

Greetings to all who read this note from Pastor Stephen Scheidt, Zion Lutheran Church

As it appears that it will be some time before we can gather together on Sundays, I thought I would provide you with some prayers, readings, and a brief homily that you can have at home for this Sunday and on following Sundays. If history teaches us anything, these times will pass and we will once again be able to gather together as one body in Christ – for now, we best care for each other by keeping physical distance. I will miss your wonderful voices and warm fellowship: but we will see each other again, and then our hearts will be filled with joy. During Lent, please listen to Lutherans Connect daily posting on our Facebook page – these are excellent Lenten meditations with beautiful music and meaningful scripture.

A Prayer for the Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 29, 2020

Gracious God, giver of life, you call us to life in you and sustain us in our fear, our weariness and grief. Give us the grace we need to place all our hope in you. Surround us by your Spirit and hold us in your everlasting love. Amen

The Gospel – John 11: 1-45 (Read this story of Jesus and Lazarus)

Homily

As we journey towards Holy Week, we hear this familiar story of Jesus and the raising of Lazarus.

The name Lazarus means, “the one who God helps”. The name is not a coincidence – we are all Lazarus – we are all those who Jesus helps from death to life. We too are dear friends of Jesus; the beloved ones of our Lord.

In the story, Lazarus responds to Jesus’ words, “Lazarus come out”. He hobbles out of the tomb, His hands and feet are still bound with bandages, and his face wrapped by a cloth.” He is tied up. He can scarcely move. He cannot even see where he is going. He still needs help.

So, Jesus turns to his followers – his friends – they too are part of this story...and says...”Unbind him, let him go”. And, in that moment, the name “God helps” takes on a new meaning. Our efforts are part of how God helps. The friends of Jesus participate in the fearful wonder of resurrection by freeing Lazarus from the bonds of death.

The story is a profound one. It reminds us that we all participate in resurrection – to take away the bonds of death, fear, grief – from each other. Our Easter faith, shared and blessed by Christ, becomes a gift for each other. We help unravel the bonds of

fear, sadness and death. Lazarus could not unwrap his bonds by himself. But, with the help of his friends in Christ, he was freed to walk forward in Easter joy.

The earliest Christians were called friends of Jesus. The story of Jesus weeping at the tomb of a friend, was a striking image for the Early Church – for the early Church – the first Christians – saw themselves as friends of Jesus, just like Lazarus. Perhaps this story told them that Jesus would also stand at their tombs, weeping, and call them from death to life in him. The story of Lazarus was really their story of faith – ours, also.

He, who is the resurrection and the life, has led us to Easter faith. And, we know, deep in our hearts, that we shall rejoice in the land of the Living, sharing the Easter life of Jesus, our Saviour and Friend. Like Lazarus, we are the one who God helps, we are the beloved, along with all of God's children, and we shall never be disappointed in God's grace. Amen

Prayers of the Faithful

Gracious God, you are forever leading us from death to life. Grant us courage and faith to follow where you lead us, for where you lead, we will go with confidence. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for our world, plagued by virus but also by fear. Help us continue to be compassionate. Bless those who, in caring for the ill, and for our needs, are endangered. Watch over them and keep them in your care. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We offer a prayer of thanksgiving for Arnold Kruschenske, and his life among us. Comfort all who mourn for him. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for our loved ones who we can no longer see or visit. Hold them in your mercy. Grant them, and us, patience and hope. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Gathering our prayers into one, we pray the prayer you taught us. Our Father...

May God bless us, keep us steadfast in faith, and renew our hearts with your holy presence. Amen