

The Fourth Sunday in Lent March 19, 2023

Just as in Jesus' day, in our day there is much confusion about sin and grace. Without the work of the Holy Spirit, we are all blind. We are blind to our sin. We are blind to God. May God's word dwell in us richly that our blind eyes would see our sin so that we would be led to repentance. May our blind eyes see the grace of God in Jesus' suffering and death on the cross. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus!

A Personal Note:

Today is a bittersweet day. It marks the completion of three years of providing these weekly home worship services. The first one was published for The Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 22, 2020. Much has happened since that day in Lent three years ago.

Like many people, I believed that extreme measures of pandemic suppression would only last for a few weeks. I was dumbfounded when local authorities prohibited churches from holding Easter services where everyone remained in their own private vehicles.

My mother loved attending church. Until the pandemic, she had only missed church when she was sick. After the pandemic, she only attended twice more in her life. She looked forward to the day when the vaccine would make it possible for her to safely attend again. Unfortunately, she didn't live to see that day. She now worships with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.

As the first year of the pandemic came to a close and the vaccine became available, I began to think that there was no more need for these home worship services. However, I received encouragement from people across the U.S. and Canada to continue and so I have.

Now after three years, we have completed the entire three-year lectionary. We have looked at all of the propers provided.

I am not sure how long this will continue but for now, I will carry on as long as I am able and as long as it appears that these services and meditations are a benefit for people who need them.

Thank you to everyone who has offered generous words of encouragement. May God continue to grant His blessings to this project and grant me the ability to provide these services.

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

Lutheran Service Book 425, Lutheran Worship 114, The Lutheran Hymnal 175



1 When I sur - vey the won - drous cross On which the
2 For - bid it, Lord, that I should boast Save in the
3 See, from His head, His hands, His feet Sor - row and
4 Were the whole realm of na - ture mine, That were a



Prince of Glo - ry died, My rich - est gain I
death of Christ, my God; All the vain things that
love flow min - gled down! Did e'er such love and
trib - ute far too small; Love so a - maz - ing,



count but loss And pour con - tempt on all my pride.
charm me most, I sac - ri - fice them to His blood.
sor - row meet Or thorns com - pose so rich a crown?
so di - vine, De - mands my soul, my life, my all!

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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 27:4–6; antiphon Psalm 25:15

L My eyes are ever toward the Lord,
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

C One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

L For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock.

C And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;

I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

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 My eyes are ever toward the Lord,
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

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

C Amen.

Isaiah 42:14–21

¹⁴For a long time I have held my peace;
I have kept still and restrained myself;
now I will cry out like a woman in labor;
I will gasp and pant.

¹⁵I will lay waste mountains and hills,
and dry up all their vegetation;
I will turn the rivers into islands,
and dry up the pools.

¹⁶And I will lead the blind
in a way that they do not know,
in paths that they have not known
I will guide them.
I will turn the darkness before them into light,
the rough places into level ground.
These are the things I do,
and I do not forsake them.

¹⁷They are turned back and utterly put to shame,
who trust in carved idols,
who say to metal images,
“You are our gods.”

¹⁸Hear, you deaf,
and look, you blind, that you may see!

¹⁹Who is blind but my servant,
or deaf as my messenger whom I send?
Who is blind as my dedicated one,
or blind as the servant of the LORD?

²⁰He sees many things, but does not observe them;
his ears are open, but he does not hear.

²¹The LORD was pleased, for his righteousness’ sake,
to magnify his law and make it glorious.

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 142

L ¹With my voice I cry out to the LORD; with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD.

C ²**I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him.**

L ³When my spirit faints within me, you know my way!

In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me.

C ⁴**Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me;
no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul.**

L ⁵I cry to you, O LORD; I say, “You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.”

C ⁶**Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low!**

Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me!

L ⁷Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name!

C **The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me.**

Ephesians 5:8–14

⁸For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

L This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Verse of the Day: Psalm 36:9

L With you is the fountain of life;

C **In your light do we see light.**

John 9:1–41

L The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the 9th chapter.

C **Glory to You, O Lord.**

¹As [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ²And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is

day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

⁶Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud ⁷and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹Some said, “It is he.” Others said, “No, but he is like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.”

