



REFLECTIONS

TRANSFIGURATION
AND PRE-LENT

JANUARY 24 - FEBRUARY 16, 2021

HIGHER
THINGS[®]

DARE TO BE LUTHERAN[®]

Transfiguration and Pre-Lent

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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.

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

JANUARY 24, 2021

Today's Reading: Matthew 17:1-9

Daily Lectionary: Joel 3:1-21; Romans 12:14-13:14

*And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun,
and his clothes became white as light. (Matthew 17:9)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. "Your lightnings lighted up the world; the earth trembled and shook." Psalm 77 provides the antiphon for Transfiguration's Introit. The glory of God is awesome and terrible and frightening. It reminds us of our own insignificance in this vast cosmos, of our weakness, frailness, mortality. Lightning can strike you dead, although some people have been struck by lightning and have lived to tell about it. I once had a chance meeting with someone who had been struck by lightning. He had survived, but his life was forever changed by the trauma.

The chance of being struck by lightning in a given year is 1 in 500,000 according to the first search Google returned. The chances of being struck by lightning any time soon are pretty slim, unless God chooses to smite you with His lightnings. That's a very real possibility, and the chances of that are pretty high given your rebellious relationship with God. The fact that so many people are walking around who haven't been struck by lightning is surprising and a testament to God's long-suffering mercy.

But something changes with Jesus. Up on the mountain with three of His disciples, God's lightnings take on a different shape. "And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light."

God is no Zeus hurling thunderbolts from atop Mount Olympus. His lightning is His beloved Son. For a time, the light dimmed as Jesus died on the Cross, but three days later the earth trembled and opened up and brought life and immortality to light in a glorious resurrection. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, in the glorious transfiguration of Your beloved Son You confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of Moses and Elijah. In the voice that came from the bright cloud You wonderfully foreshowed our adoption by grace. Mercifully make us co-heirs with the King in His glory and bring us to the fullness of our inheritance in heaven; 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 Transfiguration of Our Lord)

The Conversion of St. Paul

JANUARY 25, 2021

Today's Reading: Acts 9:1-22

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 1:1-21; Romans 14:1-23

*Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened.
(Acts 9:18b-19)*

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Paul's conversion was miraculous. From persecuting God and His people to becoming Christianity's most zealous missionary, history has rarely seen anyone do a 180 like Paul. The story of his conversion is no less miraculous: a bright light, Jesus appearing out of nowhere, scaly eyes that were once blind, but now they see.

What's your conversion story? In some churches, a conversion story is necessary to be an authentic Christian. Even if you've been going to church since you were in diapers, you're expected to give a testimony of how your life made a 180-degree turnaround because of Jesus' miraculous intervention. The problem is, few if any of us have stories that are even close to Paul's.

But there is another miracle that often is overlooked in the conversion of Paul. It's not bright and flashy. In fact, you can only really notice it when the scales fall from your eyes.

"Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened." Paul's conversion was not completed on the road to Damascus, but in the house of Ananias. The miracle that often goes unnoticed is that Paul was baptized. With the water came the gift of the Holy Spirit, forgiveness of sins, new birth—and new sight.

The same miraculous conversion also happened to you. With the water of your Baptism, you received the gift of the Holy Spirit, forgiveness of sins, new birth—and new sight. The Spirit drops the scales from your eyes so you can see Jesus just as clearly as if you were riding a donkey on the road to Damascus. This Jesus, though, is not shining with glory and terror, but with the glory of His resurrection.

So rise, remember your Baptism, and take some food from Jesus' altar so you are strengthened. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

*Praise for the light from heaven And for the voice of awe; Praise for the glorious vision The persecutor saw. O Lord, for Paul's conversion, We bless Your name today; Come shine within our darkness, And guide us on our way.
("By All Your Saints in Warfare" LSB 517, st.12)*

St. Titus, Pastor and Confessor

JANUARY 26, 2021

Today's Reading: Luke 10:1-9

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 2:1-3:10; Romans 15:1-13

To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.
(Titus 1:4)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. They couldn't have been more different. Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews, of the tribe of Benjamin, by training a Pharisee, now the older, more experienced apostle, converted miraculously on a trip to Damascus. Titus was the younger pastor, newer to the faith, presumably converted under ordinary means, a Greek, a Gentile who was not even compelled to be circumcised (Galatians 2:3). Yet for all the differences, Paul calls Titus his "true child in a common faith." The bond of faith is stronger than any division of age, class, or ethnicity.

Paul's spiritual relationship with Titus grows from the grace and peace of God the Father. St. Augustine wrote of the Holy Trinity that the Holy Spirit is the mutual love shared between the Father and His beloved Son. Paul became Titus's spiritual father and Titus became Paul's "true child in a common faith" because both became children of God the Father through Baptism. You are likewise brought under the fatherhood of God by your Baptism.

