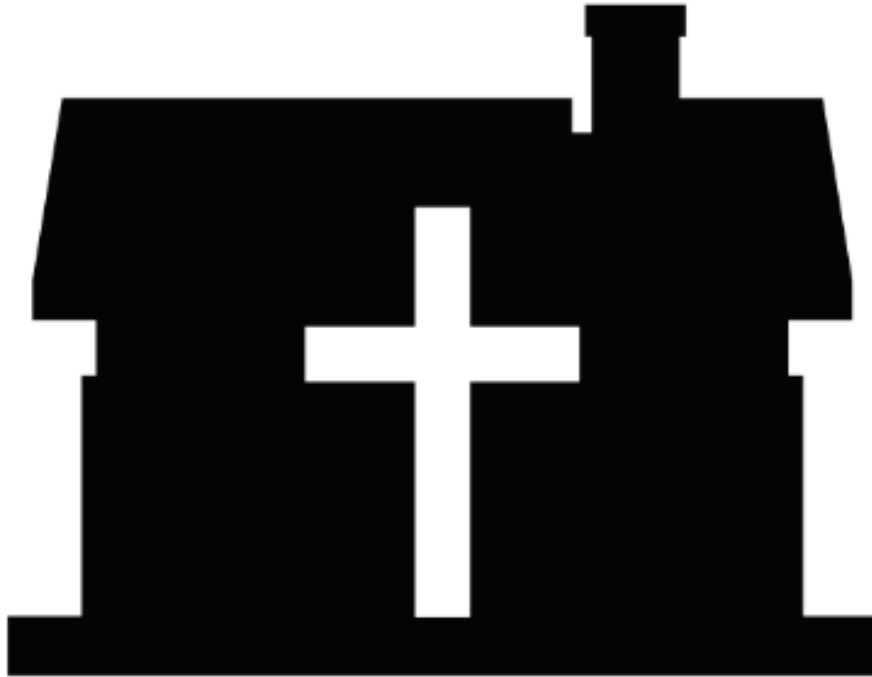


Worship Companion



Ash Wednesday - Day of Pentecost

February 17, 2021 - May 23, 2021

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Foreword

As I sit down to write these introductory remarks, it is almost 11 months to the day of the 2020 pandemic shut downs. It feels more like 11 years have passed than 11 months. Nevertheless, here we are. I feel privileged that over these 11 months I've been able to create four volumes of the "Worship Companion" in an effort to provide "worship at home" resources for so many feeling isolated and disconnected during this socially distant time.

Assembling each volume of the Worship Companion is far more work than one person can do alone. I am eternally grateful and indebted to my friends, peers, & colleagues who have contributed sermons, prayers, and other liturgical bits and pieces for these volumes. To date, I've had submissions from 45 volunteers, spanning 18 ELCA synods, and 3 ecumenical partners. My goal, starting with the second volume of the Worship Companion, was to fashion a resource that was reflective of the ELCA's diversity with as many different voices as possible including: active parish pastors, retired pastors, interim pastors, men, women, people of all races and background; bishops, synod staff, churchwide employees, laity, as well as other ecumenical partners.

I'm proud to say that this volume continues in that rich tradition. As I was reaching out to contributors I found myself reaching back into my own life, and among the list of contributors I see the story of my faith and ministry spread across 30 years.

Rev. Leonard Bolick (The Resurrection of Our Lord) has been a friend to my family for as long as I can remember.

Rev. Joanna Stallings (Lent 5) currently serves as the pastor at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Goldsboro, NC. Good Shepherd is the community where I was raised, formed, and the building where I was both confirmed and ordained.

Rev. Karl Jone Stone (Easter 5) and **Rev. Eric Bostrom** (Lent 1) were counselors at Trinity Lutheran Seminary's "Summer Seminary Sampler" in 1999. That three week program was where I heard the call on my life, and is the reason these Worship Companions came into being.

Rev. Angel Jackson (Lent 4) has been a trusted friend, confidant, and a partner in ministry since our time at Capital University in Columbus, OH.

Rev. Dominic Guido (Lent 2), **Rev. Travis Meier** (Maundy Thursday), **Ashley Wheeler** (Easter 4), **Rev. Krista Zimmerman** (Ascension of Our Lord), **Rev. Carolyn Albert Donovan** (Consulting & Support), and **Daniel Schwandt** (Thanksgiving for the Word) are all friends from my time at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Rev. Guido and Rev. Albert Donovan have contributed to every volume of the Worship Companion, a fact that leaves me eternally grateful for their friendship, insights, and support.

Rev. Paul Offhaus (Palm Sunday) is an amazing pastor, and a true friend that I happened to meet along the way.

I met both **Rev. John Marschhausen** (Good Friday), and **Rev. Thomas Benedum** (Easter 3) while serving at my first call, St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Avon, CT. Their experience, patience, and friendship to me as a first call pastor were just a few of the things that made my time at St. Matthew so special.

I met **Rev. Wayne Gollenburg** (Pentecost) at my second call. We were introduced by Tom Buchanan, a dear friend who entered the Kingdom Eternal last April, and who we both miss dearly. **Rev. Jeff Stalley** (Easter 6) currently serves at Zion Lutheran Church in Southington, CT. Zion is a wonderful community that I had the privilege of serving as my second call, and I remember fondly. **Rev. Corey Wagonfield** (Easter 2) is a colleague in ministry I have met since returning to Columbus, OH and the Southern Ohio Synod. **Rev. Hunter Sipe** (Lent 3) is a church planting pastor, and an amazing ecumenical partner here in the greater Columbus area. Finally, **Nate Terry** (Prayer of the Day) serves as the Office Administrator at Faith Lutheran Church in Whitehall, OH where I currently serve.

I list all these contributors by name for two reasons. First is to say thank you, for all that they have done to support this project, and the ministry of the church. Second is to underline what my mentor Rev. William S. Carter often said — ministry is a relay race. We move where the Spirit leads us, picking up where others left off, while handing our ministry to others.

As I look at this list of names I am reminded that God was there every step of the way through my life, good times and bad. So as we all approach the 1 year anniversary of the pandemic shut downs in March, as uncertainty about vaccine availability escalates, and as there is still no real end to all this in sight, I pray we all remember the good news — God is with us every step of the way.

Rev. Daniel W. Hille
Columbus, OH
Transfiguration of Our Lord, 2021

SERMONS

February 17, 2021

Rev. Daniel W. Hille, Pastor, Faith Lutheran Church, Whitehall, OH

February 21, 2021

Rev. Eric Bostrom, Pastor, Sheridan Lutheran Church, Lincoln, NE

February 28, 2021

Rev. Dominic V. Guido, Senior Pastor, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Crestview Hills, KY

March 7, 2021

Rev. Hunter Sipe, Pastor, Good Shepherd Bible Church, Blacklick, OH

March 14, 2021

Rev. Angel Jackson, St. Jacob Lutheran Church, North Canton, OH
Coordinator of Candidacy & First Call Theological Education, Northeast OH Synod,

March 21, 2021

Rev. Joanna Stallings, Pastor, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Goldsboro, NC

March 28, 2021

Rev. Paul Offhaus, Pastor, St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, IN

April 1, 2021

Rev. Travis Meier, Pastor, Peace Lutheran Church, College Station, TX

April 2, 2021

Rev. John J. Marschhausen, Transition Pastor, Concordia Lutheran Church,
Manchester, CT

April 4, 2021

Rev. Leonard Homer Bolick, Pastor, St. Stephen's Lutheran Church, Hickory, NC

April 11, 2021

Rev. Corey Wagonfield, Pastor, Resurrection Lutheran Church, Lebanon, OH

April 18, 2021

Rev. Thomas Benedum, Retired Lutheran Pastor & Navy Chaplain, Ellisville, MO

April 25, 2021

Ashley Wheeler, MDiv, Candidacy Coordinator at Luther Seminary, Minneapolis, MN

May 2, 2021

Rev. Karl-John N. Stone, Pastor, House of Prayer Lutheran Church, Franklin, WI

May 9, 2021

Rev. Jeff Stalley, Pastor, Zion Lutheran Church, Southington, CT

May 16, 2021

Rev. Krista Zimmerman, Pastor, Mount Pleasant Lutheran Church, Racine, WI

May 23, 2021

Rev. Wayne Gollenberg, Retired parish pastor having served congregations on Long Island, New York and Connecticut

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship, Prayers of Intercession

Rev. Daniel W. Hille, Pastor, Faith Lutheran Church, Whitehall, OH

Prayers Of The Day

Nate Terry, Office Administrator, Faith Lutheran Church, Whitehall, OH

Thanksgiving for the Word

Rev. Daniel Schwandt, doctoral student in organ performance at the university of Notre Dame, and Music Associate at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, South Bend, IN

Closing Prayer

Rev. Yehiel Curry, Bishop, Metropolitan Chicago Synod, ELCA

Consultant & Support

Rev. Carolyn Albert Donovan, Pastor, Peace Lutheran Church, Austin, TX

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Ash Wednesday

February 17, 2021

Call To Worship

(Adapted from Psalm 50)

Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

**Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love.**

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

**Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love.**

Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

**Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love.**



Prayer of the Day

Heavenly Father, thank you for the many treasures you give us, both in Heaven and here on Earth. We pray that we may have the courage and the passion to share those treasures with those who need them, even when no one is looking. Give us the strength to use our gifts in a way that is pleasing to you, Almighty Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Gospel - Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

6 "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2 "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. **3** But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. **5** "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the

synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Sermon - Rev. Daniel W. Hille,

Pastor, Faith Lutheran Church, Whitehall, OH

A child is born. Wide-eyed and screaming Sarah enters a world filled with newness, filled with lights and sounds. At a few months of age Sarah is brought into a sanctuary, where gathered in the arms of love, the Spirit of God descends upon her and a new, young pastor makes the sign of the cross on her forehead. With the sign of the cross Sarah is marked as a child of God, one of his beloved. Sarah is welcomed into God's family, into God's story, into Christ's victory over death, and into life everlasting.

Tears begin to form in the eyes of her parents as they are overcome with joy and pride on this most special day. The palms of sponsors, Godparents, and grandparents perspire and squeeze one another, and with a gulp they watch this new entry into the kingdom of God, as she is showered by the grace of God and marked by the cross of Christ forever.

The congregation watches as the child, in the arms of the pastor, is anointed with oil, leaving the faint shape of the cross on her brow. As the congregation watches, some wide-eyed, some inattentive, and some merely wanting to sit down, a little boy tugs on his father's jacket and asks, "Daddy, is it still there?" pointing to his own forehead.

Sarah grows up and is brought into that sanctuary every week. Some Sundays willingly and some Sundays with a fight. At 7-years-old there is a thrill and wonder one Wednesday night when Sarah has ashes rubbed on her head. Seven years later, that wonder has worn off, and is replaced by distain for the pastor's hand and the dirty ash that clogs the pours and messes up the carefully applied make-up of a 14-year-old girl. At 21, Sarah, a young adult, stops to question, "What do these ashes mean?"

Sarah marries and has a child of her own. Months after she is born she takes her daughter into that same sanctuary, where gathered in the arms of love the Spirit descends upon her child as the same pastor uses his now-wrinkled hand to tenderly make the sign of the cross on the child's forehead. Again, the kingdom of God showers forth as another is welcomed into God's family and Sarah's daughter, as had happened to her mother, is marked with the cross of Christ forever and invited into life everlasting.

Months later Sarah, both a mother and a child, with both her Mother and her child, stands in that familiar aisle, of that familiar sanctuary, on a familiar Wednesday night. The familiar pastor, with graying hair, as he has for years, touches a small plate, then his hand glides a short distance. It caresses her daughter's head, then her head, then her mother's - "Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return."

Seasons change. Daughters become mothers; mothers become grandmothers, and grandmothers die. Sarah, now a grandmother herself stands with clammy hands, perspiring and squeezing, in that old, familiar sanctuary. The old familiar pastor holds Sarah's granddaughter. Using his shaky, wrinkled hand, the pastor makes the sign of the cross, sealing her forehead with the cross of Christ forever so that she might know the Lord, and share in His victory over death, joining life everlasting. It's then, when a small voice can be heard from amongst the pews. Tugging on his father's coattail and pointing at his own forehead a young child innocently asks, "Daddy, is it still there?"

Three days later, in that familiar aisle of that familiar sanctuary, Sarah stands in a familiar line. There, in line with her daughter, and granddaughter tears begins to swell in her eyes as she misses her own mother. Standing in line that Wednesday night she notices that someone forgot to return the baptismal font to to the narthex on Sunday afternoon, and it is still in the middle of the center aisle.

Approaching the font, she cannot take her eyes off of it. This font seems so out of place on this night marked by ash and mortality, but as she looks at it she cannot help but think of her granddaughter's baptism, and her daughter's baptism. Her mind moves to stories of her own baptism, which bring back fond memories of her mother, and her grandmother. With that she takes step forward, closes her eyes and is met by the familiar, shaky caress and words she's heard so many times before, "Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Sarah returns to her seat. She puts her arm around her daughter, smiles at her granddaughter, and thinks of her mother.

Seasons change.

Is it still there?

Yes. For you have been marked by the cross of Christ, forever.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered in our homes and around the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Holy and merciful Lord, as we begin our Lenten journey, hold us close. Lead us and guide us through this season as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, in preparation for the glories that await on the other side.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Master of the universe, and maker of all things, you breathed your spirit into the dirt and created humanity. On this day we remember that we are dust and to dust we shall return. Remind us this day, that in our return to the dust, our spirits return to you O Lord, as you are the alpha and the omega.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

God of the sick and lowly, as we begin our Lenten disciplines many will take on penitential hardships across these 40 days to draw them closer in faith. Lord we pray especially for those with more hardships than they can handle, those weighed down by chronic illnesses, systemic oppression, financial burdens, and the loss of loved ones. Be with all those we name before you now, both silently and aloud.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

Praise to you, Word of life,
for, in receiving you through sound and silence,
song and image,
we are nourished in our fasting
and strengthened in our weakness.

For the Word of life, we praise you, O God:

We praise you, O God.

Blessing be to you, Word of mercy,
for, in receiving the assurance of forgiveness
we are freed to follow you through the desert,
bearing our cross,
and announcing your reign.

For the Word of mercy, we bless you, O God:

We bless you, O God.

Thanks be to you, Word of promise,
for, in receiving your covenant through the scriptures
you plant deep in our hearts
the seed of resurrection
and the hope of baptism.

For the Word of promise, we thank you, O God:

We thank you, O God.

Almighty and everlasting God, you abide with your church in times of trial and in times of joy. Sustain us as a community as we long to return to the waters of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Enliven us in the ways we receive and live the words of our worship, so that all creation may know the promises of life in you. Draw us together as one body, Lord, as you remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

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

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice, O Lord, that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters, even from our homes.

First Sunday in Lent

February 21, 2021

Call To Worship

(Adapted from Psalm 25)

I trust in you;
do not let me be put to shame,
nor let my enemies triumph over me.

**In you, Lord my God,
I put my trust.**

No one who hopes in you
will ever be put to shame,

**In you, Lord my God,
I put my trust.**

Do not remember the sins of my youth
and my rebellious ways;

**In you, Lord my God,
I put my trust.**



Prayer of the Day

Lord, let us remember our baptism in you. Wash over us with your Holy Spirit and watch over us during times of hardship in our lives. Let Jesus' ceaseless proclamation of the good news, even in times of trial be a reminder to always share your word. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Gospel - Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." ¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. ¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Sermon - Rev. Eric Bostrom,

Pastor, Sheridan Lutheran Church, Lincoln, NE

Last Sunday was a Mountain Top Experience

This Sunday is the opposite; it is a wilderness experience.

