



During Lent, we are reminded of an event that was carried out completely on our behalf. It was painful beyond all imaginings; it was monstrous beyond all violence. It was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ of Nazareth on a hill outside the city of Jerusalem. And with that ordeal, God's plan of salvation—as incomprehensible as it was to the human mind—was heading to completion when three days later He raised His Son from the dead.

This Lenten season, first-call pastors from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis share their thoughts about this season and its implications for a corrupt mankind. Now installed in their first churches, these pastors know well the timeless significance of Christ's passion and what His obedience "to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8b) means for each of us.

As you read these devotions during this most solemn season in the Church Year, may you find again through God's Holy Spirit how true love has conquered all for each of us.



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GivenForUs




Lenten Devotions 2009

It is our heartfelt joy to provide you with *Given For Us*, devotions of reflection and meditation for the 2009 Lenten season. At this time of the year, when our hearts are directed to the limitless expression of God's love as revealed in His Son Jesus Christ, it is our hope you find these words both thoughtful and inspirational.

As with LHM's Advent devotions of last year, these Lenten words have been written by graduating students from the 2008 class of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. Each pastor is now in his first church—an event that is both momentous and rewarding in any pastor's life. We at Lutheran Hour Ministries express our deep thanks to these servants of God and to Concordia Seminary for providing us both the messengers and the messages during this awe-inspiring season.

It is Christ's unimaginable passion on the cross at Golgotha that gives the world a second chance. Blood—God's holy blood of forgiveness—was poured out for us that day two thousand years ago, and it still transforms lives today. May these devotions lead you to that place where God has made a bridge for us to return from exile: the cross of Jesus Christ.



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“A Living Hope Now And Not Yet”

TEXT: 1 Peter 1:3-5 - 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, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

He is risen! Christ has conquered death! Sometimes, I am not sure we know what this means exactly. Most of us, because of Christ's death and resurrection, will say that we are forgiven and will get to spend eternity with Him. His resurrection, however, means much more for us. It is as Peter says, it is “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.” We get more than just new and eternal life; we get new bodies and get to be a part of a new creation. In Christ, everything will be made new. This is the promise we wait for, but it is also a promise we have now. This is the Good News!

Since we are baptized into Christ, we participate in His death and His resurrection. We are new creations; we are righteous, and we actively participate in restoring God's Kingdom on earth now. This is what Christian discipleship looks like, bringing the restorative word and life of Christ to others so they too can celebrate in Christ's resurrection—not only in the future, but now. You are a new creation. Live your newly set apart and holy life and share the light of the resurrected Lord with all those who so desperately need His and our love.

THE PRAYER: Dear heavenly Father, I pray You continue to strengthen my faith. Help me to celebrate and share Your glorious resurrection with those close to me. Use me to reach others, even as You place people in my life who encourage me to impact others with the unconditional and forgiving love of Christ. We praise You and thank You for conquering death and giving us an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. Amen.

Written by Pastor Martin Danner
St. Paul Lutheran Church - Fort Worth, Texas

“Washed”

TEXT: Psalm 51:10a - Create in me a clean heart, O God.

One of my responsibilities in our home is to wash the dishes. Yet, to be honest, there are times when I miss a few spots. I get into surface-cleaning mode, scrubbing only the spots I can see and quickly wipe away. And too often the stains remain. My wife has to repeatedly remind me to slow down and do a “thorough cleaning.” Experience has taught me that washing dishes properly involves time. The edge and bottom of a dish must be carefully inspected. The soap has to soak into the areas that have become plastered with chunks of food. And, the scrubber must scrape away any remaining pieces.

How often in our spiritual lives are we content to do a surface cleaning? We do a quick outward cleaning, but inside our lives are a mess. Jesus said to the religious leaders in Matthew 23:25b, “For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.” Aren't we the same way? We put on a good façade, pretending that we have our lives together. Yet, inside our lives are torn apart by dirty little secrets and sinful habits. The stain of sin remains.

Ash Wednesday gives us an opportunity to slow down and experience the thorough cleaning that comes from Jesus' death on the cross. Take a moment to carefully inspect your own life. Examine the dark corners. Take a tour of the places that have been corroded by your self-centered ways. Maybe you're still holding a grudge. Maybe you're constantly worrying about life. Perhaps it's a problem with pride or greed or fear. Don't rush through this experience. Yes, you'll discover things you don't want to see. Yet, when you do, let the words of David's prayer flow from your lips: “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” Allow God to thoroughly clean your spiritual dishes! Let Him reach in and scrub clean the parts of your life that have become plastered by chunks of sin. He won't miss a spot! 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

THE PRAYER: Dear Lord, reach into my life and cleanse me from every area where I have slipped away from You. Grant me the forgiveness that flows from the cross of Christ. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Written by Pastor Josh Bernau
Hope Lutheran Church - Hastings, Minnesota

“Who’s In Control?”

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 - For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that One has died for all, therefore all have died; and He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised.

The first car I purchased had a five-speed manual transmission. Weekend after weekend I searched the ads containing “5spd manual” or “man. trans.” Ever since I learned to drive a manual transmission, I enjoyed the control it gave me. When I got behind the wheel, I was in control—that is until I taught my brother how to drive my car.

No longer in control of the car I intentionally purchased in order to have more control, we rolled backward when starting up hills, stalled numerous times, and suffered several jerky starts. I became increasingly concerned about my sense of control and less about teaching my brother how to drive.

It’s when we’re out of control we realize how much we love being in control. Our self-centeredness demands control. We even try to control God at times. Control—it was the reason I purchased that car. So, who is in control of our lives? Are we living lives that are self centered and obsessed with control?

Paul talks about a life lived for God and others in his second letter to the Corinthians. It is a life controlled by the love of Christ, not by us. Christ’s love took Him to the cross making Him the One who has “died for all.” Because Christ died for all—for us—we no longer live for ourselves but for Him.

The love of Christ forgives and transforms us. Controlled by the love of Christ, we are no longer to live in self-centeredness; rather, we are to live lives centered on Him. We are no longer to demand control at all costs; rather, we are to be controlled by the love of Christ. May the love of Christ have its full power in our lives.

THE PRAYER: Father in heaven, you have shown me Your love in Christ, whose death and resurrection have won my forgiveness and secured my salvation. Change my heart, that I may become selfless in my service, and controlled by the love of Jesus. I pray this through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Written by Pastor Greg Moyer
St. Mark Lutheran Church - Omaha, Nebraska

“But God”

TEXT: Acts 10:39-41 - And we are witnesses of all that He did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree, but God raised Him on the third day and made Him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead.

Ulmer Marshall Jr., a Lutheran pastor, once preached a sermon titled “But God.” Marshall said our lives are full of “But God” stories. I was lost, but God found me and brought me to faith. I was in despair, but God surrounded me with people who cared. I was ignorant of my sin, but God showed me the truth and led me to repentance.

The Bible is full of “But God” testimonies, too. Abraham: I was in a foreign land, but God watched over me. Moses: I didn’t know how to get across the Red Sea, but God parted the waters. Daniel: I was tossed into the lions’ den, but God preserved my life.

Today, we read of the greatest “But God” moment in history. “They put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree, but God raised Him on the third day....” God took an unjustified act of murder and used it for the greatest good the universe has ever seen. Death could not hold Jesus. The crucified One became the risen One by the power of God.

You and I were destined for an eternity of separation from our loving Maker, but God had other plans. Peter declares in today’s reading that he witnessed Jesus’ earthly ministry. He personally saw Jesus’ death on the cross and His resurrection appearances. He declares these events to be true. God has taken the ugliness of His Son’s death on a cross and from it has won our life and restoration. The Suffering Servant who was crucified is now the Savior who lives in victory.

On our own, we wouldn’t recognize the significance of Christ’s death and wouldn’t believe the great news of His Resurrection. But God has given us His Holy Spirit and by faith has made us witnesses of Christ’s triumph over death.

He is risen!

THE PRAYER: Heavenly Father, You have raised Jesus from the dead and given us life in Him. Thank You for the victory we have in our risen Savior. Amen.

Written by Pastor Christopher Kennedy
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church - San Antonio, Texas

Saturday April 11th

“Grace In The Midst Of Darkness”

TEXT: Zechariah 12:10 - And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a Spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on Me, on Him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over Him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

As I was sitting at my desk completing my homework assignment, my wife was flipping through the news stations to find the local weather predictions. Unfortunately, the meteorologist’s forecast was bleak: rain and lots of it. The last thing the city needed was more rain. Waters were already at flood stage, and it did not look like they were going to crest for a few more days. This weather report was preceded by a story of a 15-year-old boy who lost a five-year battle with cancer. Before that the local anchorman announced the total number of U.S. men and women who had given their lives overseas. When events like these take place, we are left asking ourselves, “Where’s the relief?”

When tough times are before us we can feel battered and worn, but we will never be completely broken. We travel through this Lenten season of repentance feeling the weight of our sin, the guilt of our actions, and the burden of living in a world stained by sin. Yet, we are still able to smile as we can see Easter on the horizon.

As God promised the Israelites through the prophet Zechariah, He promises to us now, “I will pour out... a Spirit of grace and pleas for mercy...” You and I are truly blessed to be a part of a community of believers in our churches. It is a blessing to be able to walk through that church door, enter the sanctuary, and be a part of “the house of David.” The blessings we receive through the Word and Sacrament will continually flow down upon us as we face our daily trials and tribulations.

THE PRAYER: Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your almighty presence. As we repent of our sins, we know that You forgive us even now. Teach us to continually sing Your praises as we recall, enjoy, and look forward to the blessings that You will continue to pour on us. In Jesus’ Name, we pray this. Amen.