In his explanation of the Fourth Commandment in the *Large Catechism*, Martin Luther identifies spiritual fathers as those who govern and guide us by the Word of God. As Paul was the spiritual father of Titus, Titus also became a spiritual father for those who heard his preaching.

You also have a spiritual father in your pastor. Like Pastor Titus, your pastor is appointed to govern and guide you with the Word of God. So today, celebrate the Feast of St. Titus by remembering Paul's true child of the common faith and giving thanks for your spiritual father. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You called Titus to the work of pastor and teacher. Make all shepherds of Your flock diligent in preaching Your holy Word so that the whole world may know the immeasurable riches of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for St. Titus, Pastor and Confessor)

Wednesday after the Transfiguration

JANUARY 27, 2021

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

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 4:1-5:11; Romans 15:14-33

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

(*Small Catechism: The Third Commandment*)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Days are governed by the sun, months by the moon, and years by the stars, but a week is governed by God's Word. The Sabbath is the rhythm of creation. In six days God spoke and the world and all its inhabitants were created. But on the seventh day He rested. "So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation" (Genesis 2:3).

Every seven days after God's day of rest, the world rests and God speaks. Sabbath means rest, but it is a rest for the purpose of listening to God's Word. "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it" (*Small Catechism: The Third Commandment, Explanation*).

God gave His Word to Adam and Eve with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Every other tree was for eating; this tree was for listening. But they listened to the wrong voices. Eve listened to the serpent and Adam listened to Eve. Sin replaced Sabbath when Eve and Adam despised preaching and God's Word and replaced it with their own work.

Because of sin, the Sabbath could never offer true rest. We, like our first parents, are always more interested in offering God our work rather than our ears. But where Sabbath rest was once ruined at a tree, it is restored at a tree—the Tree. As the sun set on the sixth day of a holy week, the Son of God closed His eyes, bowed His head, and gave up His Spirit. They had to get His body into a tomb quickly because that Sabbath was a high holy day.

And the Son of God rested a rest unlike any other. His rest in the tomb restored our Sabbath rest because after the death of Jesus, there is no work left to do. It is finished. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*"You shall observe the worship day That peace may fill your home, and pray,
And put aside the work you do, So that God may work in you." Have mercy,
Lord!* (*"These Are the Holy Ten Commands" LSB 581, st.4*)

Thursday after the Transfiguration

JANUARY 28, 2021

Today's Reading: Exodus 34:29-35

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 6:1-7:14; Romans 16:17-27

And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. (Exodus 34:33)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The glory of God is a blinding light. Moses could not look directly upon God's glory or he would die. Even speaking to God's backside resulted in a forever-altered countenance. Like the moon reflecting the sun, Moses' face shone with God's glory when he came down the mountain with God's Law. But unlike the moon, Moses' face shone so brightly he needed a veil.

A veil is a perfect metaphor for how the Law reveals God. So perfect, in fact, that the Holy Spirit uses it. "Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts" (2 Corinthians 3:15). The Law is a revelation of the will of God, but it's a little fuzzy.

This is not to say that the Law is deficient. The deficiency lies in us. If we could behold the full glory of God, we wouldn't need a veil. God veils Himself for our sake, not for His. But it wouldn't do to keep the veil on. A bridegroom wants to see his bride's face.

"But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed" (2 Corinthians 3:16). Only through Christ is the veil taken away. He meets us at the altar and shows us God, not as a stern rule-maker, but as a loving husband. In Christ, we behold the glory of God in an entirely new way. The Law is the veiled revelation of God's Will, but Christ is God's Will in the flesh.

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth... For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:14, 17).

God is unveiled for you weekly at the Divine Service. When the Gospel is proclaimed, the veil is lifted at the altar and God is revealed—God in the flesh, though hidden under bread and wine. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Here, O my Lord, I see Thee face to face; Here would I touch and handle things unseen; Here grasp with firmer hand the eternal grace, And all my weariness upon Thee lean.

("Here, O My Lord, I See Thee Face to Face" LSB 631, st.1)

Friday after the Transfiguration

JANUARY 29, 2021

Today's Reading: 2 Peter 1:16-21

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 8:1-23; 2 Timothy 1:1-18

And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. (1 Peter 1:19)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever considered how odd it is that Jesus brought only three disciples with Him to the Transfiguration mountain? Or that after His glorious resurrection, He only stuck around for 40 days and didn't even appear to the chief priests or King Herod, much less Caesar? If Jesus truly wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, wouldn't it be more effective if He revealed His glory from one end of the earth to the other?

No, actually. When the disciples were on the mountain, they didn't understand God's glory. Peter wanted to house it in a few tents; the other two couldn't even think of anything to say. Had Jesus appeared in Herod's or Caesar's courts like He did in the disciples' locked room after His resurrection, they would have dismissed Him. Such an encounter would necessarily end with a violent judgment.

Rather than shine His glory in a transfigured state, Jesus conceals His glory. That's His way. His Transfiguration was only a moment; His resurrection appearances were subdued.

