

Lenten Devotions

2017



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

Provided by your Board of Christian Stewardship

Introduction

This year we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the start of the Reformation when Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of Wittenberg Castle Church. To honor this historic event, we have organized our devotions into seven weekly categories starting with Ash Wednesday and ending on Easter Sunday. The first six categories parallel the major chapters of Luther's Small Catechism.

March 1 - 7	The Ten Commandments - God's Holiness
March 8 - 14	The Creed - God's Truth
March 15 - 21	The Lord's Prayer - God's Kindness
March 22 - 28	The Sacrament of Baptism - God's Grace
March 29 - April 4	Confession - God's Forgiveness
April 5 - 11	The Sacrament of the Altar - God's Presence
April 12 - 16	Holy Week and Easter Sunday

So as you read and meditate on the Scriptures involved, do so with these categories in mind so you may grow in the wisdom of the Lord.

Ash Wednesday, March 1

by Deacon Anthony Cavaliere

" . . .for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." Exodus 20:5-6

As we start our Lenten journey, we begin our reflections with the Ten Commandments. These commands contain the fundamentals of God's Law. They reflect His holiness and show us that He hates sin and abhors idolatry. He gives them to us so that we may obey Him and be holy as He is Holy, able to dwell in His eternal presence without fear. But we cannot obey.

The first commandment forbids the worship of any god in place of Him. Those who are disobedient to this command, indeed to any and all of the commandments that follow, cannot enter into the Lord's presence. And we all disobey; we all usurp the place of God when we fail to trust Him, when we think we know better than He what is right.

And the Lord knows this. And so He delights to extend mercy to thousands of those who obey His commands. How do we obey? By faith! He grants us the faith in Jesus, for Jesus obeyed perfectly on our behalf by going to the cross and dying for our sin. Our faith in Jesus as our righteousness enables us to enter into God's Holy presence. By the faith He grants us, we are in Christ Jesus deemed to be as holy as He is.



Thursday, March 2

by Deacon Lynn Waldeck

“For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you. The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers.”

Psalm 5:4-5

In Psalm 5:4-5 David wrote some pretty strong words about how our God feels about sin. In the ESV Bible Paul states that God “hates all evildoers.” Yes, God does hate sin and expects us to keep his commandments but because we are human and have a sinful nature, we are unable to keep from sinning. Does this mean that all hope is lost? No! In this Psalm David is praying against his enemies, he is feeling hopeless at this point but is at peace with God. In trying to keep the commandments we must remember that our actions matter and always to pray. The good pray, the wicked don't. Prayer is God hearing us. This verse encourages prayer. If we know our reason to ask for prayer we may look to God to favor it. If we know that our reason for our prayer is wrong, we cannot ask God to look down in favor of it.

None of us can keep the law found in the Bible. As Martin Luther explains in the Small Catechism, it is our sinful nature that makes it impossible from keeping God's commandments perfectly. Law is to there to teach us to try not to sin and keep the world in order. It is through Jesus that we have the Gospel. It is through Jesus that we are saved because of His death, that we have forgiveness of our sins. Jesus took our sins away and gave us the gift of eternal life.

Each day brings new challenges for all of us but each day gives us new hope to strive to be better. Start and end each day with prayer.

Friday, March 3

by Deacon Doug Brosky

“Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, you shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am Holy.” Leviticus 19:2

Did you ever participate in a Bible study on the book of Leviticus? Me neither. It’s a book full of regulations and procedures. What does any of that have to do with me? My God is the God of the New Testament. However if you look deeper, the book instructs us regarding how God has selected us to experience His holiness and to be an example of how we should live our lives.

Be holy? Hold it! Paul makes it clear “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” so how can God tell us to be holy? Only God is truly holy. We are all imperfect, so what is being said? When Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment, he responded we shall love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind.

God told Israel then, and us today, to reflect the character of our Holy God, a character of uncompromising love that is to be demonstrated in our love of our fellow man and sharing Christ, the very personification of our Holy God. May we reflect that love of a holy God as we share the love he has shown to us in this Lenten season and always.



Saturday, March 4

by John Mohlin

And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" Isaiah 6:3, 5

Have you ever wondered what God looks like? When I was a kid, I pictured a kindly old man with a long beard, wearing robes, and maybe holding a shepherd's crook or a staff. If you remember the *Oh, God!* movie series from the 70's, God looks a lot like George Burns. He resembled a loving grandparent who you could go to for advice and might buy you a toy if you were good.

But Isaiah paints a different view. In the previous verse, the seraphs are present before God with their eyes covered because they cannot look at the almighty God. Isaiah sees God and believes he shall immediately die. He knows from the Book of Exodus (33:20) that "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." He knows that the whole earth is full of God's glory. God is the creator of mankind, the universe, of everything that is.

Do we forget this? Do we sometimes conjure up our own image of what we want God to be? He may indeed have some grandfatherly qualities. He does love us, and when we go to Him in prayer, he may provide us with guidance. But we should also remember that He was, is, and always will be the omnipotent, almighty, Holy of Holies. In light of our sin, how can we do anything but, like Isaiah imagined, tremble before God and die? Fortunately, we can face God. Jesus Christ was born, suffered, and died to pay the price for our sin. Through faith in our Savior, we are blameless and holy. We may appear before God and live – eternally.

Sunday, March 5

by Denise Fields

“Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 5:20-21

The Law, the Ten Commandments, are God’s explicit commands for us to follow. When the Law increased the trespasses (sinfulness), it showed how guilty we are of violating God’s standards, whether by our actions or the evil desires of our heart. Sin leads to eternal death.

Yet where sin increases, grace abounds more. God’s grace is mediated through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for all our sins as the atoning sacrifice. “Abound” is a joyous word. It means great quantities, teeming, overflowing, flourishing, and well-supplied. How wonderful!

In the modern world, the Ten Commandments are somewhat overlooked. Yet they are the guardrails for our daily lives. Martin Luther, in his preface to the Large Catechism, stated that he recited the Ten Commandments daily and that the Holy Spirit is present in the reading, repetition and meditation of the Law.

Lord, during this Lenten season, remind us of our trespasses, yet let us focus on your abounding grace. May the glory of God’s grace shine brighter against the blackness of our sin. Amen.



