

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 7, 2023

Today's Gospel lesson reminds us that the Christian faith is all about Jesus. He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus. Let us never allow the world to distract us from Jesus and the gift of salvation that He has won for us on the cross.

An Easter Salutation *adapted from 2 Timothy 1:10 & Psalm 118*

- L** Christ is risen! Alleluia!
C Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!
L Christ has destroyed death. Alleluia!
C And has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. Alleluia!
- L** The Lord is my strength and my song. Alleluia!
C He has become my salvation. Alleluia!
L I will not die, but live. Alleluia!
C I will proclaim what the Lord has done. Alleluia!
L Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
C as it was in the beginning is now and will be forever. Amen.
- L** I will not die, but live. Alleluia!
C I will proclaim what the Lord has done. Alleluia!
L Christ is risen! Alleluia!
C Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The Church's One Foundation

Lutheran Service Book 644, Lutheran Worship 289, The Lutheran Hymnal 473



- 1 The Church's one foun - da - tion Is Je - sus Christ, her Lord;
2 E - lect from ev - 'ry na - tion, Yet one o'er all the earth;
3 Though with a scorn - ful won - der The world sees her op - pressed,
4 Through toil and trib - u - la - tion And tu - mult of her war



- She is His new cre - a - tion By wa - ter and the Word.
Her char - ter of sal - va - tion: One Lord, one faith, one birth.
By schisms rent a - sun - der, By her - e - sies dis - tressed,
She waits the con - sum - ma - tion Of peace for - ev - er - more



From heav'n He came and sought her To be His ho - ly bride;
One ho - ly name she bless - es, Par - takes one ho - ly food,
Yet saints their watch are keep - ing; Their cry goes up, "How long?"
Till with the vi - sion glo - rious Her long - ing eyes are blest,



With His own blood He bought her, And for her life He died.
And to one hope she press - es With ev - 'ry grace en - dued.
And soon the night of weep - ing Shall be the morn of song.
And the great Church vic - to - rious Shall be the Church at rest.

5 Yet she on earth has union
With God, the Three in One,
And mystic sweet communion
With those whose rest is won.
O blessèd heav'nly chorus!
Lord, save us by Your grace
That we, like saints before us,
May see You face to face.

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L In the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

L Our help is in the name of the Lord,

C who made heaven and earth. (*Psalm 124:8*)

L Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.

C Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. (*Psalm 19:12, 13*)

L If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord who could stand?

C But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared. (*Psalm 130:3–4*)

L Let us, confess before God that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and as His people let us take refuge in His infinite mercy seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, saying:

C God, be merciful to me, a sinner, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life. Amen. (*Luke 18:13*)

L Almighty God, merciful Father, in Your holy Church, You daily and richly forgive us our sins and grant us new life through Your Spirit. Be in our midst, enliven our faith, and graciously receive our prayer and praise; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C Amen.

Introit Psalm 30:1–5; antiphon: Psalm 149:1

- L** Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the godly!
- C** **I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up
and have not let my foes rejoice over me.**
- L** O Lord my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.
- C** **O Lord, you have brought up my soul from Sheol;
you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit.**
- L** Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints,
and give thanks to his holy name.
- C** **For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime.
Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.
Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**
- L** Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the godly!

Kyrie

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| L O Lord, | C Have Mercy on us. |
| L O Christ, | C Have Mercy on us. |
| L O Lord, | C Have Mercy on us. |

Gloria in Excelsis ~ Glory to God in the Highest

- L** Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.
- C** **Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father: We worship You, we give You thanks, and we
praise You for Your glory.**
- L** Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, You are Lord and God, You are the Lamb of God:
- C** **Lord Jesus Christ, You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.**
- L** Lord Jesus Christ, You are seated at the right hand of the Father; and we ask you to graciously receive our
prayer.
- C** **For You alone are the Holy One,
You alone are the Lord,
You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.**

Collect of the Day

- L** Let us pray: O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what
You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our
hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and
reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C** Amen.

Acts 6:1–9; 7:2a, 51–60

¹Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ²And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to

serve tables. ³Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” ⁵And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

⁸And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. ^{7:2}And Stephen said: “Brothers and fathers, hear me. . . ⁵¹“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. ⁵²Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, ⁵³you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

⁵⁴Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. ⁵⁵But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” ⁵⁷But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. ⁵⁸Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

L This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Gradual adapt. from Matthew 28:7; Hebrews 2:7; Psalm 8:6

L Christ has risen from the dead.