¹⁰So they said to him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight.”

¹²They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” And there was a division among them. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.”

¹⁸The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. ²¹But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” ²²(His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) ²³Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵He answered, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” ²⁶They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” ²⁸And they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” ³⁰The man answered, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” ³⁴They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.

³⁵Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” ³⁷Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” ³⁸He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. ³⁹Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?” ⁴¹Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.

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.

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.**

Lutheran Service Book 571, Lutheran Worship 352, The Lutheran Hymnal 245

1 God loved the world so that He gave His on - ly
 2 Christ Je - sus is the ground of faith, Who was made
 3 God would not have the sin - ner die; His Son with
 4 Be of good cheer, for God's own Son For - gives all

Son the lost to save, That all who would in
 flesh and suf - fered death; All then who trust in
 sav - ing grace is nigh; His Spir - it in the
 sins which you have done; And, jus - ti - fied by

Him be - lieve Should ev - er - last - ing life re - ceive.
 Him a - lone Are built on this chief cor - ner - stone.
 Word de - clares How we in Christ are heav - en's heirs.
 Je - sus' blood, Your Bap - tism grants the high - est good.

5 If you are sick, if death is near,
This truth your troubled heart can cheer:
Christ Jesus saves your soul from death;
That is the firmest ground of faith.

6 Glory to God the Father, Son,
 And Holy Spirit, Three in One!
 To You, O blessed Trinity,
 Be praise now and eternally!

Devotional thoughts:

Have you ever climbed a mountain? It is a rather difficult thing to do in the corner of Michigan where I live. But, believe it or not, I have climbed a mountain!

I know that I don't look like a mountain climber. But a few years ago, while visiting my daughter in Colorado, I climbed an 8921 ft mountain with my wife, Valerie, our daughter, Becky, and her husband, Ben. It is known as Sugarloaf Mountain and is located about 11 miles west of Boulder, Colorado where my daughter was working at the time. However, in the spirit of full disclosure, I must admit that there is a hiking trail that leads to the summit. Nevertheless, the view from the top was spectacular. The climb was invigorating. And I was left with a sense of accomplishment when I came down. After today's meditation, I hope that you feel the same way because we have a number of mountains to climb in the Gospel lesson for today.

You may have already recognized the first mountain. Our Gospel lesson from John 9 is the entire chapter of the Bible. There are only a few Sundays in the three-year lectionary on which an entire chapter is read for the Gospel lesson.

A more significant peak for us to climb is the question of why this man was blind from birth. How are sin and suffering related?

Next comes the mountain of irrational opposition to Jesus. Finally, we will consider the mountain of recognizing Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world.

Every mountain presents a challenge. You cannot deny its presence. This is the way our Gospel lesson begins.

Jesus and His disciples were walking along and they passed a man who was blind when he was born. John doesn't tell us how they knew that he was born blind. But he may have been a well-known blind beggar. His presence prompted this theological question from Jesus' disciples, "Who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?"

They assumed that every ailment or affliction could be traced to a specific sin. Of course, sometimes this is true. If a boy comes home from school with a black eye, it could be a direct result of a fight he had on the playground. If someone totals a car as a result of taking a curve while exceeding the speed limit, the connection is obvious.

However, while all suffering is a result of our fallen state, not every malady can be traced to a specific sin. Unfortunately, Christians continue to be confused about this. A few years ago, a woman came into my office excited by a book that she had recently found at a "Christian bookstore." It was a rather large book that contained a catalog of ailments with their associated sins. It suggested that all you needed to do was look up your affliction and then repent of the corresponding sin. It grieves me that many believers are often deceived in this way. Jesus' words in our Gospel lesson put such foolishness to rest.

Jesus told them, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him." Here was a man who was called upon to be a New Testament Job. His suffering was designed to advance the work of God and his plan of salvation for sinners! It was necessary for him to climb the mountain of blindness to enhance Jesus' ministry and to affirm Him as the Son of God!

There are times when we are called upon to climb a mountain of suffering for the sake of others. This is especially true for parents. Mothers and fathers often sacrifice themselves for the sake of their children. This is particularly true if their child is born with a disability.

