

JESUS CHRIST, MY LORD



DAILY DEVOTIONS FOR LENT
STEADFAST LUTHERANS

Jesus Christ, My Lord – Daily Devotions for Lent

Written by: Rev. Marcus Baikie, Rev. Jacob Benson, Rev. Travis Berg,
Rev. Paul Cain, Rev. Rene Castillero, Rev. Dr. Timothy Fitzner,
Rev. Andrew Preus, Rev. Joshua Scheer

Editor: Rev. Joshua Scheer
Cover Art: Rev. Roberto Rojas Jr.

ISBN: 9798311163484

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (“The Holy Bible,” English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Hymn texts are public domain, unless otherwise noted.

Pastors are encouraged to share, download, print, and use these publications within their congregations. Go to our website for PDFs of these devotions and other resources.

Printed copies of this resource are available for purchase on Amazon courtesy of Steadfast Press.

Copyright © 2025 by Steadfast Lutherans, Inc.

www.steadfastlutherans.org

STEADFAST PRESS

Believe. Teach. Confess.

*To the glory of our Triune God
and for the Evangelical Lutheran Church
wherever she is found.*

Introduction

Now, if you are asked, “What do you believe in the Second Article about Jesus Christ?” answer briefly, “I believe that Jesus Christ, God’s true Son, has become my Lord.” “But what does it mean to become Lord?” “It is this. He has redeemed me from sin, from the devil, from death, and from all evil. For before I did not have a Lord or King, but was captive under the devil’s power, condemned to death, stuck in sin and blindness”

- Large Catechism, Apostles Creed,
Second Article, paragraph 27

Jesus Christ, My Lord. It is a personal confession of the greatest truth that God has revealed. It is more than just a confession that Jesus tells me what to do. It is a confession of who we are by nature – fallen creatures needing a Lord. It is a confession of what we are now by the power and working of the Holy Spirit. It is a confession of what Jesus has done for us. It is a confession of faith, for that possessive pronoun “my” requires faith. It is an eternal confession that will ring out in heavenly choirs forever.

We are taught to confess in the Second Article of the Creed that Christ Jesus did what He did in order that we “would be His own and live under Him in His Kingdom in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness”. This whole devotion is an attempt to explain various aspects of this. When Jesus died for us on the cross at Calvary, just what did He do for us? Where would we be without His finished work, the work the Father sent Him to do? What does His work mean for who we are today? What does His work mean for who we are going to be in eternity? The confession “Jesus Christ, My Lord” covers all of those questions, at least when we understand what we are saying when we say it.

This Lent, spend the time reflecting upon this. Some of these themes will come easily, like justification – God’s legal language is an old friend to us as Lutherans. Others will require a little more thought and reflection. All of them however are grounded in Scripture, that from God’s revelation we may know more and more about Jesus Christ and Him crucified. With this revelation we too may confess Jesus Christ, my Lord.

The Lord bless your observance of the holy season of Lent with these words. May these devotions enrich your understanding and help you to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

Rev. Joshua V. Scheer
Steadfast Lutherans

Ash Wednesday
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:16–18)

Your Father, who sees in secret. Your Father. Do you realize the absolute blessing in Jesus calling God the Father “Your Father”? This is the same phrase He uses when He speaks to Mary Magdalene on the first Easter morning – “I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.”

This is the same blessing we confess when we pray as Jesus taught – Our Father. You see, all these possessive words – your, our, my, etc. are words that bring faith in Jesus to mind. The work of Jesus is the foundation to God being Your Father. Faith in Jesus receives the benefit of what Jesus has done.

Without Jesus, God the Father is not really “Your Father” in any good sense of the word for you. Yes, God still makes the sun to rise and rain to fall and gives daily bread to all people, even to the wicked. This however is far from having God as Your Father. No, such a familial relationship is only found for those who trust in Jesus. This is what we confess about Holy Baptism making us children of God – freed from the power and dominion of the devil and now under the loving care, protection, and provision of God, your Father. In Holy Baptism we are united with Christ, the only-begotten Son of the Father, and thus become fellow heirs having the certain hope of salvation.

Jesus Christ, My Lord. That is to say, Jesus Christ, the one who makes God my Father. May you always be reminded of this.

Lord Jesus, You have made us children of God by Your work. Grant that we would ever be mindful of this in our prayers and in our lives as beloved children of God. Amen.

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Galatians 6:1-18

“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” (Galatians 6:14)

The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ accomplishes many things. Here we find that by the cross of Jesus Christ, the world is crucified to us, and us to the world. Crucifixion means death. By Jesus’ death, the world is dead to us, and we are dead to the world.

The devil, the world, and our sinful flesh do not want us to believe this. They want us to live as if all we have is this world, and that we are just so important to the world. This is because they hate the work of Jesus. They know how beneficial that work is for us both now and for eternity – so they don’t want us to have it. They hate Jesus. They hate us. So they tempt us to believe lies and to order our days and lives around wordly things.

Aren’t you already seeing this tension in the season of Lent? Extra services at church are an opportunity for hearing the Word, and yet, the world and our flesh would have us think we are too busy for that. Midweek meals with other Christians require planning and preparation, and we must be sociable – and gather together. Others may share their burdens for us to help carry. The world has made it easier for us to just be alone, after all we have enough burdens to carry already. Fasting from something as a matter of discipline for our flesh seems so odd in a world that would rather us be given over to every form of greed and gluttony we can imagine. Generously giving a little extra to help the needy is completely foreign to a world obsessed with the idea of scarcity. Quiet time in prayer is viewed as useless by the world around you – even mocking such powerful prayers. Even the idea of waiting for forty-plus days to rejoice in the resurrection is also strange in a world of instant gratification. So goes the world.

The world is dead to you in the cross of Jesus. Repent of all worldliness and live in the finished work and true reality of what Christ Jesus has done. Let the world know that you are dead to it. It’s works and ways, and all the evil it has planned for you and wants you to partake in are crucified to you.

Lord Jesus Christ, by Your holy crucifixion You have crucified the world to us and us to the world. By Your Holy Spirit make us to trust in this and live lives accordingly. We repent of our worldliness and pray that we may have renewed attitudes towards all things. Grant us to see everything through the finished work of the cross of Jesus. Amen.

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Hebrews 12:1-14

*“Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”
(Hebrews 12:2)*

Putting Jesus before us as an example has been misused a lot in Church history. That said, the Scriptures do this quite often (this text, but also 1 Peter 2:21-25 for another very good example). Here, we have the cross of Jesus put before us as a matter of enduring earthly suffering and shame. This text also ties into our devotion on Ash Wednesday about having God the Father as our Father.

Suffering is sure to come to those who want to be Christians in this life. First, we have a sinful nature which will war against our new nature, created in Christ Jesus. Second, the world will bring us tribulation as Jesus said it would. Finally the devil is roaming around like a roaring lion, seeking his prey.

These sufferings are not meant to cause us to abandon faith and run headlong into the temporary comforts of the world – not if we remember the suffering of our Lord. This is another aspect of Christ’s crucifixion. It reshapes our trials, suffering, and chastisement. Not only our view of these things, but the things themselves are different because of Jesus. Instead of things that must be avoided at every expense (the world’s view), they can be embraced and endured while trusting God to work good in us by them. These things have a different importance since Christ our Lord suffered.

The text moves directly from the earthly cross and shame and reminds us that Christ Jesus is (present tense) seated at the right hand of the throne of God. This is the Bible’s way of teaching us that Jesus now fully uses His Divine power in ruling over all things. Enduring earthly hardships is a matter of properly having eternity in mind. The only way to properly have eternity in mind is to be thinking of Jesus Christ, His work, and His many promises about eternity. God grant you this as Lent continues.

Lord Jesus, You endured suffering and shame on the cross. Help us to see how that changes things of this earthly life for us. Remind us often of what You have promised in eternal life, of the love shown in chastisement, and of the glory in sharing in what You went through, especially as we suffer here below. Amen.

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

James 2:1-13

[Note – Each Saturday will introduce the part of Sin that the next week will cover in relation to what Jesus does for us. Today we learn of our guilt, and this coming week we will learn of our being declared righteous by Justification.]

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (James 2:10-11)

There are some sins that we abhor - sins so despicable in our eyes that we dare not even mention them out loud. There are other sins, however, that we tolerate - sins that we know to be wrong and yet are barely given a second thought when committed.

But every sin, no matter how big or small we consider it, is a transgression against the Law, and therefore every sin is a transgression against God Himself. The Law is given by God, not by human authority, which means that the severity of sin is not decided by human opinion but declared by God in His Word. And He declares, “Until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:18-19a)

Whatever you have done contrary to the Ten Commandments, whether it be the most perverse acts of unchastity or simply showing favoritism to the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor and lowly, you have sinned. You have transgressed God’s Law. You are guilty of all of the Law. You are guilty before God. And the guilt of sin in every case deserves the sentence of death—spiritually, temporally, and eternally.

Where shall you flee? Only to the mercy of God in Jesus Christ alone, for in Him mercy triumphs over judgment. He bore your guilt on the cross that you would be declared innocent now and forevermore.