As people of faith we experience both.

The Wilderness of our life. The rough times in life: Depression, Divorce, Death, Disaster, Disease.

After my father's death was a wilderness time.

My awkward Jr. and Sr. High years – wilderness.

Families separated and uprooted because of natural disasters – wilderness.

The Great Depression was a time of wilderness for many in the WWII generation.

Living a life of faith isn't just about mountain top experiences, it's also about times in the wilderness.

The Wilderness is a common and repeated theme in Scripture. The 40 years of Israel wandering in the desert. The 40 days of Noah in the ark: these are both wilderness experiences. Dangerous and uncertain times.

Even Jesus experienced the wilderness of the desert and the wilderness of his spirit. In the 40 days of wilderness, Jesus was confronted with human vulnerability. The vulnerability of hunger. The vulnerability of being with the wild beasts. The vulnerability of doubting the presence of God.

Lent is a time when we come face to face with our vulnerability. "Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return." We are vulnerable to death. We are vulnerable to the temptation and deception of sin. We are vulnerable to the wild beasts in the world. We are vulnerable to a life that is dangerous and uncertain.

Vulnerability is uncomfortable. The 40 days of temptation in the wilderness were uncomfortable for Jesus, too. Jesus knows what we are going through in our vulnerable seasons of life. Jesus used his 40 vulnerable days to figure some important things out inside himself so he could heal, lead, and move forward. And I know that Jesus will help us figure out the tough stuff inside us so we can heal, lead, and move forward.

Over and over again in the Bible we learn that there is something about wilderness experiences that draw us closer to God. Or God draws closer to us in the wilderness. When we are in the wilderness we are vulnerable. And when we are vulnerable God does God's best work. So remember you are dust. Remember you will die. Remember you are a sinner. Be honest about how these realities make you uncomfortable and afraid. In this honest, you will discover God's love, grace, and forgiveness is closer than ever.

Amen

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered in our homes and around the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

God of all time and space, as your voice spoke over the waters of the Jordan River help us to hear your voice still speaking to us in our lives. Draw our attention to you, and what you are doing in the world around us as your kingdom continues to come near.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Almighty God, you sent the angels and wild animals to attend to Jesus through all the temptations and hardships of the desert. As we continue to walk through the scariness and hardships of this pandemic, remind us that you send friends and family that we might care for each other as we walk together during this desert time.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Christ Our King, you call us to feed the hungry, visit the imprisoned, and care for the sick. During this time of continued social distancing, we pray for all those cut off from the world do to illness. We remember those who feel forgotten. We pray for wholeness and care for those impact by COVID19, and all other sickness & pain in the world.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

Praise to you, Word of life,
for, in receiving you through sound and silence,
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and the hope of baptism.

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We thank you, O God.

Almighty and everlasting God, you abide with your church in times of trial and in times of joy. Sustain us as a community as we long to return to the waters of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Enliven us in the ways we receive and live the words of our worship, so that all creation may know the promises of life in you. Draw us together as one body, Lord, as you remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

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

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice, O Lord, that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters, even from our homes.

Second Sunday in Lent

February 28, 2021

Call To Worship

(Adapted from Psalm 22)

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?

**From birth I was cast on you;
from my mother's womb you have been my God.**

In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.

**From birth I was cast on you;
from my mother's womb you have been my God.**

Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.

**From birth I was cast on you;
from my mother's womb you have been my God.**

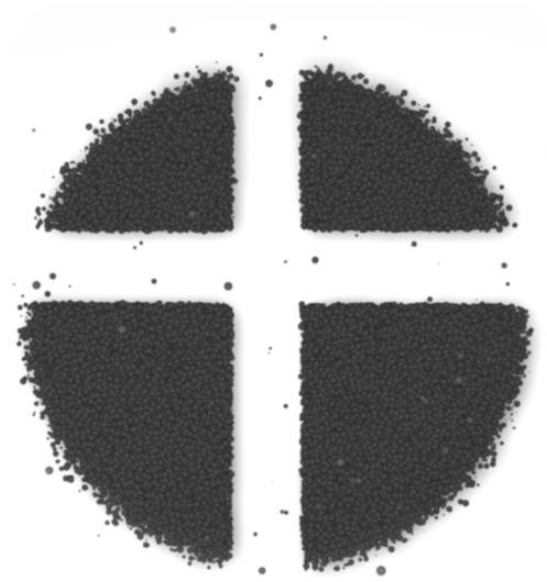
Prayer of the Day

Almighty Father, let us not be deterred by those in power and teachers of the law who go against your teachings. Let us focus our eyes upon You and not be swallowed up in worldly possessions or habits. Grant us the clarity to know how to serve You best, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Gospel - Mark 8:31-38

³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."



³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Sermon - Rev. Dominic V. Guido,

Senior Pastor, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Crestview Hills, KY

Water. Earth. Fire. Air. Long ago the four nations lived together in harmony. Then everything changed when the Fire Nation attacked. Only the Avatar, master of all four elements could stop them. But, when the world needed him most, he vanished. One hundred years passed and my brother and I discovered the new Avatar, an airbender named Aang. And, although his airbending skills are great, he has a lot to learn before he's ready to save anyone. But, I believe Aang can save the world.

Those are the words of the opening voiceover of almost every episode of the cartoon *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, of which I have been a big fan ever since it debuted in 2005. The show ran four seasons, and is a really approachable self-contained story about a boy named Aang, who must grapple with his identity as the Avatar, a sort of superhuman arbiter, who can control all four elements of water, earth, air and fire (whereas most people in that world can control or "bend" one element at most). The Avatar is meant to use their abilities to maintain harmony between the four nations, each centered on one of the elements.

Possibly the most interesting character in the whole series is known as Uncle Iroh. Iroh is the brother of the Fire Lord, who rules the Fire Nation, and serves throughout the series as a mentor to his nephew Prince Zuko. Throughout his life, Iroh had wrestled with a prophetic dream that he had in his youth. He dreamed of conquering the capitol of the Earth Kingdom, but as the series goes on, it isn't Iroh, who conquers the city for the Fire Nation. So, now Iroh has to try and understand how his dream could have been so wrong. Later on, however, Iroh realizes that his dream wasn't wrong. He was meant to conquer the city. Instead of conquering it in the name of the Fire Lord, however, Iroh would liberate it from the clutches of his tyrannical brother, re-claiming the city for the people of the Earth Kingdom. And, reflecting on that prophetic dream, Uncle Iroh tells his nephew "destiny is a funny thing, Prince Zuko. It never happens the way you expect."

On this second Sunday here in this season of Lent, we might make a similar statement of Jesus's identity as God's messiah. It's a funny thing being the anointed one of God, dear people. It never happens the way you expect.

Now, Mark's gospel, from which we have been hearing throughout this church year, and from which we will hear again on Palm/Passion Sunday and Easter, wants us very much to understand that Jesus is the Messiah. In fact, the opening words of Mark are: "The beginning of the Good News of

Jesus Christ, the Son of God." And, that word "Christ," this title for Jesus comes from a Greek word which means the same as Messiah: and that meaning is "anointed one." This identification of Jesus as God's anointed: the Messiah, the Christ, marks Jesus out with royal distinction, since anointing was the way that the people of Israel had set apart their kings in their history.

Mark's narrative is full of stories that mark out Jesus as the Messiah. At Christ's baptism, he hears a voice call out from heaven that he, Jesus, is the very son of God. We heard a similar announcement two weeks ago in the story of the Transfiguration, where a similar divine voice announces a similar message, this time to a wider audience, with Peter, James, and John standing atop the mountain with Jesus. And, at Christ's death, the centurion standing guard will repeat the same assertion, "truly this man was God's son."

Throughout Mark, even demons and unclean spirits make the same assertion, frequently referring to Jesus as the Son of God, as they are cast out. And, perhaps most pointedly, directly before our reading today, Jesus' disciple Peter makes a confession of faith, saying that Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed one of God.

And, in making this repeated assertion, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed one; Mark's gospel is inviting a set of assumptions about what this title means. On one hand, there are the royal dimensions. Again, the monarchs of God's people, Israel, were anointed as a sign of their royal authority. Messianic identification within the whole of sacred scripture is used broadly to identify those who act to deliver the people of God. In the book of Isaiah, this imagery of being God's anointed is used for the Persian emperor Cyrus. Cyrus is described as God's anointed, because Cyrus is the one who sets the people of God free from their captivity in Babylon, and allows them to return to the land that God promised to their ancestors and eventually to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. And, in the apocalyptic visions in the book of Daniel, we can read of a figure in Daniel's vision who is "like a human being." Some Bible translations call this figure a "Son of Man." And, this figure is given royal power, royal dominion to deliver the people of God from their captivity in Babylon. The commonality in all these scriptural depictions of God's anointed is that the Messiah, the anointed one is the one who delivers the people.

But, it's a funny thing being the anointed one of God, dear people. It never happens the way you expect, because here in our reading today, and throughout the rest of these forty days of preparation leading to the Great Three Days of his death and resurrection Jesus is going to continually re-frame what it means to be the Messiah. It's what Jesus does as our reading opens. Having just been identified by Peter as God's anointed, Jesus begins to teach that he must go to Jerusalem, that he must undergo great suffering, that he must suffer and that he must die and rise again. This is obviously not what the disciples expected to hear and Peter rebukes Jesus, but Jesus insists that he has proclaimed the heavenly will. And, Jesus goes on to say that if one wishes to follow him, they should deny themselves. Jesus goes on to say that whomever wishes to follow him will lose their life, and in losing their life for the sake of the good news they will find it again.

For Jesus the deliverance of God's people will not come through force of arms. For Jesus, the deliverance of God's people will not be won on the battlefield, nor will it be achieved politically through the halls of the Governor's palace in Jerusalem or the Senate in Rome. For Jesus the deliverance of God's people (which after all is what the mission of the Messiah is) will come through the Cross. And, there on the Cross: the destination to which our forty days of Lent lead, Jesus will turn the world upside down. There on the Cross, in his delivering death, Jesus will tear open this very reality, rend asunder all that separates us from God and secure our deliverance from sin, death, and the devil. Because, it's a funny thing being the anointed one of God. It never happens the way you expect. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered in our homes and around the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Most Wonderful Savior, you freely came into our world to be taken on death, that all might live through your selfless act of sanctifying love. Ignite a passion for this good news in the hearts and minds hear the gospel for the first time. Fan the flames of your gospel in hearts that my have been worn down to embers; and blow you spirit across the world that the flame of you love, justice, and salvation might reach all the end of the Earth.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Jesus Our Christ, we pray for your forgiveness, for those times that like Peter we spoke from our desires, instead of your will. We pray out of thankfulness and gratitude that you call us to yourself, and love all your children out of your mercy, compassion, and grace, not based on our actions which always fall short.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Almighty God, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the cross was transformed from a sign of death, to an image of hope and eternal life. Thanks to Jesus sacrifice we have no need to fear because as we share a death like his, we will also share a resurrection like his. Despite this truth many of our hearts still weight heavy with thoughts & memories of loved ones who have joined the Kingdom Eternal. Lord, bring comfort to those who mourn, peace to those who lament, and rest for all those who cannot sleep because they are separated by the chasm of death from those that they love.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

Praise to you, Word of life,
for, in receiving you through sound and silence,
song and image,
we are nourished in our fasting
and strengthened in our weakness.
For the Word of life, we praise you, O God:
We praise you, O God.

Blessing be to you, Word of mercy,
for, in receiving the assurance of forgiveness
we are freed to follow you through the desert,
bearing our cross,
and announcing your reign.
For the Word of mercy, we bless you, O God:
We bless you, O God.

Thanks be to you, Word of promise,
for, in receiving your covenant through the scriptures
you plant deep in our hearts
the seed of resurrection
and the hope of baptism.
For the Word of promise, we thank you, O God:
We thank you, O God.

Almighty and everlasting God, you abide with your church in times of trial and in times of joy. Sustain us as a community as we long to return to the waters of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Enliven us in the ways we receive and live the words of our worship, so that all creation may know the promises of life in you. Draw us together as one body, Lord, as you remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

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

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice, O Lord, that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters, even from our homes.

Third Sunday in Lent

March 7, 2021

Call To Worship

(Adapted from Psalm 19)

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

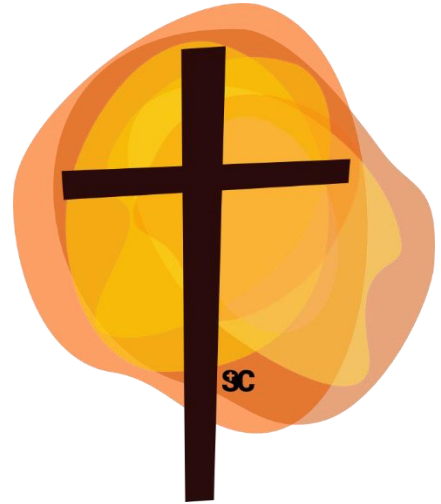
**The decrees of the Lord are firm,
and all of them are righteous.**

The law of the Lord is perfect,
refreshing the soul.

**The decrees of the Lord are firm,
and all of them are righteous.**

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,

**The decrees of the Lord are firm,
and all of them are righteous.**



Prayer of the Day

Creator of All, we remember in awe that you are truly the creator of every good thing. Help us turn from our destruction of your goodness and instead preserve your creation and all that is in it. Help us to do this for no other sake than yours, Almighty God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Gospel - John 2:13-22

¹³ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵ So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

¹⁸ The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"

¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

²⁰ They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" ²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

Sermon - Rev. Hunter Sipe,

Pastor, Good Shepherd Bible Church, Blacklick, OH

"It's my birthday! It's my birthday!" Finn, my 6 year old 7 year old was ecstatic as he flew down the stairs early Monday morning. "Buddy, your birthday is not until Friday. Remember?" "But you said that it was today!" Finn replied. "No." I said. "I told you that your birthday is this week, on Friday. Remember?" "Oh ya! That's right. I remember now." Without a good memory, life can get difficult - just ask Finn.

Our minds are constantly dictating life and reality to us. Our plans, our desires, our goals, our values are all shaped by how we think and by what we can remember. Without a clear and reliable memory, well, things can get tricky. For instance, let's pretend that I wake up on my day off and plan out my whole day - sleep in, eat a hearty breakfast, play a round of golf, pick up the kids from school, head out for a drink with the boys, eat some dinner with the family, watch the game and hit the hay at a reasonable 10:30pm. Sounds like a great day! But, let's also say that my memory failed me and I forgot that I had told my wife that I would clean out the gutters on the house so that she doesn't have to stare at the sticks and leaves stuffed into the front portion of our roof. The experience and the feelings of those two days would be totally different and it would all be dependent on my ability to remember. Like 7 year old Finn, it's easy to go from thinking it's your birthday to thinking that it's just another Monday.

As we seek to remember significant things in our lives, it should not be surprising that we see Jesus' disciples remembering significant things that Jesus said about who He was and what He was doing. It must have been fairly difficult for them. It is easier to remember things you understand - my wife wants me to clean out the gutters - that's not a hard concept. However, Jesus was talking about difficult matters: the sham of religion and power of resurrection. Remember, Jesus is not about Religion (2:13-17).