First responders place themselves at risk to help others. A firefighter who suffers an injury while rescuing a child is not being punished for sin! A soldier who is wet, cold, and hungry in a foxhole while protecting his homeland and all that he holds to be true is not suffering because of a sin that he committed when he was a child.

Suffering for the sake of others is who we are. Galatians 6:2 tells us, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Jesus suffered on the cross not because of His sins but because of ours!

The next mountain for us to climb is trying to understand the stubbornness of the Pharisees. A normal, rational person would celebrate with the blind man who received his sight from Jesus. But these Pharisees were anything but rational. They were blinded by their anger and unbelief. Instead of rejoicing that the Son of God has come to save us from sin and its effects, they declared, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."

Their stubbornness caused them to disregard these clear words of Scripture telling them that the Messiah would give sight to the blind.

Isaiah wrote this concerning the time of the coming Savior, “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped” (Isaiah 35:5). He said that God’s Chosen One would come “to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness” (Isaiah 42:7).

Jesus knew that giving sight to the blind was one of the marks of the Messiah. When John the Baptist sent messengers to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” Jesus answered, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me” (Matthew 11:2-6).

The Pharisees were blinded by unbelief because they chose to ignore God’s word. Still today, irrational unbelievers ignore all the evidence of God found in nature and the message of salvation found in the Bible. They choose to live in the darkness of their sin and suffer the consequences because they ignored the Light of the world.

You and I are different. The Holy Spirit has opened our eyes. We are able to see the love of God in Jesus and His cross. With the blind man who received his sight, we say, “Lord, I believe.”

Out of love, you and I might be called upon to climb mountains of suffering and distress for the sake of others. The Apostle Paul knew what it was like to suffer for the sake of others. Numerous times, he was beaten and thrown into jail. He was shipwrecked. He was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19).

But Paul knew what the unbelieving world doesn’t know. He wrote to the Corinthian Christians:

⁷ So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

Remember these words of Paul. Learn to be content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. God does not allow them to come to you as punishment but rather as opportunities to learn again, “When I am weak, then I am strong.”

Paul knew that our ultimate victory has already been won for us by Jesus. He has cured us from spiritual blindness. He has healed our sin sick souls. He has conquered death and granted us eternal life in heaven and the ultimate victory over every consequence of sin is already ours.

He wrote to the Corinthian Christians:

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

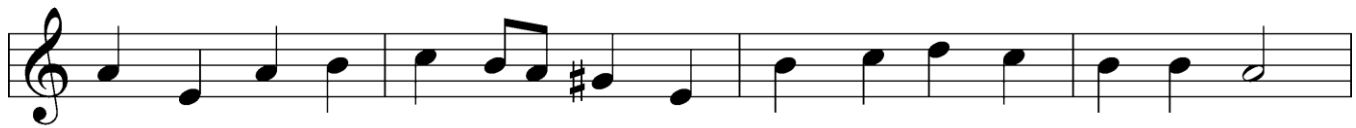
I pray that you will not allow your light and momentary affliction to distract you from fixing your eyes on Jesus and the eternal glory that is ours through His suffering and death.

“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 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).

God’s richest blessings to you in Christ.

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-rase;



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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Prayers

- L** Great Physician, enlighten our eyes by the Gospel, and hide us in Your shelter in the day of trouble. Provide a home in Your Church for those cast out by this world, and unite them with us in the confession of Your holy name.
- C** Amen.
- L** Father, through Holy Baptism You have brought us into the light of Christ. Guide us always in Your ways and teach us to know Your will, that we would do what is good and right and true.
- C** Amen.
- L** Lord God, those who wait for Your salvation have Your promise that You will not forsake them. Lead those who wander in darkness through rough places that led by the Light of the world, they would find the way of righteousness and not be put to shame.
- C** Amen.
- L** Almighty God, remember our nation and its leaders. Bless all who make, administer and judge our laws, and enable us to be good and responsible citizens.
- C** Amen.
- L** Almighty God, send Your holy angels to protect and keep us in Your ways, that no evil may befall us. Graciously behold the needy, the sick and the troubled [especially _____]. Satisfy us with long life, and show us Your salvation.
- 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.

