

REFLECTIONS

LENT AND HOLY WEEK

FEBRUARY 17 - APRIL 3, 2021

HIGHER
THINGS[®]

DARE TO BE LUTHERAN[®]

Lent and Holy Week

FEBRUARY 17 - APRIL 3, 2021

This seasons Reflections were written by Rev. Aaron T. Fenker, the pastor of Bethlehem and Immanuel Lutheran churches in Bremen, KS. He is also the dean of theology for Higher Things.

2021 Reflections Editorial Staff:

Sandra Madden (Content Executive)

Kay Maiwald (Reflections Editor)

Rev. Duane Bamsch (Audio Editor)

©2021 Higher Things, Inc., Holt, MO

A Short Form for Daily Reflection

ADAPTED FROM LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM

Make the sign of the Holy Cross and say:

In the name of the Father, † Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Read the Psalm for the Day (A table of daily psalms can be found in Lutheran Service Book, page 304).

Read "Today's Reading" if there is one listed.

Read the Daily Lectionary selections.

Read the Reflection for the Day.

Say the Apostles' Creed.

Pray the Lord's Prayer.

Pray one of these little prayers:

(In the Morning)

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray Thee to keep me this day also from sin and all evil, that all my doings and life may please Thee. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

In the morning go to your work with joy, singing a hymn, as the Ten Commandments, or what your devotion may suggest.

(In the Evening)

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast graciously kept me this day, and I pray Thee to forgive me all my sins, where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

If it is evening, then go to sleep promptly and cheerfully.

Ash Wednesday

FEBRUARY 17, 2021

Today's Reading: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 1:1-9; Mark 1:1-13

"Your Father will reward you."

(Matthew 6:4, 6, 16)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. You have a heavenly Father. Jesus' Father is your Father. He died and rose to make it happen. He delivered it to you in the water and Word of Holy Baptism, when you were baptized into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Jesus became your Brother, His Father your Father, and the Holy Spirit your down payment—your guarantee of eternal life in the Triune God's Kingdom.

You have a heavenly Father, so treat Him like that. Act and behave as if He cares for you and will care for you. Act as if He gave up His Son for you and will now with Him graciously give you all things. Behave like the Father has nothing more to say to you other than, "This is My beloved son, with whom I am well pleased." Because that's what the Father really does think about you because of Jesus' Baptism, as well as your own.

Stop acting like you can earn something from God. Stop acting like the praise you get from people for doing nice things is equal to the praise from your heavenly Dad who delights in you. Stop behaving as if other people's opinions about you matter more than the opinion of the One who gave His eternal Son into death to claim you as His son or daughter eternally. If you want the praise of the people in your life, well, then that's the only reward you'll ever get.

But that's not you, is it? No? Not even a little bit? Repent. Don't just fix your outward behavior, don't disfigure your face, don't act really sorry outwardly. Be honest with your Dad, He already knows what's going on in your heart and mind, which He created. You don't have to earn a reward with Him. He gives it away. Our problem is that we keep treating our Dad like a boss and not a dad.

But you do have a heavenly Father, and His eternal Son was faithful FOR YOU, in your place. His faithfulness is credited to you. You really are a child of God. Your heavenly Father really does love you. Lent is all about that love for you. Jesus-on-the-Cross love. Jesus-in-the-tomb love. You, baptized- into-Jesus love. You're loved. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, You despise nothing You have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and contrite hearts that lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness we may receive from You full pardon and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for Ash Wednesday)

Martin Luther, Doctor and Confessor

FEBRUARY 18, 2021

Today's Reading: John 6:22-40

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 1:20-2:3; Mark 1:14-28

This is God's work: You believe in Him whom He sent. (John 6:29)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. What are the works of God? Which are God-pleasing works? Which ones make Him smile? What will get you a pat on the back? Which ones will get God to bless you for doing them? What will get you into heaven?

Ever since Adam and Eve rebelled against their Creator and stole the fruit to be like God, this question has been engraved in our hearts, souls, minds, and consciences. There are houses of worship of all sorts of faiths all over the world dedicated to this one question: "What should we do to be doing God's works?"

We cook up all kinds of answers to deal with this question. "Be a good person." "Do your best." "Do your part, and God will do His." "God's done His work, and now it's your turn." But whether the answers are from the Koran, the Book of Mormon, Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, or even spun by so-called Christians as "The Golden Rule"—it doesn't matter! Jesus blasts all those answers to dust and obliterates them.

Your works lead you to dust. "Dust you are and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:20). And it won't be just your sins that get you there. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Your so-called "good" works will get you there! In fact, if we take Jesus seriously in the Gospels, your works, not your sins, are the express lane to hell, though sin will get you there, too.

God's works aren't many but just one: that you believe in Jesus, who came from the Father to die and rise for you, your sins, and your works. Jesus is the Sent One. Sent to deliver you, redeem you—His blood, His death, His works for you, not yours for Him. He makes you believe. His work, not yours. His at the font, His through your Pastor, His at the Supper of His Son's Body and Blood. The Spirit, sent from the Father through the crucified-and-raised-for-you Son, is the One who through those Gifts creates faith in Jesus.

God's works aren't what you do for Him. His work is what He does for you, and the result and fruit of His working on and in you is that you believe in Jesus. Our works (our gods) are dust and ashes. "All who make them become like them, so also those who trust in them" (Psalm 115:8).

But that's not you. Can't be! Not with Jesus on your side. Even now He's your Bread of Life: delivered in font, Word, Keys, Supper. And He will resurrect you on the Last Day. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Friday after Ash Wednesday

FEBRUARY 19, 2021

Today's Reading: 2 Peter 1:2-11

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 2:4-25; Mark 1:29-45

Because His divine power has gifted to us everything for life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and goodness, through which He gifted to precious and great promises so that, through those promises, you would become sharers with His divine nature, having escaped from the corruption manifest in worldly sinful desire.
(2 Peter 1:3-4)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Where does godliness come from? Where do your true and actual good works come from? Haven't you been trying hard enough? You're just lazy. Get off the bench and start playing! There's no time to waste. You've only got so much time to your name—only the length of life that God gives to you. And that's why you need to repent.

You see, godliness comes from the same place your life comes from: God. Your triune God ruled the universe so that the Father would send His Son, and the Son would come at the right and proper time. The Lord Jesus uses all the authority in heaven and on earth to make sure that you're baptized and hear His Word, and in this way the Son is using all the authority He has to make sure you get the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit "enlightens you with His gifts and sanctifies and keeps you in the true faith." He works His fruit within you: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. By the Spirit, through faith, you're connected to Jesus, the Vine, who supplies fruit, which your heavenly Father prunes.

Your Triune God gives everything for life and godliness. He delivers that almighty power through His Word and Gifts, through Baptism, through sermons, through Absolution, through forgiveness, through the Supper of the Son's Body and Blood. That's His precious promise. You share in everything God has for you. These are His Gifts to you.

Where's godliness from? Our problem is that we think it comes from us. We strive for godliness through our own efforts and never seem to achieve it. But through Jesus, through faith in Him, though to all appearances it doesn't look like we have it, we do have it. It's His for you. You have it—godliness—as a gift only from Him. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

We give thanks to You, almighty God, that you have enlivened us with the salutary gift of forgiveness through the Supper Your Son's body and body, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same, in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

FEBRUARY 20, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for the First Sunday in Lent

(Psalm 91:1-2, 9-10, 13; antiphon: v. 15a, c, 16)

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 3:1-24; Mark 2:1-17

He who dwells in the hiding place of the Most High will spend the night in the shadow of the Almighty.

(From the Introit for the First Sunday in Lent)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Lord Jesus is your hiding place, your refuge, your fortress, your God in whom you trust. He is the Most High God. He is the Almighty. When you're in Him, you don't have to be afraid of anything. You don't have to be afraid of what you've done. You don't have to worry about getting in trouble with God. You don't have to worry about letting Him down, even though you do, daily and much. You don't have to be afraid of people finding out what you've said. You don't even have to be afraid of dying.

You're forgiven. Jesus died to redeem you from death. And He spent the night, actually three days, in a tomb, dead, for you. This Jesus rose from the dead, never to die again, and now He's your eternal Hiding Place, Refuge, Fortress. And you are in Him, by faith. You and He are linked—like a Vine to its branches. Jesus is the Vine, and you're a branch (John 15:5). But you're also baptized into Him (Galatians 3:27), into His death and resurrection (Romans 6:4). You're in Him and He in you—"Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood," Jesus says, "lives in Me and I in Him and I will resurrect Him on the Last Day" (John 6:56).

You don't have to be afraid of your sins, nor of your death, nor even of the devil or any trouble. After all, He'll even command His angels concerning you, to guard you wherever you go, as they guarded Him in all His ways. He'll even do it for you on the Last Day. On that day Jesus will keep the promises He made to you on Good Friday and Easter, the promises made and delivered at the font, through the Absolution, in the Gospel, and the Supper of His Body and Blood. "He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew 24:31). In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, let at last Thine angels come, To Abram's bosom bear me home, That I may die unfearing; And in its narrow chamber keep My body safe in peaceful sleep Until Thy reappearing. And then from death awaken me, That these mine eyes with joy may see, O Son of God, Thy glorious face, My Savior and my fount of grace. Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer attend, my prayer attend, And I will praise Thee without end.

("Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart" LSB 708, st.3)

The First Sunday in Lent

FEBRUARY 21, 2021

Today's Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 4:1-26; Mark 2:18-28

*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.
(Matthew 4:1)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Adam failed. He didn't defend his wife, ate the fruit, and blamed God for it. The Israelites failed. They didn't trust the LORD, grumbled about the manna He gave them to eat in the desert, and blamed God for all their problems. Everyone in between failed: Noah, Abraham, Jacob. Everyone after Israel in the wilderness failed: Moses, David, Solomon. You fail. I do, too. From Adam all the way down to you and me—we've all failed. Everyone fails in temptation. Everyone, except Jesus.

In fact, it wasn't about passing or failing. No, it's something far more sinister than that. While in a sense it was a failure to measure up, at its core the problem was Adam's complete and total rebellion. You and I do it, too. God gives. We desire something else. God doesn't give. We take. Gift given from God. Gift rejected by mankind.

The devil hates God's Word, and so he tempts you to hate it, too, and to desire something else. It doesn't matter if that Word of God is on a tree, on Adam and Eve, on Jesus, or even on you. Whatever has the Word of God attached to it is something the devil hates and wants to destroy, and he'll use us to do it!

The Tree of Life and all other trees for eating, but not the tree of knowledge. Devil says, "That won't do. Use your eyes and belly instead of your ears to decide what's good and bad." "God's image lost." Created in His image—what word of promise!—now they were enemies with God and with each other. The devil's plan was going well. You sin daily and much, too. "Wisdom," and "being like God" sound like lofty things. Far better than fashions or things we want that won't be around for more than a year.

Adam 2.0. Jesus. He comes. Takes the devil on and wins. The devil hates the Word of God on Him: "This is my beloved Son." He hates that Word who is Jesus, dead at Calvary. Same Word on you. Baptized. You, beloved son, beloved daughter. Now you are in Jesus, and, with Him on your side, "our victory cannot fail" even in temptation. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord God, You led Your ancient people through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. Guide the people of Your Church that following our Savior we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

(Collect for the First Sunday in Lent)

Monday of the First Week of Lent

FEBRUARY 22, 2021

Today's Reading: Genesis 3:1-21

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 6:1-7:5; Mark 3:1-19

*"And the LORD God made garments of leather for Adam and for his wife, and He clothed them."
(Genesis 3:21)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Lord clothes you. You don't clothe yourself. You can try. Adam and Eve did. It didn't work. They were still hiding from God. They were naked, exposed. They had to hide from each other. Now there was shame. They had to hide from God, too! He was going to get them, after all. "Walking in the Garden in the cool of the day." Then they tried to hide behind a tree. When that didn't work, Adam hid behind Eve; used her as a scapegoat to blame God. "The woman YOU gave me." Eve tried to hide behind the serpent! "The devil made me do it."

