

A Series of Devotions
for



Lent

2022

TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH AND SCHOOL
40 West Nicholai Street
Hicksville, NY 11801

Provided by your Board of Christian Stewardship

Introduction

We are now in the third year of the pandemic. And we now celebrate our third Lenten season in that pandemic. This season remind us of God's faithfulness to us. The Lord has carried us through these years and lifted us up. That includes those of our loved ones and those brethren of our Trinity family who have passed on into glory because of COVID or other ailments. Though we miss them, we know they are in a far better place. God has fulfilled His promise to them that was made at their Baptism. They have obtained the eternal promise of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. The words and prayers we share this Lent reflect our faith in the assurance of God's Promise to each of us that we too, share in His Heavenly eternal Kingdom.

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:23-25)

Deacon Anthony Cavaliere,
on behalf of Trinity's Board of Stewardship

Ash Wednesday, March 2

by Janice Gentles-Jones

"Yet even now," declares the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.' Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster." (Joel 2:12-13)

No one would accuse Joseph of cruelty if he denied help to his desperate brothers who sold him into slavery years ago. Joseph, now second in command of Egypt, has the power to make them pay for their actions. But face to face with his brothers, he weeps with joy at being reunited with them and invites them and their father to move to Egypt where they would be provided for and have the best of everything. While shocked and relieved at Joseph's kindness, the brother's held some suspicion of his genuineness after their father died, believing Joseph would now punish them for their past actions. They go to him weeping and ask for forgiveness. Joseph weeps too and reminds them of God's providential goodness. He reassures them he'll keep his promise to provide for them and their families.

Joseph models the compassion and forgiveness God offers to us. Even though we deserve death for our sins, God welcomes us when we come before Him with a repentant heart. ***"Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments."*** (Joel 2:12) Like Joseph's brothers our weeping is not in vain. Jesus died for our sins and promises that ***whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life*** (John 3:16) So, despite our sins, we can trust God to keep His promise and return to Him with all our heart because ***He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.***

Prayer:

Jesus, forgive me for my sins. Oh Lord, You who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, I return to with my all my heart. Amen.

Thursday, March 3

by Pastor John Hopkins

The Time is Now

“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’”

(Mark 1:14-15)

Jesus came and He was a preacher. He was preaching something the people didn't really comprehend, God's Kingdom. People at the time wanted a political kingdom. They wanted the glory of King David's and Solomon's days again. Jesus was preaching contrary to their expectations. He preached about a kingdom of love, quite the opposite of Rome's rule. He preached about grace and forgiveness.

He said the time for this is fulfilled. He meant that the time was now. God's kingdom is not some far off place. It is at hand. It is now. What did Jesus call them to do to be prepared for it? Repent. Turn from your sins and back to God. There you will find forgiveness. There you will find love. That is what is in God's Kingdom.

Jesus is telling us that your time to encounter God is now! Do not let it pass by!

We have all kinds of things that distract us from God. Things that lead us away from God's love. COVID, jobs, children, retirement, anything that replaces God as the priority in our lives.

Take a moment and evaluate your life. What do you need to let go? What is distracting you from the love of God? Then, repent of those things. For Jesus is calling us to do that today and not tomorrow.

The time is now to enjoy the love and forgiveness that God offers us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Friday, March 4

by Jane Kramer

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.” (Psalm 91:1,2)

Shelter, shadow, refuge, fortress . . . God!

In this psalm we are reminded of four of God’s promises which were true when the psalmist was inspired to write them, and which are still true today. Four strong confessions of faith in God’s protection. God’s promise of shelter is not just the roof over our head, but the surrounding of our heart and soul by God’s almighty word. The shadow of God’s presence is that of a mother bird protecting and comforting her chicks by covering them with her wings. As a refuge God makes himself accessible—God with us—in every crises of body and soul. Our King resides in a castle (fortress) which cannot be penetrated by any of the temptations of the devil, the world, or our sinful flesh. We are invited to reside forever in this fortress with Him.

My God, in whom I trust!

Saturday, March 5

by Rita Liba

“And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.’” (Mark 2:17)

Let's face it, we are all sick and that is why Jesus came for us. We are sinners, and we need Jesus grace and mercy to guide us through our earthly life into eternal life. Jesus ate with the tax collectors and sinners because they need to see the love Jesus had for all. Even though they were considered traitors, Jesus knew they needed him.

If we had a family member or friend who was sick in the hospital, we would offer our help to them for whatever they needed. Well, what about if they needed Jesus in their life, would we be willing to offer them the chance to get to know him. We have to be witnesses, and share the love of Jesus, and bring anyone who is in need to show them the way to our Lord.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, Thank you for the gift of your son to forgive us of our sins, as we are all sinners, and give us eternal life. Educate us through your word that we might be able to witness to others about your grace and mercy. In Jesus name, Amen.

Sunday, March 6

by Dolores Entenmann

"...because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9

This is one of my favorite verses not just because of its powerful simplicity, but it enables me to emphasize my words with a gesture. When saying the words 'confess with your mouth' I place two fingers on my lips and then with 'believe in your heart' I touch my heart. Finally, when stating 'you will be saved' I cannot help but smile.

The passage continues with the explanation "for with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." A beautiful promise of God, that through Baptism by the power of the Holy Spirit, we have faith and this faith gives us the courage to declare that Jesus is our Lord, the desire to serve Him and the confidence that we are saved by Him and by Him only.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God," Ephesians 2:8

"And so we thank you Heavenly Father for so loving the world that you gave your only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16

And I believe... Amen

Monday, March 7

by Linda Brady Strom

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” (Hebrews 3:12-13)

Parents always want the best for their children, diligently issuing warnings and providing encouragement to assist them on life’s path.

God is no different, in fact He is the perfect parent. So, when He provides words of warning in the Bible red flags should go off in our minds, especially when we hear the phrase take heed regarding a heart of unbelief.

Unbelief is not trusting God. Not trusting that He is good, loving, and merciful. Not being able to believe God is who He says He is. That He is for you and will never leave you.

When you don’t trust someone, you tend to separate yourself from them and separation allows your heart to grow cold, yes even towards God.