Christ, the Life of All the Living

Lutheran Service Book 420, Lutheran Worship 94, The Lutheran Hymnal 151



1 Christ, the life of all the liv - ing, Christ, the death of
 2 Thou, ah! Thou, hast tak - en on Thee Bonds and stripes, a
 3 Thou hast borne the smit - ing on - ly That my wounds might
 4 Heart - less scof - fers did sur - round Thee, Treat - ing Thee with



death, our foe, Who, Thy - self for me once giv - ing
 cru - el rod; Pain and scorn were heaped up - on Thee,
 all be whole; Thou hast suf - fered, sad and lone - ly,
 shame - ful scorn And with pierc - ing thorns they crowned Thee.



To the dark - est depths of woe: Through Thy suf - f'rings,
 O Thou sin - less Son of God! Thus didst Thou my
 Rest to give my wea - ry soul; Yea, the curse of
 All dis - grace Thou, Lord, hast borne, That as Thine Thou



death, and mer - it I e - ter - nal life in - her - it.
 soul de - liv - er From the bonds of sin for - ev - er.
 God en - dur - ing, Bless - ing un - to me se - cur - ing.
 might - est own me And with heav'n - ly glo - ry crown me.



Thou-sand, thou - sand thanks shall be, Dear - est Je - sus, un - to Thee.
Thou-sand, thou - sand thanks shall be, Dear - est Je - sus, un - to Thee.
Thou-sand, thou - sand thanks shall be, Dear - est Je - sus, un - to Thee.
Thou-sand, thou - sand thanks shall be, Dear - est Je - sus, un - to Thee.

5 Thou hast suffered men to bruise Thee,
That from pain I might be free;
Falsely did Thy foes accuse Thee:
Thence I gain security;
Comfortless Thy soul did languish
Me to comfort in my anguish.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

6 Thou hast suffered great affliction
And hast borne it patiently,
Even death by crucifixion,
Fully to atone for me;
Thou didst choose to be tormented
That my doom should be prevented.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

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

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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 Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 20 – 25, 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 mediate on what God has done for you.

Monday

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

Introit Psalm 27:4–6; antiphon Psalm 25:15

- L** My eyes are ever toward the Lord,
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.
C **One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the
Lord and to inquire in his temple.**
L For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock.
C **And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.**
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 My eyes are ever toward the Lord,
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

Verse of the Day: Psalm 36:9

- L** With you is the fountain of life;
C In your light do we see light.

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. |

Our prayers reflect the things that are truly important to us. Most of my prayers are “spur of the moment.” I pray about things as they come up. However, sometimes circumstances and difficulties in life can become so overpowering that they dominate my prayer life. I can remember many times when that happened.

In this context, David’s prayer in Psalm 27:4 is quite informative about priorities in his life. He writes, “One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.” David prays to be in the house of the Lord!

This seems contrary to 21st Century sensibilities. Even Christians have higher priorities today. But the Lord’s house is where David wanted to be. It’s where Jesus wanted to be when He was 12. When Mary and Joseph finally found Jesus in the temple, He said to them, “Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” (Luke 2:49).

In the Lord’s house, we hear God’s word and sing His praise. We learn of God’s plan of salvation and His deep love for us. In the Lord’s house, we are privileged to spend time with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Maybe it is time for us to re-prioritize our prayers and learn the importance of spending time in the Lord’s house.

Prayer: Almighty God, grant to Your Church Your Holy Spirit and the wisdom that comes down from above, that Your Word may not be bound but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ’s holy people, that in steadfast faith we may serve You and, in the confession of Your name, abide unto the end; through 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: Psalm 36:9

- | | |
|----------|---------------------------------------|
| L | With you is the fountain of life; |
| C | In your light do we see light. |

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. |

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

C **Amen.**

I’m still learning! I received a 3-D printer for Christmas. I did quite a bit of research before I tried setting it up and printing. I was thrilled that my first print was successful!

I'm in the process of designing my own projects. The learning curve for this seems to be a little steep. I'm taking baby steps. Everything is so new to me.