C God the Father has crowned him with glory and honor,

L He has given him dominion over the works of his hands;

C he has put all things under his feet.

Psalm 146

L ¹Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!

C ²**I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.**

L ³Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.

C ⁴**When his breath departs he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.**

L ⁵Blessèd is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God,

C ⁶**who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever;**

L ⁷who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free;

C ⁸**the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous.**

L ⁹The LORD watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

C ¹⁰**The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations.
Praise the LORD!**

1 Peter 2:2–10

²Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation—³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

⁴As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For it stands in Scripture:

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

⁷So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,”

⁸and

“A stone of stumbling,
and a rock of offense.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

L This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Verse of the Day Romans 6:9; John 14:23

L Alleluia. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. Alleluia.

C Alleluia. If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Alleluia.

John 14:1–14

L The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the 14th chapter.

C Glory to You, O Lord.

¹[Jesus said:] “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ²In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to where I am going.” ⁵Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

⁸Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” ⁹Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

¹²“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

L This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C Praise to You, O Christ.

C I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven

and sits at the right hand of God the Father
Almighty.

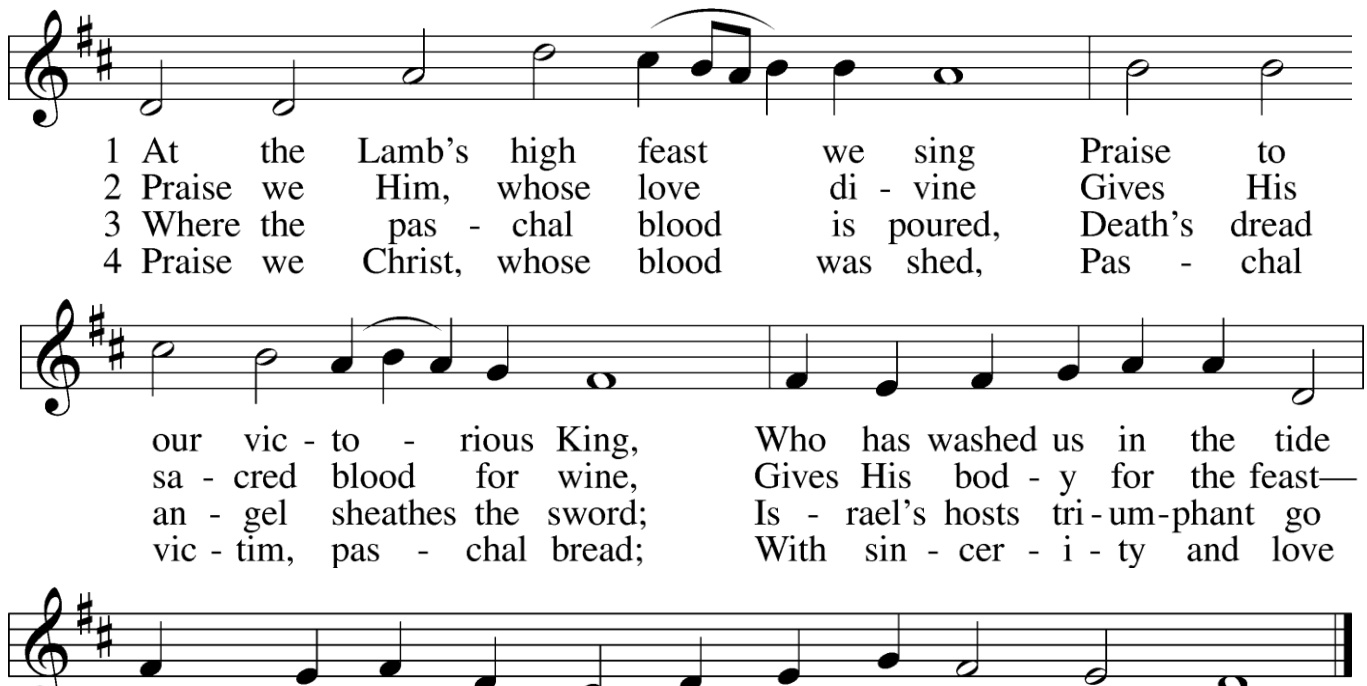
From thence He will come to judge the living
and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing

Lutheran Service Book 633, Lutheran Worship 126, The Lutheran Hymnal N/A

Stanzas 1-4



1 At the Lamb's high feast we sing Praise to
2 Praise we Him, whose love di - vine Gives His
3 Where the pas - chal blood is poured, Death's dread
4 Praise we Christ, whose blood was shed, Pas - chal

our vic - to - rious King, Who has washed us in the tide
sa - cred blood for wine, Gives His bod - y for the feast—
an - gel sheathes the sword; Is - rael's hosts tri - um-phant go
vic - tim, pas - chal bread; With sin - cer - i - ty and love

Flow - ing from His pierc - ed side. Al - le - lu - ia!
Christ the vic - tim, Christ the priest. Al - le - lu - ia!
Through the wave that drowns the foe. Al - le - lu - ia!
Eat we man - na from a - bove. Al - le - lu - ia!

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Devotional thoughts:

“Let not your hearts be troubled,” are some of Jesus’ most treasured words. Even in the best of times, trouble seems to be all around us. Distress and danger are always just around the corner.

Yet these words of Jesus are heard most often when death is near, at hospitals, funerals, and gravesides. These are particularly appropriate occasions because Jesus first spoke these words when His death was near. In the moments leading to these words of comfort, Jesus revealed to His disciples that one of them would betray Him. It is no wonder that their hearts would be distressed.

So what is the solution to a troubled heart, especially a heart troubled and distressed by death? Is it a large bank account and a balanced budget? Is it lots of friends and personal fame? Is it the sweet smell of spring? Is it quiet time and mindfulness? Is it a healthy lifestyle and diet? These things can bring a temporary sense of well-being. They may help you live longer but none of them cure a troubled heart brought on by the distress of death.

So what is the answer? Jesus quickly gives it, “Believe in God; believe also in me.” Faith is the answer! Trusting God in times of uncertainty and distress is always the real answer. It is absolutely the only answer when hearts are troubled by death.

You notice that Jesus is very clear. He is not just talking about a generic faith in a generic God. He is very specifically talking about faith in himself! Let us not be confused, Jesus makes this abundantly clear when He answers Thomas’ concern about not knowing the way. Jesus says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” There is no mistaking these words. Jesus is not just “a” way but He is the ONLY way. No one can come to the true God, except through Him.

Faith is difficult. In fact, faith is impossible if we look to our own reason and strength. It is only through the working of the Holy Spirit that unbelieving hearts can be comforted by faith. Therefore, it is no surprise that at the end of this very chapter, Jesus promises the gift of the Holy Spirit when He says, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:26-27).

Jesus also knows that an essential element to peace and calm for troubled hearts is the knowledge that “In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?” These words of Jesus bring to mind Jaroslav Vajda’s beloved Christmas hymn, “Where Shepherds Lately Knelt.” He writes in the first stanza:

I come in half-belief,
a pilgrim strangely stirred,
but there is room and welcome there for me,
but there is room and welcome there for me.

There is a place in Jesus’ Father’s house for you! There is room and welcome for each of us pilgrims who wander through this time of distress and troubled hearts!

“Let not your hearts be troubled.” Jesus personally goes to prepare a place for you! This preparation meant going to the cross to pay for your sins and the sins of the whole world.

We live in a time when the concept of “sin” is belittled and denied. Yet in the hour of death, our personal failings and regrets become all too real. Yes, I can find some whom I regard to be a “worse sinner” than I am. Dale Carnegie pointed out that even the most hardened criminal considers himself to be a basically good person.

This is not good enough. A holy God requires perfection! Jesus went to the cross to make you holy! He bore your sins and removed them from you as far as the East is from the West (Psalm 103:12). He prepared a place for you in His Father’s house by making you worthy through the forgiveness of sins! We are reminded of this truth each time we sing, “Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world; grant us peace.”