In today's Gospel passage, we see a bustling temple and people eager to express their devotion to God. We love to see churches full, don't we? We love to see people exercise their faith. I can only imagine the confusion if you and I were there - to see all of the activity, the excitement, the interest in spiritual matters - only to have Jesus come in and create havoc, chaos and destruction. It all seems a bit overboard; a bit over the top! If we were there, we might have asked, "Is that really necessary, Jesus?" You and I could have easily thought that Jesus simply needed to "chill out" or "take a chill-pill." The violence doesn't seem to fit the mood. But the disciples remembered. Their memory had given them clarity on a bigger reality. Jesus in His holiness was here to make war on mere

religion. "Zeal for (the Father's) house will consume (him)." Jesus will be consumed with a passion for the purity and holiness of the presence of God amongst His people. The temple was God's appointed place whereby He would meet with His people. Through the temple, God was fulfilling His promise to be Israel's God. But it was tricky. Remember, God was holy and, well... Israel was not. The only way a holy God could dwell with unholy people was through the temple structures of separation (distance, barriers, curtains) and sacrifice (the blood of bulls and goats). It was not a perfect system, but it was still a holy place.

To hear the engine of religiosity chugging in the temple square must have been alarming to Jesus. God was pursuing His people - condescending to His people - fulfilling His promises to His people and yet, His people were turning the temple into a marketplace, a money grab, and a "quick buck." This is what the violence was for! This is why Jesus was so angry! The Law of God was on full display as Jesus overturned the table of fake religion. Man-made schemes of self-salvation pale in magnificence to the promises of God. Perhaps this is why the Apostle Paul says that, "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:25). Sometimes, what is holy and righteous in our eyes can be hellish and damnable in God's eyes. Or as Dr. Luther so boldly states, "Although the works of man always seem attractive and good, they are nevertheless likely to be mortal sins." This is why we must hold our religion up to the light of the Law. We too must not think that because we are merely using God's things for our purposes that we are doing God's work.

Jesus was consumed by the purity and holiness of the Father. Like the disciples, we too must remember the true test of righteousness - God's holiness. Remember, Jesus is about Resurrection (2:18-22) The disciple's memory gave them clarity regarding the Law - Jesus meant business. Yet, the Jews were not as convinced. They asked Jesus for a sign - "what sign do you show us for doing these things?" Jesus' answer shows us exactly what He was really about. Jesus was not about empty religious activities for the sake of personal gain. "I can rebuild this temple in three days," Jesus says. The Jews scoffed, "Our beefy bastion of our own righteous took us forty-six years for us to build! There is no way you're going to destroy and there's certainly no way you're going to rebuild it! Are you more righteous than us?!" See, Jesus was not about religious activity for the sake of personal gain. Rather, Jesus was about giving up everything and banking every hope on a miracle. Jesus knew that God's plan included His temple - His body being destroyed. And yet, He also knew that His plan included the power of resurrection - new life in the place of death. Jesus was claiming to be the full expression of the promise of God to His people. Through Jesus, God would dwell amongst His people, but not through separation. Rather, Jesus would become one of us. God would dwell amongst His people, but not through their sacrifice for Him, but through Jesus' sacrifice for us. Jesus is our true temple and our true curtain and our true sacrificial lamb.

The disciples witnessed all of Jesus' life and ministry, all of His passion, and His resurrection all before their memory clicked in. Jesus' work for them sparked their memory of Him. They remembered

and so they believed. This means that your righteousness is not dependent upon your ability to remember. Rather, your righteousness is fully found in the death-absorbing sacrifice and life-giving resurrection of Jesus. You see, in all of our forgetting, God never forgets His promises. Jesus never forgot about the holiness of the Father. Jesus never forgot about the hope of resurrection. He remembered it all for you. Even when we forget, Jesus provides His promise to us in the waters of our baptism and in the bread and wine of His table. He remembers us and gently says, "do this in remembrance of me." Dear saint, remember His promise and know that even though our Father is holy, He delights to dwell with us through the sacrifice of His Son and the filling of the Spirit. Remember His promise and know God's requirement of righteousness is fulfilled, not in you, but in the holy and pure work of His Son. Remember His promise and know that though you have died through the Law, you are alive through the Gospel. Your hope rests in the miraculous work of Jesus' resurrection for you. Remember and believe. Grace and peace to you all in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered in our homes and around the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Master of the Universe, help us clear the temples of our hearts that we might focus all things on you. Inspire us to let go of the things and traditions that we think we need, so that we might strive for a more vulnerable and open relationship with you, that is focused not on what we bring, but what you are doing.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Sovereign and Almighty God, you are faithful to your people across all the ages. Your words are written in the stone of the 10 commandments, and the hearts of the countless faithful throughout time. Help us to remember your faithfulness when we become despondent. Hold us with your faithful care, when we feel tired and worn down by the world. Support us with your promises that are yet to come, when we feel lost in our current world.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

God of healing and wholeness, you bring wholeness, restoration, and freedom to your people. We pray for all those who feel as though they are being torn down by the world. Hold them, support them, and remind them, that though the world may tear them up, their true restoration and wholeness will come through you.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

Praise to you, Word of life,
for, in receiving you through sound and silence,
song and image,
we are nourished in our fasting
and strengthened in our weakness.
For the Word of life, we praise you, O God:
We praise you, O God.

Blessing be to you, Word of mercy,
for, in receiving the assurance of forgiveness
we are freed to follow you through the desert,
bearing our cross,
and announcing your reign.
For the Word of mercy, we bless you, O God:
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Thanks be to you, Word of promise,
for, in receiving your covenant through the scriptures
you plant deep in our hearts
the seed of resurrection
and the hope of baptism.
For the Word of promise, we thank you, O God:
We thank you, O God.

Almighty and everlasting God, you abide with your church in times of trial and in times of joy. Sustain us as a community as we long to return to the waters of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Enliven us in the ways we receive and live the words of our worship, so that all creation may know the promises of life in you. Draw us together as one body, Lord, as you remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

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

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice, O Lord, that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters, even from our homes.

Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 14, 2021

Call To Worship

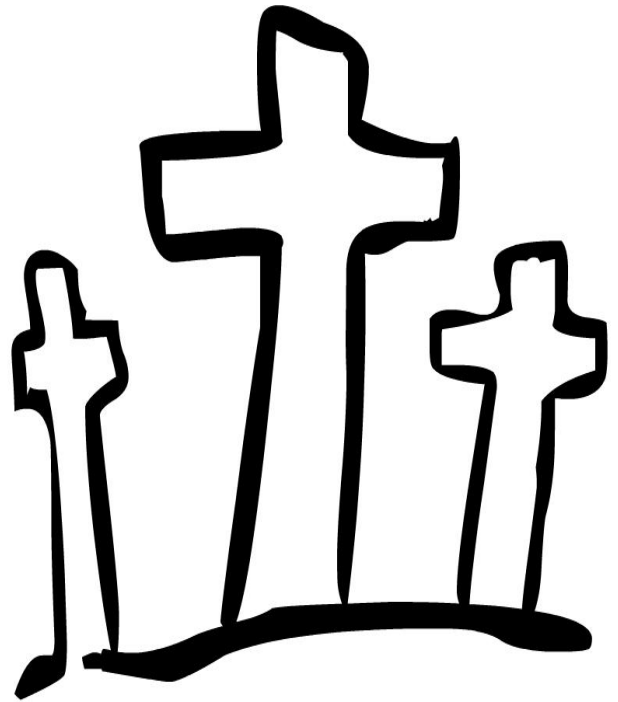
(Adapted from Psalm 107)

Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story—
those he redeemed from the hand of the foe,
**Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures forever.**

Some wandered in desert wastelands,
finding no way to a city where they could
settle.

**Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures forever.**

Let the one who is wise heed these things
and ponder the loving deeds of the Lord.
**Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures forever.**



Prayer of the Day

Holy God, we lift you up and praise your name, thanking you for the eternal life you have promised us. Though we often fail, every day we strive to be worthy of this gift. Give us the strength to live in Your light and bring those in darkness to that light as well. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Gospel - John 3:14-21

¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into

the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

Sermon - Rev. Angel Jackson,

Pastor, St. Jacob Lutheran Church, North Canton, OH

And this is the judgment . . . says our gospel reading.

And this is the judgement. When we say the creed in worship we say that Jesus “will come again to judge the living and the dead.” This is one of my least favorite images of Jesus. I mean it’s not that I don’t think he has the right to do it, and also that he wouldn’t be fair. But it brings to mind an old white guy sitting above everyone, banging his gavel. Deciding to condemn or acquit people. And it well, I mean I guess it isn’t an image I like, in general. Not one I want to worship.

But it also isn’t an image that has ever made sense to me. Because I know that we, as humans can never live up to the standards of God’s kingdom. We can never keep the law . . .and thus we could never be declared truly innocent. And yet, as our gospel lesson points out, “God so loved the world that he sent Christ to save us.” All of us. And it is all of God’s action that saves us . . .and thus we would all be in the saved category . . . so . . . what’s there to judge?

And this is the judgement . . . our passage says today. Jesus came into the world as light. And we judge ourselves. Light . . .

The summer after my first year of seminary we lived in an apartment in Columbus not too far from the airport.

The apartment met our number one requirement. It was cheap. Especially since there were five of us living there. Two sets of newlyweds in the two upstairs bedrooms and my sister, on a mattress on the living room floor, tucked behind the tv stand for privacy.

We shared one bathroom . . . upstairs, with cream colored linoleum. And I tried really hard not to need to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night. Because well . . . cockroaches. Now I’ve lived in Texas where they have big cockroaches. But these were little ohio ones, which I actually find to be much worse for some reason. And, well the bathroom was their nursery. I would step up to the doorway, take a deep breath and then throw the light switch on. And thousands of little baby cockroaches would scatter . . . like the floor was moving. Into the cracks in the walls. Down the holes around the pipes. Because they hate the light.

And this is the judgement. Jesus came into the world as the light. Jesus came into the world as light and invited everyone, invites all of us to live into the light.

And then we judge ourselves. Those who do what is evil, John tells us, don't like that light. This is true in a most literal sense. Researchers on crime have discovered that in some areas, street

light outages have increased crime rates by over 130 percent. People who do evil purposely avoid the light, whereas people who are honest, who have nothing to fear, live life in the light.

This is the judgement . . . Jesus is light for all! A circle of warmth and love and we judge ourselves. We sort ourselves. Yet, if we use the standards of the the the world . . . the standards of the law. We all chose the shadows. The light is scary.

While I know that I'm not out smashing windows and stealing cars. I am not loving God with all my heart and mind and strength and loving my neighbor as myself in all the ways I can.

Also, I have parts of me that I don't even like to acknowledge so I certainly don't want anyone else to see! Pieces of myself that feel unworthy, ugly. I don't want the light to illuminate those parts of me, those parts that I don't want to see . . . I don't want Jesus to see. It's like when I go to my friend's house to spend the weekend. She has this giant mirror in her bathroom with these excellent lights that are supposed to help you put on your makeup! I hate that light . . . I hate getting close to the mirror in that light to put on my mascara . . . I hate stepping into the shower in that light. Because light that bright shows all those imperfections, all the things about myself that I don't want to see, give me some dim light, just enough to see glaring bedhead.

And this is the judgment. So often, because we are afraid of the light, afraid of the things about us it might show, afraid of the sin we know lives within us. Because we are sure that if those around us only knew, if Jesus only knew, we wouldn't be loved. So we sort ourselves, we judge ourselves, we step out of the light into the shadow.

But is there any foundation for this fear? Is there any reason for us to actually be afraid of the judgement of Christ? "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that whoever believes in him will be saved. We are saved by Grace" God's intention is for us to stay in the light, to dwell in the light.

These words are lived out throughout the gospels. In story after story, the people around Jesus enter into the light of relationship with him. And he sees them . . . and he loves them. And I can't name a single person . . . no matter how sinful, no matter how disbelieving, no matter how misunderstanding . . . not a single one does Jesus cast out of his circle. Not a single one does God send away. He invites them in, he invites them back. He demands much of them, relationship, obedience, transformation, but he never sends them away. They may remove themselves . . . they might turn a walk away. But never does Jesus cast them out.

And this is the judgement. The other thing that I hate about the idea of Jesus judging the living and the dead is the sense of finality that some people invest in this concept. Like the sorting involved eternities in heaven and hell. But the reward of living in the light is the light itself. When you chose the light . . . you get to live in the presence of Jesus and in the Holy Kingdom. And when you walk away from the light . . . well it means living without that intimacy with Jesus . . . that sunlight that warms and nourishes and also invites us into the loving community with other followers of Jesus.

This is the judgment . . . and it is here and now. Including eternity, but now in this life. Do you want to live in the light? Because Jesus invites us in . . . shines his light on all of us. Loves us, despite the sin, the imperfection, any inadequacies that that bright light reveals. Our reading from Paul today reminds us of that. He loved us and decided to save us “while we were still sinners . . . while we were sinners!” No matter who we are or what we have done we can stand in the light with confidence that Jesus will love us in the midst of those things, that Jesus will never cast us out of his presence, his circle of warmth and love.

And on the days that we just can't do it. We can't have the courage to reveal ourselves. We are convinced that the cold shadow is all we deserve, when we can't handle the bright light . . . well that is never a final judgement. The light is where we belong, where God had called us and we can always return. We can always step back into the light . . . into Christ's arms stretched wide for us in love!

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered in our homes and around the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

God of all time and space, you speak to us through the pages of scripture. Your message comes to us from the mouths of patriarchs like Moses, and through the words & acts of your son Jesus Christ. Inspire our reading of your holy words, that across all the pages we see the true testament of love and salvation to all the world.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Master of the Universe, you love creation so much that you sent your son to save the cosmos, reconciliation all of creation to you through him. Empower us to care for all of creation. Widen our views to understand the responsibility we have to each other, and every living thing, as we were all made by your masterful hands.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Christ our Lord, Nicodemus came to you by night, asking about things that he did not understand. Strengthen and encourage us to share your good news with all who might be seeking. Give us the confidence to share your gospel in our world that seems covered in darkness recently. Help us to go into the darkness, and be the light.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

Praise to you, Word of life,
for, in receiving you through sound and silence,
song and image,
we are nourished in our fasting
and strengthened in our weakness.
For the Word of life, we praise you, O God:
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Blessing be to you, Word of mercy,
for, in receiving the assurance of forgiveness
we are freed to follow you through the desert,
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Thanks be to you, Word of promise,
for, in receiving your covenant through the scriptures
you plant deep in our hearts
the seed of resurrection
and the hope of baptism.
For the Word of promise, we thank you, O God:
We thank you, O God.

Almighty and everlasting God, you abide with your church in times of trial and in times of joy. Sustain us as a community as we long to return to the waters of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Enliven us in the ways we receive and live the words of our worship, so that all creation may know the promises of life in you. Draw us together as one body, Lord, as you remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

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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

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice, O Lord, that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters, even from our homes.

Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 21, 2021

Call To Worship

(Adapted from Psalm 52)

Why do you boast of evil, you mighty hero?

Why do you boast all day long,
you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God?

**I trust in God's unfailing love
for ever and ever.**

But I am like an olive tree
flourishing in the house of God;

**I trust in God's unfailing love
for ever and ever.**

For what God has done I will always praise the Lord
in the presence of God's faithful people.

