

Triune Lutheran Church



Fourth Sunday in Lent



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

*We thank you for joining us here
at Triune Lutheran Church, a
family united in our Lord, Jesus
Christ!*



In order to make you feel more at home, here are a few notes about the service. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. We hope to make your time here as meaningful as possible!

Worship

- The * by the headings throughout the service indicate when we invite you to stand, as you are able.
- The light print will be spoken by the pastor or another worship leader, while we encourage you to speak the **bold print**.
- The hymns are primarily chosen from our *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELW) hymnal, which is the red book directly in front of you in the pews. You will find the hymns in the last two-thirds of the book with the bold numbers on the top of the pages.
- We welcome all the baptized to join us in the Lord's Supper, where we believe Jesus is present "in, with, and under" the bread and wine as his body and blood. After the organist and assisting minister commune, you will be invited to come forward up the non-organ side aisle to the pastor, who will give you bread (gluten-free wafers also available upon request). You are encouraged to keep the bread in your hands and then dip it into the chalice of wine for intinction. You may also come forward to receive a blessing by simply keeping your hands folded. You may return to your seat up the center aisle. If you are unable to come forward, the elements will be brought to you.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

GATHERING

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

***CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

God of heaven and earth,
you come in close and make us yours.
Equip us by you as the Holy Spirit to confess our sin,
embrace your forgiveness,
and seek the way you set before us in your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

With honesty of heart, let us confess our sin.

You are invited to kneel or remain standing. Silence is kept for reflection and self-examination.

Merciful God, **forgive us.**

Our will is entangled to sin, and we cannot break free.

**We have spoken when we should have kept quiet.
We were silent when we should have said something.**

We acted when we knew better.

**We were still when we know we should have moved.
For the wrong we have done,
for the good we have failed to do, have mercy on us,
through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

People of God, look to the † Son,
given to heal you and set you free
because God loved the world so much.
Take hold of life—eternal life!

Amen!

***GATHERING HYMN**

“Through the Night of Doubt and Sorrow”

ELW 327

***PRAYER OF THE DAY**

O God, rich in mercy, by the holy humbling of your Son you lifted up this fallen world and rescued us from the hopelessness of death. Lead us into your light, that all our deeds may reflect your love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen!**

FIRST READING

Numbers 21:4-9

⁴From Mount Hor [the Israelites] set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. ⁵The people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.” ⁶Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. ⁷The people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the

people. ⁸And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.” ⁹So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

The word of the Lord!

Thanks be to God!

PSALM

Psalm 107:1-3,17-22

¹Give thanks to the LORD, for the | LORD is good,
for God’s mercy en- | dures forever.

²**Let the redeemed of the | LORD proclaim
that God redeemed them from the hand | of the
foe,**

³gathering them in | from the lands;
from the east and from the west, from the north
and | from the south.

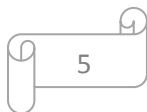
¹⁷**Some were fools and took re- | bellious paths;
through their sins they | were afflicted.**

¹⁸They loathed all man- | ner of food
and drew near | to death’s door.

¹⁹**Then in their trouble they cried | to the LORD
and you delivered them from | their distress.**

²⁰You sent forth your | word and healed them
and rescued them | from the grave.

²¹**Let them give thanks to you, LORD, for
your | steadfast love
and your wonderful works | for all people.**



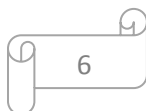
²²Let them offer sacrifices | of thanksgiving
and tell of your deeds with | shouts of joy.

SECOND READING


Ephesians 2:1-10

¹You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

The word of the Lord!
Thanks be to God!



*GOSPEL ACCLAMATION



Re - turn to the Lord, your God, for he is gra - cious and
mer - ci - ful, slow to an - ger, and a - bound - ing in
stead - fast love, and a - bound - ing in stead - fast love.

*GOSPEL

John 3:14-21

The holy Gospel according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord!

[Jesus said:] ¹⁴“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than

light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

This is the holy Gospel of our Lord!
Praise to you, O Christ!