Monday, March 6

by Deacon Betsy Lazarek

And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, 'Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations, who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.'"

Revelation 15:3-4

What an awesome day that will be when all the saints who have won the victory over the beast will raise their voices together and sing the Song of God's servant, Moses, and the Song of the Lamb. It appears these are two songs with a common theme. They show the unity of the old Covenant and the New Covenant in redemption. The Song of Moses, I believe, alludes to Exodus 15:1-19, where Moses thanks God for deliverance from the Egyptians at the Red Sea.

Place yourself in history for a moment. Consider first of all the Israelites, standing on the shore of the Red Sea, with the pursuing Egyptians vanquished by the mighty hand of God. The blood of the Passover Lamb has spared the Israelites divine retribution. The power of the one true and living God has delivered them from bondage. They pause and raise their voices in the Song of Moses: "I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted... (Ex. 15:1-2)

Now, we see in John's first-century vision, all the over comers standing in the very presence of God singing the song of Moses. But they will also be singing the Song of the Lamb because, just as they know that the blood of the Passover Lamb in Egypt spared and redeemed them, the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, spared and redeemed Jewish and Gentile believers alike from the consequences and bondage of their sins. Jesus, by His precious blood, cleansed them from all unrighteousness, washing their robes white.

Oh, yes! What an awesome day that will be when you and I, victorious in Christ, together with all the saints will be singing God's praises in great thanksgiving for all He has done

Tuesday, March 7

by Deacon Anthony Cavaliere

“Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane. . .”

1 Timothy 1:8-9a

Paul wrote these words to Timothy, his spiritual son and ministry partner who was leading the work in the church at Ephesus. His purpose was to encourage and guide him to persevere in the work of ministry in the midst of difficult circumstances. False teachers had arisen and were leading many astray with false doctrines. These teachers promoted a wide range of beliefs designed to make the Christian holier through self-denial and keeping the Jewish law. Paul acknowledged that the law of God, embodied in the Ten Commandments, is good and of vital importance but no one is saved by keeping it. In fact, no one can keep the law perfectly and so no one can be as holy as God.

The law is good because it reflects God’s righteousness and serves to guide us into holy living but it also leads us to seek the mercy of God. The law leads us to Christ Jesus who came to earth for the sole purpose of saving sinners. Those who are in Christ have been changed completely and no longer live with their focus on sin and self. Rather they are so grateful for what Christ has done, that they go out and tell others. No one who has encountered the Lord Jesus Christ in repentance and faith can come away unchanged.

Wednesday, March 8

by Fred von Barga

‘But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you have learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through Jesus Christ.’ 2 Timothy 3:14-15

In Paul’s second letter to Timothy, Paul is reminding Timothy to keep the strong faith of his mother and grandmother, which Timothy was taught as a child. Paul is concerned that Timothy’s faith is wavering as persecution from Rome has increased. Paul’s own statement of faith to Timothy is strong and inspiring. He is in prison, suffering mightily, yet he will not renounce Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. Paul encourages Timothy (and us) to remain steadfast in the one True Faith in order to obtain salvation through Jesus Christ.

Paul knows that his suffering is a result of proclaiming his faith in Jesus Christ. Paul willingly suffers knowing that if we “die in Him we also live in Him.” Paul’s words are encouragement to us all knowing that through life’s many trials, Jesus Christ is always with us and that no matter how difficult, our final reward is eternal life with Jesus.



Thursday, March 9

by Linda Hoeberlein

*“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these **last days** he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”*

Hebrews 1:1-2

“**Long ago,**” in *Old Testament* times, God appointed prophets who would be His mouthpiece to the people of God. They were chosen by God to be His messengers of truth, revealing His nature making known His laws, calling the people to obedience and sincere worship, warning of Divine judgment upon sin, foretelling future events willed by God, foretelling the coming of the Messiah, and recording the history of God’s dealings with men and the Word of God in the Holy Scriptures.

Moses prophesied in Deuteronomy 18:17-18: “And the LORD said to me, ‘I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.’”

In these “**last days,**” in the *New Testament* age, Jesus is that Prophet, Priest and King. The Word of God – Messiah Jesus – became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. Jesus came to fulfill the Law. He did for us what we could not do for ourselves by paying the price for our sin and laying down His life for us at the cross.

Many prophets were killed as a result of speaking God’s truth. Jesus, too, was killed for speaking truth – for being the Truth. In these “**last days,**” we who have received the truth of God’s Word must share with others what we have seen, heard and believed by faith.

“Word of God speak, would You pour down like rain, washing my eyes to see Your Majesty, to be still and know that You’re in this place. Please let me stay and rest in Your Holiness. Word of God speak.”

Friday, March 10

by John Haines

That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. Romans 10:9-10

There are two type of Confession: confession of our sins and confession of our faith. It’s pretty easy to say “I’m sorry.” Words that come from our lips are meaningless. But confessing and acknowledging our sins to the Lord, is another matter. That “I’m sorry” has to come from the heart. Words from our hearts are cleansing and soul saving. It is through the act of confession and repentance that will we receive God’s absolution and forgiveness.

Confession of our faith, on the other hand, should come from our lips. It can come in the form of what we say, in the form of prayer, or in the form of song. It should also be evident in what we do, what we think and how we treat others. Confession of our faith is an outward expression of the love that God has put in our hearts.

It is important therefore, that we dig deep within our souls to ask God to forgive our sins. Even when we have made bad choices, again. Upon your earnest effort to repent, God will stand by you in your most difficult hour. Why? Because He loves YOU. Yes! YOU.

So whether it is at that appropriate point in the worship service or at a moment when you realize you just failed God’s Word, take a breath, acknowledge your mistake and ask God to forgive you. Pray for strength and *Praise the Lord!*



Saturday, March 11

by Kim Merz

*“Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation;
for a law will go out from me,
and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples. Isaiah 51:4*

Listen... are you listening? Are you paying attention? Isaiah is calling out to his people, his nation, to all of us really, to pay attention and watch for the law which is to come.

To be honest, I struggled with this verse. I thought on it, I prayed about it, and dug into my Bible about it. We have already been given the Ten Commandments so what “law” could there be that we need to be made aware of? What “justice” can be a light for us?