But Peter says that we have the prophetic Word more fully confirmed. Why? Not in flashes of majestic glory or booming voices from heaven. We have the prophecy of Scripture, which was given by the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture reveals Jesus, not for judgment but for faith. The glory of Scripture isn't a blinding light, but a lamp shining in the darkness. The day is dawning, however, when Jesus will return and He will reveal Himself to kings and peasants and friend and foe alike. And we who have been enlightened with the light of Scripture will hear on that day of judgment, "This is my beloved son, this is my beloved daughter, with whom I am well pleased." In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

We have a sure prophetic Word By inspiration of the Lord; And tho' assailed on every hand, Jehovah's Word shall ever stand.

("We Have a Sure Prophetic Word" The Lutheran Hymnal 290, st.1)

Saturday after the Transfiguration

JANUARY 30, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for Septuagesima

(Psalm 18:1-2a, 27, 32, 49; antiphon: v. 5-6a)

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 9:1-17; 2 Timothy 2:1-26

For you save a humble people, but the haughty eyes you bring down.

(From the Introit for Septuagesima)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Haughty or humble. Psalm 18 makes a stark contrast between the two. Humble people get saved. Haughty people are brought down a notch or two.

Haughty means arrogant, conceited, proud. Haughtiness is always admiring yourself in the mirror. In the mirror of God's Law, haughty people think that they have accomplished everything the Law requires. Haughty people have no need for grace, because they think they have everything they already need, and if they don't they can get it for themselves. Haughty people have no need for God; they think God needs them.

Humble people need grace. Humble people are timid, modest, poor. Humble people recognize that they bring little or nothing to the table. Before God, humble people beg for mercy and open their hands to receive everything as a gift.

You can't make yourself humble. If you try, the best you can do is false humility, a humble brag. Humility happens to you. God makes you a humble person with His Law. Through punishments of the Law, God turns you from your own accomplishments and abilities. He brings you to your knees to ask for mercy, to stretch out your empty hands.

And then there is grace. His grace fills your empty hands and heart. His grace raises you up from your knees in anticipation of raising you from your grave. His grace is your salvation. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

By grace to timid hearts that tremble, In tribulation's furnace tried, By grace, in spite of fear and trouble, The Father's heart is open wide. Where could I help and strength secure If grace were not my anchor sure?

("By Grace I'm Saved" LSB 566, st.5)

Septuagesima

JANUARY 31, 2021

Today's Reading: Matthew 20:1-16

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 10:1-11:3; 2 Timothy 3:1-17

*But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong."
(Matthew 20:13a)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. God's justice is strange. There are frequent calls for justice in our society, but people confuse justice with fairness. This idea is embedded in the Declaration of Independence: "All men are created equal," it reads. You can see it in the statue of Lady Justice, whose blindfold suggests that justice does not take appearance into account and whose evenly balanced scales suggest that wrongs are made right when things are made even.

But things work differently in God's kingdom than they do in the kingdoms of the world. Justice looks very different when you come before God.

The parable for Septuagesima features workers in a vineyard who get paid the same amount irrespective of the work they put in. The ones who worked the longest, who got paid the same as those who barely worked at all, complained that it wasn't fair. The master replied to one, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong." You might translate that more literally, "Friend, I am doing you no injustice."

God's justice is not equality. And that's Good News. If God were about getting even, we'd be in a world of hurt. But God doesn't offer rewards for good work and punishments for poor work. Instead, He offers His Son, whose good work earns Him the punishment for a world of sin. The death of Jesus was the most unfair thing the world has done, the greatest injustice according to the world's standards.

But in a miraculous reversal, the Cross of Jesus turns injustice into justification. When you hear the Absolution—"I forgive you all your sins"—also hear these words: "Friend, I am doing you no injustice. My Son makes all your wrongs right." In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, graciously hear the prayers of Your people that we who justly suffer the consequence of our sin may be mercifully delivered by Your goodness to the glory of Your name; 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 Septuagesima)

Monday of Septuagesima

FEBRUARY 1, 2021

Today's Reading: Exodus 17: 1-7

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 11:4-17; 2 Timothy 4:1-18

*"Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink."
(Exodus 17:6a)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Moses' staff did some pretty phenomenal things. It turned into a snake. It turned the Nile into blood. It divided the waters of the Red Sea. And here in Exodus 17 it draws water from a rock.

It was not the staff, of course, that did all these things. There's a little detail that's easy to pass by if you aren't careful. God says, "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock." The Lord makes water come from the dry rock, not Moses or his staff. (This got Moses in trouble later on when he took it upon himself to do the same thing again but without God.)

The Lord Himself stands on the rock and gives His people a drink. Paul interprets this and takes it one step further. "All drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). Jesus Himself, prior to His incarnation, stood on that rock at Horeb.