Written by Pastor Jacob May
Emmanuel Lutheran Church - Hampton, Virginia

Friday February 27th

“I Give Up”

TEXTS: Romans 8:32 - He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?

Hebrews 12:1 - Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

When I start playing basketball after some time off, I get quickly tired with the effort. This is also true when we come to other difficulties in our lives. When life, work, and school are too much for us to handle we say to ourselves, “I give up.” Instead of tackling the obstacle, we often would rather sit idle or go off in a different direction.

We are hindered by the sin in our lives. We often don’t see how we are alongside other witnesses, who once were (or still are) in our shoes, dealing with life’s issues. These witnesses remind us they too wanted to give up. These witnesses support and exhort us: “Remember Jesus who gave His life for all of us. He is always with you. The Holy Spirit will give you faith. When you fall into sin, confess your sins and because of Jesus’ work on the cross, you have forgiveness, the resurrection of the body, and life eternal.”

Those witnesses call our eyes, hearts, and minds to remember God and what He has done and will do for us. God gave us His one and only Son. We must look to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to see how God not only didn’t give up on us, but He gave everything for us.

During this Lenten season, remember the “cloud of witnesses” surrounding us who point our thoughts to the cross and empty tomb to show what God gave for us. Remember how Jesus willingly gave His life on the cross. Remember the grave is empty when we celebrate Easter. Truly, God gave us more than we deserve, and we thank and praise Him for not giving up on us.

THE PRAYER: Father, thank You for not giving up on us. Keep us from becoming entangled in the sin of our thoughts and actions. Remind us by the witnesses around us of the love You have shown us every moment of our lives. In the Name of Your Son, who gave us His blood and His love. Amen.

Written by Pastor Matthew Schilling
St. Peter’s Lutheran Church - Conover, North Carolina

Saturday February 28th

“Be Humble!”

TEXT: Jonah 3:6 - The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

The title of this devotion is plain and simple. I once heard these two words when I was experiencing a moment of worldly success and glory. I have never forgotten them because of their impact—both at that moment and over the rest of my life. These two little words were spoken at just the right moment and caused my heart and mind to be changed for good.

Our natural tendency as humans living in a fallen world is to seek honor, glory, and power. We possess a natural desire for exciting lives of recognition and success in this world. Humility is a trait not often valued in today's world.

When the Word of God reached the king of Nineveh, who was the most powerful and successful man in the land, he did a most unnatural thing: he humbled himself. He gave up his seat of power, and lowered himself to a place of repentance before God. The power of God's Word transformed the king and caused him to recognize his true place—one of repentance and humility before the true King of glory. God in His mercy looked down upon the repentant and humble hearts of Nineveh, and He relented from the destruction He was about to unleash on them for their sinful lives.

The truth of God's Word has this same power to transform our lives. It enables us to see the truth that this world seeks only to destroy us; and so the Word drives us to our knees in humble repentance just as it did the king of Nineveh. And because of the humbling and atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God likewise turns from His wrath against our sin-stained lives and offers us nothing less than grace and eternal salvation.

THE PRAYER: Almighty Father, through the power of Your Word, You caused a king to humble himself and recognize his need to be saved. Grant us that same humble and repentant heart as we recognize our need for salvation, so that we, too, seek Your forgiveness, through Jesus Christ Your Son our Lord who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

Written by Pastor Gene Johnson
Grace Lutheran Church - Port St. Lucie, Florida

Friday April 10th

“Forsaken For Us”

TEXT: Mark 15:34 - And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” – which means, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

God was silent. Christ, the Son of the Living God, was hanging on a tree, being crucified at the behest of His own people, and God was silent. Jesus calls out in a loud voice, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” And still God was silent. He gives no answer. There is no booming voice from heaven that offers an explanation. Instead, there is only darkness and silence.

But why? How often do we ask ourselves this question when all of the circumstances in our world point us to believe that God has forsaken us as well? We ask these questions when we look for evidence of God's presence in our lives, but seem to find only silence.

This Lenten season as we approach the cross of our Lord, God's promise to us is rock solid: “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5b). Though there is no direct answer from God while Christ hung dying upon the cross, we rest in His sure promises. St. Paul tells us in Galatians 3:13a that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us,” and in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For our sake He (God) made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Indeed, Christ was forsaken by God for us, in our stead on the cross, that we might rest in the sure and certain hope that God will never forsake us. That is His promise to you and to me. Even when everything around us points us to believe that God is silent, that He has forsaken us, He is still with us; He is still for us.

For, as Paul writes, there is nothing in this world or beyond that can “separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39b).

THE PRAYER: Gracious and merciful God, through the death and forsakenness of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, You opened to us the way of everlasting life. Grant that we may know Your presence and take comfort in Your promise to never leave us or forsake us. We pray this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Written by Pastor Josh Hatcher
St. Paul Lutheran Church - Annapolis, Maryland

Thursday April 9th

“Ready Or Not”

TEXT: Revelation 15:4 - 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.

“Eight, nine, ten! Ready or not, here I come!” For me, these two short phrases bring back all sorts of summer memories from years gone past when my friends and I would take turns hiding from each other. I remember the favorite places, the thrill of the hunt, the exhilaration of the chase, and the nervous expectation of waiting.

During the season of Lent, we wait in eager expectation for our saving hope to come for us. For some, this can be a season of fear and nervousness. They might find themselves stressed as they recount their sins and the things they’ve done wrong over the course of the year. While Lent is certainly a time of reflection and repentance over the misdeeds in our lives, it is also a time when we must focus on the forgiveness Jesus won for us at the cross. And with our eyes ever hopeful, we must look forward to His coming glory.

John’s revelation reminds us of the victory for those who have the privilege of being made part of the body of Christ through faith. As we continue in our Lenten season, we look forward to the empty tomb; we look forward to the day when we too will rise because of what Christ has done for us. We cannot help but raise our hearts, hands, and voices in praise to Him who has given us so great a salvation.

THE PRAYER: Dear Lord, thank You for the gift of Your Son who came into the world to fulfill that which we could never fulfill. Help us, even as we are continually reminded of the reason for Christ’s death, to be hopeful for our future in eternity with Him because of His great sacrifice. Remind us daily of Your great love for us and the future that has been prepared for those whom You love. Amen

Written by Pastor Mark Schulze
Immanuel Lutheran Church - Twin Falls, Idaho

Sunday March 1st

“Three Gifts Given For Us”

TEXTS: I Thessalonians 2:13 - And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the Word of God, which is at work in you believers.

Titus 3:5a - He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy.

Most parents give their child small gifts from time to time, but when it comes to birthdays, parents tend to bring out the big gifts. Parents don’t give gifts because their child has done anything to deserve them, but because the parents love them. What is true of earthly parents is all the more true with our heavenly Father!

In these two readings, we see three very big gifts given to us: Baptism, the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit. All three are distinct gifts graciously given to us by God. All three are distinct, but not inseparable. In our baptism, water is poured over our heads as the pastor speaks the Word of God to kill our sinful nature and raise us to new life in Christ. And yet it is God doing the baptizing, working by means of the pastor to give us the gift of new life. It is the gift of God to give us the Holy Spirit on our baptismal birthday through the Word. All three gifts work together to create in us a faith in Christ who saves us from the curse of sin. This is the greatest gift of all, one that cannot be purchased from any store, ordered online, or earned by any of our merits or hard work. These gifts didn’t come because we asked for them. They come by the pure grace of God. It is the gift of God purchased for us with the blood of Jesus, the pure Lamb of God on the cross of Calvary. Christ was crucified for us so that the gifts of His crucifixion and resurrection could be given to us freely, according to His own mercy!

THE PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for the gifts of Your Word, Your Spirit, and our Baptism. May these gifts always be at work in our lives as your children. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Written by Pastor Eric Edwards
Christ the Life Lutheran Church - Waukesha, Wisconsin

Monday March 2nd

“He Will”

TEXTS: Isaiah 9:7 - Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

James 4:8 - Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

A close childhood friend of mine was always confused as to why Christians observed Lent. He wondered why we go through this every year. “After all,” he reasoned, “it’s not like we’re going to forget what Jesus Christ did for us.”

We, too, as Christ-followers need to remember how incomplete our view often is of God’s work in this world. God’s Word reminds us how important daily confession and absolution is. We daily and desperately need God’s Holy Spirit to reveal our sin and our need to repent so we are not destroyed by the disease and sickness our sin is.

Repentance from sin leads to the absolution, forgiveness, and reassurance that God has purified us in Christ. He purified us in our Baptism, and He will forgive us for failing every day for the sake of Jesus Christ. What reassurance this brings the followers of Jesus Christ! Isaiah 9:7 also teaches us that God will do what He has planned to do and accomplish His purpose. This is the importance of daily repentance and the daily reading of God’s Word. Just like Israel, just like the disciples, just like my friend, we so easily forget that God will do all He promises to do!

Though somber in its reflection on the death of Christ, Lent also celebrates the victory the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—has accomplished on our behalf through Christ’s resurrection. He achieves His purpose by daily forgiving and strengthening us in faith. He will fulfill His promise in the ultimate realization of peace that Christ’s Second Coming will bring in the new heaven and new earth.

THE PRAYER: Almighty God, we praise You for making us new through Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. We thank You for sending Your Holy Spirit to strengthen our faith through Your Word. Help us love and forgive others as You have loved and forgiven us. Through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Written by Pastor Ben Dolby
Resurrection Lutheran Church - Newport News, Virginia

Wednesday April 8th

“Given Up”

TEXT: Philippians 2:7 - but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

The phrase “giving up” is usually linked in our minds with defeat and despair. It’s a phrase that means we just can’t go on any longer. We’ve given up. We’ve stopped fighting. But, giving up can be a good thing. It can be the right thing. This is true if it’s done for someone else.