God’s remedy is to surround yourself with believers, those who can encourage you, examples to bolster your faith when yours may be weak. It is why the Bible tells us to not forsake the gathering of the assembly. Other people’s faith and trust in God can help you through times when your own heart is having a hard time believing or is tempted to sin. Then when you are strong you will be able to help another during their time of doubt. It is what we do as brothers and sisters in Christ. So, be an encouragement to someone today, make God smile.

Prayer:

Holy Spirit guard my heart, keep it moldable in your hands today. Quicken my spirit if an opportunity crosses my path to encourage someone who may need to be reminded that God is good. Amen.

Tuesday, March 8
by Deacon Peggy Ruhs

“By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. (Hebrews 11:3)

Many false teachings found their way into the early church. In order to be sure they were corrected, and the new Christians were being taught the truth, epistles or letters were written to the churches. The letter to the Hebrews was the one addressed to Jewish converts.

The author of Hebrews wanted believers to focus their worship on the gospel. They wanted them to remember their faith, their baptism, practice repentance, receive God’s forgiveness and love, give praise and worship for the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The author of Hebrews called for diligent and complete surrender to their new life as Christians. I urge you to take heart and be diligent in living obedient and thankful lives as we prepare to celebrate and give thanks to God for our gift of Jesus Christ and salvation in Him alone.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, this is my prayer for all Christians. Amen.

Wednesday, March 9

by Deacon Lynn Waldeck

“He said to them, “Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand? For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.” (Mark 4:21,22)

Jesus tells the parable of the lamp on the stand to encourage his us to stand out, to be an example and not to hide away. Jesus is saying that for the Christian message to spread and develop, we must proclaim and show their faith.

Lamps were brought into homes to shine light and not to be hidden and that is what Jesus wants us to do also. For early Christians, this must have been very hard for they were persecuted and often killed for their faith. For us we might not always share our faith for fear of rejection or being made fun of.

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, Help us each day to share the good news of You. May we always remember that you are with us as we share you with others in our actions and words. In your name we pray.

Thursday, March 10

by Deacon Doug Brosky

“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’” (Genesis 12:1-3)

Can you imagine you are living a comfortable life in the only place you have ever known, where you and your family grew up and suddenly you are told to pack up everything you know and move away? I imagine my response would be to show the person who made that request the door. Abram faced that very situation when God came to him and called him to be the father of many nations. Abram’s answer was yes and he did what God told him to do. Talk about faith! In response to that faith God fulfilled his promise to Abram. God made him a great nation, he blessed Abram and through him you and I and all the families of the earth shall be blessed through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This Lenten season may we have the faith of Abram to pick up and go where God leads us putting doubt aside knowing we are the sure hands of our Lord. His promises are sure.

Friday, March 11

by Rita Liba

“And he did not permit him but said to him. ‘Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has mercy on you.’” (Mark 5:19)

We might never feel that we are worthy of the love and abundant mercy Jesus has for us. Jesus healed the demon possessed man, and the man wanted to follow Jesus, but he said no, go home and tell everyone what he has done. This once demon possessed man has now become a witness for Jesus.

That is what he wants from us. We don't have to be biblical scholars to witness to others, we just have to share what Jesus did for us in our lives.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, You have done so much in our lives, let us share that with others so that they might see how much grace and mercy you have for them. In Jesus name, Amen.

Saturday, March 12

by Linda Hoerberlein

“After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.’” (Genesis 15:1)

“After these things” refers to the warfare that occurs in Genesis 14, where Abram’s nephew, Lot, had been taken captive, and Abram sets out to free him. After defeating the opposing forces and saving Lot, Abram declines accepting any spoils from the victory and receives a blessing from Melchizedek king of Salem. ***“After these things”*** Abram has an encounter with God. He is told not to be afraid, that the Lord is his shield, his protector, and his exceedingly great reward. The wealth that would have been his, had he taken the spoils, was far exceeded by the Lord Himself being his greatest reward! However, just one verse later, Abram expresses his great disappointment that he is childless and has no rightful heir to his great wealth. He is not hearing God! God is telling him not to be afraid! God will protect him! God is his great reward! God is enough!

How often do we have those moments of victory and blessing, only to be followed by allowing ourselves to sink where we think God is not with us, that He is keeping something from us! Abram had so much wealth, along with the blessing of Almighty God, but his mind dwelt on what he did not have – an heir. He didn’t realize that God already had a plan – a plan for Abram, a plan for the nation that would be Israel, and a plan for all of mankind. That plan would be for the salvation of many through the One – Jesus Christ – who would be descended from Abram, later to be called “Abraham” – the father of multitudes.

Prayer:

Lord God, teach me never to be afraid, but to always trust You, because You are my shield, my protector, and my exceedingly great reward. Amen.

Sunday, March 13

by Jeanine Davis

"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." (Philippians 3:20-21)

We need to remember while we are in the world, we are not of the world. There will always be wanting in our hearts, and that is not to be found here on earth but with our Father in heaven. Keeping a proper perspective on things can be challenging. Know that material things will not fill that void; we always want more. Circumstances change, challenges come up, loved ones get sick, but trusting in our God and having a relationship with him gives comfort. I am in no rush to die, but I am not afraid to die. I know I'll be in heaven someday and will be transformed.

Monday, March 14

by Deacon Doug Brosky

“Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.” (Hebrews 11:12)

God called Abram to leave everything he knew and follow him and he would make of him a great nation. Abram in faith went but that promise had to seem hollow. They have no child much less became the parents of a great nation with descendants like the sands. His wife Sarah was 90 and he was 100 when a messenger from God comes and tells him he and Sarah will have a child, and more than that the nations God promised will come from her. Abram’s response is understandable. You’ve got to be kidding me, we are too old to have children. However, as the writer of Hebrews says, God was not kidding. “Therefore, from one man and him as good as dead were born decedents as many as the stars in heaven.” (Hebrews 11:12) God’s promises are sure and as Peter writes “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness.” (2 Peter 3:9) We, as sinful people are impatient, but God is faithful and what he promised he will deliver. That is certain.