O God, we confess that we have sinned against You and are guilty of transgressing Your Law. We justly deserve Your temporal and eternal punishment. Have mercy on us for the sake of Your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, who bore the guilt of our sins on the cross, that we would be found innocent in Him. Amen.

First Sunday in Lent

Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"
(Matthew 4:7)

Lent 1 - From Guilt to Innocence (Justification)

God is not the one who is on trial, but the devil deceives us into thinking He is. It's part of the serpent's original lie. Did God really say? God knows that you will be like Him if you eat the fruit. In other words, God isn't telling you everything. God is holding out on you. When God is put on trial, scrutinized and tested by our own human judgments, then the devil has us right where he wants us. Because he knows that faith cannot exist in the heart that is always putting God to the test. Faith exists in a humbled heart. It exists in those who stand before God's tribunal, with God as the Judge. The broken and contrite heart recognizes that God alone has the right to kill and make alive, to condemn and to acquit. Faith therefore is not our testing of God's goodness, as if we are the ones sitting on the throne. Instead, sitting in the seat of a broken heart, the only judgment faith makes is that God is true and good at all times.

Jesus was baptized to take our sin on Himself and give us His righteousness in exchange. He was then immediately led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. This is His obedience in the place of sinners, to face the devil and declare God and His Word to be true. He, who is the innocent and righteous Judge, put Himself under the judgment of God. He doesn't give into the devil's lie to put the Lord God to the test. Instead, He entrusts himself to His Father who judges justly. It is in this way that our Lord stands for us guilty sinners to present us before the righteous throne of grace. His innocence and righteous avail for us. And God remains just.

Lord God, our righteous Judge, declare us righteous for Christ's sake and forgive us our sins, so that You may be justified in Your words and blameless in Your judgment. Amen.

Monday, Lent 1

Isaiah 45:18-25

In the Lord all the offspring of Israel shall be justified and shall glory. (Isaiah 45:25)

God calls on the nations to “declare and present your case.” What is our case before God? We are guilty. We have nothing but the idols and false gods formed by our own hands and hearts. God therefore summons us to stand before Him. This is a terrifying thought. When Adam and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God in the garden they ran and hid. That same God who summoned Adam is the God who summons all nations to stand before Him. Present your case. Not even the best defense attorney can get us out of this one.

Yet, what is the decree of God? He has declared it long ago, long before any false gods were concocted by carnal minds. He is the Lord who made heaven and earth, and here is His decree: “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God and there is none other.” By Himself He has sworn, and His word will not turn back empty: “To me every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear allegiance.” He who saves us is the same One to whom all glory and honor must be given and every knee must bend. He remains the righteous One even as He passes over our sin. How? Because of the Seed of Abraham, the Son of God who came into the flesh. At His name – the name of Jesus – every knee shall bend and every mouth confess that He is Lord. He is the Seed and Offspring promised to our fathers, that in Him all the nations of the earth will be blessed. Therefore, all who are in Him are His offspring. Their guilt is covered up by His innocence. God calls them Israel, and He has grafted us into this same Seed. We are part of Abraham’s offspring by being in the Lord Jesus. Because He is Abraham’s Seed. He is righteous. So in Him we will be declared righteous and behold His glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, our wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption, may we boast and glory only in You. Amen.

Tuesday, Lent 1

Romans 3:1-31

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:23-24)

There are those who want to say that God has not justified the whole world of sinners. Not everyone has faith, after all. So how can all be justified? Of course, this is true that not all have faith. Therefore, not all receive this gracious verdict of God as their own. Yet, we are not righteous because of our faith. In other words, we are not righteous because we have recognized God's righteousness and redemption in Christ. No, we stand righteous because of what our faith receives and lays hold of. We stand righteous because of Christ, whom God put forth as a propitiation by His blood, who turned God's anger away from our sins and stands as our righteousness forever.

In the same way, we are not sinful because we recognize that we are sinful. God's Word declares all to be under sin so that God would have mercy on all. This is God's decree and God's verdict, not our own thoughts and judgments. God, who declared Adam and his wife to be sinners and barred them from the tree of life, has also declared His Son to be the sin offering for all of Adam's descendants. Faith recognizes this as it dwells in the broken heart. But don't be mistaken! Faith doesn't make the gospel's decree what it is. Much less does your broken heart make the law's decree what it is. He who gave the law against the sin of all also fulfilled the law for the righteousness of all. Faith doesn't make it real. Faith makes it your own. All who believe in Him have exactly what He declares. They are sinners declared righteous by God's grace in Jesus Christ. Therefore, Paul says, "It was to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

Lord God, as we acknowledge Your decree against our sin, keep us in the faith always to receive Your righteousness and redemption in Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." (John 8:11)

God declares in His law that if a man commits adultery with another man's wife, then both the adulterer and the adulteress should be put to death (Lev 20:10). The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman to the temple where Jesus was teaching. She had been caught in adultery. Now, certainly there was a man involved, but the scribes and Pharisees are not interested in following justice. They only want to put Jesus to the test. The law of Moses was handed down to curb and expose wickedness and protect the innocent, but they use it as a tool to trap an innocent man. Jesus sees right through their deceit. He writes on the ground, showing that He is the law giver. He then rises and gives His judgment. He who is without sin throw the first stone.

This judgment does not do away with the law. Rather, it gets to the heart of what the law requires. The law needs to be administered by just judges, and Jesus is exposing the hypocrisy of their hearts. He is teaching the chief office of the law, exposing the guilt in the conscience even of those who would use it for their own self-serving purposes. They all leave in shame, and the only innocent and just man stands before the guilty woman. He who alone has the right to condemn this adulteress says, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." Here we see how the verdict of justification and acquittal from the divine tribunal immediately gives a new life of innocence. Go and sin no more. It's an admonition, which only faith can hear and heed, since only faith lays hold of the gracious sentence of not guilty. Now, the righteousness of the law begins to be fulfilled in us who don't walk by the flesh but by the Spirit of our Lord. In great weakness, yet confident in God's gracious verdict in Christ, we walk in this new obedience.

Lord God, we wash our hands with the innocence of Your Son. Keep us from sin and lead us in Your light. Amen.

*Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
(Psalm 32:2)*

We must distinguish between justification and the inner change that God works in us throughout our lives. God certainly does train us and lead us by His Holy Spirit. He teaches us to be wise, renewing our minds to discern His good, acceptable, and perfect will. He leads us to use our bodies as living sacrifices acceptable to Him. This is what we call inner renewal or sanctification, and it is a great comfort that God works in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure. He gives us strength to bear afflictions patiently. He does all of this because of His gospel promise. But we should not confuse this gradual growth in the Christian heart, mind, and body with his gracious verdict of declaring us righteous. God does not justify us by a process of causing us to grow in holiness and obedience. Instead, God's justification of the sinner is a gracious verdict for Jesus' sake. He forgives us, not by getting rid of the sin from the inside out. Instead, He forgives us by not counting our sin and guilt against us. He takes the record of guilt and nails it to the cross where Jesus died once and for all.

It is upon this gracious verdict in which God does not count our sins against us that our lives of inner renewal and obedience depend. It is because of this gracious verdict that your spirit is without deceit. Here, the Psalmist describes faith receiving the true and unfailing promise of righteousness from Christ himself. It follows that we are led by God in this life, always confident that when we confess our sins, He has already wiped away the guilty status of our sin. Even when we groan because of the sin that remains in us, God does not count the sin against us. We can therefore have confidence with an upright heart that we are righteous before Him.

Dear Lord, who does not impute our sins against us, give us understanding that we may walk uprightly and righteous before You, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

I wash my hands in innocence and go around your altar, O Lord. (Psalm 26:6)

If God has justified us, then it follows that He will also vindicate us. If He declares us righteous in His own sight, then He will also declare us righteous before others who accuse us. He proves that the faith He gave us is true. God declares the sinner righteous in His sight for Christ's sake. We receive this righteousness through faith in the gospel. Then God sets us on the path of life, causing us to walk in good works. Of course, we often fall short due to the weakness of our sinful nature. But God does not count our sins against us. In the meantime, He declares our works to be good, because He has given them to us and because they are carried out in faith. When you walk in your integrity, that is, doing the work God has called you to do and trusting in the Lord's promise, then you can be certain that God will not leave you or forsake you. He won't look at how you have fallen short in your works and then just let you fend for yourself. No, He will vindicate you. He will exalt you, even as He continues to nurture you by His gospel and the Sacrament of His Altar.

This is what it means to wash your hands in innocence and to go around the Lord's altar. You need to be washed as you walk the path to which God has called you. By His innocence, freely given to you from His altar in His body and blood and confirmed by His promise, Christ turns your life of labor into one of thanksgiving and praise before God. Standing on the promise you receive from Him who has declared you innocent by the blood of His Son, you stand on level ground. So bless the Lord in His assembly, and be confident that He will uphold you.

O Lord, You declare us righteous for Jesus' sake, giving us the gift of faith. So vindicate Your work in us that we may always stand on level ground. Amen.

