony of death upon a cross, they did the unthinkable, even in Pilate's eyes. The choice was between two men: Jesus of Nazareth, the innocent Son of God, or a man named Barabbas, who was convicted of murder.

"The crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" And they cried out again, "Crucify him." And Pilate said to them, "Why? What evil has he done?" (Mark 15:8-14)

The evil actions of Barabbas were well-known and were atrocious. He was a murderer. It doesn't matter where your moral compass points; murder is murder and is wrong 100 percent of the time. Demanding his release over Jesus is what befuddled Pilate! And yet, this is the very reason why Jesus came. To endure an unjust trial, to save sinners, even to save the murders, our Lord went innocently to His death for crimes He didn't commit. His death satisfies the payment required for our sins. To use a verse quoted earlier this week, "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). By His death and the blood He shed which covers us, it is as if those sins didn't happen. He remembers them no more.

And what is more, when our time comes, when our time on earth ends, and we are put on trial before the throne of the Father, the question will be asked, "What evil has he done?" By the grace of God, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the answer will be, "This is my sinless child. You are perfect in the sight of God." "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). In the name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Glory be to Jesus, Who in bitter pains Poured for me His lifeblood From His sacred veins! (LSB 433:1)

Tuesday of the Fifth Week in Lent

APRIL 8, 2025

Today's Reading: Philippians 3:4b-7, 8-14

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 2:23-3:22; Mark 14:53-72

"I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." (Philippians 3:8)

In the name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. For better or for worse, there are situations in life that play by the rule, "It's all about who you know." If you want to get a job, a promotion, or simply have privileges granted to you that others do not have, it can be very beneficial to know the right people.

But reader beware, it is a finicky two-edged sword. Knowing the right person can, indeed, open many doors for you that would otherwise be shut. Knowing the wrong person can cause a lot of damage to your reputation.

We often live as though having the right connection benefits us. And let's be clear about this: Nothing depends on our ability to acquire the right knowledge or know the right earthly people in order to be saved. Be reminded of the explanation of the 3rd Article of the Apostles' Creed. Luther leads us to confess: I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.

It IS about knowing the right person. But it doesn't mean what you think it means. We must know the one who knows each one of us, who knows us by name! We must know Him who calls to us through Scripture and brings us into His fold.

It is that knowledge that leads Paul to confidently speak as he does in our reading from Philippians today. "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:8-11).

It is FAR better to know Christ and reject the world than to be known by the world and be lost for all eternity. What is amazing and brings the best comfort is that even before we had a chance to know Him, from the foundation of the world, He knew us and saved us. In the name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, whom to know is everlasting life, grant us to know Your Son, Jesus, to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow His steps in the way that leads to life eternal; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect of the Day: Proper 15: Series B)

Wednesday of the First Week in Lent

MARCH 12, 2025

Today's Reading: Genesis 8:13-9:17

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 8:13-9:17; Genesis 9:18-11:26; Mark 4:1-20

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image." (Genesis 9:6)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

There's something special about the blood. Prior to the flood, God had given man "every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit" as food (Genesis 1:29). But when Noah emerged from the ark, God provided a new menu. "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything" (Genesis 9:3).

There's one caveat, though. "But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood" (Genesis 9:4). There's something special about the blood. "The life of the flesh is in the blood," says the Lord through Moses (Leviticus 17:11). The blood has a special use. Because of this, the blood of man is sacred. "And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. 'Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image'" (Genesis 9:5-6).

The ethical dimension of this declaration indicates that all human life has dignity because God made man in His own image. Shedding the blood of man is a direct assault upon God, and the penalty is severe. But an even more interesting spiritual dimension begins to emerge when you realize that Genesis 9 echoes Genesis 1. And when you compare God's Word to Noah to His Word to Adam, you see what's so special about the blood.

To both Noah and Adam, God makes a declaration concerning his image in a poetic verse (Genesis 1:27; 9:6). He follows this declaration with a command and a blessing, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28; 9:7). And He gives instructions concerning food. Adam receives all plants and Noah all meat. But God has a caveat for Adam, just as He has for Noah. Just as Noah was forbidden to eat the blood, Adam was forbidden to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

The Tree of Knowledge had God's Word attached to it, Martin Luther remarks, and so was a place of worship. Likewise, God reserved the blood for His Word and for worship. "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins" (Words of Institution). There's something special about the blood.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lift we, then, our voices, Swell the mighty flood; Louder still and louder Praise the precious blood! (LSB 433:6)

Thursday of the First Week in Lent

MARCH 13, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Creed - The First Article
Daily Lectionary: Genesis 11:27-12:20; Mark 4:21-41

He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. (Small Catechism: The Creed - The First Article, Explanation)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us, we tremble not, we fear no ill; they shall not overpower us." Churches around the world sang these words this week after hearing how our Lord Jesus Christ overcame the devil and his temptations. These are words of sure confidence in the face of a powerful foe.

Although, let us not become overconfident. The devil is powerful, but he is also cunning. Scripture depicts him as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), a prowling lion (1 Peter 5:8), and a great liar and deceiver (Revelation 12:9). It would not be beyond that old serpent to throw a few battles and feign defeat in the hopes of winning the overall war for your soul.

Overconfidence happens when we turn from God's provision and protection to our own powers. Overconfidence happens when our faith shifts from our heavenly Father to the strength of our own faith. Overconfidence is when we decide that it is God who needs the defense and protection and that we are the ones who can provide it.

God does not need our apologetics.

The confidence that we have in the face of the old, evil foe, the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world, is the Truth. Not just any truth, but Truth with a capital T. Jesus is the Truth who stands up against the devil's lies, even when they sound oh so sweet. And this Truth is God's Word. He is the Word made flesh, and He cannot but speak the Word of God.

The Father sends us this Truth to defend us against all danger and guard and protect us from all evil. And it is this Truth upon which our faith rests and from which our confidence grows. Martin Luther's famous hymn completes its third stanza with the ground of our confidence: "This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. He's judged; the deed is done; One little word can fell him."

Put your faith in God's Word, in Jesus Christ and His Gospel, for the Father cannot deny His own Word. He will guard you and protect you against all danger and evil.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us, We tremble not, we fear no ill; They shall not overpower us. (LSB 656:3)

Monday of the Fifth Week in Lent

APRIL 7, 2025

Today's Reading: Isaiah 43:16-21
Daily Lectionary: Exodus 2:1-22; Mark 14:32-52

"Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing;" (Isaiah 43:18-19a)

In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

Perhaps our Lord misspoke when divinely inspiring Isaiah to write the words set forth for us in today's reading. At best, it seems like the Lord God is contradicting Himself a bit with these words. Are we sure that God meant it when He said, "Remember not the former things?" Are we sure He wants us to forget what we have done? After all, this is the very God who knows all, makes all, directs all, and is all the omnis from Luther's Small Catechism.