We try it, too. We must hide what we do. We throw other people under the bus to save our own skin. We cover the bad we do with more good in the hopes of tipping the scales in our favor. We certainly have to do that for the things we think and don't even act on! Outwardly good and put together. Inwardly a mess and a sinner, so outwardly, too!

The Lord doesn't wait for Adam and his wife to get their act together. He doesn't wait for them to defeat the devil. He doesn't wait for them to get the right kind of works, the best repentance, the prettiest outfits in His sight. If the Lord were to wait for any action on our part—granted He's got the time—He'd have to wait forever!

So, the Lord acts. He promises and saves. "His mercy draws to repentance" (Romans 2:4). He tells the serpent: "Her Seed will crush your head." That Seed is Jesus. He comes to take care of the devil once and for all. He would die to do it: "You will strike His heel." The Lord killed an animal to clothe Adam and His wife, and so Jesus would be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He restored access to the Tree of Life, the fruit of His Cross—water and blood, for you.

There's no need to gussy yourself up before the Lord. No works, no proper motives, no repentance will earn you anything with Him. He must clothe you. And He does. In the death of His Son, He does. Holy Baptism. You are clothed with Jesus' good works. Why try to hide behind your own? When God sees you, He sees His beloved child. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Taste and see the bliss of heaven Known by saints around the throne, Where the Lamb, in closest union, Lives to love and feed His own. From His riven side forever Flows the purest stream of love, Love that robes us with the raiment Worn by all who feast above.

("In the Shattered Bliss of Eden" LSB 572, st.5)

Tuesday of the First Week of Lent

FEBRUARY 23, 2021

Today's Reading: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 7:11-8:12; Mark 3:20-35

"Look, now is the favorable season! Look, now is the day of salvation!"

(2 Corinthians 6:12)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When is the Lord's time to favor you? When will He be kind to you? Be gracious to you? When will He lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace? When will He save you?

Sometimes you might wonder. I know I do. It all depends on what's happening in our lives. We know we shouldn't use that as the benchmark for whether or not God loves us, but that's exactly what we end up doing daily and much. If things are going well, then God loves us. But the moment we get made fun of, or mess up, or something bad happens to us or someone we love, well, then God's out to get us. We think we've done something to make Him mad at us. Then, it seems, God doesn't love us. What evil thoughts!

Could you lose everything in life and still talk like Paul? "Having nothing and yet possessing everything." Granted, Paul's talking about how Christians and preachers are persecuted and treated in the world, but it still fits. If you lost everything, because you're a Christian or just because that's the way life would shake out for you, could you then say, "I still possess everything"? Treacherous heart!

But that's exactly the way it is for you, in Jesus. In Jesus alone you do have everything. He is your everything. Nothing can take away what He's done for you. You can't put the blood He shed back into His veins. You can't put Jesus back into the tomb. Jesus died and rose for you. And you really do have the weapons of righteousness in both hands! The water and the Word splashed over you. You've received Jesus' Body and Blood.

It doesn't matter what happens in this life, your in-Jesus-ness is certain. Jesus is for you. When will He save you? He already has! So, when's the day of your salvation? Every day is! Jesus makes sure of that. In good times you have everything. In bad times you have everything. Everything at all times because you have Jesus. Or really, Jesus has you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus Grant that balm and healing In Your holy wounds I find, Ev'ry hour that I am feeling Pains of body and of mind. Should some evil thought within Tempt my treach'rous heart to sin, Show the peril, and from sinning Keep me from its first beginning. ("Jesus, Grant That Balm and Healing" LSB 421, st.1)

St. Matthias

FEBRUARY 24, 2021

Today's Reading: Acts 1:15-26

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 8:13-9:17; Mark 4:1-20

"A witness of His resurrection."

(Acts 1:22)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Jesus is Friend of sinners. He wants to bring sinners close to Himself so that He can save them. He wants all men to be saved! That's why Jesus comes! He rejoices to do His Father's will, and His Father's will is that all men be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

Judas is proof of this. Judas was a thief. Judas loved money more than Jesus. Jesus let Judas have what he wanted, exactly what Judas wanted, even if that wasn't Jesus. Unconditional love! Jesus put Judas in charge of the money purse. So it's not surprising then that Judas sold his Friend, his Teacher, his Lord and God, for 30 pieces of silver. Judas' god was silver and gold—a dead god. "Those who make them become like them" (Psalm 115:8). So Judas "went out and hanged himself" (Matthew 27:5).

Judas had bad pastors—the priests told him to fix his own sins. But the Lord wants pastors who will preach about how the Lord Himself has taken care of sins, even Judas'. Yours, too—things worth far less than 30 pieces of silver. But Jesus paid for them—blood shed, life given, tomb empty! Jesus died and rose and Matthias was added to preach that message with the Eleven because Matthias was also "a witness of His resurrection."

Jesus is Friend of sinners. He wants to save them. Not just the likes of Matthias in the world—faithful ones. Not just the likes of Peter and the other Eleven. Even the likes of Judas. He loves and dies for those who'd rather have their other gods. Unconditional love! "God is Love" (1 John 4:8). "While we were sinners Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6).

Jesus wants to be your Friend, your Savior, your Lord and God. He is! Dead God, risen God. For-you God. Jesus brings His salvation to you through your pastor in Baptism, in sermons, in the Supper of Jesus' Body and Blood. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You chose Your servant Matthias to be numbered among the Twelve. Grant that Your Church, ever preserved from false teachers, may be taught and guided by faithful and true pastors; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Thursday of the First Week of Lent

FEBRUARY 25, 2021

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism: The Fifth Commandment*

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 11:27-12:20; Mark 4:21-41

You shall not murder. (Small Catechism: *The Fifth Commandment*)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Love creates life. We know this because God is love and created life. He created us in order to bless us, to give us gifts, and to save us. That's God's eternal plan. To love, to create, to save. That's how God is toward you, me, and all people.

We like life, too, especially our own. Others? Not so much. Sure, we don't like murderers running around. We're against abortion and mercy killings. Letter of the Law. But we're also against bullying and abuse. Spirit of the Law. And our anger and bitterness towards those around us? Let's not talk about that. Doesn't our being against abortion make up for our grudges?

Besides that, we're more concerned about the Fifth Commandment when it comes to us. We don't want people to kill us. But our neighbor in physical need—hungry, naked, thirsty, homeless, poor—well, we turn a blind eye. Serves them right for their choices. Ouch. We sometimes think that, don't we?

The Lord created life to give gifts. And He's given you as a gift to your neighbor to care for them, protect them, love them, defend them, preserve their life. They are more important than you are. Them first. No saving your own neck first. Jesus comes for all the ways we put ourselves first. For all our anger, bitterness, lack of forgiveness—murder in our hearts! For all the ways we do protect life—good gifts—but only to balance out our other sins, Jesus comes.

Jesus trades places with murders. The Author of Life is murdered by sinners in order to save them. Love itself suffers insults. He puts His life on the line for you, so that you would receive His unending life—life into your mouth (forgiveness of sins) with His lifeblood and life-body. You are saved, not because you defend the life of others, but because Jesus gave His life for you. This life He gives to you in His Word and Gifts so that you'd spend it on others. And when you mess up? Take heart. Look at Barabbas. Jesus swapped places with him—murderer! He's swapped places with you, too. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

They rise and needs will have My dear Lord made away; A murderer they save, The Prince of Life they slay. Yet cheerful He To suffering goes That He His foes From thence might free. (“My Song is Love Unknown” LSB 430, st.5)

Friday of the First Week of Lent

FEBRUARY 26, 2021

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 13:1-18; Mark 5:1-20

Abram called on the name of Yahweh there...He built an altar there to Yahweh.
(Genesis 13:4, 18)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Abraham cherished the Third Commandment. He rejoiced in what the Lord had done to save him from believing in the fake gods of Ur. Though Abraham believed in Yahweh, he also had other gods. Better to be on the safe side.

But the LORD had promised Abraham. Eventually the LORD brought Abraham out of Ur, out of his mixed-up faith, and brought him into Canaan. The Lord would keep His promise, one He didn't just make to Abraham and to Isaac and Jacob after him. No, the Lord would keep His promise that He made to Adam and Eve: "Her Seed will crush [the serpent's] head" (Genesis 3:15). It's because of that promise that Yahweh saved Noah from the flood, promised Abraham, "in you all families of the earth shall be blessed," and it's because of that first Gospel promise that Yahweh renamed him from Abram to Abraham! Adam preached to Seth, Noah preached to Shem, Abraham preached to Isaac, and everyone in between and since! That's what the Third Commandment is all about! Rejoicing and receiving the Lord's promises and salvation.

It's not about checking a box off in your to-do list, though you should add going to church to that list. Calling on the Name of the Lord, the altar, is all about Jesus for you. For there we see that Jesus and His Father rule the universe so that we have a place to hear His Word, to listen to sermons, to eat and drink the Supper of His Body and Blood.

Someone built the church you worship at. Someone constructed the altar and pulpit and lectern. There's a guy there to preach to you. The Lord worked that all out for you, down to what's delivered there! Jesus died and risen—right time, right generation after Abraham. Just like Abraham built that altar to rejoice in the Lord who saved him, so also was your church built. Hearing about Jesus, Yahweh saves, is just what Abraham preached and rejoiced in. For Abraham, that Jesus was some 2,000 years later, for you, that Jesus was some 2,000 years ago.

But wherever the Lord's altar is, wherever there's calling on His Name, there He is with you, just as He was with Abraham. In fact, Abraham's rejoicing right there with you! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Here stands the font before our eyes, Telling how God has received us.
Th'altar recalls Christ's sacrifice And what His Supper here gives us. Here
sound the Scriptures that proclaim Christ yesterday, today, the same, And
evermore, our Redeemer.*
(*"Built on the Rock" LSB 645, st.4*)

Saturday of the First Week of Lent

FEBRUARY 27, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for the Second Sunday in Lent

(Psalm 25: 1-2a, 7-8, 11; antiphon: v. 6, 2b, 22)

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 15:1-21; Mark 5:21-43

"Remember Your mercy, O Lord, and Your steadfast love...Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions." (Psalm 25:6, 2)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. God knows everything. Everything. Absolutely everything. About you. He is omniscient. His omniscience includes each and every single thing you've ever done, ever said, ever thought. He knows all the deep dark reasons for why you do what you do, why you did what you did. Oh, yeah. And His omniscience includes every thought, word, and action you *will* do!

What does He remember? Everything. What can He forget? Nothing. What does He forget? Everything! That's the Good News of Jesus. In Jesus, your sins aren't overlooked, they aren't swept under the rug, and they aren't just forgotten. They're better than all that. They're forgiven. They're blood-shed for. They're died for. They're risen for.

There's no reason for you to be afraid of what you've thought, said, or done. There's no reason to try and cover up by doing more good. It doesn't matter how you've let people down, let your family down, let God down, let yourself down. You don't have to make up for it to your God. There might be some worldly consequences, but not eternal ones. God's mercy and steadfast love are eternal—the blood of Jesus on the cross "securing eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12).

Now, the God who knows everything in Jesus doesn't know your sins! You are only in Jesus, only washed in His blood, only Absolved by His blood, only fed with His Body and Blood. Outside of Jesus and His blood, you're left with your sins. Making up for them, a debt never to be repaid.

