

The Second Sunday in Lent

March 1, 2026

Jesus, Refuge of the Weary

Lutheran Service Book 423, Lutheran Worship 90, The Lutheran Hymnal 145



1 Je - sus, ref - uge of the wea - ry, Blest Re - deem - er,
2 Do we pass that cross un - heed - ing, Breath - ing no re -
3 Je - sus, may our hearts be burn - ing With more fer - vent



whom we love, Foun - tain in life's des - ert drea - ry, Sav - ior
pen - tant vow, Though we see You wound - ed, bleed - ing, See Your
love for You; May our eyes be ev - er turn - ing To be -



from the world a - bove: Of - ten have Your eyes, of - fend - ed,
thorn - en - cir - cled brow? Yet Your sin - less death has brought us
hold Your cross a - new Till in glo - ry, part - ed nev - er



Gazed up - on the sin - ner's fall; Yet up - on the
Life e - ter - nal, peace, and rest; On - ly what Your
From the bless - ed Sav - ior's side, Grav - en in our



cross ex - tend - ed, You have borne the pain of all.
grace has taught us Calms the sin - ner's deep dis - tress.
hearts for - ev - er, Dwell the cross, the Cru - ci - fied.

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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 105:4–7; antiphon Psalm 105:8

- L** He remembers his covenant forever,
the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations.
- C** **Seek the Lord and his strength;
seek his presence continually!**
- L** Remember the wondrous works that he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he uttered,
- C** **O offspring of Abraham, his servant,
children of Jacob, his chosen ones!**
- L** He is the Lord our God;
his judgments are in all the earth.
- C** **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** He remembers his covenant forever,
the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations.

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 is omitted during Lent]

Collect of the Day

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

Genesis 12:1–9

¹Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ²And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, ⁶Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD. ⁹And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

L This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Gradual Hebrews 12:2

L O come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus,

C the founder and perfecter of our faith,

L who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame,

C and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Psalm 121

L ¹I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?

C ²My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

L ³He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.

C ⁴Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

L ⁵The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand.

C ⁶The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

L ⁷The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.

C ⁸The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

Romans 4:1–8, 13–17

¹What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." ⁴Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, ⁶just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

⁷"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;

⁸blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."

¹³For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

L This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Verse of the Day: John 3:16

L For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,

C that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:1–17

L The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the 3rd chapter.

C Glory to You, O Lord.

¹There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ²This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” ³Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

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

L This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C Praise to You, O Christ.

The Apostles’ Creed

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

Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart

Lutheran Service Book 708, Lutheran Worship 413, The Lutheran Hymnal 429



1 Lord, Thee I love with all my heart; I pray Thee, ne'er from
2 Yea, Lord, 'twas Thy rich boun - ty gave My bod - y, soul, and
3 Lord, let at last Thine an - gels come, To A - br'ham's bos - om



me de - part, With ten - der mer - cy cheer me. Earth
all I have In this poor life of la - bor. Lord,
bear me home, That I may die un - fear - ing; And



has no plea - sure I would share. Yea, heav'n it - self were
grant that I in ev - 'ry place May glo - ri - fy Thy
in its nar - row cham - ber keep My bod - y safe in



void and bare If Thou, Lord, wert not near me. And should my
lav - ish grace And help and serve my neigh - bor. Let no false
peace - ful sleep Un - til Thy re - ap - pear - ing. And then from



heart for sor - row break, My trust in Thee can noth - ing shake.
doc - trine me be - guile; Let Sa - tan not my soul de - file.
death a - wak - en me, That these mine eyes with joy may see,



Thou art the por - tion I have sought; Thy pre - cious
Give strength and pa - tience un - to me To bear my
O Son of God, Thy glo - rious face, My Sav - ior



blood my soul has bought. Lord Je - sus Christ, my God and
cross and fol - low Thee. Lord Je - sus Christ, my God and
and my fount of grace. Lord Je - sus Christ, my prayer at -



Lord, my God and Lord, For - sake me not! I trust Thy Word.
Lord, my God and Lord, In death Thy com - fort still af - ford.
tend, my prayer at - tend, And I will praise Thee with - out end.

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Devotional thoughts:

There is an interesting expression in the English language called a “Come to Jesus Meeting.” This is not a phrase that I use although I have heard it often. It came to mind when I read the Gospel lesson for today.