How can THAT God tell us we should forget the past? Does He? Remember this is the same God who told Moses on Mt. Sinai, "I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me" (Exodus 20:5). Does the God who visits iniquity really forget what you have done?

So, what is God trying to tell us? First, take note of His words in Exodus 20. Remember, and do not forget, that He is the Judge of the living and the dead. Meaning He remembers iniquity. Here, though, He is clearly talking to those who are lost in their sin, who see no need for repentance, and who have followed the ways of their forefathers.

But He confidently calls us, who are called according to His purpose. We who are sanctified, redeemed, and marked to "Remember not the former things." Forget the past! Why? Because, as He says through the prophet Isaiah, "Behold, I am doing a new thing" (Isaiah 43:10a). You are the new thing! He is making you into His new creation. He does so once at your Baptism and daily through confession and Absolution.

Our Lord forgets the past. That is what the Psalmist David tells us. Remember what David did and the forgiveness and cleansing that he needed? After that, he wrote these familiar words: "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12).

Forget the past! Our Lord does! Kill the Old Man. Deny him every single day. And, by the grace of God, live in righteousness and purity forever in His presence.

In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

Lord, on You I cast my burden— Sink it in the deepest sea! Let me know Your gracious pardon, Cleanse me from iniquity. Let Your Spirit leave me never; Make me only Yours forever. (LSB 608:4)

Fifth Sunday in Lent

APRIL 6, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 20:9-20

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 1:1-22; Mark 14:12-31

"When the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.'" (Luke 20:14)

In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen. It makes no sense. This vineyard was perfect in every way. The ground was well cultivated and primed for production. It was planted with the choicest vines. When the fullness of time would arrive, it was going to produce the finest of wine. When everything was set, and the master saw that it was good, he went out to find tenants who would live in his beautiful creation, tend to its needs, harvest the fruit, and return it to the master.

You would think that the master would have had a better vetting process and been more protective of his perfect garden. Although the master gave the tenants everything they needed to be successful, everything was laid out for them to a "t," the agreement was broken. Greed overtook the tenants, and they decided to get what they thought they had coming to them.

Now, the Master's response makes no sense. Having treated not just one or two but three servants terribly and sent them away empty-handed, the tenants thought they still had a chance at the ultimate prize, the son's inheritance. What kind of people are they that they would enact such evil and expect no repercussions?

What kind of people? Truth be told, you are the wicked tenants. You are among those who have treated servants, prophets, and pastors shamefully and sent them away and set your sights upon the master's son. Yours are the actions which have caused the death of the Son of the Master, the very son of God.

And although we have treated the Son so shamefully, though we have turned our back on the master, though we "daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment" (5th Petition of the Lord's Prayer), He has done something that makes no sense. He should bring to pass what He said in the parable. He should "come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others" (Luke 20:16). He should cast us away from His presence and take His Holy Spirit from us. Yet, He does what is unexpected.

Because it was always the Father's desire to show mercy to His Creation, He sent His Son into a sin-filled world knowing "He would go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed" (Matthew 16:22). And by His death and resurrection, we poor miserable sinners, would be made saints by His blood. Connected to His death and resurrection, we would receive full pardon and forgiveness for our sins, the inheritance that belonged to the Son, and the crown of eternal life.

It's not fair, but such is the will of God. Praise Him for His continued mercy shown to sinners such as you and me. In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

Friday of the First Week in Lent

MARCH 14, 2025

Today's Reading: Mark 5:1-20

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 13:1-18; Genesis 14:1-24; Mark 5:1-20

"And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea." (Mark 5:13)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Unclean spirits hate water. When Jesus explains what happens after an unclean spirit has gone out of a person, he says, "...it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none." (Matthew 12:43). Waterless places—the wilderness and the desert—are often associated with demonic forces in the Bible.

Such a dry spirit can return. Jesus continues, "Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first" (Matthew 12:45). What do you do when the spirits are many?

Such a fate had befallen the madman from the Gerasenes. So wild and erratic and even violent was he that he lived among the tombs—a place filled with dry bones. No one could overcome his seemingly supernatural strength, and his cries and self-harm repelled most other helpers.

But then the man met Jesus. He confessed Him to be the Son of God. When Jesus asked him his name, he responded, "My name is Legion, for we are many." He took a plural pronoun because there was not just one unclean spirit inhabiting the man. His—or rather, their—wild and erratic and even violent behavior was because there was a war going on within him. A struggle for identity. He was a living example of the warning Jesus once gave about unclean spirits and waterless places.

There is only one possible destination for this Legion to take care of them for good. "Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him, saying, Send us to the pigs; let us enter them." Jesus grants the request but then drives the herd of swine into the sea to drown them. Unclean spirits hate water. And having been drowned, they will not return.

"What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever." Baptism makes you a watered place, a place unfit for unclean spirits. Daily contrition and repentance keep the baptismal spring flowing so that there is room for only one spirit. A new spirit. The Holy Spirit. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

This is the Spirit's entry now: The water and the Word, The cross of Jesus on your brow, The seal both felt and heard. (LSB 591:1)

Saturday of the First Week in Lent

MARCH 15, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Lent 2 - Psalm 74:1-3; antiphon: Psalm 69:9
Daily Lectionary: Genesis 15:1-21; Mark 5:21-43

"For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me." (Psalm 69:9)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Lord our God is a zealous God. He often reminds us of that in the sacred Scripture. Being zealous can be sinful when it is disoriented by selfish ambition and disregard for others, but it can also be pious and just. Such zeal is the desire to guard and protect what is yours from all danger and harm. God is zealous because He does not want to lose His creation to the devil's corruption.

Zeal can also consume God's people. David wrote the 69th Psalm during a time of persecution and trouble. Open rebellion was upon the great king, but he did not want to lose that which God had won. "For zeal for your house has consumed me." His lament and imprecatory prayer for God's judgment was not from a selfish desire to get even with his enemies but that what God had won would not be lost to wicked people. His zeal was for the wood and metal and stone that housed the things of God, yes, but also for the household of God—the people of God.

This same Psalm applies to Jesus. In fact, it is, first and foremost, a song of Jesus and only secondarily a song of David. One Passover Jesus went to Jerusalem and found money changers in the temple. In fact, it was probably something He found every time He went to the temple; trading in sacrifices could be a lucrative business. On this occasion, though, Jesus does something uncharacteristic. "And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables" (John 2:15).