Tuesday, March 15

by Kathleen Porzio

“But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out. For they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.” (Mark 6:49-50)

Sometimes I tend to worry, become anxious or fearful, especially in a new or strange situation or when things haven't gone as planned. I believe most people react this way in such situations, at least sometimes. However, this scripture and many others throughout the Bible remind us that Jesus is always with us, guiding us, and does not want us to be afraid, but he does want us to trust in him, no matter what. In fact, he loves us so much that he wants us to turn to him with prayer, especially when we are anxious, frustrated, or afraid. We must remember to turn our worries, frustrations, and fears into prayer and then trust in him to take care of everything, even if we cannot see the resolution immediately.

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, help us turn our fears, anxieties, and frustrations into prayer and then trust in you to answer our prayers. Help us to realize that you answer all our prayers in your own time and in your own way, even if it is not the answer we expect or desire. Let us understand that you know what is best for each one of our lives and that we can go through any storm, as long as we put all our trust in you and come to you in prayer before we allow fear to take hold of our lives. In your holy name, Amen.

Wednesday, March 16

by Donna Haines, Comfort Dog Ministry Top Dog

Finding your God-given purpose in life is a process. It may take some time to find your purpose and passion. You will probably make some mistakes and take some wrong turns along the way.

The key is on the journey to not lose faith. It takes faith to follow God's plan and His leading.

Today's Take Away – Finding Purpose Takes Faith

In today's Bible verse, we see that Abraham followed God's leading for his life. He left his home and went to another land. He didn't know what to do each step of the way. Abraham made some mistakes too along the way.

However, Abraham kept faith in God. He knew that God would see him through. Abraham followed God in faith, without knowing where he was going.

You might feel the same way sometimes. It might feel like you're unsure of where you're going or how God is leading you. The truth is this. God is good: He has your best interests at heart. God is going to lead you on a good path and has good things for you at the end.

It's just up to you to trust Him and let Him bring good things into your life. Finding your purpose takes faith because it isn't always easy and doesn't always make sense. But when you follow God's plan, you'll be more fulfilled and find good things along the way.

This Bible verse was given to me upon my assignment to Lutheran Church Charities as a comfort dog. I never know what God has planned for me. I have faith in my handlers as I go "with them" to where God wants us to be.

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." (Hebrews 11:8-10)

Thursday, March 17

by John Doughty

And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." (Mark 7:37)

"He has done all things well." These six words are so powerful in describing God's Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It's noted that in verses 31-36 Mark describes the twenty-third of Jesus thirty-seven miracles, at the Sea of Galilee:

And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, Ephphatha, that is, "Be opened." And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.

The request was not to heal, rather to lay hands on this man, but Jesus looking up to heaven to the Father and Holy Spirit, healed the man in private which amazed the people. Consider the reaction of those people that clearly witnessed the great healing power of this 'ordinary man', with extraordinary abilities up to and including fulfilling his mission on earth. Jesus was sent for all believers and without sin died on the cross, but raised to life in payment for all our sins and the great gift of eternal rest in heaven.

We should prepare for Lent recognizing and praying for forgiveness of our many sins, strengthening our Christian faith and like the people above, witnesses to Jesus miracle zealously proclaim our faith to non-believers spreading the Gospel whenever and wherever possible. Amen.

Friday, March 18

by Linda Brady Strom

The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it." (Mark 8:11-12)

My first reaction to this reading and the Pharisees demanding a sign from heaven is, how dare they. Then a gentle spiritual tap on my shoulder whispered, have you ever done that.

Has there ever been a time in your own life when you challenged God and said, if you are really real, do such and such, so I can believe? And just as in the days of old, we can hear the deep sighing of Jesus. His heart heavy at our unbelief. He knows providing a sign will be fleeting and soon forgotten by someone with an unbelieving heart, which is why He says no sign will be given, it will serve no purpose.

If only the Pharisees had come with a heart genuinely desiring truth, God could have worked with that.

No outward sign is necessary to secure our belief in God. What is necessary is a heart seeking after Him. It is in this that God assures us that when we seek Him, He will be found (Jer 29:13). So, seek a relationship with the One who loves you beyond all measure and in finding Him, all else will pale in significance. Outward signs will no longer be necessary.

Prayer:

Jesus, help me to seek you with my whole heart; to have an assurance in Your steadfast love that melts away any doubt or need for outward signs. Amen.

Saturday, March 19

by Henry DeVries

"And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."

(Mark 8:34-35)

The beloved hymn "Lift High the Cross" tells us to *lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim till all the world adore His sacred name*. In these verses from Mark, which reference lifting our own cross, Jesus is reminding us of the cost of discipleship. Wait, cost? Don't we always learn that we receive God's grace and forgiveness freely? That is most certainly true, to quote a better known Lutheran than myself, however taking our grace without holding Christ's cross high is missing the point.

German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote about this in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, in which he reminds us though God's grace is always bestowed freely, it is never bestowed cheaply. "Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate." Bonhoeffer would have us know, grace is free, but it's anything but cheap. It comes at the price of God's only begotten Son, and it leads us to surrender our lives to God in gratitude and faithful obedience. Bonhoeffer calls this, "costly grace." As Christians who live a life of this costly grace, Christ must always be at the center of all that we do. It is our job to hold His cross for all to see, witnessing not just with our words but also with our actions. Taking up our cross is certainly not an easy job. But we are not alone, we have help, you don't carry your cross alone. Jesus picked up your sins and your guilt and your shame and he carried all that for you. He's there by your side every step you take. He is the way to eternal life, where all of our earthly troubles will be gone forever because he remained on his cross to the very end.

Sunday, March 20

by Doug Brosky

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

Why does all this happen to me, why me? We have all said that at some time in our lives. Perhaps your car has been damaged and you do not have collision coverage and then when you get home you are told the hot water heater has died and needs to be replaced. We want to roll up in a ball and hope the world will go away. Paul's words here are a comfort. The reality is the world is not going to go away, but neither is our Lord. He promises us that no matter how bad our circumstances may seem on the surface we are not alone and that God is with us and he will lead us in faith to a solution. God's promises are true and as he says through Jeremiah ***“I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil to give you a future and a hope.”*** (Jeremiah 29:11) We look forward to seeing those plans fulfilled in Christ's life, death and resurrection.