During the Covid-19 pandemic, we all had a glimpse of the loneliness that many people experience in life. From the very beginning, God has made it clear that it is not good to be alone (Genesis 2:18). The specter of loneliness and losing a loved one is troubling indeed. Spending eternity alone is a thought more than we can bear. Jesus calms our troubled hearts by assuring us that we will spend eternity with Him in His Father’s house when He says, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

The essence of heaven is spending eternity with Jesus. When the thief on the cross begged, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom,” Jesus calmed his troubled heart with the promise, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

Some may weary of Easter celebrations and find themselves ready to move on to the next holiday. For Christians, Jesus’ resurrection is our daily comfort for troubled hearts in times of danger and distress. He has prepared a place for us in His Father’s house. He will come again and take us to be there with Him for all eternity.

He lives to silence all my fears;
He lives to wipe away my tears;
He lives to calm my troubled heart;
He lives all blessings to impart.

He lives and grants me daily breath;
He lives, and I shall conquer death;
He lives my mansion to prepare;
He lives to bring me safely there.

I Know That My Redeemer Lives, stanzas 5 & 7
Lutheran Service Book 461
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The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

God’s richest blessings to you in Christ.

- L** Let us pray. Heavenly Father, through the power of Jesus’ resurrection You adopt everyone who believes in Him. Receive us as Your newborn children and nourish our faith through the pure spiritual milk of Your Word so that we may dwell in Your presence forever.

C Amen.

- L** Lord God, You have promised to build up Your Church to be a holy priesthood that Your people might offer spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving acceptable to You. Bless Your Church, and bring all congregations together. Bless all pastors who proclaim Christ to us. Bless church workers and those preparing for full-time church vocations, that we may be supplied with faithful leaders and servants of Your Word.

C Amen.

- L** Heavenly Father, build and strengthen our families that we may grow in Your grace and share together in Your forgiveness and life. Give wisdom to parents and a sense of security to children as they seek to be faithful to Your holy word.

C Amen.

- L** Heavenly Father, You called Stephen to faithful service in Your kingdom and gave Him a full measure of Your Holy Spirit in the face of death. Grant us, also, faithfulness in our service, and give us Your Holy Spirit when we approach the end of our earthly pilgrimage.

C Amen.

- L** Almighty God, suppress the powers of darkness. Bring an end to war, violence, and terror. Give us leaders who will seek peace and work for the common good. Instill in them a love of righteousness, and guide them in the pursuit of justice for all. Bless all medical and emergency workers; and all members of the armed forces who protect us.

C Amen.

L God of compassion, hear the cries to call to you in time of need. Answer them with grace sufficient for all their needs. Heal the sick according to Your will and grant them comfort in their time of need. Give Your peace to those who are nearing life's end. Remind us that You are our health and strength for this life and the life to come.

C Amen.

C I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

C Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

L Let us bless the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

L The Lord bless us, defend us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

C Amen.

At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing

Lutheran Service Book 633, Lutheran Worship 126, The Lutheran Hymnal N/A
Stanzas 5-8

5 Mighty Victim from the sky,
Hell's fierce pow'rs beneath You lie;
You have conquered in the fight,
You have brought us life and light.
Alleluia!

6 Now no more can death appall,
Now no more the grave enthrall;
You have opened paradise,
And Your saints in You shall rise.
Alleluia!

7 Easter triumph, Easter joy!
This alone can sin destroy;
From sin's pow'r, Lord, set us free,
Newborn souls in You to be.
Alleluia!

8 Father, who the crown shall give,
Savior, by whose death we live,
Spirit, guide through all our days:
Three in One, Your name we praise.
Alleluia!

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Service Notes:

One person may serve as Leader or this may be shared with a number of individuals.

Read one or more of the lessons. Hymns may be sung or read. Use as much or little of this service as you would like.

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Enhancing Your Worship

Meditating on God's Word and Works

I will meditate on your wondrous works. Psalm 119:27
My eyes are awake through the night watches,
That I may meditate on Your word. Psalm 119:148 NKJV

The Week of The Fifth Sunday of Easter May 8-13, 2023

Introduction

Most modern forms of mediation turn a person inward. Biblical meditation turns a person outward toward what God has said and done especially what He has said and done through Jesus for our salvation.

Each Sunday has its own special theme directing us to meditate on God's word and actions. This theme is found in the Propers of the Day (the parts of the service that change week to week). From Advent through the Easter season these themes focus our attention on the life of Jesus from His birth to His death and resurrection. There is always much more in the propers than can be covered in any Sunday service. God willing, I will use the propers for Sunday to provide you with a devotion each day to help you meditate on what God has done for you.

