

UNFOLDING *VICTORY*



LENTEN & EASTER DEVOTIONAL 2025

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INTRODUCTION

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

— Romans 6:5–11 ESV

In the Romans passage above, we are given these words to ponder, “*So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus*” (v. 11).

“*Dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*” We are dead to our sin yet raised to life, fully alive, with Christ. The victory of Easter is not just Christ’s alone but also ours, as we share in His defeat of death and the promise of the resurrection of our own bodies. Our eternal hope is secure; death has no lasting power. But what does the power of the resurrection mean for us now? How do we live into that power now?

The joy of the resurrection is not only for the future; it is for now. Though we have been crucified with Christ, we now live by the power of the Spirit, making our lives an ever-unfolding story of the resurrection’s transformative power. The victory is not just for later—it’s for today.

N.T. Wright, in *Simply Good News*, writes:

“Life has come to life and is pouring out like a mighty river into the world, in the form of a new power, the power of love. The good news was, and is, that all this has happened in and through Jesus; that one day it will happen, completely and utterly, to all creation; and that we humans, every single one of us, whoever we are, can be caught up in that transformation here and now. This is the Christian gospel.”¹

“*Life has come to life*”—pouring out like a mighty, unstoppable river. It cannot be tamed, nor can it be reversed. We long for the final victory, when Christ in glory will dwell with His people, but until then, we participate in the ever-unfolding story of redemption. We live as resurrection people, embodying the transformative power of Christ in and through us, so all may see and know that He is Lord.

This devotional was created with contributions from 34 authors from the North American Lutheran Church (NALC), each bringing their own reflections and insights. The daily readings are based upon the lectionary provided in the NALC *Devoted to Prayer* daily prayer and reading guide, an adapted version of the daily lectionary in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*.

PDF copies of this devotional booklet are available for download from the NALC website for individual use or for distribution in congregations. Additionally, you may access the devotional electronically or sign

¹ Wright, N. T. (2015). *Simply good news: Why the gospel is news and what makes it good*. HarperOne.

up to receive it as a daily email or text message by visiting thenalc.org/lent. May this devotional draw you nearer to Christ as we journey from Ash Wednesday to the victory of Easter.

In Christ,

Ariel Wicker
Associate Director of Communications
North American Lutheran Church



ASH WEDNESDAY

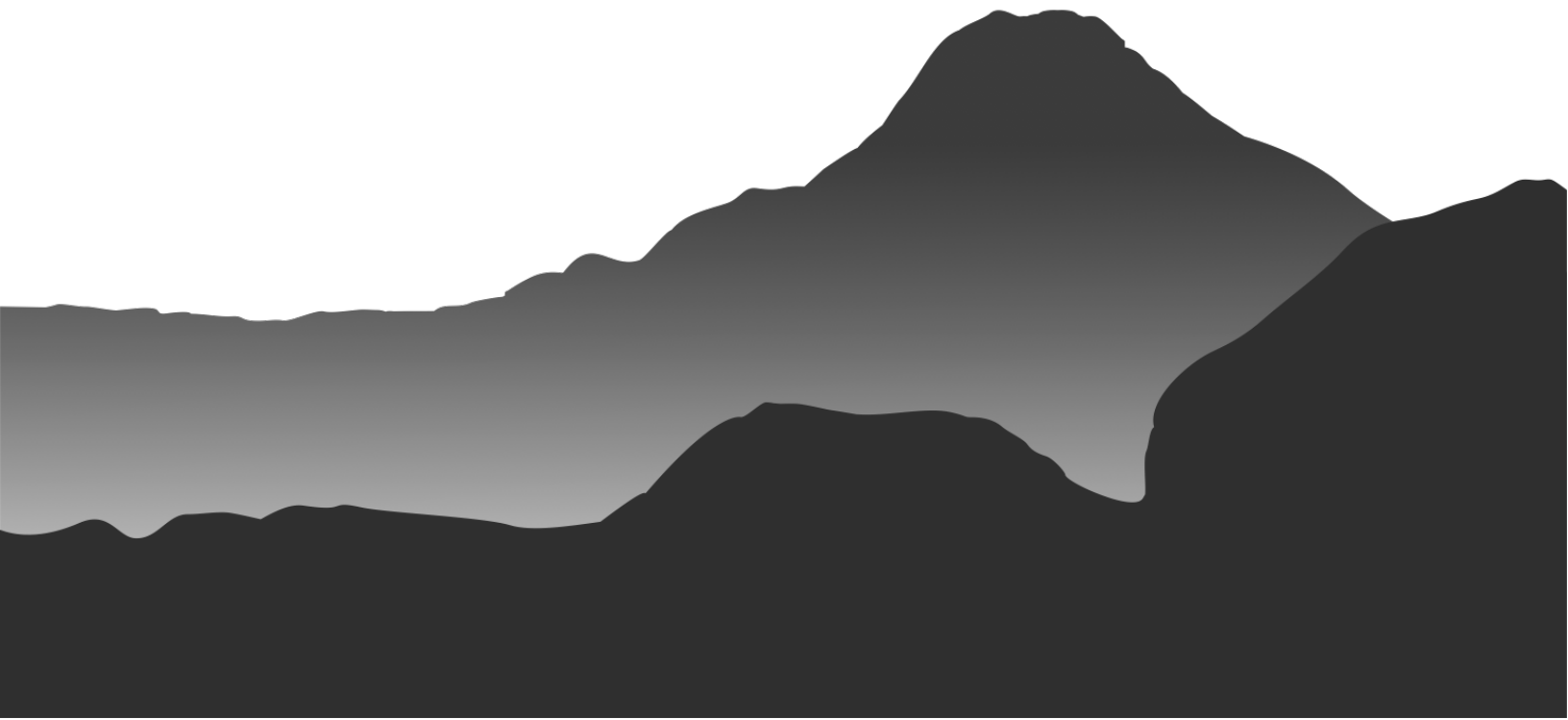
Beloved Lord, we give thanks that You have placed us in Christian community and surrounded us with that great cloud of witnesses who share their faith and strengthen ours.

Help us to deny ourselves and follow Jesus, to turn away from sin and temptation, and to live in righteousness and holiness all our days.

You alone are the source of goodness and mercy.

Let us not grow weary as we journey with Jesus to the cross of Calvary this Lenten season.

We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Wednesday, March 5, 2025 | Ash Wednesday

Jonah 3:1—4:11; Hebrews 12:1–14; Luke 18:9–14; Psalms 5 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 27 & 51 (PM)

^{18:9} He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

– Luke 18:9–14 ESV



Dear friends, greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus as we enter this most holy time in the life of the Church. Today is the first day in the season of Lent—a time when we center our thoughts and attention on the path our Lord walked on our behalf, which led to the cross. It’s a time when we remember the reason He had to die and the suffering He endured so that you and I might have life.

It’s also Ash Wednesday, a day when we remember our mortality; how “*from dust we came and to dust we shall return*” (Genesis 3:19). And yet, in spite of our sin and the many reasons why we deserve to die, the hope and the promise we have in Jesus is the security and the assurance of forgiveness and life.

The passage we just read, although taken from the context of Jesus’ day and spoken to people long ago, speaks to our context and needs to be taken to heart by each of us. It’s the story of two men who went up to the temple to pray. The one man was a Pharisee, a leader in the religious community that was as highly respected and as disciplined as they come. He fasted regularly, tithed his possessions, and was often found in the temple spending time with God in prayer. The other man was a publican, a tax collector, one who was despised by the people, whose reputation in the community may well have been that of an extortionist and a cheat.

On the surface, the contrast could not have been greater. Their lives and their actions were as different as they could possibly be, as were the prayers they offered to God. And yet, it was the tax collector, Jesus said, who went home justified that day, made right with God. It was the tax collector, and not the other, who went home in peace—assured and forgiven for all he had done.

So, what does that mean for us? How, on this Ash Wednesday, can we be at peace, assured, and confident of our standing before God? The first verse in our story makes it clear what was happening and what was at stake. Luke says, “*Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt*” (v. 9).

It all begins with the posture we take in our hearts—not so much with our goodness and righteousness in life in comparison to others but where we stand in the presence of Jesus and how we all, in comparison with Christ, come up short.

“*God, be merciful to me, a sinner*” (v. 13). That was the tax collector’s prayer. It needs to be our prayer as well. Human comparisons mean nothing. To see oneself as better or worse than another is missing the point. When it comes to our standing before God, it is one person at a time, one on one, alone with God.

The season of Lent is not a time to stand before God and tell Him how good we have been in this life and how much we have done. Rather, it is a time when we are before God, and He tells us what we need to hear.

Our sin causes a separation, and that separation leads to death. Our only hope is Jesus. Our greatest need is taken head-on and addressed in the person, the work, and the cross of Christ.

On this Ash Wednesday, the first day in the Lenten season, let the tax collector’s prayer be ours. Let his words and confession lead us to our only hope. “*God, be merciful to me, a sinner*” (v. 13).

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we come to You today, confessing our sin and acknowledging our need. We are sinners and we have failed, and we know we deserve death. We also know, because of Jesus, that You have forgiven us and made us right with You.

On this first day in Lent, let our first actions be ones that focus on Christ. Let His work become ours. Let His promise lead us to assurance and faith. And let our faith in Christ become so certain and secure in our lives, that we live in ways that would lead others to a saving faith in Him. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. Daniel W. Selbo (dselbo@thenalc.org)

Thursday, March 6, 2025 | Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Deuteronomy 7:6–11; Titus 1:1–16; John 1:29–34; Psalms 27 & 147:13–21 (AM); Psalms 126 & 102 (PM)

^{1:29} The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ ³¹ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” ³² And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”

– John 1:29–34 ESV



A little over a year ago, my wife and I went on a two-week cruise down the Amazon River. We knew that it would be a unique adventure and looked forward to seeing new things. What made it even more rewarding than we anticipated was the presence of experienced guides to lead us. On one particular morning, we went birding with a young ornithologist from the University of Brazil. She was passionate about birds and skilled at finding and identifying the various species. As a guide, however, she understood that her job was not just to find rare and exotic birds, but to point out to others what they might otherwise have missed.

In today’s Gospel lesson, John the Baptist encounters the one he has been looking and preparing for his whole life. Like an experienced guide, he understands that his job is not just to find the Messiah, but to

point Him out to others. John sees Jesus approaching and declares to the people gathered around him, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (v. 29). People were curious about John and wanted to know who he was and what he was doing. So after pointing to Jesus and declaring Him to be the Lamb of God, he proclaims, “for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel” (v. 31). John’s purpose in life is to encounter Jesus and point Him out to others.

Lent is historically a time of prayer, fasting, and honest reflection as we retrace Jesus’ journey to the cross many years ago. Today’s Scripture reading reminds us, however, that we are also called, like John, to point others to the living Lord Jesus who is present with us today. As you begin your Lenten journey, take a few minutes to consider who you might help guide through this season by pointing them toward Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, as I begin my Lenten journey, help me to be honest in my confession, diligent in prayer, focused in study, joyful in worship, generous in giving, humble in serving, and willing to walk with someone else as we walk together with You. I pray this in Your most holy name. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. David F. Keener (dkeener@thenalc.org)

Friday, March 7, 2025 | Friday after Ash Wednesday

Perpetua and Her Companions, Martyrs at Carthage, 202

Deuteronomy 7:12–16; Titus 2:1–15; John 1:35–42; Psalms 22 & 148 (AM); Psalms 105 & 130 (PM)

^{7:12} “And because you listen to these rules and keep and do them, the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love that he swore to your fathers. ¹³ He will love you, bless you, and multiply you. He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock, in the land that he swore to your fathers to give you. ¹⁴ You shall be blessed above all peoples. There shall not be male or female barren among you or among your livestock. ¹⁵ And the LORD will take away from you all sickness, and none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which you knew, will he inflict on you, but he will lay them on all who hate you. ¹⁶ And you shall consume all the peoples that the LORD your God will give over to you. Your eye shall not pity them, neither shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you.

– Deuteronomy 7:12–16 ESV

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“And because you listen to these rules and keep and do them, the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love that he swore to your fathers” (v. 12).

In this passage, God promises His blessings to those who walk faithfully in His ways. As we journey through Lent, we remember that our obedience flows not from duty alone, but from a loving relationship with God, grounded in His covenant of grace.

The *Small Catechism* reminds us of the First Commandment: “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” Lent is an invitation to examine what holds our deepest trust and affection. God calls us to let go of false securities and return our hearts fully to Him, trusting that He alone satisfies our needs. In our repentance, we turn away from idols that capture our love, and we turn toward God, who has claimed us as His own through Christ.

Luther teaches that the blessings of the commandments come from God's "pure goodness and mercy." We receive His grace not because of our merit but through Jesus' work on our behalf. As we walk in His commands, God blesses us with a renewed spirit and a steadfast heart.

May this season of Lent deepen our trust in God's steadfast love. As we reflect on our obedience, may we find our hope in the promises of God, remembering that He keeps His covenant with us in Christ.

Prayer: Gracious God, You are faithful to Your promises and steadfast in love. Turn our hearts to trust You above all things. Forgive our wandering, and renew in us a spirit of obedience and devotion. During this Lenten season, help us walk in Your ways and find our hope in Your covenant of grace through Jesus Christ. May we grow in love for You and reflect Your mercy to others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Tony D. Ede (tede@thenalc.org)

Saturday, March 8, 2025 | Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Deuteronomy 7:17–26; Titus 3:1–15; John 1:43–51; Psalms 43 & 149 (AM); Psalms 31 & 143 (PM)

^{3:1} Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone. ³ For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another. ⁴ But when the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. ⁶ This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

– Titus 3:1–7 NRSV



Here we are in the very early days of Lent. Just a few days ago was Ash Wednesday, with its earnest desire for repentance and amendment of life. We joined the ancient words of King David—mindful that we need to pray as he did:

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your lovingkindness;
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.
Wash me through and through from my wickedness,
and cleanse me from my sin.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me (Psalm 51 LBW).*

Today's reading from Titus gives us some good instruction for a Lenten life. Indeed, it gives us good instruction in Christian life all our days.

St. Paul's instructions to young Titus are humble exhortations, but they should not be overlooked. They are part of a good Christian life day by day. For one thing, St. Paul speaks of courtesy. Christians are to be a

courteous people. And so the apostle wants the young pastor to teach these things: *"Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone"* (v. 1–2).

Jesus calls us to all kinds of noble things—especially that we are to take up our cross and follow Him. But a part of this taking up the cross in daily life is simply that we are “to show every courtesy to everyone.” Christians are to be the ones who open the door for others. We are to be the ones who give up our seat on the subway to the frail elderly and to pregnant women. We are the ones who should rather stun onlookers by our gentleness even when we are riled or when we are dealing with people who have treated us in a shabby way.

St. Paul tells Titus why—why we should be people of kindness, gentleness, and courtesy. We are to be such people because that is how our Triune God has treated us. With goodness and lovingkindness, God has saved us through Jesus Christ. When we walk along with Philip and reach Jesus, we are to draw close to Him for the rest of our lives, including in the daily ways of kindness, gentleness, and courtesy, following the pattern of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, fill us with Your Spirit of gentleness, kindness, and courtesy that we may show Your love to everyone we meet. May this Lenten season be for us a time of renewed commitment to faithfully follow our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Carol E. A. Fryer (cfryer@thenalc.org)



The **FIRST WEEK** *of* **LENT**

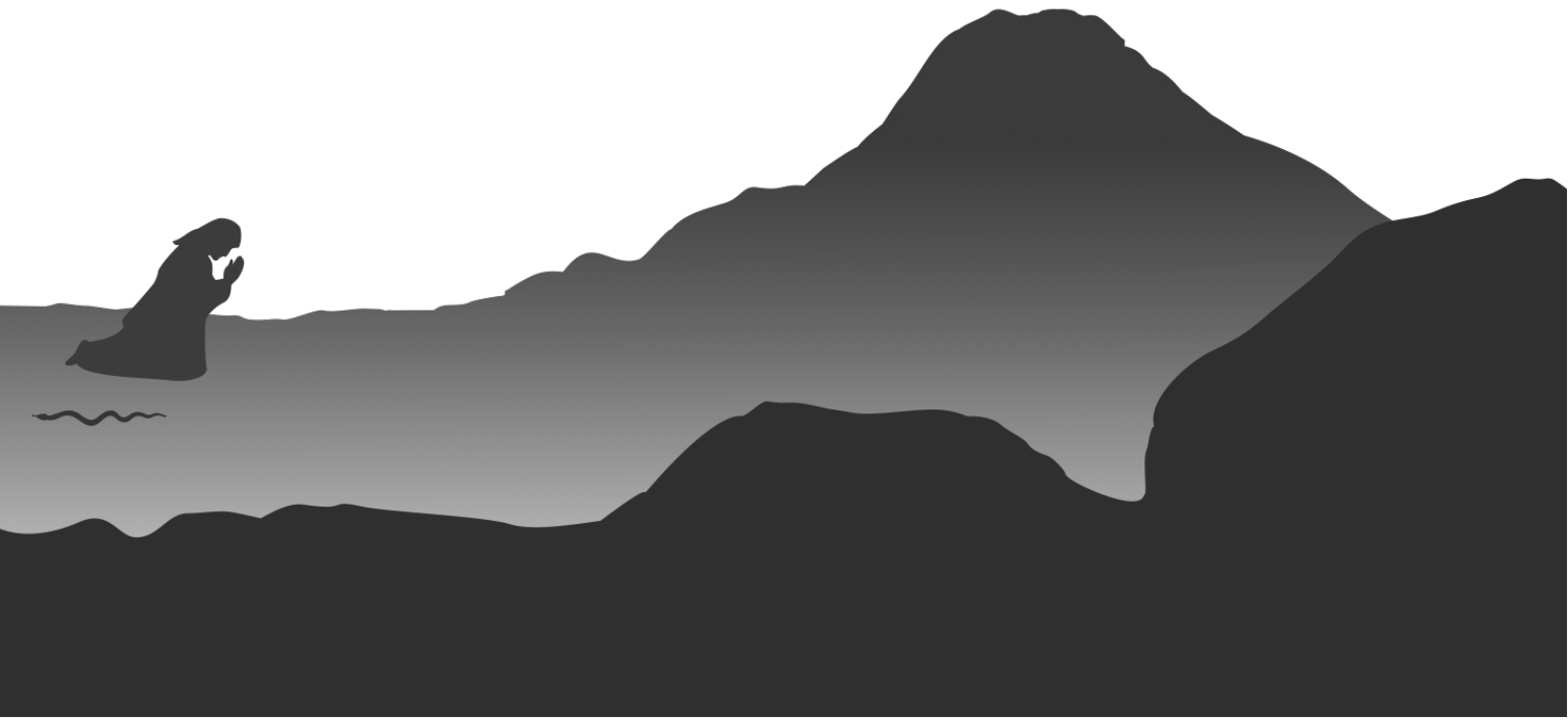
Holy Father, Jesus said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me."

Grant us faith to trust in Your Son, who leads us in all truth to see You and know You.

*May our witness to Christ's love and mercy be a beacon of hope for all to see
in this world that desperately needs a Savior.*

Send us to places known and unknown, as faithful disciples, trusting in Your guidance and care.

We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Sunday, March 9, 2025 | First Sunday in Lent

Jeremiah 9:23–24; 1 Corinthians 1:18–31; Mark 2:18–22; Psalms 84 & 150 (AM); Psalms 42 & 32 (PM)

^{2:21} “No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. ²² And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.”

