

A Lenten Midweek Service

WEDNESDAY IN LENT 1/II

Theme Baptism

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INTRODUCTION ORDER OF SERVICE

Lent has traditionally been a time of repentance and renewal. In the early church, this was a time of preparation and instruction for those to be baptized at the Great Vigil of Easter on Holy Saturday. Later this idea of preparation and instruction was applied to baptized Christians as well. In our Lenten observance on these Wednesday evenings, we will concentrate on the five great themes of Luther's Small Catechism for our lessons and sermons. Our service order will be centered around the Ten Commandments as our guide and light to a life in loving response to the Gospel of our Lord.

P = Presiding Minister A = Assisting Minister C = Congregation

PRELUDE

GATHERING

P: Come and let us walk in the light of the Lord.
And he will teach us of his ways,
and we will walk in his paths.

Please stand as you are able:

PRAYER FOR LENT: Let us pray responsively

A: Show your servants your works, O Lord;
C: And their children your glory.

A: Let your merciful kindness be upon us,
C: As we put our trust in you.

A: Not to us, O Lord, not to us,
C: But to your name be the praise.

A: Lord, hear our prayer,
C: And let our cry come to you.

P: The Lord be with you.
C: And also with you.

Prayer of the Day Lent 1

P: Let us pray.

Holy God, gracious Father, in the beginning of all that is, you blessed humanity, and established a covenant with all creatures. You showed time and again your faithfulness and steadfast love for all you have made. As we enter this season of Lent, remind us that as you shower the earth with life giving rain you shower us with the waters of baptism; new life open to us through your grace and mercy, your love and provision in Christ Jesus. Lead us by your Spirit to choose your will, working for justice, and moved by love and kindness for neighbour, to walk humbly with you each day, through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. **C: Amen**

Sit

EXHORTATION:

P: Brothers and sisters: We are created to experience joy in communion with God, to love one another, and to live in harmony with creation. But our sinful rebellion separates us from God, our neighbors, and creation, so that we do not enjoy the life our creator intended. As disciples of the Lord Jesus, we are called to struggle against everything that leads us away from love of God and neighbor. Repentance, fasting, prayer, and works of love --the discipline of Lent -- help us to wage our spiritual warfare.

Let us therefore turn to the Word of God this night. For the Word of God contains the Law and the Gospel and is the light before our eyes. The Gospel is God's gracious promise to us as his beloved children. It shows us all that He has done for us, in Israel and in Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sins and for newness of life. Christ makes us his own and heirs of his kingdom. The Law, on the other hand, represents what God expects of us in the response of our lives as we live in loving service to his will.

C: The statutes of the Lord are just and rejoice the heart. The commandment of the Lord is clear and gives light to our eyes.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS/ THE DECALOGUE

P: God spoke these words and said: I am the Lord your God.

You shall have no other gods,

C: Lord have mercy upon us,

and incline our hearts to keep this commandment.

P: You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

C: Lord have mercy upon us,

and incline our hearts to keep this commandment.

P: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

C: Lord have mercy upon us,

and incline our hearts to keep this commandment.

P: Honor your father and mother.

**C: Lord have mercy upon us,
and incline our hearts to keep this commandment.**

P: You shall not kill.

**C: Lord have mercy upon us,
and incline our hearts to keep this commandment.**

P: You shall not commit adultery.

**C: Lord have mercy upon us,
and incline our hearts to keep this commandment.**

P: You shall not steal.

**C: Lord have mercy upon us,
and incline our hearts to keep this commandment.**

P: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

**C: Lord have mercy upon us,
and incline our hearts to keep this commandment.**

P: You shall not covet.

**C: Lord have mercy upon us,
and incline our hearts to keep this commandment.**

THE LAW OF LOVE

P: Jesus summarized the Decalogue into two great commandments:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.

And the second is like it; You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."

C: The statutes of the Lord are just and rejoice the heart. The commandment of the Lord is clear and gives light to our eyes.

PRAYER OF AFFIRMATION

P: Let us pray. Gracious Lord, through water and the Spirit you have made us your own. You forgave us all our sins and brought us to newness of life. Continue to strengthen us with the Holy Spirit, and daily increase in us your gifts of grace: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord,

C: Amen

THE LESSONS**Romans 6:1-11,**

6 What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? **2** By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? **3** Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **4** Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. **6** We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. **7** For whoever has died is freed from sin. **8** But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. **9** We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. **10** The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. **11** So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

A: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

A period of silence follows each reading.