In December of 2007, King Wangchuck of Bhutan stepped down. He gave up his throne. King Wangchuck was not forced out; there was no scandal that made him an embarrassment to his people. No, He gave up his throne willingly, even against the wishes of his people. He gave up his throne for them and for their betterment. King Wangchuck realized his absolute authority was too much for any one man to have, so he gave it up that his people could be free.

There is another King who also gave it all up for His people—Jesus. Jesus humbled Himself to give up His glory and honor, and became a person just like you and me. He wasn’t forced by the Father to do this. It was His choice, which He made freely and willingly because He loves you and me. He gave up His heavenly throne so you and I could be free. Free from the power of sin, death, and the devil, we are free to be the people God the Father created us to be. Jesus gave up more than just His heavenly throne; He also gave His life as a sacrifice so we could be free to be the people of God. In His giving up, Jesus conquered defeat and despair and turned it into victory and jubilation, given for you and me.

THE PRAYER: Lord Jesus, thank You for giving up what was Yours so that we could become the children of God. Amen.

Written by Pastor Paul Undlin
Tabor Lutheran Church - Redford Township, Michigan

Tuesday April 7th

“Rise And Go!”

TEXTS: Matthew 26:46 - Rise, let us be going; see, My betrayer is at hand.

1 Corinthians 15:3 – For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.

God’s Word comes to us today with urgency! Jesus’ words in Matthew 26 are emphatic: “Rise, . . . see, My betrayer is at hand.” Paul tells us in his first letter to the Church in Corinth that what he has received is of first importance. Jesus Christ did humble Himself to become a human man. This man is foretold in the Old Testament as the Messiah. It is He who would sacrifice Himself for the evil and sin of the entire world. This is great news! In fact, it is of first importance, especially in the 21st-century, post-modern, self-centered culture we live in.

The urgency Jesus conveys in Matthew 26 today is for us, too. Don’t let the “betrayer”—the world—sneak up on you! Flee temptation, and live as a restored child of God! Do it today! Make the commitment right now to do whatever you must to break those destructive and sinful habits like gossip, lying, greed, lust, or whatever else is your commonplace sin. Abandon them all at the foot of the cross where Jesus has already taken your punishment. Then go; receive the forgiveness that only comes through His Word and Sacraments. Go out and tell this decaying world the hope and promises of this Good News. There’s no time to waste, for Jesus is coming back quickly. This time, however, it’s not to save, but to judge!

Share the truth you’ve been given, and live as one who believes that Christ died for you!

Rise and Go!

THE PRAYER: Jesus, give us the strength and courage every day to resist that which betrays us—the devil and the world’s temptations. Teach us to live as Your redeemed children, and be witnesses to the truth of Your life-giving Good News. Amen.

Written by Jeffrey J. Wilson, CPE Chaplain, Reserve Chaplain – United States Air Force Barnes-Jewish Hospital, St. Louis, Missouri

Tuesday March 3rd

“What Can We Trust?”

TEXT: Romans 3:21-22a - But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the Law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

What can we trust? If we turn on the TV, we get to see how people of different faiths and belief systems can “agree to disagree” in the name of moving forward. Of course, that’s the fantasy of the sitcom. Turn the channel to the news, and you see the way it is in the world. From 8 p.m. to 10 p.m., primetime TV gives us a Cinderella fairytale idea of unmarried sex without consequence, chuckles about drugs, and action shows where the hero escapes one outrageous situation after another just in time to find a happy ending. At 10 p.m. when the news comes on, however, Cinderella steps out of her horse-drawn carriage and ball gown and becomes a lowly, filth-covered girl surrounded by a pumpkin and mice. The dream of primetime is shattered by grim stories of unmarried girls aborting their unborn children in clinics and then leaving them to die in dumpsters. The fairytale is crushed when drug addicts murder in hopes of one more fix and, finally, when the hero turns the wrong way and—rather than find a way out—is blown to bits by a car bomb supposedly carrying medicine.

So what is the truth in Christ? Is He the happy ending or the last line in the horror story? The answer is both. As Christians we have God’s assurance through Christ’s Word and Sacraments that He has given us His promise of salvation. As Christians we know this unequalled gift came at a great price—it came at the cost of Jesus giving up His place at the right hand of the Father. It came at the cost of ridicule, being stricken, smitten, and afflicted. It came at the cost of God giving up His life by dying the death of a thief.

But the question remains: what can we trust? It is God. He is faithful and just. His Word is true, and because of the faith He gave us by His Holy Spirit, we may cling to Christ who has saved us.

THE PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank You that Your word is true and trustworthy. Thank You for cleansing me of my sins and for salvation through the death and resurrection of Your Son Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen

Written by Pastor Brant Hoffman
Zion Lutheran Church - Anchorage, Alaska

Wednesday March 4th

“Miracle Soap”

TEXT: Jeremiah 2:22 - Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before Me, declares the Lord GOD.

In our highly technological society, a solution to a problem as small as a stain is certainly available for a price. Armed with an array of detergents and stain-removing agents, anyone is a fair match for a difficult stain. That is, if all of the snazzy before-and-after demonstrations of the infomercials are to be believed.

But the stain of sin is not like any fabric stain. It is not humanly possible to remove it. As Jeremiah reminds his hearers, there is not a soap available—organic or mineral—that can wash away the ingrained blemish of our sin. Scrubbing will do no good: the stain is impervious to our efforts. It would take an act of God to make us clean again.

And yet, an act of God is what Christ gave us on the cross. Ironically, the blood He poured out for us on Calvary has become the miracle soap that makes us spotlessly clean. Blood, a stain-causing substance, has become a cleaning agent. The before-and-after picture looks something like this: “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).

By Jesus’ blood, you are perfectly, spotlessly clean and fit for His eternal Kingdom. By the work of the Spirit He has given you, you can live a life of hope and expectation of an eternity of perfectly clean garments, praising God eternally for the miracle soap of Jesus’ blood.

THE PRAYER: Precious Savior, You spilled Your guiltless blood so that I could be clean; enable me by the power of Your Spirit to live a clean life before You and to show those around me the value of Your sacrifice. Amen.

Written by Pastor Aaron M. Schellhas
Christ Lutheran Church - Peoria, Illinois

Monday April 6th

“The Power We Have Been Given From Above”

TEXTS: John 19:11 - Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over Me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered Me over to you has the greater sin.”

Mark 14:36 - And He said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Remove this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will.”

When I was in my orientation sessions prior to starting seminary, one of the speakers told us that the ability to manage time would not mystically be given to us when the stole was laid across our shoulders at ordination. Part of the seminary experience, he said, was to stretch us so much that we were forced to learn how to keep our time balanced. The premise behind his statement was that we, as fallen creatures, are not able to do everything we want to do. We are not even able to do everything we need to do nor everything we should do because we are sinful.

But so often it is easy to fool ourselves into thinking we have the power to accomplish things on our own. Pilate was mistaken when he asked Jesus, “Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” (John 19:10b). The nuance of the question that Pilate is asking indicates that Pilate thought he had the power. Jesus points out to him, and reminds us, however, that the power Pilate has is from God above, not his own.

As Christians, the power we receive from above is the power of faith. It is the ability to repent to turn away from our self-reliance and instead to turn to God in trust. In Gethsemane our Lord submitted to the will of the Father. In living His life for us, surrendering to death on our behalf, and bringing us into His resurrection, we are given that trust of faith that we are in His hands and that His hands are open with forgiveness for repentant hearts.

THE PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank You that You gave Your Son into the hands of sinful men for my sake. Forgive me for trusting my own abilities and all the times I have failed to look to You as the source of my ongoing life. As we approach Easter, grant me increasing strength to turn to You in humility and repentance. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Written by Pastor Richard Schneider
Emmanuel Lutheran Church - Kettering, Ohio

“Triumphal Entry”

TEXT: Matthew 21:5 - Say to the daughter of Zion, “Behold, your King is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.”

Some of us have experienced different kinds of triumphal entries in our lives. These are times in our lives when our entry marked the end of something completed and the beginning of something new.

Looking at my own life there have been triumphal entries of a sort. Graduation from high school and college and, soon, graduation from Seminary would rank among them. I can also recall my wedding day and remember the anticipation of my wife’s entry into church, even as I look forward to walking my daughter down the aisle, giving her hand in marriage.

Each one of these marks the end of something great and an entry into something even greater. This reminds me of our Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Jesus entered the world without fanfare as a baby born in a stable, giving up His place in heaven to live with us. Later, He entered Jerusalem to give up His life for us all. While there was great fanfare, He did this humbly, riding a beast of burden on His way to lift our burden of sin.

Jesus’ entry also marked a change of time. It was the completion of His earthly ministry and the start of events leading to the cross. His entry was a passage that eventually led to the surrender of His life, so we could one day triumphantly enter His heavenly Kingdom.

Behold, our King has come and through His obedience and sacrifice has made a triumphal entry possible for each of us.

THE PRAYER: Dear Jesus, help us see the newness of life we have received after Your triumphal entry into Jerusalem and through Your ascension into heaven. You went to the cross to give us something greater than we could ever attain on our own—everlasting life with You in Your Kingdom. Thank You. In Your Name, we pray. Amen.

Written by Pastor Chad Trunkhill
Lutheran Church of the Resurrection - St. Louis, Missouri

“How Long?”

TEXT: Habakkuk 1:2 - O LORD, how long shall I cry for help and You will not hear? Or cry to You “Violence!” and You will not save?