Saturday, Lent 1
Numbers 22:22-35

Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. And he bowed down and fell on his face. And the angel of the Lord said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to oppose you because your way is perverse before me. The donkey saw me and turned aside before me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, surely just now I would have killed you and let her live." (Numbers 22:31-33)

As Israel made its way into the Promised Land, Balak, king of Moab, called upon Balaam, a prophet, to curse them for him. Though the Lord forbade him, Balaam still tried to find a way because of his greed. But as he went, the Angel of the Lord opposed him as his adversary and was ready to put him to death because he had rebelled against the Lord's command.

Though it may not be as obvious as it was to Balaam and his donkey, the Lord still stands opposed to sinners. The Scriptures plainly teach that "[the Lord's] soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence." (Psalm 11:5)

Be warned: the Lord's hand will find out all His enemies; His right hand will find out those who hate Him. (Psalm 21:8) His enemies shall perish; all evildoers shall be scattered. (Psalm 92:9) Balaam was no exception. Though he repented on the day his donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, he would later oppose Israel again and be put to death by the sword. (Numbers 31:8)

Only the atoning sacrifice of Jesus is sufficient to satisfy the wrath of God against sinners. Thanks be to God that "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son!" (Romans 5:10) In Him alone we who were once enemies of God now have peace with Him as dear and beloved children.

Almighty Lord, we confess that we have rebelled against You. We justly deserve Your wrath and condemnation. For Jesus' sake, have mercy on us, for He bore Your wrath against sin for us. Amen.

Second Sunday in Lent

Matthew 15:21-28

“And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves,” (Luke 21:25)

Lent 2 - From Enmity to Peace (Reconciliation)

In the preceding verses in Luke 21, Jesus pointed out that the Pharisees were more concerned with ritual purity than moral purity. Despite the utter failings of His people, Jesus still tells the Canaanite woman that He was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel. Jesus didn't speak this as an eternal truth, but as a reality that was meant to yield to a ministry to Jews and Gentiles alike. The woman is to us a wonderful example of prayer in the face of what feels like a hopeless situation, not only does she pray to God face-to-face, but after His initial “no” she once again begs “Lord, help me.” Jesus then intensifies His imagery: yes, His mission is to Israel alone, but more than that, anyone who exists outside of ethnic Israel was – in the words of Christ – a dog. The woman's wittiness and persistence is incredible when she says to God in human flesh, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.” Her humility seems to surprise Jesus, causing Him to commend her faith and heal her daughter. While the death of Christ did and does reconcile the whole world to God, we see throughout the ministry of Jesus hints of what it means that Israelites and Gentiles alike were reconciled to God by that same blood of Christ.

O Everlasting Lord, who shed Your blood for all mankind: teach us remember that whether we share a lineage with the Israel of old or not, our true identity lies in our rebirth as Christians. Whether we feast at Your altar, or simply eat the crumbs that fall from the Master's table, grant us the true bread from heaven that fills our hearts with faith and reconciles us with You; in Your name, O Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Monday, Lent 2

Genesis 3:1-21

“*“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife... to dust you shall return.”*” (Genesis 3:17–19)

This familiar episode from Scripture seems to get more heartbreaking the more one returns to it. The curse to the serpent is predicated on what he has done and the curse placed upon the woman is not predicated upon anything, but is simply pronounced upon her. The curse placed upon the man, however, is different. It begins “because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you [not to] cursed is the ground.” Do you see the difference? The serpent’s actions change the way snakes exist and move. The sin of the woman brings – rather naturally – a curse that all children born to women from this point forward will be bearers of original sin. The sin of the man changes the way that nature itself acts. Thorns and thistles and weeds and rotten vegetation is now what farmers can expect from their hard work. It is true that Eve’s sin preceded Adam’s, but the sin of the man is greater and brings with it a greater curse. From the day of the fall until the end of his 930 year-long life, Adam would have to second guess himself every time he did something his wife asked him to. It was not her voice or even her sin that caused earth to rebel against its creator, but Adam’s sin. Because he listened to the voice of his wife, he would die. Thanks be to God that the “seed of the woman” would one day be manifest in the person of Christ who does not obey the voice of His Bride, but instead shepherds her and dies for her, Himself being buried in the earth that was rebelling against Him. Because of His resurrection the earth yielded justification and reconciliation for all mankind.

Lord God, who saw that it was not good for man to be alone. Just as our first parents misordered Your gift of family and fell, we confess that we often disobey Your commandments and bring about chaos into our household. Teach us to repent of our sins, especially those we commit against those closest to us. Reconcile us one to another, reminding us by Your Word that in Your Son Jesus Christ we are reconciled to You. Through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Tuesday, Lent 2

Romans 5:1-11

“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” (Romans 5:10)

Since we *have been* justified by faith. It is not as though we *had been* justified, nor that we *are being* justified. The justification that occurred for us occurred in the past, but is a current reality. What follows in this short section from Saint Paul’s letter to the church in Rome is an explanation of what the life of the Christian looks like after the justification which was once and for all has been delivered to the individual by faith. It is a life that allows access to “grace.” To say it another way, since we are justified by faith, we now live in a reality in which the grace of God is regularly and constantly showered down upon us. To use the language of the Catechism, these gracious gifts are properly “Third Article” gifts. Because the cross of Christ is ever before our eyes, we learn to grow in that one holy catholic and apostolic church by suffering, enduring, growing in character, and hoping. Even though the whole world was justified by Christ’s blood, the fruits of that justification (Second Article gifts) only belong to believers – those who have been justified by grace. What patience and mercy God showed to mankind that He sent His son to die for us when the world was still at enmity with God. And yet, this “getting saved” is not the end of the life of the Christian. The death and resurrection of Christ is the event that saves us, claims us, and justifies us, but the Christian does not reside in a stagnant state of “once saved, always saved.” No, being reconciled to God actually looks like something: so much more, now that we *are reconciled*, we shall live by the life of Christ.

Lord God, by the resurrection of Your Son, all the world has been justified and reconciled to You. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear that we live in this reality and, repenting of our sins, always seek to grow in character and virtue. Through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Wednesday, Lent 2

Luke 15:11-32

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.’”
(Luke 15:22–23)

What is God’s response to our repentance when we have wandered far from His house and slowly made our way back? “Bring the best robe and put it on him.” What is God’s response to our moral failings when we confess that our sins were not only against our neighbor, but against the God of heaven? “Put a ring on his hand.” What is God’s response to our prodigious lifestyle when we confess that we are not worthy to be called His sons? “Put shoes on his feet.” What is God’s response when we squander all the good gifts He gives us with evil living, only to recognize our filth and go groveling back to Him? “Bring the fattened calf.” What is God’s response when we sin Monday through Saturday and only think of our sins during the opening words of the Divine Service? “Let us eat and celebrate.” What is God’s response when we feel as though we have no power over sin, no self-control, no ability to bring ourselves up from the muck? “My Son was dead and is alive again.” The parable of the prodigal son is a familiar episode in Luke’s Gospel, but we often forget about “the rest of the story.” There are times when we find ourselves in the shoes of the older son. We see reconciliation occur in real time and become indignant. We feel that our faithfulness, our giving, our genuinely good works have been overlooked by God. It is true that the squeaky wheel gets the grease, but sometimes we want to be praised for being well-oiled wheels in the chariot of the Church. The beauty of God’s grace is that He does just that: to the faithful ones who have not been prodigious or evil He says “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.” Nonetheless, it is meet and right to celebrate when the wayward find their way back, when that which is lost is found.

Almighty God, everlasting Father, You bring the wayward home by Your Word and sustain Your faithful by the same. Teach us to treasure up the grace that has been shown to us, that we would not be indignant of others, but rejoice that they share in the same reconciliation You have showered upon us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

“Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?” (Psalm 85:6)

How nice it would be if sin were not as potent and that once we believed, there was nothing in the world that could rip that faith away from us. Christ makes it clear in the parable of the sower of the seed (Matthew 19) that this is not the case. There are so many things in this world – cares and anxieties, lazy catechesis, even the devil himself – that try, sometimes with success, to rip the word of God away from us. When we see this happen to those closest to us, there is in us a desire to get angry with God. If He is all powerful, shouldn't He protect my loved ones from falling away? We want Him to put away His indignation when it feels like He will be angry with His people forever. Will He not revive us again so that we might rejoice in Him? Read Psalm 85 again, this time take a pause and deep breath at verse 7 before beginning verses 8-13. When we feel as though God has abandoned us, that He has treated the reconciliation He promised to us lightly, we must pause and tell ourselves to hear what the Lord has said. He will and He does speak to His people by His word, but it is not a failure of His word when we back to folly. It is us. Us alone. But salvation is near to those who fear God. When we, like the Canaanite woman, ask God to heal those closest to us, it is as though steadfast love and faithfulness meet. When we, through no fault of our own, confess that the sin of Adam and Eve is coursing through our veins, righteousness and peace kiss each other. When we, like the prodigal son, make our way home, it is as though faithfulness springs up and righteousness rains down from the sky. Reconciliation is real and it is firmly and solely rooted in Christ. Our sin and the evils of the world can tempt us away from it. But Christ is bigger than all of that.