Perhaps the disciples were surprised by the normally demure Jesus' outburst. But then they remembered the Psalm that gives us tomorrow's antiphon. "His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me'" (John 2:17). Jesus' zeal was for the wood and the metal and the stone, yes, but it was also for that which the wood, metal, and stone housed—the Gifts of God for the people of God. The traders had turned the Gift into a work.

It was His zeal that ultimately got Jesus killed. Like David before Him, His own people rose up in rebellion and put Him to death. As in Psalm 74, when the wicked took hatchet and hammer and fire to the sanctuary of God (Psalm 74:6-7), the enemies of Jesus tore down the temple of His body. But there is a sign that God remembers His congregation, His people. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Holy this temple where our Lord is dwelling; This is none other than the gate of heaven. Ever Your children, year by year rejoicing, Chant in Your temple. (LSB 916:2)

Saturday of the Fourth Week in Lent

APRIL 5, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Lent 5 - Psalm 3:3-6; antiphon: Psalm 3:8
Daily Lectionary: Genesis 49:29-50:7, 14-26; Mark 14:1-11

"But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. I cried aloud to the Lord, and he answered me from his holy hill." (Psalm 3:3-4)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"Shields" aren't usually talked about in normal conversation. Some people think of shields as historical battle armor. Other people think about shields when they are used in games or video games. But outside of history and games, how often do you talk about shields? No matter how often you think about or talk about shields, the picture of God being the shield of a Christian comes up often. Here in Psalm 3, as well as in Psalm 46 (and the hymn "A Mighty Fortress" based on Psalm 46) and Ephesians 6, where the full armor of God is described, God's promise to Abram in Genesis 15, Psalm 28, and in many other places, God is described as a shield around His people. Shields are used for protection during dangerous times and in dangerous places.

In our modern world, it is tempting to think that we don't need shields. We like to think that shields have been appropriately retired to history and games because there is nothing that threatens us. We like to think about ourselves as invincible, without anything that can harm us. We like to think that we aren't in the middle of danger. But that's not true. Psalm 3 mentions the Church's enemies who battle against us, and the Church today has enemies and persecutors and many people who despise the Church and everything about her. That says nothing about our greatest enemy, the devil who prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8) We also need to be protected from ourselves, because our sinful bodies and minds work against us and try to work against God.

God is indeed your shield. He protects and defends you. But your faith isn't in a disc of metal or a wooden barrier, but in God Himself. God steps between you and your enemies with His grace and mercy. The Lord takes the place between you and danger. He steps between you and evil. The Lord is your protection and your safe place. He defends and protects you because He loves you. You don't have a piece of armor, but the God of all creation to defend and preserve you. He will never fail, and He will keep your life intact forever.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Dear name! The rock on which I build, My shield and hiding place; My never-failing treasury filled With boundless stores of grace. (LSB 524:3)

Friday of the Fourth Week in Lent

APRIL 4, 2025

Today's Reading: Mark 13:24-37

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 47:1-31; Genesis 48:1-49:28; Mark 13:24-37

[Jesus said,] "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." (Mark 13:28-31)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

During Holy Week, Jesus foretold what the end of time would be like. Looking around, He mentioned the budding of the trees and the emerging leaves. If you look around you, you see that, too. Jesus wants springtime to remind you that Jesus and His return are near. He is coming again. That seems like a strange message just a few weeks before Easter. Usually, we think about the end of the world in the fall and winter as the days grow short and the darkness lengthens. Here, Jesus mentions it with new life and restoration and the plants growing again. The Last Day is, after all, a continuation of Easter and a celebration of new life.

Wait, you haven't thought about the end of the world as a fulfillment of Easter and new life before? That's fair. But do it now. Easter is a spring festival because Passover originally happened in the spring and was observed after that in the spring. As the leaves start to bud on the trees and flowers grow and people start to plant their gardens, reflect that this new growing season points ahead to the "new season" of God's restoration when the current heavens and earth are replaced with the perfected, restored heavens and earth. In a couple of weeks, look at the Easter lilies and think, "Not only is it springtime, but Jesus' resurrection is preparing me for eternal life!" As Jesus prepares you for Easter, He also prepares you for His return in glory when the Tree of Life will bear fruit every month (Revelation 22:1-2), and all things will be new and perfect. Springtime is great, but the eternal life of resurrection with God is even better! Look forward to that day of new life that began when Jesus rose from the grave to new life at Easter.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Herald, sound the note of triumph; Christ has come to share our life, Bringing God's own love and power, Granting vict'ry in our strife. Sound the trumpet! Tell the message: Christ, the Savior king, is come! (LSB 511:4 and refrain)

Second Sunday in Lent

MARCH 16, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 13:31-35

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 16:1-9, 15-17:22; Mark 6:1-13

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" (Luke 13:34)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. People don't like to hear God's Word. It's uncomfortable, demanding, condemning. His Word calls a thing what it is and calls people what they are. Sinners. Enemies of God. God's Word doesn't mince words. And that's why Jerusalem kills prophets and stones apostles. People don't like to hear God's Word, so it must be silenced.

Why did Jerusalem react so violently to the prophetic voices sent by God? The pattern of putting prophets to death shows that God's Word isn't just a few suggestions to improve already good people. It's a violent encounter of the holy God with sinful man. The prophets are well aware of this: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips," lamented Isaiah at the foundation-shaking voice speaking God's Word (Isaiah 6:5).

We are not that different from Jerusalem. Perhaps none of us have resorted to murder at the sound of God's Word, but we would rather it be silenced nonetheless. His Word makes us uncomfortable. It's demanding. Condemning. Even the preachers who are sent to proclaim it shy away from it. But even stopping your ears and despising God's Word is a violent attack on God.

Violence is not God's nature, though. To curb sinful rebellion, God sometimes resorts to violent measures, but that's foreign to His nature. Jesus, the Son of God, shows the heart of God when He speaks as a mother hen. "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" And as the prophets before Him, Jerusalem put Him to death for speaking a Word that people don't want to hear.

But then something ironic happens. When they kill this Prophet, He begins to gather His brood like a mother hen. "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32). On the cross, His tender heart shed the blood that cleanses us from all sin. On the cross, He put hostility to death. With the New Testament of Jesus' Blood, there is no more violent encounter with God—only an invitation to His pierced side. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength. By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Monday of the Second Week in Lent

MARCH 17, 2025

Today's Reading: Jeremiah 26:8-15

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 18:1-15; Genesis 18:16-20:18; Mark 6:14-34

"Now therefore mend your ways and your deeds, and obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will relent of the disaster that he has pronounced against you." (Jeremiah 26:13)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

You'd better shape up! Perhaps one of your parents or a teacher or a coach has said something like this to you. Get your act together! Turn it around! Fix that attitude! Truthfully, we need to be told these things because we get bent out of shape, our acts fall apart, we walk in the wrong ways, and our attitudes are sour more often than they should be. Perhaps more often than we'd like to admit.