How long, O Lord? Have you ever found yourself asking this very question? I have a friend who has had epilepsy since he was very young. It’s a condition that causes him to have full-blown, fall-on-the-ground seizures. He tells me he’s one of the lucky ones because his drugs control the seizures. But there are side effects. The drugs slow his thinking; his hands shake visibly, and he’s tired all the time. Day after day, he lives with this invisible handicap. And it makes him frustrated and angry. His prayer is this: “How long, O Lord?”

The problem is we feel a tension between God’s promises and what we experience. God tells us we are His special people, but we lose our jobs; our families break up, and our loved ones die. So we can’t help but pray with Habakkuk, “How long shall I cry for help, and You will not hear? ...and You will not save?”

In the pain of our suffering, God turns us to the cross where Jesus Himself suffered. It is there on the cross that Jesus cried out our prayer, “My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?” (Mark 15:34b). On the cross Jesus suffered for us. On the cross, He bled and died for us. And after all that suffering, He rose to save us. Not just from our sins, but He promises to save us from every kind of suffering. Until that day, we wait, praying, “how long until you come, O Lord?” And He answers, “Behold, I am coming soon” (Revelation 22:7a).

THE PRAYER: Father in heaven. Your son, Jesus Christ, rose from the dead to give us eternal life free from suffering and death. Give us faith in the promise that He is coming soon. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.

Written by Pastor James Huenink
St. James Lutheran Church - Chicago, Illinois

Friday March 6th

“Forgiven Freedom”

TEXT: Exodus 9:1 - Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, “Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, Let My people go, that they may serve Me.”

The late Charlton Heston became widely known during his life for several reasons. In his later years, he became well known for his support of the *Second Amendment* to the *United States Bill of Rights* as the president of the National Rifle Association. For me, however, he is best remembered for his immortalized support of the *First Amendment* when he played Moses in *The Ten Commandments*. With the wind in his long beard and his staff in hand, his deep voice boomed to Pharaoh the words of the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me.”

Of course, the enslaved Hebrews did not have the *First Amendment* to protect their right to the free exercise of their religion, but we do. It came at a terrible price and is preserved still by the lives of our servicemen and women who keep us safe both at home and abroad. Freedom always comes at a price to someone.

As Americans, it is easy to forget the simple freedoms we enjoy when our generation silences the offensive realities of life, and the next generation sleeps through its history classes. As Christians, it’s easy to forget the forgiveness that was won for us as our generation slips out the Church’s back door, and the next generation neglects to even approach her door. How thankful we can be that Christ has come to set us free from the bondage of sin and death.

Freedom and forgiveness have come at a price—maybe not to you—but certainly to our crucified Lord. This Lenten season, let us recall the supreme price He paid for our forgiveness and the liberation we have from sin’s damnation on account of what Christ Jesus has done for us. Today, we are free, and we pray the coming generations remain free to serve the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE PRAYER: Gracious Lord, preserve the freedom we have to worship You and remind us of the gifts You give to us daily. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Written by Pastor Matt Wurm
Trinity Lutheran Church - Bemidji, Minnesota

Saturday April 4th

“Giving The Gift Of Paradise”

TEXT: Luke 23:43 - And (Jesus) said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

The cost was too much. To have to pay for all the sins of the entire world was the burden that fell upon the outstretched arms of our Savior as He hung on the cross. The agony and the pain He endured while having His hands and feet nailed to the tree was only part of the suffering He experienced that day. He suffered the mocking comments, the taunts, and the doubts of those surrounding Him—from the soldiers standing at His feet, to the criminals whom He divided. Yet, even in these last hours of Christ’s life we find He is giving of Himself. He answers the dying request of a criminal with reassurance that he will join Him in paradise that very day. It is a paradise the thief does not deserve. He did not earn it on his own account, yet it is credited to him by the suffering and death of the One who promises it.

We, too, are like the criminal that died alongside Jesus that day. We deserve to pay the penalty for all of our sins, by dying on a cross. We have daily failed to live up to the commandments God has given to us by sinning in our thoughts, words, and deeds. We deserve to be punished and suffer death just like the criminals on the cross did.

But Christ Jesus took our place on the cross. His suffering and death on the cross has opened the gates of paradise for all those who believe. We share in the same promise the thief received that day—one day we will be with Christ in Paradise.

We wait patiently and expectantly for that day when we will share in the peace, joy, and happiness that Christ has opened for us in paradise.

THE PRAYER: Dear heavenly Father, we thank You for the precious gift of Your Son Jesus Christ who gave of Himself so that we may one day be with You in paradise. Amen.

Written by Pastor Luke Jacob
Pentecost Lutheran Church - Racine, Wisconsin

Friday April 3rd

“Taking The Fall”

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 15:58 - Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

The first time I ever passed out I was 15 years old. I remember feeling hot and short of breath. I remember losing my ability to focus, and then my vision narrowed. It was like looking down a long dark tunnel and seeing a small picture of light framed by dark walls. When I passed out, it felt like the tunnel rushed upon me suddenly, and pulled me in deeper. The light on the other side got smaller, until all I could see was blackness. It was at that moment I fell.

It was my face hitting the corner of the table and then the floor that snapped me out of it. Now, while falling is painful, the most damaging and painful of all falls is the spiritual fall into sin that every one of us knows all too well. We feel the fall when guilt plagues our consciences. We feel the fall when we're confronted with death. We feel the fall when we sense the devil doing some evil work around us or inside us. It always hurts.

Nonetheless, in this passage from 1 Corinthians, Paul is speaking words of encouragement, and his words—"be steadfast, immovable"—point us to the Savior in whose death and resurrection we are forgiven and lifted up from our fallen sinful states. It is by His grace that standing is made possible, and so we stand firm in His love; because, quite literally, He took the fall for us.

THE PRAYER: Gracious Lord, in this season of Lent we remember Your death and the depth of Your love for us. Help us to stand firm in Your grace and Your abiding love. Amen.

Written by Pastor Joel Brandt
Trinity Lutheran Church - Wausau, Wisconsin

Saturday March 7th

“The Best Of Times?”

TEXT: Isaiah 53:3a - He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.

One of the worst feelings is being alone, isolated, and separated from those you love and who care about you. What's worse than feeling alone is feeling despised. Being despised is not only being alone but also having to endure the animosity of those around you. In fact, just being alone—without the woeful burden of others' enmity and ill will—would be better.

People sometimes suggest that the four years of high school are the best years in life. Adults often advise teenagers to slow down and enjoy those years. But as I talk with others, I'm reminded of just how difficult those years can be. They are often scarred by a sense of personal isolation, awkwardness, misunderstanding and, sometimes, even hostility. There are times when we all have felt alone and despised.

And Christ certainly felt that way too. But His aloneness was of an entirely different magnitude. It's not just that He felt utterly alone or despised or hated. He was utterly alone and despised and hated. Christ was abandoned by His disciples, denied by Peter; even God the Father turned His back on Him. You can hear His pain in the words, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:34b). And Jesus had no shortage of enemies either. Throughout His ministry there was a growing group of Jewish leaders and others who hated Him. They hated Him with such passion they had Him nailed to a wooden cross as a criminal—a death Christ willingly submitted to on our behalf.

During this time of Lent, we reflect on the pain and suffering Christ endured on our behalf. For us, Good Friday is the best of times, when Christ overcame sin, death, and the power of the devil so we might live in a restored relationship with our heavenly Father.

THE PRAYER: Lord, we thank You for Your sacrifice on our behalf. We marvel and are humbled at the magnitude of this event. To have been hated, alone, and despised as You were is more than we could bear. But that is just the point. You took on human flesh and did what we could not do. You lived a perfect life and died our death that we might live forever in Easter joy as the true children of our heavenly Father. Amen.

Written by Pastor Josh Moldenhauer
Grace Lutheran Church - Oberlin, Ohio

Sunday March 8th

“Ultimate Security”

TEXT: Mark 10:17-22 - And as He was setting out on His journey, a man ran up and knelt before Him and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” And he said to Him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

When the rich man found out what he must do to inherit eternal life, he felt “disheartened” and “sorrowful” because he was told to give up what made him feel secure in his life, his earthly possessions. How would we survive if we were to give up all the possessions in our life? Our solution is to partially trust Jesus and to partially trust in this world. This, of course, does not work. We have to either trust in God or trust in ourselves; there is no half way.

So, as the disciples asked, who can be saved? Jesus’ answer is that no thing or person in this world can save—only God can bring us into eternal life. Jesus came to this world and went to the cross to accomplish the impossible. He alone provides ultimate security. Through Christ Jesus’ sacrificial work on the cross on our behalf, He has made eternal life possible through faith given us by the Holy Spirit. For when we have faith, God comes into our hearts to work the impossible, and we learn that God is our ultimate security.

THE PRAYER: Almighty God, heavenly Father, I implore You to grant me the strength to trust in Your consuming love that is found only in Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. By His sacrificial death, He has opened the Kingdom of God and welcomed me home. Help me I pray to always live my life according to His will and His Word.

Written by Pastor Jace Detrie
Athens Lutheran Church - Athens, Tennessee

Thursday April 2nd

“True Joy”

TEXT: 2 Peter 2:10 - And especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

When we read through the Bible as part of our regular devotions or in church, there are things we let slide by without much thought. Since verse ten of chapter two in 2 Peter is only half a sentence, the desire immediately arises to scan the context forward and backward to see what is being said.

In his book *Surprised By Joy*, C.S. Lewis identifies opponents of true joy as different kinds of lust. Whether they were sexual lust or some lust fulfilling a psychological need, they were approximations of true joy. Occasionally, he was reminded with excruciating clarity that they did not satisfy; they did not give the enduring joy he searched for.

According to Peter, the passion of lust defiles a person, and when boundaries and checks are ignored, authority is despised as well. Only Jesus’ blood will wash away the stain of lust and rebellion, healing the corruption that has infected our bodies and souls. Only Jesus can pierce our black hearts with the pure light of grace given to us through faith in His atoning work for us on the cross and the promise of His resurrection.