Monday, March 21

by Lauren Straub

“For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him.” (Mark 9: 31-32)

Can you imagine actually being with Jesus as he taught his disciples and said these words? What an incredible honor. Can you imagine after hearing such words as these that you would have the nerve to ask him what he meant? That the Son of man is going to be killed and rise on the third day? Incredible. The disciples had seen many amazing miracles Jesus performed. Still, aside from wanting to protect Jesus, and they did want to do that, how could he rise from the dead? That notion was beyond comprehension of even the miracles they had witnessed. Did they know what they were hearing and witnessing was God’s will about to be fulfilled for them, for us?

We are the beneficiaries of this tremendous sacrifice and miraculous rising. We should continually thank God that he sent his Son to suffer this horrendous death for us ... to grant us forgiveness from our sins. And each day we can be thankful for his rising on Easter. We are blessed beyond our understanding.

Prayer:

Dear God, Help us to understand the sacrifice of your Son for us. Such a tremendous sacrifice is not to be disregarded at a whim, yet it happens frequently. Nor should it occupy our minds solely when in Church. Help us celebrate the miracle of Easter in our lives daily. Amen.

Tuesday, March 22

by Deacon Anthony Cavaliere

"If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."

(Mark 9:35)

These words of Jesus are not merely words of instruction. He spoke them to His disciples as the substance of His own calling and mission was. He had come to earth as a human being to be servant to all men and women. He served them by carrying the sins of all to the cross as their sacrificial offering which would take away their guilt. He served us all by taking our sins on Himself and giving us His righteousness.

Most people would probably find His sacrifice quite acceptable to them until they find out that He expects the same kind of unselfish sacrifice from us, His followers, not as sin bearers of offerings but as instruments of His gospel to needy and hurting people. For many, He is fine as Savior, but not as Lord. This may be because the concept of servanthood runs counter to the self-centered, me-first ideals and norms of our culture. Our society maintains that the servant is on the bottom of the social scale. It idolizes the leaders, the rich, the movers and shakers, the talented, the famous, and the beautiful.

Jesus came to serve others by giving His life as a ransom on the cross. The supreme ruler of the Universe gave up His throne to humble Himself to die for those He created, for those who were disobedient, rebellious, unworthy and unlovable. Therefore the Kingdom of God is filled with those the world regards as losers and rejects. These are exactly the kind of people God uses.

Prayer:

Help me to be your servant Lord by serving others.

Wednesday, March 23

by Janice Gentles-Jones

"But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh." (Mark 10:6-8)

God told Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." (Genesis 12:1-2). It was God's first promise to Abram. He obeyed and left his father's house with Sarai, his wife. When he arrived in Canaan, God told Abram, "To your offspring I will give this land." (Genesis 12:7) Abram was 75 years old at the time and he and Sarai had no children. But God is one who keeps His promises.

Sometime later there was a famine in the land and Abram and Sarai went to live in Egypt. Because Sarai was beautiful, Abram feared for his life and asked her to lie and say she was his sister. Abram's lie led to Pharaoh taking Sarai as his wife. But God's promises can't be thwarted. He caused a plague to come upon Pharaoh and his household "because of Sarai, Abram's wife". (Genesis 12:17). Pharaoh returned Sarai to Abram, her rightful husband.

You see, Abram and Sarai's union was part of God's plan. His promise of an offspring for Abram included Sarai being the mother to this child. That union, whereby, *"a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."* (Mark 10:7-8), was honored by God. For through the union of Abram and Sarai, God's promise was fulfilled with the offspring of Isaac, whose birth led to the family line that Jesus was born into. And from that promise, our salvation through Jesus is ours today.

Thursday, March 24

by Donna Hopkins

“When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.” (Mark 10:14-16)

I recently read that “...only 15% of Americans 30 and under attend church and only 5% of Americans 18 and under attend church. That means that the vast majority of children in our country are growing up apart from the influence of the church. Fewer and fewer children are growing up with knowledge of Jesus Christ.”

In verse 13, just prior to today’s devotion, the disciples were turning away those who brought them to Jesus for a blessing. Jesus strongly rebuked their efforts saying, ***“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”*** It seems strange doesn’t it? That the people who are followers of Jesus would turn children away from him? Imagine how the children must have felt? That maybe Jesus was too important for them? That he didn’t care about them? But what does Jesus do? He hugs them and blesses. He values the “unimportant.”

What does this mean for us? Are we welcoming people (and children!) into church and Bible study? Or do we turn them away because they don’t look like us or think the same as we do? Are we showing the love of Jesus to others? Just as earthly children turn to their parents to feed and nourish them, we should ask the Holy Spirit turn others to Jesus, for He will feed us with the bread of life.

Friday, March 25

by Elaine Koop

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

Many relationships are based on give and take. However, you may have a friend or family member who often wants something from you, but never gives back anything in return. Or we volunteer to help someone, but do it begrudgingly.

There is someone who gave everything for you without expecting anything in return. Jesus has done that for us! We know that there is nothing that we can do for Jesus that He couldn't do better Himself. Jesus came to earth to serve us. He didn't demand to be treated as royalty, but rather knelt to wash His disciple's feet.

In response to this amazing gift and God's mercy, we are to serve and sacrifice for others. This is following Jesus' example. Ultimately, Jesus sacrificed His life to pay the price of OUR sin so that all who believe will have life everlasting!

Prayer:

Father, please help me to be a blessing to others and to use my gifts and talents in service to others and to You - even when it's inconvenient. Amen.

Saturday, March 26

by Deacon Kathy Funfgeld (From Lent 2018)

For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you! (Psalm 84:11-12)

God Himself, is our shield, and Jesus is our anointed Messiah.

This prayer asks our Father to look on us (His people) graciously for the sake of Jesus who is our righteousness. We alone are surely unrighteous before God, and only through the work of redemption can we come before our Father.

We are reminded that God faithfully provides His people with everything that they need, especially if we walk with Him. God does provide for all of our needs, even when we don't understand what the great Creator has in mind for us.

We are "blessed", happy, blissful, having God's gifts. God bestows the ability for success to all, not because we deserve it, but because He made us, marked us as one of His own, and sent His Son for us. This is a gift!

Suffering, hardship, illness, or hard times are so difficult to explain. They are not Godly. We are human, and because we are human, we rely on the gift of grace to help us through the difficult times. Rely on that promise through your daily lives. God is faithful, God will provide.