SERMON

HYMN OF THE DAY

“Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness”

ELW 843

***APOSTLES’ CREED**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

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

***PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

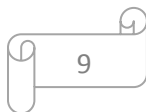
Renewed in the promises of baptism, let us pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence

We pray for the whole church. Direct and guide us in following your will for all of us. Grant us clarity in the midst of confusion and give us courage in the face of challenge. Make us passionate to share the Good News. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the whole world you so deeply love: for wilderness places, for deserts and mountains, fruit trees and gardens. For places devastated by flooding or drought, by wind, fire, or earthquake. Restore damaged habitats and protect fragile environments. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all the nations. Grant wisdom to our leaders. Teach us to resolve conflicts without violence. Strengthen those who protect human rights, civil rights, and civil liberties. Bring an end to warfare, famine, and hunger. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**



We pray for those in any need, including those serving in the armed forces and their families. For those who lack meaningful employment or stable housing. For those who live with mental illness. For those who have chronic pain, and for all who are grieving, sick, or injured especially Hazel Schwab, Trudy Weidman, Gary Weiss, Mardell Weiss, Dave & Clara Wilcox, Ed Uhlir, Jenny Bennett, Richard Jakubcin and all those we name in our heart. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our family of Triune: for all of us in our respective ministries of prayer and precious conversation with one another and our neighbors near and far. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

With thanksgiving, we remember those who have died in faith, especially those whom we have known and loved. Bring us with them to the fulfillment of your promise of life eternal with you. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Trusting in your covenant of mercy, O God, we lift our prayers to you, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior. **Amen!**

***PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always!
And also with you.

OFFERING

*OFFERING HYMN

“Create in Me a Clean Heart”

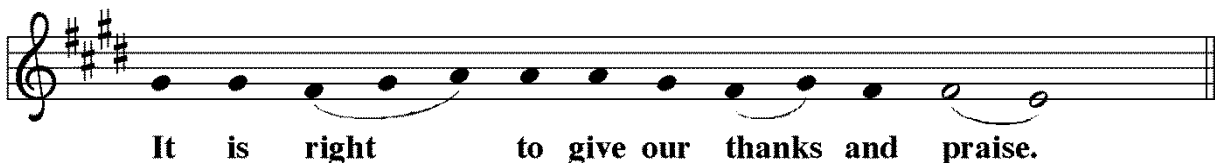
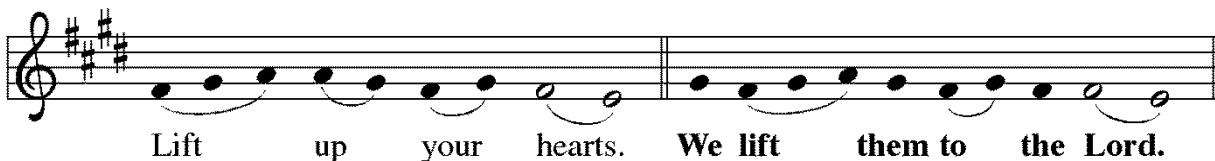
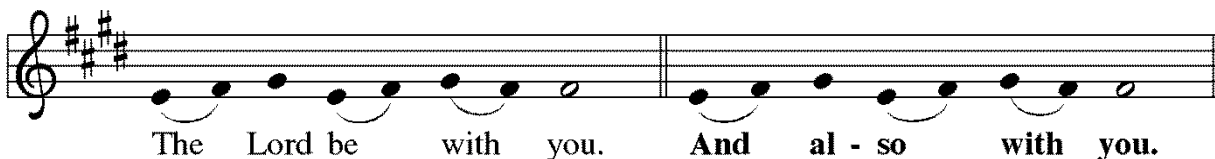
ELW 186

*OFFERING PRAYER

Merciful God,
receive the sacrifice of our praise and thanksgiving
and the offering of our lives,
that following in the way of the cross,
we may know the joy of the resurrection;
through Christ our Lord.