**I trust in God's unfailing love
for ever and ever.**

Prayer of the Day

Blessed Father, we come to you, asking to see Jesus. Let us see the love of Jesus in every good thing. Remind us of Jesus even in times of trouble and unrest. Let us do the work of Jesus each and every day, Almighty Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Gospel - John 12:20-33

²⁰ Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

²³ Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

²⁷ "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!"

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

³⁰ Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. ³¹ Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up^{al} from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

Sermon - Rev. Joanna Stallings,

Pastor, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Goldsboro, NC

This is the last Sunday in Lent before we move into Palm Sunday and Holy Week. The end of Lent is near. In previous years I have been eager to return to a liturgy filled with music. A sanctuary adorned with flowers and vestments that change from the gloom of penitence to the brightness of life. If truth be told, I would like to trade virtual worship for a full sanctuary and voices raised in praise of God. I am certain that all of us are ready to return from the exile brought on by the pandemic. It is not time just yet.

In the meantime, we have Jeremiah who is one of my favorite prophets. Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet. Maybe it is because he had such a difficult job getting the Israelites back on track or maybe it was because he was the mouthpiece of God during the turnover of five kings. With that much governmental chaos you can be sure he got through the situation because God and only God, gave him the words to soften the hard hearts of the Israelites.

Historically the people of God, were not known to be manageable or even faithful people. At the time of the destruction of Solomon's temple, the people were as fractious as prepubescent boys who were smelling their armpits. Not only were they unfaithful to the law of God, but they had also turned toward Baal—a pagan god—considered to be a fertility god among the middle eastern people, especially the Canaanites. The Israelites rejected the covenant established at Sinai. They trampled on the promises of God. The people of God had grievously broken the covenant established by God. It was the Prophet Jeremiah's job to call them back into relationship.

The Prophet Jeremiah, the mouthpiece of God, was not shy about proclaiming the judgment of God. His words stung and offended the people. Once the scalding words of the prophet began to melt their hearts of stone—the message of Jeremiah turned to restoration and reconciliation with God.

The words of God were a guide to Jeremiah. The words of wisdom were familiar like those from Proverbs 6:2-22. *"My child, keep your father's commandment, and do not forsake your mother's*

teaching. Bind them upon your heart always; tie them around your neck. When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will like down, they will watch over you." Other passages from the Torah were deeply rooted in their ethos; *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise up."* This was the prayer of the ancient peoples that established them as faithful children of God. It was part of the prayer said at the rising of the sun and setting of the sun intended to tell again who they belonged to.

The relationship of God was one of mutuality—*"I will be your God and you will be my people."* It was a unique relationship with all who believed in God. Through the word of God a new community was formed, from which the forgiveness of God flowed. God was aware that his people were not experts in the ways of repentance. They had turned away from God too many times, but the love of God was so strong, that out of great love God continued to pursue his children.

The relationship with God as Jeremiah reminded them, was formed around a covenant, the covenant made at the Red Sea and the Sinai. The covenant that was to come was far greater, not only will God be their God, but a new covenant would not be written on stone tablets but on the inner beings of the people.

Does this sound familiar to you? The turmoil, rejection, and faithlessness in our relationship with God?

During the season of Lent, we have pondered and prayed, considered and deliberated on our own sins. We have made this journey of reconciliation and soon we will find ourselves at the foot of the cross to find the happy exchange. As Martin Luther said, *"We will be mystified by the divine grace of God. The wonderful exchange of our sins will no longer be ours but Christ's and the righteousness of Christ. Christ emptied himself of His righteousness that He might clothes us with it. He has taken on our evils that he might deliver us from them."* The love of God is at the center of this covenant even though we are disobedient people.

Most of the time, we fear repentance. In our lengthy relationship with God, we view repentance in a negative way. Repentance is not only a time to name our fears, idols, and demons, it is time to give them to the Lord who will heal us of these afflictions. Repentance is an opportunity to think differently. Repentance is an opportunity to change what we think. Our softened hearts change the way that we act because Godly repentance brings new life. How can we draw closer to God in Christ, if we do not remove the barriers that prevent us from fully experiencing his grace and extraordinarily love?

Through prophets like Jeremiah, God beckons us to mend our relationship with God. The unimaginable love of God is calling us into transformation to move us from brokenness to healing, from death to life. Thanks be to God, for the steadfast love of God our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Let us pray.

O God, with steadfast love you draw us to yourself, and in mercy you receive our prayers. Strengthen us to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, that through life and death we may live in your Son Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered in our homes and around the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Almighty God, as our Lenten journey draws to a close, help us keep our thoughts and minds focused on the hour of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In the week ahead may we again hear the story of his Passion with new ears. May the supreme sacrifice made for each and every one of us call to us with love from across the eons.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Jesus our Christ, you tell us in John's gospel that when you are lifted up from the Earth that you will draw all people to yourself. We thank you for your unending compassion, and your salvation of the entire world. Your grace extends wider than our vision. Your mercy reaches further than our rationality. Your salvation bleeds through our man made divisions, and claims all that you have made.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Holy God, be with all those for whom the darkness of the seasons does not stop. We pray for compassion, restoration, and wholeness for all people oppressed by suffering, illness, and death. Lord be with those that we name before you now, both aloud, and in the silences of our hearts.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Thanksgiving for the Word

Praise to you, Word of life,
for, in receiving you through sound and silence,
song and image,
we are nourished in our fasting
and strengthened in our weakness.
For the Word of life, we praise you, O God:
We praise you, O God.

Blessing be to you, Word of mercy,
for, in receiving the assurance of forgiveness
we are freed to follow you through the desert,
bearing our cross,
and announcing your reign.
For the Word of mercy, we bless you, O God:
We bless you, O God.

Thanks be to you, Word of promise,
for, in receiving your covenant through the scriptures
you plant deep in our hearts
the seed of resurrection
and the hope of baptism.
For the Word of promise, we thank you, O God:
We thank you, O God.

Almighty and everlasting God, you abide with your church in times of trial and in times of joy. Sustain us as a community as we long to return to the waters of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Enliven us in the ways we receive and live the words of our worship, so that all creation may know the promises of life in you. Draw us together as one body, Lord, as you remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

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

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice, O Lord, that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters, even from our homes.

Palm Sunday

March 28, 2021

Call To Worship

(Adapted from Psalm 31)

Lord, how many are my foes!

How many rise up against me!

**You, Lord, are a shield around me,
my glory, the One who lifts my
head high.**

I call out to the Lord,

and he answers me from his holy
mountain.

**You, Lord, are a shield around me,
my glory, the One who lifts my head high.**

From the Lord comes deliverance.

May your blessing be on your people.

**You, Lord, are a shield around me,
my glory, the One who lifts my head high.**

Prayer of the Day

Lord, we praise you and we understand that you are our one true King. We know that you come in peace, and we pray that we may feel and understand that peace at all times. Strengthen us that we may know and reflect that peace in a world of constant chaos. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Gospel - Mark 11:1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, [Jesus] sent two of his disciples ² and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. ³ If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.' " ⁴ They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵ some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" ⁶ They



told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. ⁷ Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

“Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

¹¹ Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Sermon - Rev. Paul Offhaus,

Pastor, St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, IN

For many, Palm Sunday is one of those “memory maker” Sundays. I for one can remember waving palm ‘branches’ – more like palm slivers, actually – as a child and singing, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord – Hosanna in the highest!” At my own church we usually enjoy the added bonus of our children parading around the worship space, palms all a-waving. And of course, no Palm Sunday would be complete without the requisite hymn, “All Glory, Laud and Honor,” part of which goes like this: “All glory, laud and honor to you, redeemer, king, / to whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring. / You are the king of Israel and David’s royal Son, / now in the Lord’s name coming, our King and Blessed One.”

In a large number of our churches this morning, depending on any restrictions in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, similar hymn-singing and waving of palms will replay itself many times over. And while orthodox Christianity certainly affirms Jesus as all the hymn declares him to be – King of Israel, descendent of King David, the Blessed One coming in the name of the Lord – there remains what Paul Harvey calls ‘The Rest of the Story’ still to be told, in order to more fully grasp the story Jesus seemed to be telling that day long ago outside the gates of Jerusalem.

Jesus’ procession, it turns out, was one of two that made its way into Jerusalem that day. At the head of the other procession was Pontius Pilate, who as governor of the land represented Caesar, ruler of the whole Roman Empire. Pilate would come down to Jerusalem three times a year from his palace by the sea at Caesarea, once for each of the three major festivals of the Jewish people. Each time, he would exchange the sweet breezes of the Mediterranean for the sweltering, stifling heat of the city, filled to over three times its normal capacity with sweaty, stinky pilgrims – not to mention the pungent smell of animals being sold and then butchered in sacrifice to God. He would have entered from the west with a show of force – royal Roman eagle banners unfurled, legions of armed and armored foot soldiers and cavalry – to

remind the subjected Jewish people of just who was in charge: Rome. Pilate himself would be riding an imperial stallion, likely at the head of the procession. He would make his way loudly and with great fanfare up to the Roman fortress of Antonia, from which he could look out over (and down upon) the Temple and the rest of the city. His imposing presence was meant to intimidate the oppressed and discourage any sort of revolutionary thoughts from being contemplated, let alone acted upon.

Jesus, on the other hand, headed up a loyal but motley band of followers. Ragged, poor, and for the most part uneducated, this procession was neither forceful nor imposing. Jesus, their leader, rode at the head, entering from the east, but rather than proudly on a horse, he rode humbly on a donkey. And yet, in the cries of the people who lined the streets that day, one can hear words of hope. "Hosanna in the highest!" they cried, which in Hebrew is *hoshi'ah-nah*, which means "please save." They called him Son of David, a tip of the hat to Israel's greatest king, David, through whose descendent the prophets said God's Messiah, or Anointed One, would come to deliver God's people from oppression. Certainly Jesus' entrance – backed up as it was by his ministry, his miracles, his powerful teaching – had cultivated a great deal of hope that the Roman oppression was indeed coming to an end in and through him. The fact that Jesus was entering Jerusalem for the Jewish festival of Passover – the remembrance of God's great deliverance of his people from slavery to Egypt under Moses – only heightened and deepened this hope.

Yet in the end, Jesus proved to be a different sort of Messiah, a different sort of king. As the humble donkey on which he rode suggested, Jesus came to give, not to take. Rather than challenge the Roman Empire directly, force to force, thereby replacing one violent, oppressive power with another, Jesus chose the way of sacrificial love. He chose the Roman's weapon of torture, crucifixion, as his own unique weapon of love. "When I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32). In perhaps the ultimate irony, Jesus, through his own suffering and death, defeated once and for all the oppressive forces of Empire that seek to subject and destroy. His resurrection on the third day is God's stamp of approval on Jesus' self-giving love.

Two different kings entered Jerusalem that day, from two opposite directions, along two radically different paths, with two radically different agendas. Which king, which path, will you follow?

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered in our homes and around the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

God almighty, we praise your name and thank you for coming. You came into our world on Christmas to change it. Today we watch you go into death, and so we stand together a community that extends through space and beyond time, as your people waiting to see you come again.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Master of the Universe, thank you for all that is yours that you have given us. Help us to walk in your ways and be led by your light, in our towns and across our country. Guide us along your way, so that we might tell others of your grace, show others your love, and live out your generosity.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Lord Jesus you came into our world to show us the way, to lead us, teach us, forgive us, and to die for us. Today we watch you, as you make you head to you greatest hour. Thank you for your gift, your life, and your promises that are yet come to.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Holy God, you have the final word. You have the gift of life everlasting. In you we have hope. Be with all those who need hope & wholeness, all those who suffer and are lost in the depths of pain, illness, and depression. Lord today we pray your presence on all those we know who are in need of any kind.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

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

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice, O Lord, that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters, even from our homes.

Maundy Thursday

April 1, 2021

Call To Worship

(Adapted from Psalm 116)

The cords of death entangled me,
the anguish of the grave came over me;
I was overcome by distress and sorrow.

**I love the Lord, for he heard my voice;
he heard my cry for mercy.**

The Lord is gracious and righteous;
our God is full of compassion.

**I love the Lord, for he heard my voice;
he heard my cry for mercy.**

I will lift up the cup of salvation,
and sacrifice a thank offering,
and call on the name of the Lord.

**I love the Lord, for he heard my voice;
he heard my cry for mercy.**



Prayer of the Day

Lord, help us to be like you. Help us to lead by example just as Jesus did with the disciples. Give us the courage to help those with needs, both physical and mental, so that we may further your kingdom and invite all to the table. In the name of Jesus Christ, our lord, Amen.

Gospel - John 3:1-17, 31b-35

3 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. **2** He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

3 Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

4 "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

5 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. **6** Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. **7** You should not be surprised at

my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

⁹ "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Sermon - Rev. Travis Meier,

Pastor, Peace Lutheran Church, College Station, TX

"Love, Love, Love Love, Love, Love There's nothing you can do that can't be done Nothing you can sing that can't be sung Nothing you can say, but you can learn how to play the game It's easy Nothing you can make that can't be made No one you can save that can't be saved Nothing you can do, but you can learn how to be you in time It's easy All you need is love All you need is love All you need is love, love Love is all you need" The Beatles - All You Need is Love

The world first heard the Beatles' "All You Need Is Love" on June 25, 1967. It was broadcast to the whole world. An estimated 400 million people in 25 countries heard it and saw it on the first live global television link. The Beatles were specifically asked to write a song for this production, the Our World event. "Love, love, love" - these words broadcast and sung to a world that was witnessing the horrors of Vietnam and the Cold War. Love is all you need, indeed. This is what today is all about - Love.

We gather at the table with Jesus and his disciples to experience love. This is not a somber occasion. Some of us may have grown up that way. This is not a night for sadness. It's a night to remember what God in Jesus has first done for us. Jesus kneels as a humble servant to lean into the need of his tired disciples and a weary world. He demonstrates a love that runs so deep that it will overcome the power of death. The fire of love that will burn through the darkness of the cross and light a new fire a few mornings from now. Tonight is about love.

Jesus breaks bread and remembers the Passover. The story about God's love overflowing into Egypt and drawing the people into new life through the Red Sea. Jesus kneels down and washes his disciple's feet. An act of humility. Even Judas, poor misunderstood and scapegoated Judas, caught between a revolution of power through violence and a revolution of power through love. Even Judas received the bread and has his feet washed by Jesus. Judas too, is loved. Jesus leaves his disciples with new commandment - "Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." Now this is not something that is really new, the people had long understood as a part of the Law. But here, in Jesus, in the Word become flesh, the call to love one another was fully realized. Here John uses one of his

favorite words for love, agape.

This word is not about emotions or feelings. Agape means “to take a high level of interest in the well-being of another.” Three times in two sentences John uses this word agape. This Greek word describes a relationship invested in the life of another. If I were to give you a picture of the human body and ask you to draw where the agape lives in each of us, it would not be in the heart, but in the hands and feet and mind. Agape lives in how we interact with each other. For Jesus, agape is lived out on the cross. The cross is where Jesus takes a high level of interest in the well being of all people and the world. Jesus does not give up his life on the cross, he gives it away. The distinction is important.