The water quenched their thirst, but something more happened on that rock. They got a spiritual drink as well. Once in the Temple, "Jesus stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:37-39).

The Spirit is the spiritual drink that issues forth from Jesus. Forgiveness flows out of the crucified Christ and quenches souls parched by a lack of grace. So draw near to Christ, take a drink, and fill your heart with living water. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

He who His saints in this world rules and shields, To all believers life eternal yields; With heav'nly bread He makes the hungry whole, Gives living waters to the thirsting soul.

("Draw Near and Take the Body of the Lord" LSB 637, st.2)

The Purification of Mary and Presentation of Our Lord

FEBRUARY 2, 2021

Today's Reading: Luke 2:22-32

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 12:1-13:9; Titus 1:1-2:6

And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord"). (Luke 2:22-23)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Law demanded every firstborn male of Israel, both of men and of beast (Exodus 13:1-2). God made His lawful claim just before the first Passover, when His Angel executed the firstborn males of all the Egyptian children and livestock. Israel's firstborn were not excluded from this judgment because of special status or privilege, but because they were marked by the blood of the Passover lamb. They were spared because another died in their place.

The deaths of the firstborn males in Egypt ended with the tenth plague, but in Israel that Law continued through the generations. The death of the firstborn is a symbol of original sin, showing that before we even have a chance to transgress the Law we already stand condemned to death.

But just as the firstborn were marked by the blood of the lamb in Egypt, every firstborn male child born after the Exodus was marked by the blood of a sacrifice. They were spared because of the death of another.

When Jesus was 40 days old, His holy parents offered the same sacrifice as countless parents before them. But this sacrifice meant something different for the One who was born of a virgin. Instead of being spared death, the sacrifice of presentation marked Jesus as the One who must die. Now His blood sets us apart as holy to the Lord. We are marked by the blood of the Lamb, which cleanses us from our sins and is a pledge of life. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus, by Your presentation, When they blessed You, weak and poor, Make us see Your great salvation, Seal us with Your promise sure; And present us in Your glory To Your Father, cleansed and pure.

("In His Temple Now Behold Him" LSB 519, st.3)

Wednesday of Septuagesima

FEBRUARY 3, 2021

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

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 14:1-21; Titus 2:7-3:15

Honor your father and your mother.

(Small Catechism: *The Fourth Commandment*)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. It's the first commandment with a promise. Honor your father and your mother. It's also the first commandment that governs our relationship with other people rather than our relationship with God.

Your parents are the first people you meet on this earth. Even before the obstetrician slaps your naked behind in the delivery room, you know your parents. In the womb you hear their voices and feel their touch. You're fed and nourished in an intimate way.

Even after you're born, your parents are about as close to being God for you as it gets. They give you clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, and all you have. They richly and daily provide you with all that you need to support your body and life. They stand in God's place.

It might seem odd to think that your parents stand in the place of God. Martin Luther says in his Large Catechism that this is what it means to honor parents—to recognize a “hidden majesty” in them, to see them as masks of God.

This is true even when parents are strange (which, let's be honest, is most of the time) or when they fail. Parents represent God, but they are not God. And so parents deserve our forgiveness as part of the honor we owe them, just as they forgive you when you dishonor them.

This forgiveness flows from the forgiveness of Jesus, which He earned by honoring His heavenly Father even when it meant His own dishonor (John 8:49). We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*“You are to honor and obey Your father, mother, ev'ry day, Serve them each way that comes to hand; You'll then live long in the land.” Have mercy, Lord!
 (“These Are the Holy Ten Commands” LSB 581, st.5)*

Thursday of Septuagesima

FEBRUARY 4, 2021

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 9:24-10:5

Daily Lectionary: Job 1:1-22; John 1:1-18

For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. (1 Corinthians 10:1-2)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. God's work is all wet. In the beginning, God's Spirit was over the waters and through the water He made the earth (2 Peter 3:5). Water flooded the earth's wickedness away and delivered faithful Noah. Water marked the beginning and end of Israel's forty years of wandering and a pillar of it, in the form of a cloud, led them in the desert. God quenched their thirst with water from a rock.

The sea and the cloud were a kind of baptism for Israel. Their baptism, though, was a baptism into Moses. Shortly after passing through the water, God passed His Law on to His people through His prophet Moses. The Law distinguished this people as those who had no other gods, who did not misuse His Name, who kept the Sabbath Day holy, who loved their neighbors as themselves.

But a Moses-baptism isn't enough. This is not because God's water is ineffective, or even, God forbid, because His Word is powerless. It's just... incomplete. God's people rebelled, they turned away. They dried out, like a seed planted in rocky soil.

To the Law must be added the promise. Israel had a promise of a new life in a new land, but they kept looking over their shoulders with nostalgia, and they tried to make their new lives like their old lives.