Monday

At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing – 1

At the Lamb's high feast we sing
Praise to our victorious King,
Who has washed us in the tide
Flowing from His pierced side.
Alleluia!

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L Christ is Risen!

C He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

L Alleluia. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. Alleluia.

C Alleluia. If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Alleluia.

(Romans 6:9; John 14:23)

Introit Psalm 30:1–5; antiphon: Psalm 149:1

- L** Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the godly!
- C** **I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up
and have not let my foes rejoice over me.**
- L** O Lord my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.
- C** **O Lord, you have brought up my soul from Sheol;
you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit.**
- L** Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints,
and give thanks to his holy name.
- C** **For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime.
Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.
Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**
- L** Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the godly!

Have you ever experienced a time when someone was angry with you but you didn't know the reason? I don't think that this is too uncommon. Some people are easily offended even when no offense was intended.

In the early days of my ministry and in my confirmation classes, I remember pastors teaching me about the difference between "giving offense" and "taking offense." It can be very frustrating when someone near to you all of a sudden becomes cold and distant for no apparent reason. Often this can be the result of "taking offense" when no real offense was given.

During the last few years, Valerie, and I have found ourselves watching the Hallmark channel. It doesn't take very long before you notice that most of the movies are simply variations on the same recurring themes. One of those themes is a misunderstanding of an overheard conversation and a misinterpreted message. It usually happens when someone only hears one side of a phone call or walks in during the middle of a dialogue. Many plots are dedicated to these kinds of misunderstandings between romantically inclined individuals.

Of course, the solution to these misunderstandings is open and clear communication. This is how most of these movies eventually resolve difficulties for starry-eyed lovers.

There is another kind of offense that should be noted. This is when a real offense is given but the offender is ignorant of the fact. This also seems to be common between men and women but it happens in all kinds of relationships. It can happen in the family, at work, or at school. It occurs frequently between races and cultures.

Does communication help here? It certainly may but something more is needed. What is needed is confession and forgiveness. When real offense is given, repentance and confession is the only solution!

Through the years, God has granted me the opportunity to teach many people from a variety of backgrounds. Some are well versed in Scriptures and we have the opportunity to dig deeply into every verse of the Bible and as I often say, "Squeeze every drop from the lemon."

Others are new to the Christian faith or only marginally acquainted with it. These people often have only a minimal knowledge of God's law and His requirement of perfection (Matthew 5:48). In these situations, I have often observed great joy in people when they learn of God's grace and complete forgiveness. However, as weeks pass and they learn more about God's holy law, they become dismayed at how short of perfection their lives have been.

I remember a time when a young couple attended a new member class I was teaching. The husband was a sincere and eager learner but his language was foul and full of profanities. Without extending the story too long, I noticed that after several weeks of studying God's law, he no longer used such vulgar speech. I had never confronted him on this issue. Rather, until this study of God's law, he had never realized how sinful his

speech had become. He simply believed it was the normal way to communicate. When he became aware of how offensive his language was to God, he corrected the situation.

The psalmist praises and extols God. There is no greater reason to praise and extol God than the gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation won for us by Jesus on the cross. When we honestly and openly confess our sins to Him and repent of even the sins we do not know and feel in our heart, He restores us to the joy of salvation.

“For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime.

Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning” (Psalm 30:5)

Prayer: O Lamb of God, You have washed us in the tide flowing from Your pierced side. Move us to true repentance and confession of all that we have done to break Your holy law. Grant that we would always rejoice in the forgiveness that You have won for us on the cross. Amen.

Tuesday

At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing – 2

Praise we Him, whose love divine
Gives His sacred blood for wine,
Gives His body for the feast—
Christ the victim, Christ the priest.
Alleluia!

Public domain

L Christ is Risen!

C He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

L Alleluia. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. Alleluia.

C Alleluia. If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Alleluia.

(Romans 6:9; John 14:23)

Collect of the Day

L Let us pray. O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen

While reading our lesson from Acts this week, I had a flashback to a conversation that I had with my pastor when I was a freshman in college. I was excited about everything that I was learning from the Bible and in particular from the Book of Acts.

I told my pastor that I thought it would be wonderful if the Church could be like it was in the days of the early Church. He gently burst my bubble by telling me that things weren't so wonderful in the early Church. It was filled with sinners just like today.