Amen!

* GREAT THANKSGIVING



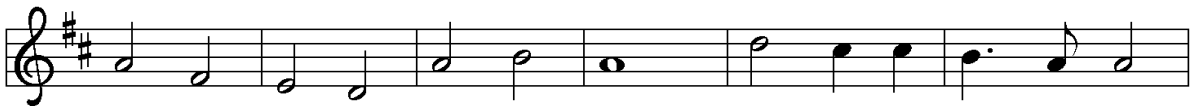
*PREFACE

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
that we should at all times and in all places
give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,
through our Savior Jesus Christ.

You call your people to cleanse their hearts
and prepare with joy for the paschal feast;
that renewed in the gift of baptism,
we may come to the fullness of your grace.

And so, with all the choirs of angels,
with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

*HOLY, HOLY, HOLY



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, Lord God of pow'r and might,



heav'n and earth are full of your glo - ry.



Ho - san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is he who comes



in the name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

***THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE**

Holy God,
our living Water and our merciful Guide,
together with rivers and seas, wells and springs
we bless and magnify you.

You led your people Israel through the desert,
and provided them water from the rock.

We praise you for Christ, our Rock and our Water,
who joined us in our desert,
pouring out his life for the world.

In the night in which he was betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Remembering, therefore,
his life, death, and resurrection,
we await your salvation for all this thirsty world.

Pour out yourself as the Holy Spirit on this holy food
and on all the baptized gathered for this feast:
wash away our sin,
that we may be revived for our journey by the love of Christ.

Through him all glory and honor is yours,
Almighty Father, with the Holy Spirit,
both now and forever. **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.**

***INVITATION TO COMMUNION**

Return to God with all your heart.
Receive bread for the journey, drink for the desert.
Thanks be to God!

*COMMUNION HYMN



Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on



us. Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have



mer-cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a-way the



sin of the world; grant us peace, grant us peace.

COMMUNION

*COMMUNION PRAYER

Compassionate God,
you have fed us with the bread of heaven.
Sustain us in our Lenten pilgrimage:
may our fasting be hunger for justice,
our alms, a making of peace,
and our prayer, the song of grateful hearts;
through Christ our Lord.

Amen!

***BLESSING**

May God who has called us forth from the dust of the earth,
and claimed us as children of the light,
strengthen you on your journey into life renewed.
The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord's face shine upon you with grace and mercy.
The Lord look upon you with favor
and give you ☩ peace. **Amen!**

***SENDING HYMN**

“Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross”

ELW 335

***DISMISSAL**

Marked with the cross of Christ,
go forth to love and serve the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Copyright © 2016 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission under Aug. Fortress Liturgies Annual License #SAS000689. NRSV Bible, copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission.

Pastor: ***Brad Ross***
Assisting Minister: ***Dale Kirk***
Organist: ***Edith Schatt***
Office Manager: ***Jan Piskac***

John 3:16, Opie and the World

In the community where I grew up there was one thing all the churches agreed upon – John 3:16 was the most important verse in the Bible. Whatever differences the Methodist, Baptists, Presbyterians and Pentecostals had about baptism, or sacraments, or speaking in

tongues, or educated preachers or a number of other things, people agreed with one basic theological idea, “You’re a mess. The world is a mess. God loves you. Accept Jesus and you’ll be OK. If enough people accept Jesus, the world will be OK.” It’s no wonder that everybody knew John 3:16 by heart. It seemed to summarize a straight-forward, very American, individualistic approach to everything including religion. “Whosoever believeth on him” Nothing could be plainer, right? “God loves you. God sent his Son to save you. You choose to believe, and you will be saved. If you don’t, you won’t.” A rather stark, personal choice between heaven and hell.