O God who restored the fortunes of Jacob, restore to us the peace which we tasted when we first believed. Lead us not into temptation, deliver us from evil, and set Your righteousness before us so that our footsteps may lead us continually back to the place where Your reconciliation is proclaimed again and again. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

“Leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:24)

How has this week prepared you for Sunday? That we are reconciled to God through Christ is an article of the Gospel alone, something to which we cannot add and something from which we cannot take away. The Gospel, however, does not change the fact that sin still resides in this world and even in our own flesh. As long as the earth produces thorns, we know that sin still exists in the world. Being reconciled to God should not cause us to stagnate, but should stir us up to action. Just as witnessing a knight slay the dragon does not cause young boys to shrug at the possibility of bravery, so also realizing that Christ has accomplished all for us ought to excite us and embolden us. Slaying dragons is hard work. It’s scary. If we wish to imitate Christ by acting out reconciliation we should expect the same sort of suffering: bruises, being mocked, pain and death. As you prepare your heart, mind, and body to receive the Lord’s Supper on Sunday, meditate on how you can be an icon of Christ’s reconciliation. How have you sinned against others, especially those who live under the same roof as you? How have they sinned against you, causing you to carry a grudge? Reason among yourself that you will not go forward on Sunday, that you will not even put a dollar in the offering plate until you have sought reconciliation. Sometimes that means sending a text or leaving a voicemail with no reply. This is – so to speak – like Christ rising from the dead for the sake of those who don’t believe in Him: the reconciliation is there, but it has not been acknowledged or received. Reach out and say sorry. Or reach out and ask someone to say sorry. Speak a word of forgiveness or ask them to speak a word of forgiveness to you. All this so you can offer your gift, and so you can receive the greatest gift with a pure heart.

O God, who reconciled the whole world to Yourself in Christ, give us the words to enact the same reconciliation with those who are closest to us. Give us humility and patience so that we may repent, forgive, and receive the joys of Your Supper in a worthy manner. Through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

“Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made.” (Matthew 18:23-25)

We confess in the Small Catechism that it is our “duty to thank and praise, serve and obey [God].” (Explanation of the First Article) This obligation has not been met. You have failed to render to God the worship you owe Him, and as you daily sin much you fall deeper into the debt of sin—an unpayable, unimaginable debt. Nevertheless, the Law demands that your debt be paid in full, along with the service and obedience it demands in the first place.

Your sinful debt made you a slave. Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.” (John 8:34) It is slavery from which you cannot free yourself. It is to be sin’s servant and the devil’s captive, ensnared by him to do his will. No matter how hard you try, no matter how firmly you resolve, you cannot set yourself free from bondage to sin and the devil. And even if you could make a new start and begin to do what is commanded of you by God, you cannot pay back the debt of your sins that you already owe God.

But God, in His mercy, has forgiven your debt and set you free from slavery to sin and the devil. For Christ Jesus has paid your debt in full—not with silver or gold, but with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. He did this so that you would be His own—no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Lord God, we confess that we have not done what You have commanded. We have failed to render what we owe: thanks and praise, service and obedience. Forgive us our debts, for Jesus’ sake, as we forgive those who are indebted to us. Amen.

Third Sunday in Lent

Luke 11:14–28

Now [Jesus] was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. (Luke 11:14)

Lent 3 - From Slave to Son (Redemption)

When Jesus casts out a demon He is accused of doing so by the devil's power (Beelzebul, v. 15). The devil doesn't sabotage his own devious plans and schemes against God's people. He wants to hold on to the creation corrupted and tainted by sin. Sin, death, and devil hold creation captive in the open maw that leads to hell and everlasting fire. Jesus fulfills what was spoken by the prophets and begins to recapture His creation, undoing the ravages of sin and all its dastardly consequences (Isaiah 35:5-6; 61:1-2; Matthew 11:4-5).

From the incarnation to the temptation in the wilderness to Calvary, the devil never ceased to attack the Christ. At every turn, Jesus defeated the old, wicked foe. As an infant, He became a slave (Phil 2:7, δούλου), and He submitted Himself to the Law (Luke 2:21). He was baptized by John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit. The Lamb of God carried the world's sins, and became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The God of creation became a slave to redeem those enslaved by the devil so that they might be declared to be sons of God. The baptized have the robe of Christ's righteousness that covers them. The voice from heaven twice declared Jesus to be the beloved Son in whom the Father is well pleased (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). Now, for you who are baptized into Jesus, who hear the Word of God and keep it (Luke 11:28), the Father sees you clothed with the robes of justification, the blood of Christ, the righteousness and purity of the Son of God. God the Father is pleased with you, not for anything you've done or accomplished, but because of Christ who has redeemed you by His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.

Like the mute man who spoke, God opens your lips to sing His praise and tell of all His wonderful works (Psalm 118:17).

O Lord, open our lips, and our mouths will declare Your praise. Amen.

Monday, Lent 3

Exodus 6:1-8

Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.' (Exodus 6:6)

Redemption is regaining possession of something previously held, usually either through direct payment or by forgiving a debt. In some states, there are redemption centers for recycling aluminum, glass, or plastics. The State of Iowa has a 5¢ deposit on such items at the time of purchase. You can redeem that 5¢ when the can or bottle is brought to a redemption center.

The Lord set out to redeem His people from slavery in Egypt, having heard their groaning. He fulfilled His covenant that He made with the people. He did this redeeming by His outstretched arm and judgments on the Egyptians. The Ten Plagues of Egypt are that judgment.

The whole creation groans under the weight of sin (Romans 8:22). God remembered His covenant to send the Messiah and at the right time, sent His Son, one like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-19) who delivered His people from bondage.

Instead of being the receiver of the Law on Sinai like Moses, Jesus is the fulfiller of the Law. Instead of being the outstretched arm and the judgment of God, Jesus stretched out His arms on the cross and received the judgment and wrath of God the Father.

This is God's act of redeeming His people. He sets free those who are in bondage and are slaves to sin. They are declared to be sons of God and set free.

The Epistle of Jude says, "Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe" (v. 5). With mighty acts and judgments, Jesus set the Israelites free from Egypt. With humility and receiving the judgment against sin, Jesus set the world free and those who believe in Him, have eternal life.

You have blotted out our transgressions like a cloud and our sins like mist. Keep us steadfast in the faith for You have redeemed us. Amen.

Tuesday, Lent 3

Galatians 4:1-7

So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (Galatians 4:7)

Have you ever been or heard someone else be accused of being a “slave to your money”? It doesn’t have to be money, it can be anything. You’re a slave to your work, desires, flesh, even your spouse or children.

St. Paul says that we, “were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.” The evil influences of the world and the forces of the devil want to keep everyone in darkness so that there’s not even a glimmer of hope. They want you to believe that like a horse can be tied to a post by simply wrapping the lead rope around without a knot, you’re left without escape. They want you to despair to “fate”, that you’re a slave without the possibility of escape. You’re a prisoner without the possibility of reprieve or parole.

God gave the answer in Eden. The second person of the Trinity became man and was born of a woman, shed His blood at His circumcision, and was presented at the Temple. He took your place under the Law to redeem you by His blood and by laying down His life as the sacrifice for sin. He paid the price fully and completely for you to no longer belong to devil, be under the power of his world, or slavishly serving your sinful nature.

It’s into Him that you’re baptized. It’s with His righteousness that you’re clothed. “He put Himself under the Law, as though He were a sinner like all the rest of the children of men. And this He did for us, that He might redeem us” (Pasche, F.E., *Daily Bread*. CPH 1926, p. 178).

No sin is too great. No guilt is too heavy. No shame is too burdensome. No price was too high. Jesus pays for it all and sets you free. You’re a child of God and an heir of salvation and eternal life through the waters of Holy Baptism where you were clothed with Christ and sprinkled clean by His blood. Even if that was long ago, it is still true this very moment.

O Son of God, have mercy on us and remember us whom You have purchased with Your blood to redeem us. Amen.

They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" (John 8:33)

While it's always been true of people, it's especially true today in Western society that people like to think of themselves as autonomous. They're a law unto themselves. They can govern and control themselves. To a certain extent, this is true. You can choose many things for yourself. What clothes to wear, car to drive, occupation, housing, food, drink, etc... Other things are beyond our control, like the weather.

The Jews who had heard Jesus' preaching and teaching and had believed in Him heard from Jesus "The truth will set you free." They knew the implication of that meant that they weren't free, but slaves. They weren't in control, they weren't autonomous. Protesting Jesus' teaching they said, "We have never been enslaved to anyone." Ironically, they had not only forgotten their history of slavery in Egypt, but they were also under occupation by the Roman Empire at that very moment.

Jesus is speaking of a more substantial slavery and freedom. Slavery to the whims of the flesh, the tidal forces of the world that go back and forth between extremes of sin, and the lies of the devil that are always pulling people away from truth and into bondage and death. Jesus is speaking of freedom from those enemies, from that slavery.

St. Paul writes, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1). Those who protested Jesus denied the reality of what He was saying. Instead of protesting like them, confess it. Acknowledge it. Hear the truth and believe it. What is the truth? In the Vulgate (Latin) translation of John 18:38, Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, "Quid est veritas ("What is truth?")? In Latin, this is a well-known anagram for "Est vir qui adest" ("It is the man who is before you"). True freedom is found only in Christ, the Truth, the Redeemer (John 14:6).