Jeremiah has a similar message for the officials of Judah and all the people: "Mend your ways and your deeds!" he says. By this, he means, "Obey the voice of the Lord your God!" Shape up, get it together, turn it around, fix that attitude. Or else the Lord will bring disaster. But if you obey, God will relent.

That's the way the Law of God works. Threats and punishments. Obey...or else. We call this the first use of the Law, and it is somewhat successful in getting people to do the things that they should do. In this case, it worked. The officials and all the people decided not to put Jeremiah to death. But behaviors motivated by threats and punishments don't last. They're superficial.

The Law of God also shows us what we should be doing and even offers rewards for those who do it. The converse of Jeremiah's threat is that if the people mend their ways and obey God, they will be rewarded. We call this the third use of the Law. But such positive reinforcement also only goes so far. We do the Law for selfish gain. The Law of God can keep us from doing what we shouldn't do and even get us to do what we should do, but it will never make us love doing it. And without love, you cannot fulfill the Law (Romans 13:10).

There is another function of the Law. St. Paul writes, "Now the law came in to increase the trespass" (Romans 5:20). Even though the people relented in putting Jeremiah to death, the pattern of persecuting the prophets continued to Jesus, whom the officials and the people put to death for speaking God's Word. But in putting Him to death, God revealed the solution to the problem of the Law. "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20). By increasing the trespass, the Law also shows the severity of our sin and the abundance of God's grace. Turn it around and turn to the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

To Jesus we for refuge flee, Who from the curse has set us free, And humbly worship at His throne, Saved by His grace through faith alone. (LSB 579:6)

Thursday of the Fourth Week in Lent

APRIL 3, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Lord's Prayer

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

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

When Jesus' disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, this is the prayer He gave them. When children learn this by memory, there are some words that are difficult to understand, like "hallowed" and "trespasses." There are some places where the old, traditional translation is a bit confusing, like "who art in heaven." When this is learned by a young child, they are often quick to want to learn something else, something new.

But this prayer is one that no Christian ever learns completely, at least not here on earth. This profound prayer washes over us, each phrase like a profound wave of meaning. God is in heaven, and His name is holy. Ponder that for a minute or for a lifetime. God's kingdom comes and His desires are completed, no matter if we ask for that to happen or not. He gives us what we need, and He forgives us and strengthens us to forgive others. That sounds simple, right? It isn't. How often have you failed at trusting God to do good for you or faltered at forgiving someone else? Then, we ask God to lead us away from temptation and deliver us from evil. The more we pray those words, the more often we see temptation and evil around us. Finally, we recognize that God has an eternal kingdom and power and glory forever, and that doesn't make sense to our time-conscious sensibilities. This prayer that Jesus gave His Church never gets old. You can never pray it and say, "I don't need to pray like that again." This prayer is always good for God's children to pray until the day when His kingdom comes, and you see Him face to face.

When it comes to the Lord's Prayer, don't move on. Don't look for something new. Pray this prayer again and again. Slow down. Don't rush through it. Stop. Ponder. Reflect. Repeat. Wonder. After all, this is how your Lord wants you to pray.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Our Father, who from heav'n above Bids all of us to live in love As members of one family And pray to You in unity, Teach us no thoughtless words to say But from our inmost hearts to pray. (LSB 766:1)

Wednesday of the Fourth Week in Lent

APRIL 2, 2025

Today's Reading: Mark 12:28-44

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

"And [Jesus] sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.'" (Mark 12:41-44)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

It's not polite to watch what other people put into the offering plate at church. Don't do that. Even though congregations used to post a list of which members gave how much money to the church, that practice has (thankfully) been done away with. Still, politeness didn't stop Jesus from sitting next to the offering box in the temple and watching what people were putting into it. He even commented about their offerings to His disciples!

He doesn't do this as an example for you to follow but to teach you that the gift of an offering is a confession of faith. People who had plenty gave something from their wealth, but they had more money and more possessions to go back to. The poor widow, on the other hand, gave two small coins, and that was all she had to live on. She didn't have money in the bank left over. She trusted in God to provide for all her needs.

What about you? It's easy to say that you trust God, but do you? When your money is taken away, or when your health fails, or when you lose friends, are you confident that God is all you need? You would probably like to say that you trust God completely, but that is really hard! Instead, when things are taken away from you, you often try to fix the problem yourself or look to your other gifts.

God doesn't call you to fix problems with your other gifts. He doesn't tell you to take care of yourself. He doesn't try to get you to fix things on your own. He doesn't say, "A for effort, but go try to do better next time." Instead, He tells you to believe in Him because He is the way, the truth, and the life. He gives you every good and perfect gift from above. (James 1:17) He gives you His gracious gifts out of His mercy and love. The Gifts of God are all you need!

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus, Trusting only Thee; Trusting Thee for full salvation, Great and free. (LSB 729:1)

Tuesday of the Second Week in Lent

MARCH 18, 2025

Today's Reading: Philippians 3:17-4:1

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 21:1-21; Mark 6:35-56

"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." (Philippians 3:20-21)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, or so the saying goes. While it is often attributed to Oscar Wilde, the concept of honoring admirable behavior by imitation has a long history. Imitation is fundamental to the master-disciple relationship, which is the paradigmatic relationship of the Bible.

Just as Jesus called His disciples to imitate Him, for example, by washing their feet to demonstrate how they should love each other, St. Paul invites his disciples to imitate him. But Paul did not originate; he, too, imitates. The example he sets is also the one that was set before him by his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

If you don't imitate, then you're an enemy. Paul doesn't allow for much middle ground. Walk according to his example or walk as enemies of Christ. This walk idolizes the belly, celebrates shame, and always puts the mind in the gutter.

It's important to note the goals or the destinations of these two diametrically opposed courses of life. "Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things," St. Paul writes of those who walk as enemies of Christ and do not imitate him. It is a dead-end road. On the other hand, "Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." The goal of imitating the walk of St. Paul is heaven. Even as residents of Earth, we attain heavenly citizenship in imitation.

But imitation alone can be simply superficial. Imitation without transformation is hypocrisy. The transformation comes by faith—first in a hidden way in this life and then revealed in the life to come, when we are glorified in our bodies as Christ is glorified in His body.