But in Jesus your sins are forgiven. Jesus died for them, shed His blood for them, and only in His blood, by faith in His blood, are you redeemed, bought back, saved. Only in Jesus does an omniscient God not know something because Jesus, eternal Son of the Father, is the all-knowing God who doesn't know everything. Not just the day or the hour of His return, but also, thanks be to God, your sins! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

If my sins give me alarm And my conscience grieve me, Let Your cross my fear disarm; Peace of conscience give me. Help me see forgiveness won By Your holy passion. If for me He slays His Son, God must have compassion!
("Jesus, I Will Ponder Now" LSB 440, st.5)

The Second Sunday in Lent

FEBRUARY 28, 2021

Today's Reading: Matthew 15:21-28

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 16:1-9, 15-17:22; Mark 6:1-13

"I wasn't sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

(Matthew 15:24)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Brutal words from Jesus. After giving this poor woman the silent treatment, this is what He says. Well, do you believe Jesus' Word or not? Who did He come for? Who does He come to save? This silent treatment from Jesus seems to suggest it was not for her.

What about you? Did He come for you? Does He want to come to save you? What if something bad happens to someone you love? Where's Jesus then? At those times Jesus probably couldn't have spoken truer words than, "I wasn't sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." We think we're excluded by Jesus at those times. Because, after all, you and I aren't Israelites, and neither was that woman. She was a Syro-Phoenician, from the region of Tyre and Sidon.

Who does Jesus come to and for? Does it include this Gentile dog woman? What about you? Oh, most certainly yes. After all, "not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel" (Romans 9:6). This woman's faith is in Jesus, fully, solely, only in Him. He of course came FOR her, TO her. Why else would He come TO the region of Tyre and Sidon. Faith says, whenever and wherever Jesus shows up, He's showing up for me, to save me.

And faith always confesses and says, "Yes" and "Amen," to whatever the Lord says. "It's not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs get crumbs." Great faith! Great Jesus! Master Jesus. Lord Jesus. Savior Jesus. "Her daughter was healed that very hour." Jesus comes, faith gathers. Jesus is silent, faith prays. Jesus speaks, faith says, "Yes, Amen." You're a dog. Yes, Lord. You're a sinner. Yes, Lord. I baptize you. Amen. I forgive you. Amen. Eat and drink this my Body and Blood for you for the forgiveness of your sins. Yes, Lord. Amen.

There's no reason to think that Jesus is not there for you. That's not the Jesus you have. You're part of Israel by trusting Jesus. Faith gathers to Jesus, receives all from Him as gift. There's no other reason for Him to show up except to save YOU. You can ask that woman—and her daughter!—all about that in the resurrection. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength. By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Monday of the Second Week of Lent

MARCH 1, 2021

Today's Reading: Genesis 32:22-32

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 18:1-15; Mark 6:14-34

"Your name, Jacob, will not be said any more, but Israel." (Genesis 32:29)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Jacob was a sinner. Not a little sinner, but a big sinner. He didn't treat Esau with love, stealing both his inheritance (birthright) and his father Isaac's blessing. Jacob ended up with two wives and two concubines, causing no end of fighting in his household. He recognized that Leah was the wife of promise, the one through whom the Savior would be born. He stole from his father-in-law. He was an all-around sinner.

"Jacob"—"heel grabber," supplanter, thief, sinner. That was Jacob to a T. Jacob's history isn't one to necessarily follow. Jacob's history isn't a moral tale, but rather a preaching about how the LORD does one thing: He keeps His promise to save sinners.

For that Jacob needs a new name. "Israel," "Wrestles with God." That's what Jacob did. He fought, stole, and manipulated everyone around him, too. But with God all He was looking for was a blessing, salvation, forgiveness. "I will not let you go unless you bless me." A bigger sinner needs and desires above all else even bigger forgiveness. That's the gift the LORD really wants to give.

"In you all nations of the earth will be blessed." That's a Savior Promise for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Savior Promise kept through them. Jesus born—"son of Jacob, Isaac, Abraham" (Luke 3:34). Savior Promise for you, too! Jesus, born to save His people—all are His people—from their sins. For "heel grabbers" (sinners) His heels were pierced; His hands and side were, too. He shed His blood and died for you.

There's a new name for you, too. Baptized into Jesus. You are His. Just as He was with Jacob wherever Jacob went, so also, "I will be with you always." You shall be brought to the eternal Peniel, where you will see your God Jesus face to face, in His Kingdom, where He rules and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever FOR YOU. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Lord, when Your glory I shall see
And taste Your kingdom's pleasure,
Your blood my royal robe shall be,
My joy beyond all measure!
When I appear before Your throne,
Your righteousness shall be my crown;
With these I need not hide me.
And there, in garments richly wrought,
As Your own bride shall we be brought
To stand in joy beside You.*

("A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth, LSB 438, st.4)

Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent

MARCH 2, 2021

Today's Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 21:1-21; Mark 6:35-56

"This is God's will: your sanctification."

(1 Thessalonians 4:3)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. God wants you to be holy. That's His will for your life. You can't get around Paul's words here. There they stand. No qualifications. No misunderstandings. God's will is for you to be sanctified, for you to be holy. So, are you holy? How do you know? Where do you look to know if you're holy before a holy God? What's this holiness supposed to look like, anyway? It looks like Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:30)!

You weren't expecting that, were you? You were expecting me to talk about you, your works, your sins, what you do to be holy before a holy God. I know, I know. That's how you think. That's how many Christians talk. Repent! We're hardwired to think and act that way!

What you do doesn't make you unholy. Each one of your sins, even the unholy things we do with our bodies (see verses 3-5 about that) are just symptoms of being sinners. Your unholiness, your flesh, works at a fever's pitch to YOLO. Live it up. Live for yourself. And then, work even harder to make up for it! You're hardwired to live selfishly in your relationships with those in your daily life, and at the same time you're a slave to improving yourself before God. And if you can use His Law to do it? Even better!

What you do doesn't make you holy, either. Your good can't make up for your bad. If you're living that way, well, that is certainly the opposite of "how you ought to please God." "Everything that does not proceed from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). So are you holy? Eternally yes! Only in Jesus. Jesus is your sanctification, your holiness before God. And in Jesus alone, by faith in Him alone, you are the very righteousness of God! Jesus' holiness has been given to you by the Holy Spirit. He's called holy because He makes holy. Through Jesus Word and Gifts the Spirit sanctifies you.

That holiness has fruit! From Him through you. His Gift. Not your work. Need more? Want more? You should. No excuses for sinning allowed. The Lord always has more for you. He'll give it. He has and will: "just as you are doing, that you do so more and more." Ask and you shall receive. He gives it. Whatever God wants, God gets. His will happens, even without our prayer. He wants you holy. He makes you holy...in Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

On my heart imprint Your image, Blessed Jesus, King of grace, That life's riches, cares, and pleasures Never may Your work erase; Let the clear inscription be: Jesus, crucified for me, Is my Life, my hope's foundation, And my glory and salvation! *("On My Heart Imprint Your Image" LSB 422)*

Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent

MARCH 3, 2021

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism: The Sixth Commandment*

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 22:1-19; Mark 7:1-23

"You shall not commit adultery."

(Small Catechism: *The Sixth Commandment*)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. What's the Sixth Commandment all about? Jesus is pretty clear on that one, not just at Sinai, but also in what we call His Sermon on the Mount: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery,' but I say to you that anyone who looks at a woman and thinks of her with lust has committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5). There's no getting around that. When the Triune God created man He said, "Be fruitful and multiply." This blessing from God is now all out of whack in the desires of mankind, because we also join in, rebelling in heart, soul, mind, and strength.

We do what we want. We do what feels good. We jump the tracks of what the Lord intended for marriage, a beautiful intimacy between two human beings. We turn a blind eye to divorce. We act like husband or wife, with many people along the way. We live in a world where sex sells, along with other deeper, darker things which ought not to be named among us!

Put away your porn. Stop dating for the sake of dating. Stop doing things that are for marriage alone. But if you really want to keep doing them, not caring in the least what God says about them, then the Lord promises that He will give you exactly what you want. He'll hand you over to these things (Romans 1).

This isn't about God's setting up rules, or being a prude. This is actually all about Jesus. He saves His Bride, the Church. He dies for Her. Sheds His blood for Her. Marriage, between one man and one woman, is all a picture of this. The relationship between Jesus and His Church is one of mercy, love, and forgiveness, and the Lord brings husbands and wives together so that their household would be of His mercy, love, and forgiveness.

You are a member of the Church, the Lord's Bride, because you are baptized into Him. You're saved from your lusts. They aren't you anymore! Jesus sets you free, forgives you, enlivens you to be with the husband or wife He's chosen for you in holiness and honor. After all, Jesus died for you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Father, You created Adam, Crafted Eve, and made them one; Jesus, from their sin You saved us, As God's true incarnate Son; Holy Spirit, You forgive us; From our sins we are released. Bring us, Lord, at last to heaven, To the endless wedding feast. ("Gracious Savior, Grant Your Blessing" LSB 860, st.5)

Thursday of the Second Week of Lent

MARCH 4, 2021

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 24:1-31; Mark 7:24-37

He came from the region of Tyre, through Sidon, unto the Sea of Galilee, in the middle of the region of the Decapolis. (Mark 7:31)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Jesus goes here, there, and everywhere. He'd just wandered up northwestward from Galilee to Tyre. Ran into the Syro-Phoenician woman. On His way back to Galilee, He goes a little bit farther north to pass through Sidon. Then He goes all the way across the Galilee to the The Ten Greek Cities (Decapolis) that were east of that sea and the Jordan River. Finally, He gets to His final destination, Magdala, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee (Mark 8:10, Matthew 15:39).

What's Jesus doing? Well, don't you remember our question from Sunday? Who does Jesus come to? Who does He come for? He came for that Syro-Phoenician woman. She believed He journeyed up there just for her. And looking at this verse from Mark 7, she was absolutely right! In fact, Jesus' travel itinerary proves that He takes the fastest way back to Galilee that will take Him just where He means to go—to this blind, mute Gentile.

That's what Jesus is about, after all. He comes to save. He comes to say, "Ephphatha," to this blind man. He comes to say equally freeing words to you, too. "I died for you. I rose for you. I baptize you. I absolve you. This is My Body and Blood for you for the forgiveness of your sins." He adjusts His travel itinerary for this man, and He also uses His almighty power to come to you.

Wherever Jesus goes and whatever Jesus does shows you this one thing: He came to be your Savior. It doesn't matter if you're a Syro-Phoenician, a deaf/mute Gentile, a sinner, or even dead! Jesus will save you. He will come for you. He already has. He will do it again. To save you. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

I thank Thee, Jesus, Sun from heaven, Whose radiance hath brought light to me; I thank Thee, who hast richly given All that could make me glad and free; I thank Thee that my soul is healed By what Thy lips revealed.

("Thee Will I Love, My Strength, My Tower" LSB 694, st.3)

Friday of the Second Week of Lent

MARCH 5, 2021

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 24:32-52, 61-67; Mark 8:1-21

"They were seeking from Him a sign from heaven, tempting Him."

(Mark 8:11)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Jesus isn't a showman. He doesn't parade Himself around doing parlor tricks, miracles on a whim, just to get people to believe in Him. When we get power, wealth, strength, we tend to flaunt it, brag about it, show it off. We'll all flex, given the opportunity. Jesus doesn't flex. He doesn't need to.

But that's the temptation swirling around Jesus. "You don't need to be this or that Jesus. You don't need to be Savior Jesus." The devil tempts Him, "All these kingdoms I will give you if you will bow down to me" (Matthew 3). Peter tempted Him, "Being crucified shall never happen to You, Lord" (Matthew 16). They were doing it here, and they'd do it again. "Tell us, Christ, who struck you" (Matthew 26). "Come down from the cross, and we'll believe in You" (Matthew 27).

Jesus "didn't count equality with God as something to be stolen, but He made Himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant, becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2). And that's the only sign Jesus actually does. He dies. "The sign of Jonah—for as Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and nights." He does this for you. To save you. He goes to His Cross, stays on His Cross, but does not stay dead in His tomb. And you are saved.