Come to Him daily in repentance, and know He is faithful and will forgive you, filling you with true joy and hope this Lenten season.

THE PRAYER: Lord Jesus Christ, renew us and lead us according to Your great love and mercy. Fill us anew each day with the true joy and hope that only comes from You, and guide us into a life of service to one another, thereby resisting the temptations of this world. In the Name of the resurrected Lord Jesus. Amen.

Written by Pastor Matthew Mortenson
Faith Lutheran Church - Humboldt, Nebraska

Wednesday April 1st

“Not Our Own Story”

TEXT: Galatians 1:11-12 - For I would have you know, brothers, that the Gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

The world tells us that there is no way for Christianity to make sense. Why would there be a God who is willing to sacrifice Himself to save people that hate Him? Why would there be a God who allows people to have the free will to disobey Him? None of it makes sense. God is able to make us all love Him and force us to do His will but He doesn't. Christianity is the story of a God who doesn't follow the rules that humans follow. We tend to look out for our own interests where God is only interested in our wellbeing. He only wants us to be with Him forever. The Gospel is the story of God fulfilling this desire for us to be with Him forever.

In the passage for today, Paul explains the Gospel he is preaching came from Christ Jesus. It is not the product of some individual's imagination or wishful thinking. Christ crucified is the plan of God to save the whole human race—"a stumbling block to Jews and folly to the Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:23b). Only God could understand the saving power that came from the death and resurrection of Jesus. "For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:25). For us, it's outlandish to think the sacrifice of one man could satisfy the penalty man incurred for his sins, but that is what God did for us. God gave us the message of the Gospel; it didn't come from a human mind. Even though we can't understand the fullness of the Gospel, we know it is true because God gave it to us. It is God who gives us the faith to believe that Jesus Christ suffered and died to take all our sins away and rose to give us the promise of eternal life.

THE PRAYER: Lord Jesus Christ, we praise and thank You for giving us the blessing of knowing Your love through the Gospel. Amen.

Written by Pastor Robert Zellmer
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church - Farnhamville, Iowa

Monday March 9th

“Reconciled”

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 5:18 - All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

John was broken and devastated. His girlfriend of nine months had just broken up with him. There were many questions and much hurt. What happened? Why? How could this have happened? What could he have done differently? On top of this, John started to harbor feelings of bitterness towards his now ex-girlfriend. Some of the things she said to him had really hurt him. He wanted to still be friends with her, and he wanted to not be bitter towards her, but he didn't think that was possible. So he started to pray about it.

After spending much time in prayer and in God's Word wrestling over his own thoughts and emotions, John came upon 2 Corinthians 5:18. He read these words: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." John sat there and read this passage over and over again with his mouth wide open. He had read this verse before, but it hadn't spoken to him like it did at that moment.

John realized that God had a great yearning for him to be reconciled to Him. This yearning was so great that Jesus died for him in order that their relationship could be restored. John began to see God's love in a greater way.

As a result of this, John was able to work through his feelings of bitterness towards his ex-girlfriend. He realized that only through God's strength could he forgive her. After all, God has reconciled John to Himself and forgiven him.

During this Lenten season that is what we remember. We reflect upon Jesus and His love that is given for us. We read those same words in 2 Corinthians 5:18. "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." God has reconciled us to Himself in Jesus Christ! May your Lenten season be one of reconciliation.

THE PRAYER: Dear Lord, thank You for reconciling us to You. Your love for us is so great. Help us to forgive others as You have forgiven us. Amen.

Written by Pastor Adam Parvey
Redeemer Lutheran Church - Springfield, Missouri

Tuesday March 10th

“The Lord’s Timing”

TEXT: Isaiah 55:10-11 - For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My Word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Children often grow impatient at how long things take. My two-year-old son can’t contain himself when he sees my wife baking cookies. He gets so worked up we have to tell him to calm down and be patient. He is learning, but he’s still a two-year-old.

The prophet Isaiah was talking to impatient children also, but these weren’t toddlers. They were the children of Israel—God’s children. At that time, the Babylonians had taken them into captivity. They lost their homes and the temple where they worshiped. Forsaking God, they trusted in alliances with other nations. God sent Isaiah to warn them of their sinful idolatry, but they didn’t repent. Even so, afterwards God gave Isaiah a message of hope for them. Isaiah proclaimed the compassionate Lord would gather them back to their homeland. They were overjoyed to hear this, but soon again many wondered if God’s Word would actually be fulfilled. Like impatient children, the complaints started. God answered them in the verse above. He told them just as the water He sends takes time to nourish the earth to make it sprout, so also His Word will nourish them and in due time return to Him fruitful. His Word of promise will come to pass. Israel eventually did return from its captivity, and ultimately the promise was fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ who was gathering the entire world to Himself.

As Christians, we, too, are impatient children. We wonder why God has not answered our prayer or why a loved one must suffer illness. We ask anxiously, “How long Lord until you return?” Yet, God has been faithful in giving His Son Jesus Christ, who suffered the cross for our sins and will return to resurrect our bodies to reign with Him forever. Whenever we become impatient, He answers us with the promise that His Word will accomplish all that He intends for it.

THE PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I am Your child, give me the patience to simply trust in Your Word. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Written by Pastor Eric Estes
Redeemer Lutheran Church - Columbus, Georgia

Tuesday March 31st

“Practice Makes Perfect”

TEXT: Philippians 4:8-9 - Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Everyone probably remembers certain phrases or words of wisdom given to us to live by: “Birds of a feather flock together” or “One in the hand is worth two in the bush.” We grasped some meanings easily; others puzzled us.

How about the saying, “What goes in must come out”? It’s a little bit like what Jesus said in Luke 6:45: “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” Fruit identifies the tree and actions reveal character. The content of our heart and mind determines our character.

Paul celebrated how the Philippians lived out their faith after the example of their Servant-King Jesus. He urged God-pleasing behavior to enhance their witness and joy. He prayed that active love would increase as Christian insight and discernment increased. But he knew that strong and vital as their faithful living was, it was still vulnerable. Misdirected thinking would sabotage their living, skewing their words and actions away from Christ’s grace. Living based on anything else but Christ’s righteousness would tarnish the meaning of what they said and did.

So, St. Paul concludes with a critical point: Remember! What goes in must come out. Put these things into your minds: true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy things! Put into action the good works that these good things inspire in your hearts. You can do them through Christ in you. Others are impacted by the good we do and the example we set in serving Jesus. By an honorable witness, others can be led to the truth of Christ.

Let this be the practice we seek to perfect.

THE PRAYER: Heavenly Father, lead us with Your Spirit to discern and honor what is excellent and so bear the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Written by Chaplain Dave Morfitt
Perry Lutheran Home - Perry, Iowa

Monday March 30th

“Troubling News”

TEXT: John 16:31-33 - Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? 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. 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.”

If you watch the news, you will hear troubling stories. Wars, murders, and crimes of all kinds make us feel uneasy. Have you ever wondered if Jesus would speak words that would upset someone? In John chapter 16 Jesus does just that; He brings some troubling news.

In this chapter, Jesus speaks to His disciples immediately before the events leading Him to the cross. He tells them they will be hated by the world. They will feel great sorrow over the events they will soon experience; some will even be killed.

Have you ever received troubling news? Perhaps you heard a disturbing word of some disease or the death of a loved one. Could it be you’ve heard bad news about your children or that you’ve lost your job? Whatever the case may be, each of us at some time has probably heard some unwanted news. In those difficult moments, what words of comfort will we turn to?

As Jesus told the disciples they would face tribulation, He also told them something radical. He said, “take heart; I have overcome the world.” The events soon to occur to Him—His suffering, death, and resurrection—were to be the redemptive work that would overcome the world and give these men a hope beyond all hope. They will know that no matter what happens to them, victory is theirs.

That same news comforts us. We all face trials and tribulations, but Jesus has overcome the world. He has overcome the terror of this world by defeating sin and crushing it on the cross. On the third day He rose from the dead, bringing us the promise that we, too, will rise; we, too, will live forever! And when Jesus returns, He will wipe away all our tears and gather us to Himself. This is news we can trust and rejoice in!

THE PRAYER: Lord Jesus Christ, thank You that even in the midst of our troubles we have hope. Thank You for Your death and resurrection. Give us comfort in trusting that You have overcome the world. Amen.

Written by Pastor Michael Hall
Trinity Lutheran Church - Exeter, California

Wednesday March 11th

“Overflowing Comfort”

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

In my grief-counseling group, there was an elderly woman who came with all of her friends who had recently lost a loved one, usually a spouse. This sweet Christian lady had already completed the grief-counseling workshop three years earlier, but she kept coming back every year to go through the whole thing again. She was there to lend support to her friends because she knew the pain they were experiencing first hand.

There are few things more comforting than knowing that someone else really does know what you are going through. In this Bible verse, Paul speaks of sharing in suffering in this life so that we may be able to comfort others with the comfort we have received from God. That comfort is, of course, the comfort of Jesus who died and rose again for us. It is the comfort of knowing that God knows what it feels like to be a person and to suffer all the pain you and I face in our lives.

How different this comfort is than what we might find in the world! Here is comfort that goes beyond painful and sometimes inexplicable circumstances to see that our God is the Father of all mercies. He is the Father that showed mercy to you and me in the cross of Christ. And this Father teaches all Christians to comfort others through the sufferings we endure.

This endurance is given us by God as another way of sharing with each other in Christ. This is the way of the cross. Suffering passes for the Christian, and all that is left is comfort, not only for us, but for all those who are in need of the comfort of Christ.