Sunday, March 27

by Deacon Kathy Funfgeld (From Lent 2018)

“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:26)

What familiar words these are to our ears. BUT, have you really considered what they are saying?

Jesus’ words were very clear. He did not put a time table on the word “often.” He just said “often,” or every time.

Jesus reminds us to proclaim, to shout aloud, to witness, not to a general public, but to other Christians for generations to come that in the Sacrament we all also share the new covenant. Not just one person, but all of us who believe. In these words, we are charged to remind each other with joyful voices that God keeps His promises in Jesus and that we need to remember that always.

This Sacrament, the very body and blood of Jesus, in with and under the bread and wine does not merely look back at what Jesus did, but it also looks forward to the feast to come in the presence of the Lord on the last day.

For us, and especially our young people who will receive the Sacrament for the first time, may these words continue to ring in our hearts and minds as one of great joy and celebration until eternity.

Monday, March 28

by John Mohlin

“Have you not read this Scripture:

‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’ (Mark 12:10-11)

I suspect many of us have read this Scripture from Psalm 118, and perhaps even know it by heart. Here in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus questions the chief priests. He has just told them the Parable of the Tenants where a father sends his son to his vineyard to get some of the fruit from the tenants. The tenants ultimately kill the son. In asking this question, Jesus is trying to point out to the priests that He is the cornerstone, the Son of God, the promised Messiah. But they reject Jesus, and only plot against Him.

What about us? Surely, we know better than those priests. We accept Jesus and know he is the “stone that the builders rejected”. He did not come to us with wealth, or power, or prestige. Instead, he was rejected, tortured, and crucified. He died a terrible death to pay the price for our sin and give us salvation. It is truly marvelous that God has given us such a gift.

Yet, do we always accept Him? Jesus reminds us that whatever we do for prisoners, strangers, the poor, the sick, we do for Him (see Matthew Chapter 25). Have we rejected people like this in our lives? Maybe there is an in-law who has just been arrested for DWI...again. Or, an unpleasant co-worker is in the hospital. Perhaps it is the “weird kid” in class or a grumpy neighbor. Do we accept them and treat them like we would Jesus?

Prayer:

Lord, forgive me when I reject others. Teach me to see You in everyone I meet. Amen.

Tuesday, March 29

by Terri Cavaliere

“And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong.” (Mark 12:26 –27)

The Sadducees were a Jewish sect who did not believe in the resurrection after death, even though the scriptures point to a resurrection. Here they are trying to trick Jesus by creating a hypothetical situation in which a widowed woman marries many times after her first husband's death. After her death whose wife will she be?

Jesus turns the tables on them, telling them that they are [quite] wrong because they do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God. He cites the passage in Genesis, where Moses meets God at the burning bush. Jesus' use of the phrase ***“I Am”*** implies the present tense. By implication, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are living still, even after death.

Looking at this situation with earthly eyes we can ask: What is the rationale for living a holy life, obedient to the Commandments if death ends it all? Why bother if this existence is all there is? I am frequently confronted by this question from unbelievers. My response is simple: “If you are right and there is nothing after death, neither of us has anything to worry about. When we die, it's lights out. But... if I am right, you are in a lot of trouble! Pray to the Lord Jesus and ask to be led to the truth. And contact me and we can have a conversation.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for Your sacrificial death, which won my salvation for me. Holy Spirit, remind me of this priceless gift, gained by grace through faith. Help me to share this truth with others, so they can share in salvation. Amen.

Wednesday, March 30

by Pastor John Hopkins

“Jesus answered, ‘The most important is, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The second is this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’”

(Mark 12:29-3)

What is it that God wants from us? Love!

People can obey God’s commandments and not love Him. When that happens, following the commandments becomes a chore. Something that a person has to do. They begin to resent it and abuse them. But what if a person changed their attitude toward things and in particular towards God? What if they loved God?

If you loved God, one would find that keeping the commandments would naturally follow. It would not be a chore. If you loved God, then you would love Him and Him only. You would not have any other thing as a higher priority than Him. If you loved God, it would never occur to you to use God’s name in a bad way. If you loved God, you would honor Him by worshipping Him every Sabbath (Sunday).

If you loved God in this way, one will find that makes it so much easier to love others in spite of what they do. Why? Because you are naturally going to want to love your neighbor as you do yourself. When you love others in this way, you are not going to want to see harm come to them in any way. You will want only what is best for them.

Love.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength and you will find that keeping His commandments will become second nature to you.

And your neighbor? They will know that you belong to Jesus by your love.

Love. Put it into practice.

Amen.

Thursday, March 31

by Moses Saxon (From Lent 2017)

“Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” (John 3:5-6)

In this scripture Nicodemus visits Jesus at night. He recognizes that Jesus is a man sent from God and that He is one who can help to further the Jewish traditions. However Jesus immediately let Nicodemus know that keeping the Jewish traditions does not usher one into the kingdom of God. Jesus informs him that you must be born again; born of the water and the Spirit.

Baptism is a symbol of this New Birth. Baptism as a symbol of this new birth, gives us two assurances of God’s grace.

Firstly the symbolism of baptism gives us the assurance of New Birth. In verse 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus, very truly I tell you no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.

And again in verse 5 he defines more clearly what it means to be born again when he adds, ***“you must be born of water and the Spirit.”*** This is the assurance of New Birth.

Secondly this scripture gives us the assurance of spiritual cleansing. Being born of the water refers to a spiritual cleansing that takes place in the heart of every believer. The act of baptism is symbolic of this spiritual cleansing. He saved us not because of righteous things we have done, but because of his mercy. ***“He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”*** (Titus 3:5)

The sacrament of baptism joyously reveals the amazing grace of God in giving us eternal life that we did not deserve and could not earn.

Friday, April 1

by Deacon Lynn Waldeck

“At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.” (Mark 13:26, 27)

As I start to write this it is an extremely windy day but I think it is nothing like we will experience when Jesus gathers his faithful together. Do you every think what it will be like when Jesus comes back? People keep trying to guess when and how, but we do not know this. Jesus Christ is coming back. And he won't do it in a quiet way either. His return will not be secret. It will be unmistakable, obvious, glorious, and awesome. Won't that be wonderful!