– Mark 2:21–22 NRSV



What’s your backup plan when everything goes wrong? In 1970, the crew of Apollo 13 famously declared, “Houston, we’ve had a problem.” An oxygen tank had exploded, crippling their spacecraft. Their survival depended on rethinking everything—scrapping old plans and finding creative ways to use what they had. It wasn’t just about fixing what broke; it was about survival in the most desperate conditions.

Today’s Scriptures show us that our spiritual condition is even more desperate. In Jeremiah 9:23–24, God warns His people not to boast in their wisdom, strength, or wealth—the very things they trusted to secure their lives. These systems, like Apollo 13’s damaged spacecraft, cannot save. Instead, God calls them to boast in knowing Him, the one who acts with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness.

Paul picks up this theme in 1 Corinthians 1:18: “*The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*” The cross overturns every human assumption about strength and wisdom. It isn’t a patch for our broken lives; it’s the decisive victory of God over sin and death. Through Christ’s obedience, God doesn’t just repair us—He gives us something entirely new.

On this First Sunday in Lent, we begin our journey through the wilderness, a time to confront the old systems we cling to. Where do you place your trust? In your own strength? Your achievements? Your plans? God invites us to let go of what cannot save and to embrace the new life He offers through the cross. His steadfast love leads us through the wilderness, not just patching us up but bringing us home to share in His everlasting grace.

Trust His unfolding victory today.

Prayer: O Lord, as we journey through this season of Lent, strip away the old that cannot save and clothe us with the newness of life found in Your Son. Replace our boasting with humility, our striving with trust, and our brokenness with Your healing grace. By the power of Your cross, lead us through the wilderness and into Your eternal victory. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Dcn. Andrew S. Ames Fuller (aamesfuller@thenalc.org)

Monday, March 10, 2025 | Monday of the First Week in Lent

Deuteronomy 8:1–20; Hebrews 2:11–18; John 2:1–12; Psalms 119:73–80 & 145 (AM); Psalms 121 & 6 (PM)

^{2:1} On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him,

“They have no wine.”⁴ And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.”⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”⁶ Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.⁷ Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim.⁸ And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it.⁹ When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom¹⁰ and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.”¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

– John 2:1–11 ESV



In the Gospel lesson, we hear some of the best advice ever given. Mary, the mother of our Lord, says to the servants at the wedding feast, “*Do whatever he tells you.*” That’s wisdom and the servants wisely obey. They follow Jesus’ instructions to a T—fill the jars with water, draw the water out of the jars, carry it to the head steward.

Simple enough, but lo and behold, about 150 gallons of water became wine—really good wine. Not the cheap stuff.

This was the first of the signs Jesus did and His signs point us to the truth. I wouldn’t want to claim that there is only one main truth to this story. However, I would claim that a main point is that in simple and mundane acts of obedient faith God is at work. Think small.

“*Do whatever he tells you,*” and then see what God does. The emphasis is upon God’s action. Imagine how ludicrous it would have been for the “servants” to take the credit for their oenological skills. If, in a pretense of humility, they would have said, “*Well, we wanted to surprise the family. We labored to fill all those jars and carry them about. We took it to the steward, but didn’t want to say too much. It was a labor of love.*”

This story is not primarily about what human beings do. It is about what God does. This is why the lesson from Deuteronomy 8 cautions, “*Beware, lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth’*” or this wine!

No, the wedding at Cana is a story, a sign of God at work. However, at the same time, human beings are not zeros in this equation. To paraphrase St. Augustine, “*We can’t change water into wine. That’s what God does. However, God will not change it without us.*” All that work filling jars, drawing water, and carrying it were necessary. God works through us, in us, with us, and for us but not *without* us. We are not mere observers watching passively from the sidelines. We are active players in whom and through whom God is at work. God takes our watery existence and intoxicates our small lives and ministries with the transformative power of grace. By this the glory of God is revealed, and like the first disciples we are drawn into faith in Jesus. Through Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit continues to draw us out of dismal unbelief and into the divine wine of life in Christ.

Our small Lenten acts of obedience are not in vain because, “*in everything*”, not just big things, but “*in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose*” (Romans 8:28). Our role is simply to do whatever He says.

Prayer: God our Savior, bring us back to You and fill our minds with Your wisdom. May we be enriched by our observance of Lent. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen,” (*For All the Saints*, Volume I).

Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. Eric M. Riesen (eriesen@thenals.org)

Tuesday, March 11, 2025 | Tuesday of the First Week in Lent

Deuteronomy 9:1–12; Hebrews 3:1–11; John 2:13–22; Psalms 34 & 146 (AM); Psalms 25 & 91 (PM)

^{2:13} The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. ¹⁵ And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade.” ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

¹⁸ So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” ²⁰ The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²² When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

– John 2:13–22 ESV

One of the core values of the North American Lutheran Church is that we are “Christ Centered.” One would think this would go without saying, but it is possible in the church to become so focused on how we worship that the one we worship gets pushed to the sidelines.

The Gospel of John’s account of the cleansing of the temple differs greatly from the other three Gospels in a couple of ways. In this account, Jesus does not accuse the money changers and merchants of being thieves. In truth they are doing what was necessary under Jewish law. During Passover people from all over came to Jerusalem, as required, to sacrifice in the temple. To do that, however, they needed to exchange their foreign currency for the local currency in order to buy the proper animals for sacrifice. Jesus commands them to “*Take these things away*” (v. 16). He doesn’t accuse them of being unethical but rather unnecessary. Jesus is the sacrificial “*Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world*” (John 1:29). This point is emphasized when He tells the gathered people He will destroy the temple and raise it up in three days, referring to His death and resurrection.

A second way John’s account of the cleansing of the temple differs from the synoptic Gospels is that it comes at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry rather than at the end. People, especially His disciples, wanted to know who Jesus was and what He came to do. Though it will take them a while to fully comprehend, this early incident in the temple revealed the answer. Salvation comes through a person, not through a building

or by keeping religious rules. Pretty churches, well-written liturgies, and eloquent prayers are wonderful but only necessary when they are centered in the only one who can truly save, Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, You show us the way, teach us the truth, and give us life everlasting. Help us to keep our eyes focused fully on You so that all we say and do glorifies and honors Your name. Strengthen us in our weakness, encourage us by Your love and inspire us with Your Word so that, centered in You, we can be the faithful witnesses You have called us to be. It is in Your name that we pray. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. David F. Keener (dkeener@thenalc.org)

Wednesday, March 12, 2025 | Wednesday of the First Week in Lent

Gregory the Great, Bishop of Rome, 604

Deuteronomy 9:13–21; Hebrews 3:12–19; John 2:23—3:15; Psalms 5 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 27 & 51 (PM)

^{2:23} Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴ But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵ and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

– John 2:23–25 NLT



Surprise! Everyone loves a surprise, especially if it is a good one. A generation or two ago, a baby's gender reveal occurred at its birth. The baby would be delivered, and someone would exclaim, "It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!" These days, parents have gender reveal parties in which the daddy, the family, the friends find out in a surprising way the gender of the baby so that preparations can be made for paint colors in the baby's room, types of clothing to purchase, and other ways to best be prepared for the delivery of this addition to the family. A few things are known about this baby to come. Yet, some things are still a surprise.

In John's Gospel, Nicodemus encounters Jesus at night and is surprised by Jesus' reveal of himself. Nicodemus is familiar with Moses, he is familiar with the prophecies of the Messiah through the writings, the Law, and the prophets, he is familiar with God's promises to Abraham, but he is surprised by Jesus' BIG surprise that Jesus Himself is the suffering servant prophesied through Isaiah (Isaiah 52–53), that Jesus himself is the one who will intercede even to death for you and me, that Jesus was and is God in the flesh (Matthew 1), that to be born again would come through the Holy Spirit's work of believing in Jesus, the one whom God sent (John 3). Nicodemus ponders all of this.

But the *biggest* reveal is that Jesus knows you! He knows who you are. He knows what is in your heart and mind—to the depth of your soul. He knows you do not trust Him in all things and with all things. He knows all about your human nature and your sin and your disobedience. So Jesus came to reveal Himself to you. To reveal to you that He is your Savior, your Redeemer. On the cross of Calvary, He paid the price for your sin. He announces to you forgiveness. He raises you each day to a new life lived in Him, for He lives in you.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, my Redeemer, You know all about me. You know what is in my heart and mind and every word on my tongue or in my thoughts. I confess to You that by my very nature, I am sinful and unclean, not trusting You, Holy God, above all. By Your great mercy, forgive my sin. By the power of Your Holy Spirit lead me to trust You above all and to trust that Your crucifixion and resurrection are enough for me. Amen.

Thursday, March 13, 2025 | Thursday of the First Week in Lent

Deuteronomy 9:23—10:5; Hebrews 4:1—10; John 3:16—21; Psalms 27 & 147:13—21 (AM); Psalms 126 & 102 (PM)

- ^{27:1} The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?
- ² When evildoers assail me
to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes,
it is they who stumble and fall.
- ³ Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident.
- ⁴ One thing have I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to inquire in his temple.
- ⁵ For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will lift me high upon a rock.
- ⁶ And now my head shall be lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.
- ⁷ Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud;
be gracious to me and answer me!
- ⁸ You have said, "Seek my face."
My heart says to you,
"Your face, LORD, do I seek."
- ⁹ Hide not your face from me.
Turn not your servant away in anger,
O you who have been my help.
Cast me not off; forsake me not,
O God of my salvation!
- ¹⁰ For my father and my mother have forsaken me,
but the Lord will take me in.
- ¹¹ Teach me your way, O LORD,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.
- ¹² Give me not up to the will of my adversaries;
for false witnesses have risen against me,

and they breathe out violence.
13 I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living!
14 Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the LORD!

– Psalm 27 ESV



This is a Psalm written by David. Like many of David's psalms, it is not known exactly when it was written. It mentions problems with rivals, enemies, false witnesses, and violent men, but this was the case for a lot of David's life, both before and after becoming king. Despite facing all of these things, this psalm is not just a cry to the Lord for help. It is also a psalm of faith and trust.

The 18 verses of Psalm 27 take us on a sort of roller coaster ride through lament and trust. In verses 1–6, David explains why he puts his trust in the Lord and all God has done for him. Then David's tone changes a bit in verses 7 and 8. Here David is crying out to the Lord to answer his prayers. And in verses 9 through 12, David's anxiety seems to rise as he pleads with the Lord for help and laments his difficulties. Then in verses 13 and 14, David once again expresses his faith and trust.

In the face of adversity and suffering, both lament and trust are appropriate expressions of faith, and they frequently occur side by side. What unites them is a steadfast belief in the existence, goodness, and power of God, who is both deserving of our trust and receptive to our prayers for assistance.

David knew this. And because of what Christ Jesus accomplished for us—His triumph over sin, death, and the grave—we can be confident of this. Christ's victory is not only His but also ours, and we share in it. We will live with Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, for all eternity.

So, as you go through your life of ups and downs, good times and bad, know that you can call on the Lord with expressions of all kinds: trust, love, thankfulness, as well as anger, questioning and lament. Know that He will always be your light and salvation.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, our light and salvation, like David we have both good times and bad and sometimes we struggle with trusting You. Help us to remember that You are with us always and You are the stronghold of our lives in whom we put trust. We pray all this through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Teresa E. Peters (tpeters@thenalc.org)

Friday, March 14, 2025 | Friday of the First Week in Lent

Deuteronomy 10:12–22; Hebrews 4:11–16; John 3:22–36; Psalms 22 & 148 (AM); Psalms 105 & 130 (PM)

^{3:22} After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. ²³ John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized ²⁴ (for John had not yet been put in prison).

²⁵ Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. ²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." ²⁷ John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' ²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease."

– John 3:22–30 ESV



Life is full of big transitions. Times when one thing lessens and falls away as another takes hold and grows. Not to say that the former is now bad, it's just that things change and we are changed by them.

John the Baptist is seen here in our text acknowledging this. He was the last of the prophets given to us by God to usher in the coming of the Lord. Jesus proclaims John's great ministry in Matthew 11:11. But John declares that the place of the prophets, including himself, has come to an end. Jesus has come, so "*He must increase, but I must decrease*" (John 3:30).

We have many transitions in life. We have a bicycle, then a driver's license, but something transitional happens when we get our first car. We remember our first kiss, our first boyfriend or girlfriend, but marriage changes things. One of the most profound transitions we have is becoming a parent.

John the Baptist announces the most transitional change we will ever experience. "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29). Not "someday the Lord will come" as the prophets proclaimed, but "*he has come, so my time is at an end*".²

During this Lenten season, let's look at the transition that our Baptism places before us. We believe in the promise Christ announces that we are His and are now united with Him in His Baptism and death, knowing we are also united with Him in His resurrection. But we believe as well that, while now we see Him with eyes of faith, there will be a time when Christ will come again, and we will gaze upon His face, and the reality of our Baptism will be complete. Lent is a great time to reflect on the age-old question of the "now and not yet"—which is the most important? In this transitional life we live, we can confidently declare: "Both!"

Prayer: Gracious Lord, Heavenly Father, help us to confidently hold on to our hope for the future during these transitional times. We look back to our Baptism with great comfort and as we focus forward to the promise of the eternal life with You. We claim the surety of Your constant love in the present time while eagerly awaiting the incredible magnificence of Your glory when we see You face to face in the future. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Marvin Combs (mcombs@thenalc.org)

² Luther, M. (1957). Luther's works, volume 22: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, chapters 1-4 (J. Pelikan & D. E. Poellot, Eds.). Concordia Publishing House.

Saturday, March 15, 2025 | Saturday of the First Week in Lent

Deuteronomy 11:18–28; Hebrews 5:1–10; John 4:1–26; Psalms 43 & 149 (AM); Psalms 31 & 143 (PM)

^{4:11} The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?” ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.” ¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” ¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”

– John 4:11–15 ESV



There we were at Ft. Dix, New Jersey, finally under the control of real drill sergeants in basic training for chaplains. Despite the fact that chaplains do not bear weapons, the U.S. Army wants to put them through combat training to make sure they stay alive under extreme conditions and under fire. So, they put us through the obstacle course, which involved numerous and difficult exertions. Before it all began, the drill sergeant instructed all of us to take our canteen and drink it all. We all downed one quart. Chaplains bear two canteens because they don't bear a weapon; so, they carry extra water. The drill sergeant then instructed us to take our second canteen, upend it, and drink it all. Some chaplains gagged and sputtered trying to take in the second quart; some of us got it into our gullet. An hour later, after climbing several towers and enduring various difficult obstacles, we all crossed the finish line, begging for water.

There Jesus is, with the woman at a well. She's there because she and those depending on her trip are, or will be, thirsty. She meets a man who doesn't talk like she expects. I doubt she ever heard someone say a person could “never be thirsty again.” But she persists in thinking of great possibilities, like not having to keep trudging way out to that well. The Gospel drama ends very well. The woman becomes a proclaimer of Jesus' arrival, and her Samaritan town gets to have Jesus live with them for two whole days!

There's a reason John's Gospel is called “the spiritual Gospel.” I'm pretty sure that by supper time of that very day, Jesus, the woman, and everyone in town, drank some water. But something was very different in town by supper time. There was spiritual gushing going on; you can even feel it coming off the pages of John's fourth chapter. To trust in Jesus for our life, well-being, purpose, and future is, indeed, refreshing. John reminds us, especially during our Lenten journey, that there are needed “wells” in our lives, but ultimately, they don't lead to eternal life. For that, we need a gushing “spring.” That spring is Jesus in our lives.

So, enjoy the wells in life this week. Employment is good. Meals are good. Family and friends are good. But remember, there is much more. You have Jesus as your Lord. And He, my friends, can never be taken from us, nor will He leave us alone. Luther had it right in his last line of the hymn “A Mighty Fortress”. *“Were they to take our house, goods, honor, child, or spouse. Though life be wrenched away, they [foes] cannot win the day. The Kingdom's ours forever!”*

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, we thank You for giving Yourself on the cross to release us from total dependance on the wells in our lives. Help us to recognize when we get obsessed or distracted by the temporary waters of life. Guide us to depend on the waters of faith for eternal life that only You provide. Amen.



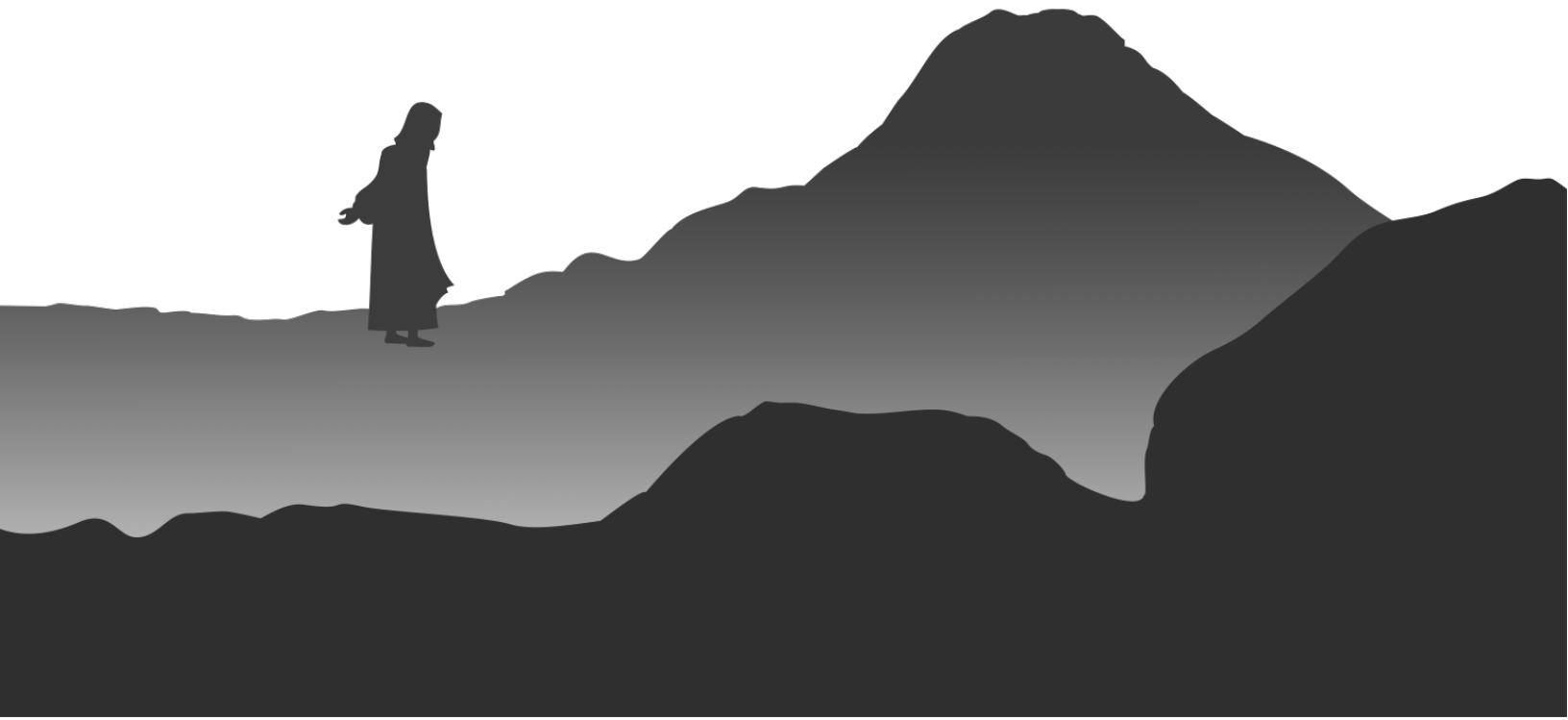
The **SECOND WEEK** *of* **LENT**

God, our Creator, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Your Son Jesus, through You.