THE PRAYER: Lord Jesus, as You have been my comfort in suffering, make me a comfort to others in Your Name. Amen.

Written by Pastor William D. Miller
Grace Lutheran Church - Knoxville, Tennessee

Thursday March 12th

“The Reason For The Race”

TEXT: Hebrews 12:1 - Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Every muscle is fatigued and in anguish. Lungs ache with every breath. Hands begin to go numb. The perception of reality begins to fade, and it seems hallucinating has taken over. These are people’s reactions after running a grueling 26.2-mile marathon. Their bodies feel like they’ve “hit a wall,” and can’t go on. It’s a race definitely not for those unprepared for the rigors of going the distance.

In the verse above, the author is using such an analogy – running a race. And like that marathon, the spiritual race he is describing can be grueling. It wears us down, and we don't think we can make it. The truth is this: if we had to rely on ourselves for the strength to carry on in this spiritual race, there is no way we could finish. In the same way that we would not have God's salvation without His grace and mercy through Word and Sacrament, we have no hope of running this race unless He is with us.

This is the message of the author to the Hebrews. Yes, the race is hard, but instead of worrying about how difficult it is, we fix our eyes instead on Jesus. He has already run the road we travel. In spite of the scorn and punishment He received from men, He ran with joy toward the cross because He knew that on that cross sin, death, and the devil would be destroyed once and for all.

So, during this Lenten season when we focus on our Savior’s death, burial, and resurrection, let us fix our eyes on Him, that Suffering Servant, who has already run this race and won. And remember that He goes with us as we travel down the road.

THE PRAYER: Father God, You have chosen us as Your very own through the waters of holy Baptism. Give us the courage and strength to be like our Savior, running our races faithfully. Help us daily to run with endurance, looking for the joy that will be ours when we will be united with Him on the last day. In the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we pray these things. Amen.

Written by Pastor Bill Weiss
Immanuel Lutheran Church - Lidderdale, Iowa

Sunday March 29th

“Peace Of God Given To You”

TEXT: Romans 5:1-2 - Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

As we look around the world, we see evidence everywhere of great hurt and pain. We see a divorce rate approaching 50 percent. Families are ripped apart; people are suffering. We see school shootings on the nightly news. We read headlines predicting yet another disastrous economic failure, another approaching catastrophe, or another imminent war. It seems people everywhere are in distress due to some natural disaster, act of human cruelty—or both. And what makes it worse is that often we feel the hurt and pain because these things happen in our own lives.

As we walk through this Lenten season, we ponder the grief and sorrows in our lives. We meditate on the brokenness and sinfulness of the world. We see and feel the darkness that surrounds us on a daily basis. During this Lenten season, we also focus on the agony Jesus experienced on the cross. We concentrate on the slashes, on the betrayals He endured. Jesus came into this world to reconcile it to God. He came to conquer all our sins, all our hurts, and all our pain. He came. He felt. He suffered. All of this, He did for each of us. He did this to give us hope and salvation.

When we see and feel the evil in this world, we remember that Jesus bore the evil of the world on the cross. Evil does not control us anymore because we have been bought with a price—the blood of Christ. Evil does not have power over us anymore because the grace of God as given us in Christ Jesus has conquered it completely. He has shown us mercy, and we eagerly await His Second Coming when all our sorrows will be turned into joy.

Now there’s a headline of peace nothing in this world can take away.

THE PRAYER: Dear Jesus, thank You for bearing on our behalf the evil that is in this dark place. Please give us the confidence—full of peace and joy—to trust in the promise of salvation You have given to each of us. Amen.

Written by Pastor Patrick Niles
St. Paul Lutheran Church - Concordia, Missouri

Saturday March 28th

“God Gives Us Unity In Christ”

TEXT: Ephesians 2:13 - But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Today, our world may seem like a small place. The Internet allows us to communicate with people from all over the globe in a matter of seconds. We can travel to faraway lands in a matter of hours. Most of us have probably come into contact with many foreign cultures within our lifetime. Even the regions of outer space are within our grasp. Seemingly, nothing is far from us.

Yet, as Paul reminded the Gentile Christians of Ephesus, there was a time when we were “separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12b). It hardly seems possible to us, who have the world at our fingertips, that we could be left so far away from God, our Father, and the rest of the world. But sin alienated us from our Creator and divided us against each other, putting us at odds with Him and the people of this world.

Thanks be to God that this is no longer the case! Now, at this current time, God has already brought us near to Him by the holy, precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. By our Baptism, we were united with Christ into His death on the cross, which now brings us near to Him so that we would be set free from the sin that kept us far off. As a result, “you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19).

THE PRAYER: Gracious Father, You have drawn us near to You by the blood of Your Son, Jesus Christ, and grafted us into fellowship with the saints and all believers into Your household. Grant that we never become strangers to You and empower us with the Holy Spirit to invite those who are foreigners to Your Word to become citizens in Your house. In the Name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Written by Pastor Steven Weispfennig
St. John’s Lutheran Church - Yankton, South Dakota

Friday March 13th

“At A Loss For Words”

TEXT: Romans 8:26 - 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.

I consider myself an avid cyclist. I typically ride four to five times per week, and many times I take advantage of this quiet time to pray and have conversation with God. On one particular morning ride, I started talking with/praying to God and suddenly, I found myself at a loss for words. I was overcome by a flood of emotions and thoughts, and I had no idea what to say next. My mind started racing and spitting out what seemed like complete gibberish. I realized I could no longer discern a single coherent thought.

Maybe you’ve had a similar experience in your prayer life. We experience so many different events in our lives. Sometimes, when they occur together, we can easily feel overwhelmed and not even know how to pray or what to pray for: the joy at the birth of a child, sadness over the loss of a loved one, anger or fear as the doctor diagnoses cancer, guilt over sins of the past. Sometimes, even if we do know what to pray for, we don’t know how to say it. We find ourselves at a loss for words.

St. Paul reminds us that in our weakest moments—when we don’t even know what to say or what to pray for—we have someone who knows our needs and intercedes for us. That someone is the Holy Spirit—sent by Christ—who “intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” He takes our babblings, ramblings, and even our silence and turns them into coherent thoughts before our heavenly Father. And, because of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross in our place and His victory over death, our Father hears and understands our every need, even when we’re at a loss for words.

THE PRAYER: Dear heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your only Son, Jesus Christ, to take our place on the cross. You know our every need, and we ask You to hear us on His behalf, especially when we don’t know how to pray. In Jesus’ precious Name. Amen.

Written by Pastor Russ Troester
St. Michael’s Lutheran Church - Bloomington, Minnesota

“Given Faith”

TEXT: John 20:27 -Then He (Jesus) said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand, and place it in My side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”

When the disciples told Thomas, “We have seen the Lord,” Thomas doubted. For this, we know him as “doubting Thomas.” But in John 20:18, Mary Magdalene said to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and in 20:19 the disciples locked themselves in a room for fear of the Jews. Then Jesus appeared in the locked room. Jesus showed the disciples His hands and His side.

Jesus showed Thomas the same signs He had shown the other disbelieving disciples. Jesus showed them those signs so they would believe. Believing, Thomas and all the disciples unlocked the doors and went out into the world as witnesses of Christ’s resurrection.

You and I may experience doubts like those first disciples. Satan never ceases to sow seeds of doubt. In the face of our doubts, Jesus shows us the same signs of His resurrection. But we don’t see the signs the same way those first disciples did. We only have the Word. Through this Word, we are given faith. Faith drives out our doubts. Faith opens our eyes to see the signs. We are the blessed who have not seen and yet believe. Through faith, we are made witnesses of Christ’s resurrection.

And as the Father sent Jesus, so Jesus sends you and me. Jesus sends us with His word so those whose eyes are dark with doubt will see the signs and believe. “Put your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand, and place it in My side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Given faith, we believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and believing we have life in His Name.

THE PRAYER: Gracious Father, forgive my doubts and renew my faith through Your Word. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Written by Pastor Kevin Fenster
Immanuel Lutheran Church - Sandy, Oregon

“Tradition Given”

TEXT: 2 Thessalonians 2:15 - So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

In this text, Paul addresses a congregation alarmed by false teachings. Deceiving individuals were unsettling Christians by telling them the day of the Lord had already come. This deception caused some people to embrace these falsehoods and produced fear among the local Christians. But Paul calms the faithful with his encouragement to stand firm and hold to the traditions. Nowadays, “tradition” is sometimes seen as a bad word. Paul uses it here as something handed down—either verbally or in a letter. He speaks of the Gospel delivered to the Church and directs these frightened believers to the crucified Christ, pointing them to the words of his first letter.

In that letter, Paul encouraged Christians with the salvation Christ would bring when He returns. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16b, he writes, “the dead in Christ will rise first.” And, in 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10, Paul says, “For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with Him.” The true Gospel always calms fears. Paul does not need to scare the Christians into believing his word. The proclamation of the salvation that Christ brings is sufficient to encourage and give peace to the believer.

Paul hands over the tradition of the Gospel to the Thessalonians. In a similar way, he handed over the tradition he received to the church at Corinth, as recorded in 1Corinthians 11:23b: “That the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread.” Paul hands down the Words of Institution to other Christians. Paul hands down the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood, which is given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Paul hands down the tradition, which does for you what Jesus says it does. That is, it gives you forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

THE PRAYER: Heavenly Father, You have given Your Son for our salvation. Defend us from all false doctrines that would cause fear among us. Grant that the Gospel be preached purely and the Sacraments be administered according to Your holy Word, so that we receive the blessings of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.