Sacrifice is not grace. Jesus gives away his life, investing his life into others is grace. Jesus invests his life into the future of all people and world drawn into a renewed relationship with God. This grace inspires new opportunities for the life of the community. And it’s all about love. Tonight we are not called to just admire the depth of his love. Listen again to what Jesus tells his disciples; “I give you a new commandment, that you love another. Just as I have loved you, you also ought love one another.” Just as I have loved you, just as I have taken a high level of interest in your lives, you should also do the same. And this high level of interest is not always warm and fuzzy. Agape can be direct and blunt for the sake of the well being of another. Sometimes we need a wake-up call. Love in those situations can be blunt, but only if the well being of the other is at the heart of the matter.

The world will know that we are followers of Jesus through our love. The old camp song is spot on - “they will know we are christians by our love.” The words from the Beatles are spot on - “All you need is love, love is all you need.” What the world needs. We are invited by Jesus to invest our lives into the well-being of others, into the future of our world as a gift. Because that’s what Jesus does. And only because Jesus has already done it can we truly invest our lives into the well-being of others and the future of the world. We can do it because of what happens at the table. What we celebrate tonight in the gathering around is the place where we take a little bit of Christ into ourselves. Where we get a foretaste of the feast of God’s victory. It’s an intimate moment, the Lord’s supper. We take a bit of Christ into ourselves and plant the seeds of love. And Christ promises to be here. Through Jesus, there is nothing that we cannot do. Nothing we cannot make. Nothing to stand in our way of God’s love poured out through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. So love, love, love people of God, so that the whole world may know of God’s power and presence.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered in our homes and around the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Christ Our Savior, you give us your body in so many ways, as you inspire, heal, save, and empower us. Help us to see all that you give us, and seeing these gifts respond in faith, obedience, and action to your generous acts love.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Master of the Universe, this evening we look into the bare center of truth: a table, an altar, a reminder of your giving self. Be with us these Holy Days as we remember your call of love, that speaks to us from beyond our existence.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

God of hope and salvation. Be with us as we sit in the silence of this evening. Call through the darkness to us, and to all who suffer. Be with us, as we miss those who we have shared meals with in the past. Be with those who long for you, those who ache, who cry, who suffer. Be with all those that we name before you now, both silently and aloud.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

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

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice, O Lord, that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters, even from our homes.

Good Friday

April 2, 2021

Call To Worship

(Adapted from Psalm 22)

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?

**Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.**

My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.

**Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.**

Lord, do not be far from me.
You are my strength; come quickly to help me.

**Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.**



Prayer of the Day

Good and Gracious God, today we remember the sacrifice of your Son. We recall the immense hardships and suffering of Jesus, and we thank you once again for the perfect gift you have given us. Let us remember each day how much you love us, even on days where we face our own suffering and pain. Let us share that love in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

The Passion of Our Lord According to John (18:1-19:42)

18 When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it. ² Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. ³ So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. ⁴ Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" ⁵ "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor

was standing there with them.)⁶ When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.⁷ Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they said.⁸ Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go."⁹ This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me."¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)¹¹ Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

¹² Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him¹³ and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year.¹⁴ Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jewish leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people.

¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard,¹⁶ but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in.¹⁷ "You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?" she asked Peter. He replied, "I am not."¹⁸ It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

¹⁹ Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.²⁰ "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret."²¹ Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said."²² When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" he demanded.²³ "If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?"²⁴ Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

²⁵ Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, "You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?" He denied it, saying, "I am not."²⁶ One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the garden?"²⁷ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

²⁸ Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.²⁹ So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"³⁰ "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."³¹ Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." "But we have no right to execute anyone," they objected.³² This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die.³³ Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"³⁴ "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"³⁶ Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is

to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”³⁸ “What is truth?” retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him.”³⁹ But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release ‘the king of the Jews?’”⁴⁰ They shouted back, “No, not him! Give us Barabbas!” Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.

19 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.² The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe³ and went up to him again and again, saying, “Hail, king of the Jews!” And they slapped him in the face.⁴ Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.”⁵ When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!”⁶ As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, “Crucify! Crucify!” But Pilate answered, “You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him.”⁷ The Jewish leaders insisted, “We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.”⁸ When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid,⁹ and he went back inside the palace. “Where do you come from?” he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer.¹⁰ “Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?”¹¹ Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.”¹² From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.”¹³ When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge’s seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha).¹⁴ It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon. “Here is your king,” Pilate said to the Jews.¹⁵ But they shouted, “Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!” “Shall I crucify your king?” Pilate asked. “We have no king but Caesar,” the chief priests answered.¹⁶ Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus.¹⁷ Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.¹⁹ Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.²⁰ Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek.²¹ The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.”²² Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”²³ When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.²⁴ “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.” This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said,

“They divided my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.”

So this is what the soldiers did.²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,”²⁷ and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

²⁸ Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.”²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a

stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. ³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. ³¹ Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. ³² The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. ³⁵ The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. ³⁶ These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," ³⁷ and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."

³⁸ Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹ He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. ⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Sermon - Rev. John J. Marschhausen,

Transition Pastor, Concordia Lutheran Church, Manchester, CT

My Friends: Within American Christianity, unanimously to my knowledge, today is known as **Good** Friday. When you come to think about it, though, this is a strange designation, isn't it? The day of Jesus' death while he is still only in his thirties? ... the day when his beautiful life came to an end, when he was betrayed and deserted, ridiculed and manhandled? ... the day when the actions of powerful people resulted in the shame of a crucifixion? – how can we call that day **good**? In many other Christian countries it's quite different. Today is *not* called **Good** Friday. In Scandinavian countries, for example, they call it *Long* Friday, expressing their identification with Jesus' pain and suffering during the long hours on that cross. The term suggests how the people of Scandinavia keep the day distinct and holy, as all activities stop and a mood of mourning dominates the day ... the one day of the year in Sweden, for example, when not only stores and shops are closed, but also all restaurants and theaters.

In calling the day **Good** Friday, however, we are looking, rather, at the results, the fruits, the consequences of Jesus' death ... and the passion narrative of John's Gospel is the right text for understanding this day as **good**. John's passion is not geared toward a pilgrimage along the *via dolorosa*, where we might identify in our sinfulness with the various actors in the drama, or where we might be stirred in our sympathy for this man of sorrows as if he were a tragic hero. To be sure, Jesus does not need our sympathy or our tears. Nor are we invited to imitate his humility and obedience.

Our imitation would be arrogant, for in all honesty we are not primarily followers as much as we are the beneficiaries, the heirs, the recipients of Jesus' mighty glorification on the cross.

Sing, my tongue, the *glorious* battle; tell the *triumph* far and wide;
Tell aloud the *wondrous* story of the Cross, the Crucified;
Tell how Christ, the world's Redeemer, *vanquished death* the day he died.
[ELW #355, one of the oldest (6th cent.) Passion Hymns in Christendom, st.1]

There is no good English word for the German word, *Andacht*. It expresses an attitude of quietly, silently meditating on the picture painted before our eyes by St. John. Such a meditation is for what today is calling. We are invited to see, and our response almost has to be in song and poetry. To attach moral lessons would be self-centered ... rash ... premature.

For here in John's passion the death of Christ is seen from *God's* perspective, and not from that of the bystanders or even the followers. As John often refers to the relationship between the Father and the Son, so he has tried to tell of **Good** Friday as from within the heart and mind of God. What is seen and heard by the faithful witness, the beloved disciple, is how the benefits of this death flow from the side of Christ, blood and water ... the sacramental power in the sustaining eucharist and in the baptism of rebirth from above.

This, my friends, is the victory of God, not in spite of death, but by and through a transfigured death. "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" [John 5:25]. Jesus' death is not our death, but through his mysterious death a new power of life flows into the world. The cross has become the tree of life.

Bend your boughs, O tree of glory, your relaxing sinews bend;
For a while the ancient rigor that your birth bestowed, suspend;
And the Lord of heav'nly beauty gently on your arms extend.
Faithful Cross, true sign of triumph, be for all the noblest tree;
None in foliage, none in blossom, none in fruit your equal be;
Symbol of the world's redemption, for your burden make us free. [ELW #355, st. 5-6]

God so loved the world that the Friday on which his Son died by human hands became **Good** Friday! Thanks be to God, in the name of our crucified Lord Jesus. Amen.

Now may the peace of God that passes all our human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered in our homes and around the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Sovereign God, in this darkest of nights, we pray to you from the depths. Lord lead us and guide us through this darkness. May your word be a light unto our path. May your presence lead us through the valley of the shadow of death. May your comfort show us the way to find a new day in you.
Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Almighty God, help us to find the "good" on this Friday. Help us to see your activity even in the death of Jesus Christ our Lord. Hold us close, and strengthen us that we too might be surprised when we arrive at the tomb with Mary, Mary, and Salome.
Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Jesus our Christ, you have taken on the sins of the entire world that you might draw all of humanity to yourself. We thank you for your supreme sacrifice of unending love that reconciles all of creation. As we are reminded of your passion and the fact that nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of God that you reveal to us this night.
Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

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

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice, O Lord, that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters, even from our homes.

Easter Sunday

April 4, 2021

Call To Worship

(Adapted from Psalm 118)

Let Israel say:

“His love endures forever.”

Let the house of Aaron say:

“His love endures forever.”

Let those who fear the Lord say:

“His love endures forever.”

**Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures forever.**

The Lord is my strength and my defense;
he has become my salvation.

**Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures forever.**

The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.

**Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures forever.**

Prayer of the Day

Resurrected Lord, today we rejoice in your victory over death and the great gift your coming brings. Help us to understand the full impact your presence has on our lives and inspire us to live unrestricted by the bonds of death, that we may freely follow your holy way. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Gospel - Mark 16:1-8

16 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ²Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”



⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

⁶ "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

⁸ Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Sermon - Rev. Leonard Homer Bolick,

Pastor, St. Stephen's Lutheran Church, Hickory, NC

Little Philip had significant physical challenges, he was limited in what he could do but he loved his 3rd grade Sunday School Class. His parents had always known the future would be challenging for Philip.

One Easter morning, during Sunday School, the teacher gave each student a plastic egg, took the class to the church lawn and asked each one to find something that reminded them of "new life", place it inside the egg and bring it back into class and they would talk about "new life" that comes from being baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus! Twenty minutes later everyone returned to class.

The teacher opened the first egg, inside was a flower, Mary said that's mine, it's beautiful and it reminds me of "new life"; the teacher opened the next egg and inside was a rock, Billy said, that's mine and on the side of the rock is some moss, that reminds me of "new life". Inside the next egg was a butterfly and Elizabeth screamed that's mine and it's the best of all. That beautiful butterfly was a worm and that reminds me of "new life"

The teacher opened the next egg and it was empty. Philip said that's mine. Someone in the class said Philip, you never do anything right. Philip said, I did so, do it right, the egg is empty and the tomb is empty. That reminds me of "new life". After that, the class saw Philip in a new and different way.

On Easter we proclaim that the tomb is empty and we have "new life". At funerals we proclaim ""new life". In fact, I refer to a funeral as "an order for the celebration of the resurrection faith" On Friday Jesus was nailed to the cross, suffered and died to bear our sins so that we might have life eternal.

Remember Philip - several months after that Easter morning in Sunday School, Philip died. His parents had always known. At the funeral, his Sunday School Teacher and all of the students sat on the front row of the church and at the end of the service, they each placed an egg in the altar, and of course, they were all empty, because the tomb is empty.

Grace and Peace as we celebrate the Resurrection!

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered in our homes and around the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Holy and Almighty God, on this day, we celebrate your victory, and we thank you for the paschal lamb that was slaughtered. Thank you for being so faithful to us, your people. Thank you for loving the world so much that you sent Jesus Christ to overcome death and the grave, so that none may perish but all may have eternal life!

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

God of wholeness, We praise you for mending the tear of death. We glorify you for filling in the hole left by sin, We exult you for finishing the reign of death, and commanding all of existence into new life.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Lord in this celebration of your triumph, this celebration of your finest hour, we thank you for all that you have given to us. Our selves, our time, and our possessions. But above all, we thank you for Jesus the Messiah who gives us victory over death.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Holy Father, in the same way that Mary Magdalene, Mary the Mother of James, and Salome, were met not by darkness and death, but by angels and hope; send your hope, your grace, and your life to all those who feel forgotten, dead, or afraid. Send your angels to sit with all who are entombed by darkness, depression, illness, and pain, all those we name before you now both silently and aloud...

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

The Lord be with you

And also with you.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God,
maker and redeemer of the universe.

You created all things,
and the earth proclaims your glory.

Your new creation, Jesus Christ,
calls us from the chaos of death
to new life in you.

For your Word of life, O God,
we give you thanks and praise.

You brought your people Israel through the Red Sea waters
to the safe side of the sea.

By your word and promise,
the waters of baptism
bring us safely to your side,
joined to your death and resurrection forever.

For your Word of life, O God,
we give you thanks and praise.

You feed us with the abundance of your table,
and your salvation is offered freely to all.

Send forth your Spirit
that your word may not return empty,
but accomplish all things for which you purpose.

For your Word of life, O God,
we give you thanks and praise.

Almighty and ever-living God, our hearts burn within us as you open to us the scriptures. Through the words of the prophets, reveal to us your timeless love. Through the hymns of the psalmist, teach us to sing your praise. Through the stories of the gospels, anoint us with the power of your resurrection, that we may go forth strengthened to endure times of trial, hardship, and fasting from your table. As we await the fulfillment of your promise to be with us to the end of the age, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

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

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice, O Lord, that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters, even from our homes.

Second Sunday of Easter

April 11, 2021

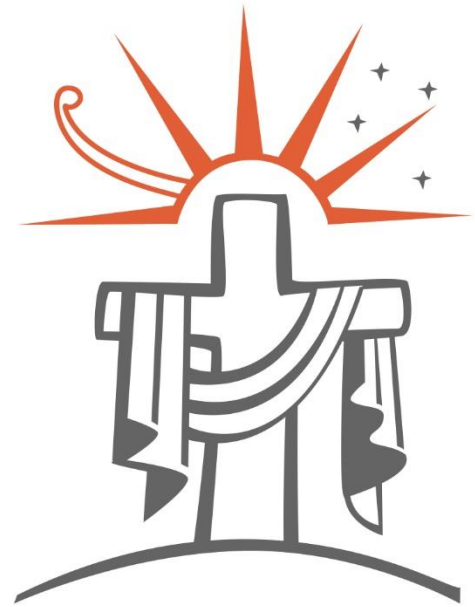
Call To Worship

(Adapted from Psalm 133)

How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!

It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
when God's people live together in unity!

For there the Lord bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore
when God's people live together in unity!



Prayer of the Day

Prince of peace, may we know your peace. Help us to go through life with abundant forgiveness and peace, that we may share them with all we know. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Gospel - John 20:19-31

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus^[a]), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." ²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." ²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe[Ⓜ] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Sermon - Rev. Corey Wagonfield,

Pastor, Resurrection Lutheran Church, Lebanon, OH

Grace and peace to you from God, who breathes life into all of creation. Amen.

Greetings from Resurrection Lutheran Church in Lebanon, Ohio. My name is Pastor Corey Wagonfield and I am serving in my first year of ordained ministry. Even though I serve in Lebanon, Ohio, I was born, raised, and still reside in Hamilton, Ohio. I have grown to love this city over my thirty-nine years of life and hold a fond place in my heart for many of the small, family owned restaurants (as evidenced by my expanding waistline). The food here may not be better than any other small town, but because I have grown up eating it, I often think that it supersedes any other comparable delicacies.