While imitating behaviors and actions can have some benefit, St. Paul's invitation is to imitate his faith. For faith trusts the power of God to make all things new. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, by the patient suffering of Your only-begotten Son, You have beaten down the pride of the old enemy. Now help us, we humbly pray, to imitate all that our Lord has of His goodness borne for our sake, that after His example, we may bear with patience all that is adverse to us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord (Treasury of Daily Prayer, Collect for 18 August)

St. Joseph, Guardian of Jesus

MARCH 19, 2025

Today's Reading: Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23
Daily Lectionary: Genesis 22:1-19; Mark 7:1-23

"And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'" (Matthew 2:14-15)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. St. Joseph has a small but very important role to play in the history of salvation. He is only featured in the infancy narratives of Jesus and in His genealogy. He is referred to again in the story of Jesus teaching in the temple as an adolescent, though not by name. Then, he disappears from the story. Presumably, St. Joseph died when Jesus was a teenager or a young man. The Bible doesn't say for certain, but when Jesus entrusts His mother, Mary, to the care of His beloved disciple, John, it confirms that Joseph was no longer around to care for Mary.

Despite his almost cameo appearance in the biblical narrative, Joseph's role is very important. First, in a very simple way, Joseph was entrusted with taking care of the Christ child along with His mother. While he was not Jesus' father by blood, he was a father in office. He was the legal guardian and adopted father of Jesus, and so Jesus was legally part of Joseph's family tree. By willingly taking on this role when He was called by God through the voice of an angel, Joseph confirms the goodness and necessity of dads, and he provides an example of the kind of sacrificial love dads should have for their families. Any young men who read the story of Joseph who hope to be dads one day, or who have already become dads, should be encouraged by his example and selfless service to his wife and child.

But Joseph also plays a spiritual role in the history of salvation. In carrying out his role as the guardian of Jesus, he takes Him to Bethlehem to be born and then into Egypt to hide from Herod's wrath. He brings Him back out of Egypt after Herod's death and settles in His hometown of Nazareth. His guardianship of Jesus fulfills prophecies that show Jesus to be the Son of God. "This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'"

In his adopted fatherhood, Joseph also reveals the Fatherhood of God and the divine Sonship of Jesus. Thanks be to God for the service of St. Joseph, and for all fathers. 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. (Collect for the Festival of St. Joseph)

Tuesday of the Fourth Week in Lent

APRIL 1, 2025

Today's Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21
Daily Lectionary: Genesis 43:1-28; Mark 12:13-27

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Some people are good at making things with their hands. They build birdhouses or buildings; they shape bowls from clay; they paint and draw and create. Then, there's me. I'm not good at any of those things. My reality is that I make something, and then I try to remake it with no success, and then I give up. I destroy the ugly, imperfect project because I don't want anyone to know how badly I failed to make something.

God is the creator of all things. The God of creation made the heavens and the earth and everything that is in them. From cows and dogs to giraffes and hipopotamuses to eagles and hammerhead sharks and all trees and plants, He made everything very good. Then, Adam and Eve fell into sin, and things weren't very good anymore. It's not God's fault that creation was flawed. Still, the God of creation stepped in to make all things new again, even you.

God made you, forming you in your mother's womb. Even there, you were a sinner. (Psalm 51:5) Then, God remade you in the womb of the baptismal font, washing you with His holy name and covering you with righteousness and forgiveness. You are a new creation because you have been united with Jesus' death and resurrection in Baptism. (Romans 6:3-4) God didn't throw you away because you're a sinner, nor did He destroy you and try again. Instead, He has perfected you by His grace and had mercy on you.

The cost for your righteousness is His own Son, who didn't know sin but became your sin. He died for you so that you would not die eternally but have the righteousness of God. God didn't throw you away, but He did sacrifice His Son on the cross for your forgiveness. The new has come! If you doubt that you are a new creation, look to the cross. Look to Christ. Hear your pastor speak on God's behalf: "Your sins are forgiven!" Remember that you are baptized. Receive the Body and Blood of Jesus for your forgiveness. These are reminders of God's grace, yet even more than reminders they deliver the grace of God to you. Your sin has been replaced with the righteousness of God, and you are His new creation!

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

My faithful God, You fail me never; Your promise surely will endure. O cast me not away forever If words and deeds become impure. Have mercy when I come defiled; Forgive, lift up, restore Your child. (LSB 590:3)

Monday of the Fourth Week in Lent

MARCH 31, 2025

Today's Reading: Isaiah 12:1-6

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 42:1-34, 38; Mark 12:1-12

"You will say in that day: 'I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.'" (Isaiah 12:1-2)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Has anyone ever been angry with you? Since you have a pulse, probably. You might have done something to anger someone, or you might have accidentally done something that resulted in another person's anger. Still, it happened. You did something, and they were angry. Perhaps that was when you learned that saying, "Now, don't be angry..." doesn't actually help someone's anger go away. Parents, siblings, teachers, classmates, and others aren't impressed when you just ask them not to be angry.

But on the Last Day, God won't be angry with you. That's the promise of Isaiah. That promise makes you want to throw your hands in the air and say, "What?! How does that work?!" God has every right to be angry with you because of your sin. You live like God doesn't matter and like you matter most. You don't keep his Commandments, and sometimes your actions flaunt God's holiness, even on purpose. He should be angry with you, but because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, His anger is turned away, and He comforts you.

Micah 7:18-19 declares, "Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." God pardons you and forgives you, and He is your salvation.

That sounds too good to be true, but it is true. This truth can't be proven or debated but only believed. Like Isaiah says, trust and don't be afraid because the Lord your God is your strength and your song. He has become your salvation. If you have ever had someone stop being angry with you, you know how difficult that is to believe. But God's grace is true and believable for you. He is your salvation.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Yet as the Law must be fulfilled Or we must die despairing, Christ came and has God's anger stilled, Our human nature sharing. He has for us the Law obeyed And thus the Father's vengeance stayed Which over us impended. (LSB 555:5)

Thursday of the Second Week in Lent

MARCH 20, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Creed - The Second Article

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 24:1-31; Mark 7:24-37

Who has redeemed me...not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death... (Small Catechism: The Creed - The Second Article, Explanation)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. I once heard a corny religious joke about a rich man who wanted to be buried with a bag of gold so that he could bring it with him to heaven. When he got to the pearly gates, St. Peter asked him what he brought with him. The man opened his bag, and St. Peter remarked, "Why did you bring pavement with you?"

The joke plays on Revelation 21:21, which describes the heavenly city: "And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass." In fact, gold and silver and precious stones are frequently associated with the things of God, not just in Revelation's picture of heaven, but also in the tabernacle and later the temple, where God was present for His people. The Magi bring gold as one of their gifts for the baby Jesus. Your church may have Communion vessels plated with silver or gold.