Thanks be to God Jesus isn't like us! He doesn't do anything for recognition, He does all that He does simply to save you. No signs, no wonders. He dies and rises for you. You are saved. Need a sign for that? Look no further than the Lord's own signs—His Word and Gifts: Baptism, Absolution, the Gospel, the Supper of His Body and Blood. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

No blinding sign we ask, No wonder from above. Lord, help us place our trust alone In your unswerving love.

("O Christ, You Walked the Road" LSB 424, st.3)

Saturday of the Second Week of Lent

MARCH 6, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for the Third Sunday in Lent

(Psalm 25:1-2, 17-18, 20; antiphon: v. 15-16)

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 27:1-29; Mark 8:22-38

*"My eyes are continually toward Yahweh, for He will cause my feet to come out from the net."
(Psalm 25:15)*

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Why do you trust the Lord? Why look to Him in time of need? Because He's saved you, obviously! Yes, yes, we all know that. But so often we flip that around. He doesn't rescue you because you trust in Him. He saves you, and because of His acting to save you, you trust Him.

He will cause your feet to come out of the net, whatever net you're trapped in. Is it sins? Which sins? How can they be a net for you? They were tied to Jesus on the Cross! Is it persecution for believing in Jesus as your God and only Savior? "A student is not above His teacher." As Jesus was delivered on Easter, so also you will be, too, on your Easter—the Last Day. And that gets you to the next net—death. Yeah, Jesus rose, and He will raise you. That's His promise.

The Lord will cause your feet to be brought out of the net of your grave, and the sins that put you there. Your feet, and your entire body, soul, and spirit, were placed into something even stronger than the flimsy net of sin, death, and the devil. Your heart, soul, mind, strength, your body, soul, and spirit were all placed into Jesus Your Savior. You're baptized. Nothing can ever keep you down.

Jesus saves you. He didn't save you because you trusted Him. He saves you and therefore you trust Him. He went through Cross, death, and grave to do it. He'll save you. He really will. He already has! When you get out of your coffin you'll see it. You'll see Him, forever and ever! In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

In all the strife Of mortal life Our feet shall stand securely; Temptation's hour Will lose its pow'r, For You will guard us surely. O God, renew With heav'nly dew Our body, soul, and spirit Until we stand At Your Right hand Through Jesus' saving merit. ("Who Trusts in God a Strong Abode" LSB 714, st.3)

The Third Sunday in Lent

MARCH 7, 2021

Today's Reading: Luke 11:14-28

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 27:30-45; 28:10-22; Mark 9:1-13

"Then a stronger man than he will come and conquer him, take away his armor that he trusted, and will distribute his spoils." (Luke 11:22)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. We're the devil's spoil. He captured us back in Eden. He chained up Adam and Eve through his lying and deceitful words, "You won't die. You'll be like God." And by nature we are enslaved to that word, too. We throw in with the devil, trying to be like God, struggling not to die. Jesus would have none of that. When Adam blamed God for his sins, when the woman tried to blame the serpent, Jesus made a promise. "Her seed will crush your head." He didn't wait for people to shape up, get better, show that they wanted to get help, wanted to be saved.

Jesus waits for no man or woman. He cuts off all our sins, all we do to justify our actions. He silences us whenever we try to say, "Well, the reason I did it is..." He stops our mouths when we open them to say, "I know it was wrong, but at least I've done this or that," or, even worse, when we say, "At least I'm not like that person over there." To each and every lie of the devil, the ones he whispers to us, the ones we then speak out loud, Jesus says, "Be quiet. You're a sinner. I'm the Lord. And, good news. I save sinners."

Jesus is stronger than the devil, stronger than your sins, stronger than your sinfulness, stronger than your death, grave, and hell. He comes to save us. He invades the devil's kingdom, being born of the Virgin Mary. He bound the devil at every turn: casting out demons, silencing them, healing sickness, forgiving sin, raising the dead. Then He did the ultimate binding of the devil. Jesus Himself was bound, beaten, crucified, dead.

Jesus conquered the devil, saving you in the process. You're the spoil Jesus desired. He could have anything He wanted, and He wanted you and me—to save us. This is why the Lord calls His people, "His heritage." As we sing in the Te Deum, "Save Your people and bless Your heritage." We're the thing He forever wanted. The Lord gets what He wants. You. Blood-bought. Empty tomb-certain. You've got His Name on you to prove it. Baptized. That's you. The Lord's inheritance, His eternal spoils. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy, be gracious to all who have gone astray from Your ways and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of Your Word; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the Third Sunday in Lent)

Monday of the Third Week of Lent

MARCH 8, 2021

Today's Reading: Exodus 8:16-24

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 29:1-30; Mark 9:14-32

"And Yahweh did so."

(Exodus 8:24)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. The Lord's Word does what He says. If He says there will be flies, there are flies. If He says there will be plagues, then the plagues happen just the way He says. If He says they'll end, they end. Only when He says.

We try to match the Lord, try to be like Him, make our words reality. We seek to control the universe, make what we say happen. It doesn't. It might for a little while, but our words aren't almighty, nor are our wishes, hopes, or our could-be's. Not so the Lord's Word. His Word always has almighty power behind it. His Word created the universe. His Word released plagues. His Word ended plagues. His Word also saves. The Word of judgment to Egypt was a Word of salvation for Israel: "I will establish a division between my people and your people." So it was Yahweh matched up with Pharaoh. His Word, His plagues that happened just as the Lord said, undid Pharaoh as a false god, but that same Word brought rescue to the people of Israel.

The Lord uses His almighty power to save His people, to save you. He has all the power in the universe. Actually more, since He, you know, created the universe. But be that as it may, the Lord's almighty power and glory is shown chiefly in showing mercy, in saving you.

The Almighty Son of God dies. How powerful is God? So powerful He can do the impossible. Die. He promised it. The Lord does what He says. He also comes back to life. Even more impossible! Dead people are supposed to stay dead, right? Not Jesus. He comes back to life.

And now He's got all authority in heaven and on earth to what He eternally wants to do: save you. You're whatever the Lord says you are, and you are whatever He does for you. He saves you. You're saved. He says, "I baptize you." You're baptized. He says, "I forgive you." You're forgiven. He says, "This bread is My Body, this cup is My Blood FOR YOU for the forgiveness of sins." Then, well, that's exactly what it is and what you have.

Whatever the Lord says, He does. He does it to save you. And that's exactly what happens. Because, well, "Yahweh," the LORD Jesus, "did so." In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

We eat this bread and drink this cup, Your precious Word believing That Your true body and Your blood Our lips are here receiving. This word remains forever true, All things are possible with You, For You are Lord Almighty.

("Lord Jesus Christ, You Have Prepared" LSB 622, st.4)

Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent

MARCH 9, 2021

Today's Reading: Ephesians 5:1-9

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 35:1-29; Mark 9:33-50

Before you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of the Light—for the fruit of the Light is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth. (Ephesians 5:8-9)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. You're baptized. Jesus died for you. That's who you are. Jesus is the light of the world—snuffed out at Calvary, relit on Easter, for you. He shines His resurrected face upon you in the forgiveness of your sins. In Holy Baptism you are united with Him, child of the Father, light of the world (Matthew 5), but only in Jesus.

There's no darkness in Jesus, no sin, no death. He died never to die again. And because that's how it is with Jesus, that's how it is with you. No darkness. No sin. No icky thing done in the darkness. No shame. No bad internet history. You won't die. No darkness of a grave for you. That's all true for you in your Baptism and in Jesus.

In you, in your personal efforts, there's only darkness, only sins, only death. But that's not you in the LORD. No, not ever you in Jesus. In Jesus you are the brightness of God Himself, the apple of the Father's eye. You baptized. You saved. You in Jesus.

The Light bears fruit. You don't bring it up, make it grow, make it blossom, make it happen. No, it's the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). "Fruit of the Spirit is...**goodness.**" (Galatians 5) Jesus "became for us wisdom from God, and **righteousness** and redemption, so that we would become the righteousness of God in Him." (1 Corinthians 1:30) "I am the way, the **truth**, and the life" (John 14:6). "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).

From Jesus to you. Of course that's in you. How could anything else be true? In you there is only darkness, but that's not you in God's sight, not ever. Why make it true? No, you're baptized. You're died for. That's who you are forever...in Jesus alone. He was snuffed out and relit for you. And how it goes with Jesus, it goes with you. You will live again forever in His marvelous light. After all, "We are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who hopes this way in Him, purifies Himself as He is pure. (1 John 3:2-3). You're that pure. You're that light. You're in Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

He came from His blest throne Salvation to bestow; But men made strange, and none The longed-for Christ would know. But, oh, my friend, My Friend indeed, Who at my need His life did spend!

("My Song Is Love Unknown" LSB 430, st.2)

Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent

MARCH 10, 2021

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism:* The Seventh Commandment

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 37:1-36; Mark 10:1-12

You shall not steal. (Small Catechism: The Seventh Commandment)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Jesus was actually stolen from. He really was. This is not just grandstanding. His enemies and one of His disciples stole from Him. He was the friend of sinners, to forgive them, to save them from their stealing, to make them not thieves. And so to save them He came and was stolen from.

“They took His garments, and for His clothing they cast lots.” That’s what the Roman soldiers did at Calvary. Judas, too! He didn’t just want 30 pieces of silver to betray Jesus. He’d always wanted more. Jesus gave it, too. He unconditionally loved Judas. Judas was a thief, put in charge of the money purse. (John 12). Jesus was also numbered with thieves, crucified between two of them, to save them, to save Judas, to save everyone who takes what isn’t theirs.

We’re saved from our stealing, too. Whether it’s permanently borrowing something, illegally downloading, not treating our neighbor’s stuff well, wasting something, or even taking a toy, a tablet, or a game controller our sibling was playing with, we all try to get what isn’t ours.

The Lord saves us from this. He gives us exactly what we have, not so that we take from our neighbor, but the Lord gives to us so that He can use us to help and serve our neighbor. The stuff isn’t important: money, clothes, technology, cars, popularity, or whatever else we want. He loves you unconditionally. He’d let you go off to your own destruction, like he let Judas.

But that’s not you. Can’t be. Not in Jesus. He saved you from your stealing. He shed His blood to buy you back from your stealing. He forgives it away. You’re rich in Jesus, eternally rich. Blessed eternally. Blessed now, too. Stuff for your neighbor. Through you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*I build on this foundation, That Jesus and his blood Alone are my salvation,
My true, eternal good. Without Him all that pleases Is valueless on earth;
The gifts I have from Jesus Alone have priceless worth.*

(If God Himself Be for Me” LSB 724, st.2)

Thursday of the Third Week of Lent

MARCH 11, 2021

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 39:1-23; Mark 10:13-31

Permit the little children to come to Me; do not slow them down, for the Kingdom of God is theirs.”
(Mark 10:14)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. You don't do anything to be saved. Sorry, rich guy in Mark 10. Jesus wanted to save him from more than his worldly riches. Jesus wanted to save him from the riches of his own works. Jesus would save that rich man from whatever he trusted in. Inheritance from God, getting into His Kingdom, isn't done by way of works. Even in our daily lives, no one inherits because of what they do. We inherit by way of gift, relationship, because the person giving (bequeathing) the inheritance dies. You don't do anything to get it.

But you and I keep trying. It's why we think we're not saved when we let other people, God, or ourselves down. It's also why we think we're more Christian, more saved, when we act better than others, even people in our own congregations and families. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" is hardwired into us as sinners.

"It's hard for rich people to be saved," Jesus warns. In the way of the Law, to be saved is to sell everything. Even then, "Who can be saved?" "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For everything is possible with God." What's possible? Saving. The Lord does His salvation by way of Gift. He rescues sinners. Jesus sheds His blood, more precious than gold or silver, for them. He gives His eternal Kingdom to those who've got nothing else going for them except Him.