For people that have grown up without God, the process of knowing Him can be even more difficult. Godliness is so different from worldliness that it seems like a whole new world and way of thinking.

The first concept that is foreign to worldly people is the idea of sin. Yes, worldly people can recognize evil in others. What they find difficult is recognizing evil in themselves. They rebel against the thought!

I once read an account of a hardened criminal and murderer who blamed everyone else for his actions. He felt no responsibility for the evil things that he had done. This is typical of worldly thinking. Worldly people seek to justify all of their sins by blaming others.

A worldly person rebels against the thoughts expressed in the collect for this week that "we deserve only punishment." Other people may deserve punishment but not me!

The first thing that God must do with such people is to bring them to the knowledge of their sins. He does this with His law. His law shows us our sin and our need for a savior.

The second problem the collect presents to us is that God's mercies are new every morning. Worldly people believe that they deserve good things. They believe that the world owes them a comfortable and pleasant life. They don't believe that good things come by the mercy of God.

We understand that although we don't deserve good things, God in His mercy gives them to us every day. God provided manna from heaven every day to the children of Israel. While we do not receive manna, every good thing we have comes from God! In fact, God provides all our needs of body and soul.

Worldly people are mostly interested in bodily needs. Spiritual people know that our greatest needs are the needs of our souls. God bountifully provides for the needs of our souls through Jesus. He forgives us for the evil that we have done and opens the door of paradise for us through His death and resurrection!

Worldly people refuse to acknowledge God's merciful goodness. As His children, we recognize God's goodness and give Him thanks for every one of them.

Worldly people serve themselves. God's people willingly serve Him in grateful thanksgiving for every one of His blessings. Our most important service to God is telling others about His only-begotten Son who came into the world to save sinners.

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

Wednesday

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

C Amen.

Verse of the Day: Psalm 36:9

L With you is the fountain of life;

C In your light do we see light.

Psalm 142

L ¹With my voice I cry out to the LORD; with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD.

C ²I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him.

L ³When my spirit faints within me, you know my way!

In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me.

C ⁴Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me;

no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul.

L ⁵I cry to you, O LORD; I say, “You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.”

C ⁶Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low!

Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me!

L ⁷Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name!

C The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me.

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.

Psalms 142 and 57 are both connected to a pivotal event in the life of David. The title of Psalm 142 reads, “A Maskil of David, when he was in the cave. A Prayer.” The title of Psalm 57 is, “To the choirmaster: according to Do Not Destroy. A Miktam of David, when he fled from Saul, in the cave.” The references to David being in a cave and fleeing from Saul point to an event recorded in 1 Samuel 23:29-1 Samuel 24:22.

David and his men were hiding from Saul in the caves of Engedi. Engedi is a spring and oasis in the Judean desert located on the western shore of the Dead Sea. By car, it’s about a half-hour south of Qumran and twenty minutes north of Masada.

It is a lovely place to visit with waterfalls and lush vegetation in the middle of an arid desert. There are so many caves in the area that you can easily understand why David chose this as a place to hide from Saul who was trying to kill him.

(Here’s a link to an excellent brochure describing En Gedi today. It was produced by the En Gedi Nature Reserve. <https://static-en.parks.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/brochureEn-13.pdf>)

David and his 600 men hid from Saul and his troops. 600 sounds like an impressive number. However, Saul was coming for David with 3,000 men. David was outnumbered 5 to 1!

With this background, you can easily imagine David praying Psalm 142. It begins, “With my voice I cry out to the LORD; with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD.” David was in a desperate situation. His only hope was that God would deliver him. David trusted that God was able to change things even when no human help was in sight.

We know from the Bible that God did save David. He delivered David from Saul and his army.

Psalm 142 is an excellent prayer for us to use in times of distress and travail. God is always willing to hear our complaints and our troubles.

Just as He did for David, God may choose to deliver us from our troubles. Or He may choose to give us strength to bear our infirmities and weaknesses as He did for the Apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 12:9).