I do believe the “law” that Isaiah is talking about in the Old Testament is actually grace and salvation that was made ours when Jesus died on the cross for us. The old has passed away – the old law – and the new law, love, grace and salvation – is the justice, our light. Jesus paid the price so that our “justice” is not one of eternal damnation, but of salvation. Galatians 3:11 says “Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” We are saved through Jesus’ blood and justified by our faith in God.

I may not fully understand Isaiah’s words, but I do understand that Jesus died for my sins and His act of love on my behalf has justified me in my Father’s eyes. I pray during this Holy Season that we listen and pay attention with our hearts and our minds, as we fully contemplate the price that was paid for us when Jesus went to the cross.

Sunday, March 12

by Deacon Doug Brosky

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. John 3:16-17

How many of you have you seen at an NFL game someone holding up a poster with just John 3:16 on it and nothing else? While I cannot get into the head of the guy holding the sign, I wonder if it's not a safe bet he did it that way to cause the reader to wonder what that is about, and to look up the verse.

The verse provides a foundational statement about our relationship with God “whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life,” and then verse 17 says “that the world might be saved through him.” These two verses tell us to “believe in him” so that we will be “saved through him.”

These words spoken to Nicodemus by Jesus are about faith, our accepting the promise of spending an eternity with God, not because of anything we could do to make us right with God, but rather what God has done for us by sending his Son to eliminate that gap created by our sin. It is a free gift that we must reach out and accept in faith.

John 3:16

Monday, March 13

by Meredith Canavor

“But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, KJV

“Called by Name.” Bursting through the door my daughter couldn’t wait to show me her new necklace engraved with those words. Excitedly she explained her school had chosen it for their theme that year, inspiring students that God gifted them with unique talents and abilities to reach others in Christ and encouraging them to have a personal relationship with our Lord and Savior. Sharing a common theme, the reference text also mirrors the school’s motto in its profound brevity. This powerful passage captures the very essence of our faith in just a few short lines. We come to know the Trinity - Father Creator, Spirit Counselor, and Savior Christ. We learn salvation comes through baptism and belief. We celebrate that the Word is the truth that sets us free.

When I was growing up, our minister preached a sermon on the irrelevance of “I Found Him” bumper stickers. He was adamant that God was never lost and of our inability to find Him. Instead, he used Hunt’s “Light of the World” painting of Jesus standing knocking at the door to our hearts to underscore the truth that He finds us. He calls us. Through baptism, scripture, worship and communion throughout life and before we were born, He calls us. “The very hairs of your head are all numbered.” (Luke 12:7).

Today, during Lent, and always, let us give thanks for God’s most gracious gift of salvation and for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ from whom we draw strength and with whom our voices of praise are amplified. God is calling; don’t let Him go to voicemail.



2 Thessalonians 2:13

Tuesday, March 14

by Scott Galdo

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,” 1 Peter 1:3-4

Death. It is something I do not like to think about, and I bet you don't either. However, there is death every day in our lives. Whether it is a family member or a close friend that passed away, watching a show on television, watching the news or reading the paper, death is around us. We cannot escape it.

One of my favorite hymns is “Abide with Me.” (LSB 878) When my grandmother passed away I was searching for hymns for her funeral service and I came across this one. I started reading it and it talks about death and dying. Did I really want to sing this at the funeral? No, but I read on. When I got to the fifth and the sixth verses and felt a peace immediately come over me. The fifth verse reads, “I fear no foe with Thee at hand to bless; Ills have no weight and tears no bitterness. Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory? I triumph still if Thou abide with me!”

Yes, my grandma has just passed away and I was upset, but I was reminded that because of Christ's death and resurrection, she was now living with Him in Heaven. Things were not looking great on that first Good Friday. Jesus was hanging on that cross dying. He was buried and everyone thought that was it. But then on that third day, Jesus rose from the dead so that we might have eternal life with Him. He conquered sin and death. That was the victory.

My grandma is celebrating that victory today up in heaven. We all will eventually. Whenever I sing this hymn, I am reminded of her and I have a hard time making it through the last two verses. Even if I am not able to sing it, I will close my eyes and listen and I know that Jesus is there and all will be good.

I leave you with the sixth verse,

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies.
Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

Death and the grave did not win. Jesus did, and because of that victory, we did also.

Wednesday, March 15

by Erika Skoch

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." Ezekiel 36:25-26

"What a sweet baby. She looks so innocent!" How many times have we heard such a phrase? As much as we would like to think that each person begins life innocent and spiritually unblemished, we are all born plagued with what Luther calls the, "Old Adam," in us: original sin. That original sin separates us from God. Many live their entire lives looking for a way to free themselves from mistakes and problems, or seeking some sort of spiritual enlightenment. However, the passage from Ezekiel gives us a simple solution: the waters of baptism. From the moment that water is sprinkled on us in the name of the Triune God, the Holy Spirit cleanses us of the sin cast down from generation to generation. Luther explains that in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, the water combined with the word of God indeed brings us the new life in the Holy Spirit. During the season of Lent, we should especially reflect upon the fact that through the waters of baptism and Jesus' death and resurrection, we are not only freed from the bondage of sin, but we will also receive the gift of eternal life with our Lord in heaven, "without any merit or worthiness in me." Luther's Explanation of the First Article of the Apostles Creed

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for cleansing me through the waters of baptism. Help me to share Your saving message of grace with others during this season of Lent. Amen.

Thursday, March 16

by Doris Gargan

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." Matthew 7:7-8

What a beautiful verse to tell us of the kindness available to all of us from God. But we must remember that God doesn't just give us anything we ask for. He gives us what He knows is best for us. Like a parent and child relationship, a good parent will not just give their child anything and everything they ask for. They will consider first whether the request is what is best for the child. If it isn't, they will deny the request altogether and/or replace it with something that is better for the child. When we don't receive what we've asked God for, do we accept it wholeheartedly or do we pout, complain, and/or throw a temper tantrum like a child who doesn't get their way? We would frown upon that action by a child and try to teach them to be more understanding when we deny their request. We should expect no less from ourselves. We need to be praying for understanding, patience, wisdom, and love. We also must remember to seek God's will in all that we do. As we learn to know God better as a loving Father, we learn to ask for what is good for us, and then He grants it.

Prayer: Loving Father, thank You for only giving us what You know is best for us. Although we may not always understand Your ways immediately, over time and with prayer and the understanding we receive through Your Word, we know that Your ways are best for us. Thank you for the many blessings in my life. Amen.



Friday, March 17

by Deacon Peg Ruhs

“Give thanks to the Lord for He is good. His faithful love endures forever.”

Psalm 136:1

What a beautiful promise! In our everyday lives most of the things we own, use, and surround ourselves with are disposable or replaceable. Yet, at the same time, we consider them absolute needs. However, our most important need in life is to love and be loved.

Sometimes we think of love as something romantic, or demonstrative, like a nice big hug, a warm handshake, a soft kiss, a kind deed. But love is more than a feeling. Love is acceptance, trust, faith, and security.

Lent is a perfect time for us to give thanks to God for His perfect love. The love that brought Him to earth in the person of Jesus to pay for our sins and grant us forgiveness, opening the door to eternal life with Him. So let us “Give thanks to the Lord for He is good. His faithful love endures forever.”



Saturday, March 18

by Deacon Anthony Cavaliere

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.” James 1:1-6

James calls the church to pray for wisdom in times of suffering and persecution. We must not give up or lose heart. The incentive and stimulus to prayer is God Himself. He is faithful and true. He is always reliable, unchangeable and good. We can always trust Him to answer our prayers even if we do not agree with the answer. He will always do what is right, always enable us to persevere in the midst of suffering, always grant us wisdom.

The wisdom He grants is faith in Jesus Christ, our sure rock, our firm foundation in the midst of chaos. Such wisdom is foreign to our contemporary culture which rejects our loving God for gods that are capricious, aloof, powerless or vindictive. And so the world seeks for firm anchors in philosophy, fame, sensuality and wealth, things which will not satisfy. People seek wisdom in astrology and mystical religions which put the self at the center. Our God is the center of life. He has made all there is. He does not change. Only He can provide sure and certain wisdom if we are humble enough to know we need Him and ask for it.

Sunday, March 19
by Marite Hennessey

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” Romans 8:26

In this verse from Romans, we are reminded that as members of the faithful, we have been endowed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, who “helps us in our weakness.” The verse continues by speaking about prayer. As followers of Christ, we are expected, moreover, privileged, to bring our thanks, praise and concerns to the Lord in prayer. However, we are reminded that in our human condition, unable to fully understand the ways of God, “we do not know what to pray for as we ought.” The verse concludes “but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” This is to say that the communication (groans) between the Spirit and the Father is in a form incomprehensible to us, but the Holy Spirit knows our heart, hears our prayers and intercedes with God the Father so that our prayers are properly communicated, aligned with the Father’s Will and received by Him. As the Triune God, Jesus intercedes for us with the Father from His place at the right hand of the Father, and the Holy Spirit intercedes for us from within our hearts.

Many times, we may fail to pray, believing we can handle everyday life, just calling on God when we are in a “fix.” Yet Jesus prayed to God the Father, even depended on Him for all things. Or we may feel that since we are told that, “we do not know how we ought to pray” why pray at all? Yet we are charged to pray in all circumstances. It needn’t be eloquent: we rest in the assurance that the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf with the Father who hears us.

When we do not receive the answer or blessing we are expecting, it is not that the Father did not hear our prayer or that He does not care. God hears our prayers, but they are not always answered in our timing or always according to our understanding or plan. Rather, they are answered in God’s time, according to His will and His perfect plan.

God’s kindness to His children is ever apparent! He is ever listening, providing us with help and always answering. Great is God’s faithfulness to us!

Monday, March 20

by Helen Peter

“When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.” Psalm 91:15

Psalm 91 is about God’s protection in the midst of danger. He doesn’t promise that we will be free from danger, but He does promise His help. God first loved us and because we loved and acknowledged Him by faith, we are told in verse 14 that He will rescue and protect us. He also tells us that we can call upon Him and He will answer.

How do we call upon Him? Through prayer! He is just a prayer away, always ready to help us in time of need. He never promised us a rose garden, but He will deliver those who honor Him. It is by His love, mercy and kindness, through our Lord Jesus Christ our Savior that we obtain salvation.

The dictionary describes the one who has kindness, as having tenderness, understanding, unselfishness, is merciful and self-sacrificing. How blessed we are to have a God just like this.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your many acts of kindness toward us and that we can, with confidence, take everything to you in prayer. Amen



Tuesday, March 21

by Lorraine Fogarty

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Titus 3:4-6

Paul, in his letter to his young fellow worker Titus, stresses that Titus emphasize and reassure his congregation of God's grace and loving kindness. The people must know that God's kindness appeared through Jesus Christ's suffering and death on the cross for our sins enabling us to be justified and accepted into God's kingdom as His children and heirs of eternal life in heaven, though undeserving we are. By trusting in God's kindness we now need not fear death.

We must continually thank and praise God for this, the greatest of gifts. Though we were foolish, disobedient, enslaved to sinful desires, it is the kindness of God our Savior, His mercy and love for mankind that is indeed the most complete picture of kindness we will ever know. It is this promise that should lead us to God, not the fear of His wrath. It is God's kindness that should cause us to turn away from our sinful self and want to lead a life that is pleasing to Him. Though God's wrath and judgment are real, we should turn away from our wicked ways out of love and gratitude to God for His loving kindness. We now have access and can speak to God through prayer, asking forgiveness for our sin and knowing that He will hear and answer our prayer requests according to His will. By giving us the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, we now have everything we need to live a life that pleases God. We must in turn go the "extra mile" to show others more kindness than they deserve, just as God did for us. We pass on this kindness because God has been so kind to us.

Wednesday, March 22

by Nancy Weisgerber

"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." Romans 6:4

As I read Romans 6:4 I was reminded of my own baptism when I was in Israel over 40 years ago. I can't really say why it was so important to me, but I am so glad I did it.

The night before we were to be baptized, I couldn't sleep. I felt uneasy; I couldn't understand why. This is not something everyone gets a chance to do. After I read about Jesus' baptism, I felt better and I knew it would be alright.

Then I realize that most people are very private about how we feel about God and how we think He feels about us. We don't talk about it as much as we should. I wanted to be different: reborn. So you see, I went into this with more apprehension than excitement.

The next day, while standing in the cold water, I knew it was right; I didn't feel any uneasiness. After the Pastor baptized me and I came out of the water I felt heat radiate out of every part of my body. I felt warm all over. What that was I now know to be the presence of the Holy Spirit. I knew now that my life in Christ wouldn't be private anymore. I knew I was a new person, able to share my love for Him with anyone now.

Lord, help me to use every experience and opportunity of life as a means of growing in your love and guidance. Amen.



Thursday, March 23

by Jane Kramer

“And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.’” Mark 16:15-16

“I was baptized, happy day;
All my sins were washed away.
God looked down on me and smiled.
I became His own dear child.”

What a privilege it is to hear the enthusiasm of a class of four-year-olds singing that song!

Would that daily we all are as thrilled to be a baptized child of God. As the children sing this song at home I pray it leads to family conversations about baptism. Last fall the baby brother of one of our students was brought to faith by baptism, and we teachers had the blessing of participating as readers during that sacrament.

Some fifty years ago a vicar at Trinity had a favorite daily greeting, “Remember your Baptism!”

And isn't that what Martin Luther means in the catechism when he encourages us to begin and end the day in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit while making the sign of the cross? Remembering our baptism means that because of God's grace in baptism we are loved, forgiven, redeemed and sanctified as God's forever child every day of our life. I like to read all the words of Hymn 594 to remind myself of the joy of baptism.

"I am baptized into Christ; I'm a child of paradise"

Remember your Baptism!

Friday, March 24

by Moses Saxon

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

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

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

Firstly, the symbolism of baptism gives us the assurance of New Birth. In verse three, Jesus tells Nicodemus, *very truly I tell you no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again*. And again in verse five he defines more clearly what it means to be born again when he adds, you must be born of water and the Spirit. This is the assurance of New Birth.

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

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



Saturday, March 25

by Dolores Entenmann

“...having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.” Colossians 2:12

Luther tells us in the Small Catechism that “the benefits of baptism are that it works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this as the words and promises of God declare, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

Colossians 2:12 gives us two benefits in this verse. The first blessing is accomplished through the joint burial in the baptismal pouring of the water or immersion. The water represents our burial with Jesus. It is the burial of our old carnal life: the Old Adam. Our sins are forgiven and though we were born into sin, we are no longer slaves to sin and are delivered from the curse of the law. Along with the Word of God, it is the washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit.

The second blessing comes from being “raised up also with Christ,” for just as He was raised up into heaven by the power of the Father, we also can rely on the fellowship of the bodily resurrection of Christ, which by faith has been given to us by God, and not of our own doing, but through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

By baptism we have been made to share in Christ’s death and resurrection; and as fellow heirs in the kingdom of God, we have a new life in Christ Jesus.

To God Be the Glory... Amen!



Sunday, March 26

by Kathy Krass

“John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” Luke 3:16

I was baptized – Happy Day
All my sins were washed away.
God looked down on me and smiled;
I became His own dear child.

And so my four-year-old students sing. In childlike simplicity they know and believe that through these waters they have come to know their best friend – Jesus.

In Jesus we, and these children, have been embraced by the Father and filled with His Spirit. These children have no qualms in telling others that Jesus is their friend. Or, much to many an adult’s dismay, break out with Jesus “songs” in public places.

Oh, that we as adults were fired with the flame of the Gospel’s grace as these young children!

John the Baptist challenged the people of his day as well as the religious factions to “Repent! Be baptized!” And receive the Holy Spirit from the Messiah, Jesus. And so John still challenges us today!

We praise and thank you, Father, for your grace and mercy showered on us in the waters of Baptism.

We praise and thank you, Lord Jesus, for the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit at Baptism who enables us to come to you and the Father.

We praise and thank you, Holy Spirit for gifting us with your mighty power that we might spread the news of God’s redeeming love and grace to our family, our neighbors, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Remain with us, O Triune God, that we may know and feel your grace, love and power in our lives.

Monday, March 27

by Mary Izzo

And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Hebrews 10:21-22

I always feel great joy whenever there is a baptism during our worship services at Trinity. What a great day this is for the baby, or child, or adult who is being baptized.

I feel great joy because when I see parents presenting their child, I think about my parents bringing me to be baptized. I remember how I brought my children to be baptized because I love them so much and I wanted them to have the amazing blessings of baptism too.

What are those blessings? Martin Luther wrote that, along with the word of God, baptism works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil and gives eternal life to all who believe this. This is why Jesus commands us to baptize.

Forgiveness of sins! Rescue from death and the devil! Eternal life! I am reminded of this every time I see another baptism and I am filled with gratitude. Hallelujah!

Dear Father in Heaven, thank You for sending your Son Jesus to save us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Thank you, Jesus, for baptism, so we can draw near to You with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Holy Spirit, keep us steadfast in Your Word and lead us to everlasting life. Amen

Tuesday, March 28

by Walter Timoshenko

“And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” 1 Peter 3:21 NRSV

In the prior verse, Peter spoke of the ark as being the means by which God saved righteous people in Noah’s time. In this verse, Peter states that baptism “now saves you - through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Seemingly drawing a parallel between the “saving” qualities of baptism as well as the flood and the ark, Peter has updated redemption via water baptism in the name of the resurrected Jesus. While the flood waters removed washed wickedness from the earth, the ark saved Noah and his family from destruction and delivered them into a new communion with God. So, too, Christian baptism, through water, faith and God’s Word takes a new soul into a bright and God-centered life as it washes away sin and opens the door for a “good conscience” and salvation – a rebirth by the Holy Spirit. As Martin Luther wrote in his Small Catechism in answer to the question “How can water do such great things?” – “It is not the water indeed that does them, but the Word of God which is in and with the water, and faith, which trusts such Word of God in the water. For without the Word of God the water is simply water and no baptism. But with the Word of God it is a baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost...”



Wednesday, March 29

by Elaine Koop

"But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Psalm 32:5

It's hard to admit, for most of us, when we have done something wrong. It usually takes some soul searching to recognize our wrongdoing and courage to ask someone to forgive us and hope that they will. Often most of us try to explain away our transgression by saying, "I'm sorry, but . . ." and offer some excuse.

It's even more difficult for us to acknowledge and repent of our sins to God. Oh, yes, we say the words pretty easily each Sunday during the Confession. "...we have sinned against you in thought, word and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone ..."

But, how much time do we spend truly examining our heart? Luther's catechism asks "... have you been disobedient, unfaithful or lazy? Have you been hot tempered, rude or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds?"

Although the devil tempts us to feel differently, after an honest confession of our sins, God our Father not only lovingly forgives us but remembers our sin no more! An incredible and undeserved blessing!

As difficult as that is for us to believe, it is true. The Bible tells us so!

FORGIVEN

Thursday, March 30

by Janice Gentles Jones

For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

Psalm 51:3-4

There's an old saying that 'confession is good for the soul.' Well, I think King David would agree. Imagine the pain he must have felt when the prophet Nathan told him his sin was considered "evil" in God's sight. Here you have a man who loved and praised God deeply, yet he was burdened with a sin that was, as he put it, "*ever before me.*" So, what was David's response? First, he asked God for mercy (Psalm 51:1) and then he acknowledged his sin, fully understanding he deserved God's judgment.

David's approach to God gives us an example of how we can handle sin in our life. No matter what our sin, when we come with a repentant heart, we're assured of God's "*steadfast love and abundant mercy.*" (Psalm 51:1) That's the beauty of our relationship with God. With this assurance, we can remove any resistance to admitting we have sinned. It's hard sometimes confessing that we've done wrong, but we must not forget that God is merciful and wants to *wash away all our iniquity and cleanse us from our sin.* Psalm 51:2

In addition to confessing our sins, receiving God's forgiveness is important to *restoring the joy of His salvation.* (Psalm 51:12) *Our God does not despise a broken and contrite heart.* (Psalm 51:17) He uses it to *create in us a pure heart and renew a steadfast spirit within us.* Psalm 51: 10 What a wonderful God we serve!

Friday, March 31

by Richard Straub

So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

Matthew 5: 23-24

These words of Jesus come from his Sermon on the Mount. His message is one of relationships, self-examination and reconciliation. Coming to church every Sunday may provide personal comfort and a sense of spirituality. However, our relationship with God is not that simple.

In a sermon delivered by Martin Luther in 1523 he states “Here you see what God demands of us, that He does not want anything done even for Himself unless it be done in love, after the proper relation has been established with one’s neighbor.”

We must examine our lives and the quality of our relationships with others. Without living His word daily, which includes actively seeking to identify and reconcile the difficult or troubled relationships in our lives, we cannot begin to have a true and complete relationship with God. What Jesus is providing is a clear directive to make reconciliation with others a priority. We cannot ignore or dismiss these relationships as unfortunate. To live a life that is ready for a full and meaningful relationship with God every effort must be made to right wrongs, address misunderstandings and constantly seek to maintain healthy relationships with all those that are a part of our lives.

Saturday, April 1

by Tammy Mazza

Jesus said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead. Luke 24: 46-47

The Lord Christ, our Creator had accomplished salvation and had risen from the dead. He is the Lord of our lives, and so this means that we believe Him and all He said and taught. Although God forgives, as sinners it is difficult for us to always forgive. We must never forget He sent His only Son to save us from our sins. He made us to be imperfect, but we should honor him by aiming to forgive those, as He has forgiven us.

Sunday, April 2

by Paul Viole

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:8-9

The truth, in accurate fashion, reveals my true selfish nature which, in the cold light of day, is hard to acknowledge and harder to accept. How many wrongs do I commit, how much hurt do I inflict, all in pursuit of misguided goals or ideals which, after they are attained, prove to be vainglorious and, many times, unsatisfying?

How many good deeds will buy me a ticket to a stairway to heaven? The truth is, I can climb no stairway to heaven. Can I deny my sinful nature, or turn selfish behavior into something more in line with the way the rest of the world is, taking a "C'est la vie!" attitude? The truth is there is no denying my sinful nature.

According to 1 John 1:8-9, my hope is to acknowledge and confess my sins to God, face the truth, confront the selfishness of my sinful nature and ask God for forgiveness.

This is my simple prayer of hope and gratitude:

*"Dear Lord, I cannot change my sinful behavior.
I know that my efforts fall short of my expectations.
Help me to be who you want me to be.
Help me to go where I can do the most good.
Thank you for your gift of salvation."*



Monday, April 3

by Jeannine Cichinsky

"He who conceals sin does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." Proverbs 28:13

During this season of Lent it is important for us to remember that this is a time for preparation through prayer, penance, atonement and confession of sin; for the death and resurrection of Christ, who suffered and died for the forgiveness of our sins.

So how do we know God will forgive us? 1 Timothy 2:4 tells us that "God wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth."

How do we obtain God's forgiveness? In his Small Catechism, Martin Luther explains: That God offers forgiveness of sin only through the gospel... "the Good News that we are free and saved eternally because of Christ's keeping the law and His suffering and death for us." And the Gospel teaches us what God has done and still does for us and our salvation.

Through the sacrament of baptism: for Acts 2:38 states, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sin."

It is also important that we confess all sin, even those we are unaware of. Because even though God knows our sins, He wants us to come to Him in confession and repentance. Luther tells us that "Confession should be made to God first because sin is always against God's Law."

1 John 1:9 explains "that if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." And St. Augustine writes, "In failing to confess Lord, I would only hide you from myself and not myself from you."

And we receive forgiveness through the sacrament of Holy Communion. We read in Matthew 26:28 the words of Jesus, "This is the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin." So by receiving this sacrament we remember how Jesus suffered and died in order for us to receive God's forgiveness of our sins and everlasting life.

We pray: *Lord, I confess that I sin every day. I hear you calling through your Word to repent. I come asking your forgiveness. And thank you for saving me from sin through the death and resurrection of your beloved son Jesus. Amen*

Tuesday, April 4

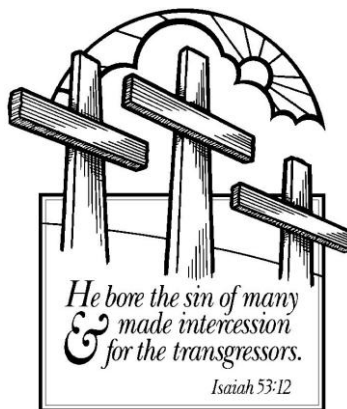
by Lauren Straub

“Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.” Isaiah 1:18

In this Old Testament Book, God reveals to Isaiah what he sees concerning those living in Judah and Jerusalem: their way of living, the way they “practiced” their religion, their sinful ways. This verse from the Old Testament relayed God’s prophesy of Jesus’ coming and His taking on all of our sins; the forgiveness of our sins; the promise of Easter.

The same message applies today. For those of us who believe that our sins have been forgiven and we have been saved through Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection, we still need to “see reason.” While we know we cannot live a sinless life, we must remember the tremendous sacrifice made on our behalf, and do our best to follow God’s directives, to try each day to live with the knowledge of God’s love and forgiveness.

Lord God, thank you for sending your son to take on our sins. Your mercy is beyond measure. Help us to obey your Commandments, show us those places in our lives where we fall short and give us the strength to do better each day. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen



Wednesday, April 5

by Alex Shehigian

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Matthew 26: 27-28

People like knowing things. We are always asking questions, studying things, scrambling to grab onto any new knowledge. Scientists ask "Why?" and are learning new things about our universe every day. Mankind's progress is remarkable.

When it comes to Holy Communion, however, we come to a screeching halt. How can the bread and wine be Jesus' actual body and blood? According to science, this is impossible! How can we understand what's going on here?

The fact of the matter is: we can't. We can try as hard as we like, but we will never fully understand the Sacrament of the Altar. It will always be a mystery to us.

Thankfully, we don't need to understand. We don't need to know how that wafer and wine are at the same time Jesus' body and blood in order to commune with Him. We need only have faith that they are what Jesus says they are-- His body and blood, in, with, and under the bread and wine.

How do we have faith in something we don't understand? This is where the Holy Spirit comes in. He gives us faith in the truth of the Words of Institution and all of the other unexplainable phenomena of the Bible, so that we can believe.

Dear Jesus, thank you for giving your body and blood for us. Please forgive us when we doubt your presence. We ask that you would give us faith in you. Amen



Thursday, April 6

by Sue von Bargen

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

The weight of our sin is a heavy burden for us to bear. When we are distressed by something we have done, it can drag us down, make us unable to sleep or eat or even function in our daily lives. But if we come to the Lord in true repentance, He will forgive our sins and lift the weight from our shoulders. Christ took the weight of everyone's sin and carried it with Him to the cross. It doesn't mean our lives will necessarily be easy. Everyone faces hard times in his or her life. But when we truly believe our sins are forgiven, we can face life's difficulties more easily.

This is because we know that Christ is there by our side to help us through anything we may face.

Do not be
anxious
about
anything.
Philippians 4:6

Friday, April 7

by Howard Graves

. . . so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. Hebrews 9:28

The writer of Hebrews is addressing early Jewish Christians. They would have been familiar with sacrificial practices of the Jewish religion. Annual sacrifices had been taking place for centuries. But the writer throws them a curve when addressing Christ's sacrifice. There is nothing annual about it – one and done. One sacrifice to end all sacrifice; one sacrifice done on our behalf. The next time Jesus comes it will not be about sin and sacrifice for they are done; it will be about salvation.

Luther writes in the Small Catechism about the Eucharist: "For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."

Dear Lord, in this season of profound sadness and exhilarating joy, help us to keep both your sacrifice and your salvation close to our heart.

Saturday, April 8

by Joyce Rausch

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? 1 Corinthians 10:16, NIV

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the truthful and almighty God, instituted the Sacrament of Holy Communion for us as recorded by the Holy Evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke.

I read a commentary reminding that Holy Communion is more than a ritual. We can rush through it or experience a RUSH of the Holy Spirit.

Holy Communion is about:

Remembrance – being mindful of God’s great love for us through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and the forgiveness of our sins.

Unity- giving thanks to God as we join together in the unified body of Christ, being members of God’s great family.

Self-examination – looking within ourselves as we confess our sins and seek forgiveness.

Hope - awaiting God’s promise of eternal life to believers when we will have communion with Jesus in His kingdom.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, we thank and praise you for the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Keep us ever mindful of your true body and blood received “in, with and under” the bread and wine, and the love and promise to give to all believers. Amen.*



Palm Sunday, April 9

by Bill Kist

"And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest." Matthew 21:9, KJV

In Matthew 21, we read about Jesus entering Jerusalem. Two disciples were sent into a nearby village where they would find a donkey and a colt. Jesus would ride the donkey into Jerusalem. In verse four we read "All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet." This scene is described in the Old Testament in Zechariah 9:9.

A multitude gathered and spread garments and branches in the way. In Matthew 21:9, which is our verse for today, we read about the reaction of the crowd to the entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem. They shouted praises and called out "Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest."

It was a celebration, a very happy time indeed. For us this is the beginning of Holy Week, the last week in Lent. We know that there would be some very dark and difficult events in the week to come. We take some time to reflect on these events and the impact that those events have on our lives today.

As we prepare for the events of Holy Week, let us thank God that He loves us so much that He gave His only begotten Son to die for us and enables us to participate in another celebration the very next Sunday, the Resurrection of our Lord!



Monday, April 10

by Terri Cavaliere

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whosoever abides in me and I in him, he is it that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

John 15:3

I have attended many deliveries of babies performed emergently due to issues involving the umbilical cord. Thus I am acutely aware of the importance of being anchored.

In utero the placenta is the supply station delivering nutrients and oxygen to the fetus while removing waste products. The umbilical cord is the tether and the conduit between fetus and placenta/mother. Survival and, ultimately healthy growth and development, depend upon intact connection. Sometimes this link is tenuous, thin or knotted and sometimes it is prematurely severed, leaving the fetus with little or no opportunity for survival or growth. Occasionally with twins there is an abnormal connection between siblings before birth. One twin is the recipient of the lion's share of needed nutrition while the other is the donor. The donor twin can become scrawny and underdeveloped.