We do not know if Jesus is coming back next month or in 500 years. Would we live differently if He were coming back next month? We need to live as he will be back today. That is a promise from Jesus that he is coming back .It is the day we all look forward to. It is also a warning to all of those who reject Him. Try to live each day as the day we see Jesus again.

JESUS IS COMING BACK!

Saturday, April 2

by Deacon Doug Brosky

“But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.” (Genesis 50:19-20)

In the devotion for March 20, I referenced God’s words to Jeremiah in which God said he had plans for us and those plans were for our good and not evil. Perhaps you recall how Joseph’s brothers were jealous of him and ultimately sold him into slavery in Egypt. They figured problem solved. Despite what appears to have been sets backs Joseph rose to a position of power and ultimately it was Joseph who God put in a position to preserve and save God’s chosen people. While we will at times face challenges and disappointments remember the words in Jeremiah and in faith in our Lord we too can say in the face of the difficulties of this world ***“You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive.”*** (Genesis 50:20) On that Good Friday, those who wanted to inflict evil on our Lord instead saw their “success” turned on its head and we were made acceptable to God the Father because of what Christ did for us. God fulfilled his promise.

Sunday, April 3

by Deacon Doug Brosky

***“Those who sow in tears
shall reap with shouts of joy!
He who goes out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
bringing his sheaves with him.”*** (Psalms 126:5-6)

The overriding theme of these Lenten devotions is that God fulfills his promises. The people of Israel had rejected God and in punishment God had allowed Babylon to destroy the nation and send the people into exile. Can you imagine the pain of seeing your home destroyed and being exiled in a foreign land? God however sent his prophets to call the people to return to the Lord and promised that when they did their fortunes would be restored. This Psalm reflects both the pain of rejecting God and the exile that follows, but also reflects the promise that was theirs when they returned to God. They went to Babylon in tears but returned in joy with the assurance that God has fulfilled his promise to restore his people. This Psalm in a small way reflects our Lenten journey. Our sin separates us from God and should send us into a permanent exile, but God sent his only Son to pay the price we could never pay to return us from exile and in faith be made acceptable to God. Like the tears of the exile of Israel and the joy of their return we experience the tears of Good Friday and the joy of Easter. God fulfills his promise and therefore we in faith are assured of spending eternity with him.

Monday, April 4

by Linda Hoerberlein

“He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said, ‘Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.’” (Mark 14:35-36)

In December, we prepared for the coming of Jesus as a baby in Bethlehem. We heard in Luke Chapter 1 that the Holy One to be born would be called the Son of God, and that nothing will be impossible with God. Now that Holy One, Jesus Christ, both Son of God and Son of Man, is preparing Himself for the cross where He would offer His own body as the perfect sacrifice for all of mankind’s sin. This is the very purpose for which He left His heavenly throne to be one of us. As He prays in a personally intimate manner to God the Father, He verbalizes the familiar words, that all things are possible for God.

By asking that this cup be taken away from Him, is He saying He does not want to go to the cross? Does He want this hour to pass from Him so He does not have to suffer and die? As the Son of Man, Jesus’ humanity comes through. As the Son of God, He knows what is required of Him. The greatest suffering would be the separation from His Abba Father while He carried the weight of our sin. God the Father could not look upon Him while our sin held Him to the cross. In obedience, Jesus submits to “do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.” He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Why? Because God the Father made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. He did it for you and me!

Prayer:

Thank you, Lord, for your love! You gave everything so I could spend eternity with You! Amen.

Tuesday, April 5

by Dolores Entenmann

"During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew." (Exodus 2:23-25)

God saw His children Israel suffering. He knew their condition; their troubles, their oppression. He understood and was concerned. He had compassion on them. When we are in trouble, hurting, or distressed... God knows.

As children of God, we know that He will never leave us or forsake us. Psalm 103:13 tells us ***"As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him."***

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, noted author and Lutheran theologian said, "We must learn to regard people less in the light of what they do or omit to do and more in the light of what they suffer."

It may be a difficult request, but we too, as recipients of God's mercy, grace and eternal love, and created in Christ Jesus, should show compassion to our neighbors.

"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts..." (Colossians 3:12a)

Wednesday, April 6

by Donna Hopkins

“So if they don’t trust you and aren’t convinced by the first sign, the second sign should do it. But if it doesn’t, if even after these two signs they don’t trust you and listen to your message, take some water out of the Nile and pour it out on the dry land; the Nile water that you pour out will turn to blood when it hits the ground.”

Moses raised another objection to GOD: “Master, please, I don’t talk well. I’ve never been good with words, neither before nor after you spoke to me. I stutter and stammer.”

The LORD said to him, “Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.” (Exodus 4:9-12)

If you have been following Pastor’s study on Exodus, you know that Moses spends a lot of it questioning why God is asking him to do His work. In verse 9 Moses bemoaned to God, “Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.”

How often do we do the same thing? How often do we say I can’t or I’m not qualified when asked to say a prayer or when talking with our friends, families or neighbors about Christ? Isn’t God’s answer to Moses the same answer he would give to us? We don’t have to be eloquent, nor do we have to know all the answers. God is only asking us to show and share his love. He will teach us what to say in our Bible study and in sermons. He will help us speak the easiest words of all, “Jesus loves you.”

Thursday, April 7

by Pastor John Hopkins

“But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.” (Hebrews 8:6)

First, the Old Covenant. It relied on a person to keep the commandments perfectly. The people always failed, because no one is perfect. So they had to offer sacrifices to receive forgiveness. The priests would offer those sacrifices before God on behalf of the people. In turn, the people would receive forgiveness. Again, a process that was repeated over and over.

Jesus, He is our high priest. He brought us a better covenant than the old. How so? Jesus kept the commandments perfectly. He offered up His own life on behalf of ours. Even though Jesus never sinned and didn't need to die, God accepted His sacrifice on behalf of everyone that we might be forgiven.

We receive this forgiveness by Faith. We receive this forgiveness by God's Grace. Not by works. Not by keeping the commandments perfectly, because we can't. Quite frankly, that helps us appreciate all the more what Jesus did for us.

What did Jesus earn for us? Forgiveness of sins, which in turn leads us to having access to heaven.