But gold can also be idolatrous. The calf Aaron fashioned for Israel to worship while Moses was on the mountain was a golden calf. Martin Luther observed in his explanation of the First Commandment in the Large Catechism that the most common false god in the world is Mammon. Possessions. Money. Silver and gold.

Silver and gold are precious metals, but their worth is relative. That's the irony in the joke. When gold is so plentiful you can pave streets with it, it's not worth that much. In the kingdom of heaven, there is something of far greater worth.

Heaven's currency is neither silver nor gold; it's the holy, precious blood of Jesus, more precious than gold or silver. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7). Redemption requires a transaction, and Jesus offers the blood that He shed in His innocent suffering and death in exchange for our lives. His death was the down payment on the redemption that will be complete in our own resurrection.

Silver and gold become gods when you put your faith in them, according to Luther. But Jesus shed His blood for the forgiveness of sins, which is what creates and sustains faith. And He gives this Gift for you, sometimes in a chalice of gold or silver, but always with the promise of forgiveness. "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, I believe, were sinners more Than sands upon the ocean shore, Thou hast for all a ransom paid, For all a full atonement made. (LSB 563:4)

Friday of the Second Week in Lent

MARCH 21, 2025

Today's Reading: Genesis 25:1-26

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 24:32-52, 61-67; Genesis 25:1-26:35; Mark 8:1-21

*"Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them."
(Genesis 25:26)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Jacob is well-named. Ya-akob means "heel-grabber," and he is called Jacob because he was born clutching his twin brother's heel. Esau's birth was straightforward, but his twin Jacob was born arm-first, which immediately put his life and his mother's in danger. "In the very midst of life, we are in death," sings an old song in the church.

Yet God had promised Rebekah that she would be the mother of two nations, and that promise sustained her through a healthy delivery. But just as they struggled in the womb, these brothers continued to struggle with each other for years, thus fulfilling the Lord's prophecy concerning these twins.

Jacob continued to live up to his name, though. More broadly, Jacob means "supplanter." The manner of Jacob's birth suggests that he was struggling to be born first, to hold his brother back. Before he knew the rules of inheritance, he struggled for the birthright of the firstborn. Later, Jacob would accomplish what he started when he grabbed his brother's heel, bartered for Esau's birthright, and tricked his father into blessing the whole thing. "The older shall serve the younger," said the Lord (Genesis 25:23).

The heel business is an interestingly inverted sign. Jacob grabbed hold of the promise by striking at his brother's heel and risking a crushed head at his birth. But it's not the struggle of two brothers that fulfills God's first promise. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15).

The devil struck the heel of Jesus and even wounded His sacred head on the cross. But in striving to overcome the one and only Son of God, the devil suffered a bruise and more. "You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed. You crushed the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck" (Habakkuk 3:13).

Jacob grabbed the heel to get at the promise, but Jesus used His heel to keep the promise. So let us grab hold of Jesus' heel, that is, His promise, and we will be born again. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Bruise for me the serpent's head That, set free from doubt and dread, I may cling to You in faith, Safely kept through life and death. (LSB 352:5)

Fourth Sunday in Lent

MARCH 30, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 41:28-57; Mark 11:20-33

"It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found." (Luke 15:32)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

This parable is often called the "parable of the prodigal (or lost) son." But the younger son isn't really the main character in the parable, and neither is his older brother. The main focus is the father. He was shamed by his younger son, who wanted his share of the inheritance early, and he was shamed by his older son, who threw a temper tantrum outside his father's celebration party. Both sons behaved badly. But the father didn't treat either of them like they deserved. Even after giving the younger son his share of the estate, he watched for his return and celebrated his homecoming. He invited and pleaded for the older son to come into the party because everything that belonged to the father also belonged to him.

According to common sense, that's not how things work. When a relationship is damaged by hurtful, sinful action, it is rare that everything is immediately forgiven and set right. When you hurt someone else, maybe it took time to earn their trust back. Maybe the relationship was so damaged that it can't be repaired. But that's not how this father deals with his sons. Instead, he forgives them both and has an important place for both of them at his celebration feast. This parable is really "the parable of the forgiving father."

According to our common sense, this surprising forgiveness is backward. That's the very essence of God's Gospel. God the Father is fully aware of your sin. He doesn't excuse it or say that it's okay. He sends His one and only Son into the flesh so that all who believe in Him have eternal life. (John 3:16) He doesn't hold a grudge, ignore you, or wait for you to re-earn His trust. He takes the burden onto Himself to forgive you and to restore His relationship with you.

When your Father forgives you, He throws a celebratory feast! That feast is the Body and Blood of His Son for you to eat and drink for the forgiveness of sins. That Communion feast prepares you for the supper of the Lamb on the Last Day when you eat and drink with Him in Paradise. Your forgiving Father restores you when He forgives all your sins.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Saturday of the Third Week in Lent

MARCH 29, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Lent 4 - Psalm 51:2-6; antiphon: Psalm 51:1
Daily Lectionary: Genesis 41:1-27; Mark 11:1-19

"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me... Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psalm 51:3, 5)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Taking stock of yourself and how you talk about yourself are important. Counselors, internet celebrities, and self-care specialists will tell you that. However, Christians are not left to themselves for how they consider themselves or how they describe themselves. God tells us about ourselves in Scripture, including in Psalm 51. However, these words don't come with a lot of positivity. In fact, many people would say that it isn't helpful to focus on our transgressions, sins, and iniquities. Confessing that we have been sinful since our conception, even before our birth, doesn't line up with "the power of positive thinking."

The power of positive thinking, healthy self-talk, or self-awareness won't save you. The Lord confronts you with your sin, and denying the totality of your sin is simply living in denial. Don't deny your sin. Don't ignore it and pretend like it isn't that bad. Scripture is true, and this God-given confession addresses the reality of your sin. The invitation to stand before the Lord and confess your sin is a powerful one. 1 John 1:8-9 says, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." God is faithful to you, and that's why recognizing and confessing your sinfulness isn't depressing.

Your faithful and just God comes to you with forgiveness and cleansing. How you describe yourself isn't nearly as important as the transformation the Lord brings for you. After all, Scripture also teaches us to beg God to wash us from our iniquity and cleanse us from our sin. This is no empty prayer or optimistic hope. This is a faithful prayer that recognizes God's power to heal, save, and forgive. That's exactly what He does for you. Your sin is terrible, horrific, and pervasive— and the Lord Jesus has forgiven your sin by grace through faith. Rejoice in God, who hears your prayer and cleanses you from all your sin and sinfulness! Take comfort in the fact that the Lord your God has forgiven your sin and cleansed you from all unrighteousness!