Grant that we would trust Your grace so deeply that we would submit our whole lives to Christ.

*Renew our hearts and minds for the work of Your Holy Church,
that we would share in our neighbors' joys and sorrows and serve others in humility.*

We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen



Sunday, March 16, 2025 | Second Sunday in Lent

Jeremiah 1:1–10; 1 Corinthians 3:11–23; Mark 3:31—4:9; Psalms 84 & 150 (AM); Psalms 42 & 32 (PM)

^{1:1} The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, ² to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. ³ It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

⁴ Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ⁵ “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

⁶ Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” ⁷ But the LORD said to me,

“Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. ⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD.”

⁹ Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. ¹⁰ See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”

– Jeremiah 1:1–10 ESV



Jeremiah is not excited to obey God’s call. There is quite the contrast in today’s lesson. God begins with massive words of grace to Jeremiah—“*I knew you before I formed you in the womb, I consecrated you before you were born*” (v. 5). God tells Jeremiah the wonderful things that God has done for Jeremiah. Then God calls for Jeremiah to serve. Jeremiah responds, “*No thanks.*” Jeremiah doesn’t want to hear God’s call. Now Jeremiah has excuses—“*I don’t know how to speak, I’m only a youth.*” But the clear message is Jeremiah doesn’t want to obey.

I have to think that Jeremiah is not at all unique. We modern-day Christians do the same thing. God does massive things for us. He has claimed us, loves us, redeemed us. God also calls for us to serve. Perhaps not as a prophet, but God calls us to live faithfully, to pray, to give, to serve others, to open our congregations to new paths of ministry. And we, like Jeremiah, are awfully good at coming up with reasons why we can’t heed that call. We respond with things like, “*That isn’t how I do things, I’m not religious enough for that, I’m not comfortable doing those new things.*” We have a lot in common with Jeremiah.

Lent is a good time to recognize this all too human tendency. Lent is a time to remember all that God does for us. It is also a time to listen anew to what God is calling us to do. Both are essential for the life of faith.

Notice in the reading, God doesn’t give up on Jeremiah. Jeremiah has his excuses and fears, but God pursues and shapes him. I believe God does that for us also. God, in His love, pursues us and shapes us. He can and does lead sinners like you and me deeper into a life of grace and obedience.

This Lent, let’s listen anew to God’s Word. Let’s hear again all that God is doing. Let’s also dare to be open to the call that God sets before us.

Prayer: Lord, we give You thanks for all that You have done and are doing for us. Your grace is truly amazing. Shape us more and more into people who hear Your call and live for You. In Jesus name, Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. Mark H. Braaten (mbraaten@thenalc.org)

Monday, March 17, 2025 | Monday of the Second Week in Lent

Patrick, Bishop, Missionary to Ireland, 461

Jeremiah 1:11–19; Romans 1:1–15; John 4:27–42; Psalms 119:73–80 & 145 (AM); Psalms 121 & 6 (PM)

^{2:2b} [W]e had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. ³ For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵ For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. ⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸ So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

⁹ For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. ¹¹ For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹² we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

– 1 Thessalonians 2:2b–12 ESV

Today I am drawn to reflect on St. Patrick. Perhaps it has something to do with remembering my late grandfather—a red-headed Norwegian born on St. Patrick’s Day! But it also has to do with the call to be mission driven in a penitential season where one can be absorbed by self-reflection. The Gospel appointed for this commemoration is the Great Commission after all, found at the end of Matthew’s Gospel.

What I found intriguing about St. Patrick, Bishop of Ireland, was his desire and mission to proclaim the good news of the Gospel to the very ones who had occasioned his bondage. According to his Confessions, Patrick was captured by Irish raiders and taken back to Ireland where he was sold into slavery and indentured to be a shepherd until his escape some six years later. During this time of hardship, Patrick’s faith came alive through much prayer and reflection, as well as the deep awareness of the forgiveness of his sins as he walked through the countryside tending sheep. Upon his return home, his deepened faith and trust in God, “who has shown me how to trust in him always, as one who is never to be doubted,” gave him vocational clarity to study for the ministry so that he might return to walk the Gospel to the Irish people. Patrick explains this clarity by referring to a vision where he received a letter entitled, *The Voice of the Irish* where he heard these words, “We appeal to you, holy servant boy, to come and walk among us.”

As I tend my livestock, I am amazed at how many steps my phone says I take in a day. Checking fences, putting out salt and mineral, looking over the herd. I know my livestock as I walk among them, and I am known by them. The notion of “come and walk among us” captivates me as we think about mission and discipleship, as well as pastoral ministry. As we walk with Christ Jesus, being found in Him, we are also called, like Patrick, to ‘walk the Gospel’ among those who Jesus desires to gather into His flock.

The New Testament epistles refer to walking 44 times as a description of faith life on the move: walk in love...walk in a manner worthy...walk in the light...walk in the truth...walk in newness of life...walk according to the Spirit...we walk by faith...walk in Christ. As we journey through Lent toward our salvation on the cross, toward the great news of the resurrection, and onwards to the great sending of the Spirit, we remember the astonishing fact that the very Son of God walked among us, still bids us follow, and calls us to walk the Gospel among those for whom He died.

It is for this reason: the notion of walking, shepherding, being known and knowing that I love the Lorica attributed to St. Patrick. It can be found as Hymn 188 in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Personally, I love the version by Gayle Salmond as recorded by Steve Bell, set as a prayer for walking:

*Be above me, as high as the noon day sun,
Be below me, the rock I set my feet upon,
Be beside me, the wind on my left and right,
Be behind me, oh encircle me with your truth and light.*

*God's ear to hear me,
God's hand to guide me,
God's might to uphold me
God's shield to hide me*

*Against all powers deceiving,
Against my own unbelieving
Whether near or far.*

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, we give You thanks that You came to walk among us. As we journey through this season, may Your presence in Word and Sacrament be bread for our journey. May we share that bread with a world hungering and thirsting to be deeply known yet loved, to find forgiveness in You, and to be led out of darkness to the joy of Your light. Empower us by Your Holy Spirit, like Patrick, to walk the Gospel, whether near or far. In Your holy and wonderful name we pray. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Kevin Ree (kree@thenalc.org)

Tuesday, March 18, 2025 | Tuesday of the Second Week in Lent

Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, 386

Jeremiah 2:1–13, 29–32; Romans 1:16–25; John 4:43–54; Psalms 34 & 146 (AM); Psalms 25 & 91 (PM)

^{4:46} So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. ⁴⁷ When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. ⁴⁸ So Jesus said to him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” ⁴⁹ The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. ⁵¹ As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. ⁵² So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” ⁵³ The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” And he himself believed, and all his household. ⁵⁴ This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

– John 4:46–54 ESV

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One of the things I love about the Gospel of John is that he tells us clearly at the end of the book his purpose for writing: *"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name"* (John 20:30–31). In other words, John wrote an account of numerous signs Jesus did in the presence of credible witnesses so those who read or heard about them would come to faith and trust Jesus' word. Our Gospel text for today is the second of those signs.

What precisely was this sign Jesus performed? He healed the dying son of an official from Capernaum, sight unseen. By doing so Jesus demonstrated His authority and power over deadly diseases and death itself. However, as miraculous as that was, there is an even greater sign in this text. Did you see it? Even *before* he knew his son had been healed, the official *believed* Jesus' word! *Before* he experiences the wondrous sign of his son's recovery, the official experiences coming to genuine *faith* in Jesus *without* having a visible sign. Now that is miraculous! All Jesus said to him was, *"Go; your son will live"* (v. 50), and the man believed!

The same is true today. The Savior's Gospel is read, shared, and proclaimed. The Holy Spirit works through that Word and faith in Jesus is given to folks like you and me. What's more, we get to share this saving Word with others so that they, too, might believe.

Prayer: Almighty and ever-living God, we thank and praise You for the many signs Jesus performed that we might believe and have life in His name. Mostly we thank You for Jesus' greatest sign, His victory over the forces of evil, sin, death and the grave won at Good Friday's cross and Easter's empty tomb. Use us to share the stories of Jesus' signs with others that they too might believe and have life in His name. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. William E. White (bwhite@thenalc.org)

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 | Wednesday of the Second Week in Lent

St. Joseph, Husband of Mary and Guardian of Our Lord

2 Samuel 7:4, 8–16; Romans 4:13–18; Luke 2:41–52, Matthew 1:18–24a; Psalms 89:1–29 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 27 & 51 (PM)

^{1:18} Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

– Matthew 1:18–24a ESV

We live in a time of bitter custody disputes, paternity testing, parental alienation, absent parents, custodial and non-custodial parents, visitation and co-parenting agreements...and the list continues. Many who are involved personally in these situations forget to actually consider the children and the children become secondary to their own agenda, to their own worth, to their proving the others 'wrong' and themselves "right." This happens in cases when a child is already born and when a child is still in the womb.

In this passage (and the verses preceding it) recorded in St. Matthew, we learn of Joseph's dilemma: his betrothed, his promised wife, is with child! Joseph appears to be an honorable and righteous man who seeks to protect Mary from societal shame. He doesn't want to publicly humiliate her and instead, decides to divorce her quietly. In reality, he actually fails to trust the woman that he loves. It takes an angel of the Lord to come to him directly and explain the situation. It was the "paternity" test, if you will, for Mary and Joseph because it proved to Joseph that Mary had not been unfaithful to him. I experienced a request for paternity testing for the child I carried. Oh, how the devil must have been gleefully dancing as he watched this part of my story unfold! The powers of darkness are ever with us, not only during Lent, but throughout our earthly journeys. A subsequent life was granted to grow and mature in my womb and hope sprang anew within me. Alas, my hope was sorely misplaced as that hope quickly faded into another request for proof of paternity from the same man. My hope was misplaced—it was temporal, it was without light.

This Scripture passage in Matthew demonstrates that all life is of the Lord. Humans are merely the carriers of life and we are entrusted by God the Father with children to raise, nurture, and foster. We might be entrusted with biological children or with adopted children, with Sunday school children or catechism students, with neighborhood children or with nieces and nephews, but all come from God to us. God calls on us, His Joseph's, to care for the little ones, to arrange for the care of the little ones, and to support all the other Joseph's and the Mary's around us—with prayers, with our voices, and with offers of help and support.

Let us place our trust in Christ because He is our hope, His victory is our victory, His defeat over death is our defeat over death, and we cling to His promise of the resurrection.

Prayer: Gracious Father and giver of all life, we thank You for the glorious gift of life granted to all of Your creatures. Help us to be mindful of this gift of trust for all children and vulnerable people for whom we are called to provide care and nurture. We thank You for Your gift of everlasting life won for us through the saving work of Christ; for the gift of hope; your defeat of sin, death, and devil; and for bringing us into Your victory. Send Your Holy Spirit to help us cling to Your promise of the resurrection and to live in the covenant of our Baptisms. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, Amen.

Devotion written by Rebecka Andræ Frontz (rfrontz@thenals.org)

Thursday, March 20, 2025 | Thursday of the Second Week in Lent

Cuthbert, Bishop of Lindisfarne, 687

Jeremiah 4:9–10, 19–28; Romans 2:12–24; John 5:19–29; Psalms 27 & 147:13–21 (AM); Psalms 126 & 102 (PM)

^{5:19} So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. ²¹ For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. ²² For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who

sent him. ²⁴ 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 5:19–24 ESV



I came away from my seminary homiletics class after several life-altering experiences. One such experience was spending more time with a certain guy named Andrew Fuller (now Ames Fuller), which is a delightful story, but one for another day! Another was the gradual shift in my understanding of the purpose of preaching and the paradigm of Law/Gospel that undergirds the method. My homiletics professor was of course the marvelous Dr. Amy C. Shifrin, and as I read the John passage today, I was reminded of the maxim she would repeat most times she offered critique of a seminarian's sermon, especially if that sermon had concluded with law: "Does this sermon move from death to life?" Or another: "Did Jesus have to die for this sermon to matter?"

Those few words function as the simplest and yet most profound of litmus tests, which when held up beside my attempts at "personal application" or "biblical moralizing" shine forth urging me to adopt a different paradigm, which is simply this: I can do nothing in my own strength or willpower that matters in light of eternity. This movement of death to life is something that the Lord did *for* me, *in spite of* me even. All I can do is enter alongside in Baptism—through the waters of death, into His true life.

On this journey through the Lenten season, we are reminded every day of darkness—of the pain, confusion, and loneliness that accompanies a time of death. We sit in this uncomfortable space in order to remember the truth of it for ourselves. But also to remember the truth Himself, who walks before us and takes us with Him on this journey, from death to life.

Prayer: Be with us, Lord, in the valley of the shadow of death, and carry us through. Guide our feet. Guard our hearts. Heal us. In the name of Jesus our Messiah. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Dcn. Shannon R. Ames Fuller (samesfuller@thenalc.org)

Friday, March 21, 2025 | Friday of the Second Week in Lent

Thomas Ken, Bishop of Bath and Wells, 1711

Jeremiah 5:1–9; Romans 2:25—3:18; John 5:30–47; Psalms 22 & 148 (AM); Psalms 105 & 130 (PM)

³⁰ "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³¹ If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. ³² There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. ³³ You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. ³⁴ Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. ³⁵ He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. ³⁶ But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, ³⁸ and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. ³⁹ You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. ⁴¹ I do not receive glory from people. ⁴² But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. ⁴³ I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own

name, you will receive him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? ⁴⁵ Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶ For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. ⁴⁷ But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”
– John 5:30–47 ESV



Here Jesus addresses the religious leaders, revealing that they have missed the point of the Scriptures they so diligently study. Though the Scriptures testify to Jesus, these leaders refuse to come to Him for life. Their misplaced trust in rigid adherence to the Law blinds them to the unfolding victory found in Christ.

Jesus reminds them—and us—that His works, given by the Father, bear witness to His divine mission. His miracles, teachings, and ultimately His sacrifice reveal the Father’s will and point to the victory of salvation. Yet, despite the evidence, unbelief persists. This passage invites us to reflect: Are we seeking the glory of God or the approval of others? Are we letting the testimony of Christ’s works lead us to deeper faith, or are we distracted by lesser things?

Lent is a time to recenter our hearts. Jesus calls us to come to Him, the source of life and victory. His sacrifice on the cross secures our eternal hope, a hope that is not dependent on human effort but on His completed work. As we journey to the cross, we are reminded that true faith is not found in religious performance but in surrender to the one who has already won the decisive battle over sin and death.

Let us heed Jesus’ call to trust in Him and seek the glory that comes from God alone.

Prayer: Oh Christ, You are the fulfillment of God’s promises and the source of eternal life. Help us to trust in Your victory and seek the glory that comes from You alone. Amen.

Devotion written by Steven Neaton (sneaton@thenalc.org)

Saturday, March 22, 2025 | Saturday of the Second Week in Lent

Jonathan Edwards, Teacher, Missionary to the Native Americans, 1758

James De Koven, Priest, 1879

Jeremiah 5:20–31; Romans 3:19–31; John 7:1–13; Psalms 43 & 149 (AM); Psalms 31 & 143 (PM)

^{5:21} “Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but see not, who have ears, but hear not. ³⁰ An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: ³¹ the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?”

– Jeremiah 5:21, 30–31 ESV



I have the privilege of teaching our high school Sunday school class at my church. One week we were discussing the importance of intentional, daily attention to our faith life. We talked about making time for daily prayer, daily devotions, having Christ-like behavior in all situations, especially when their peers were enjoying not having Christ-like behavior. One young man openly admitted he would rather just live his life

to the fullest and then come back to Christ on his deathbed when he was an old man. I looked at him and said, “What happens if you’re in a car accident and you never make it to old age, let alone have a deathbed?” That thought made them all pause.

Thank goodness we have prophets like Jeremiah who can sound off like he did in our text for today and ask those hard questions. These questions really reach into the purpose of Lent, the time in the church year that reminds us of our sinfulness, and can lead to self-reflection and refocusing on the Lord. Ask yourself: how “of the world” am I really? And do I love to have it so?

Through our eyes of faith, let us see Christ crucified for our redemption. Let us listen with our God-given ears the truth of our salvation given to us by the appalling and horrible death of His Son, Jesus. And let us know with certainty that, when the end comes, we know what we will do. We will live with Christ for all eternity. Because we didn’t have to do anything. Christ did it all for us. Thanks be to God for His grace and mercy shown to us poor sinners.

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for the gift of Your Son who died so that we will live with You in eternity. Forgive us for those times when we are lured by the world and act or speak in an un-Christlike manner. Be with us as we navigate our lives in this fallen world and bring us to live with You at our life’s end; in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Devotion written by Robin Harris (rharris@thenalc.org)



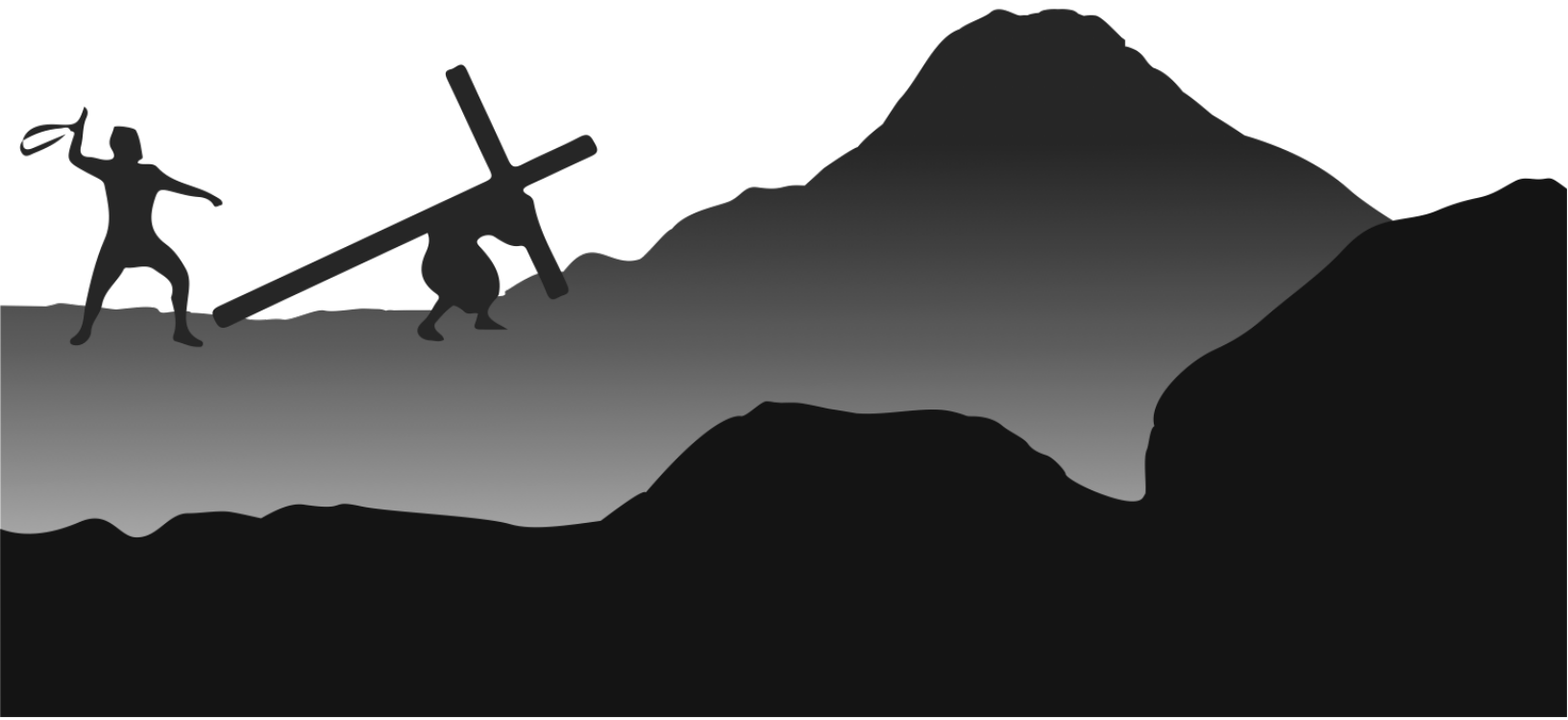
The **THIRD WEEK** *of* **LENT**

*God of life, You are the source of all things living, the maker of all that exists.
Help Your people to hear your voice and to live fully into the life You have given us.*

*Let us always seek the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life —
the One who put an end to death so that all who believe may live eternally.*

Give us eyes to see and ears to hear Your call on our lives.