Our reading from Acts recounts the first recorded controversy in the Church. The Greek-speaking widows weren't getting their fair share in the daily distribution.

This event and countless others throughout the history of the Church make our collect prayer for this week as timely as ever. I must confess that the greatest frustrations in my ministry did not come from people outside the Church. Our own sinfulness and selfishness are the cause of endless turmoil in the Church.

In His High Priestly Prayer Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father, “that they may be one, even as we are one” (John 17:11). May this also be our constant prayer.

Prayer: O Lamb of God, You were both the Victim and the Priest during Your sacrifice on the cross. Grant us true repentance and forgiveness that we may be of one mind with our fellow believers. During this time of uncertainty and danger let us fix our eyes on the cross and resurrection remember the ultimate joy that awaits us in eternity. Amen.

Wednesday

At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing – 3

Where the paschal blood is poured,
Death's dread angel sheathes the sword;
Israel's hosts triumphant go
Through the wave that drowns the foe.
Alleluia!

Public domain

L Christ is Risen!
C He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
C Amen.

L Alleluia. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. Alleluia.
C Alleluia. If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Alleluia.

(Romans 6:9; John 14:23)

Psalm 146

L ¹Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!
C ²**I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.**
L ³Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.
C ⁴**When his breath departs he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.**
L ⁵Blessèd is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God,
C ⁶**who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever;**
L ⁷who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free;
C ⁸**the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous.**
L ⁹The LORD watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
C ¹⁰**The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations.**
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 146 is the first of the five Hallelujah Psalms that bring the Book of Psalms to a conclusion. (Hallelujah means “Praise the Lord.”) It begins where all praise ought to begin. It begins with “my soul.”

It is wonderful when the whole earth praises the Lord. I am happy when nations and peoples praise the Lord but this is all for naught unless I praise the Lord!

Why praise the Lord? I praise the Lord because He has brought salvation to me!

Salvation doesn't come from princes, kings, presidents, or dictators. Political parties promise me the world but not one of them can bring me salvation. Only the Lord has brought salvation to me in the person of Jesus.

The salvation that the Lord brings lasts forever. It's not a temporary tax break or the fleeting fancy of the latest technology.

Praise the Lord, O my soul!

Prayer: O Lord, I praise You for opening the eyes of the blind and lifting up those who are bowed down. I praise You for upholding the widows and the fatherless but most of all I praise You for the salvation You have granted to me in my Savior Jesus. Amen.

Thursday

At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing – 4

Praise we Christ, whose blood was shed,
Paschal victim, paschal bread;
With sincerity and love
Eat we manna from above.
Alleluia!

Public domain

L Christ is Risen!
C He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
C Amen.

L Alleluia. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. Alleluia.
C Alleluia. If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Alleluia.

(Romans 6:9; John 14:23)

Acts 6:1–9; 7:2a, 51–60

¹Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ²And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” ⁵And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

⁸And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. ^{7:2}And Stephen said: “Brothers and fathers, hear me. . . . ⁵¹“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. ⁵²Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, ⁵³you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

⁵⁴Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. ⁵⁵But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶And

he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." ⁵⁷ But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. ⁵⁸ Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

The martyrdom of Stephen is both sad and inspiring at the same time. He is named as the first church worker after the appointment of the Apostles by Jesus. He was identified as being a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. Luke tells us that he was full of grace and power and he was doing great wonders and signs among the people.

In human terms, it seems that God could have used Stephen to become a key figure in the growth of the Church. He had all the gifts necessary to serve in God's kingdom faithfully for many years. Yet, God had other plans. Stephen became the first Christian martyr.

Why did God do this with Stephen? We cannot know for sure but His example of faithfulness in the face of death has been repeated countless times throughout history. James became the first Apostle to lose his life for the faith. Tradition tells us that Peter and Paul also died martyr's deaths. From this, we learn that faith in Jesus is more valuable than life here on earth.

They all understood the truth of Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 16:24-26:

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"

Thankfully, in our society, Christians are seldom called upon to give the ultimate sacrifice for the sake of their faith in Jesus. However, we are often challenged to compromise what we believe in order to fit in with the misshapen morals of our contemporary culture.

May we always share the faith of Stephen and know the value of the salvation that Jesus won for us on the cross.