It is used to indicate an unpleasant experience where those in authority lay down the law to an underling. It’s an expression used both in business and personal relationships. The Urban Dictionary gives this definition. “A time when a polite ultimatum is given, generally followed by a less polite ultimatum, then a threat or final option.” In my experience, politeness is never included in a “come to Jesus meeting.”

After reading about Jesus and Nicodemus, I am moved to quote Inigo Montoya of *The Princess Bride* when he says, “You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.”

Let me explain. John 3:1-17 is the account of one of the most famous “come to Jesus meetings” in history. It begins by recording that Nicodemus “came to Jesus by night.” It turned out to be more beautiful and delightful than Nicodemus could have begun to imagine. There was no ultimatum. There was no threat. There was nothing unpleasant about it. It was filled with grace and love. It concluded with the treasured Gospel message of John 3:16.

I’m not going to explore the history of the expression, “Come to Jesus Meeting.” But its widespread use to indicate the ultimate demands of the law is understandable. That’s our human nature. If someone isn’t doing what they are supposed to do or what you want them to do, our inclination is to use a threat to force compliance. This is not the way of Jesus nor should it be of His people.

Nicodemus is curious about Jesus. He knows about Jesus’ miracles. Perhaps he has witnessed a few. He began his encounter with Jesus by saying, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.”

Nicodemus was a Pharisee. He was a powerful man, being a ruler of the Jews, a member of the Sanhedrin. He may have felt that Jesus should be honored to have someone in his high position come to him with such a compliment.

Jesus wasn’t intimidated by Nicodemus. He didn’t look at him as a powerful person. He saw Nicodemus as a confused sinner who needed a savior.

Nicodemus was trapped by his reliance on human logic and reason. Like the rest of the Pharisees, he was convinced that he didn’t need a savior. He thought that God would reward him for his outward obedience to biblical laws and ceremonies. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Jesus began His encounter with Nicodemus by saying, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” No amount of outward compliance to God’s laws would open the kingdom of heaven to him. Nicodemus needed to become a whole new person for that to happen!

Nicodemus spoke for all of fallen humanity when he responded to Jesus saying, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” It is ludicrous to think of such a thing. And of course, humanly speaking, it is impossible. It would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle (Matthew 19:24). What Nicodemus didn’t believe or know is the same thing that afflicts us all. He was limited by his human wisdom and understanding. He was locked into a worldly way of thinking.

As a leader of the Jews, he should have known what people born of the water and the Spirit know. “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

We shouldn't be too hard on Nicodemus. The Virgin Mary also was limited in her understanding when the Angel Gabriel came to her with the message that she would be the mother of Jesus. She asked, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" Gabriel answered her, "Nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:26-38).

Many Christians today continue to find it difficult to believe that God can and does do the impossible. Jesus went on to say, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." To this some ask, how can baptism open the door to the kingdom of God? Like Nicodemus, they are captive to their human reasoning and conclude that it cannot despite what Jesus said.

Martin Luther anticipated this hesitation to believe that baptism accomplishes what God says it does. He asked this very question in the Small Catechism:

How can water do such great things?

Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God's word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says in Titus, chapter three:

"He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying."

[Titus 3:5-8]

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At this point, Nicodemus still wasn't convinced. So Jesus spelled out to him the heart of the problem. He said, "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" Nicodemus, like all unspiritual people, was locked into his earthly way of thinking. Heavenly thoughts were simply beyond his ability to comprehend.

Jesus then told Nicodemus the most unbelievable, incomprehensible thing yet. He said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." Here is something beyond belief. There is something called eternal life and it is given to whoever believes in Jesus! It is even more inconceivable than being born again.

Jesus' reference was to Numbers 21 and the account of the poisonous snakes also known as fiery serpents. People were being bitten and dying. They repented their sins and asked for relief. God directed Moses to make a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. Anyone who was bitten would look at the bronze serpent and live. Inconceivable (but true)! Nothing is impossible with God!

Nicodemus' "come to Jesus meeting" ended in the most astounding and incomprehensible way. Jesus told him, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world! Inconceivable but true! Jesus came into the world so that the world might be saved through him! This is the heart of the Gospel message!