As a solution, God does one final thing with water. He gives a new Baptism, not just with water, but with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matthew 3:11). The Baptism of Jesus is a Baptism of death for the purpose of resurrection. No more looking over your shoulder. Instead, look ahead and see the pierced hand of Jesus pulling you out of the water to a new life. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Baptismal waters cover me; Christ's wounded hand has set me free. Held in my Father's strong embrace, With joy I praise Him for His grace.
(*"Baptismal Waters Cover Me"* LSB 616, st.5)

Friday of Septuagesima

FEBRUARY 5, 2021

Daily Lectionary: Job 2:1-3:10; John 1:19-34

Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

(John 1:29b)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Guilt can weigh you down. In some cases, your guilt can be a matter of public knowledge, but more often it's the result of private, even secret sins. If your parents or your friends found out about what you have buried deep within the recesses of your heart, it would be devastating. But the more you hide it, the heavier it weighs on you. You may even feel your shoulders drooping with the weight of your sin.

When John sees his cousin Jesus following His Baptism, He exclaims, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" This is not John's own idea, but it was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit shows Jesus to be a Lamb not because He's cute and fluffy, but because He will be the sacrifice for a world of sin. If your sins seem unbearable, turn to the Lamb who bears your sins.

John's proclamation has become one of the pillars of the Divine Service. The Agnus Dei (Latin for Lamb of God) is the hymn we sing just after the Words of Institution and just before the Distribution. This is no accident. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, whom John saw out by the Jordan River, also comes to the altar of your church. Only now He is not the sacrifice, but the Sacrament.

Sacrifices in the Old Testament were not only offered to God, but they became meals for the priests and for the people. Jesus, who bore your sins to the Cross where He shed His blood as a sacrifice, now comes to the altar, where gives His Body and sheds His Blood as a meal.

In the Holy Communion, the Lamb of God takes away your sin and He bestows on you His righteousness. There is a blessed exchange that happens at the altar. Your sins can no longer weigh you down when the Lamb bears them away. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

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

("Lamb of God, Pure and Holy" LSB 434, st.3)

Saturday of Septuagesima

FEBRUARY 6, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for Sexagesima
(Psalm 44:1-2, 7-8; antiphon: v.23, 25a, 26a)
Daily Lectionary: Job 3:11-26; John 1:35-51

Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? (From the Introit for Sexagesima)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Does God really need to sleep? Sure, He rested on the seventh day of creation, but the Sabbath was made for man, not for God. God doesn't need rest and recuperation. He doesn't need to sleep like we do.

Elijah mocked the prophets of Baal because their god didn't respond to their prayers. "Cry aloud, for he is a god," Elijah said. "Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened" (1 Kings 18:27).

In Psalm 44, it seems like the Sons of Korah run into the same problem as the prophets of Baal. "Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord?" Elijah's mockery implied that Baal wasn't a true god. Perhaps the same is true of the God of Psalm 44.

But the psalmist's cry for God to wake up takes on another dimension when God becomes flesh. Jesus certainly falls asleep; He even fell asleep in a boat in the middle of a storm. But there's an even more profound significance to the psalm's appeal to the Lord to wake up.

Imagine for a moment, someone singing this psalm outside the tomb of Jesus. "Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord?" Christ's sleep in the tomb followed the hard labor of bearing the world's sins on the Cross. If anyone deserves a Sabbath rest, it is Jesus at the end of His Holy Week.

But this cry for the Lord to awake must be paired with the final verse of Psalm 44: "Rise up; come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love!" Christ ends His sleep in the tomb by rising from the dead.

Jesus is the answer to Psalm 44. His resurrection is redemption, and redemption means that you also will one day awake from death. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Awake, O sleeper, rise from death, And Christ shall give you light; So learn His love, its length and breadth, Its fullness, depth, and height.
(“Awake, O Sleeper, Rise from Death” LSB 697, st.1)*

Sexagesima

FEBRUARY 7, 2021

Today's Reading: Luke 8:4-15

Daily Lectionary: Job 4:1-21; John 2:1-12

*As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."
(Luke 8:8b)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. "John, don't forget to take out the trash!" "Yeah, mom," John replied as he continued progressing to the next level of his video game. The next morning, the trash was overflowing as John was snoring from his late-night gaming.

Having ears doesn't guarantee hearing, and hearing doesn't mean listening. This is the paradox of God's Word. People hear it and don't understand. And Jesus conceals the message intended for the world under difficult words. Even His explanation to the parable doesn't reveal much more than the parable itself.

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Jesus' exhortation needs to be paired with another that comes a few verses after the parable: "Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away" (Luke 8:18). It's not enough to simply hear. It's also how you hear.

So what should you listen for when you hear God's Word? The parable indicates one condition necessary for God's Word to bear fruit: "As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15).

"Honest and good" is a technical term the Greeks used to refer to a character that was shaped by righteousness. In the context of the Gospel, the "honest and good heart" that receives God's Word and bears fruit with patience is a heart that hears God's Word and listens for the righteousness of God.