One of my favorite foods is the steak sandwich from Richard's Pizza. It is like most other steak sandwiches except for the fact that the bun is slathered with garlic butter and it comes with a stack of onions about half an inch high. The smell is undeniable when a Richard's steak sandwich is in your general vicinity. In fact the smell often lingers in your clothes and upholstered furniture for about 24 hours after you are done eating. I could quite possibly eat a Richard's steak sandwich every day of my life and be totally content... but, if that were a reality, I might possibly lose my job, my social life, and my spouses' affection. As tasty as that sandwich is, the combination of potent garlic and onion makes your breath pretty pungent. It is best to keep your distance from people for about 24-hours, even after you brush your teeth and gargle some mouthwash. To the right is a picture of this mouthwatering sandwich.



Even though we may not share the same cultural experience of eating a Richard's steak sandwich, I think you can identify with the experience of being around someone who is sporting some rank breath. It is an experience that drives a physical wedge between two or more people. It is not unlike our current situation with the COVID pandemic. The idea of an unmasked person coming at you, heavily breathing particles of potentially deadly virus in your general direction, is something that will send you running for the hills. Taking all of this into consideration, please bear with me when I say that the reading from John makes me cringe when Jesus "breathed on" the disciples. Let's be honest... it's kind of strange. Nobody just breathes on someone. My guess is that we just accept that action as part of the story and move on without really thinking about it. Do you really want a person breathing on you? That kind of behavior usually gets the cops called on you!

As much as I want to think that Jesus had cool, minty fresh breath when he breathed on the disciples, my common sense tells me it probably wasn't the case. His breath was probably hot, and

without the miracles of modern dentistry, it probably wasn't pleasant in odor. Despite the condition of his breath, it speaks to the intimacy that Jesus had with the disciples, that they were willing to allow Jesus to come close and breath onto them.

How intimate are we willing to be with Jesus? Are we willing to open up our lives to the point where we are comfortable with Jesus coming close to us so that we can feel the force (breath) of life wash over us? This breath is not just an intimate act that brings us close to Jesus, but it changes us. It is not a singular act that happens once and then we go on with our normal daily lives. It is a gift from God that connects us to the beginning of time and awakens us to the reign of God (the kingdom of God) that is all around us right now.

When Jesus breathes on the disciples we are reminded of the creation story in Genesis 2, where God breathes into the nostrils of Adam and Eve and brings them to life. It is the breath of God that awakens creation and propels life. When Jesus breathes, he is awakening the disciples in a new way. He is giving them the Holy Spirit (the advocate) that will lead and guide them in the process of living in a new reality, one where the kingdom of God has come close to them and where they have seen the end game, that death will be defeated.

The good news is that the breath of God is not reserved only for the disciples. We have received the breath of God at our individual creation and we experience it again in the waters of baptism. This GOOD breath is a gift from God that shows us that God desires life and wholeness for all of creation. When we are open to it, the Holy Spirit, the wind and breath of God, guides us toward seeking that wholeness and life as demonstrated in the life and words of Jesus. The paradox of all this, is that when we are open to the movement of the GOOD breath of God, that it propels us to be with those people who society deems as "bad breath people." We encounter them with the grace, love, and acceptance that God shows to all people, no matter their past indiscretions. Because, let's be honest, we all have them.

This week, I encourage you, every time you brush your teeth (which is hopefully at least once each day) to remember the GOOD breath of God that resides within you. Be open to seeing how that Holy Spirit is directing you to help bring life and wholeness to everyone and everything around you.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered in our homes and around the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Holy Lord you meet us in our locked rooms. Come into our homes, meet us in these rooms, and touch us with your nail scared hands. In our helpless love bring peace, in our fearful love bring comfort.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

God of glory, resurrection, and new life we praise your name during this season of your victory over death. We pray that our voices rise to join with your one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, echoing throughout the ages your victory over death, so that none may perish but all may have eternal life- by, with, and through you.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Holy Mystery, on this journey of life we experience so many things, both good and bad- the joys and the sorrows. As illness reminds us of our distance from your perfect and eternal care, stay by our side. Lord, we pray especially for those who are close to us, those that are bound by disease, loneliness, pain, infection, and distance, those we remember before you now.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

The Lord be with you

And also with you.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God,
maker and redeemer of the universe.

You created all things,
and the earth proclaims your glory.

Your new creation, Jesus Christ,
calls us from the chaos of death
to new life in you.

For your Word of life, O God,
we give you thanks and praise.

You brought your people Israel through the Red Sea waters
to the safe side of the sea.

By your word and promise,
the waters of baptism
bring us safely to your side,
joined to your death and resurrection forever.

For your Word of life, O God,
we give you thanks and praise.

You feed us with the abundance of your table,
and your salvation is offered freely to all.
Send forth your Spirit
that your word may not return empty,
but accomplish all things for which you purpose.
For your Word of life, O God,
we give you thanks and praise.

Almighty and ever-living God, our hearts burn within us as you open to us the scriptures. Through the words of the prophets, reveal to us your timeless love. Through the hymns of the psalmist, teach us to sing your praise. Through the stories of the gospels, anoint us with the power of your resurrection, that we may go forth strengthened to endure times of trial, hardship, and fasting from your table. As we await the fulfillment of your promise to be with us to the end of the age, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

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

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice, O Lord, that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters, even from our homes.

Third Sunday of Easter

April 18, 2021

Call To Worship

(Adapted from Psalm 4)

Give me relief from my distress;
have mercy on me and hear my prayer

**Answer me when I call to you,
my righteous God.**

Many, Lord, are asking, "Who will bring us prosperity?"
Let the light of your face shine on us.

**Answer me when I call to you,
my righteous God.**

In peace I will lie down and sleep,
for you alone, Lord,
make me dwell in safety.

**Answer me when I call to you,
my righteous God.**



Prayer of the Day

Lord of all, we continue to celebrate your resurrection and your truth. Direct us to that truth, no matter the challenge or situation, so that it may prevail and be a light unto you, our God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Gospel - Luke 24:36b-48

³⁶ While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

³⁷ They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

⁴⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹ And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate it in their presence.

⁴⁴ He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.

Sermon - Rev. Thomas Benedum,

Retired Lutheran Pastor & Navy Chaplain, Ellisville, MO

Almost a century ago, the English author and poet laureate John Masefield wrote a play titled "The Trial of Jesus." In the scene after the crucifixion, the Roman centurion who had just come from the cross is talking with Pilate's wife. She asks him, "Do you think He is dead?"

He answers, "No, lady, I don't."

"Then where is He?"

The centurion replies, "Let loose in the world, lady where [no one] can stop His truth."

This bit of fictional dialogue is a reminder that ultimately Christ rules, that, as we pray in The Lord's Prayer, His will *will* be done on earth as it is in heaven. Neither hostility nor indifference can stop His truth. And because the risen Christ lives in and through believers, it is also a reminder that Jesus uses *us*, His people, in proclaiming His message of the cross – that is, the message of God's love – and the message of the resurrection – that is, God's validation of Jesus and His power – by having us take it to the world in our actions and words. In short, we are called, just like the apostles, to be His witnesses.

Anyone who has spent much time at all with the Bible will have discovered that much of the language of the Bible has been borrowed from the language of the law court. The atmosphere is that of a trial, a lawsuit between God and the world, in which God's people are called to be witnesses. Both in the Old Testament in the calling of Israel and of the Church in the New Testament, believers serve as material witnesses for God in the world.

No New Testament writer employs this concept more strongly than Luke, the author of both this week's Gospel lesson and the reading from Acts. Luke began his Gospel by telling his readers that the accounts in his narrative were given him by eyewitnesses to these events. More than that, he investigated the reliability of these accounts before he put pen to paper. The eyewitnesses are the disciples, later apostles, who were with Jesus "from the beginning" of His ministry. Luke concludes his Gospel with Jesus' final words to His disciples, "You are witnesses of these things," that is, of His ministry and God's plan of salvation that included His suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection.

Luke picks up this theme immediately as he begins his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles. As eyewitnesses of the public ministry of Jesus, the apostles were obviously qualified to bear witness to "all that Jesus did and taught" (Acts 1:1). They could personally testify that Jesus' death by crucifixion was not the end of His story; they saw and experienced Him alive again. As Luke summarizes, "He presented Himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

As the book of Acts begins, Peter, who near the end of Luke's Gospel had denied with curses even knowing Jesus (Luke 22:54-62), is now the apostles' chief spokesman. Today's First Lesson is one of those early opportunities for him to speak publicly about Jesus and God's plan. He speaks from what he knows (he was there with Jesus in His ministry) but more than that. He speaks firsthand about forgiveness, a poignant restoration He received from Jesus after the resurrection, but also a forgiveness that was intended in God's plan for all believers.

God's cause in the world is still dependent on witnesses. While we are 21 centuries removed from Peter and the Apostles who were actual eyewitnesses of Jesus and His ministry, we share their faith. That is, though we ourselves have not actually "seen," we can still be an "I" witness through the living testimony of what God through Christ still does today in the world through the Holy Spirit. Specifically, we can testify to what God is doing in *my* life.

What makes a witness believable? What makes *us* believable as God's witnesses today? One thing is the character of the witness. If a statement is made by a reputable person, it is more readily accepted as true. This is obviously true in the civil courts. A favorite tactic of defense lawyers is to try to discredit the testimony of a witness by showing the person is not trustworthy, is a liar, or is a "bad" person (whatever that means). The person whose life is "bad" will have trouble convincing someone to believe his or her "good" testimony. The same is true in the witness of Christians when it comes to the truth about being one. It is not until faith is made a visible, demonstrable part of one's life that our testimony becomes credible. In fact, our life cannot be separated from the words we say. If actions don't speak louder than words, they at least can't contradict the words we do speak.

Does this mean that we as Christians are better than others? Of course, not! Last week's lesson from 1 John reminded us, if we were ever tempted to forget it, that we do sin, just like everyone else – *but*, it also joyfully reminded us that we also know of Christ and His "atoning sacrifice for our sins." Further, 1 John reminds us pointedly for our witness, this atoning sacrifice was "not for ours [our sins] only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). We aren't better, but we are forgiven. And having fellowship with Christ means living by the power of His Spirit, for "if we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth" (1 John 1:6, NIV). That means people will have a hard time believing us (and rightly so) if we *claim* to be Christians but live lives that aren't consistent with that confession. Put another way: we can't act out our faith on Sundays but then ignore it on Monday or other days; nor can we choose when to "be a Christian" or not depending on where we are or whom we're with.

We're Lutheran, but let me tell you a Methodist story from a few years ago. An old Methodist preacher from Texas, Rev. Ed Barcus, traveled to England. He was 80 years old and it was his first trip to

London. Naturally, as a Methodist, he wanted to see all the places where John Wesley lived and worked as he founded the Methodist movement. His guide, a British Methodist pastor, showed him all the usual places – Wesley’s home, his gravesite, and Aldersgate Street where Wesley had his conversion as he read Martin Luther’s commentary on Romans.

Barcus wasn’t satisfied. “I want to visit Wesley’s chapel on West Street, where the evangelical revival began.” So, his patient guide traipsed with him across London, thinking that the chapel had been demolished years ago – and sure enough, when they got to the site, there was a theater where the chapel had once stood. But on the outside of the theater building was a plaque that read: “Here John Wesley preached at West Street and began the Evangelical Revival.”

Barcus insisted on going into the theater. It was open because rehearsals for a new show were going on, and the chorus girls were practicing on the stage. Marching down the aisle, the old preacher went up onto the stage, pushed his way through the girls, clapped his hands for attention. “Young ladies, I am a Methodist preacher from Texas. Here where I stand, our founder, John Wesley, began his work. Now I want you to join me in prayer.” The old man knelt on the stage. The show girls were so startled they simply knelt where they were, too. The prayer was an expression of gratitude for Wesley and also a direct, personal plea for God’s blessing and Christ’s protection for the girls rehearsing in that theater. When Barcus rose, his faith had won them completely. He had reminded them of God’s love and they were deeply moved, some to tears. They gathered around him, not wanting him to leave, and he continued witnessing to them.

Long after Barcus went back home to Texas, the London preacher and others continued his ministry to the show girls and the theater people of London’s West End. It started with a Texas preacher who came among them with a heartwarming message of concern and who spoke a good word about Jesus Christ for them as they lived their lives.

We have a similar privilege. We don’t have to go to London, we aren’t preachers or Methodists, but we all can say – and live – a good word about Jesus, what He means in our lives, about Jesus who is alive and at work in our world today and in the lives of people everywhere who call themselves Christians. His Spirit is given to us for power and for guidance. His word to the disciples turned apostles is now ours to speak and live: “you are [my] witnesses.” To that end, may this prayer accompany us today and every day: Lord, let the witness of my words and the witness of my life be consistent and faithful reflections of You and Your love that embrace us all. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered in our homes and around the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Lord Jesus, you offer us the peace that passes all understanding. Remind us of this peace as we remain faced with the world’s uncertainty. Open our hearts and minds, that we might live our lives as examples of your peace to all the world.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

God Almighty, on this day we thank you for all who support us, all who care for us, and all who nurture us. Thank you for those people who you have put in our lives to be examples of your presence, your patience, and your love.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Christ our King, throughout this holy season we give our thanks and praise that you have come to crush hell underfoot, fulfill the words of scripture, and free us from the bondage of sin and death. Help us to be a light to all that we meet, sharing your gospel with them.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

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And also with you.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God,
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You brought your people Israel through the Red Sea waters
to the safe side of the sea.

By your word and promise,
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bring us safely to your side,
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Lord's Prayer

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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

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice, O Lord, that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters, even from our homes.

Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 25, 2021

Call To Worship

(Adapted from Psalm 23)

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

**Surely your goodness and mercy will follow me
all the days of my life.**

Even though I walk

through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;

**Surely your goodness and mercy will follow me
all the days of my life.**

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my
enemies.

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

**Surely your goodness and mercy will follow me
all the days of my life.**



Prayer of the Day

Good Shepherd, we thank you for taking us with you and leaving no one behind. Thank you for the protection you provide for us, and thank you for those you put in our lives that help steer us in the right direction as a shepherd would. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Gospel - John 10:11-18

¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

Sermon - Ashley Wheeler, MDiv,

Candidacy Coordinator at Luther Seminary, Minneapolis, MN

One of my seminary classmates was an actual Shepherd in Croatia. He is the only Shepherd that I have encountered in real life, and I loved hearing his understanding of the shepherd imagery in our Gospel texts. He would recount the hours the shepherds and the sheep would all be in the fields mingled together, and as they all went to go home, the sheep would follow the voices of their shepherd. He says that you would look out and see all of these sheep moving and following **their** shepherd. Not one of their sheep was lost, and not a single one was ever left behind.

It is by no mistake that Jesus uses this imagery to help us understand his relationship with us and I also think this imagery can help us understand our relationships with each other. At the time of Jesus, many of the very people he was talking with were shepherds. He spoke their language, and he understood who they were. As a Shepherd, their daily work was in caring and tending to their flock. This is a great responsibility. One that requires knowing each of your sheep.

While many of us may not be actual Shepherds in our daily vocations, I believe that the core functions can translate into our church communities, our schools, our government, our healthcare, and the list can go on. What if we were to tend to our communities in the way a Shepherd does? What if we were to look out and know each unique person and be sure that no one was ever left behind?