Written by Pastor Michael Bahr
Christ/Immanuel/ Trinity Lutheran Churches - Central Illinois District

Thursday March 26th

“Teaching With Confidence”

TEXT: Colossians 2:6-7 - Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

To be honest, I'm a little scared of being a parent. One year ago my wife delivered our first little gift from God: Adalyn Love. While this first year has had its challenges (diapers, sleep deprivation, etc.), more challenges await us as Adalyn learns more everyday. Knowledge is a wonderful thing, but what scares me is what she will receive from this sinful world and me. Knowing myself and what awaits her in this world, I believe I have adequate reason to be a little scared. Or do I?

When fears and doubts overwhelm my soul there is a stronger word, the Word of God. It reminds me Adalyn is not my own. Bought with the blood of Jesus and sealed as God's own in Baptism, she is forever in His care. Yet, God has given parents important tasks. Through Paul's letter to the Colossians, I see I have the responsibility with the Spirit's guidance to make sure she is rooted and strong in the faith she is taught. As parents, our goal is to tell Adalyn how much Jesus loves her, read to her of God's sacrifice for her on the cross, pray with her, and create a home of love and care for each other. Is this goal always met? Well, some days are better than others. Even so, as parents we repent of our sins, and we seek the Spirit's help to raise a godly young lady.

Somewhere inside are you scared about how your child is going to turn out? Join the club. Yet, God does not desire us to live in fear but with confidence that He who began the good work of faith in our children is right beside us, giving us wisdom to diligently mold the next generation. This is an enormous responsibility, but we have a God who supplies all our need. For this we ought to be “abounding in thanksgiving” as Paul writes. May God bless all your teaching endeavors.

THE PRAYER: Heavenly Father, take away my fear. Give me the strength, confidence, and faith to boldly teach the next generation of Your great love as manifested in the sending of Your Son Jesus Christ. I pray this in Jesus' powerful Name. Amen.

Written by Pastor Tim Ahlman
Bethlehem Lutheran Church - Lakewood, Colorado

Sunday March 15th

“Trusting The Promise”

TEXT: John 20:29 - Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

By coincidence or, perhaps, more appropriately, by God's providence, the chaplain intern ended up on the elevator with the 60-year-old daughter of a 96-year-old woman dying of renal failure. When the chaplain asked the daughter how her mother was doing her response was resolved, yet sad: “She's dying, chaplain.” “Yes, I know,” he responded, adding, “I'm sorry. How are you?” “I'm okay.” But then she paused. “Well no, I'm not,” she started hesitatingly. “I don't get it. My mother has been so faithful to God her whole life, but for the last 35 years she has had such awful stuff happen.” The daughter gave a quick review of the many personal tragedies her mother had faced right up to the last few years of dialysis and then she choked as she remembered her mother's words. “Everyday she says to me, ‘God has been so merciful to me!’” She paused and then added, “I just don't get it.”

The chaplain explained to the daughter that her mother was proclaiming her confidence in the promise given her at her Baptism; reinforced at her confirmation; and continually repeated throughout her life when she received Christ's body and blood in Holy Communion. Rather than be distracted by the things around her that seemed to show God had deserted her, she clung to the promises of salvation and resurrection on the last day that were given her through the testimonies of the very apostles that demanded to see Christ's very wounds.

The world is interested in signs and wonders as proof of any given thing. Sadly, all too often the Church mimics the world and demands these signs as well, requiring God show Himself to us through healing or prosperity. In the process, we lose sight of the ultimate promise: eternal life in heaven with Christ. As we trust God's promises may we find our hope is not in the things we can touch, see, and feel, but in God's total promise being completed in our lives, through His Son Jesus.

THE PRAYER: Dear Father, we pray You would guide our hearts today. Send Your Holy Spirit into our lives that we would trust in Your promises even when the problems of this world would defeat us. For You have been so merciful to us through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen

Written by Rev. Chaplain James Paul Mueller
Lutheran Senior Services, Heisinger Bluffs

Monday March 16th

“A Given Pattern”

TEXT: Romans 12:2 - Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

My wife made me a cassock. We searched the fabric stores in the area for a pattern to follow. It was apparent that there was not a very high demand for liturgical garments. Of the hundreds of patterns for shirts, suits, sport coats, dresses, skirts, even the costume patterns, there was not one pattern for liturgical wear.

Much of our lives we spend looking for a pattern. When the pieces are all put together, according to the instructions, we have what we want. We want something that fits in: trendy, stylish, fashionable, something that makes other say, “Wow!”

In Lent, we are given a different pattern. The pattern isn't popular, but it is bold and does make a statement, and it is not one we can piece together. The pattern is a garment of grace.

Over these 40 days, we worship our Lord Jesus Christ as He stitches together a pristine garment that covers all of our sin. It is stitched together by His life and washed in His redeeming blood and made complete by His resurrection.

Paul writes to the Romans, appealing to them to present themselves as a living sacrifice. As living sacrifices, we have been robed in His grace and transformed to pattern our lives by His grace, and not according to the image of this world.

Though we are only half way through Lent, we've already begun to see the bright Easter colors. As the fashion world comes out with its new spring styles, may they remind us of the free and new life we've been given in Jesus Christ.

THE PRAYER: Lord of life, daily remind us that we are not bound by the patterns of this world, for we have been robed in Your righteousness. Amen.

Wednesday March 25th

“Given Identity”

TEXT: Galatians 2:20 - I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

What do people think of me? This is a question that is pretty hard to avoid, because every morning we start our day by making ourselves presentable to the world. We are constantly comparing ourselves to other people's lives, bodies, possessions, and status. Our value and worth is placed in our monetary success or our education that allows us to think, if not say, well, at least I'm not like _____. All of us can fill in this blank, and we do everyday.

However, this is not the life God desired for us. Before the fall, life was all about communion with God in harmony with the earth and each other. However, as Adam and Eve turned from God, life made a nasty shift from concern about God to obsession with self, which resulted in our alienation and death. But, Christ came and died for us! We have been crucified with Christ. God has given us our new identities as children of God through Baptism. In this, He forgave our rebellion against Him and turned us back to real life in Him. Our worth is not found in our relation to others and our personal success or failure, but rather in our relationship to God.

As Christians, we know that living in a fallen world produces a constant temptation to turn from God back to ourselves. The Holy Spirit brings daily forgiveness through God's Word when our flesh is weak. He empowers us to live as believing and forgiven people, so that others would also learn of their true identity in God through His work in us. God uniquely uses each one of us as the world sees Christ in our given identity!

THE PRAYER: Lord Jesus, during this Lenten season crucify the mistaken identity that we have created for ourselves, and turn us back to our true identity in You. Forgive us daily and empower us by the Holy Spirit to live as Your children to others. Work through us and show the world our transformed lives, even as You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Written by Pastor Daniel Prugh
First Lutheran Church - Gainesville, Florida

Tuesday March 24th

“To Be With Jesus”

TEXT: 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 - For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with Him.

The family gathered around the casket one last time. With many tears, they said goodbye to their loved one. The pain they felt was apparent; their grief was written on their faces. As the casket was closed, in a near whisper one voice said, “At least now he has gone to be with Jesus.”

For this family, questions about what happened to a Christian after death were a major concern. This question also troubled the Thessalonians when believers died before Christ returned. What did that mean? Were they still in fellowship with Christ? Would they receive Christ’s gifts? Today, rather than worry that earthly death separates someone from Christ, we often think that upon earthly death, the person is then joined with Jesus.

Paul words to the Thessalonians also address us. Jesus Christ died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with Him. When this earthly life ends, we are not separated from Jesus, nor is it a gateway into fellowship with Jesus. Whether we are awake or asleep—alive or dead—we live together with Christ. There are two deaths that put us into fellowship with Jesus, and neither is our earthly death.

First, we are in fellowship with Christ because He died for us. Christ satisfied the penalty for our sins. “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23a). While we still die a natural death, our death is not eternal. Christ bore the eternal consequences of our sin on the cross by suffering death and hell in our place. Our sin, which would have separated us from Him, was overcome.

We died the other death that joined us to Christ through the power of Baptism. There we were baptized into Christ’s death. We died with Christ, so we might live with Him forever (Romans 6:3-4). Whether we are awake or asleep, those two deaths keep us joined with Christ forever!

THE PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of Your Son. Because of our sin, we deserve only wrath. Yet, You joined us to Your Son through His death and our dying with Him in holy Baptism. Help us to live as Your people in the certainty we are joined to Christ forever. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Written by Pastor Chris Lieske
St. Paul Lutheran Church - Montevideo, Minnesota

Tuesday March 17th

“Heaven Can Wait”

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 – So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Do you have a prayer request that you have been bringing to the Lord’s throne for weeks or months or even years—a request He never seems to answer? Paul was familiar with that experience. Though he never told us exactly what was troubling him, Paul was sure he could serve the Lord and His Church much better when God answered his prayer and removed his thorn. But despite his faithful prayers, the thorn remained. Finally the Lord explained that Paul didn’t really need to have the thorn removed, he only needed God’s grace, because Christ would reveal His power through Paul’s weakness. Paul came to see that without the thorn he would become conceited by the wonderful things God was doing through Him.

Our Lord Jesus had the same experience. In Luke 22:41-42 we read, “He withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, ‘Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done.’ ” If God had given in to Jesus’ prayer and spared His own Son, we would have been lost forever. Instead Jesus humbled Himself to fulfill God’s will and save us all. Because He said “no” to His own Son, our Father in heaven says “yes” to us, welcoming us into His family through the gift of Baptism. Jesus Christ has laid His nail-pierced hands on each one of us, healing us from the sting of death. And every time we receive the Lord’s Supper, we are strengthened in our faith that He has done all these things for each one of us.