Lord Jesus, You are the way, the truth, and the life. By Your grace alone You have set us free. Help us to confess Your truth and abide always in Your Word. Amen.

Thursday, Lent 3

Psalm 130

O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. (Psalm 130:7)

Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. In other words, be on guard against those who would trick or swindle you a second time. Is God like that? He lays out His divine Law clearly for all to hear and see. He makes His demands known. So why don't you do it? Because Original Sin means there's no good in you. St. Paul grapples with this in Romans 7:7-25. The Psalmist wrestles with this as well, pondering, "If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O LORD, who could stand?" The answer - no one could stand!

What hope is there? If it were left to you, there would be no hope. Left to other people, there would be no hope. Mankind without Christ is hopeless.

There is only one hope, one way, one truth to which you must cling. The truth is Jesus. In Jesus, there is steadfast love and redemption. Like a loving father is patient with his children, so God in Christ is patient with you. The prodigal father and the wayward son (Luke 15:11-32), the father waits patiently for his son to realize the error of his ways and return with weeping and mourning (Joel 2:12).

The Father's love for you is limitless, inexhaustible. He doesn't put limits on forgiveness, more than seven times (or 70 x 7 times!) (Matthew 18:21-22). The blood of Jesus is the propitiation for all sin, and He continually calls to you that you might repent of your sin and believe the Gospel (Mark 1:15). He has paid the full price for all forgiveness, for all redemption.

Hope in the Lord, not as a wish or desire, but as a firm and certain confidence that He is faithful. His love holds firm, and His redemption is plentiful, without limits. We continually pray, as He has taught us, *forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

O God, You showed Your great love for us in giving Your only begotten Son into death, stretching out His arms on the cross to embrace the world. Strengthen our faith in You so that we will always rely on Your steadfast love and plentiful redemption. Amen.

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. (Romans 6:20)

The world says, “You do you.” Whatever makes you happy, that’s fine. Who is there to judge you? If that’s the case, then there’s nothing you can’t do and you can act with impunity. You’re free...at least that’s what the world and your flesh want you to think. A lack of laws or restrictions equates with freedom. No boundaries. No hindrances. No saying “no!”

That’s backward. Look at any college campus after a night-long frat party. What’s the result? Physical suffering and regret. That’s what comes from “You do you.” That’s not real freedom. It’s slavery masquerading as freedom. The results, the fruits (Romans 6:21) speak for themselves.

Instead of indulging in the desires of the flesh and doing whatever makes you momentarily happy, as a Christian, live for others. Christ lived and died for you and He lives eternally for you now. Christ sets you free, not as liberty to go on sinning, but that you can love and serve one another in your station in life (Romans 12).

Jesus has set you free from sin and death. You are redeemed. He has unbound you from captivity to the devil. He doesn’t mark iniquity but cleanses you by His blood. Now, in Him, you forgive others and serve them. You love because He has loved you (1 John 4:19). This isn’t a Hallmark type of love that’s sappy or sentimental. This love is active, sacrificial, bloody, involving struggle and suffering with Christ, for the sake of others. Love that takes courage and strength and only comes from Jesus who did not despise the cross or shun the suffering before Him (Hebrews 12:2).

You were bought for a price. You are free in Jesus. You are no longer a slave to sin, under the shadow of death, or held captive by the devil. You are not your sinful nature. You are in Christ, the Son of God who has set you free. “For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (Galatians 3:26).

Send us Thy Spirit, teach us truth; Thou Son, O set us free from fancied wisdom, self-sought ways, to make us one in Thee (LSB 569:5). Amen.

Saturday, Lent 3

Romans 7:4-25

I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. (Romans 7:9-13)

God warned Adam, “In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Genesis 2:17) After Adam’s disobedience, God declared, “To dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:19b) Death is not a part of life as God created it, but “sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” (Romans 5:12)

Therefore, “the wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23) You will die someday. Your flesh and your heart will fail. Perhaps even now there are signs of inevitable death in your own body: disease, injury, weakness, etc. Yet it’s worse than just physical death, even now sin separates men from God and leaves them spiritually “dead in the trespasses and sins” in which they walk. (Ephesians 2:1-2a)

Wretched men that we are! Who will deliver us from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:24-25) The Son of God alone is able to deliver us from death and bring us to life by His death and resurrection—a deliverance and resurrection that is not only in the future but present here and now: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my Word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (John 5:24)

O God, we confess that we deserve nothing but death and hell for our sins. For the sake of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again for us, raise us from the death of our sins to newness of life in Him. Amen.

Fourth Sunday in Lent

John 6:1-15

“Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?”” (John 6:5)

Lent 4 - From Death to Life (Creator, Life-Giver)

When sin entered the world, bread became hard to come by. God’s judgment was this: “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:19) Man’s relation to the earth changed. His sustenance required sweat. Work was once a joyous duty, but now it is difficult. Today, we sweat and strive to put bread on the table. While God does indeed give us daily bread, the curse makes sure that the loaf is earned by the laborious.

In the gospel, Philip is sweating. Christ tests Philip. Philip strives and sweats. He makes a careful calculation. But there isn’t enough. All the sweat in the world cannot feed a single soul. No amount of math can fix this problem. There is not enough bread and enough life to go around. Someone is going to go hungry. Scarcity is truly an issue out in the wilderness, that uncultivated ground which produce nothing to gladden the hearts of men.

But the people will not sweat this day. Here, the curse is temporarily lifted. The people eat without sweating and striving. They eat bread to the full from the gracious hand of Jesus Christ. Christ lifts the curse to show that He has come to be a curse for them. While they eat without sweat, Christ will later sweat. Indeed, sweat like great drops of blood will fall from His sacred brow as He prepares, not to eat bread, but to drink the cup of wrath and pain His Father prepared for Him.

We still sweat as we eat our bread. But Christ offers us a different kind of bread. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word which comes from God’s mouth. This is the bread of life, because it gives you Jesus and, through this bread, you shall live eternally.

Lord Jesus, You are the bread of Life. Comfort us as we eat our earthly bread here by the sweat of our brows, knowing that You have redeemed us from the curse. Amen.

Monday, Lent 4

Jonah 2:1-10

“I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.” (Jonah 2:2)

The sea was scary in the ancient world. Most ships clung to the coasts. There are no landmarks in the open sea, since the waves are ever changeable. There was little security. And, if you die, how will your body be found so that it might be buried among your kith and kin?

Jonah is, literally, encompassed by a watery grave. Seaweed is wrapped around his head. In his living submarine, Jonah visits the roots of the mountains. All this is self-inflicted. Jonah was driven, not by God, but by his own sin. He didn't want the Ninevites to repent. He left God's temple. He was cast into the sea because of his own hardheartedness and lack of pity. That's something to remember. Hatred of other peoples, no matter how rightly deserved, to the point of damnation leads to death. The lack of mercy leads to death.

But this is not where Jonah's history ends. This song is a hymn of thanksgiving for deliverance. Our Lord heard Jonah's cries. He forgave him his sins. God rescued him from the womb of hell itself. Worthless idols did not do this. God did this. Like Jonah, we can remember with thanksgiving that God has brought us up from the bottomless pit and seated us in a safe place.

Jesus speaks of Jonah's sign. This is right, for salvation is from the Lord. Christ was buried three days and nights in the belly of the earth. But our Lord rose from the dead. The grave, like Jonah's fish, vomited Him out; it could not hold Him any longer. Because we are in Christ, the grave cannot hold us either. We live because Jesus, the One greater than Jonah, lives. Because we live, we, like Jonah, give thanks and praise to the Lord Who hears our prayers and has mercy upon us. We now give the sacrifices of thanksgiving to God our Savior. We pay our vows, made at our baptism, our confirmation, our wedding, and every other place, because of what Christ has done for us.

Lord Jesus, You spoke to the fish and it vomited up Jonah on dry land. We ask You to come quickly and speak, so that the earth and the sea shall vomit up all the dead on the Last day. Amen.

Tuesday, Lent 4
Ephesians 2:1-10

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—” (Ephesians 2:4–5)

Paul gets to the root of our problem. Our problem isn't that we are ignorant of divine truths, even though we are. Our problem isn't that we are sick with sin, although the Bible certainly speaks that way. Our problem isn't that we are simply slaves of the devil, even though verse 2 speaks of this spiritual possession of every unbeliever by the devil. These are problems, but they are not our chief problem.

The chief problem, Paul says, is that we are dead. We are dead in our trespasses and sins. The dead cannot learn or overcome their ignorance. In fact, spiritual death is the cause of our ignorance: “the dead know nothing” (Ecclesiastes 9:5). We cannot denigrate sin by saying it is merely a sickness: no, sin brings sickness to its natural conclusion: death. We cannot say that we are merely slaves, because slaves can be freed or even free themselves. But what dead man can free himself? This is our chief problem. We are dead in trespasses and sins.

If the root of our problem is death, then the solution we need is just as radical. We must be made alive. This is what Christ does. Just as Christ rose from the dead, so too do we rise with Him. The basis for this joint resurrection is the mercy of God. Mercy is a close synonym of love. Mercy is pity on those who cannot help themselves. God works by raising us in Christ. That's why this is the gift of God. We cannot boast. We were dead. Dead men do nothing. But God has done everything for us in Christ.