So it is even to little children. Talk about nothing in themselves! Nothing before God. For they get the Kingdom. It's theirs by faith, trusting in Jesus. He gives it freely to them, little children. Even infants! (See Luke 18:16 about that.) In Holy Baptism Jesus gives the Kingdom away. It's yours. You're baptized into it. "Lasset die Kindlein zu Mir kommen." So it says on the baptismal font at one of my congregations. "Let the little children come to Me." Don't keep children away from Baptism, don't wait for the family to get together, don't wait for Grandma, Grandpa, anyone else. "Don't keep them away," Jesus says. Bring them right to me. If anyone wants the obedience way, waiting to baptize is disobeying Jesus.

No need to go away sad. There is always more gift from Jesus. He died for you, for all, even babies. You, the baptized. As His baptized children, "the kingdom ours remaineth." In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Miracle each time it happens As the door to heaven opens And the Father beams, "Beloved, Heir of gifts a king would covet!"

("See This Wonder in the Making" LSB 593, st.2)

Friday of the Third Week of Lent

MARCH 12, 2021

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 40:1-23; Mark 10:32-52

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life in payment for many.”
(Mark 10:45)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Jesus serves you. You don't serve Him. How does Jesus serve you? How does Jesus minister to you? Only one way: by giving His life as a ransom in payment for many. He renders this payment by being handed over, being killed, and coming back to life on the Third Day. That's how He has served you, "redeemed you, purchased and won you, with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death."

Now, you are His. He did it for you. No need to make Him proud or bolster your own position. You don't have to call "shotgun" in His Kingdom, like James and John tried to do. "Let us sit on your right and left hands, Jesus." "I'm sorry," Jesus says, "those seats have already been taken." Who got those seats? "And they crucified two thieves with Him, one at His right and the other at His left" (Mark 15:27). But what about James and John? What did they do when Jesus was being ushered away? "Leaving Him, they all fled" (Mark 14:50).

Who does Jesus die for? "Many." No limit to how many exactly. God can always add more into the many. Thieves? Sure. Those who abandon and let down those they love the most? You bet. What about those who try to push themselves forward in God's sight? Of course! And if all those are true, this last one's easy. What about you? "This is most certainly true."

Jesus is your Son of Man. He's your payment for sin. He's your coming back to life after you're dead. He's your everything. His death and resurrection are delivered to you in Holy Baptism. His body given into death and His blood shed for you at Calvary are His Body and Blood delivered to you at Communion. His "It is finished," His "Father forgive them" is put into your ears with sermons, Bible readings, Absolution, forgiveness, even this Reflection!

Jesus serves you. Life into death. Jesus serves you still through His Word and Gifts. Jesus will also serve you in the eternal life to come. "He will dress and seat them, and, after He arrives, He will serve them" (Luke 12:37). In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O my God, my rock and tower, Grant that in Your death I trust, Knowing death has lost its power Since You crushed it in the dust. Savior, let Your agony Ever help and comfort me; When I die be my protection, Light and life and resurrection.
(“Jesus, Grant That Balm and Healing” LSB 421, st.5)

Saturday of the Third Week of Lent

MARCH 13, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for the Fourth Sunday in Lent

(Psalm 122:1-2, 6, 8; antiphon: Isaiah 66:10a, 11a)

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 41:1-27; Mark 11:1-19

I rejoiced when they were telling me, "Let's go to Yahweh's house."

(Psalm 122:1)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When your alarm wakes you up tomorrow, you wake up totally excited and jump out of bed just because you get to go to church tomorrow, right? I knew it! Oh, wait, that's not you? Why go to church anyway? Well, the LORD commands you to love Him above all things. He commands you to call upon Him in every trouble. He commands you to pray, praise, and give thanks. He commands you to cherish His Sabbath day as holy.

Jesus is the LORD in the Old Testament. He's Yahweh in the flesh. Jesus is "I AM WHO I AM" along with His Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus gave each "you shall" and "you shall not" on Mt. Sinai. He gave the First Table of the Law which shows you what faith toward God looks like. And that means "Yahweh's House," is Jesus' house, His Father's house.

This isn't an obedience test. After all, the Sabbath was created as a gift for mankind. But if you actually trusted Jesus, you'd go to church. It's not about earning points with God. Jesus' house, His Father's house, is a "house of prayer, not a den of thieves." No earning with Him. All such buying and selling gets you thrown out, kicked out, locked out of Jesus' house—now and forever! "Weeping and gnashing of teeth" for you if you peddle your church-going before God, or peddle your other works to make up for not going to church.

Jesus rejoiced to go to church for you. He always went to synagogue and temple, always cherished the Sabbath. He credits that to your account. He dies for our not going, for our not wanting to go, for our turning going into some brownie points with God. Blood shed. Life given. Sabbath kept—dead in a tomb on Saturday. Life again—every Sunday an Easter! Church is not a test, but a Gift-giving extravaganza!. That's why David was happy to go. You, too! Think about it. Jesus has ruled the universe to make sure there's a house of His to go to. There He's used His power to make sure you hear His forgiveness, hear His preaching, receive His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of your sins. Tomorrow, hop out of bed. Jesus has His gifts for you, just for you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Hear us, O Father, as we throng Your temple. By Your past blessings, by Your present bounty, Smile on Your children, and in grace and mercy Hear our petition.
("Only-Begotten, Word of God Eternal" LSB 916, st.3)

The Fourth Sunday in Lent

MARCH 14, 2021

Today's Reading: John 6:1-15

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 41:28-57; Mark 11:20-33

"For Jesus already knew what He was going to do."

(John 6:6)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Of course, Jesus knows what He's going to do! He's a God with a plan. He not only knew that those people were going to seize Him to make Him King, but He knew they would eventually seize and crucify Him. Nothing gets by His notice. Not even you or I. You are on Jesus' mind. He knows how He's going to take care of you. You don't have to worry about what's going on in the world, how school will turn out, or what will happen in your parents' relationship. You don't have to worry about college, work, career, family, life. Jesus is your God and He's got a plan!

He already put that plan into motion and has used His almighty power to pull it off. He moved history to be born, to die, and rise again at the right time, just like He made sure someone in that crowd had five loaves of bread and two fish. "He knew what He was going to do." He did this for you. Your salvation is that certain. He knows what's coming in the future, too. It's all part of His plan to save you: a First Article miracle and meal—feeding 5,000 with five loaves and two fish—to preview what He would do for you to bring His Second Article Redemption to you in His Third Article gifts.

It all sounds so familiar: "He took bread. Gave thanks. Broke it. Gave it to His disciples." So it was on the night He was betrayed: food for their bodies and souls—Body and Blood for you for the forgiveness of your sins. You're in on that meal. The Supper is for you. Jesus knew He would institute that Supper. He came to do it, just like He came to die and rise for you. He's used His almighty power to move history in order to provide a place where He can deliver it to you. A congregation with bread and wine just where He can give what He promises through His Word—His Body and Blood.

See, you don't get by Jesus' notice. You're on Jesus' mind. He's planned to care for you body and soul. Not just today, but even forever! "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will resurrect him on the Last Day" (John 6:54). In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the Fourth Sunday in Lent)

Monday of the Fourth Week of Lent

MARCH 15, 2021

Today's Reading: Exodus 16:2-21

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 42:1-34, 38; Mark 12:1-12

"What is it?"

(Exodus 16:15)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. I'm sure the Israelites had lots of questions. When would they get out of Egypt and to the promised land? When they got out into the desert, they had a few more. "Why'd you bring us out here to die, Moses and Aaron? Where's the food? Where's the water?" But they weren't really grumbling against Moses and Aaron. They were questioning the LORD who brought them out of the Land of Egypt. "Is the LORD even going to provide for us?"

We question the Lord, doubt the Lord, too. Whenever things seem like the Lord doesn't care, we despair. We think life is miserable. Maybe we think we're going to die. We'll try and blame others. Maybe we blame ourselves. But we're really grumbling, complaining, doubting the Lord.

The Lord took care of Israel. "What is it?" they asked. It was the bread the Lord gave them. For their entire journey through the wilderness the Lord provided the manna. He cared for them. He loved them. He saved them from Egypt, from slavery. He proved for their needs. He kept His promises. Rescue-from- Egypt promises. Bread-in-the-wilderness promises. Savior-born-of-a-Virgin promises. Calvary and Easter promises.

The Lord does the same for you. You're saved like Israel was, from the slavery to your sins under the Pharaoh Satan. Jesus suffered the death of the firstborn, under the darkness of Good Friday, darkness He felt—"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" He keeps His promises to you, as well.

Daily bread promises. He will give you from His Father what you need to support your body and life. Baptismal promises. "I am with you always." As He was with Israel in the desert. Lord's Supper promises. "What is it?" "Take, eat; this is My Body, given for you. Drink of it all of you; this cup is the new testament shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

What is this bread? Christ's body risen from dead: This bread we break, This life we take, Was crushed to pay for our release. O taste and see—the Lord is peace.

What is this wine? The blood of Jesus shed for mine; The cup of grace Brings His embrace Of life and love until I sing! O taste and see—the Lord is King.

("What Is This Bread" LSB 629, st.1-2)

Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

MARCH 16, 2021

Today's Reading: Galatians 4:21-31

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 43:1-28; Mark 12:13-27

"You, brothers, like Isaac are children of promise." (Galatians 4:26)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. You're a child of promise. You're a child of Jerusalem above, that is, the "holy Christian and Apostolic Church," the "Bride of Christ." You're a member of Jesus' Body, the Church, not because of who you are or where you were born or who your parents are. You're part of His Body because, well, that's His promise. And what the Lord promises happens.

That's how it was with Abraham and Sarah. The LORD promised they'd have a son. Abraham didn't need to take Hagar as another wife. (It didn't work out well at all. It's almost like the Lord only intended for him to have one wife... Oh, wait...) Anyway. What the LORD promised, happened. Abraham and Sarah had a son. He was born in a way that was absolutely impossible! But when the Lord makes a promise, the Lord keeps a promise. "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'The Virgin will conceive and bear a Son and shall call His name Immanuel,' which means, 'God with us'" (Matthew 1:22-23). Oh, yeah, Abraham and Sarah also had Isaac when they were really super old, too.

Jesus is the Promised One. He came to save His people from their sins. Abraham from his adultery. Sarah from her unbelief. You and I from all our sins. He died and shed His blood to redeem us. He rose from the dead, too. The firstborn of the dead! All this was just as God promised.

And like Isaac, like Jesus, we are children of promise. Because, well, the Lord says we are. And when the Lord makes a promise, He keeps it. How does the Lord keep His promise to you? You're baptized. You're absolved. You're fed with Jesus' Body and Blood. You're a child of those promises because you receive those promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation. Because of them, you're one with Jesus, Jesus is your brother, by faith, trusting Him.

The Lord promises it. The Lord does it. You're a child of His promises. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Christ is the world's Redeemer, The lover of the pure, The font of heav'nly wisdom, Our trust and hope secure, The armor of His soldiers, The Lord of earth and sky, Our health while we are living, Our life when we shall die.

("Christ Is the World's Redeemer" LSB 539, st.1)

Patrick, Missionary to Ireland

MARCH 17, 2021

Today's Reading: Mark 9:33-50

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 44:1-18, 32-34; Mark 12:28-44

"If anyone wants to be first, he will be last of all and servant of all."

(Mark 9:35)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Humility isn't humiliation. Humility isn't thinking less of yourself. Humility is thinking of yourself less. And putting others first isn't the credit to get ahead. That's not being humble at all! No one who's humble says, "See how much I serve! Look at how I'm the last in line!" That's exalting yourself by means of a show of humility. "Whoever exalts exalts himself will be humbled."

No one wants to be last. You really don't. When we think about what Jesus says, "If anyone wants to be first, he will be last of all," we twist it like this. How can a loser win? How can an F get me an A? That doesn't make any sense! I don't want the F. I'm not going to lose. I'm not going to make sure other people get stuff before me. That's humiliating! But if I'm going to get something out of it, maybe...