He who has ears to hear, let him listen for the righteousness of God that is found in Christ. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, the strength of all who put their trust in You, mercifully grant that by Your power we may be defended against all adversity; 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 Sexagesima)

Monday of Sexagesima

FEBRUARY 8, 2021

Today's Reading: Isaiah 55:10-13

Daily Lectionary: Job 5:1-27; John 2:13-25

It shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11b)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. God's Word cannot fail. It always does what it says it will. It's a performative Word. Our words don't have that power, though we wish they did. We would like to speak reality into existence. It's a good thing that we can't, though. If you turned on your phone's voice recorder for an hour and listened to the words that you speak, you'd be ashamed. Slander, gossip, swearing, cursing, lying, deceiving. It's a good thing your words can't accomplish that which you purpose.

But God's Word is different. "It shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." God's Word creates the reality He speaks. "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). God cannot lie because what He says becomes true. His Word cannot fail.

God sends His Word for two primary reasons. The first is His command. He speaks what we ought and ought not to do. But we don't listen. Still, His command accomplishes something. It's a Word of condemnation, a Word of curse, a Word sent to bring death, if we don't do the things it commands.

But the second reason God sends His Word is in answer to the first. Since we do not accomplish what His Word commands, and so fall under His condemnation, God has accomplished it Himself. He sent His Word in the flesh to keep His commands, but also to suffer its condemnation. The Word of God made flesh speaks another Word—a Word of promise.

God sends His promise to forgive our sins and restore us to grace. He sends His Word into our hearts to germinate, grow, and bear fruits of righteousness. God's Word cannot fail. It will succeed. It will accomplish His purposes. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty Father, bless the Word Which through Your grace we now have heard. Oh, may the precious seed take root, Spring up, and bear abundant fruit! ("Almighty Father, Bless the Word" Lutheran Service Book 923, st.1)

Tuesday of Sexagesima

FEBRUARY 9, 2021

Today's Reading: 2 Corinthians 11:19-12:9

Daily Lectionary: Job 6:1-13; John 3:1-21

*If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.
(2 Corinthians 11:30)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. No one likes a boaster. The one who boasts usually has an over-inflated sense of his own importance. She considers herself to be God's gift to the world. Boasting is not only off-putting because it greatly exaggerates a person's skills or accomplishments, but it also tends to belittle everyone else around.

Boasting is usually compensation for some serious deficiency. It puts forward an overstated image, hoping to divert attention away from what would otherwise be a glaring weakness. A person who boasts always has something to hide.

And that's precisely what we do before God. We want Him to think better of us than we deserve. Our default religious setting is to promote our piety and emphasize our spirituality. We want to show God that we are worthy of His kingdom, of His favor. We boast in our works, but our boasting comes from an over-inflated sense of our own importance, As if God needed our works. Our boasting is not good.

The Cross changes boasting. If there was anyone who had reason to boast, to show how He was worthy of God's kingdom, it was the Son of God. But He did not count equality with God as something to be prized (Philippians 2:6). Instead, He humbled Himself and became weak for our sake.

So, "If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness." That's the way of the Cross. We must become weak to see that Jesus is strong. And in Him we find our strength, and of Him we boast. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Jesus loves me! This I know For the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong They are weak, but He is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.
(“Jesus Loves Me” Lutheran Service Book 588, st.1)*

Silas, Fellow Worker of St. Peter and St. Paul

FEBRUARY 10, 2021

Daily Lectionary: Job 6:14-30; John 3:22-4:6

By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. (1 Peter 5:12)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Silas, aka Silvanus, was at first a companion of Paul on his second missionary journey, and later became a companion of Peter as well as the secretary by whom Peter wrote his epistle (1 Peter 5:12). He doesn't appear often in the Bible other than in conjunction with Paul and Timothy.

He is introduced along with Judas (Barsabbas) as a prophet (Acts 15:32). We're not told if he predicted the future, but presumably he spoke convincingly concerning God and His promises fulfilled in Christ. That's the reason Paul chose him to go on a missionary journey.

Silas had a gift with words, but he used that gift in service of a greater gift—the Word of God. Both by speech and by pen, Silas “encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words” (Acts 15:32).

We may not have any record of Silas's sermons, but his writing certainly has encouraged and strengthened you. His pen received dictation from Peter, but it was ultimately moved by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit unites the preaching of Paul, the exhortation and declaration of Peter, and the many words both spoken and written by Silas. These words deliver “the true grace of God,” the Gospel. They deliver Jesus. In them you stand firm. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, Your servant Silas preached the Gospel alongside the apostles Peter and Paul to the peoples of Asia Minor, Greece, and Macedonia. We give You thanks for raising up in this and every land evangelists and heralds of Your kingdom, that the Church may continue to proclaim the unsearchable riches of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Thursday of Sexagesima

FEBRUARY 11, 2021

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

Daily Lectionary: Job 7:1-21; John 4:7-26

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

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Fifth through Eighth Commandments deal with our neighbors. They are certainly prohibitions against sin—"you shall not"—but they are also implicit instructions for us to love and serve our neighbor. These commandments deal with our neighbor's body and life, husband or wife, possessions, and reputation.