The radical problem is solved by the radical solution. This is why sanctification is not just a change of attitudes or the introduction of certain habits. No, our sanctification is a product of our being alive in Christ. Our new life in Christ is shaped to do good works, just as much as our circulatory system is shaped to move blood throughout our body. This too is God's doing.

Heavenly Father, thank You for making us alive with Christ when we were dead in our sins. Amen.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12:24)

Jesus here speaks of his own death in agricultural terms. He is the great of wheat. He will fall into the earth, that is be buried. He will die, just as many in ancient times viewed the sowing of seed as a symbol of death. We hear in Psalm 126:6: “He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.” And our Lord Jesus uses this language of sowing about Himself too.

It is as if Christ is saying: “I too, as a noble chosen grain of wheat, will be buried in the earth after My death. But after I am raised from the dead, gone into heaven, and seated Myself at the right hand of God, there will be much fruit. The gospel of My suffering and death shall create much fruit among the Gentiles, those Greeks who came to see Me. They shall be converted in great numbers and gathered like good wheat grains into My heavenly barn.”

This is why the Germans called their graveyards Gottesacker, or God’s acre. This is because of St. Paul’s language in 1 Corinthians 15:42 “So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable.” At our funeral services, we are planted in the earth, just as Christ was. But we plant our dead with tears and trust, knowing that, just as Christ rose, so too shall our dead rise. They shall not be perishable seeds anymore; they shall be imperishable oaks of righteousness.

Cemeteries or sleeping places is a good name, but I believe we should return to calling graveyards “God’s field,” or “God’s acre.” We are not finished with our bodies; in fact, the great harvest is yet to come.

Lord Jesus, You were planted into the ground in order to produce much fruit. Thank You for this great sacrifice for us and help us to also not love our lives to death, but to take up our crosses and follow you. Amen.

“for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.” (Psalm 103:16)

God knows that man is a creature born of dust. He is as ephemeral as grass. His strong body and sharp mind wither and decay like the flowers. I hope we know it. We cannot live without God’s compassion.

Look at the gentleness and tenderness of God! He always tempers His justice with mercy. He never repays us as we deserve. His anger is for a moment; His steadfast love is for all time. He helps the most helpless among us: the oppressed. He sends us pastors like Moses. He not only heals our diseases, but He also makes us young again by satisfying us with all good things both temporal and eternal.

God knows what we are. I hope we know it. We are not angels; we are men. Men are weak, frail, and fleeting. But God’s love for us is everlasting. It is higher than the heavens. Dear Christians, should we not show gentleness and mercy to our fellows? They are made of dust, like we are. They wither and decay as the hours tick by. They also need compassion and love and forgiveness. We have been much loved; let us love our brothers. Let us bear with their weakness and frailties, just as God our Father has borne with us. For He knows our frame and now we do too.

Heavenly Father, You have been so gentle and gracious with us. Give us a spirit of gentleness and longsuffering for our fellows, so that we might be merciful as You are merciful. Amen.

Friday, Lent 4

Hosea 6:1-11

*“After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.”
(Hosea 6:2)*

This week we have learned about Christ our Lord as a life giver. Today, we hear an Old Testament prophecy from Hosea. Here, we see how God will demonstrate Himself to the contrite and penitent soul.

He will revive us. Who will do this? This “He” is Christ, the true Messiah. He shall make us alive with Him. We heard about this earlier when we spoke about Ephesians 2. We are resurrected with Christ. And not only that, but we are also seated together with Him in the heavenly places.

Why two and three days? Christ was raised on the third day. Through Christ’s merit and resurrection, we too attain life. There is no life apart from Christ’s resurrection. What applies to Him also applies to us who are in Him through true faith. This is our hope and our trust.

What does it mean to live before Christ? Simply what you learned in the catechism: That I may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. No longer shall the death of sin be upon us. No, we receive a new life. A new life means new thoughts, new speech, and new deeds. This is why Old Testament sacrifices are insufficient. God desires mercy and not sacrifice, that is, He desires the true and living sacrifices of love, mercy, and thanksgiving. In short, we live before Christ when we live sacrificial lives for others. We live before Christ when we show mercy. This new life and reality is given to you freely by Christ and then, wonder of wonders, He rewards such works by grace!

This is God’s demonstration of Himself toward the broken and contrite heart. Though He wounds and kills with the law, He also revives and raises us up with the gospel.

Lord Jesus, You revive and raise us up through Your resurrection. Help us to live before You, knowing that you desire mercy and not sacrifice. Amen.

And [Jesus] said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." (Mark 7:20-23)

The Church sings in the Divine Service, "Thou only art holy." The Lord God Almighty is indeed the Holy One: exalted above all creation as the Creator, perfect in majesty and glory, without sin. Though He is the Most High, He created man in His image, after His likeness, having perfect righteousness and holiness, to dwell in fellowship with Him.

But Adam and Eve sinned, and that sin is rightly called "The Fall," for by it mankind fell from righteousness to wickedness, from holiness to profanity, from fellowship with God to separation from Him. Now the corruption of sin is not something external to you but in you, in your very nature. Jesus says that it is not what goes into a person from outside of him that defiles him but rather what comes out of a person. In other words, you commit sins because you are a sinner. The uncleanness of your human nature, stained by sin, is revealed in your sinful thoughts, words, and deeds.

The Scriptures declare that "nothing unclean will ever enter [the holy city of God], nor anyone who does what is detestable and false." (Revelation 21:27a) Those who are profane and defiled cannot stand before God in fellowship with Him. Instead, they will come under God's wrath.

Our only hope is to be cleansed from all our uncleanness and to receive a new heart and a new spirit. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to do this, but the blood of Jesus, the Son of God, cleanses us from all sin. Because He gave Himself up for you, He presents you to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, holy and without blemish.

Holy Lord, we confess that we are poor, miserable sinners, defiled in our very nature. Cleanse us from our transgressions by Your Word and Spirit, that we might stand holy and righteous before You. Amen.

Fifth Sunday in Lent

John 8:46-59

“Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?’” (John 8:42–46)

Lent 5 - From Profane to Holy (Sacrificial Lamb)

“You are of your father the devil.” Harsh, yet very true. This text demonstrates well what Luther said about false teachers. A theologian of the cross calls a thing what it is. Sin is condemned as sin. Righteousness is commended, encouraged, and is to be imitated. The theologian of glory looks for answers beyond the revealed word of God and calls sin “righteousness” and calls true righteousness “sin.”

Why do people not believe what God’s Word says? Hearts are profane and bent against anything sacred and holy. They don’t like what God says. Sinners don’t want to be told that what they are doing is sin! Sinners attack the Law of God and those who do believe the truth. Sinners are on their way to hell for all eternity until the truth, Jesus, sets them free. Jesus takes us, the profane, and makes us holy.

We beseech Thee, Almighty God, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the unity of the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Monday, Lent 5

Leviticus 16:1-34

“And the priest who is anointed and consecrated as priest in his father’s place shall make atonement, wearing the holy linen garments. He shall make atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. And this shall be a statute forever for you, that atonement may be made for the people of Israel once in the year because of all their sins.” And Aaron did as the LORD commanded Moses.” (Leviticus 16:32–34)

Jesus is our great High Priest, not of the tribe of Levi, but of Judah. Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek, as we learn from Psalm 110 (and the Epistle to the Hebrews). Jesus is the priest in His Father’s place that makes atonement for us and our salvation.

The Jewish priests in the Scriptures and in Jesus’ day made atonement once per year. Their work was based upon God’s promise about the Day of Atonement – foreshadowing Christ’ atoning work. Unlike the priests of old, Jesus makes atonement once for all time. Unlike those priests, He doesn’t offer up another for sacrifice, but offers up Himself. He, the eternal priest is also the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus, as our High Priest does what no other priest did or could do. He offers Himself as a sinless atoning sacrifice. Jesus is “Himself the Victim and Himself the Priest” as we sing in the hymn “Draw Near and Take the Body of the Lord.” (LSB 637)

Jesus makes atonement for all people by His sacrificial death on the cross. This is revealed by His victorious Easter Resurrection from the dead. Because He promised to deliver the fruit of His sacrifice to us through Word and Sacrament, we are now clothed in the holy white robe of Christ’s righteousness that covers all our sin.

Lamb of God, pure and holy, Who on the cross didst suffer, Ever patient and lowly, Thyself to scorn didst offer. All sins Thou borest for us, Else had despair reigned o’er us: Have mercy on us, O Jesus! O Jesus! (LSB 434:1) Amen.

Tuesday, Lent 5

Hebrews 9:1-14

“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” (Hebrews 9:11–14)

Hebrews 9 recalls both the Tabernacle that traveled with God’s Old Testament people and the permanent Temple in Jerusalem. Only a select few, priests of the tribe of Levi performed the ritual duties. Inside was the Holy Place, where one found the candlestands, the Bread of the Presence, and the altar of incense. The Holy of Holies or Most Holy Place was only entered once per year and only by the High Priest. Blood was required. The blood of an unblemished perfect sacrifice was the substitute for the blood of the human being who sinned. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

At the death of Jesus, the curtain in the temple was torn in two, the curtain between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. Jesus enters the heavenly temple as our Great High Priest. He gives us an eternal redemption. The shed blood of Jesus purifies our consciences from dead works to serve the living God. Where we were profane and defiled, because of Christ’ sacrificial work we are purified, cleansed, and atoned.