"The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Thank God! Jesus is that sort of servant for you. He puts you first. His life paid in your place. "He made Himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant, becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2) He put Himself on a cross, put Himself into a grave to save you. So that you would be exalted.

You don't have to fight for the top. You don't have to hide your attempt for first place by pretending to want last place. Because, again, we really don't want last place. You're exalted—in Jesus. In Him alone you are God's righteousness. Into Him you are baptized, clothed with His righteousness. "By His wounds, you have been healed," forgiven. You get the feast of feasts! Don't even have to fight to get in line! More than enough to go around! "My Body and Blood for you for the forgiveness of your sins."

Jesus became nothing, servant, slave to save you. You have everything you'll ever need or want in Him. He frees you. When you're truly free, you serve. You really are that free in Jesus alone. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

I bind unto myself today The strong name of the Trinity By invocation of the same, The Three in One and One in Three.

I bind this day to me forever, By pow'r of faith, Christ's incarnation, His Baptism in the Jordan River, His cross of death for my salvation, His bursting from the spiced tomb, His riding up the heavenly way, His coming at the day of doom, I bind unto myself today.

("I Bind unto Myself Today" LSB 604, st.1-2)

Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent

MARCH 18, 2021

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism:* The Eighth Commandment
Daily Lectionary: Genesis 45:1-20, 24-28; Mark 13:1-23

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

(Small Catechism: The Eighth Commandment)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. The Lord gave you His Name in Holy Baptism. There He gave you the Name above every name. A good Name, the best Name, His Name. Jesus' Name, the Father's Name, the Spirit's Name—one Name for you. "I baptize you in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

You don't have to make a name for yourself. Before the Creator of the universe you can't get a better name than His own Name that He gave to you. And to make a name for yourself, which you don't actually have to do, you certainly don't have to tear down the names of others, ripping them to shreds to do it. Gossiping, lying, tattling won't make you any better, won't claim a better name for yourself. Oh, sure, it might make you look better in the eyes of some people, it might even make you more popular for awhile. But in the process you actually set aside the Almighty God who's created you, redeemed you, and sanctified you. You set Him aside by setting aside His Name, choosing instead yourself and your own name.

Jesus bore a bad reputation for you. He bore the bad reputation you've been given by others. He bore the bad reputation you give to others. He was crucified as a thief, as a sinner, shedding His blood to save you. He rose from the dead, clean reputation forever. "Worthy is Christ the Lamb who was slain!" And that's what you have in His Name, baptized into His Name, having faith in His Name. "For there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

You now use His Name, and even your own name, for the sake of others. For the sake of their reputation you forgive them, bear the shame with them, for them, if possible. Not to make a name for yourself. Why would you keep trying that old game? That's a game you'll eternally lose in hell. You don't have to make any name for yourself. You already have the best Name ever. You're baptized. You've got God's Name. His for you. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Baptized into Your name most holy, O Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, claim a place, though weak and lowly, Among Your saints, Your chosen host. Buried with Christ and dead to sin, Your Spirit now shall live within.

("Baptized into Your Name Most Holy" LSB 590, st.1)

St. Joseph, Guardian of Jesus

MARCH 19, 2021

Today's Reading: Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 47:1-31; Mark 13:24-37

"Out of Egypt I called My Son."

(Matthew 2:15)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the Son of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus is an Israelite. Jesus is God Most High. "True God, begotten of the Father from eternity and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary."

As the Son of Man, the promised Son of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as an Israelite. He does the Israelite thing. He goes to Egypt. He comes out of Egypt, too. He goes into the desert for a while—40 days instead of 40 years. He multiplies bread in deserted places.

But Jesus is also God, Son of God. And so when He does the Israel thing, He's also doing the saving thing. Saving Israel, saving you. And for that He does another Israel thing: He shows up at a mountain called Calvary. There He is crucified, "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert."

Jesus endures the places of slavery to save you from the slavery of sin. He flees from the wrath of Herod so that you don't have to be afraid of the devil. He is a faithful Son of the Father, so that you are counted, adopted as a child of His heavenly Father. Made yours in Holy Baptism!

Out of death, the Egypt of this life, He will call you. He puts people in your life to care for you along the way, just as you are put there to care for others, and just as Joseph was chosen to care for Jesus.

Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the Son of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus is an Israelite. Jesus is God Most High. "True God, begotten of the Father from eternity and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary." And that means He's your Lord, your Savior, who has "purchased and won you from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil." Calvary won. Font delivered. You, eternally a son of God. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, from the house of Your servant David You raised up Joseph to be the guardian of Your incarnate Son and the husband of His mother, Mary. Grant us grace to follow the example of this faithful workman in heeding Your counsel and obeying Your commands; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent

MARCH 20, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for the Fifth Sunday in Lent

(Psalm 43:3-5; antiphon: v. 1-2a)

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 49:29-50:7, 14-26; Mark 14:1-11

Send Your Light and Your Truth. They will lead me; They will bring me to your Holy Mountain, to Your Tabernacle. (Psalm 43:3)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Jesus is the Light of the World (John 9:5). Jesus is “the Way, the TRUTH, and the Life” (John 14:6). Jesus is the Rock upon which every wise man, everyone with faith in Him, builds (Matthew 7:24-25). Jesus is the Mountain not cut with human hands (Daniel 2:45)—born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus is the true Temple, the true Tabernacle (John 2:21). “The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us” (John 1:14). Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End (Revelation 21:6), “the Author and Finisher of our Faith” (Hebrews 12:2).

Everything that’s for life and godliness comes from God your heavenly Father, on account of Jesus Christ, His Son, and it’s all given through the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life. The Holy Spirit was given to you in Holy Baptism, and He continually comes to you through the Word He inspired. This Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth (John 15:26) because He is the Spirit of Christ Jesus (1 Peter 1:11), and the Holy Spirit delivers the Truth, delivers Jesus. As Jesus promises, “The true worshipers of the Father will worship Him in the Spirit and in the Truth” (John 4:24).
Worship of the Triune God!

Why will true worshipers worship the Father in the Holy Spirit and in Jesus the Truth? Well, look at our psalm verse! They will because He will send out His Light and Truth. Jesus will come, be born of the Virgin Mary, suffer under Pontius Pilate, be crucified, die, be buried, and raised—all FOR YOU. That Jesus sends the Spirit who draws you to Jesus’ Word and Gifts tomorrow. There, gathered as God’s baptized children, the Spirit works on you, in you, and through you through the Word, the psalms, the hymns, and Spirit-filled songs (Ephesians 5:19). Jesus will be there with His Body and Blood for you to eat and drink in His Supper for the forgiveness of sins.

Your church service tomorrow is God’s temple because Jesus is there. Beginning to end, from Baptism until forever, He saves you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

I walk with Jesus all the way, His guidance never fails me; Within His wounds I find a stay When Satan’s pow’r assails me; And by His footsteps led, My path I safely tread. No evil leads my soul astray; I walk with Jesus all the way.
(“I Walk in Danger All the Way” LSB 716, st.5)

The Fifth Sunday in Lent

MARCH 21, 2021

Today's Reading: John 8:46-59

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 1:1-22; Mark 14:12-31

*Jesus answered, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."
(John 8:54, 56)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Abraham's joy is the same joy you have. Abraham's trust and hope is the same trust and hope you have. Abraham's Messiah and Savior is your Messiah and Savior. Abraham's religion is your religion; the heart and core and central teaching is all the same. Besides a few thousand years, the only difference between you and Abraham is one of perspective.

Abraham's Savior and salvation was Yahweh (the Lord, I AM) Himself. His own good works, his being a pretty nice guy, even his own believing and trusting weren't Abraham's trust and hope. Same with you. You aren't saved by anything you do, think, decide, desire, or feel. You aren't damned because of any of those things, either. Same with Abraham. Abraham's sole trust and hope, like yours, is the Lord Himself. It's just that Abraham trusted Someone who hadn't come yet, and you trust Someone who has come and will come again: Jesus.

Jesus is I AM, Yahweh. Jesus is the God of the Old Testament. He made the promises of a Savior to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to all His faithful people; He promised them Himself. He would die and save them. He would shed His blood for them. He would even rise again from the dead. But it wasn't just for them, it was for everybody!

Abraham was a preacher of faith in Christ. He trusted that Yahweh would be true to His promise to come and save all humanity. He did. He was born. He lived a perfect life to save Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, you, and the person next you. He died and rose. He wants all people drawn to Himself in Baptism. He wants heaven opened for them with Absolution. He wants to give them His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins.

Abraham trusted Yahweh and His salvation promises. For Abraham they had yet to come, but He saw that day and rejoiced. Jesus is the I AM, and we know that because He was crucified. He's made promises to you, too. He'll come back for you, too. You have Abraham joy for that day! Promises made are promises kept in Jesus. Jesus' Cross for you says so. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(Collect for the Fifth Sunday in Lent)*

Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent

MARCH 22, 2021

Today's Reading: Genesis 22:1-14

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 2:1-33; Mark 14:32-52

Abraham went, sacrificed the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering in his son's place.
(Genesis 22:13)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. "The wages of sin is death." Tough word. True word. We don't really like that word. I mean, none of us actually wants to die, right? So it's shocking for the Lord to ask Abraham to slaughter his son, and it's even more shocking that Abraham gets after it! What's even most shocking is that Isaac is willing! He keeps going with his dad even after Abraham hinted that Isaac would be the sacrifice. He allows himself to be bound by his 100+ year old dad.

What you do deserves death. Sure, we don't think we're all that bad. Maybe we have some bad habits that we're trying to work on to make ourselves better for God, better for those around us. But come on! Death? Really? Yes, really. That's the Lord's assessment of you and your behavior. He's God. You're not. He's Judge. You're not. He's Doctor. You're patient. He's Potter. You're clay. We bristle at that. We don't really like it. Well, we'll really only let God be God in the areas of our life that we don't like. The sins we do like, well, we'll hang on to those, and God shouldn't bring that up. You can try that. You'll end up dead and in hell then. After all, He's God. You're not.

"A ram in his son's place." That's what Isaac needed. That's what Abraham needed. You and I need it, too. What we need, God gives. He gives not someone else's promised, only-begotten, and beloved son. He promises to send His own only-begotten and beloved Son.

Jesus is that Son, that Ram, that Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. He does it where Abraham was told to do it—Moriah, a hill in Jerusalem. Jesus was willing! More so even than Isaac. Jesus willing from eternity to choose and save you. "For the joy set before Him He endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2). And Jesus was tired from carrying the wood. "They compelled Simon of Cyrene to carry His cross" (Matthew 27:32).

A ram for an Isaac. A Jesus for Isaac and for you. Your Lamb. Your sacrifice for sin. Not just by believing that He is for you, yours even more—baptized into Him, fed with His Body and Blood. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

This Lamb is Christ, the soul's great friend, The Lamb of God, our Savior, Whom God the Father chose to send To gain for us His favor. "Go forth My Son," the Father said, "And free My children from their dread Of guilt and condemnation. The wrath and stripes are hard to bear, But by Your passion they will share The fruit of Your salvation."

("A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth: LSB 438, st.2)

Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

MARCH 23, 2021

Today's Reading: Hebrews 9:11-15

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 2:23-3:22; Mark 14:53-72

He is the Mediator of a new testament so that those who were called would receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (Hebrews 9:15)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Only what Jesus does counts. It counts eternally. It counts forever. What He does, He did once. Once and for all.

Calvary counted. Counted for everyone. Jesus' blood paid for everyone, for all time, forever. He "entered once for all into the holy place obtaining an eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12). He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Not just an offering. Priest, too. "High Priest of the good things to come" (Hebrews 9:11). Priest and Sacrifice for each, for all, for you. He, your Lamb. He, your Priest. Calvary much. Easter much. Eternally much.