So, to apply these facts to our scripture verse: Jesus is the vine, and like the mother, He is the source of everything we need for spiritual survival and production of fruit. The Holy Spirit is the placenta, the protective barrier, assisting with fruit production. Unless we are moored into Christ, we cannot expect to be successful in our walks as Christians. If we have a weak connection to Christ and a stronger connection to worldly concerns, we will be scrawny, underdeveloped Christians and our fields will be barren.

Let's examine our connections to see if we are secured to THE VINE. Is our connection free of knots and obstacles, allowing the Holy Spirit to equip us with the grace we need to survive? We should go back to our Bibles and read what Jesus says about those who do not abide in Him. We would NOT want that to happen to us! Right?

Tuesday, April 11

by Roberta O'Connor

Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” John 12:31-32

I thought a lot about this scripture passage. I read commentaries from learned scholars debating the various translations of the text. I read how people interpreted the text. I sat in stillness after prayer and waited for insight to write about it. But through it all what kept repeating in my head are the words of a song I once directed. . .

*Thou shalt know Him when He comes,
not by any din of drums, nor His manner,
nor His airs, nor by anything He wears....
Not by crown or by His gown...*

but by the Holy Harmony which His coming makes in Thee.

We live in a world that cries out for harmony. We are profoundly divided by gender, race, political leaning and religion. Searching for the person to save us from our human predicaments has left us more bitterly opposed than ever in recent history. So caught up in our sense of the righteousness of our causes, we forget that the world is already saved. Our Lord has been lifted up on the cross. He has been lifted up from the earth to heaven. Christ continually draws us to Himself, and when at the last we are all drawn to Him, then will we experience complete Holy Harmony. The incredible peace that passes understanding that we may experience when we come to the Lord's Table, and for a brief moment we glimpse our unity with our Savior. . . When His presence becomes a reality. . . “The Holy Harmony, which His coming makes in Thee.”

Wednesday, April 12

by Scott Mann

“And calling the crowd to Him with His disciples, He said to them, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’” Mark 8:34

Deny yourself. It is one thing to deny ourselves things in daily life - certain foods or drinks, temptations and addictions. After all, 'tis the season to "give it up for Lent." It's also something to deny ourselves things for causes which we may believe in. I buy "American-made" given the choice because I believe in the American worker and an honest, hardworking middle class. However, it is another thing completely to deny ourselves for Christ Jesus. Too often we become spiritually comfortable, knowing that Jesus is there for us at all times. The security that comes with that is tempting enough to serenade us into complacency. We find ourselves saying, "I've done this a thousand times, what could go wrong?"

When Jesus hears Peter rebuke Him after describing His fate to come, He exclaims "Get behind me Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." In similar fashion, we speak the words of Satan, setting our minds on the things of man in our lives. Therefore, brothers and sisters, let us listen to Jesus by setting our hearts and minds on the things of God. Let the power of this season and the love of Christ Jesus encourage us to truly deny ourselves, take up the cross and follow Him. Amen.



*For God so loved
the world that he
gave his one and
only Son....*

JOHN 3:16, NIV

Maundy Thursday, April 13

by Jeanine Davis

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

When you hear something week after week does it lose its meaning? Do you stop and reflect on those words? All I know is when I read this passage it gives me comfort. I don’t think about it because it’s so familiar, I know it in my bones and it is good because God is good always. On this day, though, when I really meditate on this scripture the impact of what He has done for me, us, is overwhelming.

Thank you, Jesus, for being my Savior and dying on the cross for my sins. In His name, we pray. Amen.

Editor’s Note: Perhaps we all ought to meditate on these words as we approach the Lord’s Table not just today, but every time we partake of the Lord’s Supper.



Good Friday, April 14

by Diane Litterer

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

Isaiah's prophecy of Jesus' suffering and pain comes through thousands of years to rest on our hearts this Good Friday.

Isaiah described Jesus as a man of sorrow. I see in my mind's eye an ordinary man with a kind face and soft, loving eyes traveling the Holy Land healing, comforting and sharing His love with all sinners.

How often we sin; many times we don't even think about what we have done. When I reflect on Isaiah's words "upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed" I go back over my life and think of all the ways I have sinned and I picture how great a burden Jesus has carried for me. In my guilt I fall on my knees and pray to God to forgive me. My heart swells with love knowing that God forgives and loves me and all His children. All I can do is very humbly and with all my heart say "Thank you dear Jesus."



Holy Saturday, April 15

by Deacon Doug Brosky

We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once and for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. Romans 6:9-10

We are on the eve of the greatest day in the church calendar, a day of victory promised to each of us all the way back to the fall of Adam and Eve. Christ's victory is our victory. The power of sin and Satan to control our lives has been eliminated. As Martin Luther proclaimed in his hymn, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, "He's judged; the deed is done."

Today is a quiet day, a day of reflection. The dramatic days of Holy week are behind us. Death and the power of sin have been buried once and for all on Good Friday. God's plan to remove the gap of sin that separates us from Him is complete. Paul quotes the prophet Isaiah in I Corinthians 15, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death where is your sting?"

We share in Christ's victory by faith, and not because of anything we did, but because of what God has done for us. May that faith fill each of us with assurance, not only today as we prepare to celebrate our risen Lord, but every day that nothing can separate us from the love of God.



Easter Sunday, April 16

by Pastor Charles Froehlich

... But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb.

Luke 24:1

Imagine what it must have been like when the women made the journey to the tomb with the spices to anoint the body; what they found was not what they expected. No body, an empty tomb, but they were met by two men in dazzling clothes. A fearful engagement I am sure but the message they had for these seekers was, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."

Their journey ended with hearing the good news that Jesus had conquered death by taking our sins to the grave. The journey ended in a message of great joy for all of us.

And now as we have completed our Lenten and Holy Week journey we are led by the Holy Spirit to go and live for the Savior. Our journey of faith is each of us reflecting the love and forgiveness of Jesus into a world that finds it difficult to love and forgive on another.

It is my prayer that as Trinity Lutheran Church begins a new chapter in its journey of faith, serving our risen Lord, that we will find joy in the journey and that each of us would seek the Holy Spirit's guidance along our journey of faith and life.

Because He lives we also live. We live to serve using our individual gifts to build up the body of Christ.

May our Lord lead us in the journey.

HE IS NOT HERE;
He **IS RISEN!**