We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Sunday, March 23, 2025 | Third Sunday in Lent

Gregory the Illuminator, Missionary Bishop of Armenia, c. 332

Jeremiah 6:9–15; 1 Corinthians 6:12–20; Mark 5:1–20; Psalms 84 & 150 (AM); Psalms 42 & 32 (PM)

^{6:12} “All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. ¹³ “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. ¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

– 1 Corinthians 6:12–20 ESV

Paul’s message about the body follows his exhortation to remember: “*you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God*” (v. 11). We have heard these promises. At some level, we know these truths. So when it comes time to hear Paul’s words concerning food and sexual immorality, to receive his call to treat our bodies as the temple of the Holy Spirit, we should be prepared not because of our own competence but because we know that since our Baptism we have had the Holy Spirit at work within us, making us new.

Nevertheless, despite our knowledge of these things, it is so easy for us to become like those about whom the prophet Jeremiah declares “*the word of the Lord is to them an object of scorn; they take no pleasure in it*” (Jer. 6:10). Paul reproves the churches at Corinth for their careless treatment of their bodies. Just as in first-century Palestine, so also in 21st-century America, we fall into habits which are lawful but not helpful (v. 12). Are we not all holding onto fleshly forms of comfort, surpassing moderation and succumbing to excess, held captive to the desires of our flesh?

As we look to Jesus during the season of Lent, with our eyes fixed upon the works he performed for us and our salvation, we must remember that what God did in Christ He will do for us, for by our Baptisms we have been joined to Christ and have thereby become His members. As Paul says, “*he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him*” (v. 17). We have received a share in the Spirit of Christ. The assertions that “*your bodies are members of Christ*” (v. 15) and “*your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God*” (v. 19) may land as law and accusation as we struggle in and with our bodies. But for those who belong to Christ, it is a reminder of the promise that “*You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body*” (v. 19–20).

We already have victory over the sinful desires at work in our flesh because we are subject to the Lordship of the humble Christ who defeated the evil one. Jesus did not exit stage left at His Ascension until His Second Coming. Christ has sent His Spirit to dwell within us as He sits at the right hand of the Father, the same one who died and was raised for us, “interceding for us” (Rom. 8:34) still today.

Prayer: O most loving Father, You want us to give thanks for all things, to fear nothing except losing You, and to lay all our cares on You, knowing that You care for us. Protect us from faithless fears and worldly anxieties, and grant that no clouds in this mortal life may hide from us the light of Your immortal love shown to us in Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Devotion written by Dr. Alexander H. Pierce (apierce@thenals.org)

Monday, March 24, 2025 | Monday of the Third Week in Lent

Óscar Arnulfo Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, Martyr, 1980

Jeremiah 7:1–15; Romans 4:1–12; John 7:14–36; Psalms 119:73–80 & 145 (AM); Psalms 121 & 6 (PM)

- ¹ Give ear to my | words, O LORD;*
consider my | meditation.
- ² Hearken to my cry for help, my King | and my God,*
for I make my | prayer to you.
- ³ In the morning, LORD, you | hear my voice;*
early in the morning I make my appeal and | watch for you.
- ⁴ For you are not a God who takes pleas- | ure in wickedness,*
and evil cannot | dwell with you.
- ⁵ Braggarts cannot stand | in your sight;*
you hate all those | who work wickedness.
- ⁶ You destroy those | who speak lies;*
the bloodthirsty and deceitful, O LORD, | you abhor.
- ⁷ But as for me, through the greatness of your mercy I will go in- | to your house;*
I will bow down toward your holy temple in | awe of you.
- ⁸ Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness, because of those who lie in | wait for me;*
make your way | straight before me.
- ⁹ For there is no truth | in their mouth;*
there is destruction | in their heart;
- ¹⁰ their throat is an | open grave;*
they flatter | with their tongue.
- ¹¹ Declare them guilt- | y, O God;*
let them fall, because | of their schemes.
- ¹² Because of their many transgressions | cast them out,*
for they have re- | belled against you.
- ¹³ But all who take refuge in you | will be glad;*
they will sing out their | joy forever.
- ¹⁴ You will | shelter them,*
so that those who love your name may ex- | ult in you.
- ¹⁵ For you, O LORD, will | bless the righteous;*
you will defend them with your favor as | with a shield.

– Psalm 5 LBW

On this day that falls in the middle of Lent, in the middle of our journey to the cross, we remember blessed Óscar Romero: bishop, martyr, saint, a child of God who went into God's house and whose body was cut down as he proclaimed Christ's Lordship in his holy sacrament. Christ's blood poured over his bleeding

body as it pours over us all. For with the chalice held high, he continued to pray, even as he saw his assassin lift the gun towards him. He did not move to protect himself for he trusted in Christ's eternal protection. He continued to proclaim Christ's sacrifice for all the world, even for the assassin.

In the 4th century intercessions in the Eucharistic Prayer we receive from St. Basil of Alexandria we hear, "Since, Master, it is a command of your only-begotten Son that we should share in the commemoration of your saints, vouchsafe to remember, Lord, those of our fathers who have been pleasing to you from eternity: patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors, preachers, evangelists, and all the other righteous perfected in faith..."

And all the other righteous perfected in faith. Such a witness continually remembered in the context of our Lord giving up His life becomes the patterning through which we are shaped in faith. It is precisely this sacramental connection in which the martyrs of every generation receive a strength beyond their own making, for it is in the sacramental expression of His love that the connection between Christ's death and resurrection, and our death are resurrection, are made known. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

Death and Life, crucifixion and resurrection: Destroy these bodies and God will raise them up: Judgment upon the world, Judgment upon human autonomy. For when we see the executioner through the martyrs' eyes, we see all the way to the resurrection, a sign of God's promise to set all things aright. And in looking to the martyrs' destination we again see our source, the one who has promised to shelter us so that we may eternally exult in Him.

Prayer: May God so work in our hearts that we may live obediently wherever we are called, so that as we look to the future that God is preparing for us, our voices will be joined to apostles, prophets, and martyrs forever filled with God's eternal love. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. Amy C. Schiffrin (acschiffrin@gmail.com)

Tuesday, March 25, 2025 | Tuesday of the Third Week in Lent

The Annunciation of Our Lord to the Virgin Mary

Isaiah 7:10–14; Hebrews 10:4–10; Luke 1:26–38; Psalms 40:1–11 & 146 (AM); Psalms 25 & 91 (PM)

^{1:26} In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

– Luke 1:26–38 ESV



Mary knew the Lord of her ancestors and His promises of deliverance. She also lived in a world that contained little hope. Her people toiled under the oppression of Rome. The church was divided by debates both arbitrary and sincere. The rich were getting richer, the poor were getting poorer. The world had little to offer orphans, widows, prisoners, and young Jewish women. And yet, today on March 25th, the Word of God, delivered by the angel Gabriel, offers a strange intrusion: hope. Exactly nine months from now, the church will gather to sing *Joy to the World* on Christmas morning, but today is the day Mary discovers that she will bear the Christ to the world.

This festival feels misplaced during Lent, a season set aside for us to examine the chaos of our world, the suffering of our neighbor, and the pain of our own sinful hearts, but our examination of these realities isn't intended to provoke us to self-flagellation. It's intended to point us towards our desperate need for the child growing in Mary's womb, the God crucified upon the cross, and the Lord who conquered death itself.

Today, the proclamation of Gabriel and the hymns of Mary and the psalmist reverberate through time delivering hope. God—not the state, not pharisees, not sin, not death, but God—is sovereign. His mercy extends to those who love Him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds, scattering the proud in their hearts, and exalting the humble. He has promised food for the hungry, freedom for the prisoner, and sight for the blind. He has become human, dwelling amongst us, suffering and dying, killed by Caesar upon a cross, so that He may destroy the tyrants of sin and death, and we may know life, free to worship him now and forever. Amen.

Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, you became obedient to death and your name was exalted above all others. Teach us always to do the Father’s will, so that, made holy by your obedience and united to your sacrifice, we can know your great love in times of sorrow and sing a new song to our God now and forever. Amen” (Psalm Prayer for Psalm 40, *Lutheran Book of Worship*).

Devotion written by the Rev. Taylor M. Rister-Stempniak (ptmarie96@gmail.com)

Wednesday, March 26, 2025 | Wednesday of the Third Week in Lent

Jeremiah 8:4–7, 18–9:6; Romans 5:1–11; John 8:12–20; Psalms 5 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 27 & 51 (PM)

- ^{51:10} Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.
- ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.

– Psalm 51:10–13 ESV



I heard someone talk about Peter and his denial of Jesus. The prediction by Jesus, the courtyard and the charcoal fire, the accusers, his accent, the frantic cursing “I do not know the man” three times, the rooster crowing, the shame. Then the crucifixion and the frightened disciples behind closed doors.

Come the end of John, the risen Jesus meets His fishing disciples with some fish cooking over a charcoal fire. And Jesus is all “Peter, do you love me?” And Peter is like “Lord, you know I love you.” This three-fold call and response is all about the forgiveness Jesus is extending to Peter. “You denied me, Peter, just as I knew you would. You are not as strong as you think you are. You need me to be your shield, your strength, your forgiveness.”

“And by the way,” Jesus continues, “feed my sheep, care for my lambs, love my sheep.” Seems like such a small thing—three words. Feed. My. Sheep. But in saying it, Jesus is forgiving Peter and sending him with a mission.

The word of forgiveness always includes a word of commission.

King David knew that. Nathan the prophet had confronted David with his sin around Bathsheba and the killing of Uriah. “You are the man!” Nathan yelled to his face. And David repented. He wrote Psalm 51—a psalm of repentance.

We know—and sometimes sing—“Create in me a clean heart, O God.” We know that, and it is true that God can and does create in us clean hearts. But we leave off the next verse from our singing, from our thinking, from our actions—but King David did not. “*Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you*” (v. 13). The word of forgiveness always includes a word of commission.

Our Lutheran church service begins with confession and forgiveness. How does it end? With commission. *Go in peace and serve the Lord. Thanks be to God.* Serving the Lord comes from a place, not of greatness nor pride, but it comes from a place of repentance and forgiveness.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You *should* depart from us, for we are sinful people—but You don't. You are gracious and merciful. In You, our scarlet sins are as Minnesota snow, our crimson defiance as pure white wool. Thank You for Your forgiveness and Your commission to go in Your peace and serve You. In Your strength and name, and with You, we go. Amen and Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Peter Lurvey (peterlurvey@gmail.com)

Thursday, March 27, 2025 | Thursday of the Third Week in Lent

Charles Henry Brent, Bishop of the Philippines and of Western New York, 1929

Jeremiah 10:11–24; Romans 5:12–21; John 8:21–32; Psalms 27 & 147:13–21 (AM); Psalms 126 & 102 (PM)

^{8:31} So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

—John 8:31–32 ESV

When I officiate at graveside committal services, toward the end of the service, after having committed the remains of the deceased to their resting place, before speaking the benediction, I sing the first and last verses of the hymn “Abide with Me”, written by Henry Lyte. In those hymn verses, we sing:

*“Abide with me, fast falls the eventide.
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me.*

*Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes,
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies;
Heaven’s morning breaks, and earth’s vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.” (LBW #272)*

Those words have brought comfort to so many people over the years, because they remind us of the words of Jesus that He speaks to us at the end of today’s reading from John 8. As followers of Jesus, we abide in His Word, meaning, we live in it. We stay immersed in it every day. We listen as it speaks to us in joy, but also in moments of great sorrow and distress. When we don’t know where else to turn, we always turn first to the Scriptures, because it is there, Jesus, the Word Made Flesh, speaks to us to remind us that He has already defeated everything that afflicts us in this life. He has already shed His holy, innocent, blood to atone for every last one of our sins. He has defeated sickness and death by His resurrection from the dead! And we remember that Jesus is the “first fruits” of the resurrection, meaning there’s more to come!

Perhaps as you have this encounter with Jesus’ word today, you find yourself in a moment of sorrow, struggle, or grief. And you may wonder “O Lord, how much longer must I endure?” As you abide in the word of Jesus, the truth does indeed set you free: the truth that Jesus is your Savior from your afflictions in this life. While you may not see it happen in your time, He promises through faith to bring you into His Father’s kingdom, and to raise you up from death, to life everlasting.

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for abiding with me through Your Word, that points me to Your cross and empty tomb, and gives me hope when I am in despair. Send Your Holy Spirit to abide with me through Your Word, so that I will know the truth, and the truth of the Gospel will set me free from sin and despair, to live in joy and anticipation for life everlasting in You. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Christopher W. Martin (pastorcwmartin@gmail.com)

Friday, March 28, 2025 | Friday of the Third Week in Lent

Jeremiah 11:1–8, 14–17; Romans 6:1–11; John 8:33–47; Psalms 22 & 148 (AM); Psalms 105 & 130 (PM)

^{1:1} What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For

the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

– Romans 6:1–11 ESV



There are few passages in Scripture which eclipse the clarity of Romans 6 when it comes to what Christ's death and resurrection has accomplished for us who believe in Him. These gracious promises are delivered chiefly through Holy Baptism where we, in faith, are brought to the lifegiving water empowered by the Word. Christ's death becomes our death. Christ's resurrection becomes our resurrection. In these baptismal waters our old sinful selves are drowned, and a new person arises with Christ to live forever with Him in righteousness. As Martin Luther says in his *Small Catechism*, Baptism “works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.”

Unfortunately, there is a tendency in our time to leave this baptismal piety at the font. We cheapen the great and blessed sacrament of Holy Baptism when fail to see and live out its enduring grace. Christ died once for all, and we are baptized once in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for all time. But Christ's work, though made complete by the cross, did not stop at the cross. So too, the “work” of Baptism is made complete at the font, but a baptized life continues after the font. Luther understood this well, and upon reflecting on this same passage in Romans, he stated in his *Small Catechism* that the enduring reality of Baptism is “it signifies that the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise; who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” In short, to live out our Baptism is nothing less than to live in the power of the resurrection which has been opened to us by the cross.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, we thank You for taking the cross which was rightfully ours. We thank You that through Your death, Jesus, we too may die in Holy Baptism so that we may share in the new life which burst forth in Your resurrection. Inculcate in us a healthy baptismal piety to carry us through this life until the fulfillment of Your promises to us on the Last Day. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Roland Weisbrot (pastorroland@victorylutheran.ca)

Saturday, March 29, 2025 | Saturday of the Third Week in Lent

Hans Nielsen Hauge, *Renewer of the Church*, 1824

John Keble, *Priest*, 1866

Jeremiah 13:1–11; Romans 6:12–23; John 8:47–59; Psalms 43 & 149 (AM); Psalms 31 & 143 (PM)

^{6:12} Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

¹⁵ What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your

members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

– Romans 6:12–23 ESV



“For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” (v. 14).

In Lent, we confront the reality of sin and the gift of grace. Paul’s message in Romans is clear: once enslaved by sin, we are now freed to serve righteousness through the grace of Christ. This passage calls us to a decisive response—refusing to let sin reign in us and choosing instead to live as instruments of God’s righteousness.

Paul’s words challenge us: who will we serve? If we present ourselves to sin, we become its slaves, bound by its destructive path leading to death. But through Jesus, we are offered a new identity: no longer slaves to sin but “slaves of righteousness,” leading us toward holiness and eternal life. This transformation doesn’t mean we won’t struggle with temptation, but it assures us that sin no longer has the final word.

The *Small Catechism* affirms that our freedom from sin is rooted in grace. This grace calls us not into complacency but into a life of active obedience. As Luther teaches, being free in Christ means we willingly serve our neighbor and live righteously, not out of obligation but out of gratitude for God’s grace.

This Lenten season, let us present ourselves fully to God. May we not misuse the freedom Christ has given but instead seek to live each day as instruments of righteousness. With hearts devoted to God, let us reflect on the fruit our lives produce—no longer shame and death, but sanctification and life eternal.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for freeing us from sin’s grip. Help us use this freedom to serve You and walk in righteousness. Guide our hearts to reflect Your grace and to bear fruit that honors You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Tony D. Ede (tede@thenalc.org)



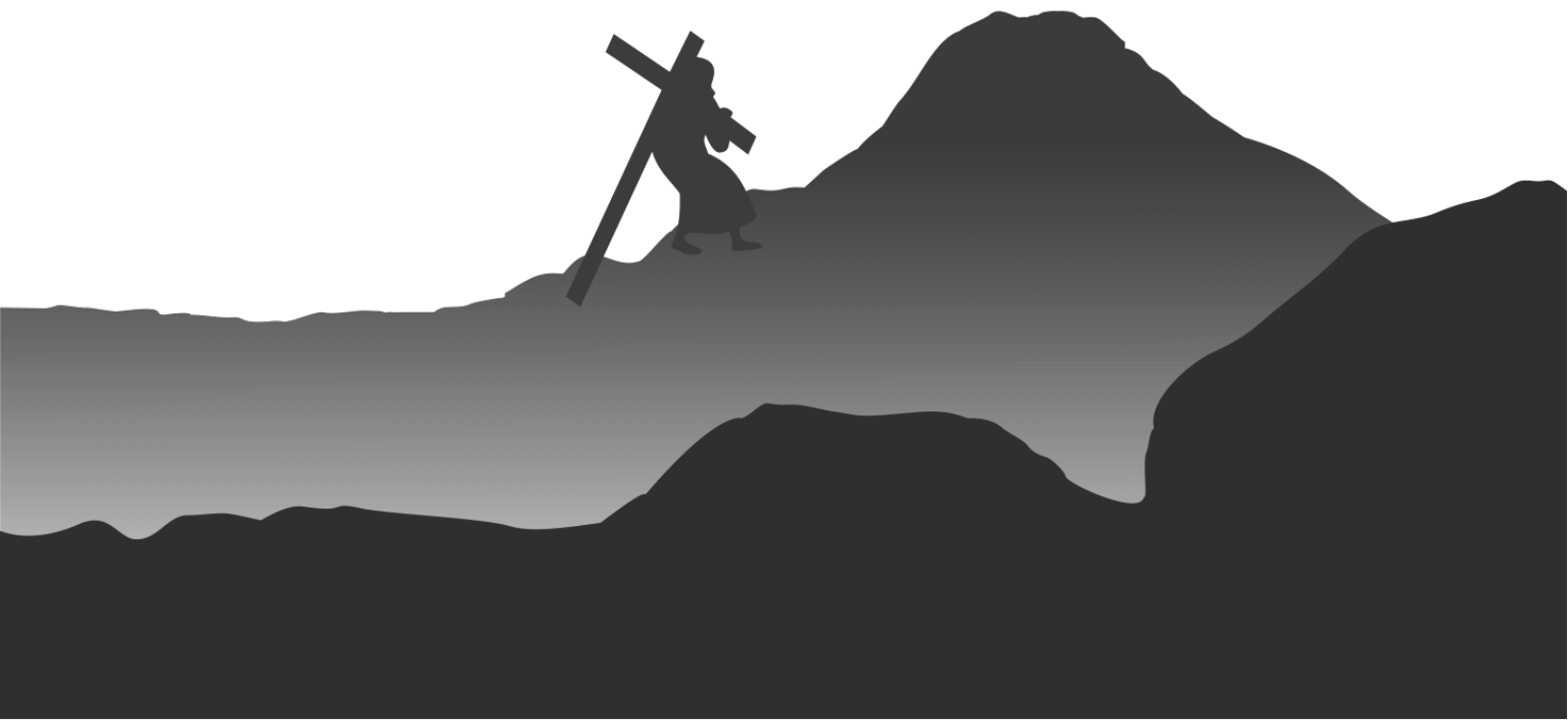
The **FOURTH WEEK** *of* **LENT**

*Holy Father, Giver of all good things, help us to work for the food that endures to eternal life,
rather than wasting our time and effort on things that are perishable.*

May our eyes always be fixed on the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Savior.