He has already delivered us from the worst troubles of all—sin and death. During this Lenten season, we remember that Jesus won the ultimate victory for us on the cross. We trust that one day we will leave this vale of tears and experience the eternal joys of heaven.

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for hearing our prayers and complaints. Grant that we would look forward to the day when the righteous will surround us in the eternal mansions of heaven 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: Psalm 36:9

L With you is the fountain of life;
C In your light do we see light.

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.

Isaiah 42:14–21

¹⁴For a long time I have held my peace;
I have kept still and restrained myself;
now I will cry out like a woman in labor;
I will gasp and pant.
¹⁵I will lay waste mountains and hills,
and dry up all their vegetation;
I will turn the rivers into islands,
and dry up the pools.
¹⁶And I will lead the blind
in a way that they do not know,
in paths that they have not known
I will guide them.
I will turn the darkness before them into light,
the rough places into level ground.
These are the things I do,
and I do not forsake them.
¹⁷They are turned back and utterly put to shame,
who trust in carved idols,
who say to metal images,
“You are our gods.”
¹⁸Hear, you deaf,
and look, you blind, that you may see!
¹⁹Who is blind but my servant,
or deaf as my messenger whom I send?
Who is blind as my dedicated one,
or blind as the servant of the LORD?
²⁰He sees many things, but does not observe them;
his ears are open, but he does not hear.
²¹The LORD was pleased, for his righteousness’ sake,
to magnify his law and make it glorious.

I suppose that everyone who pursues a career is surprised by some aspect of their profession. Hopefully, most of those surprises are happy or pleasant. But I’m sure that many are not.

I was raised in the church. I spent many years preparing for the pastoral office. I spent a year on vicarage but I wasn’t prepared for the surprise that came my way after I was ordained. I discovered that the church is often a refuge for aggressive and unruly people. This includes both clergy and laypeople.

To be sure, I have had the privilege of knowing and interacting with many wonderful and caring people. However, certain individuals can be belligerent and antagonistic.

I know that people who work in the retail field are aware of these types of people. They have convinced themselves that life is easier when they make others feel miserable. But it's very disappointing to find them in the church.

I remember a time when one of our members was extremely rude to the wife of one of our elders. I called this poor lady and apologized to her for having to endure such bad manners. She said, "I understand. It's just the way she is." Because we are compassionate people, we tend to ignore such offensive and disrespectful behavior. Unfortunately, patience with bad manners can sometimes be interpreted as acceptance. This can have disastrous consequences.

The Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 42 describes God as keeping silent and restraining Himself in the face of such disrespectful and sinful behavior. But God's patience has its limit. He will one day come in judgment and "lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their vegetation."

No one should be deceived into believing that God doesn't see and judge sin. His patience should not be misinterpreted as acceptance.

On the other hand, God cares for those with the greatest needs. He leads the blind and turns their darkness into light.

He will utterly put to shame those who trust in carved idols, But He mends the brokenhearted. He give eternal life to those who believe.

Prayer: Lord God, thank You for Your patience. Grant that we would never interpret Your patience as an acceptance of sinfulness through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Friday

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

C Amen.

Verse of the Day: Psalm 36:9

L With you is the fountain of life;

C In your light do we see light.

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.

Ephesians 5:8–14

⁸For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

What's your opinion concerning daylight savings time? It seems that everyone has one.

Daylight savings time doesn't add or subtract any light to the day. We have just experienced the spring (vernal) equinox when the daylight hours and the hours of darkness are the same length. From now until the

summer solstice, the hours of light each day will increase whether or not we observe daylight savings time.

The real difference is whether we choose to have an hour of light added to the morning before work or an hour of light added to the evening when the workday is over. Or another way to put it is, “When do we want more darkness?”

The general consensus is that no one wants more darkness! Daylight is precious. It is something that we want to save. From ancient times, people have worked hard to provide more light. In Bible times, there were oil lamps. More recently, kerosene lanterns and gas lights ruled the night. Finally, electric light bulbs pushed back the darkness.

Now with our current push toward energy efficiency, incandescent lights have given way to compact fluorescent bulbs. They are quickly being replaced by LEDs. No one has suggested that we return to darkness.