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Though great our sins, yet greater still is God's abundant favor; His hand of mercy never will abandon us, nor waver. Our shepherd good and true is He, Who will at last His Israel free From all their sin and sorrow. (LSB 607:5)

Saturday of the Second Week in Lent

MARCH 22, 2025

Today's Reading: Introit for Lent 3 - Psalm 5:4-8; antiphon: Psalm 1:6
Daily Lectionary: Genesis 27:1-29; Mark 8:22-38

"But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house. I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you." (Psalm 5:7)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The world has forgotten to fear God. Christians, too. We've managed to turn God into a milquetoast deity who makes threats that no one really believes he'll carry through. The god of postmodern imagination has a bark that far surpasses his bite. Instead of the righteous judge who holds the power to condemn or to save, we have an image of a god who nods approvingly at all of our faults and blunders (which we don't think are that bad anyway) and accepts us for whatever we are.

We've lost the fear of God.

But we can't regain the fear of God by making God angry again. This, too, is a god of our own imagination who swings his hammer of judgment without a hint of mercy. True, the God of Scripture often becomes angry, and sometimes that anger ends in an act of judgment or punishment, but this is alien to His nature of love.

To learn the proper fear of God, turn to the Psalms. No other book of the Bible speaks of fear as much as the Psalms. But the Psalms do not try to soften God's judgments, nor do they intensify His anger. The fear of the Lord first recognizes God's righteous anger over sin and His threats of punishment: "For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you." (Psalm 5:4). But it also recognizes that His anger is always tempered by His mercy and His steadfast love.

"But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house." There is no entrance into the house of God, into the presence of God, apart from an abundance of His steadfast love. He is not permissive; He is merciful.

Psalm 5 also highlights another aspect of the fear of God. To fear God doesn't mean to quake in His presence, nor does it mean to disregard the ongoing severity of our sin. It means to worship God.

"I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you." The fear of God is the worship of God, and the worship of God is to receive His Gifts. That's the way of the righteous.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Blessèd Jesus, at Your Word We are gathered all to hear You. Let our hearts and souls be stirred Now to seek and love and fear You, By Your teachings, sweet and holy, Drawn from earth to love You solely. (LSB 904:1)

Third Sunday in Lent

MARCH 23, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 13:1-9

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 27:30-45; 28:10-22; Mark 9:1-13

[Jesus said,] "No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:5)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Hurry up and wait. That's often the situation in this world. You scramble to get a paper or project turned in for class by the due date, and then it takes your teacher long weeks to return it to you. Your parents ask you to get your chores done right away, but when you need something from them, it seems like the hands of the clock are turning in molasses. You hurry up, and then you wait. That seems to be the experience of these words from Jesus. First, He insists that your repentance is needed right away! Repent, Jesus says, before a tower falls on you or an evil dictator puts you to death for no good reason. Don't delay, but repent of your sin!

And then, Jesus turns around and tells a parable that seems to have a completely different point. Instead of "repent before you die," Jesus talks about a patient vinedresser who tells the farm owner to be patient with the unproductive fruit tree before having the tree chopped down. "Let me work my magic," the vinedresser pleads. "Don't chop it down yet; I have hope that it will work out." Right after the call to "hurry up and repent," Jesus now talks about waiting.

It's REALLY important to look at this two-part teaching that Jesus gives in order. First, He provides the Law. "Repent before it's too late!" These words are addressed to comfortable sinners. If you think that everything is okay and that you have life under control, look at your life and repent of your sin. On the other hand, the second part of this reading shows the Gospel. If you are crushed by your guilt and sin, hear that the Lord is merciful and patient, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He isn't quick to judge or cut down trees but takes time to see the work of His Word in people, including you.

If you are afraid that you aren't a good enough Christian or if you wonder if there's a chance that God will judge you because of your sinfulness, remember the vinedresser who begs for more time and more effort before chopping down the fig tree. Your Savior Jesus is patient with you, delivering His Word to you so that you will not perish but have everlasting life. 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 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. (Collect for the Third Sunday in Lent)

Friday of the Third Week in Lent

MARCH 28, 2025

Today's Reading: Mark 10:32-34

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 40:1-23; Mark 10:32-52

"[Jesus] began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.'" (Mark 10:32c-34)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Sometimes, people get a "feeling" or a "premonition" of what will happen. Maybe that happens to you before a test, when you think either "I've got this covered, and I'm going to get an A!" or "This isn't going to go well, and I hope to eke out a C." Maybe you have the feeling on the basketball court or softball field of how things are going to go. But those premonitions are fallible and don't always come true. On the other hand, Jesus tells His disciples exactly what is going to happen to Him. This was no mere feeling that may or may not come true, but the prophecy of the Son of God who knows all things. He told His disciples exactly what would happen to Him in Jerusalem, down to the details of being spit on and mocked and flogged before His death.

That threw the disciples into frightened conversation about what would come next. But Jesus called them back to the reality of what would happen to Him. After His death, He would rise again. This news of Jesus' death and resurrection is the very heart of the Gospel. Jesus' miracles and teachings are wonderful, but they mean nothing to sinners, including you, if Jesus didn't die and rise again. Focus your attention on Jesus, who knew exactly what would happen in Jerusalem and went there for you.

When you have a feeling or a premonition that things won't go well for you, or when you think that things aren't going your way, set aside those self-centered feelings and focus on the eternally true fact that the Lord Jesus Christ suffered, died, and rose for you. He was spit on and mocked and flogged and crucified for you, but death could not hold Him. He did all that for you. His death and resurrection brings you the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. He didn't turn aside from that suffering but suffered and died for you. Those words from the cross are for you: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." You are forgiven by the perfect suffering and death of Jesus.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

What punishment so strange is suffered yonder! The Shepherd dies for sheep that loved to wander; The Master pays the debt His servants owe Him, Who would not know Him. (LSB 439:4)

Thursday of the Third Week in Lent

MARCH 27, 2025

Today's Reading: Catechism: The Creed - The Third Article
Daily Lectionary: Genesis 39:1-23; Mark 10:13-31

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

What does this mean? I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true. - Small Catechism Creed, The Third Article

"Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely" (1 Thessalonians 5:23a)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. "Sanctify" and "sanctification" are words that probably remind you of confirmation class. Do you remember the definition of the word "sanctify"? In case you don't, "sanctify" means "to make holy." So, "sanctified" means "made holy." So, who drives the sanctification bus? Who is responsible for you being holy— God or you? St. Paul provides a blessing to his readers that "the God of peace sanctify you completely." That means it's God's work. Dr. Luther, in the meaning of the 3rd Article of the Creed in the Small Catechism, confesses the same thing: "the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." God is the Holy One who makes you holy.