These are all good gifts from God, and we do not have the authority to deprive our neighbors of God's good gifts. Furthermore, God sends us into the world as His agents to help, support, and provide the gifts He gives. The nearest gift anyone has is his or her own body and life. From the moment of your conception until the day of your death, you cannot escape your body. It is an integral part of who you are, regardless of how weak and frail it is on account of sin.

God created humans as embodied creatures, creatures of flesh and blood; it is not His will that we be separated from or deprived of our bodies or lives. It's no coincidence that the second sin recorded in Scripture is murder. God gives life in the body and sinners want to take that away.

Of course, not all murder takes physical life. The Fifth Commandment forbids hate, anger, and name-calling as well. See what Jesus has to say about it in what we call His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-26). The seed of murder is anger. So we need to learn to repent of murder even if we have never committed the actual deed.

The Fifth Commandment should also point us to the fact that God assumed a human body. God is concerned about bodies because Jesus has a body. And that means we should help and support our neighbors in every physical, bodily need. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

"You shall not murder, hurt, nor hate; Your anger dare not dominate. Be kind and patient; help, defend, And treat your foe as your friend." Have mercy, Lord!
(*"These Are the Holy Ten Commands" LSB 581, st.6*)

Friday of Sexagesima

FEBRUARY 12, 2021

Daily Lectionary: Job 8:1-22; John 4:27-45

Does God pervert justice?

(Job 8:3a)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Lady Justice stands before the courthouse blindfolded, holding a sword in one hand and a balanced pair of scales in the other. Justice is blind, the statue proclaims—she does not take appearances into account. Justice is fair. For every good there is a reward. For every crime there is a punishment. And she does not bear the sword for nothing.

By all appearances, Job was suffering under God’s justice. He was a righteous man, yet he had lost everything. Trying to make sense of it all with his friends, one of them, Bildad, asks Job if God perverts justice. There must be some secret, hidden sin that Job hasn’t revealed for God to be punishing him and his family so much. The solution? Repent and start to put some good works on the other side of the scale to balance it out.

Job responds, “Truly I know that it is so: But how can a man be in the right before God? If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand times” (Job 9:2-3). Yes, God is just. But that’s not the problem. The injustice is not with God, but with Job. If he wanted to make himself right before God, it would be an impossible task to heap up enough good on the scales to cancel out the bad.

Does God pervert justice? Never. But His justice is a little strange. By rights, everyone should receive Job’s punishments and worse. But we don’t. God’s justice is tempered by His mercy, and even Job did not receive all that he deserved for his injustices.

God does not pervert justice, but He answers it in a new way. He descends into the depths of our depravity to suffer the injustice of the Cross, thereby elevating us into His grace. Christ bends the scales of justice with His forgiveness.

“How can a man be in the right before God?” Job asks. “You are forgiven,” Jesus answers. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*For You have promised, Lord, to heed Your children’s cries in time of need
Through Him whose name alone is great, Our Savior and our advocate.*

(“When in the Hour of Deepest Need” LSB 615, st.3)

Saturday of Sexagesima

FEBRUARY 13, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for Quinquagesima

(Psalm 31:1, 5, 9, 16; antiphon: v. 2b-3)

Daily Lectionary: Job 9:1-35; John 4:46-54

*Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD,
faithful God. (From the Introit for Quinquagesima)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The last words Jesus spoke in His time of humiliation were from Psalm 31. "‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ And having said this he breathed his last" (Luke 23:46). These words evoke the unwavering trust that Jesus puts in His Father in heaven, even after crying out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) The place for the spirit of Jesus is in the hands of the Father.

This is also an example for you. When life is at its worst, it's not a time to resent God for allowing you to suffer. Suffering is part of life; you can't escape it. Sometimes you bring trouble upon yourself. You can't blame God. Often, though, you find yourself in trouble through no fault of your own.

Rather than retreat from God, times of trouble and suffering are precisely when to lean into God. The second half of Psalm 31:5, the psalm that Jesus quotes with His dying breath, shows what God does for those whose spirits are afflicted: "You have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God."

Redemption is an exchange. Jesus offers up His sacrificial death to His Father and receives resurrection three days later. Likewise, your redemption is resurrection. Commit your spirit into the hands of the Father and rest in comfort, knowing that you will be set free from your bondage to corruption.