How can anyone ever hope to believe this? God has provided the means. Through His word and sacraments, the Holy Spirit works to bring us to faith and keep us in the faith. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, we are born into a new life of faith. It is life that reaches beyond the grave into eternity. It is given to us freely as a gift to all who believe! Come to Jesus and receive what He has to offer!

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with

¹Martin Luther, *Luther's Small Catechism With Explanation*, Contains the basic principles of the Lutheran religion with some explanation.; Translation of: *Kleine Katechismus - English.*, electronic ed., 3 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997, c1986).

thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:4-7).

Prayers

- L** Heavenly Father, Your Son loved world in His death and resurrection. Give us hearts to remember the salvation that He won for us and to proclaim the Gospel to all.
- C** Amen.
- L** Lord God, heavenly Father, You promise us an inheritance not because of Your law but because of the promise You made to Abraham and to us. By Your grace, nourish us in our faith unto life eternal.
- C** Amen.
- L** O God, You have graciously given us a new birth in the waters of Holy Baptism. Sustain our faith in You and turn us from the old things of the flesh, that we would fix our eyes on the Son of Man through faith..
- C** Amen.
- L** O God, You have graciously given us new birth in the waters of Holy Baptism. Sustain us in our faith and turn us from the old things of the flesh and the sinful world so that we would fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith.
- C** Amen.
- L** Lord, guide and give wisdom to our nation and its leaders, and to all judges and magistrates. Protect those who serve us as firefighters, police, disaster workers and medical personnel. Protect those in harm’s way because of the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East that cause innocent men, women, and children to suffer. Grant that the new found peace in Gaza would be sustained.
- C** Amen.
- L** Visit us in Your compassion, O Lord. Deliver the sick from their infirmity, the troubled from their afflictions, the grieving from their sorrow, and the dying from their fear. May all who cry to You receive grace according to Your will. Help each of us to bear our crosses with patience and grace.
- C** Amen.
- L** O Lord, Nicodemus received the word of new life and salvation from Jesus. Grant us faith to trust Your Word and so receive forgiveness, life and salvation from Jesus.
- 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.

On My Heart Imprint Your Image

Lutheran Service Book 422, Lutheran Worship 100, The Lutheran Hymnal 179



On my heart im - print Your im - age, Bless - ed Je - sus, King of grace,



That life's rich-es, cares, and plea-sures Nev - er may Your work e-raise;



Let the clear in - scrip-tion be: Je - sus, cru - ci - fied for me,



Is my life, my hope's foun - da - tion, And my glo - ry and sal - va - tion!

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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 Second Sunday in Lent March 2—7, 2026

Introduction

Most modern forms of meditation 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

- L** In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- G** Amen.

Introit Psalm 105:4–7; antiphon Psalm 105:8

- L** He remembers his covenant forever,
the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations.
- G** **Seek the Lord and his strength;
seek his presence continually!**
- L** Remember the wondrous works that he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he uttered,
- G** **O offspring of Abraham, his servant,
children of Jacob, his chosen ones!**
- L** He is the Lord our God;
his judgments are in all the earth.
- G** **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** He remembers his covenant forever,
the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations.

Verse of the Day: John 3:16

- L** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,
- G** **that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**

Kyrie

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

Our introit is only five of the forty-five verses of Psalm 105. It couples well with the Old Testament lesson and the Epistle lesson for today. They both recall God's covenant with Abraham. Psalm 105 praises and thanks God for His faithfulness to Abraham and his descendants from the time God called Abraham through the Exodus. (Psalm 106 continues with the rebelliousness of the people in the wilderness and God's continued patience and mercy.)

The antiphon is verse 8. It is a key verse for Psalms 105 and 106. It is a key verse for our lessons today. It is a key verse for the whole Bible and all of Christian life. God "remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations."

We can rely on God to be faithful to all His promises! This isn't true when it comes to the people around us.

Someone I know worked for an institution of one of our states. When hired, this person was given the choice of opting for a defined pension from the state or a payment of cash for an IRA or a similar private retirement investment plan. Other employees advised taking the cash because it wasn't wise to trust the state to keep its promises!

Such is the world in which we live. Headlines abound with states breaking their promises to retirees.

God never goes back on His promises. His word is firm. He always does what He says He will do.

God's promise meant that He would send His only-begotten Son into the world to save sinners. It cost Him dearly but God is faithful! He remembers His covenant forever! You can count on it!