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for people who serve us in this life. Thank You for those who like the Apostles have dedicated their lives to proclaiming your holy word of forgiveness through faith in Christ. Thank You for those who like Stephen have refused to compromise their faith even in the face of death. Give us such a faith that we would never waiver even in the face of opposition from our culture and society. Amen.

Friday

At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing – 5

Mighty Victim from the sky,
Hell's fierce pow'rs beneath You lie;
You have conquered in the fight,
You have brought us life and light.
Alleluia!

Public domain

L Christ is Risen!
C He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
C Amen.

L Alleluia. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. Alleluia.

C Alleluia. If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Alleluia.

(Romans 6:9; John 14:23)

1 Peter 2:2–10

²Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation— ³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

⁴As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For it stands in Scripture:

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

⁷So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,”

⁸and

“A stone of stumbling,
and a rock of offense.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Our epistle for this week contains the words of the introit from Quasimodogeniti Sunday, “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk.” Peter goes on to tell us that this pure spiritual milk is the message about Jesus, the “living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious.”

No one likes to be rejected. Acceptance by friends and society is something that we all crave. Bullies in school seek to have their victims rejected by classmates and friends. Manipulative individuals seek to use acceptance as a way to control people.

But for us Christian people, Peter reminds us that Jesus was rejected by the world. He endured this rejection all the way to the cross to make us His own chosen people called out of darkness into His marvelous light.

We, who follow Jesus, can expect no less from the world. Honesty, integrity, morality, and truthfulness are often belittled and rejected. Yet in Christ, we endure this rejection because we have become living stones being built up as a spiritual house. This rejection is only a temporary and light annoyance on our spiritual journey to eternity with the Savior.

Prayer: O Chief Cornerstone, thank you for enduring rejection by men for our sake. Grant that we may fully live as living stones in your marvelous light proclaiming love and salvation through Your name. Amen.

Saturday

At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing – 6, 7, 8

6 Now no more can death appall,
Now no more the grave enthrall;
You have opened paradise,

And Your saints in You shall rise.
Alleluia!

7 Easter triumph, Easter joy!
This alone can sin destroy;
From sin's pow'r, Lord, set us free,
Newborn souls in You to be.
Alleluia!

8 Father, who the crown shall give,
Savior, by whose death we live,
Spirit, guide through all our days:
Three in One, Your name we praise.
Alleluia!

Public domain

L Christ is Risen!
C He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
C Amen.

L Alleluia. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. Alleluia.
C Alleluia. If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Alleluia.

(Romans 6:9; John 14:23)

Gradual

L Christ has risen from the dead.
C God the Father has crowned him with glory and honor,
L He has given him dominion over the works of his hands;
C he has put all things under his feet.

(adapt. from Matt. 28:7; Heb. 2:7; Ps. 8:6)

1 Peter 2:9–10

⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

As strange as it seems, thinking about these two verses brought to my mind "Stripes." "Stripes" is a comedy film that was released in 1981. Its stars included Bill Murray, Harold Ramis, Warren Oates, P. J. Soles, Sean Young, and John Candy. It featured a rag-tag group of army recruits who were destined to be boot camp washouts. They were unusually incompetent and everything went wrong for them. They were clearly irredeemable. But through a series of incredible circumstances, they pulled themselves together and graduated at the top of their class. They were given one of the most prestigious assignments in the army.

Why did this film come to my mind? These inept and hopeless soldiers illustrate our human condition without Christ! But 1 Peter 2:9–10 describes how dramatically things have changed for us in Christ!

Along with all believers, you and I have been chosen to be part of God's family. He has made us not just priests but royal priests in His kingdom! From being a rag-tag group of misfits, God has made us a holy nation, a people for his own possession.

This is not something that we've done by ourselves. God has done it for us by His grace. He has called us out of the darkness of sin and death and brought us into His marvelous light!

This great turnaround came about through Jesus' death and resurrection. Without Him, we could not expect any mercy from our holy and righteous God. But through His cross, we are no longer under judgment and condemnation but we have received the mercy that none of us deserve. This is why no one can stop us from declaring "the praises of him who called (us) out of darkness into his wonderful light" (NIV).

Prayer: O Lord God, though we were no people, thank You for making us Your people, a holy nation Grant that we would joyfully tell others of the marvelous gift of salvation that is ours in Jesus. Amen.

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