Yet, you struggle when you fall into sin and when you are confronted with the reality that you do unholy things. Sometimes, you make willing decisions to do unholy things. Sometimes, you want to do the opposite of what's holy. You can't make yourself holy because that's God's responsibility. But you can make yourself unholy, and you can depart from God's holiness. Sanctification is a Gift from God, but your sinful nature still fights against holiness. Still, the God of peace continually returns to you as He calls, gathers, sanctifies, and keeps you in His Church.

Are you a sinner whose sinful nature fights against God's holiness that dwells in you? Obviously. Does that change the power of God to heal, save, and sanctify you? Of course not. The Lord your God blesses you with His holiness because He is holy, and He is your faithful God of peace. He keeps you blameless until the day of Jesus' return. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

We all confess the Holy Ghost, Who from both in truth proceeds, Who sustains and comforts us in all trials, fears, and needs. Blessed, holy Trinity, Praise forever be to Thee! (LSB 953:3)

Monday of the Third Week in Lent

MARCH 24, 2025

Today's Reading: Ezekiel 33:7-20
Daily Lectionary: Genesis 29:1-30; Genesis 29:31-34:31; Mark 9:14-32

"And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said: 'Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?' Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:10-11)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"Who are you to judge?" "Live and let live." "Mind your own business!" How often have you heard these words when you repeat what the Bible says about sin and holiness? Often, when people feel accused or condemned by God's Word, they challenge the person who shares God's Word with them of being nosy or of trying to be the "holiness police." Another way to say this might be that they say, "Who died and made you God?"

Well, no one. You aren't God. Neither was the prophet Ezekiel. While Ezekiel isn't God, God did send him as a watchman to warn the people of God. He calls people to repent, even when they complain that God isn't fair. Those who make up their own rules of how the world should work complain that God isn't fair to them. That's hypocrisy!

So, are you like the people who need to hear Ezekiel's words, or are you like the prophet Ezekiel? The short answer is, "Yes!" You need to be called to repentance. When you think you have it figured out, when you think that God isn't fair, when you resent God's Commandments; repent! The words of Ezekiel call you to turn from your sin so you aren't destroyed. On the other hand, when those around you sin and you see it, you are called to lovingly present the word of the Lord to them. They might not like it. They might get angry at you. They might say that you're "judgy" or trying to be the "holiness police." But their behavior isn't against you. It's against God. God has called you to be salt in the world and a light on the hill that invites people to hear the Word that comes from the Lord. Share the Lord's Word as a watchman who cares for your neighbor, not to bully them into living like you do, but so that they aren't condemned forever but enjoy everlasting life with Jesus and with you.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

If you cannot be a watchman, Standing high on Zion's wall, Pointing out the path to heaven, Off'ring life and peace to all, With your prayers and with your bounties You can do what God commands; You can be like faithful Aaron, Holding up the prophet's hands. (LSB 826:3)

The Annunciation of Our Lord

MARCH 25, 2025

Today's Reading: Luke 1:26-38

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 35:1-29; Mark 9:33-50

[The angel answered her,] “‘For nothing will be impossible with God.’ And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’ And the angel departed from her.” (Luke 1:37-38)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. This isn't the way that parents usually find out they are having a baby. There was no pregnancy test, no excitement and fear for a couple, no looking at calendars or dates. There was just an angel, a virgin, and a promise. When Mary asked how this would be since she's a virgin, Gabriel simply replied that nothing is impossible with God. The Lord of Life established a normal way for babies to be given life— but that doesn't mean that He can't create babies in an extraordinary way. Jesus, the Lord of life Himself, was conceived of Mary in an extraordinary way without a human father. After all, nothing is impossible with God, and in this way, God in the flesh is conceived. That's why we celebrate this holiday nine months before Christmas.

Mary, the new mother, responds in faith: “Let it be to me according to your word.” She has no more questions about how this will take place but simply recognizes God's action in her life and in her womb. Mary is called to a unique role. No one else is the mother of God in the flesh. Jesus only has one mom, and she's it. No other woman is called to bear the Savior of the World.

Yet, Mary is an example to every Christian as she hears God's promise and reacts in faith. When the Lord speaks the truth to you, it doesn't matter if it makes sense or if that's usually the way things work or if that's the way you would do it. What does matter is that God accomplishes His will and that He is merciful and gracious to you. The Lord Jesus was born of a woman, under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive the adoption of sons. (Galatians 4:4-5) You are redeemed and rescued from sin because God makes and keeps promises to you.

Today, confess your faith in the Lord. You are His servant. Let all things be for you according to His Word. The Lord of life has come to save you from sin, death, and the devil. Join in the faith of the whole Church, including Mary, that Jesus has come to save His people from their sins. 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. Amen.

Wednesday of the Third Week in Lent

MARCH 26, 2025

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 37:1-36; Mark 10:1-12

“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Temptation is serious business. There's a reason this topic comes back again and again for Christians, especially in the season of Lent, just like there's a reason that Jesus teaches us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation” in the Lord's Prayer. As we are confronted with temptation that comes to us from our own sinful flesh and nature, from the world around us, and from the devil himself, we hear with relief that the Lord will provide the way of escape so that we can endure temptation.

But this verse is written in context with other verses around it. In 1 Corinthians 10, St Paul writes about the timeless temptations that confront God's people. As he reflects on the people freed from slavery in Egypt, he points out the temptations to idolatry, to sexual immorality, to test God, and to grumble about God's will. Not only did God's Old Testament people face these temptations, but many fell into sin and were judged by God. Idolatry, sexual immorality, and grumbling about God's will aren't only temptations thousands of years ago in the wilderness but also today. In your bedrooms, in your living rooms, in the classrooms where you learn, temptations come. Not only does temptation come to you, but you sometimes fall into sin.

The comfort of 1 Corinthians 10:13 isn't that the Lord will free you from temptation or that you will perfectly stand up under temptation. The way of escape from temptation is the Lord Jesus Christ. In the midst of your temptation and in the midst of falling into sin, Jesus brings forgiveness. When you are tempted, pray that Jesus will send the Holy Spirit to strengthen you and keep you from sin and evil. And when you fall into sin, pray that Jesus covers you with His forgiveness. In His grace, you endure temptation. By the work of the Holy Spirit, you are strengthened against temptation. By the grace of God, you are forgiven and redeemed. You endure all things by the grace and mercy of God, even when it seems like you are a failure as a Christian. Your “success” as a Christian isn't up to you; it completely relies on the grace of God that makes you righteous and holy as a saint of God.

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

In your hearts enthrone Him; There let Him subdue All that is not holy, All that is not true: Crown Him as your captain In temptation's hour; Let His will enfold you In its light and pow'r. (LSB 512:5)