"Into your hand I commit my spirit." Jesus prayed this prayer with His dying breath. That's a good example for you. In fact, you can rehearse it every night before you go to sleep. Why don't you begin tonight to pray, "Into your hand, I commit my spirit," and anticipate the payout of your redemption in the resurrection. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Into Your hand, O Lord, I commit my spirit. You have redeemed me, O Lord,
God of truth. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.*

(Responsory for Compline, LSB p.255)

Quinquagesima

FEBRUARY 14, 2021

Today's Reading: Luke 18:31-43

Daily Lectionary: Job 10:1-22; John 5:1-18

And he cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Luke 18:38)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. After the congregation enters the presence of God during the Introit, the very first words it says collectively to God in the Divine Service are, "Lord, have mercy upon us." It's a short prayer, but a necessary one.

We don't come before God with anything. There is no status, no store of works, no special privilege to which we can appeal. The only thing that allows us access to the presence of God is His mercy.

Mercy means that we don't get what we deserve. If we were to appeal to our own status, our own works, or claim some kind of privilege, we wouldn't be allowed in God's presence. Or worse, God would allow us in His presence and then unleash His wrath and punishments, which we couldn't bear.

But God has mercy. The blind man begging on the road to Jericho knew this. And He knew why God has mercy. It's embedded in the man's confession of who Jesus is. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" If we were to approach God in His majesty, there would be no mercy. But God has already shown mercy by sending His Son Jesus to be the Son of David.

The fact that God comes in human flesh is a signal of His mercy for the whole world. The blind man simply asks for that mercy to be extended to him personally.

We pray the same thing in the Divine Service. "Lord, have mercy upon us," is followed with "Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." That's the song of Christmas. The mercy of God is shown in the Son of God's becoming the Son of David in order to suffer, die, rise, and ascend with our human nature to sit at God's right hand.

Lord, have mercy upon us. The blind man received his sight, and we are likewise made whole by the mercy of God, poured out through the gifts of Jesus, the Son of David. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, mercifully hear our prayers and having set us free from the bonds of our sins deliver us from every evil; 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 Quinquagesima)

Monday of Quinquagesima

FEBRUARY 15, 2021

Today's Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Daily Lectionary: Job 11:1-20; John 5:19-29

For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.
(1 Samuel 16:7b)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Looks can be deceiving. Instagram influencers and TikTok users understand this well. They spend a lot of time and energy cultivating an image that gains them followers and sponsors. It doesn't matter that the image is only superficial—whatever gets clicks and likes is what works for them.

It's not just our digital selves that we like to touch up for the world. We always project a pretty picture of ourselves to the world, but that picture hides the ugliness under the surface. If we're good at hiding our worst selves, no one will ever know.

Except that God sees differently. He's not fooled by outward appearances. We're captivated by the superficial, but God's sight pierces to the heart. He sees the ugliness that lurks beneath the surface, and that's a frightening thought.

Yet there is also a comforting inversion with respect to God's sight. David was, by all appearances, the poorest choice of Jesse's sons for the future king of Israel. Yet God saw something that no one else did. It wasn't that David possessed a hidden quality that his brothers (or anyone else) did not. Rather, God anointed the unlikely David to show that when God is at work, things aren't always as they appear.

There was nothing about Jesus that would indicate anything special about him. "He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2b). Yet hidden beneath His human flesh and blood is the majesty of the Son of God. In that humble form, He endured the ugliness of the Cross in order to bring us to the beauty of resurrection. Learning to see like God does means learning to find His work hidden under the most unlikely places. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ, for the majesty hidden beneath Your humble human flesh and blood. Thank you for enduring the ugliness of the cross to bring about a beautiful resurrection. We confess that we cultivate outward appearances while neglecting our hearts, yet we pray that You would renew us inwardly day by day with the good news of forgiveness. Amen.

Tuesday of Quinquagesima

FEBRUARY 16, 2021

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Daily Lectionary: Job 12:1-6, 12-25; John 5:30-47

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:2)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Theology should cultivate love. Love is the heart of the Gospel. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). All theology (or God-talk) must be talk about love.

But that's not necessarily the case. In fact, Paul indicates that it's quite possible to prophesy, to delve into divine mysteries, and to believe the incredible, but to lack love. How does this happen?

Love is the greatest of the Christian virtues. "So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13). Elsewhere, Paul writes that love is the summary and fulfillment of the Law (Romans 13:8-10). But ironically, it's the exclusive focus on the Law that empties theology of love.

The Law demands love—love for God and love for your neighbor. But the best the Law can do is tell you what to do; it can never make you love doing it. For that, you need something more. For love, you need the heart of theology.

Love is the summary of the Law, but it is the full content of the Gospel. Paul says that the Law is fulfilled by love. Jesus says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17).

To restate Paul's claim in 1 Corinthians 13: If you can do all theology, but don't have Jesus, you are nothing. However, even if your prophecies are way off, and if your understanding of divine mysteries is confused at best, and if your faith doesn't exactly move mountains, but you have Jesus, you are everything. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Where charity and love prevail There God is ever found; Brought here together by Christ's love By love are we thus bound.

("Where Charity and Love Prevail" LSB 845, st.1)

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

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