John 3:1-17

SECOND READING

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. **2** He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” **3** Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” **4** Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” **5** Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. **6** What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ **8** The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” **9** Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” **10** Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

11 “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. **12** If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe; how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? **13** No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.**14** And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, **15** that 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.

A: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

A period of silence follows each reading.

RESPONSORY:

P: Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

C: Into your hands I commend my spirit.

P: You have redeemed me, O Lord, God of truth.

C: Into your hands I commend my spirit.

P: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

C: Into your hands I commend my spirit.

HYMN:

ELW 448, This Is the Spirit's Entry Now

THE GREAT LITANY ELW #238

Please stand as you are able

Great Litany responsively

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

O Christ, hear us.

In mercy hear us.

God, the Father in heaven,

have mercy on us.

God, the Son, redeemer of the world,

have mercy on us.

God, the Holy Spirit,

have mercy on us.

Holy Trinity, one God,

have mercy on us.

Be gracious to us.

Spare us, good Lord.

Be gracious to us.

Spare us, good Lord.

From all sin, from all error, from all evil;
from the cunning assaults of the devil;
from an unprepared and evil death:
Good Lord, deliver us.

From war, bloodshed, and violence;
from corrupt and unjust government;
from sedition and treason:
Good Lord, deliver us.

From epidemic, drought, and famine;
from fire and flood, earthquake, lightning, and storm:
and from everlasting death:
Good Lord, deliver us.

By the mystery of your incarnation; by your holy birth:
Help us, good Lord.

By your baptism, fasting, and temptation;
by your agony and bloody sweat;
by your cross and suffering;
by your death and burial:
Help us, good Lord.

By your resurrection and ascension;
by the gift of the Holy Spirit:
Help us, good Lord.

In all time of our tribulation;
in all time of our prosperity;
in the hour of death; and in the day of judgment:
Save us, good Lord.

Though unworthy, we implore you
to hear us, Lord our God.

To rule and govern your holy catholic church;
to guide all servants of your church
in the love of your word and in holiness of life;
to put an end to all schisms
and causes of offense to those who would believe;
and to bring into the way of truth all who have gone astray:
We implore you to hear us, good Lord.

To beat down Satan under our feet;
to send faithful workers into your harvest;
to accompany your word with your Spirit and power;
to raise up those who fall and to strengthen those who stand;
and to comfort and help the fainthearted and the distressed:

We implore you to hear us, good Lord.

To give to all nations justice and peace;
to preserve our country from discord and strife;
to direct and guard those who have civil authority;
and to bless and guide all our people:

We implore you to hear us, good Lord.

To behold and help all who are in danger, need, or tribulation;
to protect and guide all who travel;
to preserve and provide for all women in childbirth;
to watch over children and to guide the young;
to heal the sick and to strengthen their families and friends;
to bring reconciliation to families in discord;
to provide for the unemployed and for all in need;
to be merciful to all who are imprisoned;
to support, comfort, and guide all orphans, widowers, and widows;
and to have mercy on all your people:

We implore you to hear us, good Lord.

To forgive our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers,
and to reconcile us to them;
to help us use wisely the fruits and treasures
of the earth, the sea, and the air;
and graciously to hear our prayers:

We implore you to hear us, good Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,
we implore you to hear us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world;
have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world;
have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world;
give us peace. Amen.

O Christ, hear us.

In mercy hear us.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

PRAYER

P: Let us pray. Heavenly Father, you gave your only Son to be a life to redeem us, an example to follow, the word for our rule, the grace for our guide, the lamb on the cross for the sins of our souls. Send your Spirit to enter into us and take possession of our hearts, and dwell with us forever; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen

P: Lord, remember us in your kingdom, and teach us to pray:

**C: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen**

Sit

Assistant brings offering to the altar

OFFERING PRAYER- all

P: Let us pray

Because you are the God who saves us,
We give you these gifts
And use them to save our world
We put our hope in you. Amen

HYMN ELW 642 "Where Charity and Love Prevail"

SERMON Pastor Leena Jensen

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, an observant religious man, a member of the powerful Sanhedrin religious order. Something about Jesus was so intriguing to Nicodemus, that he was willing to take the risk of going to see this travelling preacher who was causing such a fuss among the people. But as impressed with Jesus as Nicodemus was, he took the precaution of coming to Jesus at night, maybe not to be seen by anyone else.

We learn that Nicodemus addressed Jesus with respect: "Rabbi" he said, "Teacher." Then Nicodemus discloses his own heart, when he says, "We know you are a teacher come from God, for no one can perform the signs and wonders that you do, unless by the power of God." Seems to me that Nicodemus approached Jesus to find out for himself, who Jesus could really truly be.