*Let our lives be sustenance for a world in need,
that Your love would pour through us and into the world You love.*

We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Sunday, March 30, 2025 | Fourth Sunday in Lent

Jeremiah 14:1–22; Galatians 4:21—5:1; Mark 8:11–21; Psalms 84 & 150 (AM); Psalms 42 & 32 (PM)

^{8:11} The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. ¹² And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, “Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.” ¹³ And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side.

¹⁴ Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. ¹⁵ And he cautioned them, saying, “Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” ¹⁶ And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. ¹⁷ And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? ¹⁸ Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? ¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?” They said to him, “Twelve.” ²⁰ “And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?” And they said to him, “Seven.” ²¹ And he said to them, “Do you not yet understand?”

– Mark 8:11–21 ESV



EXASPERATION!

If we were to summarize Jesus’ feelings toward the Pharisees and his disciples with one word, it would be exasperation. The Pharisees come to Jesus once again and demand He perform a sign from heaven to prove to them who He is. Mark writes that Jesus sighs deeply in His spirit and refuses to give them a sign.

Exasperated, Jesus walks away, gets in the boat with His disciples and heads to the other side of the lake. The disciples realize they forgot to bring enough bread for lunch. Still frustrated with the Pharisees, Jesus cautions the disciples to be aware of the teachings of the Pharisees and Herod. The disciples are still preoccupied with their lack of bread. Jesus is aware of this and chastises them for not remembering that He fed at least 9000 people on two different occasions with 12 loaves of bread, do they not think that He could feed the 13 of them with one loaf? Did they not understand? Do they not realize who is with them? Geeze!

The disciples are no different than the unbelieving Jews that Jeremiah had to deal with in today’s reading from Jeremiah 14. In this passage the land is ravaged by a drought brought on by God because of the peoples’ sinful disobedience. They acknowledge their sin but refuse to repent. They continue in their sin resulting in an exasperated God consuming them by sword, famine and pestilence. In the second lesson from Galatians 4 an exasperated Paul is frustrated with a group of “Christians” who are teaching obedience to the Law is imperative for salvation. Paul reverses their definition of Abraham’s true children. The uncircumcised Gentile Christians are Sarah’s children, who are set free from their sin, not Hagar’s children who are of the Law and thus still enslaved in their sin. Legalism imagines that a saving relationship with God is dependent on keeping the Law. The Christian faith, however, sets people free, enabling them to inherit eternal life in Christ.

When, through the Word and the Spirit we come to know Who Jesus is and that He came to set us free from sin, death and the devil, and that salvation is completely by grace through faith, the hosts of heaven celebrate! Exasperation goes away and Christ rejoices in those who understand. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: Dear Christ, forgive us for those times when we exasperate You. Open our hearts and minds through the reading of Your Holy Word, to realize that You have done everything for our salvation which is ours by grace through faith in You. Relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, guide us to reach out in love to proclaim this great news to those around us that they too might be set free to know the joy of life in Your presence. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Carl M. Haynes (pastorcarl82@gmail.com)

Monday, March 31, 2025 | Monday of the Fourth Week in Lent

John Donne, Priest, 1631

Jeremiah 16:1–21; Romans 7:1–12; John 6:1–15; Psalms 119:73–80 & 145 (AM); Psalms 121 & 6 (PM)

^{121:1} I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From where does my help come?
² My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.
³ He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
⁴ Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
⁵ The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade on your right hand.
⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
⁷ The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
⁸ The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore.

– Psalm 121:1–8 ESV



Welcome, fellow pilgrim, as we continue our Lenten journey to Holy Week and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our passage today, Psalm 121, focuses on the Lord as the one who helps the people of Israel as their keeper or guardian.

In verse 1, the psalmist asks a pivotal question: “*From where does my help come?*” In raising that question, he humbly expresses his need for help. His answer in verse 2 is a personal expression of faith in “*the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*” With this expression of faith, the psalmist is testifying to his experience in having the Creator of the universe save him from trouble in the past.

In verses 3 through 8, the writer addresses his audience. You and I are included in this audience. Why? By virtue of our being baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, you and I are included in the family of God's chosen people. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the psalmist tells us that the Lord is our keeper, our protector, our guardian. He is present with us every moment, never tiring as He watches over us.

As a spokesperson for the Lord, the psalmist proclaims this promise to all of God's chosen people: "*The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life*" (v. 7). How does God fulfill this promise? By sending His only begotten Son into the world to die on the cross and rise from the dead. By so doing, Jesus Christ won salvation from sin, death, and the devil for all who believe and are baptized (Mark 16:16a).

Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Savior, never slumbers nor sleeps. In Matthew 28:20, at the close of the Great Commission, the keeper of all God's sheep proclaims, "*I am with you always, to the end of the age!*"

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, we thank You for being our source of help in all trouble. If You had not sent Your Son Jesus to save us, we would be destroyed by sin, death, and the devil. Having been saved to live forever with You in Your eternal kingdom, may we share the good news of Your Son with others, that they, too, may receive the life-giving help that only You can give. We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen!

Devotion written by the Rev. H. Brian Triller (briantriller@protonmail.com)

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 | Tuesday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Amalie Wilhelmina Sieveking, Renewer of Society, 1859; Frederick Dennison Maurice, Priest, 1872

Jeremiah 17:19–27; Romans 7:13–25; John 6:16–27; Psalms 34 & 146 (AM); Psalms 25 & 91 (PM)

^{6:16} When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷ got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸ The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. ²⁰ But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." ²¹ Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

– John 6:16–21 ESV

There are so many instances in Scripture when a truly shocking thing is taking place and these words are uttered: "*do not be afraid.*" As someone raised in the church I have become immune to seeing the wonder in the situation that sometimes made the original witness "*fall down in terror.*" So I like to sit in these passages and try to imagine how terrifying it would be to, say, see a figure walking through the darkness on top the billowing, crashing walls of water that are threatening to overturn my small fishing boat. Could I even shout out to the other disciples, clutching at elbows, trying to howl over a wind that ripped rain into my eyes and unrelentingly soaked my already sopping wet clothes? And when I realized it was Jesus, when I experienced the mystery of the calming of the storm, the instantaneous arrival of my boat to land, what would I make of His words? "*It is I,*" he says, "*do not be afraid*" (v. 20).

In this journey of life, there are many times that the Lord comes to us in ways we did not anticipate, through circumstances we do not control. He comes to us declaring in majesty and splendor, in a I-can-calm-the-storm-with-just-one-word sovereignty, "*It is I, do not be afraid.*"

He comes too, gently and tenderly, grasping our hand to pull us up from the waves, "*It is I,*" he says. "*Do not be afraid.*"

Prayer: And so it is to You, Lord, that we say: “*To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul; my God, I put my trust in you. Show me your ways, O LORD, and teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; in you have I trusted all the day long.*” In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Dcn. Shannon R. Ames Fuller (samesfuller@tbenalc.org)

Wednesday, April 2, 2025 | Wednesday of the Fourth Week in Lent

James Lloyd Breck, Priest, 1876

Jeremiah 18:1–11; Romans 8:1–11; John 6:27–40; Psalms 5 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 27 & 51 (PM)

^{6:27} Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.’ ²⁸ Then they said to him, ‘What must we do to perform the works of God?’ ²⁹ Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.’

– John 6:27–29 NRSV



“*What are you working for? What do you do for a living?*” Having just read these two questions, take a pause and consider your answers.

The question about ‘working’ is central to our Gospel text for this 4th Wednesday in the season of Lent. We, likely, all work hard...but, for what? Jesus has just fed the 5000, walked across the Sea of Capernaum, was chased by a crowd in boats, and instructs the pursuing crowd that they are only looking for Him because they had eaten their ‘fill of the loaves’.

It is then that Jesus tells them (and us) not to “*work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life*” (v. 27). Having down-sized to our present home back in 2013, I learned a lot about what I understand to be “*food that perishes.*” We had a massive garage sale, beginning at 8:00 a.m. At 11:30 a.m., as customer traffic was diminishing, I began telling all customers that everything was free. You might imagine the looks I received, as people began grabbing for these now free “treasures”. At the end of that long day, we still had enough left to fill the trunk of my wife’s car. Humbled, I realized that we had just removed stuff from our home that we couldn’t even give away. I took it to our nearby Goodwill. Upon moving, we are still getting rid of things we don’t need or want.

I found downsizing to be, in addition to a lot of work, freeing and refreshing. As I grow older, and hopefully wiser, my understanding of what I value has changed. I am thankful I actually worked for the many treasured relationships I continue to have with people from the congregation I served and the family I love more and more with each passing day.

I once read of a survey given to people who had reached their 100th birthday, asking them “*What would you do differently in your life?*” Their answers were categorized in three ways: laughed more, risked more, and invested in more that will outlast them. I find their answers significant and profound. What we have from God is what will truly last, even enduring “*for eternal life.*” What’s more, we don’t even need to “*work*” for such things. They are given to us by the Son of Man and we are to live our lives in gratitude! The victory is ours, by God!

Prayer: Gracious God, during this Lenten season, further enable us to sort through the things that strive to fill our days, our minds, and our homes and to rid ourselves of “*the food that perishes.*” Help us to invest what You have first given us in ways that will produce dividends for decades to come. May we keep our eyes upon Jesus the victor, obediently walk with Him, and all the while invite others to do the same. When we do, we'll never be disappointed or ashamed. As Your servant Luther wrote, “*But now a champion comes to fight, Whom God himself elected.*” I ask this in His precious and holy name, Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Daniel M. Powell (pastordanielm.powell@gmail.com)

Thursday, April 3, 2025 | Thursday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Richard, Bishop of Chichester, 1253

Jeremiah 22:13–23; Romans 8:12–27; John 6:41–51; Psalms 27 & 147:13–21 (AM); Psalms 126 & 102 (PM)

^{6:41} So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” ⁴² They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” ⁴³ Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— ⁴⁶ not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. **50** This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

– John 6:41–51 ESV



Victory over the grave is the ultimate victory. Won for us by Christ Jesus, it is truly our victory, though not yet fully realized in the grand eschatological view of Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and return. The fullness of this victory concerns the end times, and the fulfillment of the eternal kingdom of Christ. And, in my opinion, it is the very culmination of the many victories Christ Jesus won along the way as the perfection of humanity, specifically over sickness, sin, tribulation, temptation, and more. Even if we, who believe, boldly proclaim this great promise of eternal life, we still grieve when death strikes us, and those we love. Oh, how hard it is to lay to rest our dearest family and friends! But, to trust in this ultimate victory, we lay them to rest with hope.

The careful preparation and faithful burial led by Joseph of Arimathea and the women who brought spices and oils to the tomb when the lifeless body of Jesus was taken down from the cross and laid to rest, is part of our tradition. More than tradition, it is part of our faith. It is a true witness to the power of the claim Jesus makes about this victory over the grave. To lay to rest the body of a loved one, in the certain hope of its resurrection at the command and coming of Christ, is a heartfelt and true expression of our faith in the eternal promise made to us. This very body will rise in glory, maybe even with the marks of the world still visible, like the blessed hands, feet, and side of our Savior. Yet, we proclaim “*a resurrection like His*” awaits us, and that means a bodily resurrection like the one that walked from that tomb of darkness to the beautiful light of that first Easter morning!

St. John records Jesus teaching the crowds that the eternal manna in the form of His own flesh, will be for those who believe the very manner in which eternity is conveyed. Specifically, those who eat of this bread

will taste eternity, and He will “*raise [us] up on the last day*” (v. 44). A difficult thing to hear for the crowds listening to Jesus, but central to our faith and life as His disciples. We ought, as often as we can, partake of this Holy Sacrament, present to witness to His power as He comes to sustain us along this journey, until we too rest in blessed sleep awaiting His command to rise.

And, in great confidence we can be assured of that power in the form of the statement made by Jesus, “*I AM.*” He declares His oneness with the Father in the use of the great declaration that God spoke from the burning bush to Moses. The Great I AM, in all His glory and power, will call to Himself all those who have eaten of the bread of life He provides, and when the last day comes, that simple foretaste we have received will be revealed as part of the great marriage feast of the Lamb.

Prayer: Eternal Father, who from the flames of the bush declared to Your people the name by which we know Your authority and power, grant to us by Your Holy Spirit the call to receive Your grace, by an inspired faith, in the form of eternal bread from heaven, Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. In that eating, may we, like your servant St. Richard, who we commemorate this day, “*know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, and follow thee more nearly, day by day.*” Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. Nathan C. Minnich (ncminnich@gmail.com)

Friday, April 4, 2025 | Friday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Martin Luther King, Jr., Renewer of Society, 1968; Benedict the African, Friar, 1589

Jeremiah 23:1–8; Romans 8:28–39; John 6:52–59; Psalms 22 & 148 (AM); Psalms 105 & 130 (PM)

^{23:1} “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!” declares the LORD. ² Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: “You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD. ³ Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. ⁴ I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the LORD.

⁵ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’

– Jeremiah 23:1–6 ESV

Today is the Commemoration of Martin Luther King Jr. He was a reformer and renewer of society with a pastor’s heart. He was given the name Michael King at his birth. In 1934, his father made a visit to Germany and witnessed the beginnings of Nazi Germany. He also learned of the life of German monk Martin Luther who stood up against abuses of the church. It was this that caused Mr. King Sr. to change his name and that of his son to Martin Luther who was 28 at the time. Martin Luther King Jr. led the civil right movement in the late 50’s through the 60’s. In his studies of Ghandi, he learned of nonviolent protest which he made central to the movement. He wrote in his Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963, “*My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure.*”

That there should be any need for pressure of any kind to ensure the fair and equal treatment of any group of people is lamentable, but true. Humankind has had trouble getting along from the beginning. Societies have passed laws to keep people separated and suppressed. This has never been God's intent for beloved humankind.

In Jeremiah 23, God takes to task the evil leaders who care nothing for their charges. "*Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!*" declares the LORD" (v. 1). God will attend to the evil shepherds and will give to good shepherds who will tend the fold. The Lord will send a "*righteous Branch*," one who will rule in wisdom, righteousness, and justice. This is the promise of the Almighty and points us to Jesus Christ. His death and resurrection has done the work. He will make all things new and right. In the meantime, we look to our Lord and live our lives in the example of Jesus, of Martin Luther King Jr. and others who stand up for others and make this world a better place even as we look to the day when Christ returns.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, give us the strength and wisdom, courage and ability to stand for what is true and right. Give us Your love where in our own being we could not possibly love. Holy Spirit guide us and direct us in ways of goodness and love even in the face of darkness and opposition. Renew Your church. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Pamela J. Thorson (pjthorson78@gmail.com)

Saturday, April 5, 2025 | Saturday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Jeremiah 23:9–15; Romans 9:1–18; John 6:60–71; Psalms 43 & 149 (AM); Psalms 31 & 143 (PM)

^{6:60} When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" ⁶¹ But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you?" ⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³ It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

– John 6:60–63 NRSV



"Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). These are the words that our Lord Jesus proclaims just prior to our text, and so the disciples are understandably perplexed by His words. Eat His flesh? Drink His blood? The words of Jesus certainly are still perplexing (maybe even more so) for modern ears today.

This is because we swim in materialist age, where life is placed in the category of Biology. In medical terms, "life" refers to the state of being alive, characterized by biological processes like growth, metabolism, reaction to stimuli, and reproduction. This, however, is not how Jesus understands life. It is not our biological process that constitutes life, but rather, "*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life*" (v. 63).