You're called to what Jesus did for you. You have to be called. Baptized. There you are in Christ now and forever. Believe it. It's true. In Jesus. Your Baptism does what Jesus says it does, and by it you "are an heir having the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7). You have the blood, Jesus' blood—"for you for the forgiveness of sins." Way better than other good things you could do for yourself.

Jesus is the Mediator of this New Testament, a New Testament for all—"first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Romans 1:16) "for we are all sons of Abraham by faith" (Galatians 3:7), "baptized into Christ." (Galatians 3:27).

You receive what He gives—that's faith. Faith is receiving. Receiving is believing. Receiving as merit? Unfaith. Receiving as due? Unfaith. Receiving because you have to? Unfaith. Not receiving? Unfaith. Jesus gives, you receive as a free Gift? Faith.

Receiving in the faith way—the Jesus gives-for-free-to-you way—well, that faith saves you because Jesus saves you. What He does counts. Counts before God. Counts forever. Counts for all. Counts for you. He gives it to you. You have it. Eternal inheritance. Jesus' for you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

What costly sacrifice To cover human sin! Who but Christ Jesus had the right To enter in? His blood, that sprinkled price, So we might be assured That our inheritance in light Has been secured.

("Christ Sits at God's Right Hand" LSB 564, st.4)

Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

MARCH 24, 2021

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism:* The Ninth Commandment

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 4:1-18; Mark 15:1-15

"You shall not covet." (Small Catechism: *The Ninth Commandment*)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Big problem here. Your heart covets. It wants. There's nothing you can even do about it! You can control your actions, you can stop your passions, your desires from becoming actions, sometimes. As long as you don't like that sin too much. Repent!

God commands the impossible. As if the first eight commandments weren't bad enough, He tells us, "I don't just want outward holiness. I want inner holiness in your heart, soul, mind, and strength." The Ninth Commandment reminds us—how easily we forget!—things we learned in all the commandments. Here we see clear as day what God's really driving at: You shall have no other gods. Because all the things we crave, the people we lust after, the desires we give in to, even the desires we don't—all those things are our gods.

"You're just telling people they can sin." Not one bit. Don't sin. The Ninth Commandment shows us how terminal our problem is, how deep it goes. Even that passing glance—hell, forever. We have a sinfulness problem. That sinfulness produces desires. Those desires produce actions—sins! And from beginning to end, the diagnosis, the judgment, the penalty, the payment for sinfulness, desires, and sins is the same: death.

Thanks be to God Jesus also desired. He desired your place. So he took it at Calvary. He did because Jesus desired to save you. Calvary much. Christ took your desires, your coveting, your lusts, your temptations, as His own. Your sins, too. All of it He claimed. No sins of His own to speak of, no sinful desires even. Yours given to Him by way of imputation, charged to His account, and so no longer charged to yours.

"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that we would become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). That's what you are in Jesus. Only in Him do you have a "clean heart." Only in Jesus do you have a right Spirit, the Holy Spirit. Yours through Baptism, through the inspired Word. Jesus' cleansing blood in the Supper. No desiring to suddenly find a clean heart in yourself and your own behavior. You have a clean heart, a not-coveting heart, only in Jesus alone. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"Yes, Father, yes most willingly I'll bear what You command Me. My will conforms to Your decree, I'll do what You have asked Me." O wondrous Love, what have You done! The Father offers up His Son, Desiring our salvation. O Lord, how strong You are to save! You lay the One into the grave Who built the earth's foundation. ("A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth" LSB 438, st.3)

The Annunciation of Our Lord

MARCH 25, 2021

Today's Reading: Luke 1:26-38

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 4:19-31; Mark 15:16-32

"No sermon from God will be impossible."

(Luke 1:37)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. What the Lord says goes. It must happen if He says it. He created the universe by speaking, preaching. Darkness can't become light. Water can't become dry ground. Impossible! Unless, of course, the Lord preaches to them!

So it is with all His promises. They win the day. They happen just as the Lord intends them to, when the Lord intends them to. You can't stop it. Can't delay it. Can't hurry it along, either. So it was that Gabriel showed up at Virgin Mary's door.

"You have found favor with God." Must be true. The angel preached it! Gabriel, arch-angel of God, is a true messenger of what God has to say. Favor with God, not with Mary. Favor from God to Mary. His for her. That's why she's highly favored. Just like Noah was. Not because they were awesomely good in the God department. No, but they were saved by the Lord's steadfast love alone.

Jesus born from a Virgin. Impossible! But then He was. The baby can't be God! Impossible. "The one born from you will be called holy, the Son of God." God can't die! But then He did. Dead people stay dead! But then He didn't. "Of His kingdom there will be no end." You see, "No sermon from God will be impossible."

So also for you. If He says you're baptized and a child of God the Father, that's what you are. If Jesus says, "I forgive you," you're forgiven. That can't be His Body and Blood! Of course it is. That's what He says it is: "This is My body, this is My blood for you for the forgiveness of sins."

The Lord preaches the impossible. Impossible for us, but not for Him. Light from darkness. Earth from water. Son of God born of a virgin. God the Son dead. God the Son raised. All for you. Adoption in water and Word. Bread and wine that are His Body and Blood. One day you will be brought back to life from your casket. Impossible? No way! Not with God. "No sermon from God will be impossible." In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, as we have known the incarnation of Your Son, Jesus Christ, by the message of the angel to the virgin Mary, so by the message of His cross and passion bring us to the glory of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the Annunciation of Our Lord)

Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent

MARCH 26, 2021

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 5:1-6:1; Mark 15:33-47

After Jesus let out a loud cry, He breathed His last.

(Mark 15:37)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Jesus won. At Calvary He won. Calvary wasn't a defeat. His death wasn't a loss. Far from it! It was always the plan. He and His Father—Spirit, too!—ruled the universe and moved history to make sure it happened just at the right time: born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate. He shed His blood, died—victory! And like any good victory, you take a victory lap. “He descended into hell and on the third day rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven.”

Jesus didn't win for Himself. He came to win for you. He came to win... you! You were the prize He was after. From forever He chose you. From forever He planned how He'd win you for Himself. At the right time He put His plan into place, and at just the right time He did it. Crucified, died, buried. You, saved! Risen from the dead, ascended, coming again with glory. You're part of the eternal victory party!

You don't have to win your way to Jesus. You don't have to put away your sins. You don't have to do enough good. None of that. Jesus takes your sins. He's the Lamb of God, after all. He does good for you, in your place. His doing good is credited to your account, but even that doesn't save you. That's not His victory for you. That's just icing on the cake.

No, His victory is Calvary, and He gives that victory to you. You're baptized into His death, into His resurrection, too! In Holy Absolution, the Keys of the Kingdom, Jesus' Word comes true again and again, “Today, you will be with Me in Paradise.” “I forgive you.” Three words do it! “This is My body that was given for you; this is My blood that was shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”

Jesus won. At Calvary He won. He won you. You're His. His forever and ever. His resurrection proves that. So does your Baptism, His Absolution, His Supper. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Then, for all that wrought my pardon, For Thy sorrows deep and sore, For Thine anguish in the Garden, I will thank Thee evermore, Thank Thee for Thy groaning, sighing, For Thy bleeding and Thy dying, For that last triumphant cry, And shall praise Thee, Lord, on high.

(“Christ, the Life of All the Living” LSB 420, st.7)

Saturday of the Fifth Week of Lent

MARCH 27, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for Palmarum
(Psalm 24:7-10; antiphon: Psalm 118:26)
Daily Lectionary: Exodus 7:1-25; Mark 16:1-20

"Yahweh is a warrior in war."

(Psalm 24:8)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Yahweh is the Name God gave Himself in the Old Testament. It's related to the Hebrew for "I AM" (Exodus 4). What sort of God is I AM? He's the God who saves, who redeems, who pardons iniquity, transgression, and sin (Exodus 34). "Yahweh is a man of war; Yahweh is His name" (Exodus 15). Or as the psalm puts it: "Yahweh is a mighty man of war" (Psalm 24).

That's what kings do, after all. They fight for their people. They save them, protect them, care for them. Good kings only do that. That's the sort of King I AM is. He's the best King. He puts everything on the line for the sake of His people. He would do anything for His people, even die for them.

That's what He does. Jesus is that I AM. His death and resurrection prove that. Calvary is the final battle of the war. Not only the war between God and the devil. Not only the war that God makes against sin. It's also the war He wages against sinners. That battle is finished! Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, spoke forth that exact royal proclamation: "It is finished!"

Jesus is the God who saves, who redeems, who pardons iniquity, transgression, and sin. Yours! He shed His blood for our sins, but not only ours—the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He brought you into Himself and His Kingdom through the waters of Holy Baptism. He's now your King, your Brother. He gives you the feast of feasts—His purchase price—in the Supper of His Body and Blood for you for the forgiveness of sins.

He will bring you into the place where there's no more war, no more crying, no more pain, no more death, no more sin. He died. He rose. He has baptized. He has fed. He's King. Good King. Your King. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Now he who bore for mortals' sake The cross and all its pains And chose a servant's form to take, The King of glory reigns. Hosanna to the Savior's name Till heaven's rafters ring, And all the ransomed host proclaim "Behold, behold your King!" ("No Tramp of Soldiers' Marching Feet" LSB 444, st.4)

Palmarum

MARCH 28, 2021

Today's Reading: Matthew 21:1-9

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 8:1-32; Hebrews 1:1-14

Others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

Then [they] cried out: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (Matthew 21:8-9)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. They emptied the tree. They took what was pleasant and pleasing to the eye. It's almost as if they couldn't do anything else. It wasn't the branches that made them do it. It was the fruit. It was able to make them wise. That's what he said. The serpent seemed to be right, and "then the eyes of both of them were opened" (Genesis 3:7), and we all know the rest: Adam and Eve hid from God, were cast out of the garden, and were barred from the Tree of Life.

The crowd in Matthew 21 emptied the trees. They took the branches and cast them all over the road. "Hosanna!" was their cry. "Save us, Son of David!" They needed to be ready for His coming. Palm branches, the symbol of peace, were the pavement for a donkey, the animal of peace, who was ridden by Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

We want empty trees, as if His coming is dependent on our behavior. We do need to repent. Changing your behavior, putting away your icky deeds, isn't repentance. (Though you should stop all those things!) They are just fruits, signs of bad roots. Repentance is a complete change in heart, soul, mind, and strength—a change only Jesus, the Gardener of Eden, can do.

The point of Holy Week isn't the emptying of trees, isn't preparing Jesus' way. Holy Week is Jesus making His way, straight to the Cross, that He might hang upon the Tree for you. There He bears not only your bad fruit but rotten roots, too, being the most rotten tree and fruit ever in your place—"He became sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21)—to make you the very righteousness and perfection of God.

Repent of thinking you've got to empty trees to make way for Jesus. Holy Week is about His coming to fill a Tree for you and giving to you the fruits of His Cross: His water and His blood (John 19:34), His Baptism and Supper. Through these, the Spirit produces His fruit (Galatians 5), and grafts you into Jesus (Romans 11). The Tree of Life is yours because He filled the Tree for you. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, You sent Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon Himself our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of His great humility and patience and be made partakers of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(Collect for Palmarum)

Monday of Holy Week

MARCH 29, 2021

Today's Reading: John 12:1-43

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 9:1-28; Hebrews 2:1-18

[The Greeks said to Philip], "Sir, we want to see Jesus." Jesus answered, "The hour has come that the Son of Man be glorified." (John 12:21, 23)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Jesus is a preacher. Why does He preach? He preaches because He was sent "to preach the gospel to the poor...to proclaim liberty to the captives...to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD" (Luke 4:18-19). What does He preach? Well, the Gospel, liberty, and the year of the Lord's favor—that's what "acceptable year of the LORD" means. Okay...so, how does He do all that? Well, that's what we learn from what happens when some Greeks come for Passover in Jerusalem, and they seek out Jesus.