Well, not exactly. There are several problems with that approach to this text. The first is what a Methodist preacher friend, Charles Nicholson, called, “taking a text out of context and making a pretext out of it.” That is, using a text to prop up a preconceived idea. If we think that Christianity is really an individual thing, all about “me and Jesus,” then that is what we will see in this text. But notice, John does not say, “For God so loved Willie, or Tonya or Delmer.” Nor does it say, “For God so loved the nation of Israel, or people who do what God says.” No. It says, “For God so loved the world.” The cosmos, the universe, the creation, everything and everybody. This is not an individual, one-by-one rescue mission. This is a revolution, an action that turns the *world* around and points it in a new direction.

Further, it leaves out the very important verse 17 that follows: “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

I heard John 3:16 preached many times in my youth and several times since. Seldom did I hear it without a major dose of condemnation, reminiscent of Jonathan Edwards’ famous sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” Somehow, they missed this part about God not condemning us. Or, if they heard it, it segued into talking about something we had to do in order to “get saved.”

The second problem with the “accept Jesus” interpretation of John 3:16 is that it assumes “believe” means something cognitive and logical, like “I believe $2 + 2 = 4$,” or “I believe that H₂O is the chemical symbol for water.” In this text, “to believe in” is more like “to trust” or “to rely upon” than it is “to understand the facts about.” It is a relational term, akin to “I believe in my spouse,” or “I believe in (I trust) my country.”

Mr. McBeevee is one of my favorite episodes of *The Andy Griffith Show*. (Modern viewers will have to suspend judgment about smoking, little boys alone in the woods, and talking to and accepting gifts from strangers.) Little Opie is playing in the woods, and he strikes up a friendship with a power company lineman working among the trees. Mr. McBeevee is a jovial sort, who makes smoke come out of his ears, jangles because of his

tool belt, and climbs up and down to work on the lines. He entertains Opie with a few simple tricks, gives him a hatchet, and then climbs back up the pole.

When Opie's father asks where he got the hatchet, he tells the truth. "Mr. McBeevee gave it to me." He then proceeds to tell all about the man who walks in trees, jangles when he walks, and blows smoke out of his ears. Much discussion and melodrama ensue, in which the adults try to decide if Opie should be forced to tell the truth or be allowed to continue in his fantasy with his imaginary friend. There is a solemn tear-jerking scene between Andy and Opie in which Opie cries, "Don't you believe me Pa?" and Andy looks at him and says, "Yes, I believe you son." Later, Barney complains, "You don't actually believe in this Mr. McBeevee, do you?" and Andy says, "No, no I don't. But I do believe in my son. I believe in Opie."

It's that second sort of relational, trusting, relying, belief that John is talking about here—a belief that doesn't yet have all the facts, that hasn't yet figured out all the theology, that hasn't yet worked out all the whys and wherefores, but yet has been able to trust in the promise of a God who has acted to save the world, the world that God created and loves.

All too often, we turn this belief, this trust, this reliance into an "if/then" proposition. We say, "If you obey God, then God will love you." "If you give tithes and offerings, then God will bless you." "If you accept Jesus, then God will save you." That's backwards. The story of God contained in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is that God has acted first to save us, and afterwards we respond to having been saved. It's a "because/therefore" equation. "For God so loved the world, God sent his Son" Because God so loved the world. Because God sent his Son. Because that Son died upon the cross. Because God raised Jesus on the third day. Because of all this, **we have already been saved.**

As Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and it is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." Therefore, as a response to this gift, we believe on, rely upon, trust, have faith in Jesus. We respond to God with faith and action of our own, being made alive in Christ, trusting Christ's love and presence in our lives: "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared for us beforehand to be our way of life" (Ephesians 2:10). God acts first; we respond with love and action.

Living in the rural South, I am occasionally asked, "Brother, are you saved?" When I say "yes," they usually want to know when. A few years ago, a friend told me what I think is the perfect answer to the "when" question: "2000 years ago on a garbage heap outside Jerusalem. But I only found out about it a few years back." We are God's beloved children, and we were saved long ago. We are invited this day to trust that salvation anew and live each day in the hope and security of that love.

Amen and amen.

- The Rev. Delmer Chilton