Lent is understood as a season of stripping away, of giving up those things that we love for a deeper devotion to our life of faith. In many ways, when we strip away the noise and distractions, we are able to see and hear much more clearly. In this season of Lent, rather than cling to things that are connected to death (perishable), we can orient our hearts and minds to cling to the one who has the words of eternal life. His

words *are* life itself. When we hear the Word read and preached on Sunday morning, we receive life. In our devotional and personal study of Scripture, we encounter the words of life. When we partake of the Eucharist, we are nourished and given life. While bread and wine nourish our physical bodies, it is Christ' body and blood that give us life in the truest sense: eternal life. Again it is worth repeating the words of our Lord: *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all."*

Prayer: Almighty God, You alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant Your people grace to love what You command and desire what You promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of this world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Anthony Wick (pastoranthony@alcfdl.org)



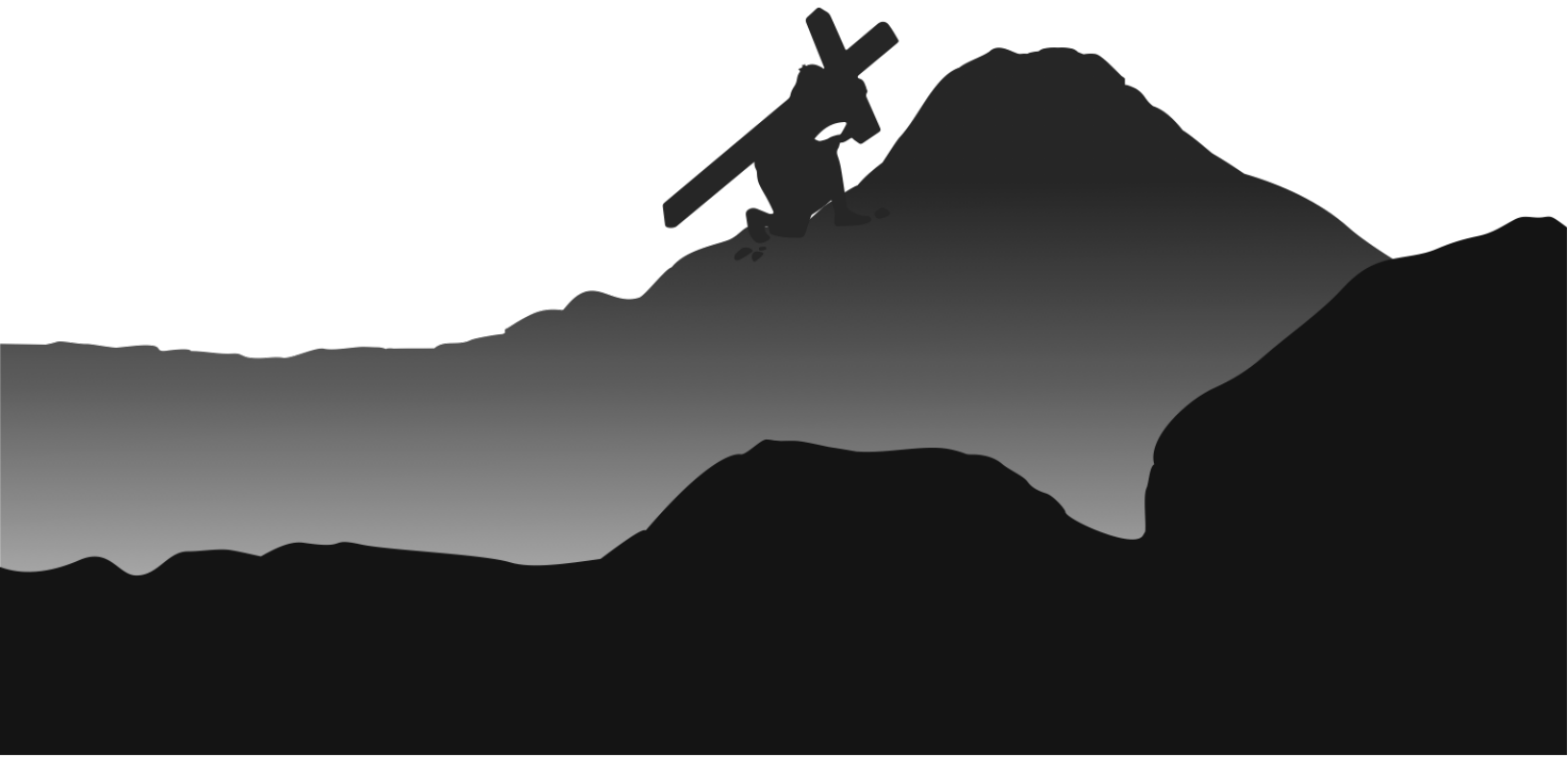
The **FIFTH WEEK** *of* **LENT**

*God of all glory and might, You grant new life through Your Son, Jesus,
who gave His life for all who trust in Him.*

*Help us, as followers of Christ, to keep His Word and to live according to His holy will.
May we be willing to risk scorn, rejection, suffering and trials for the sake of the Gospel message,
trusting that we will never be alone, but that our lives are securely in Your hands.*

*May we reach out with Your love to the ends of the earth,
giving our very best in service to the lost, alone and in need.*

We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Jeremiah 23:16–32; 1 Corinthians 9:19–27; Mark 8:31—9:1; Psalms 84 & 150 (AM); Psalms 42 & 32 (PM)

^{8:31} Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

– Mark 8:31 NRSV



Jesus speaks openly about His future in today’s Gospel reading. In response, Peter rebukes Jesus because he has trouble wrapping his head around what Jesus said. In the last passage, Peter confessed Jesus’ identity correctly before the disciples: “*You are the Christ!*” (Mark 8:29). “Christ,” as in “anointed one” or “Messiah.” Now, Peter is confused: Jesus is telling His disciples He must suffer and be killed?! That’s *not* supposed to happen to God’s Messiah. The Messiah is a conquering hero who will overthrow Israel’s enemies and bring freedom and restoration to the oppressed. How does His dying accomplish that? What seemed so clear just a few verses ago has become murky and confusing.

That’s often what happens when we try to apply human logic to kingdom principles. In the Gospels, Jesus repeatedly tries to get His followers to understand how His way is different than what they expect. As often, the disciples demonstrate how they do not understand what Jesus is saying. When Jesus tells them a second and third time about His impending death and resurrection, the disciples respond by arguing about which of them is the greatest in Jesus’ kingdom (Mark 9:30–35) or whether James and John can sit at Jesus’ left and right had “*in his glory*” (Mark 10:32–45). Not only do they not understand the meaning behind Jesus’ passion and resurrection, but they also misunderstand the nature of Jesus’ “kingdom” and how power is lived out in it. Jesus is talking about a kingdom inaugurated by His death and resurrection, while the disciples are imaging their roles in Jesus’ new leadership structure. They hear Jesus’ words, but they are unable to process how completely different Jesus and His kingdom are from their cultural and religious expectations. Not until the Holy Spirit infused the disciples at Pentecost did they finally “get it.”

Prayer: Gracious Lord God, we thank You for not behaving as we expect. The surprising nature of Your work in our world and in our lives brings restoration, healing, and hope. Empower us to be instruments of Your work in our corner of the world, that those we meet would come to know You and the love You have for them; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. Allen Schoonover (aschoonove@iuhealth.org)

Monday, April 7, 2025 | Monday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Jeremiah 24:1–10; Romans 9:19–33; John 9:1–17; Psalms 119:73–80 & 145 (AM); Psalms 121 & 6 (PM)

^{9:2} And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

– John 9:2–5 ESV



Have you ever played the “Hindsight 20/20” game? You know the one, where you start going through your life experiences, saying “Well, ‘x’ had to happen in order for ‘y’ to happen, and so I’m thankful ‘x’ happened, because of ‘y.’” Now, I’m not knocking the game at all, there’s a grain of truth in some of these things, and even a bit of maturity. But, if we aren’t careful, that game can often land us in trouble, and with a rather mutilated picture of God and His work in our lives. Why? Because we don’t know all things. We’re bound to run up against things that, from our perspective, don’t make sense; ‘y’s that don’t seem to justify their ‘x’s, questions about whether ‘y’ could’ve come about with a different ‘x,’ if ‘y’ is the only ‘y’ there is, if ‘y’ is really the end of the equation rather than a ‘z,’ and so on.

Jesus, being God, doesn’t have to worry about this, of course. But even here, I think He’s after something else. I don’t think Jesus is playing the game but, unlike us, playing it perfectly. Instead, I think He is calling us to see all things, even the things that might not make sense to us, through the lens of the work which He was sent to do. In restoring the blind man’s sight, He also gives us “corrective lenses,” as it were. Through the knowledge of the love of God for us in Him, through the promise of forgiveness and eternal life, through the sure and certain hope of the resurrection and new creation, all the ‘x’s find their true meaning—even if we can’t quite plot out yet how that works for all of them.

The man born blind experienced something much greater than being born with normal vision; much greater, really, even than having his vision restored. He encountered a little bit of the new creation in the here and now. He experienced the love of God for him in Christ Jesus. Love which came to find him, despite the fact that it was a day of rest. And He got to participate in others experiencing it, “seeing it,” too. That is to say, he experienced the same thing you experienced in your Baptism, where you, too, were “washed,” that you might “see.” And so, now seeing, look to Christ, the one whose grace transforms all, even down the meaning, of everything it touches.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you sent Your Son to accomplish Your great work of salvation. Help us to see all things by His light, as we await Your new creation, through that same Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Scott A. Smith (prscottsmith@gmail.com)

Tuesday, April 8, 2025 | Tuesday of the Fifth Week in Lent

William Augustus Muhlenberg, Priest, 1877

Jeremiah 25:8–17; Romans 10:1–13; John 9:18–41; Psalms 34 & 146 (AM); Psalms 25 & 91 (PM)

^{9:24} So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵ He answered, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” ²⁶ They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷ He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” ²⁸ And they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.” ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” ³⁰ The man answered, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.” ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” ³⁴ They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶ He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” ³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” ³⁸ He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

– John 9:24–38 ESV



There is a question that has often been asked but seldom answered sufficiently. “*Why do bad things happen to good people?*” Ever since ancient times humans have struggled with such questions. Surely, the tragedy must have been brought about through some misstep or fault. In our text, Jesus’ disciples seem to be wondering this very thing. Who sinned that this man was born blind? There must be someplace to assign blame for the man’s blindness. Jesus couldn’t disagree more.

Jesus explains to His disciples, and to us, that it isn’t because of anyone’s sin that the man was born blind, but that God’s compassion and goodness would be made visible through Him. Unpacking that a little more, the place to find God’s presence is not in the cause of personal crisis, but there with His people in the midst of it. God does not hand out challenges to human health, sickness, or disease as a means of judgement for sin. Rather, God is right there with us in the midst of our struggle. Jesus is and always will be our Emmanuel, that is, God with us.

That’s where God meets us. He is with us in the midst of our mess, in the very worst parts of it. God is there working through faith and love to bring forth something new. He doesn’t promise to clean up the mess. Rather, God transforms it, using it for His good purposes.

Our Lord is the same God who uses the travesty of false accusations, extreme physical punishment, and even wrongful execution to redeem people from their sin. He is the one with wounds on His hands and feet and side, the one who suffered for our sake because He is the God who loves and cares for His people. When bad things happen to good people, God is the one who shares our suffering and pain. He takes it upon Himself in the fullness of compassion and love.

“*Why do bad things happen to good people?*” The question will continue to arise, but it’s not one that we must answer on our own. What makes sense out of tragedy is not that we understand it. Instead, it’s that God is with us in it and through it. That is where we find the presence of Christ. And we make His presence known for others as we share His love and compassion with our neighbors in the midst of their need.

Prayer: Gracious God, we thank You for Your mercy and grace, for Your compassion and love in the midst of struggle and calamity. As we continue our Lenten journey, open our eyes to see the power of Christ’s death and resurrection, that because He has conquered sin and the grave, death no longer has power over us. Pour out your mercy, grace, and love upon all who call upon Christ Jesus, for it’s in His name we pray. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. David Nuottila (revdavidwn@gmail.com)

Wednesday, April 9, 2025 | Wednesday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Teacher, Martyr, 1945

Jeremiah 25:30–38; Romans 10:14–21; John 10:1–18; Psalms 5 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 27 & 51 (PM)

^{10:1} “Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

– John 10:1–18 NIV2011



As we continue our Lenten journey, this fifth week in Lent, we reflect on the precious gift of grace that God has bestowed onto you and me as His children. This gift of grace shapes the very essence of our faith with Christ Jesus as an heir of His salvation.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus shared, with us that He is the Good Shepherd, sent by God, to lead His people out of the bondage that held us captive to sin and death, and to faithfully lead us into eternal life. This is a power passage that resonates the full embodiment of faith, and hope, held within Christ’s impending death and resurrection. When Jesus said: “*I lay down my life—only to take it up again,*” Christ shared His promise that by His death, He would win victory over the sting of sin and death, and by His resurrection, would open for us, the way to eternal life (v. 17).

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus calls out to you, as His sheep, to hear His voice, and to follow Him. Reaching out to those who are lost, renewing you by faith, and enlightening you with His precious gift of grace. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, sent to be our advocate, Christ continues to call on you, and lead you through the promise held within the Gospel—gifting you hope that what was once broken by sin and death, has now been restored new through Him. Through His preached Word and Sacrament, the Good Shepherd leads you away from sin and death, and renews the promise given to you in your Baptism by grace through faith.

This Lenten season, we continue to follow the Good Shepherd to the cross, as we anchor our hope in the sure foundation of victory found within the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. Just as the sheep follow the shepherd’s voice, so too, do we, as God’s people, hear the voice of Christ Jesus, calling out to us by faith

through his Gospel—inviting us into His Word, receiving His forgiveness, and sharing in His precious gift of saving grace.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, thank You for being the Good Shepherd who calls us by name, who laid down Your life to save us. Help us to hear Your voice, and by faith, be strengthened and empowered by Your Word, so that we, too, may share all that You have done to save us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Hailey Halmstad (rhbenj6@icloud.com)

Thursday, April 10, 2025 | Thursday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Mikael Agricola, Bishop of Turku, Renewer of the Church, 1557

William Law, Priest, 1761

Jeremiah 26:1–24; Romans 11:1–12; John 10:19–42; Psalms 27 & 147:13–21 (AM); Psalms 126 & 102 (PM)

^{10:22} At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. ²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” ²⁵ Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

— John 10:22–30 ESV

—*“How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” (v. 24)*

Our lives are filled with much ambiguity, or at least this is what the powers that be want us to think and believe. Things that used to be so clear aren't as clear anymore. Can somebody please just give us a straight answer about something?! Somebody give us something that we can hang our hat on.

In yesterday's gospel text, Jesus called himself “*the Good Shepherd*” and made the audacious claim to have the power to lay down His life and to take it up again (John 10:17b-18). This caused a great rift amongst the Jews who were present and leads them to say what they say in today's text. They're tired of signs and wonders and just want Jesus to come out with it already—“*Are you the Messiah or not?*”

Some things that we/society call “*ambiguous*” aren't actually ambiguous at all, we either simply don't like what we see or we want what we're seeing to be something else. To anyone “*with ears to hear*,” Jesus has already told them who He is, and under no uncertain terms. In John 6, He says, “*I AM the bread of life*,” and, “*I AM the true bread which comes down from heaven*.” In John 8, He declares, “*I AM the light of the world*” (repeated again in John 9:5), “*I AM from above...I AM not of this world*,” and, “*before Abraham was, I AM*.” At the beginning of John 10, Jesus added, “*I AM the door of the sheep*,” and, “*I AM the Good Shepherd*.” How many more times can Jesus tell us who He is—that is to say, “*I AM*”—than the number of times He has repeated this phrase in John's account of the gospel? And make no mistake about it: to Jewish ears, “*I AM*” is one thing and one thing only—the great Tetragrammaton, the name of God so holy that none should let it cross their lips.

The good news is that “*those with ears to hear*” hear the voice of the Shepherd, hear Him speak the great “I AM’s”, and all ambiguity is gone. The Holy Spirit, given to us in the waters of Baptism, hears the Shepherd’s voice and recognizes the living Way, Truth incarnate, Life in its fullest. The Spirit points us to the Shepherd (John 14:26) and says, “*Here, at last, is your peace.*”

Prayer: Holy Spirit, true preacher of the Gospel, clear our minds and clean our ears that we may hear the voice of our Shepherd calling and exclaim with joy, “My God and my King!” Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Kristopher D. Madsen (revmadsen@gmail.com)

Friday, April 11, 2025 | Friday of the Fifth Week in Lent

George Augustus Selwyn, Bishop of New Zealand and of Lichfield, 1878

Jeremiah 29:1–14; Romans 11:13–24; John 11:1–27; Psalms 22 & 148 (AM); Psalms 105 & 130 (PM)

^{130:1} Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!

² O LORD, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

³ If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
O LORD, who could stand?

⁴ But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.

⁵ I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;

⁶ my soul waits for the LORD
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.

⁷ O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.

⁸ And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.

– Psalm 130 ESV



If we looked at the major religions around the globe, we would discover that many promote the idea of following rules and striving to earn their deity's approval. In contrast, the Bible conveys, and we read here in verse 4, that our God, the one true God, fully forgives sins. Scripture teaches that sin warrants punishment due to its affront to God's sacred nature. However, it also reveals that God is a God of grace and mercy, who initiated our forgiveness by sending His Son, Jesus to be our Savior.

God grants us forgiveness not to instill fear, but to inspire us to worship and respect Him. He desires us to recognize Him for who He truly is and to respond with sincere and loving obedience.

When my husband was a teenager, he was asked to cut his neighbor's lawn while they were away on vacation, and they would pay him. He got busy, as teenagers do, and it was two days before they were set to return, and he had not cut the lawn yet. The problem was it was pouring outside. One day before they

would return it was still raining. The morning, they were to come home it stopped raining, but the grass was wet, very wet. He chose to cut it anyway. You can imagine the mess. It was uneven, too long in some places and too short in others and there were even a few places the grass pulled out from the root. When the neighbor's returned they came to my husband's house, didn't say a word about the lawn, and paid him. My husband began to apologize, the neighbor said that we were all teenagers at one time, and he could come over next week and help plant new grass where it was needed. That was a true human example of grace and mercy.

Yet, the ultimate forgiveness is God's forgiveness, the one that transcends this life and is a promise unto itself. In the words of Luther from the explanation of Third Article of the Apostles Creed: "*in this Christian Church, he daily forgives abundantly all my sins and the sins of all believers; And at the last day, he will raise me and all the dead and will grant everlasting life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true!*"

It is most certainly true that we, you, and I will live with Him fully forgiven because of what Jesus first did for us. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we are grateful that You gave us the ability to forgive. You give us everything even though we don't deserve it. Please give us kind and compassionate hearts so that we may be able to go into the world and forgive those who need to experience the power of Your gracious and loving forgiveness; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Teresa E. Peters (tpeters@thenalc.org)

Saturday, April 12, 2025 | Saturday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Jeremiah 31:27–34; Romans 11:25–36; John 11:28–44; Psalms 43 & 149 (AM); Psalms 31 & 143 (PM)

31:31 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, **32** not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. **33** For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. **34** And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

– Jeremiah 31:31–34 ESV

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In our passage today, the prophet Jeremiah proclaims that God will provide a new covenant, a new way God and His people will interact. In calling it the “new,” it is not that there will be new content to God’s law but a new way it is received. No longer can the Word of God be perverted and distorted by false teachers and our own fallenness. I love the imagery of God polishing our hearts of stone smooth by forgiveness so He can inscribe His law directly on our very souls. This will be God’s act on us, not our own action, making us incapable of straying from God’s law again.

This Lenten season, we are facing another “*now and not yet*” situation. Christ has come and ushered in the new covenant. Hebrews 8 uses our passage intensively to make that point. But we still sin, and the world

still rejects the Lord. Hebrews 8:4–5 says the law of the old covenant is just a shadow of the new that came with Christ. We understand that Holy communion is a foretaste of the feast to come. But what has changed for us is that we can now focus on the person of Christ, not simply the law, realizing that God’s commands are His self-revelation. In short, it becomes personal.

When we are married, we give up the ways we lived when we were single, not because of laws, but because of the superiority of life with our beloved. Life changes for us when we have a child. We make sacrifices we didn’t have to before parenthood, not because we are compelled by a law, but because of the blessed privilege of receiving a child.

Martin Luther wrote that striving to only follow the commands of Christ makes Him just another Moses. “*In short, this mode [of understanding Christ as simply an example] does not make Christians but only hypocrites.*”³ Let this Lent be a time where we not only attend to the things Christ taught us to do but, more importantly, turn our hearts to the one who’s character is revealed through them. The new covenant has done away with the old and we now have our High Priest, Christ Himself, to intercede in all thing for us. Let us focus on Him. In short, let’s make it personal.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, Heavenly Father. We pray for the day when You polish smooth our hearts of stone and inscribe Your love for all of us You have called. Your new covenant was ushered in by Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ and we pray for that time when it will be completed. Be with us until then, giving us Your promises in Your Word and a foretaste of that great banquet to come in the Eucharist. Strengthen us to see Your covenant at work today, confidently awaiting our Lord’s final glorious return. We pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Marvin Combs (mcombs@thenalc.org)

³ (Luther, M. (1960). Luther's works, volume 35: Word and sacrament I (E. T. Bachmann, Ed.). Fortress Press.