There will be a day when we close our eyes for the last time here on this earth and then next time we open them, we will be looking at Jesus. He will have a big smile on His face and saying to us, "Welcome to My home and now your home too."

That is the better promise that is ours through our faith in Jesus. That should put a smile on your face too, that will last for all of eternity, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Friday, April 8

by Linda Hoerberlein

“And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ which is translated, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ (Mark 15:34)

Growing up, I recall going to the Good Friday service of the Seven Last Words from the Cross, and hearing the pastor very profoundly stating these words of Jesus. It left a lasting impression on me.

Our Savior was tortured and nailed to a cross where he hung for about 6 hours before dying. It is difficult for us to imagine what suffering He endured. If we had been there, I think we would not have been able to look at Him for the horror of the scene.

Jesus had spent his years on this earth living a sinless life, selflessly showing mankind the love of the Heavenly Father. He often went to a quiet place to spend time communing with the Father in prayer. He only deserved praise for His holy life, but instead he was condemned to death as a criminal.

These words of Jesus from the cross are the exact words of Psalm 22:1, but Jesus was not quoting them so much as He was living them. At that moment, Jesus was totally alone, abandoned by friends and now separated from the Father, becoming sin for us.

Have you ever felt that God has forsaken you? The trials and difficulties of life can weigh us down to the point we feel totally alone and abandoned. Jesus knew that feeling. He understands. He’s been there. The only difference is that He experienced that abandonment on the cross so that we would never have to be separated from the God who loves us.

Prayer:

Lord, I confess I have sinned. I am sorry. I believe that you died for me. Forgive me of my sin. Lead me in your path of righteousness. Help me to know you more. Thank you that You will never leave me nor forsake me. Amen.

Saturday, April 9

by Janice Gentles-Jones

"Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!" (Psalm 118:29)

Some may say the Hallmark Channel writes some of the best love stories. While others may praise Charlotte Bronte, Jane Austen, and Elisabeth Gaskell. Although I would heartily agree that Jane and Mr. Rochester's love from *Jane Eyre* is a wonderful love story, it doesn't compare to the greatest of them all, which is our love story with God.

Our story starts with a lovely beginning for Adam and Eve. They are the first humans to see God's good creation and His perfect love. But the story turns tragic, when after being deceived by a serpent, Adam and Eve disobey God and brings sin into the world. God lays out the consequences, the worst of which is death. Sin and death are not only for them, but for all mankind. That's where we come into this story. Now most love stories that ends in death are tragic. But this story doesn't end here.

"Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!" (Psalm 118:29) This verse has special meaning when we reflect on what Scripture says about God's love for us:

- *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* (John 3:16)
- *"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:8)
- *"For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."*(Romans 5:19)

When Jesus died for our sins, He fulfilled His promise to redeem all who believe in Him. So, our love story ends not in tragedy but in triumph. Our happily ever after is eternal life with Jesus Christ our Lord, whose steadfast love endures forever.

Prayer:

Oh, give thanks to you Lord, for You are good; Your steadfast love endures forever! Amen.

Sunday, April 10

by Kim Merz

“And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

(Philippians 2:8)

Let’s talk about obedience. The dictionary defines “obedience” as “the act or practice of obeying; dutiful or submissive compliance.” Jesus was obedient, even though He knew it was going to end with His death. Do you think you could do that? As much as I would love to think I had the strength and ability to be obedient to anyone, knowing I was going to die as a result, I highly doubt I could do it. I am a sinner and I am weak.

But, Jesus is GOD! Oh how thankful I am for that! He was able to obey His Father in heaven, carrying His own cross – which was the weight of all the sins of mankind as well as the weight of the cross itself, to His very own death. Wow.

We all know there is a miraculous, fabulous ending to this story. Jesus’ obedience and death on the cross was just the beginning of what would be our salvation. God loves us so much that He allowed His Son to become man, like us but not like us. And because of that element of not being like us, He was able to be “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Thank you Jesus!

Monday, April 11

by Deacon Anthony Cavaliere

Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (Hebrews 2:17-28)

As the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus has supreme divine authority; we should learn, heed and obey all that He has to say. Otherwise we run the risk of drifting away from God into sin, error, legalism, unbelief, and chaos. Now some may wonder why we should listen to Christ at all because if He rules all things and has defeated the powers of darkness and death, how come evil runs rampant throughout the world? Why do evil men create such havoc? Why do we still have pain, persecution and death?

The writer of Hebrews teaches that all our suffering is within the plan and purpose of God. In the process of teaching this, the writer presents a striking explanation of the Incarnation. Jesus became man to identify with us, to become one of us, a human being. He did so in order to suffer and die for our sins and so destroy the power of death and Satan over us. He became perfect through suffering, meaning that He fulfilled the Father's plan completely; He was the perfect sin-offering. Our oneness with Jesus means that we receive the glory and salvation He achieved for us but it also means that, like Him, we too must suffer.

Our suffering gives glory to God for it is part of His plan for the triumph of His kingdom and His sovereign will. At the same time our suffering helps us to grow into the image of Christ. The good thing is that because Jesus was like us, endured pain and temptation, He can help us to persevere. He knows what we are going through and we know by faith, that all our suffering is fruitful: it serves His providential purpose and plan in ways that we cannot imagine.

Tuesday, April 12

by Deacon Anthony Cavaliere

“Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.” (Hebrews 3:5-6)

The Jews, both in Jesus’ day as now, hold Moses in high esteem. But as great as Moses was, Jesus is infinitely greater. Jesus is the 2nd Person of the Godhead. He gave Moses the Law. He granted Moses the power to work signs and wonders as well as the authority to lead the Jews out of bondage. Moses did only as God empowered Him.

The same is true of us today when it comes to our righteous standing before God. Christ Jesus was faithful unto death. In what Luther terms the great or wonderful exchange, He took our sins upon Himself and gave us His righteousness:

“That is the mystery which is rich in divine grace to sinners: wherein by a *wonderful exchange* our sins are no longer ours but Christ’s and the righteousness of Christ not Christ’s but ours. He has emptied Himself of His righteousness that He might clothe us with it, and fill us with it.

And He has taken our evils upon Himself that He might deliver us from them... in the same manner as He grieved and suffered in our sins, and was confounded, in the same manner we rejoice and glory in His righteousness.”