The Good Shepherd imagery is powerful and I wonder if it still holds up in our society today? At times this burden feels too great and there have been too many losses to account for this past year: losses of jobs, homes, safety, and for many the loss of a loved one. If you have felt lost or left behind this year, you are not alone. This past year's pandemic has been hard on every facet of our lives. It has been scary and frustrating, isolating and overwhelming. We have seen deeper divides at a time when we are being called to tend to one another; to reach out to our neighbor and help one another.

Our normal patterns of life have been altered. We have seen an increase in screen time in order to stay connected to our families, friends, work, schools, and churches. We have been asked to isolate ourselves and wear masks for the greater good. We have been asked to make personal sacrifices for the safety and well-being of our neighbors. It has also been really hard and it has come at a cost with deep grief and loss of what once was.

In this past year when the world is overwhelming, it can be hard to see where the Good Shepherd is. The truth is, the Good Shepherd, has never left us. We can see Jesus in the healthcare workers who have worked tirelessly day in and day out; in the Indigenous communities that have protected their elders, their wisdom, and their cultures; in the grocery stores that have kept their doors open to ensure that everyone has access to food; in the restaurants and hotels that have donated food and shelters to those who have lost their support systems; in the youth, marching in the street, crying out for justice.

The reality is we do not know what is on the other side of this pandemic. We have no idea what our world will look like or feel like or be like. I am hoping that we can all be a little kinder with a deep sense of

care and compassion for our neighbors. I am hoping it also moves us into a world that relies on support from one another; a world that lives into love and grace through Christ.

The Good Shepherd has been active in our world, not just yesterday, or today, but for the generations to come. When we are able to gather at the table, together, as a community again may the body and blood of our Lord, the Good Shepherd, continue to sustain and nurture us. This collective table is one where all are welcome, where all can be seen and heard, and where all are known by name. We have a Jesus, a God, who is all of this and more. The Good Shepherd has laid down his life for us and will do it again and again. We have a Good Shepherd who calls us by name, we will listen to his voice, and we will not be left behind. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered in our homes and around the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

God of New Life, as you walk among us this Easter season, you call us to be your children, those who follow in your ways. Be with us through this seasons of our lives, walk with us and guide us with your peace , leading us down your right pathways.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Holy Lord, you are the Good Shepherd, you laid down your life for us your sheep. You walk us toward still waters, anoint our heads, and call us by name. Guide us and your sheep from other folds, as we walk together toward your glorious tomorrow.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

God of peace, help us to love not only in word and speech but in truth and action, caring for those in our communities, reaching out to those we know in need, and making peace wherever we go.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

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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.

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice, O Lord, that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters, even from our homes.

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 2, 2021

Call To Worship

(Adapted from Psalm 22)

All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him

**I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you.**

From you comes the theme of my praise
in the great assembly;

**I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you.**

Dominion belongs to the Lord
and he rules over the nations.

**I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you.**



Prayer of the Day

Holy Lord, may we be fruitful to your creation in word and deed, and may we always remain faithful to you, knowing that you will keep us from harm and deliver us to life eternal. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Gospel - John 15:1-8

15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. **2** He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. **3** You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. **4** Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. **6** If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. **7** If you remain in me and

my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Sermon - Rev. Karl-John N. Stone,

Pastor, House of Prayer Lutheran Church, Franklin, WI

I recently came across a column written by Faye Vincent, who was the Commissioner of Major League Baseball about 25 years ago. He was writing about some of the wisdom that has been shared with him by baseball players over the years. This is what he learned from the great hall-of-fame pitcher Warren Spahn:

*"When I asked Warren Spahn who **taught him how to pitch**, he peered at me as if I had just insulted him. I was sure I had asked a stupid question and he acted as if he agreed. After a pause, his answer was – **"Commissioner, hitters taught me how to pitch."** I was stunned by the answer. He knew there is also **no other way to become a great pitcher, or doctor or lawyer or rabbi. One has to learn from one's patients, clients, audience or competition...**" [<http://www.murraychass.com/> Tell It to the Commissioner]*

"Commissioner, hitters taught me how to pitch." Think about that for a moment--the greatest left-handed pitcher of all time, with 363 major league victories, didn't learn how to pitch from studying another great pitcher, or from working with a great pitching coach, or exercising, or even through mastering his pitching delivery. I'm sure he did all of those things. But it was ultimately the hitters who taught him how to pitch. Hitters--the players who do the very opposite of the pitcher. It was by paying attention to their perspective, their wants, their reaction, their way of being and of doing things--of putting himself in their shoes and thinking along with their thoughts--that's how he became a pitcher.

Warren Spahn's insight reminds me of today's scripture reading, and the meeting between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. This story is really part of the larger story of Philip the Evangelist--it spans a few chapters in Acts. If you read up on it, you'll see how Philip's background and experiences prepared him for his meeting with the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip had been chosen by the believers in Jerusalem to be in charge of the daily food distribution to the widows. It was the original "Meals on Wheels" ministry! Like the other deacons, such as Stephen, he was "full of the Spirit and wisdom". He lived in Jerusalem, the center of faith and worship.

But pretty soon after beginning this ministry, his colleague Stephen becomes the first Christian martyr, and his death changes the course of Philip's life. A great wave of persecution begins, and most of the Christians in Jerusalem have to flee for their lives, basically as **refugees**. Philip flees north and finds a warm welcome from crowds of people in Samaria. God gives him the opportunity to do something unexpected and different from his experience in Jerusalem. He becomes an evangelist, talking about Jesus, perform signs of God's Kingdom like healing and baptizing people. The people there were hungry for the **word of hope** in Christ he was able to share with them.

And how did he know how to do all of this? He wasn't trained to do it in Jerusalem. Sure, his ministry as a deacon in charge of the food distribution gave him some experience. Presumably, he talked with the widows about Jesus. Yes, he'd been taught about faith and prayer by the Apostles, and earned the respect of his fellow believers in Jerusalem. But it was **the people he met in Samaria who taught him** how to be an evangelist; because they're the ones who needed the news about Jesus **to be good news for them.**

So when he met the Ethiopian eunuch, he knows what to do: keep learning. Philip doesn't just start talking about Jesus out of the blue. He first learns where the Ethiopian eunuch is coming from--his perspective, the things that are on his mind. He knows what to say **not** because the Apostles gave him a script. He knows what to say because he **listened**--and in the listening, he could see how **God was already at work in the life of this man.** And then he could talk about Jesus in a way that gave the man real hope for his life.

In listening, Philip learned that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading from Isaiah 53--a section where the prophet Isaiah describes a "suffering servant"--a Christ-like figure who gives his life in humility and service for the sake of others, in the same way that Jesus would choose to do when he went to the cross. These particular verses would have a **special significance** for a eunuch, because they refer to someone who would have **no descendants and who dedicated his life to serving others.** Maybe the Ethiopian saw himself in those words? He had dedicated his life in service to the Queen. He would have no descendants.

He had an interesting dynamic at work in his life. In some ways he was the ultimate **"insider" back home.** We know that he was powerful--the treasurer of Ethiopia. He moved in exclusive social circles, being a member of the royal court. He was wealthy--able to afford his own chariot and driver, and travel hundreds of miles. He was well-educated, able to read at a time when most people were illiterate

But he was also in other respects an **"outsider"**. We know he was very committed to his faith in the God of Israel--traveling to Jerusalem to worship. But because he was a eunuch, he could never worship in the inner part of the Temple because of the ceremonial religious laws that prevented him from doing so--only in the outer court of the Gentiles. He knew that God had a good plan for him--as Isaiah would write just three chapters later from the portion we hear in Acts, the Lord had promised to the eunuchs "an everlasting name that will not be cut off", and to the foreigners a place in the Lord's house--so that it would be "a house of prayer for all people". But this had not come to fruition yet. He was connected to God, but because of his status as a eunuch **he couldn't fully integrate the rest of his life into the practice of his faith.**

To get back to Warren Spahn's nugget of wisdom, the Ethiopian eunuch was the "hitter" to Philip's "pitcher". Not that they were adversaries or opponents, but because **God could work in the space between them** in ways that would otherwise not have been possible. Each could learn to see himself in the other guy's shoes, thinking along with the other guy's thoughts, and interpreting their

faith in terms of the good news of Jesus--and that's when God breathed new life into them both. **"Here is water! Why can't I be baptized!"** The Ethiopian realized that the good news of Jesus was **for him!** In Christ, he could **integrate his faith with the rest of his life.**

We learn from this story that having **God as an active presence in your life** is not just for the believers of Jerusalem, or the people of Samaria, "the insiders"—but also for the Ethiopians, the eunuchs, those who may be different in some way, "the outsiders". And you know what? When you get right down to it, we're all insiders in some ways, and outsiders in other ways. But the scope of God's Kingdom is **much wider** than we usually realize. And we can learn a lot about God and faith by **listening** to those who are different from us—once we realize that God has **already** been working in their life, just as God has **already** been working in our own life.

In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther put it like this: "God's Kingdom comes on its own without our prayer. But we ask in the Lord's Prayer that it may also come to us." Like Philip, like the Ethiopian, when we open our hearts and minds to the Holy Spirit, we can **look for God** to come among us through **unexpected people, and unexpected ways.** Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered in our homes and around the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

God of life, you are the true gardener of all creation. We thank you for the gift of life that we share and celebrate. We thank you for Jesus Christ, the true vine who connects us to you. We pray that our lives may bear good fruit, and be signs to the world of your nourishment, faithfulness, and care of your people.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

God of forgiveness, we pray for those who hurt us, we pray for those who steal and kill, for those who destroy and make this world a dangerous place. We pray Lord that you do not hold these things against them, but instead use the light of your Son to illuminate their paths to your truths, your ways, and your eternal life.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Lord of wholeness, be with all those across the world who need your touch, and your care. Sit with those in waiting, and enshroud those who seek freedom from affliction, pain and depression. Lord, be with those we remember now both in our hearts and aloud.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

The Lord be with you

And also with you.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God,
maker and redeemer of the universe.

You created all things,
and the earth proclaims your glory.

Your new creation, Jesus Christ,
calls us from the chaos of death
to new life in you.

For your Word of life, O God,

we give you thanks and praise.

You brought your people Israel through the Red Sea waters
to the safe side of the sea.

By your word and promise,
the waters of baptism
bring us safely to your side,
joined to your death and resurrection forever.

For your Word of life, O God,

we give you thanks and praise.

You feed us with the abundance of your table,
and your salvation is offered freely to all.

Send forth your Spirit
that your word may not return empty,
but accomplish all things for which you purpose.

For your Word of life, O God,

we give you thanks and praise.

Almighty and ever-living God, our hearts burn within us as you open to us the scriptures. Through the words of the prophets, reveal to us your timeless love. Through the hymns of the psalmist, teach us to sing your praise. Through the stories of the gospels, anoint us with the power of your resurrection, that we may go forth strengthened to endure times of trial, hardship, and fasting from your table. As we await the fulfillment of your promise to be with us to the end of the age, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

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

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice, O Lord, that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters, even from our homes.

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 9, 2021

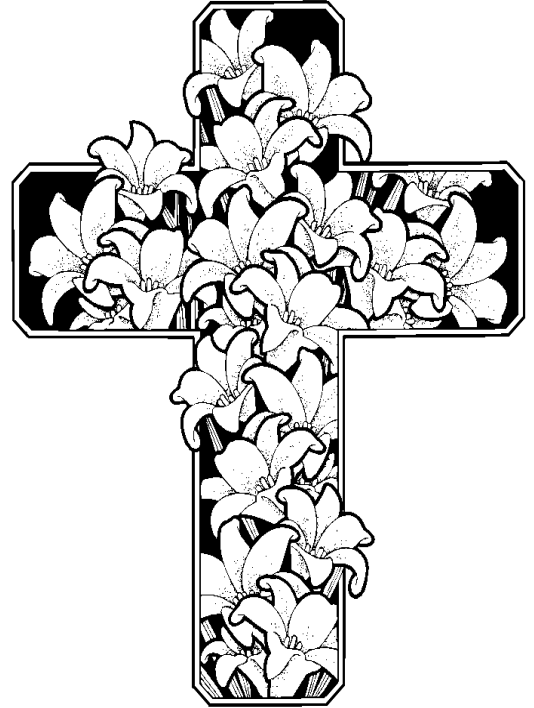
Call To Worship

(Adapted from Psalm 98)

Sing to the Lord a new song,
for he has done marvelous things;
**The Lord has made his salvation known
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.**

Let the sea resound, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it.
**The Lord has made his salvation known
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.**

He has remembered his love
and his faithfulness to Israel;
all the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.
**The Lord has made his salvation known
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.**



Prayer of the Day

Loving God, we thank you for your abundant love. May we live in you and learn how to truly love one another, in word, in action, and in reaction. Thank you for your gift of perfect love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Gospel - John 15:9-17

⁹“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷This is my command: Love each other.

Sermon - Rev. Jeff Stalley,

Pastor, Zion Lutheran Church, Southington, CT

I have a drawer where old cords go to live. Charging cords for old phones. Old ear phones. Cords for computer speakers. Cords for.....I have no idea, I don't remember what they were for. Cords that have plugs that will not plug into any modern electronic device

I don't know why I didn't just throw them away. I wasn't going to use them. I think the most likely explanation is that I thought I would donate them some day after I matched them up with the device they belonged to.

I moved recently and had to deal with that drawer for the first time in years. What I found was a tangled mess that likely would take hours to untangle and separate each cord. When I said that drawer was a place for those cords to live, I almost mean that literally. I had just placed each cord in the drawer, but it was if those cords came alive like vines and wrapped around each other.

In preparing to move, I also had to deal with real vines. Vines in the yard that had wrapped around bushes. Vines that had wrapped around each other. I would pull and pull on a vine to get in out and then there would be another vine. I couldn't tell where one vine started and another ended. There was a strength in the way that they wrapped around each other.

I am the vine.....and you are the branches

In most years when this gospel comes up in the lectionary, I preach on pruning so that the rest could bear fruit.

But something struck me this year, that got me thinking in a different direction. Context does that. But Bible Study does as well. I gather weekly with other pastors to look at the reading for the upcoming Sunday. Quite often, someone will say something like "I've never noticed this part before" or see things in a new light.

The verse before this passage Jesus says "Come now let us leave". Now he is talking about abiding. You know, remain, stay. It makes me wonder which is it Jesus, are we to remain or to stay? But, of course, abiding means much more than that. It doesn't mean not going forward. Not moving.

Abide with me means be with me. Be a part of me.

I came across this quote from Gail O'Day, "In a vine, braces are almost completely indistinguishable from one another, it is impossible to determine where one branch stops and another branch starts. All run together as they grow out of the central vine".

That quote flipped the idea of vines as hard yard work to showing a positive image of the community of Christ.

Because of the pandemic - remember I said above that context can lead to a new understanding - I have been missing the human interaction of church work - greeting people as they walk into worship, singing in unison, responses to prayers, communion, doing work in the community, places and times where we work and act together and it is hard to determine where one person's work ends and another person's work begins

The vine as metaphor for church life. Not just a tangled mess.....but an intricate tangling of people who are stronger together just like a vine.

I always thought of the vine in this passage as linear. Jesus to us to fruit. But the strength of the vine system is as Gail O'Day says is that vines are not individualistic, their strength lies in how they are intricately intertwined with each other.

So what I thought was just linear.....is also the nourishment of Jesus, but the strength of each other. Or maybe the strength of all of us together. To endure. To sustain. To abide.