HOLY WEEK

Most gracious Father, You know the deepest needs and desires of our hearts.

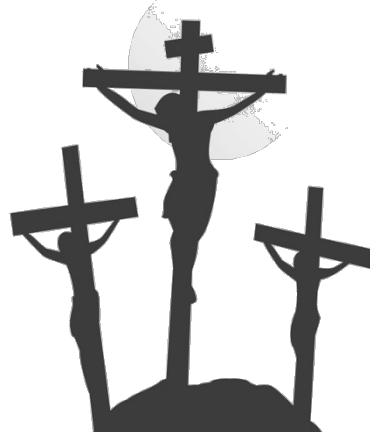
It is our desire to walk with Jesus in faithfulness, and yet when life gets rough, we often fail.

Help us to run this race of faith with perseverance, clinging to Your strength rather than relying on our own.

*This week, may we refrain from all the busyness and slow down
so we can hear Your voice amidst the clatter that is all around us.*

Help us to dwell in silence so that it is only Your Word we hear.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.



Sunday, April 13, 2025 | Sunday of the Passion

Zechariah 12:9–11; 13:1, 7–9; 1 Timothy 6:12–16; Matthew 21:12–17; Psalms 84 & 150 (AM); Psalms 42 & 32 (PM)

^{21:14} And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant, ¹⁶ and they said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, “Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?”

– Matthew 21:14–16 ESV



When we celebrate our confirmands and ask them to help us get to know them better, one of the questions we ask about is their favourite church memory or service. While their answers vary, a common response is the Palm Sunday procession with palms. I found it interesting that the traditional procession of children waving their palms to “All Glory Laud and Honour” registered so often as an important memory. Whether by design or not, this seemed an important liturgical role for them that could be expressed by none other than children. As adults, perhaps we celebrate vicariously through such young voices willing to wave their praises, or perhaps we know that very soon in the service the other shoe is going to drop as we transition to hearing the passion in the passion narrative.

The notion that children should be seen and not heard has survived longer in public worship than other places. Disruptions can be frustrating for many in a public setting with poor sound, but the bigger question is whether children are truly ‘seen’.

In his classic book from the 70s on Christian education, John Westerhoff III asks if our children will have faith. We also wonder if our faith will have children. Westerhoff raises concern about the schooling model of passing on the faith; in effect removing children from the environment and relationships where faith is formed to place them in a schooling environment that primarily teaches not about faith but about religion. The work of the Search Institute and the Augsburg Youth and Family Institute reminded us that faith is not taught so much as it is caught; caught in the context of trusted personal relationships like those most often found in our own homes. Passing on the faith to the next generation is for me one of the most important tasks of the commission Jesus gave to make disciples.

Our Gospel reading for today reminds us that, like many other occasions in the Gospels, Jesus sees children. He welcomes them, embraces them, and highlights their capacity for faith and trust. Just as He sees and heals the “blind and the lame” (code for those previously excluded from temple back in David’s day for not measuring up to the notion of “without spot or blemish”), Jesus both sees and declares that the kingdom is for those easily overlooked. In the midst of the crisis of the triumphal entry into Holy Week, Jesus sees and lifts up the child in our hands just as He hold in His hands the child that is us: vulnerable, hurting, unsure, at times manipulative and self absorbed.

There is a lot to see, hear, experience, and ponder this week. As we are immersed in all that our Lord has done for us, let us not forget how significant this recounting is to passing on the faith to the next generation. The Institutes mentioned above outlined four “keys” that have been identified to help us in this calling: (1) Caring Conversation, (2) a Devotional Life, (3) Rituals and Traditions, and (4) Service/Mission. In the weeks to come I invite you to explore further what these might mean for passing on the faith in our homes and congregations.

Through our calling to pass on the faith, may God continue to prepare praise out of the mouths of children so that we might join them in shouts of Hosanna to the Son of David.

Prayer: God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we give You thanks for freeing Your sons and daughters from the power of sin and for raising them up to a new life through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Pour out Your Holy Spirit upon our children: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in Your presence. Look with kindness upon fathers and mothers. Let them ever rejoice in the gift You have given them. Make us all teachers and examples of righteousness. Strengthen us in our own Baptism so that we may share eternally the salvation You have given them, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen (Adapted from the Service of Holy Baptism, *Lutheran Book of Worship*).

Devotion written by the Rev. Kevin Ree (kree@thenalc.org)

Monday, April 14, 2025 | Monday in Holy Week

Jeremiah 11:18–20; 12:1–17; Philippians 3:1–14; John 12:9–19; Psalms 119:73–80 & 145 (AM); Psalms 121 & 6 (PM)

^{12:12} The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!’ ¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: ¹⁵ ‘Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!’

– John 12:12–15 NRSV



Have you ever thought you could outsmart the system? Maybe you skipped a step or cut a corner, confident no one would notice—until it all fell apart. Shortcuts often lead to bigger messes, don’t they?

God’s people in Jeremiah’s time tried something similar. They abandoned their covenant with God, chasing their own way. Their rebellion wasn’t just about breaking rules; it severed their relationship with the Creator. Heartbroken, Jeremiah asks, “*Why does the way of the wicked prosper?*” (Jeremiah 12:1). God responds with a challenge: “*If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses?*” (12:5). Their brokenness runs far deeper than Jeremiah realizes, and God is preparing them for greater challenges—His justice is still unfolding.

Centuries later, that justice rides into Jerusalem. But it doesn’t come on a horse, a symbol of strength and conquest in the ancient world, used by kings and warriors. Instead, it comes on a donkey, a symbol of humility and peace. The crowd shouts, “Hosanna!” celebrating Jesus as King. Yet they misunderstand. They expect a conqueror to overthrow Rome, not a Savior who will bring victory through suffering and death. To the watching world, Jesus appears as a humble Redeemer, yet His death and resurrection are the unseen victory over the kingdom of darkness, defeating sin and death.

Jesus conquers not by wielding power to bring death, but by laying down His own life as a sacrifice. At the cross, Jesus disarms the powers of sin, death, and the devil (Colossians 2:15), defeating them through His obedient sacrifice. His death is not defeat—it is the decisive act of love and obedience that secures the victory. And in His resurrection, He triumphs as the true King of the universe, reigning over all creation.

The contrast between the horse and the donkey reveals the paradox of God’s kingdom: while human power relies on domination, God’s power is made perfect in weakness. Paul captures the heart of this mystery in Philippians 3: true victory isn’t earned; it’s received. “*That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection*” (Philippians 3:10). At the cross, God’s justice and mercy collide. Jesus transforms rebellion into redemption and suffering into glory.

This is the unfolding victory of Holy Week: Jesus doesn’t just triumph over sin and death—He shares that victory with you. His light shines into your darkness, offering grace and hope. Lay down your rebellion, abandon the shortcuts, and embrace the Savior who reigns through sacrifice. His cross transforms everything—even you.

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, as we journey through this Holy Week, plant the cross of Your Son in our hearts. Grant us the grace to lay down our rebellion and receive the victory He won through suffering. By His light, dispel the darkness of our sin, and by His resurrection, lead us into new life. Transform us by Your Spirit to walk in faith and hope, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Dcn. Andrew S. Ames Fuller (aamesfuller@thenalc.org)

Tuesday, April 15, 2025 | Tuesday in Holy Week

Jeremiah 15:10–21; Philippians 3:15–21; John 12:20–26; Psalms 34 & 146 (AM); Psalms 25 & 91 (PM)

^{12:20} Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. ²¹ So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

– John 12:20–26 ESV



The Gospel reading from John 12 takes place on what we observed last Sunday as “*Palm Sunday*” or “*Sunday of the Passion*.” Jesus came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast and was welcomed by an adoring crowd of admirers. In the First Century, thousands and thousands of pilgrims from around the Roman world would go up to Jerusalem to keep the Passover. Many of these were observant “Hellenized” Jews who spoke Greek rather than the locals who conversed in a Hebrew dialect. However, there were also many Gentiles who came who were attracted to the Jewish faith. These “*Godfearers*,” as they were called, admired the faith and lives of Jewish people. They came as pilgrims seeking God. There was a special place for them on the outskirts of the Temple—the Court of the Gentiles.

Some of these God-fearing Gentiles wanted to “*see*” Jesus. This does not mean that they are like ancient paparazzi who want to catch a glimpse of a religious celebrity. Rather, they have heard about Jesus, and they are open to believing in Him. They want “*to see*” Him. They approach one of Jesus’ disciples, Philip, who then tells Andrew about the request. Interestingly, Philip and Andrew are Greek names, so that’s probably why they were asked.

When they tell Jesus about the request of the Greeks, Jesus offers a curious response: “*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*” We first heard Jesus speak about “the hour” way back in chapter two at the wedding of Cana in Galilee. When Mary informs her Son about the lack of wine at the wedding, Jesus says rather cryptically, “*My hour has not yet come,*” but now His hour has come. The hour of His Passion and glorification.

The absolute singular importance of this “hour” is signaled when Jesus adds, “*Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*” This is the hour in which Jesus must die alone. He must die and be glorified if both Israel and the Gentile world are to be reached with God’s truth. The truth is that in Christ we are never alone.

Jesus uses a key word in this passage. It’s a word rich in meaning; especially in John’s Gospel. That word is “*remain*” (menein). It is also translated as abide or dwell. It is a deeply relational word.

Listen again, “*Unless a grain of wheat fall to the earth and dies it remains/abides/dwells alone.*” God the Father does not want us to exist alone in a world bereft of His Presence. God does not want to leave us as orphans without a Father: alone in our joys, alone in our sorrows, alone in desperation, alone in our thinking, alone in life—and alone in death. The good news is that God sowed a seed in the death and resurrection of our Lord so that no one, Jew or Gentile—would ever be truly alone—abandoned to the cold indifference of a sinful suffering world. The grain, which is Christ, continues to bear much fruit.

Hear the Good News! In Jesus Christ you are not alone. You are loved and forgiven by the God who will never leave or forsake us.

Prayer: Lord, you call us to your service and continue your saving work among us. May your love never abandon us. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, one God, forever and ever. Amen. (*For All the Saints*, Volume I).

Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. Eric M. Riesen (eriesen@thenals.org)

Wednesday, April 16, 2025 | Wednesday in Holy Week

Jeremiah 17:5–10, 14–18; Philippians 4:1–13; John 12:27–36; Psalms 5 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 27 & 51 (PM)

^{12:27} “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹ The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. ³⁴ So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” ³⁵ So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.

– John 12:27–36 ESV



In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus is nearing the end of His journey to the cross. In Jerusalem, He will face betrayal, torture, humiliation, and death, so it is not surprising that today's text references death, pain, trial, tribulation, internal anguish, and judgment. Nothing we face in this life will ever compare with what Jesus endured for our sake. What is surprising to many is how Jesus faces the prospect of death, betrayal, and suffering. In obedience to His Father's will, Jesus is facing the prospect of incredible pain and yet He says, "*Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.*" Then a voice came from heaven: "*I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again*" (v. 27–28).

As I read the lesson today, I began to wonder how often I come to God with the wrong request. So often, when I am facing some trial, perhaps experiencing physical, emotional, or spiritual pain, I am guilty of only asking God to fix the problem.

I am in pain, Lord—fix it!

I am stressed, Lord—fix it!

I am struggling, Lord—fix it!

I am afraid, Lord—fix it!

But Jesus, in His prayer, doesn't ask God to "fix it," but rather He asks that His Father use it—and Him—for His glory.

You may currently be facing physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, or relational difficulties in your life. Problems that won't disappear with a few weeks of therapy, a new medication, or the next self-help book. You may be feeling overwhelmed by the pressures of life and feel as if God has not heard your prayers. I assure you that He has, but I would also like to encourage you to ponder the words of Jesus, "*Now my soul is troubled and what should I say?*" and consider asking God to not just fix the trial you are facing, but somehow use it for His glory.

Prayer: "*Teach us, Lord, to serve you as you deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labor and not to ask for any reward save that of knowing that we do your will. Amen*" (Ignatius Loyola).

Devotion written by the Rev. David F. Keener (dkeener@thenalc.org)

Thursday, April 17, 2025 | Maundy Thursday

Jeremiah 20:7–18; 1 Corinthians 10:14–17; 11:27–32; John 17:1–26; Psalms 27 & 147:13–21 (AM); Psalms 126 & 102 (PM)

^{10:14} So, dear friends, carefully avoid idol worship of every kind. ¹⁵ You are intelligent people. Look now and see for yourselves whether what I am about to say is true. ¹⁶ When we ask the Lord's blessing upon our drinking from the cup of wine at the Lord's Table, this means, doesn't it, that all who drink it are sharing together the blessing of Christ's blood? And when we break off pieces of the bread from the loaf to eat

there together, this shows that we are sharing together in the benefits of his body. ¹⁷ No matter how many of us there are, we all eat from the same loaf, showing that we are all parts of the one body of Christ.

– 1 Corinthians 10:14-17 TLB



A hymn written by John Foley, “One Bread, One Body” (*With One Voice* #710), best expresses the apostle Paul’s longing for our unity of Jesus’ message to the world. The chorus of Foley’s hymn is:

*One bread, one body, one Lord of all;
One cup of blessing which we bless,
And we, though many throughout the earth,
We are one body in this one Lord.*

The apostle Paul encourages those Christians living in Corinth to express the unity that Jesus prays for on the night of His betrayal (John 17). Jesus expresses to the Father, to His disciples, and to us that He longs for us to know and understand the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to know and understand that all people throughout the world have but one Lord, Jesus Christ. One faith in Him who saves and gives life, one Baptism into His death and resurrection, one Father of all people everywhere throughout every age and generation.

But it seems impossible. As Christians, we are not unified. We argue and fuss about the meaning of this passage and that, of who intercedes for us with the Father, of how Jesus is present in the Lord’s Supper, and it divides us Christians one from another. This points us to our need for our Savior. The unity of fellow Christians is not dependent upon our human will but is dependent upon the power and fulfillment of the Body of Christ. The unity comes from each Christian’s confession that we are not God, we are sinners, each of us, in need of Jesus Christ’s redeeming love and forgiveness. Our unity comes through and from Jesus, God’s own Son, delivered to death for our sin and raised to life for our justification. It is His Body broken for your life; it is His Blood poured out for your forgiveness. True for every believer in Christ Jesus. As you receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ this day, you are not only in unity with Christ but also with every Christian throughout the world.

Prayer: God our Father, Your Son Jesus prayed that His followers might be one. Make all Christians one with Him as He is one with You, so that in peace and unity we may carry to the world the message of Your love and salvation won for each; through the death and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord who lives in unity with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Adapted from the “Prayer for Unity,” *Lutheran Book of Worship*).

Devotion written by the Rev. Shelly D. Schultz (sschultz@tbenalc.org)

Friday, April 18, 2025 | Good Friday

Genesis 22:1–14; 1 Peter 1:10–20; John 13:36–38; Psalms 22 & 148 (AM); Psalms 105 & 130 (PM)

^{13:36} Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.” ³⁷ Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” ³⁸ Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.



Dear friends, greetings to all of you on this day we know as Good Friday. A day in which our sin and God's grace, both revealed in all of their fullness on that first Good Friday long ago, met on the cross in which our Lord Jesus willingly offered His life.

Tough realities to face today as we remember the path Jesus walked to the cross for us. To think that the one who died between two thieves was nailed there because of our sin. To think that the nails that were driven into His hands were ones that were nailed into His flesh by you and by me.

What happened on that first Good Friday involved both God and us—our sin and God's forgiveness, our failings and God's grace. In many ways, the events of that first Good Friday involved every man, woman, and child who ever lived. Universal responsibility for what happened on the cross that day. Universal implications as a result of what Jesus has done.

And yet, in just as real a way, what we're remembering today has very little to do with us and everything to do with God. Because what's being remembered on this Good Friday is something you and I could do nothing about, apart from watching and seeing and believing in the love and the goodness and the grace of our God.

God's saving work was finished when Jesus suffered and died on the cross. Everything that was necessary for our salvation was finalized when Jesus breathed His last breath.

Think back to the Garden, where this all started. There were actually two gardens in the story when Jesus was sacrificed for us. The first was in Eden, not long after Adam and Eve ate that forbidden fruit. The promise was that God would one day send one who would crush the serpent's head. And that's what happened when Jesus went to the cross. The power of Satan, the deceiver, was destroyed. The saving work of God for His people was complete. But not without its price. Not without its pain. A penalty needed to be borne. A price needed to be paid. A sacrifice needed to be offered.

And so it was in Jesus. Jesus took our sin and gave to us His perfect life. Jesus suffered and died, and you and I were set free.

Was it fair? Not at all. Was it right? It's hard to imagine that it was. But it was the plan and the purpose and the will of God that Jesus would go to His death, and you and I would be given life.

That's where the second Garden comes into play. In Gethsemane, not long after our Lord had shared His last supper with His disciples, and not long before He would go to the cross for us. Remember the story?

“If there be another way” (Jesus prayed), “then take this cup from me...yet, not my will but thine be done. Not what I would choose for myself, but what you would choose for me.”

Little wonder that the apostle Paul talks about Jesus as the Second Adam. Little wonder that the finishing work of Christ, the will for which He prayed in Gethsemane, was to undo the work and the will that happened in Eden.

I've always been fascinated by the fact that Jesus, even as He was being tried before Caiaphas and Pilate, that He remained silent and said nothing to defend His cause. Apart from a recognition that He was a king, and that His kingdom was not of this world, the only words we hear from Jesus were the ones He spoke from the cross, revealing once and for all who He was and what His life and death were all about.

Let me ask you a question. Have you ever been at a loss for words. Have you ever stood there watching with nothing left to say? You have, if you've stood at the cross. You have, if you've realized what happened on that first Good Friday happened because of and for you.

In the silence of the cross, God's word of promise becomes as loud and as clear as you'll ever find. As you read our Lord's final words, know that they were offered and spoken for you.

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do... Woman, behold your Son; Behold, your mother... Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise... I thirst... My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!... Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit... It is finished."

In the silence of the cross, nothing left to say, save that which was said for us by the one whose death has given us life.

Prayer: Lord God, Heavenly Father, we come to You this day, confessing our sin, acknowledging our need, repenting of the part we played in sending Jesus to the cross. We ask for Your forgiveness. We ask for Your grace. We ask that You pardon us from the part we played in nailing Your Son to the tree. We also come in thankfulness and in praise, knowing that what happened on that first Good Friday happened only by Your will and power. Thank You for Your goodness. Thank You for Your grace. Thank You for loving us, in Jesus, all the way to the cross. In His holy and precious name we pray. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. Daniel W. Selbo (dselbo@thenalc.org)

Saturday, April 19, 2025 | Holy Saturday

Alphege, Archbishop of Canterbury, Martyr, 1012

Olavus Petri, Priest, 1552; Laurentius Petri, Archbishop of Uppsala, 1573; Renewers of the Church

Job 19:21–27a; Hebrews 4:1–16; Romans 8:1–11; Psalms 43 & 149 (AM); Psalms 23 & 114 (PM)

^{19:25} For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; ²⁶ and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, ²⁷ whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

– Job 19:25–27a NRSV



Holy Saturday has always been a mystery to me. I mean, what does one do on the day between Jesus's death and resurrection? I bet the disciples were heartsick with grief and fear. But we know what happens next. So, usually, I find myself preparing for our great Easter celebration, both at church and at home. But it seems such an odd day to me. I mean, where is Jesus on this day?