–Martin Luther, *Werke* (Weimar, 1883), 5: 608.

Our faith in Jesus manifests itself in His righteousness in us. This righteousness is demonstrated by our perseverance and trust as well as works of kindness and compassion that glorify God in Christ because they are wrought by His power not our own. As good as we humans think ourselves to be, we are all sinners. We are not perfect, we do fall, but we do press on by the power of Christ.

Wednesday, April 13

by Kim Merz

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:15-16)

Sometimes I think my prayers (wants, needs, petitions) are trivial. Should I be asking God for this, or that, or the other thing? Am I worthy? Should I be asking for loftier, holier things?

I asked a friend about this, a long time ago. A lovely, God-fearing woman who I knew spent way more time than I did, in the Word. And she set me straight. She told me that God is our Father. And that nothing His children ask Him for is trivial. If it's important to us, it's important to Him. He knows we are weak and loves us in spite of it. This is why we can draw near to the “throne of Grace” and approach with confidence. God hears us. God loves us. And because He is our Father, He will answer with grace, according to our need. Mind you, it may not be exactly what we ask for, but it will be what we need. And maybe not in our timing. But His. God's timing is always perfect timing.

So don't be afraid to pray and ask God for what is important to you. He will answer. I can vouch for that. My life, and I'm sure yours as well, is what it is because of answered prayer. Because we approached the “throne of Grace” with confidence.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for hearing me. Thank you for answering and providing, all according to your will. I am continually blessed, comforted, and loved by your answers and provisions. Amen.

Maundy Thursday, April 14

by Terri Cavaliere

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh.”

(Hebrews 10: 19 – 20)

This passage was written by Paul to give us confidence and assurance of our faith in our salvation. It is a reminder of what occurred after Jesus’ death while He was still on the cross. Matthew 27:51 describes this scene for us: “...the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.” God designed the temple furnishings and ordered a curtain to be placed before the Holy of Holies; only the priests were allowed access. The curtain is symbolic of the separation between man and God that existed before Jesus’ sacrifice.

Didn’t our Savior tell us that He was the Way? Here Paul is reminding us that, by His death, Jesus provided free access to the holiest place. This holiest place is heaven and we enter through Christ’s flesh. When His soul and body were separated, the way was cleared for us.

I am reminded of this when confessing and seeking absolution for transgressions. While repenting I ask for God’s infinite mercy for the sake of **“the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings”** of Jesus, to be gracious to me, a sinful being. (Lutheran Service Book, page 213)

Prayer:

Dearest God, I can’t even imagine the magnitude of what it meant for You to sacrifice Your Son and for Jesus to leave the majesty of heaven to join humanity on earth. Holy Spirit help us to be ever mindful of this undeserved gift that we have been given and to live each day knowing that there is no separation between us and heaven. Amen.

Good Friday, April 15

by John Doughty

“Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:4-5)

Today, Good Friday, we remember Jesus’ horrible death on the cross as payment for all of our many sins. The Prophet Isaiah above predicted in the 7th century BC, part of Jesus painful misery from being sent to the cross, further that with his wounds we would be healed. I was curious and researched when this prophecy was fulfilled in the New Testament described below.

And when Jesus entered Peter’s house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him. That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.” (Matthew 8 14-17)

Our beautiful Savior, Jesus, by dying for us on the cross took not our physical illnesses and diseases; rather our many sins and transgressions. The Great Healer suffered an undeserved brutal, excruciating death for us, His children on earth. Thanks be to God as we look forward to His Easter morning resurrection and His promise of eternal life for all who believe. Peace be with you always. He will be risen Indeed! Amen.

Holy Saturday, April 16

by Helen Peter

"I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure." (Psalm 16:8-9)

How many times have you made plans and then asked God to bless them? David put God first knowing that God would always be there to guide him and because of that guidance he would not be shaken. David knew God would be with him no matter what he had to face.

The title of this psalm is "A miktam of David." The word "miktam" means to cover or a prayer that someone might be covered with protection. Cover can also mean "atone for." Therefore, this psalm could be considered a prayer of atonement. This psalm is often called a Messianic psalm because it is quoted in the Old Testament as referring to Christ's resurrection.

Are you like David keeping your eyes on the Lord and sure no matter what happens God will be at your side? Do you trust Him that your faith will not be shaken? Do you praise Him for what He has and will continue to do for you?

Holy Saturday has arrived. Jesus has been crucified and placed in a tomb. We are awaiting His resurrection. Like Christ, we are born to die. The big question is will YOU live again?

Prayer:

Lord God, help us to remain faithful to you until death and win the race for our crown of glory. Amen.

Easter Sunday, April 17

by Pastor John Hopkins

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” (1 Corinthians 15:20-22)

Look what we have in common! Family history!

“For as by a man came death... For as in Adam all die.”

I had an uncle who kept track of the family tree. He wanted to know who was related to whom. Who got married. How many kids did they have. Etc. If you wanted to know something about someone in the family, he was your go to guy. He also liked to hear himself talk, so you got a very thorough explanation of who they were, and how you were related to them. 😊

Adam... and for that matter Eve... are included in each of our family trees. That makes us all have one thing in common besides being related. Those two brought sin into the world and we all inherited that inclination to sin from them.

Yet, “... by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead... so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”

Jesus, through His death on the cross, took care of the sin problem. He earned forgiveness for everyone. And that means that we have hope of living now. Sin brings death. Jesus brings life. Hope of everlasting life. In the Scripture passage above, the key words are “in Christ.” That hope is given to only those who have faith in Jesus.

You, who are reading this right now, have that living faith. Oh, how I like to say “living” faith! You are alive now because of your faith in Jesus and you will be alive in the future. How can that be? You have eternal life now by virtue of the faith you have now. It is all about your faith in Jesus. That faith is the thing we have in common that makes us brothers and sisters in Christ.

So the next time you hear “He is risen!” consider that a reminder of how you belong to the family of faith. Because you belong in the family of faith, one day you will rise again to be with all the family who have gone before us in the faith. Smile now with that news, for you are alive now and will be with the Lord forever.

Brothers and sisters, He is risen for you! You are alive in Christ!

Happy Easter!!