And so the discussion becomes. Jesus is the vine. We are the branches. We are to bear fruit. How are we going to intricately entangle with God's people? How are we going to live together? How are we going to work together? How are we going to be God's people together?

When Jesus says "abide with me", it is a communal call. For we are stronger together.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered in our homes and around the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Holy God, you send your Holy Spirit to all, that people of every tongue and tribe might hear of your love, and feel the blessings of life with you. Help us not to stand astounded, but to accept and support all our sisters and brothers in your love.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Jesus the Christ, you call us to abide in your love: the love that created existence, the love that hung on the cross, and the love that calls to us this day. Give us patience, strength, and faith to take a firm stand in your love, sharing it with all people.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Most Holy Trinity, bless us with your wisdom, that we might see in Christ there is a new creation, one not divided by us & them, but one wherein we are all your loved people.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

The Lord be with you

And also with you.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God,
maker and redeemer of the universe.

You created all things,
and the earth proclaims your glory.

Your new creation, Jesus Christ,
calls us from the chaos of death
to new life in you.

For your Word of life, O God,

we give you thanks and praise.

You brought your people Israel through the Red Sea waters
to the safe side of the sea.

By your word and promise,
the waters of baptism
bring us safely to your side,
joined to your death and resurrection forever.

For your Word of life, O God,

we give you thanks and praise.

You feed us with the abundance of your table,
and your salvation is offered freely to all.

Send forth your Spirit
that your word may not return empty,
but accomplish all things for which you purpose.

For your Word of life, O God,

we give you thanks and praise.

Almighty and ever-living God, our hearts burn within us as you open to us the scriptures. Through the words of the prophets, reveal to us your timeless love. Through the hymns of the psalmist, teach us to sing your praise. Through the stories of the gospels, anoint us with the power of your resurrection, that we may go forth strengthened to endure times of trial, hardship, and fasting from your table. As we await the fulfillment of your promise to be with us to the end of the age, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

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

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice, O Lord, that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters, even from our homes.

Ascension of Our Lord

May 16, 2021

Call To Worship

(Adapted from Psalm 47)

Clap your hands, all you nations;
shout to God with cries of joy.

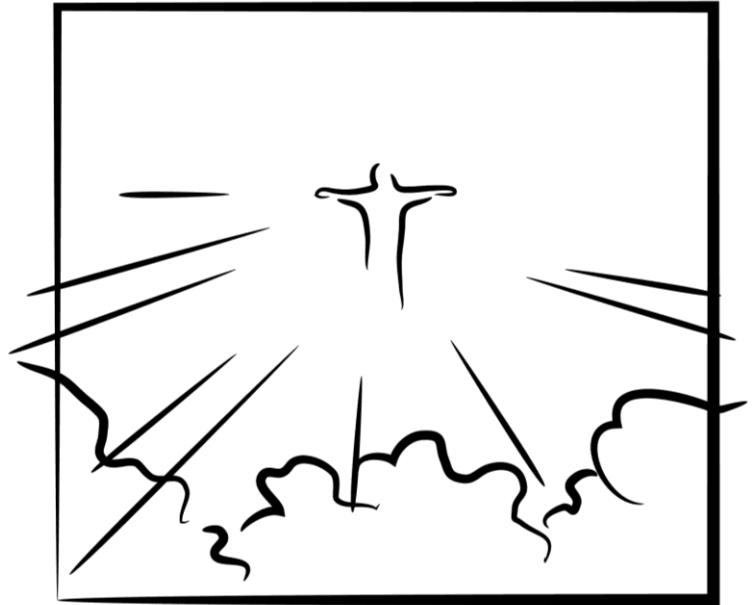
**The Lord Most High is awesome,
the great King over all the earth.**

He chose our inheritance for us,
the pride of Jacob, whom he loved.

**The Lord Most High is awesome,
the great King over all the earth.**

God reigns over the nations;
God is seated on his holy throne.

**The Lord Most High is awesome,
the great King over all the earth.**



Prayer of the Day

Lord, thank you for your glorious love. We go through life knowing that you have a glorious gift waiting for us. Give us the compassion and strength to love one another as you have told us to do. Let us share your love with all who seek it. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Gospel - John 17:6-19

⁶“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸ For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹ I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. ¹¹ I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I protected them

and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

¹³ "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

Sermon - Rev. Krista Zimmerman,

Pastor, Mount Pleasant Lutheran Church, Racine, WI

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen

Ascension of our Lord is not always celebrated in Lutheran churches. It's considered a minor festival and if it's celebrated- it would be during the week. Ascension was actually this past Thursday. But I like to celebrate it and preach on it because it brings the Easter season to a proper close before we launch into Pentecost next week. Another way of saying that is- I think we need closure. Ascension is about closure but also making space for something and someone new to come. Jesus returned to his heavenly home- but didn't leave us alone. Jesus was still with us in a new way and sends another- the Holy Spirit to lead us and guide us.

According to Luke, Jesus enlightens the disciples in his last moments on Earth. He had appeared to the women that first Easter. He had appeared to the men on the road to Emmaus. He even appeared to the disciples on a beach and asks for some fish. Just in case anyone wondered if he was some kind of ghost- he proved he wasn't by eating the food before him.

Jesus enlightens them to understand the scriptures through the eyes of him. By this he meant the law, prophets and Psalms- much of what we now call the Old Testament. The disciples were witnesses to him fulfilling these scriptures. The disciples were important eye witnesses called to share the verbal stories of how Jesus is the Messiah- the fulfillment of the scriptures. Eventually, these would be written down. The Ascension is similar to the road to Emmaus story. When the two men unknowingly talking to Jesus, later said- were not our hearts burning within us? Their eyes were opened to seeing Jesus and understanding his ministry. Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecy.

Jesus had to be lifted to heaven to make space as a new chapter of the mission of God began. Making space for the church to begin. So long as Jesus was in human form- all eyes and hearts are fixed there- like a celebrity. But if he has ascended back to heaven with God his father- then the people could concentrate on the mission that God has called them to. Make space to focus on what Jesus would have them do in the world- spread the good news. For the Holy Spirit to come and work in a new way on Pentecost. Jesus said: Wait in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.

Jesus was blessing the disciples as he was being raised up. He was acting as a mediator between us and God's power. We in turn are called to bless God.

We bless God by being God's children. By living out prophetic witness in society.

Putting our faith and trust in the Jesus we have learned about- even when we cannot see him. We are blessed by God's presence always. When it is hard to see- we look inside. Jesus is there to awaken our faith.

There is natural connection here between the ascension of Jesus and our graduates whom we celebrate today. One of our staff members and I were talking this past week about raising kids. She said talking about parenting, "Isn't that the point of all this- to send our kids out into the world to be productive members of society?" It's not to keep them with us forever. But with that comes a range of emotions from pride and joy to sadness. Parents- you do your best. We as a church family also strive to help you in the task of raising children who are wise as serpents and gentle as doves. In their baptisms- God promised to be with them always. Now as our graduates prepare to launch from their homes, their families, their church- God still promises to be with them. Graduates- you do not go alone. God goes with you wherever you are. And you are part of a worldwide network of Christians that we hope you tap into wherever life leads you.

Jesus disciples went on their way rejoicing after they had seen Jesus magically and mystically lifted into the clouds. They go off to what they were called to do- spread the good news. We also are sent from this place to spread the good news- by how we live. By how we act. By how we speak. We are called to bless God. We bless God by loving one another. And God blesses us by never leaving us alone. We always have the Spirit to guide us. The community of Christ to accompany us. Jesus Christ to love and forgive us. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered in our homes and around the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Most Holy Spirit, you pour out the power and blessing of the gospel on all people, empower us to keep up with your radically inclusive grace. Strengthen us to grow in our understanding of church and community as they constantly change. Keep us firmly rooted in the life, teachings, and radically inclusive love of Jesus our Lord.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Jesus the Christ, you walk with us, leading and guiding us down your pathways; teaching us your ways of grace, peace, compassion, and forgiveness for all people. Support us as we try our best to follow you down this path of faith, loving each other as you first loved us.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

God Almighty, we remember on this day that Jesus ascended to be at the right hand of the Father. Be with all those that we miss, those who have completed their life's work, and have entered into the Father's house, where Christ has prepared them a place. Be with those who mourn the loss of loved ones, especially those lost to COVID19.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

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And also with you.

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Lord's Prayer

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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

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice, O Lord, that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters, even from our homes.

Pentecost

May 23, 2021

Call To Worship

(Adapted from Psalm 104)

Lord my God, you are very great;
you are clothed with splendor and majesty.

Praise the Lord, O my soul!

The Lord set the earth on its
foundations;
it can never be moved.

Praise the Lord, O my soul!

How many are your works, Lord!
In wisdom you made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

Praise the Lord, O my soul!



Prayer of the Day

Living God, your prodigal love and protection knows no bounds as you provide life-giving breath from the Spirit poured out on your Church. Help us appreciate with deep gratitude your ever-present gift in our lives so we may share your Love with all whose lives we touch. In the name of our Lord Jesus, the Christ, we pray: Come, Holy Spirit, Come. **Amen.**

Gospel - John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

²⁶ "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. ²⁷ And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

²⁶ "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. ²⁷ And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

⁴ I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, ⁵ but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' ⁶ Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. ⁷ But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go

away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ about sin, because people do not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

¹² "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."

Sermon - Rev. Wayne Gollenberg, Retired parish pastor having served congregations on Long Island, New York and Connecticut

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Even those not part of "*Red Sox Nation*" might be familiar with "**the curse.**" Even those who are not fond of baseball might know the name Babe Ruth.

Without all the fascinating details of dates and dollars and personalities know this: Before 1918 the Boston Red Sox had won five of the first 15 World Series, BUT, after selling Babe Ruth to the New York Yankees that year the Sox didn't win another World Series... for 86 years! Throughout New England for over eight and a half decades "**The Curse of the Bambino**" lived on.

Red Sox fans pleaded and prayed, "**Reverse the Curse.**" Finally their petitions were heard as their beloved team defeated the New York Yankees in the American League Championship Series and then went on to defeat the Saint Louis Cardinals in the 2004 World Series. The curse was reversed and joyful pandemonium reverberated among longsuffering Red Sox fans.

There was a curse in the Church that lasted longer than a measly 86 years. The reversal of that curse was sensational and lives on!

The joy of Pentecost arrives because God does something brand new. God does, in a manner of speaking, what the Red Sox did... Reverse the Curse.

Pull up some of your Bible knowledge going all the way back to Genesis. Those early chapters of Scripture tell us that as people began populating the earth, wickedness increased. Humans became quite smug about themselves and their abilities. Nothing drives out the awareness and need of God like self-pride. Some decided to construct a tower that reached the heavens, "**so that we may make a name for ourselves...**" Disturbed by their audacity and arrogance God splintered their common language into many dialects. Soon they could no longer communicate. They gave up building the tower. The place became known as Babel, which sounds like the Hebrew word for "confused." (The Complete Idiots Guide to the Bible, p. 33)

On this day of Pentecost, as we celebrate the giving of the Holy Spirit to the followers of Jesus, the curse of Babel is reversed! On the day of Pentecost the language barrier was removed. The Spirit we say we believe in in the Creeds we confess, in the prayers we offer, and in the songs we sing, reversed the curse. Now the message of **"God's deeds of power"** could be spread near and far because the disciples were speaking the languages of the world. God, by reversing the curse, blazed a path for His followers so they could share the Good News of salvation to all people.

Great story! Terrific fulfillment of God's holy will! But what difference does it make TODAY?!?

Besieged by a pandemic of epic proportions, beleaguered by debt that won't be erased by stimulus checks, and inundated by worrisome phone calls and texts from sick or grieving family and friends, what difference does the Spirit given a couple of thousand years ago make in our lives now? "Curses" seem to be alive and well in every corner of our lives.

How can all these "curses," from the smallest to the greatest, be reversed in our lives? Where's the cure for curses we keep hidden and don't even share with those closest to us? How's change going to come into lives that are stuck under the curse of depression and anger?

What can God do to "reverse the curse" in our lives today?

The reversal starts with an absurdity. Logic would tell us it's going to take Jesus' power to reverse the curses befalling us. But Jesus says in the Gospel reading: **"I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer."** Jesus is *outta* here! As much of a shock as that may have been to the disciples (and to us!) what comes next is profoundly memorable. Jesus says, **"I will send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to you..."** This gift will change everything.

The change, the reversal, is visible in Peter. That big-hearted big-mouthed fisherman who rarely said the right thing at the right time, says the exact right thing on the day of Pentecost. Peter said what needed to be said quoting the prophet Joel, **"I will pour out my Spirit upon everyone, no one will be neglected; young and old will see visions of my glory... what you thought was hopeless will be turned around, what you thought was impossible I will make happen, what you know you don't deserve I will give you, and even though you thought you were unloved... I will love you to death... for everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."** (generous paraphrase)

Peter got it right! When God's Spirit is poured out on you, as it was at your Baptism, you became God's beloved forever. You were adorned with the Spirit of God's love, embraced with God's mercy, imbued with the fragrance of God's grace, and forever marked with the sign of His sacrifice... a cross... so we might know how much it cost God to embrace us, love us, and grace us with his ever-present Spirit.

The curse has been reversed... we are God's children and we rejoice and sing, "*fashion us all anew... help us to follow you... teach us... nourish us... guide us... free us from guilt and shame... Come Holy Spirit, Come!*"

(Evangelical Lutheran Worship, #401, "*Gracious Spirit, Heed Our Pleading*")

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the **HOLY SPIRIT!** Amen

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered in our homes and around the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Holy God, since the beginning of time you have breathed life into creation & sent your spirit into the world. Be with your community scattered across our nation, and around the world. Breathe on us, and help us feel your presence and support this day.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Master of the Universe, our confidence is built on our sure & certain hope in you. Help us to trust that even though we might not have the words to say, that your Holy Spirit will act stronger, and communicate more clearly, than we ever could on our own.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

God of Compassion and wholeness, in the glory of Pentecost your good news was spoken so that all might hear of you. We pray for all those who need your healing in their world today. Those locked behind doors of oppression, those trapped by sadness & limitations, those disconnected from their lives by the hurdle of social distancing. Be with all those we remember before you now.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear Our Prayer.**

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

The Lord be with you

And also with you.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God,
maker and redeemer of the universe.

You created all things,
and the earth proclaims your glory.

Your new creation, Jesus Christ,
calls us from the chaos of death
to new life in you.

For your Word of life, O God,

we give you thanks and praise.

You brought your people Israel through the Red Sea waters
to the safe side of the sea.

By your word and promise,
the waters of baptism
bring us safely to your side,
joined to your death and resurrection forever.

For your Word of life, O God,

we give you thanks and praise.

You feed us with the abundance of your table,
and your salvation is offered freely to all.

Send forth your Spirit
that your word may not return empty,
but accomplish all things for which you purpose.

For your Word of life, O God,

we give you thanks and praise.

Almighty and ever-living God, our hearts burn within us as you open to us the scriptures. Through the words of the prophets, reveal to us your timeless love. Through the hymns of the psalmist, teach us to sing your praise. Through the stories of the gospels, anoint us with the power of your resurrection, that we may go forth strengthened to endure times of trial, hardship, and fasting from your table. As we await the fulfillment of your promise to be with us to the end of the age, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

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

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice, O Lord, that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters, even from our homes.



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