Prayer: O Lord God, You promised to Abraham that in his offspring, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Grant us faith to trust in Your promise of eternal life through Abraham's Offspring who offered His life for us on the cross through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Tuesday

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

Verse of the Day: John 3:16

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| L | For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, |
| C | that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. |

Kyrie

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

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

Our collect prayers are always designed to reflect the universal truths of the Bible. Today's prayer reminds us that we all deal with adversities of body and soul.

Physical adversities are well-known. We need food, clothes, house, home, etc. We must cope with illnesses and injuries. God "richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life."²

Assaults against our souls are less easy to see. Our sinfulness means that we are prone to have evil and sinful thoughts. No matter how harmful physical adversities are, these assaults against the soul are infinitely worse. They can have eternal consequences.

Our first line of defense against evil thoughts is filling our minds with wholesome and pure thoughts. We do this by immersing ourselves in God's holy word.

I have learned through personal experience how helpful it is for me to listen to the Bible. I regularly try to listen to an entire Gospel at one time. Other times, I will listen to one or two epistles.

An important Bible passage for me to remember is Philippians 4:8:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

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

Wednesday

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

Verse of the Day: John 3:16

- L** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,
- C** **that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**

Psalm 121

- L** ¹I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?
- C** ²**My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.**
- L** ³He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.
- C** ⁴**Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.**
- L** ⁵The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand.
- C** ⁶**The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.**
- L** ⁷The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
- C** ⁸**The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.**

²Martin Luther, *Luther's Small Catechism With Explanation*, Contains the basic principles of the Lutheran religion with some explanation.; Translation of: *Kleine Katechismus - English.*, electronic ed., 3 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997, c1986).

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.**

Psalm 121 is the second of 15 Songs of Ascents (120-134). There are two thoughts about how the Songs (Psalms) of Ascents were used in worship. One is the idea that they were sung ascending the steps of the temple courts. The other is that they were sung by pilgrims as they approached Jerusalem to attend the various Biblical festivals. It is possible that both ideas are true.

It is easy to imagine singing Psalm 121 as you are approaching Jerusalem from Jericho. Jesus took this route on His final trip to Jerusalem. Jericho is located 846 feet below sea level! Jerusalem is 2,470 feet above sea level. On the way to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, each step of the journey would take you higher into the hills and mountains. Why would you take this journey? You climb this path because it brings you to the Lord and His temple!

In our world of casual Christianity, it is hard for us to imagine the effort that the ancient people of God put into their worship of the Lord. The pilgrimage to Jerusalem was arduous and dangerous. Luke 2: 41 tells us that Jesus' "parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover." On the way, at times, their footing must have been precarious (Psalm 121:3). The way was frequented by robbers (Luke 10:29-37). They may have often prayed for safety, day and night (Psalm 121:3-8).

Where does our help come from? Our help comes from the Lord! He helps us day and night. He helps us on all of our journeys. His ultimate help is the gift of salvation that He grants to us so that we may spend eternity in His mansion in heaven.

Psalm 121 would be a good psalm to pray and sing on the way to church on Sunday morning. Consider giving it a try.

Prayer: O Lord, You are our help in time of need. You watch over us on all of our journeys. We especially pray that You would grant us Your protection as we travel to Your house to hear Your word and sing Your praise through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Thursday

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

Verse of the Day: John 3:16

- L** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,
C that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

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.**

Genesis 12:1–9

¹Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that

you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, ⁶Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD. ⁹And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

Every parent has experienced a time when an excited child comes running to report something important. It could be an injury or a dispute between siblings, etc. At some point, mom or dad has to say, “Settle down. Start at the beginning.”

Where should the story begin? Should he explain that he went to the neighbors to play for a while? Should he begin with the decision to climb a tree or when the ambulance arrived? All of these would qualify as the beginning.

To the point, the Bible presents us with several beginnings. The account of creation certainly qualifies as the beginning. After all, Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning.” However, God began His relationship with humanity a second time when Noah and his family left the ark. Genesis 12 is the third beginning recorded in Genesis. It is the beginning of God’s relationship with Abraham and his descendants. In a way, it is also the beginning of His relationship with us because the Bible says that we are Abraham’s descendants by faith (Galatians 3:7-9).