But the sad truth is that sinful people live in spiritual darkness. Many of them don’t even realize it. They were born spiritually blind and have never known anything else.

But we are different. The Apostle Paul says that we were darkness but now we are light in the Lord. Now is the time to live in the light and to produce the fruit of light which is “found in all that is good and right and true.”

When Jesus healed the man who was blind from birth, He did more than open his eyes to the world of light. He also healed him of his spiritual blindness. He was able to recognize Jesus for who He is—The Son of God and our Savior.

Paul does not want us to return to darkness. No one who has seen the Light of Life wants to. Paul urges us to “take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”

May we always walk in the light of Christ until we experience the never-ending daylight of eternity.

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for making our spiritually blind eyes see the light of Your salvation. Grant that we would always seek to produce the fruit of light which is found in all that is good and right and true through Jesus Christ our Lord. 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: Psalm 36:9

L With you is the fountain of life;

C In your light do we see light.

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.

Hebrews 12:1-2

^{12:1} Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Dick said, “Look, look. Look up. Look up, up, up. Jane said, “Run, Run. Run, Dick, run. Run and see.”

These are the opening sentences of *Fun with Dick and Jane*. I learned to read with the Dick and Jane series. I remember those days fondly as I sounded out the words and the sense of accomplishment that I felt when I was successful.

According to certain standards, this is some of the best literature ever written. Here’s what I mean. Almost every website that I consulted while researching the question, “What is the ideal length of a sentence?” has given a variation of this answer: “The average sentence length is between 15–20 words. In most cases, the shorter the sentence, the better.”

I don’t know who decreed that shorter sentences are better but that seems to be the consensus. It wasn’t always the case. An analysis of books from the Sixteenth Century indicates that the average sentence length then was 63.02 words. By the 1820s, sentence length had declined to 26 words per sentence. In 1950, sentence length was down to 14.4 words per sentence. I couldn’t find any research on contemporary writing but I doubt that sentence length has increased since 1950. If anything, it may have declined.

Why all the fuss about sentence length? This is an important issue that translators consider when translating the Bible. Our contemporary craving for short sentences forces translators to choose between reproducing the sentence structure of the original language or shortening it for our modern eyes and ears.

Hebrews 12:1-2 is a case in point. In Greek, these two verses are one sentence of 49 words. One Greek word sometimes represents two or three English words. As a result, these two verses are translated as one sentence of 76 words in the English Standard Version of the Bible. (The King James Version uses 82 words! By the way, we all know that the shortest verse in the Bible is John 11:35, “Jesus wept.”)

I’ve written all of this because the Lenten Gradual is one of my favorites. It’s Hebrews 12:2. However, after reviewing all 63 English translations available to me, I discovered that none of them said, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” I was stumped. Most of them begin in a way similar to the ESV, “looking to Jesus” which is in the middle of the sentence. And as one of my favorite fictional detectives was fond of saying, “The game is afoot.” (I know that some of you English literature devotees [Jacqui] will be thinking of Earl of Northumberland who famously said in Henry IV, Part I, Act I, Scene 3, “Before the game is afoot, thou still let'st slip.”)

I had a hunch (ala, Johnny Dollar) that it may be from the New International Version. But Hebrews 12:2 in the NIV begins, “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” Close but no cigar.

Then I recalled that the NIV of today is not the one that many of us grew to love at the end of the 20th Century and the beginning of the 21st Century. In 2011, the NIV of old was put out to pasture and a “new” NIV was introduced with the same name. Confusing, to say the least.

So with this in mind, I decided to follow this lead and check the 1984 “old” NIV. There it was in all its glory.

So what’s the point? Do you see how easy it was for me to take my eyes off Jesus? How easy it is to be distracted?

Jesus was never distracted from His mission. For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, scorning its shame. What was that joy? It was the salvation of the world. It gave Him joy that we would be saved from sin, death, and the devil by His suffering!

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author, and perfecter of our faith!

Prayer: Almighty God, thank You for the gift of Your only-begotten Son who endured the cross and scorned its shame for us. Grant that we would always keep our eyes fixed on Jesus as we run our earthly race until we share in the never-ending joy of heaven through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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