First, let's look at who Nicodemus was. He is educated, he's part of an elite religious order, and well respected in the religious community and as a pharisee he had leadership authority and carried a lot of weight with the people, as to how to live a religious faith directed life. He is

curious about Jesus, he sees Jesus as someone who preaches, and teaches somewhat differently than the other rabbi's and yet is stirring some spiritual sense in him.

We here today, as we gather on this Wednesday of Lent, we want to get to know Jesus better as well. We are curious just like Nicodemus. We like Nicodemus are not strangers to the teachings in the bible, but we are certainly willing to grow in understanding and in relationship to God. I would imagine Jesus, was onto Nicodemus and his compliments and admiration for recognizing that Jesus is a teacher come from God. And as a wise teacher, Jesus pushes Nicodemus beyond his compliments and admiration to a vision of a life that is totally transformed. "The truth of the matter is, unless one is born from above, one cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus being a Pharisee, believed in the afterlife and they taught that the way to get there was by following the law. Righteousness was their focus.

Jesus continues to push Nicodemus, beyond his obsession of religious law and order, "Are you not a teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things." As to reinforce, "Listen to what I'm teaching Nicodemus," Jesus insists that, "whoever believes that God so loved the world as to send me, that one will not die but have eternal life." Jesus insists, yes, I come from God, but not to condemn or to judge but to tell you, that you will not die but have eternal life.

We today, like Nicodemus in the gospel are being urged to see beyond our own self absorbed limited thinking to open to the Good News that Jesus teaches. We get it when we are in church, acknowledging our faith in Jesus comes easy. Our worship liturgy guides us in our confession of faith, in listening to the word, coming forward for the holy meal. It is safe inside these walls, and there is no judgement, and we do our best to get closer to God. We acknowledge weekly that God is amongst us, and we feel better knowing that we are not alone when we are here together in worship. The last words in our liturgy is a sending, to go into the world and serve the Lord and to be like Christ to others.

Yet, we all live in the real world, away from the church sanctuary, places where we meet others, others of no faith, or refusal of faith, or different faith. It does not seem as comfy and cozy out in the world and specially to speak of Gods Kingdom and how we are saved through Grace, through God's love. Well, we are not alone, we all have our doubts and we certainly do not want to speak out of turn.

Father Henry Nouwen, a Dutch catholic priest and theologian reflects on the story of Nicodemus, he writes from his own context.

"I love Jesus but want to hold on to my own friends even when they do not lead me closer to Jesus.

I love Jesus but want to hold on to my own independence even when that independence brings me no real freedom.

I love Jesus but do not want to lose the respect of my professional colleagues, even though I know that their respect does not make me grow spiritually.

I love Jesus but do not want to give up my writing plans, travel plans, and speaking plans, even when these plans are often more to my glory than that to the glory of God."

Upon reflection Father Nouwen realizes that he is not all that different from Nicodemus. He writes, "So I am like Nicodemus, who came by night, and said safe things about Jesus to his colleagues."

There is an element of Nicodemus in all of us. It is always easier to play it safe and keep Jesus off in the distance rather than witness and share what we know with others.

It may be that today we are like Nicodemus, and we are standing within the shadowed doorway, seeking to move from what has been our style of living to a new way of life that Jesus describes

as the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth. When Jesus tells Nicodemus⁵ “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit, to be born from above, that meaning shapes our lives now and for eternity.

"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

That word to Nicodemus is shared with each one of us, to bless us, to save us. Amen.

Silence for reflection

CLOSING PRAYER:

P: Let us pray. Lord, we thank you that you have taught us what you would have us believe and do.

Help us by your Holy Spirit, for the sake of Jesus Christ, to keep your Word in pure hearts, that we may be strengthened in faith, perfected in holiness, and comforted in life and in death.

C: Amen

Please stand as you are able:

BLESSING and SENDING

P: God continues to tear open the heavens of our world and our lives, calling out with a voice of love:

"You are my beloved children, whom I love deeply."

P: God continues to tear open the heavens of our world and our lives, sending us onto new paths and missions.

God changes our hearts and lives,

And the Spirit pushes us in new directions.

P. "Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom!"

We are Jesus people

We are kingdom people.

Now is the time! Amen

Go in Peace and Christ has made you free.

By permission **A Lenten Midweek Service**

by **The Rev. Thomas L. Weitzel, ELCA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**