This good news of Gospel means that we are a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We are saints, holy ones of God. We approach the Lord in prayer through the one Mediator between God and man, the incarnate Christ Jesus.

Heavenly Father, Christ our High Priest, and Eternal Spirit, may we in faith the Gospel message learn, nor thanklessly its blessings spurn; May we in faith its truth confess And praise You Lord, our righteousness (Adapted from LSB 580:5). Amen.

“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

Every Divine Service we sing this verse. “O Chirst, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. O Christ Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. O Christ thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, grant us Thy peace. Amen.” We call it the *Agnus Dei*, Latin for Lamb of God. But what does it mean for Jesus to be the Lamb of God?

In Exodus 12, the lamb was a substitute for the household. The lamb was a male, without blemish. The lamb was killed at twilight. The blood was painted on the doorposts of the household, and the Angel of Death passed over. What did He pass over? - sinners in the household. That’s why this was called the Passover. And then, the Lamb was eaten. God specified the conditions. He promised to forgive, and He did.

Jesus is our substitute. John the Baptist rightly preached that Jesus is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. (Hebrews 9:22) It took the death of the lamb at the Passover for the blood to cover over the sinners in the household according to the promise of God. And it took the death of THE Lamb of God at Jesus’ Passover to cover over sinners in this world. His blood does what no animals ever did or ever could. Jesus, as our substitute, does what we could never do for ourselves.

We need Jesus. We confess our sins in order to hear the Lord’s absolution. We all need the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for us and for His sake forgives us all our sins in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Lamb of God, pure and holy, Who on the cross didst suffer, Ever patient and lowly, Thyself to scorn didst offer. All sins Thou borest for us, Else had despair reigned o’er us: Have mercy on us, O Jesus! O Jesus! (LSB 434:2) Amen.

“The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.””
(Psalm 110:1)

In Matthew 22, Jesus is confronted with questions. He eventually asks one of His own. Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” He said to them, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, ““The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet”? “If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Acts 2 references this psalm, too. Peter preaches:

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, ““The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.””

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

In Psalm 110, David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, explains what the Father (the LORD) said to the Messiah (my Lord). Jesus is the forever priest like Melchizedek. Jesus is Son of God and Son of Man, a descendant of King David, our Bridegroom, King, Prophet, and Priest.

Lord, when Your glory we shall see And taste Your kingdom’s pleasure, Your blood our royal robe shall be, Our joy beyond all measure! When we appear before Your throne, Your righteousness shall be our crown; With these we need not hide us. And there, in garments richly wrought, As Your own bride shall we be brought To stand in joy beside You. Amen (LSB 438:4).

“Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.” (1 Peter 3:13–17)

Christ is our holy High Priest. This week we have heard much about Christ our Lord and how we go from profane to holy because of the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God who is also our High Priest.

We, as sinners are profane. Since Christ has been sacrificed for us, we are no longer profane, but holy. The Scriptures over and over call living Christians “saints”. This is usually celebrated in our Churches on November 1st (All Saints’ Day). We don’t have an intricate system by which the church canonizes someone a saint. No, Christ is the reason someone is a saint, by the shedding of His blood.

Peter’s lesson here helps us understand that we are to live saintly lives, and find our whole being in what Christ has done for us. We are not identified by our profane, sinful nature. That has passed away. We are in Christ and have new lives now – saintly lives. As holy ones of God we are zealous to do the good Christ has prepared for us to do, and we will likely suffer for it. Christ who is holy suffered, so we as His holy ones will suffer.

Still, suffering for holiness is far better than suffering for doing evil – that is, acting as defiled, profane ones separated from Christ and rejecting His atoning work through unbelief. The saintly life given and led by Christ is how Peter could live, and even encourage the Christians being persecuted during the time of his writing 1 Peter.

Christ the Lord is holy. We have His holiness when we believe in Him. The profane life you used to live is no more yours. Let that fact fuel your everyday life and rejoice when you suffer for doing good.

Lamb of God, pure and holy, Who on the cross didst suffer, Ever patient and lowly, Thyself to scorn didst offer. All sins Thou borest for us, Else had despair reigned o’er us: Thy peace be with us, O Jesus! O Jesus! (LSB 434:3) Amen.

For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. (2 Peter 2:18-20)

“The Word of God also teaches that we are all conceived and born sinful and are under the power of the devil until Christ claims us as His own.” (from the rite of Holy Baptism, *LSB* p. 268) Sin binds us under Satan as his captive. The devil is truly a strong man next to you. He is “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31) and “the one who has the power of death.” (Hebrews 2:14) You, however, are spiritually blind, dead, and powerless to resist him. Well does the Church sing: “Fast bound in Satan’s chains I lay; death brooded darkly over me. Sin was my torment night and day; in sin my mother bore me. But daily deeper still I fell; my life became a living hell, so firmly sin possessed me.” (*LSB* 556:2)

But we continue singing, “God said to His beloved Son: ‘It’s time to have compassion. Then go, bright jewel of My crown, and bring to all salvation. From sin and sorrow set them free; slay bitter death for them that they may live with You forever.’” (*LSB* 556:5) Satan may be a strong man, but Jesus Christ is the Stronger Man who through death has destroyed the devil and delivered all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. Through Holy Baptism Christ has set you free from the devil, and all his works, and all his ways. He has set you free to live as servants of God. (1 Peter 2:16)

O Lord God, we confess that we cannot free ourselves from the captivity of sin. Deliver us from the evil one, that we may serve You without fear in holiness and righteousness all our days. Amen.

Palm Sunday
Matthew 26:1-27:66
John 12:12-19

“*Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!*” (John 12:15)

Holy Week - From Captive to Free (Savior)

The Gospel is not in the toppling of kings, overturning governments, rebellion, passing laws; it’s certainly not in the salvation of culture. We need Palm Sunday this year more than we know. Just as we do every week before the divine service, we examine ourselves, we see the sin that we committed, whether we know it or not. You see how your sin has hurt your family, neighbors, and friends. Remember that in divine service you confess that you are by nature sinful and unclean, deserving both temporal (earthly) and eternal punishment. The shackles of our sins are tethered to a fate worse than death—everlasting captivity of condemnation. You need a savior, and behold, our Jesus comes to even you.

The Gospel is found in the crucifixion of Jesus, your savior, for the forgiveness of your sins. The point of Christ coming to Jerusalem was a great upset because Jesus did not do what our enemies expected. But it’s what you needed: freedom by His blood. Jesus’s destination was not to ascend the earthly throne, but on the cross on Golgotha. Jesus entered Jerusalem, mild, meek, riding on beast of burden, carrying the heavy weight of your sins on His shoulders. He came with full knowledge of what He would do: die a bitter death for you. By His death, He suffers your punishment and breaks the hold that hell has over you. You are no longer hell bound (that is, bound to go there and bound by hell along the way) but set free from this captivity by Jesus.

Gracious and merciful Father, teach us to evermore repent of our sins and cling onto Jesus Christ, Your Son our Lord, who entered into our world to save us from captivity of death, hell, and our own sinful flesh. Grant us Your Holy Spirit to guard and protect us in this faith where we may enjoy the gifts of paradise in Your kingdom. Amen.

Holy Monday

John 12:1-43

“Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.” (John 12:30–33)

We hear the voice and believe, with confidence, that the Lord Jesus Christ was sent to die for the sins of the whole world. Jesus knew that the hour of judgement had come and His work for our final release from the bondage of sin and hell would be complete. It is the very hour of atonement, through the dearest, most precious, and innocent blood of Christ that was spilt to the ground is the power that the prince of this world, the devil, finally conquered and his strength vanquished.

Our freedom is in Jesus. Freedom from captivity is a work accomplished for us in Jesus. Not just your own but the whole world of believers will be gathered by the Gospel and given the benefits of this victorious act. In order to gain this wonderful day of victory, it was necessary that Christ be cast upon the cross that very hour to be lifted up as the perfect sacrifice. This is what draws all sinners to see, this is what draws all men to see, this is what accomplishes their salvation: the Son of God upon a cross.

O Lord who opened our ears to hear the voice of Your Son, preserve us in this one true faith so that we may always hear Your Word, that we may not walk in darkness but in the light, always trusting in Jesus Christ, Your Son Our Lord, who lives and reigns with You in all eternity. Amen.

Holy Tuesday
Mark 14:1-15:47

“And he said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”” (Mark 14:36)

While it is pathetic that while the disciples slumbered, Christ took to His Father’s ear with a plea that the hour that had finally come, that the time of His bitter sufferings, even in the face the approaching betrayer and soldiers, that this cup of God’s righteous wrath would be withdrawn. Yet, there was no hint of betrayal, rebellion, or desire to oppose the Father’s will but complete submission that He would see that His Father’s work would be completed. How would we even understand the mind of God that works in the heart of Jesus? Your salvation was costly. This event in the garden gives a mere glimpse into the weight and anguish that our Christ had to endure under the punishment of a Just God.