Those Greeks wanted to see Jesus. That's what they told Philip, and Philip and Andrew went and told Jesus. So what does Jesus do when He's told, "Hey, Jesus, these Greeks want to see you"? He preaches. He preaches about Himself. He preaches about how you should "see" Him, how you should look at Him, what you should think about Him. How's that? As the Crucified One.

"Jesus Christ crucified" is what Jesus Christ preaches. His hour had come. Soon He would be seated in glory, enthroned on Calvary's hill. Jesus wants those Greeks to see Him with their ears. To believe in Him as the One who would save them by death and resurrection. But not just them. Jesus saves all sinners. "When I am exalted from the earth, I will draw all to myself" (John 12:32). You're drawn to Him; your sin is drawn to Him. He bears it for you. That's His glory, saving you. "That's why I came to this hour," He declares (John 12:27).

Jesus wants you to hear this same message that He preached to the Greeks that Holy Week. He sends your preacher to deliver it. Any preacher worth his salt will take his preaching cue from Jesus. He'll preach to you in such a way that you see Jesus with your ears, see Him as the Crucified One—the One crucified for you. That's His glory. His glory is saving you. That's why He was born. It's why He went the way to Calvary FOR YOU. That's Jesus' own message. Preached even to you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle, Sing the ending of the fray. Now above the cross, the trophy, Sound the loud triumphant lay; Tell how Christ, the world's redeemer, As a victim won the day.

("Sing, My Tongue, the Glorious Battle" LSB 454. st.1)

Tuesday of Holy Week

MARCH 30, 2021

Today's Reading: Mark 14:1-15:47

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 9:29-10:20; Hebrews 3:1-19

"She has anointed My body for burial ahead of time."

(Mark 14:8)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Jesus was always going to die. It was prophesied about Him in the Old Testament. His name shows it. Jesus means "Yahweh saves." Saving happens by blood. Salvation comes through death. His death. His once-for-all death. It was coming. Jesus knew it. He proclaimed it throughout His ministry. This woman knew it, too. She poured myrrh over Jesus. She got Him ready to die. He was going to die.

He was going to die for sins. Sins of judging. Of wanting money instead of helping those in need. He would die for all sins. He wouldn't just die, He would be buried. This woman got Him ready for that.

But He wouldn't just die and be buried. He would rise from the dead. He paid for sin. Defeated the devil. Conquered death. His death did it. His resurrection proved it. What Jesus preached came to pass. The woman's preparation was fulfilled. It must be so or you would be damned.

Just as that myrrh did Jesus' body no good unless it was poured on Him by this woman, so also Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection do you no good unless they're given to you. They're given to you by Christ's Woman, His Bride, the Church. It's within the Church, at the font, that you're buried with Christ and raised with Him. You're fed with His crucified, dead, buried, and raised Body and Blood. His death-defeating death, life-giving resurrection, and empty tomb are and will be yours.

Christ was buried and raised. You will die, you will be raised. You will be prepared for burial, but you will rise victorious because Christ rose victorious for you.

Jesus died for you. He was buried for you. He was raised for you. You'll rise, too. Just like He did. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O my God, my rock and tower, Grant that in Your death I trust, Knowing death has lost its power Since You crushed it in the dust. Savior, let Your agony Ever help and comfort me; When I die be my protection, Light and life and resurrection. ("Jesus, Grant That Balm and Healing" LSB 421. st.5)

Wednesday of Holy Week

MARCH 31, 2021

Today's Reading: Luke 22:1-23:56

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 10:21-11:10; Hebrews 4:1-16

They all said, "Are You the Son of God?" So He said to them, "You yourselves are saying I AM." Then they said, "Why do we still need witnesses? For we all heard it from His mouth." (Luke 22:70-71)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Why was Jesus sentenced to death? What actually was the tipping point in the trial? It was all a puppet court anyway. It was convened in the middle of the night. Jesus was arrested by a mob and brought into this very calculated, evil plot hatched and implemented by the religious leaders. They even had a whole slew of false witnesses. That didn't work, though. No matter how many charges they could trump up, they didn't stick. All they could do was "mock Him and beat Him." All they could do was blindfold and slap Him, and ask, "'Prophecy! Who's the one who hit You?" (Luke 23:63-64)

What else could they do? They needed something true to condemn Him for. So they asked Him, "Are you the Son of God?" (Luke 23:70) He said, "I AM." Jesus is condemned for being who He is. He's condemned for being the eternal Son of the Father. Sinners condemned and killed God for being God.

But His being God also means He's our Sin-Bearer. He's the One who bore our sin and the punishment of the Law in His own body. There He was the greatest sinner, the curse, sin itself. That's Jesus. And so He's condemned for that, too. The religious court condemned Him for being God. The heavenly court, God His own Father, condemned Him for being sin and curse (2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13). So He cried out from His Cross, "My God, My God why have you forsaken me!"

Jesus' being God means His death counts for you. Jesus' being condemned means you won't be condemned. This death for sin that Jesus underwent is yours and FOR YOU. You've received it in your Baptism. You eat and drink of it in His Body and Blood given and shed for you. You hear the "not guilty" verdict spoken by your pastor in the Absolution. Jesus is the eternal Son of the Father which means He's the Sin-Bearer—our Sin-Bearer. He's guilty. Now, you're not. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Ye who think of sin but lightly Nor suppose the evil great Here may view its nature rightly, Here its guilt may estimate. Mark the sacrifice appointed, See who bears the awful load; 'Tis the Word, the Lord's anointed, Son of Man and Son of God. (Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted" LSB 451, st.3)

Maundy Thursday

APRIL 1, 2021

Today's Reading: John 13:1-15, 34-35

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 12:1-28; Hebrews 5:1-14

*Jesus said to Him, "He who's bathed doesn't need anything except to wash his feet, but he's completely clean. And you are clean, but not all."
(John 13:10)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. You're clean. You're completely clean. You're as white as the colors on the altar this Maundy Thursday. How can you be anything else? In Jesus you're not! You've been washed, you've been sanctified (made holy) by His blood. You were wiped clean at the font. Now, because of the water and Word of Holy Baptism, you are a washed-clean, pure, holy, spotless child of God. He's given you His Name, marked you has His holy one, His saint.

But that's not all for you is it? You know what you've done. I know what I've done. We gossiped even before we realized what we were doing. We downloaded that movie file. We got mad at our brother or sister because of some stupid reason. We clicked the link. We're jealous of our neighbor. All these sins and others just creep up on us, and we step into them.

We want to be like Peter, "Lord, wash all of me." But Jesus says to you, "You've already been bathed. I washed you. I cleansed you. Be absolved! Let me take care of THAT sin. I will forgive it again and again and again. Receive my Body and Blood. It's given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins."

Yes, you fall into sin. You step in it daily and much. In Christ you are pure. In yourself you are not. In this life you are sinner, but you are also saint. Jesus will make sure to keep you spotless and pure. He's washed you. He'll wash your conscience from whatever you happen to step in. He does this to save you, to keep you clean in this life and in the life to come.

You're clean. You're completely clean. You're as white as the colors on the altar this Maundy Thursday. In Jesus, how can you be anything else? In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*O Lord, who left to us in a wonderful Sacrament a memorial of Your Passion, grant we implore You that we so use this Sacrament of Your body and blood that the fruits of Your redemption continually may be manifest in us; who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(Collect for Maundy Thursday)*

Good Friday

APRIL 2, 2021

Today's Reading: John 18:1-19:42

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 12:29-32; 13:1-16; Hebrews 6:1-20

Jesus said, "It is finished!" Then bowing His head, He handed over His spirit. (John 19:30)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. God died. That's right. God died. He died for you. The One who created the heavens, the earth, and all that is in them died. He was beaten, mocked, scourged, crucified. God suffered all that for you.

"My God, My God why have you forsaken Me?" God was condemned and damned for you. He bore your sin, and it killed Him. He suffered for your sins. Your punishment was His—God's. Then God died. He died for those sins. He died to rescue you from those sins. God died to do it. There your God hung bloody, beaten, dead: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

Jesus, your God, died. He didn't just look like He was dead. It's not that a man died that day. If that were the case, you'd still be in your sins because no one "can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him" (Psalm 49:7). But God redeems you. Your God Jesus redeems you by dying.

It's all finished. The accounts have been settled. It took God's dying for you to do it. How do we know it's all taken care of? Well, your God didn't stay dead. Death could not hold Him! Jesus rose from the dead. How do you know it's taken care of? You've been baptized, absolved, had the Gospel preached to you, received Jesus' Body and Blood in His Supper. The once-dead-then-resurrected Jesus gave all these gifts for you. Jesus did all these things for you. "It is finished" now and forever. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Merciful God, heavenly Father, who removed from us the grievous burden of our sins and placed it on Your dear Son, our Savior, we humbly implore You to govern us by Your Holy Spirit that we may comfort ourselves with His suffering and death in the face of all temptation; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Good Friday)

Holy Saturday

APRIL 3, 2021

Today's Reading: Matthew 27:57-66

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 13:17-14:9; Hebrews 7:1-22

O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!

(Psalm 8:1, from the Introit for Easter Day)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Jesus' Name is excellent. It's greater than any Name in this age and also in the age to come (Ephesians 1:21). "At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Philippians 2:10). The angels speak that Name to the women that first Easter morning. "I know you seek Jesus the Crucified. He isn't here because He was raised, just as He said" (Matthew 28:5-6). Jesus had added resurrection glory to crucified glory. He's enthroned in power on the Cross, dying for you and the whole world. His Name was there, too: "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews." But now He is always the Crucified. He bears the scars in His own body. As John sees in Revelation: "I saw in the middle of the throne...a Lamb standing, looking as if He'd been slain" (Revelation 5:6).

But before that, He was buried. God was lying dead in a tomb, His lifeless body placed there. God took His rest on the seventh day. This makes your grave holy. Your resurrection from the dead will be holy by His resurrection from the dead.

You will die. It's going to happen. You could be hit by a bus tomorrow, or you could die in your sleep when you're 100. You could die from cancer or in a storm. Your body will be laid to rest. But that's not the end for you, dear Christian, because Christ has baptized you into His death and resurrection, burying you with Him, you will rise again to new life. There are no ifs, ands, or buts about it. Jesus placed His Name upon you. You've been marked by Christ the Crucified in your Baptism.

Jesus died. You will die. Jesus was buried. You will be buried. Jesus rose. You will rise. Tomorrow in the Divine Service you will receive the Body and Blood that was dead, buried, and raised. Jesus keeps you with these in body and soul to life everlasting. Jesus the Crucified lives forever. You will live forever. In Him you already do. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord Jesus Christ, we give You thanks that through death You have destroyed the power of death and delivered us, who are subject to lifelong bondage through the fear of death, comfort us with Your precious merit and assist us in our last hour by Your grace; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for Holy Saturday)

Notes

Notes

*Martin Luther's Morning and Evening Prayers taken from
the Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther.*

The Scripture quotations for this season were prepared by Rev. Aaron Fenker

*Higher Things Reflections are free, like the Gospel! They may be reproduced
for congregational, personal, and other non-commercial use. Please use the
following attribution: "Daily Reflections are provided by Higher Things.
www.higherthings.org. Used with permission."*

*Higher Things exists and grows on the basis of donations and free-will
offerings from congregations and individuals. All donations are tax-
deductible. If you wish to contribute to the work of Higher Things, please
send your donation to:*

Higher Things, Inc.

P.O. Box 155

Holt, MO 64048

*(Donations are also accepted at www.higherthings.org via credit card
or PayPal.)*

*Visit our website at www.higherthings.org to read, listen to, subscribe to,
or view the ASL video of Reflections each day.*