The Apostles Creed tells us that before Jesus rose from the dead, he descended into hell! And St. Peter tells us that *"the gospel was proclaimed to the dead"* (1 Peter 4:6).

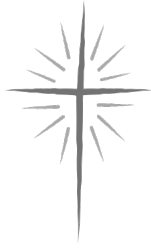
Why did Jesus descend into hell? To preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to those who had already died before Jesus was born. Like Job who long ago declared, *"I know that my Redeemer lives!"* And to all those who believed in God and had been waiting for the Messiah to come.

This puts me in mind of the Eastern Orthodox Icon of the resurrection. The icon is called the *"Anastasis"* or *"The Harrowing of Hell"* and it depicts the risen Jesus pulling Adam and Eve up out of the dark depths of hell into the light of heaven! Hallelujah!

So, if Holy Saturday is the day that Jesus devotes himself to saving Adam and Eve and Job and so many others who have been languishing below, perhaps it is a good day for us to spend some time meditating on these things and praying for those who have died, that they too might see God, their Redeemer, who descended into hell to break open the gates and set His people free.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, help us today to be mindful of all that our Lord has done for us, including descending into hell to save many who had been waiting for the Messiah and breaking down the gates of hell so that we may all be free. Prepare us to rejoice in the glorious victory of our Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Carol E. A. Fryer (cfryer@thenalc.org)



The **SEASON** *of* **EASTER**

God of life and light, we rejoice this day of Your promise of being made new.

The stone is rolled away, the tomb is empty, and Jesus is alive!

*Grant that we may live every day as if it's the day of resurrection —
without fear, without regret, but with open hearts and joyful minds.*

He is risen! Sin and death cannot hold us captive!

We bless You and praise You, O Lord, for Your mighty works. We praise the holy name of Jesus. Amen.



Sunday, April 20, 2025 | The Resurrection of Our Lord

Johannes Bugenhagen, Pastor, 1558

Exodus 12:1–14; Isaiah 51:9–11; Luke 24:13–35; Psalms 93 & 150 (AM); Psalms 136 & 117 (PM)

^{24:13} That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. ¹⁶ But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” ¹⁹ And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. ²² Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” ²⁵ And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

²⁸ So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹ but they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” ³³ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

– Luke 24:13–35 ESV

“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (v. 27).

He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Hallelujah!

On the road to Emmaus, two disciples, hearts heavy with sorrow, encounter a stranger. They share their despair over Jesus’ death, their hope dashed and their grief deep. Yet, unbeknownst to them, this “stranger” is the risen Christ, walking with them in their sorrow and bringing new life to their understanding of Scripture.

Easter is a season of revelation and joy, a time when God opens our eyes to the truth of Jesus’ victory over death. In this story, Jesus gently opens the disciples’ minds and hearts, explaining how all of Scripture points to Him. He shows them that His suffering was not a defeat but part of God’s redemptive plan, woven throughout history to bring eternal life.

The *Small Catechism* teaches us that the heart of Christian faith lies in believing that Jesus' death and resurrection reconcile us to God. Luther explains that, through Christ, we have the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Just as Jesus met the disciples in their doubt and led them to faith, He meets us in our doubts and guides us to deeper trust.

As we celebrate Easter, let us open our hearts to the risen Christ who walks with us still, opening our eyes to His presence in Scripture, in the sacraments, and in our daily lives. Like the disciples, may we recognize Him and feel our hearts burn within us, filled with the assurance that Jesus is alive.

Prayer: Risen Lord, walk with us in every step of our journey. Open our eyes to see You and to understand the wonders of Your Word. Fill our hearts with Easter joy, and help us to live in the light of Your resurrection. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Tony D. Ede (tede@thenalc.org)

Monday, April 21, 2025 | Easter Monday

Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, Teacher, 1109

Jonah 2:1–10; Acts 2:14, 22–32; John 14:1–14; Psalms 97 & 145 (AM); Psalms 124 & 115 (PM)

^{14:1} “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way to where I am going.” ⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

– John 14:1–6 ESV



Have you ever considered just how potent and consequential the word “place” is, or pondered the “way” to get to a place?

As Cheryl and I continue planning for our retirement years, our number one question is, “Where is the best *place* for us to retire?”

“If you ever want to go fishing, just let me know. I have a secret *place* where we can really catch the big ones.”

“Do you have a special *place* you go for your birthday?”

“Why don't we host the Easter dinner at our *place* next year?”

“I love my church. It is such a beautiful, sacred *place* to worship.”

The devotional text above comes from a section of John's Gospel some scholars refer to as the farewell discourses. In chapters 13–17, Jesus, knowing He is only hours away from His crucifixion, is preparing His disciples to continue His mission and ministry after His departure. John chapter 14 and portions of chapter

15 are from a section of the farewell discourse where Jesus makes a series of farewell promises to disciples. Specifically, our text contains the first two of the promises. These promises are to the disciples, and they are to us as well.

The first is the promise of a *place*. At the right time according to God's plan, our Lord Jesus will come and take us to the place He has prepared just for us. This will be a place of permanent abiding with our Lord Jesus in God's house. No more sin, no more illness, disease and suffering, no more evil, no more death, just being in the glorious presence of Christ for all eternity!

We have all been lost, confused or turned around at some point. Whether using maps, a person directing us, or our GPS, we have all experienced joy when we find the way to a particular place we are going. GOOD NEWS! In our Scripture today, we have the second promise: the *way* to God. Jesus says, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" Through His suffering and death on the cross, and His glorious resurrection on that first Easter Sunday, our Lord Jesus fulfilled the demands of God's law, and was victorious over the powers of sin, death, and the devil. Thus, Jesus becomes the *way* to restore a good and right relationship with our heavenly Father. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we know the *Way*, and are filled with hope, peace, joy, and love.

How privileged we are to know the *Way* to the *place* prepared for us! I can think of no better response to this good news than to thank, praise, serve, and obey almighty God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Christ is risen, He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, by Your death and glorious resurrection You have made a way to the place You prepared just for us. As we await that time when You will come and take us to that glorious place, fill us with Your Holy Spirit's power that with our whole lives we will joyfully thank, praise, serve, and obey You. We ask this in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. William E. White (bwhite@thenalc.org)

Tuesday, April 22, 2025 | Easter Tuesday

Stewardship of Creation

Isaiah 30:18–26; Acts 2:36–47; John 14:15–31; Psalms 98 & 146 (AM); Psalms 66 & 116 (PM)

^{14:15} "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

¹⁸ "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." ²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" ²³ Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

²⁵ "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father

is greater than I. ²⁹ And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. ³⁰ I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, ³¹ but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.

– John 14:15–31 ESV



I was blessed to serve in small town and rural settings in Iowa for the majority of my pastoral ministry. In rural ministry, where isolation and loneliness are a reality, the words of Jesus in John 14 offer a lot of comfort. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit as our Helper and Advocate, ensuring that we are never alone in our work. As rural pastors, we may feel distant from larger church networks or may even be hundreds of miles from our nearest colleague, but Christ Jesus assures us that His Holy Spirit is present with us, empowering us for service.

Jesus connects love with obedience in this passage: *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”* In our rural context, this means living out our love for Christ through service to our communities, from pastoral care to everyday acts of kindness, to helping at the local school, and being involved with town organizations. The Holy Spirit enables us to obey and live faithfully, even when the results of our work are not immediately visible.

Jesus also promises His peace: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.”* This peace is not an absence of challenges but a deep, abiding assurance that Christ is with us. In rural ministry, where resources and support may be scarce, we are given peace through the Holy Spirit, knowing that our work is meaningful, blessed, important, and needed in God’s eyes.

Finally, Jesus reminds us that He is returning. This promise of His return gives us hope, especially as the darkness of Good Friday is outshined by the glory of Easter morning. We serve with the expectation that Christ will come again to bring restoration and fulfillment to our labor. Light to darkness, life to death, hope to the hopeless.

In every season of ministry, Christ’s promise to send the Holy Spirit remains, offering guidance, strength, and peace for the journey.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for the gift of Your Holy Spirit. Help us to love You through our obedience and to find peace in Your presence. Strengthen us as we serve in rural communities, knowing You are always with us. May we reflect Your love to those around us and serve faithfully, awaiting Your return. In Your name, we pray. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Tony D. Ede (tede@thenalc.org)

Wednesday, April 23, 2025 | Easter Wednesday

Toyohiko Kagawa, Renewer of Society, 1960

Micah 7:7–15; Acts 3:1–10; John 15:1–11; Psalms 99 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 9 & 118 (PM)

^{3:1} Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. **2** And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful

Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. ³ Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. ⁴ And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.” ⁵ And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ But Peter said, “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” ⁷ And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. ⁸ And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. ⁹ And all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

– Acts 3:1–10 ESV



Joy.

Easter offers us an entire season in which to emphasize joy. After the prolonged darkness of a journey through Lent, the white and gold of the Easter season feels so light and free. In this time we rejoice that our Savior, once dead, is alive again! Not only alive but ascended to the right hand of the Father, never to die again, and always to live to make intercession for us! The Holy Spirit has come! Everything has become new again.

Joy jumps off the page from our Acts passage today. A man, once begging at the temple gate, unable even to get there without the help of others, encounters the power of the risen Jesus, and so he “*leaps up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God*” (v. 8).

This way of joy is told to us in the words of Jesus, as He tells His disciples, “*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love*” (John 15:9–10). “Abide” is such a curious word—imparting simultaneously a sense of resting and acting. It’s as if the act of abiding is to inhabit, in rest, the Lord himself! And this is just how we see Peter and John, these disciples of our Lord, once full of fear, but now full of faith, full of joy, offering to someone in need from “what they do have.” May we know, as Peter and John and as the lame man now healed, the joy of abiding in the risen Christ!

Prayer: Lord, thank You for Your words, Your call to abiding in You. Thank You for blanketing us in joy, that we may go forth into the world and share that joy with those around us. Help us to know the rest of abiding in the assurance of Your joy. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Dcn. Shannon R. Ames Fuller (samesfuller@thenalc.org)

Thursday, April 24, 2025 | Easter Thursday

Johann Walter (Walther), Musician, 1570

Ezekiel 37:1–14; Acts 3:11–26; John 15:12–27; Psalms 47 & 147:13–21 (AM); Psalms 68 & 113 (PM)

^{15:12} “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide,

so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

¹⁸ “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. ²¹ But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ Whoever hates me hates my Father also. ²⁴ If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. ²⁵ But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’

²⁶ “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

– John 15:12-27 ESV



As Jesus’ arrest drew near, He gave His disciples a command: “*Love one another as I have loved you.*” This love is not casual or convenient; it is sacrificial, modeled after the ultimate expression of love—Christ laying down His life for His friends. In this love, we see the unfolding victory of Easter: Christ’s victory is not only over sin and death but also over the barriers that divide and isolate us.

Christ doesn’t stop at love; He calls His disciples friends, a relationship that reflects intimacy and trust. He chooses them—and us—not merely to receive His love, but to bear His love so others may come to know Him and be transformed.

However, Jesus also warns of the cost of this calling. The world hated Him, and in turn the world will hate those who follow Him. Living out His love often means standing apart, enduring rejection, and bearing witness to His truth in a world that may resist it. Yet, we are not left alone. Jesus promises the Helper, the Spirit of Truth, who will empower us to live faithfully and bear witness to the victory of the cross and the empty tomb.

This Easter season, let us embrace Christ’s command to love, knowing that this love is both our witness and our victory. As we remain in His love, we are empowered to bear fruit and testify to the unfolding triumph of His grace.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You laid down Your life in love for us. Help us to abide in Your love, bear lasting fruit, and boldly witness to Your victory, Amen.

Devotion written by Steven Neaton (sneaton@thenalc.org)

Friday, April 25, 2025 | Easter Friday

St. Mark, Evangelist

Isaiah 52:7–10; Ephesians 4:7–8, 11–16; 2 Timothy 4:6–11, 18; Mark 1:1–15; 16:15–20; Psalms 2, 57 & 148 (AM);

Psalms 49 & 138 (PM)

^{4,7} And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

– Acts 4:7–12 ESV



Have you ever looked at your feet? I mean, *really* looked at your feet? Flat arches, thick toenails, bunions, calluses, crooked toes, dry heels, a road map of veins...Would you call them beautiful?

Now, imagine not being able to use your feet since birth. Remember the story of Peter and John’s encounter with a beggar at the Temple in Jerusalem in Acts 3: “*But Peter said, ‘I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!’ And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God*” (v. 6–8).

What a response! Walking and leaping and praising God! Those broken, ugly, and useless feet became beautiful and whole through the healing power of the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who is the cornerstone of our salvation. Can’t you just picture the joy of this beggar made whole and the shock of the temple priests?

The next time you take your socks off take a good look at your feet. OK, so maybe they are not foot-model beautiful. Maybe you cannot walk very well anymore, and leaping is out of the question. But through the power of faith in this same resurrected Jesus Christ of Nazareth we can still praise God with great joy for the gift of salvation, no matter what our feet look like.

Today is the Festival of St. Mark, Evangelist, a man who used his feet to carry the good news of the Gospel to the African continent. As the prophet Isaiah said, “*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news...*” (Isaiah 52:7).

Let us praise God today and every day with our whole being and share the good news that Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia! Walking and leaping are optional.

Prayer: Thank You, Jesus, for the gift of salvation through You and You alone. Help us to live out our faith always and to not shy away from praising You, the Father, and the Holy Spirit with our whole being. Be with us this day and every day as we walk in faith until that day when we see You face to face; in Your powerful name we pray, Amen.

Devotion written by Robin Harris (rharris@thenalc.org)

Saturday, April 26, 2025 | Easter Saturday

Isaiah 25:1–9; Acts 4:13–31; John 16:16–33; Psalms 92 & 149 (AM); Psalms 23 & 114 (PM)

^{16:25} “I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. ²⁶ In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; ²⁷ for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. ²⁸ I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.”

²⁹ His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! **30** Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.” ³¹ Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? ³² Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. ³³ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

–John 16:25–33 ESV

We are often filled with doubt. We abandon our trust and hope in Christ. We feel a need for evidence that God is real, that His promises can be trusted, and that He is truly for us. Lent is a time to be reminded that despite all the lies with which we are constantly confronted, we are desperate people. “*You are dust and to dust you shall return*” (Genesis 3:19).

Before Jesus interpreted His more difficult teachings for His disciples, He prefigured for them His death and resurrection: “*A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me*” (John 16:16). We do not see Jesus in the flesh in the same way as the apostles, but we do share with them the experience of waiting. We stand not between the cross and the resurrection, but between the ascension and Second Coming. During Lent we are given to join the apostles in anticipation of Christ’s suffering and death for us.

When we experience moments of doubt, when our trust migrates, when despair displaces hope, Jesus assures us that “*the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God*” (John 16:27). Jesus assures us “*that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33). In the midst of the trials of this life, we stand on the promise announced by the prophet Isaiah: “*He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces*” (Isaiah 25:8).

As the disciples rejoiced following Jesus’ resurrection appearances and ascension, so will we, on Easter Sunday and at Jesus’ Second Coming, declare: “*Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation*” (Isaiah 25:9). Let us remember the work of our Lord on our behalf in the words of the psalmist, “*For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy*” (Psalm 82:4).

Prayer: O God, in Your love You have given us gifts which our forebears neither knew nor dreamed of. Mercifully grant that we may not be so occupied with material things that we forget the things which are spiritual and thus, even though we have gained the whole world, lose our souls; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sunday, April 27, 2025 | Second Sunday of Easter

Isaiah 43:8–13; 1 Peter 2:2–10; John 14:1–7; Psalms 93 & 150 (AM); Psalms 136 & 117 (PM)

- ¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for | he is good,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever.
- ² Give thanks to the | God of gods,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever.
- ³ Give thanks to the | Lord of lords,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
- ⁴ who only | does great wonders,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
- ⁵ who by wisdom | made the heavens,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
- ⁶ who spread out the earth up- | on the waters,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
- ⁷ who creat- | ed great lights,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
- ⁸ the sun to | rule the day,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
- ⁹ the moon and the stars to gov- | ern the night,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
- ¹⁰ who struck down the first- | born of Egypt,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
- ¹¹ and brought out Israel | from among them,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
- ¹² with a mighty hand and a | stretched-out arm,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
- ¹³ who divided the Red | Sea in two,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
- ¹⁴ and made Israel to pass | through the midst of it,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
- ¹⁵ but swept Pharaoh and his army in- | to the Red Sea,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
- ¹⁶ who led his people | through the wilderness,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
- ¹⁷ who struck | down great kings,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
- ¹⁸ and slew | mighty kings,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
- ¹⁹ Sihon, king | of the Amorites,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
- ²⁰ and Og, the | king of Bashan,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
- ²¹ and gave away their lands for | an inheritance,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
- ²² an inheritance for Isra- | el his servant,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;

²³ who remembered us in our | low estate,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
²⁴ and delivered us | from our enemies,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever;
²⁵ who gives food | to all creatures,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever.
²⁶ Give thanks to the | God of heaven,*
for his mercy en- | dures forever.

– Psalm 136 LBW



*For his mercy endures forever. For his mercy endures forever. Say it aloud. Say it again. Then close your eyes and hear it in your heart, for this refrain is at the center of our faith. Psalm 136 recounts God’s work in creation (v. 5–9), in salvation (v. 10–22), and in upholding us in every moment of our lives (v. 23–25). Nothing has ever stopped His mercy, and nothing ever will. The opening and closing of this psalm (vv. 1, 26) are a call to thank and praise God for who He is, what He has done, and all that He promises to do forever. And the penultimate verses (v. 23–25) not only give us a hint as to how He will come to us in the flesh, a child in a manger, overcoming the powers of sin and evil, and feeding us with His very life, but they tell us that He is with us no matter how difficult this life can be, *for his mercy endures forever.**

The psalmist is telling us (and putting words in our mouths) to proclaim that the one who does great wonders is the same one whose mercy endures forever. These wonders, which include making the heavens and creating the sun, and the moon and the stars, are a sign of God’s mercy that are with us in each day. As God rescues Israel through the Red Sea and leads His people through the wilderness, more signs of His mercy are given. He puts an end to those who would seek to destroy those whom He loves, because His love is for all.

There is a way that when we pray this psalm, especially this sacred refrain, that we, too, come to receive His love as a sign that no matter what miseries befall us, what obstacles we endure in this life, that He, the God of gods, the Lord of lords, is with us (v. 2–3). Every one of His works are a revelation of His holy name. Thus, as we pray, our whole life becomes an exposition of His enduring mercy that sings like Handel’s Hallelujah Chorus: “*Kings of Kings and Lord of Lords, and he shall reign forever and ever, forever and ever...Hallelujah!*”

Prayer: O Lord our God, King of the universe, in Your wisdom You have created all that is and all that is to be, and in Your mercy You have made us in Your image and likeness. In this season of joy we pray that You would fill us with Your resurrecting love, the greatest sign of Your eternal mercy. We pray in the name of Jesus, who raised from dead, lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. Amy C. Schiffrin (acschiffrin@gmail.com)