We are given this moment to enliven our hearts to be zealous for Christ Who for our sake went to calvary in our stead. Our sinful desires continue to cause a crust of sleep to form over our eyelids where our prayerless souls’ slumber in the darkness of death. But we hear our Lord’s words to wake and watch. Do not just sit there. Shake off the call to sleep and see Him ascend to the cross for our salvation. Watch, as the betrayer comes, watch as the Savior is ridiculed, mocked, abandoned, pierced, and executed. Watch by listening as Jesus appears again, after He overcame His enemies and yours, where His resurrection is the gift of life for all believers. Take heart in these great works of our Savior for our salvation.

Your Son, O Lord, is our helper and holds our lives in His hand. He destroyed the power of our enemies and given us the promise of eternal life. Deliver us from every trouble, forgive us our sins, and awaken from idleness to walk in the light of our baptismal callings. Amen.

Holy Wednesday
Luke 22:1- Luke 23:56

“For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’ For what is written about me has its fulfillment.” And they said, “Look, Lord, here are two swords.” And he said to them, “It is enough.”” (Luke 22:37–38)

Although the disciples would not truly grasp Jesus’s words until after the resurrection (Lk. 24:44-46), we read these Scriptures with a different understanding. We read these Words and hear with Jesus’s own voice, yet again, that He has come not to be served, but to serve sinners like you and the rest of the world. Jesus does not mince words, He is not a God of confusion but is absolutely clear when He says that everything that God has planned out for the salvation of the world would be completed in Him.

Whereas the disciples’ minds immediately went to action with thoughts of physical battle with swords and shields, the truth is more enormous than they conceived. Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures with the sacrifice of His life. He destroyed the devil not with weapons, but with God’s Will and Word. God’s love for the world poured out from Jesus with mercy, kindness, and gentleness. It came at a price. Not with gold or silver, but with holy, precious blood spilt by scourge, nails, and a spear.

May all who seek You, O Lord, rejoice and be glad in the love of salvation given to us by Your Son, Jesus Christ. Have mercy on all of us that love You, help and deliver us from the devil and all our enemies. Be quick to save us, O God. Amen.

Maundy Thursday

John 13:1-15

1 Corinthians 11:23-34

*“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)*

Jesus’s love poured from his heart into His actions. His love brought Him to wash His disciples’ feet and it brought Him to give them yet another gift. It is as though Christ’s love permeates through the entire Gospel even to the end of His own life. It poured into that cup also, and into that bread—His very own body and blood. This is one cup of blessing, one bread, in one body and spirit. We consume it as one church under one Savior, Jesus Christ, Who died for one holy act of atonement, all for your salvation and life.

This New Testament given to us means that the devil no longer feeds us lies, death, and the food of decadent empty promises. Through this New Testament of grace, God’s Word holds our church free in the safety of Christ. In Christ, we are saved and kept safe even if the devil himself should surround us with hordes of his demons and followers. No, the faithful cannot be torn from our savior any more can we be taken from the ark of Christ’s church. Christ’s real presence in the bread and wine means your savior is still with you.

So, the food and drink this night, the meal of our savior is a victory feast. Christ has conquered for us. This is the food of life everlasting. This food is served to deliver to you now all that Christ did on the cross of calvary. Running to the cross doesn’t mean clinging to the wood, or doing mental gymnastics, but to run to where the blood which flowed from His side pours into the chalice, into the font, onto those Scriptures, onto you in the words of absolution. Your Savior gave all of His life-giving blood for your sake. Your Savior continues to give it to you in the exact places He has promised for it to be found.

Beloved Father, Your Son gave us this holy meal as a sign and testament of His victory over sin and all evil powers. Grant that as we eat this bread and drink this wine, we may faithfully proclaim His death until He comes again with glory. Amen.

Good Friday

John 18:1-John 19:42

“And again another Scripture says, ‘They will look on him whom they have pierced.’” (John 19:37)

You must know, above all else, what your Jesus suffered to set you free from the captivity of sin. To look at Jesus on the cross is to know that you will live forever. Christians must take the Crucifixion of Christ with the utmost serious devotion. You must know that in that moment, that work of Christ, is what all faith and all theology and all life depend upon. Without Jesus on that cross then you have nothing. But with Jesus Christ and Him crucified you have absolutely everything.

Victory came by the crucifixion of Jesus. Your victory, too. Today may not be Christ’s funeral, but it is death’s funeral. Say again: “O death, where is your victory? Where is your sting?” Jesus said “It is finished,” and death is defeated. Sins which earn death are atoned for and forgiven. Sin’s curse on you is broken, death has no power over you. When Jesus died, He won salvation completely. He laid down His life into death, that He might show His victory over death by being raised. All of the might of the devil and of death, and of sin was not strong enough. By His death Christ completed the work. By His resurrection it is proven to us. The sign of Jonah is fulfilled—Christ conquered it all, left your sins elsewhere, and comes to you.

Your savior Jesus Christ, in one word, “it is finished,” announced that salvation has been achieved. His death and resurrection has abolished death and brought your life and immortality to light through the Gospel (2 Tim. 1). Jesus won; the day is done. That cross by your altar is a reminder of the source of our confidence even in the face of all dangers, hellish antagonists, the devil’s wiles, and even death itself. In Jesus Christ and Him crucified, you are saved. In Jesus Christ, the risen Lord, you will go the way of the saints. You will share the bounty of His victory in paradise. And just as He promised, Jesus will come for you, He will extend His hand and say to you “it’s over—its done. Rise.”

O God, you are our rock of refuge and strong fortress. You sent Your Son, Jesus Christ, to lead us and release us from pit of death and the snares of the Devil. Direct Your ear to hear our prayers for the righteousness that is only found in the faith which clings to Your Son’s name and atonement for even our sins. Grant us life and the promise won for us on the Cross of Calvary, Amen.

Holy Saturday

1 Peter 2:4-10

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

In the beginning, God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good. In particular, man was exactly what God intended him to be. Adam and Eve were innocent, without sin. They lived in perfect fellowship with God as His dear children. They received life from Him who is the Giver of Life. They were holy and without blemish, free to live and serve and love Him and each other.

But man sinned against God and fell from God. They were now guilty of transgression against Him. They became His enemies, enslaved to sin. They became subject to death—spiritually, temporally, and eternally. They were now unclean, defiled with iniquities, captive under the devil's power. From that terrible day forward all mankind was lost, doomed to eternal condemnation.

But God, out of his boundless love for us, had compassion on man and sent His only-begotten Son into the world. To redeem man, Jesus Christ became Man. In His body Jesus lived and died and rose again for us men and for our salvation. For the sake of His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death, you have been delivered from guilt to innocence, from enmity to peace, from slavery to sonship, from death to life, from profanity to holiness, from captivity to freedom. Jesus has claimed you who were once lost to be His own, showering you with His boundless mercy.

In short, this is what it means to confess that Jesus Christ is your Lord. He is your Lord because He has saved you, and you are His now and eternally.

O Jesus Christ, we thank and praise You for delivering us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. You alone are our Lord. Grant us to live as Your people now and forevermore. Amen.

The Resurrection of our Lord - Easter Sunday

Mark 16:1-8

“And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.” (Mark 16:6)

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! We have spent this Lenten season learning the various aspects of what it means when it says “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified.” We have heard of many of the various aspects of Christ’s finished work at Calvary.

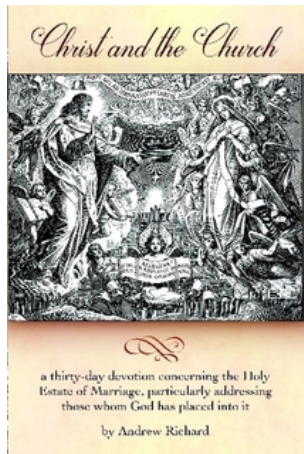
This morning, we are greeted with the solemn, joyous reminder that Jesus did not remain in the grave. The devil, his ways, and his works are defeated. Forgiveness of sins is fully earned by Jesus. Death could not hold onto Jesus but now does what He says. What this means for us is that all His work has been done perfectly. Jesus came to do the Father’s will and has done it. His being alive is proof of this fact. Our hearing and rejoicing today is done with firm confidence in that fact.

As you finish this devotion, consider going back and reading at least the boldfaced titles on the Sundays of each week. These are brief summaries of what Christ has done for you by being crucified for your sake. They are stark reminders of who we really are, right now, but also who we are in eternity. The world around us wants to identify by anything except Christ. As Christians, we find our identity completely in what Christ has done for us. We are exactly who He declares and makes us to be. In that good news, we can rejoice exceedingly with great joy.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, today we give You praise and thanksgiving for raising Your Son from the dead, confirming that He who was crucified is now the source of all our lives as Your beloved children. Help us to always realize who we are by what He has done for us. Amen.

If you have enjoyed this devotional, consider using our many other Advent and Lenten devotions available for download at steadfastlutherans.org and for purchase at Amazon.



Also of interest is a great-selling 30 day devotional concerning marriage.



If you want to learn more about the Lutheran Confessions we have a great book to read.