God called Abraham (At this time, he was still called Abram.) to leave his home and go to a place that God would show him. Abraham left and went to the Land of Canaan. God gave that land to him and his offspring.

The Bible doesn’t record what went through Abraham’s mind when God called him. We don’t know if he had anxiety or doubt. We do know that he followed God’s leading by faith (Hebrews 11:8-9).

All of God’s people are called to follow God’s leading by faith. His leading often seems contrary to human reason but we follow Him by faith.

Jesus followed His Father’s will when He went to the cross. This seemed contrary to what appeared to be a reasonable course of action for the King of the Jews. But for the joy that was set before him, He endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2) for our sake and God raised Him from the dead.

We, too, endure crosses in life. To our fallen nature, this feels contrary to reason. But we know that “all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). This is living a life with the faith of Abraham, Isaac, Moses, David, and all the prophets. It is living a life of faith with the Apostles, martyrs, and all the children of God. We know that beyond this vale of tears, there awaits for us the Promised Land of eternal life in heaven because of Jesus’ cross and resurrection.

May we always walk along life’s journey with the faith to follow God’s calling.

Prayer: Lord God our Father, You kept Abraham and Sarah in safety throughout the days of their pilgrimage, You led the children of Israel through the midst of the sea, and by a star You led the Wise Men to the infant Jesus. Make our ways safe and our homecomings joyful, and bring us at last to our heavenly home, where You dwell in glory with Your Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Friday

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

C Amen.

Verse of the Day: John 3:16

- L** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,
C that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

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.

Romans 4:1–8, 13–17

¹What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” ⁴Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, ⁶just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

- ⁷“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;
⁸blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

¹³For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

There is a popular misconception about the Bible that goes like this. In the Old Testament, people were saved by keeping the law and people are saved by believing the Gospel in the New Testament. The Epistle lesson for this week shows how wrong this is.

Ever since the fall into sin, no one can be saved by keeping the law. We all fail miserably in our attempts to achieve perfection. That path leads to one of two outcomes. Either, we deceive ourselves into believing that we are keeping the law (The Pharisees were guilty of that). Or we become filled with despair when we realize that perfection is beyond our grasp.

Paul tells us that Abraham was not justified by doing the works of the law. No, Paul reminds us, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” (He is quoting Genesis 15:6.)

Just as Abraham was saved by faith so are we. Abraham believed the promises of God. Like all the Old Testament heroes, he was saved by faith in the coming savior. We, too, believe God’s promises. We have the advantage of knowing that God fulfilled His promise by sending His Only-begotten Son into the world so that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life.

We may not be descendants of Abraham according to the flesh but we are fully his children because we share in his faith.

Prayer: Almighty God, thank You for sending Jesus to fulfill the demands of Your law for us. Grant us the faith of Abraham and David that we would receive the forgiveness of sins that were won for us by Jesus on the cross. Amen.

Saturday

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

C Amen.

Gradual Hebrews 12:2

L O come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus,

C **the founder and perfecter of our faith,**

L who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame,

C **and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.**

Verse of the Day: John 3:16

L For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,

C **that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**

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.**

Romans 4:13–17

¹³For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Abraham is the father of all believers! What do we believe? We believe that God gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Faith in God is more than simply trusting Him to grant us blessings and success in life. It is far beyond that. We believe that because of Jesus, God has promised to raise us from the dead. This is the foundation of our Christian faith.

I once attended a pastors’ conference where the main speaker gave a presentation on reaching out to Muslims with the Christian message. It sounded like an intriguing topic and I eagerly anticipated hearing what he had to say. I was very disappointed. After two and a half hours, it was clear to me that he wasn’t going to talk about the heart and soul of our Christian faith. He didn’t mention forgiveness, life, and salvation won for us by Jesus on the cross. His main point seemed to be that Christian rules for living are better than Muslim rules.

If Christianity is just a better set of rules for living, then it’s a waste of time. The Christian faith is about what happens when we don’t follow the rules perfectly because no one does. Even the most rule-conscious people die!

We believe that despite our sinfulness God still loves us and forgives us for Christ's sake. Although our earthly life will one day end, God will raise us and all believers to life again. The God who created the world is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20).

Prayer: Almighty God, thank You for the promise of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord. Grant us true faith to believe that You grant us eternal life through Him. Amen.

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