Even though God might seem to be putting some of our prayers on hold, He assures us that He has a good reason for everything He does. And He promises He is making all things work together for our good, and the good of those around us (Romans 8:28). When He chooses not to remove our troubles He invites us to bring those heavy burdens to Him that, like Paul, we might find His strength made perfect in our weakness (Matthew 11:28-29).

THE PRAYER: Dear Father in heaven, You created all things in the universe, including time. Strengthen my faith and give me patience to accept Your perfect timing for my life. Use my weaknesses to demonstrate Your perfect strength. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Written by Vicar Christian C. Tiews
Grace Lutheran Church - Tulsa, Oklahoma

“A Burden Has Been Lifted”

TEXT: Psalm 37:5 - Commit your way to the LORD; trust in Him, and He will act.

Have you ever felt the demands of life were too much to handle? I know I have. Spending 23 of my 27 years of life in school, I have often felt burdened with the rigors of studies. I've often felt like the old cartoon drawing of a little boy with a small library of books strapped to his back, bent over from the enormous weight. Sometimes that's the way life feels, doesn't it? While it may not be schoolwork, our job, or being a parent that drags us down, it is often the heavy weight of responsibility. It is also the weight of sin.

As sinners, every day our wrongdoings pile up, and we feel their burden. Yet, it is when we feel so overburdened with the weight of our sin that God reminds us we do not have to carry them any longer. In Psalm 37:5 King David writes, “Commit your way to the Lord, trust in Him, and He will act.” The word often translated as “commit” comes from the idea of rolling a large stone off of or away from something. God wants to remove the crushing boulder of our sin. It is Jesus who has taken our sins and their consequences upon Himself. It is He who has carried our sins on His back to Golgotha and to the grave.

When we strain under the sin in our lives, we can turn our burdens over to God. We can trust Him to act on our behalf, not only on Good Friday but also on Easter Sunday when our greatest burden was rolled away. As you feel the weight of life and sin piling upon you today, may you commit it all to Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away your sins.

THE PRAYER: Heavenly Father, we come before You today burdened with the weight of our sin and the demands of this life. Please send Your Holy Spirit into our hearts so we might put our faith once again in Christ who has taken away the weight of our sin and its consequences. Fill us this day with the joy that comes from knowing our sins are lifted by Your Son who was Himself lifted upon the cross for us. In His Name we pray. Amen.

Written by Pastor Andrew Menz
Salem Lutheran Church - Coloma, Michigan

“The Lord's Promise”

TEXT: Hebrews 11:11 - By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.

Abraham and Sarah were both old and although they had lots of possessions, they had no children. Yet God promised Abraham and Sarah a child (Genesis 18:10) and as Hebrews 11:11 states, Sarah clung to that promise of God.

But that was all that Sarah, Abraham's barren wife, had—the promise of God. Everything in her body and about her body and life told her that she could not have children. There would be no child to give the inheritance to. Everything said no! But God's promise told her otherwise. That's all she had from God—His promise—but that was more than enough because she knew God would be faithful to His Word. She knew God would not fail to fulfill His promise, even though it looked impossible.

We face a lot of trials and troubles in this world. Family and friends get injured. We get sick. Loved ones die. We see destruction and wars on television. We hear about tornados, earthquakes, tsunamis, and hurricanes. Nothing seems certain except death.

Yet, we, too, have a promise from God. In Baptism we were promised a new identity in Christ Jesus. We were promised a new life in eternity with God our Father—a life in His presence forever—a life with no more suffering, illness, death, or evil. This promise was made for us at the cross of Christ Jesus, where Jesus gave His life to redeem us from the sin of Adam and Eve that resulted in all our troubles. Jesus gave His very self to make us His own, and in Baptism He confirmed this promise for each one of us.

We are His, and He will take care of us. We are not left on our own. Sarah was not abandoned by God, but God was faithful to His promise and gave her and Abraham a child. He will also be faithful to us, giving us all that He has promised.

THE PRAYER: Faithful Lord, call us back to the promises in Your Word and so sustain us until You come again. Amen.

Written by Pastor Jason Krause
Cross of Christ Lutheran Church - Bountiful, Utah

Sunday March 22nd

“What’s Your Interpretation?”

TEXT: 2 Peter 1:20b-21 - No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The apostle Peter comes along and tells us what we don’t want to hear. It’s not about your interpretation but what God’s Word says. The apostle Paul echoes the power of Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”

In John 17:8, Jesus’ words are eloquent and to the point: “For I have given them the words that You gave Me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.”

So, you see, we simply cannot read the Bible to make it say what we want it to say. When we do that, we might as well have no Bible, no Word of God. When we say, “That’s your interpretation,” we become a bit like Pilate who sentenced Jesus to the cross. Pilate said, “What is truth?”

What then do we do when there are millions of interpretations? Be sure to know this: the Scriptures flow from the Holy Spirit, who moved men to speak from God. The Scriptures are the words of God, as God breathed them through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus earned eternal salvation for us on the cross 2,000 years ago. That’s not a matter of interpretation. If it were, we’d get it all wrong. It’s not about people and their interpretations. It’s all about God the Father who spoke to His Son. It’s about the Son who won forgiveness for us on the cross. And it’s about the Holy Spirit who delivers Jesus’ cross-won salvation to us in the Word.

Your sins are forgiven (Luke 7:48). That’s no interpretation. That’s what Jesus says.

THE PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for Jesus, Your Son, whom Your Word tells us about. Thank You for the Holy Spirit who creates faith in me to believe. And so I pray to You because of Your Son, who is the Word. Amen.

Written by Pastor Rich Futrell
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church - Kimberling City, Missouri

Thursday March 19th

“What God Gives To Us”

TEXTS: 1 Corinthians 2:12 - Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

John 15:13-15 - Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. 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.

During Lent, as Christians we sometimes find ourselves giving up something. We hear things like “I gave up this for Lent” or “What did you give up for Lent?” These are a few things we hear from other people in the faith. We surround ourselves with materials that we have to give up during Lent. Does Lent mean we only have to surrender our earthly materials for 40 days?

The meaning of Lent prepares us as God’s Children for the crucifixion of our Lord and Savior. At the cross, Christ gave His life for us. He took our sins upon Himself. From His death, God forgives us and sends us the Holy Spirit freely. There is no cost or prerequisite required of us. This gift is not of the world. It is the gift of God.

How wonderful it is to have a God whose love for us sent His Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross for us? Even after sending His Son and raising Him, He continues to be with us today. God continues to love each one of us everyday of our lives. This is a perfect love with no faults because it is from God. No love is greater. No longer are we just common people with common things. We have something much more; we have Christ in our lives.

THE PRAYER: Dear heavenly Father, during this time of Lent, prepare our hearts and minds in Your Word. Continue to send Your Holy Spirit to guide our hearts. Thank You for listening to our prayers and being with us everyday of our lives. In Your Name, we pray. Amen

Written by Pastor Travis Yee
St. Peter Lutheran Church - Pine Island, New York

“Foolishness?”

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 2:14 - The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Alex hated tweezers. The four-year-old winced in anticipation as the tiny metal tongs hovered over his index finger. He had tried to hide the splinter from his parents, but they had discovered the sliver of wood underneath his skin and insisted that they pull the splinter out to prevent an infection. He closed his eyes, squinting back the tears as the tweezers pinched the skin in order to pull the splinter free.

The tweezers frightened Alex. He would rather have lived with the dull pain of the splinter than the sharp pinch of the tweezers. He did not understand how much better it would be for him to have the splinter removed.

A grown-up Alex might look the same way at the things God offers. After all, God's plan of salvation sounds foolish and uncomfortable. Deny yourself? Take up your cross? Follow a man who died the death of a criminal? Why not just live with the dull pain caused by a little sin in your life? Without the Holy Spirit, we cannot see that sin is deadly and that the death of Christ on the cross is the only way to salvation. Apart from God, Alex will see only the blood and nails and agony that Jesus experienced. To the human mind, the cross is pure foolishness.

But God is no fool. He opens our eyes to see, not just the cross, but the empty tomb as well. By the Holy Spirit, Alex can see sin for the deadly infection that it is, and he can look forward to the beautiful life that awaits all who place their trust in Christ.

THE PRAYER: Lord Jesus, You have shown me wisdom where the world sees foolishness. Enable me to follow You, to understand the wisdom in Your commands, and to firmly trust You for the forgiveness You won for me on the cross. Amen.

Written by Pastor Carl Lehenbauer
Trinity Lutheran Church - Freistadt, Wisconsin

“Jesus, Our Substitute”

TEXT: Isaiah 53:4-6 - Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

My brothers and I grew up playing soccer. My dad coached our teams, and we played many weekends and evenings. Whenever a person got hurt or exhausted from a hard play on the field they yelled out, “Coach, I need a sub!” The game would stop, and another player would take the field in the injured player's place.

In a more somber way, the idea of a substitute comes into view during the season of Lent. No longer is the word “substitute” used only in sporting events. It is used to communicate with and open our hearts, minds, and souls to the reality found in Isaiah 53.

God's only begotten Son was born to take our place under His Father's divine judgment. He became the Suffering Servant, standing under the guilt of the world's sins. He carried them to that fateful hill outside the gates of Jerusalem. There our Lord was crucified for our transgressions.

Even as disciples of Christ, we forget the costly sacrifice made on our behalf. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

Therefore, in this season of Lent we focus on the substitution Christ made on the world's behalf. Just as verse six of Isaiah rings true in our ears, so does verse five that shares the Gospel message: “But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His stripes we are healed.”

THE PRAYER: Dear Lord Jesus, forgive me for those times I take Your sacrifice for granted. Thank You for being my substitute through Your death on the cross. Strengthen my faith through the working of Your Holy Spirit in my life. Amen.

Written by Pastor Ryan Honeycutt
Redeemer Lutheran Church - Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio