

The Fourth Sunday in Lent March 14, 2021

What is the essence of our Christian faith? The answer seems obvious: Jesus and His cross. No other religion in the world points to a Savior. All other religions only point to what the individual must do to save himself or climb his way back to God. Indeed it is sad when even Christians see salvation in self-help, inward reflection and mindfulness, striving for perfection, and the like. Rather let us remember Jesus' own words, "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."

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 27:3–5; antiphon Psalm 27:1

- L** The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?
- C** **Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.**
- L** 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.
- C** **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** **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** The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

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.**

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.**

Numbers 21:4–9

⁴From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. ⁵And the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.” ⁶Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. ⁷And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he

sees it, shall live.”⁹ So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

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 107:1–9

L ¹Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!

C ²Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble

L ³and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

C ⁴Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in;

L ⁵hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.

C ⁶Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

L ⁷He led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in.

C ⁸Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men!

L ⁹For he satisfies the longing soul,

C and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

Ephesians 2:1–10

¹And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

L This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Verse of the Day: Joel 2:13; John 3:16

L Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;

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

John 3:14–21

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

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

¹⁴[Jesus said:] “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.

¹⁶“For 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. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God.”

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.**

God Loved the World So That He Gave

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!

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Devotional thoughts:

My family and close friends know that I enjoy listening to what has come to be known as Old Time Radio. Sometimes it is referred to as the Golden Age of Radio. In our media-hungry world of virtual reality and video conferencing, it is hard to imagine that there was a time before television. In those days radio provided all the same types of shows that we watch and stream today, only without the pictures. There were reality shows, game shows, soap operas, sitcoms, mysteries, westerns, suspense, science fiction, talk shows, news, sports, documentaries, etc. Even today, you can find these programs being rebroadcast. The internet has given new life to this fascinating entertainment medium.

Yesterday, I was listening to one of my favorites, Fibber McGee and Molly. This sitcom originally ran for 24 years from 1935-1959. As often happened in the days before streaming and downloads, the show was nearing the end when I turned to the station. Fibber was engaged in conversation with the little girl. Suddenly, he came to the horrible realization that he had forgotten Molly and his wedding anniversary.

While berating himself with an endless stream of derogatory adjectives, the doorbell rang. To his surprise, it was the delivery of a dozen roses for his wife Molly. (Yes, they did have home delivery before our current pandemic.) Curiosity overcame Fibber and he opened the attached note. To his surprise and dismay, Fibber discovered that the flowers were sent to Molly by her old flame.

With what Fibber believes to be a flash of brilliance, he solved all of his problems by destroying the greeting card and substituting one of his own! He then called his wife Molly, and presented her with a dozen roses for their anniversary!

If you've stayed with me this far, I can imagine that you are asking yourself, "What in the world does this have to do with the Gospel lesson for today?" Let me see if I can get myself out of this hole I've dug.

Our Gospel lesson for today starts with John 3:14. It's a good place to start on this Fourth Sunday in Lent. However, just like me listening to the radio yesterday, we've tuned in near the end of the story! Many questions are unanswered. Who is speaking? Fortunately, the lectionary tells us that Jesus is speaking, although verse 14 doesn't. When did this take place? Verse 2 tells us that these words are spoken at night. Finally, to whom is Jesus speaking? Verse 1 supplies this information. It is a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

You might remember Nicodemus or maybe he is as unfamiliar to you as Fibber McGee. You may recall that our Gospel lesson from John 2 last week recounted Jesus cleansing the temple in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. Without a doubt, this angered the temple authorities. Nicodemus was a member of the ruling council known as the Sanhedrin. He was one of these authorities. Unquestionably, his fellow council members were outraged at Jesus and His actions. Therefore, Nicodemus must secretly meet with Jesus at night.

There was a glimmer of faith beginning to glow in Nicodemus' heart. He told Jesus, "You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him" (John 3:2). Later, we learn that Nicodemus spoke up for Jesus in the council when they wanted to arrest him (John 7:50-51). Finally, we

find Nicodemus with Joseph of Arimathea when they took Jesus' body down from the cross. For Jesus' burial, Nicodemus provided a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight (John 19:39).

At the beginning of John 3, we hear Jesus teach Nicodemus about baptism and being born again. Nicodemus is skeptical and asks, "How can these things be?" Jesus answers Nicodemus with lessons concerning faith and believing. Our Gospel lesson for today is part of Jesus' answer to Nicodemus' question. To a doubtful, Nicodemus, Jesus says that whoever believes has eternal life and will not perish! (John 3: 15, 16, 18).

That sounds simple enough but we live in an unbelieving world. In our world, people love darkness rather than light! Their works are evil! (John 3:19).

Fibber McGee illustrates the problem of the Pharisees and all of humanity! First, Fibber is totally ignorant of his sin. In fact, he believes that he is completely innocent.

While walking recently, I met a man who is anxious about the direction of our country. He sees many in leadership and popular culture promoting sin as being acceptable and even wholesome! Of course, this is nothing new. The authorities in Jesus' day promoted the sinful practices of the temple. They were firmly convinced that Jesus was wrong and that they were right. They loved living in the darkness! They were blind to sin.

A few, maybe one at a time like Nicodemus, begin to see the truth of God's word. But they may not be convinced of the deadliness of sin. They don't know that sin is so great that they must die to sin and become alive to Christ. Instead, they seek their own human solutions to sin which always come up short.

When Fibber realizes his failure to remember their anniversary, he chooses sin to cover it up. He steals the roses and lies about their true sender! How typical of humanity!

Remember David and his adultery with Bathsheba? (2 Samuel 11-12). When Bathsheba's pregnancy is discovered, his immediate reaction is to cover up his sin. He summons Bathsheba's husband, Uriah home from the battlefield in hopes that her pregnancy can be attributed to him. Because of Uriah's loyalty to his brother soldiers, he rejects the opportunity to visit Bathsheba. In response, David has Uriah assigned to the front line where the fighting is fiercest. The commander is ordered to abandon him there so that he is killed.

David's cover-up is complete! He used the darkness of murder to hide the corruption of adultery.

We live in a world of deceit and false appearances. In that world, sinful cover-ups sometimes work. But God is not deceived.

No human could accuse David of sin. But God sent Nathan the prophet to expose him for who he was. Nathan tells a story of a rich man who steals his poor neighbor's pet lamb to prepare a meal for a guest. David is outraged at such behavior. (It is so easy to see sin in others.) Nathan turned to David and said, "You are the man!"

What are we to do? All of our solutions come to naught. We all have sinned and gone astray. We all deserve the wage of sin.

There is only one solution to sin and death. Jesus' is that solution. To solve the problem of sin, we must recognize it, then turn to Jesus in repentance and faith! For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

A world that rejects Jesus is a world that condemns itself. It is a world that perishes. But whoever believes in Jesus is not condemned but is saved through Him. During this Lenten time and always, let us fix our eyes on Jesus as the people of old looked to the serpent raised up in the wilderness by Moses.

Stop here unless you want to know the rest of the story of Fibber McGee and Molly. In the end, Fibber confesses to Molly that he had forgotten their anniversary, replaced the card with one of his own, and presented the roses to her. Molly confesses that she was so upset that Fibber had forgotten their anniversary that she sent the roses to herself with a fraudulent card! Confession led to forgiveness and all was well.

"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 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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- L** O Lord God, in these Lenten days we pray that You would draw us into Your light. In repentance move us to look to Your Son lifted up on the cross for our salvation and be saved from Your righteous wrath.
- C** Amen.
- L** O God, You have made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins. We pray that Your Spirit would be at work within us, that we may not carry out the sinful desires of our bodies and minds but be Your workmanship in Christ Jesus, walking in the good works You have prepared for us to do in Him.
- C** Amen.
- L** Almighty God, send Your holy angels to watch over all of our loved ones, especially those who live in distant places. Protect all who attend to our needs during this time of national emergency and pandemic. We ask that you would quickly grant relief according to Your will.
- 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.

G Amen.

In the Cross of Christ I Glory Lutheran Service Book 427, Lutheran Worship 101, The Lutheran Hymnal 354



1 In the cross of Christ I glo - ry, Tow'r - ing
2 When the woes of life o'er - take me, Hopes de -
3 When the sun of bliss is beam - ing Light and
4 Bane and bless - ing, pain and plea - sure By the



o'er the wrecks of time. All the light of sa - cred
ceive, and fears an - noy, Nev - er shall the cross for -
love up - on my way, From the cross the ra - diance
cross are sanc - ti - fied; Peace is there that knows no



sto - ry Gath - ers round its head sub - lime.
sake me; Lo, it glows with peace and joy.
stream - ing Adds more lus - ter to the day.
mea - sure, Joys that through all time a - bide.

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A word about the home worship services.

I began these home worship services one year ago on March 22 with the Fourth Sunday in Lent. I have published them every week except for the two weeks near my mother's death in February. I thank you for your kind words of support and encouragement. When I began, I had no idea that we would still be in the pandemic a year later. It seems as though we may be seeing a light at the end of the tunnel.

I am not sure how long these home worship services will be needed or desired. I will continue as long as there seems to be an interest in them. As the pandemic winds down, please let me know if you want to continue to have these services available.

Again, thank you for your support.

Pastor Quardokus

A Reading from *The Book of Concord* to consider this week

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession

Article IV Justification

“We Obtain Forgiveness of Sins through Faith Alone in Christ,” 86, 87

Since we receive forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit through faith alone, faith alone justifies. For those reconciled are counted as righteous and as God’s children. This is not because of their own purity, but through mercy for Christ’s sake, provided only that they receive this mercy through faith. So Scripture testifies that *by faith we are accounted righteous* (Romans 3:26).

In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul discusses this topic specifically. He declares that when we believe God (for Christ’s sake) is reconciled to us, we are justified freely through faith. This point, which contains the statement of the entire discussion, Paul sets forth in the third chapter: “For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law” (Romans 3:28).

If moral works would merit the forgiveness of sins and justification, there would also be no need for Christ and the promise. All that Paul says about the promise would be overthrown. He would also have been wrong in writing to the Ephesians, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works” (2:8–9).

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 15 – March 20, 2021

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 27:3–5; antiphon Psalm 27:1

- L** The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?
C **Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.**
L 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.
C **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 **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 The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

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 27 is one of my favorites. I have often read it in the hospital at the bedside of patients preparing for surgery. When I had heart surgery years ago, I asked my wife Valerie to read it for me. I often only read my favorite verses from the NIV translation:

¹ The Lord is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?

⁴ One thing I ask from the Lord,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord
and to seek him in his temple.

⁵ For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.

⁶ Then my head will be exalted
above the enemies who surround me;
at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make music to the Lord.

⁷ Hear my voice when I call, Lord;
be merciful to me and answer me.

⁸ My heart says of you, “Seek his face!”
Your face, Lord, I will seek.

¹³ I remain confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.

¹⁴ Wait for the Lord;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the Lord. (Psalm 27:1, 4-8, 13-14 NIV)

I was recently at the bedside of someone preparing for a procedure that was described as safe, painless, and effective. But this person was terrified! I was reminded of the difference between major and minor surgery. Major surgery is mine!

It seems that whenever we are in the hospital, there is a reason for anxiety. However, with God on our side, we don't have to be afraid. He is our light, our salvation, and our stronghold.

We know that troubles come in life. But in the day of trouble, God will keep us safe in His dwelling!

David wrote this Psalm long ago. Today, he is in the land of the living because of Jesus, our savior. You and I look forward to that day. Until then, I pray that you will be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

L Let us pray. Thank You, God, that You have promised to be our Light and Salvation. Grant that we would be strong and take heart as we await the day when we will see you face to face in the land of the living through Christ Jesus, our Lord.

C Amen

Tuesday

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

C Amen.

Verse of the Day: Joel 2:13; John 3:16

L Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;

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

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. Amen.

C Amen.

Each week, our collects provide insight into our needs and God's mercy. A day never goes by when we do not need God and his mercy! Every day He provides me with everything I need. Or as Luther says in the explanation to the First Article of the Apostles' Creed:

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them.

He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.

He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil.

All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.

This is most certainly true.

But more than that, He provides for my soul! Since you and I never experience pure holiness in this life, it is hard for us to understand just how sinful each of us is. Each day we sin in thought, word, and deed. As a result, we deserve temporal and eternal punishment. In Jesus, God has taken away that punishment, as Luther reminds us in the explanation to the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed:

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord,

who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death,

that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness,

just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.

This is most certainly true.

If this is hard for you to believe, you are not alone. It is impossible for our fallen human nature to understand or believe this! That is why God sends His Holy Spirit as Luther reminds us in the explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.

In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.

On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

This is most certainly true.

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. Amen.

Wednesday

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

C Amen.

Verse of the Day: Joel 2:13; John 3:16

L Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;

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

Psalm 107:1-9

L ¹Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!

C ²Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble

L ³and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

C ⁴Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in;

L ⁵hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.

C ⁶Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

L ⁷He led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in.

C ⁸Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men!

L ⁹For he satisfies the longing soul,

C and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

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 107 consists of 43 verses. This week, we only read the first nine. You may wish to read the entire psalm today.

Have you ever experienced difficulty in your life? That's a silly question, I know. We all experience difficulty. Problems in life come one after another. Sometimes they come in bunches.

Yet you and I can give thanks to the Lord, for He is good and His steadfast love endures forever! We give thanks and praise God because He delivers us from trouble. Psalm 107 describes many of the kinds of trouble that we experience and the rescue that God provides.

Verse 5 lists hunger, thirst, and a fainting soul. These problems should not lead us to despair. Rather, they should move us to prayer and the deliverance that God provides.

When life is too easy, it is also too easy to forget God. Sometimes God allows trouble in life so that we will remember Him and turn to Him.

I am reminded of an often repeated truth: "Sometimes God places us on our backs so that we will look up to Him."

God is not the author of evil, but He sometimes allows evil to happen so that he can turn it into something good for us and the people around us. Consider the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:28-39.

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,

"For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Prayer: O Lord, when trouble comes do not allow it to drive me away from You and Your steadfast love. Grant that I would trust in Your promise that all things work together for my good, 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: Joel 2:13; John 3:16

L Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;

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

Numbers 21:4–9

⁴From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. ⁵And the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.” ⁶Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. ⁷And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” ⁹So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

This iconic scene of the Children of Israel wandering in the wilderness is deeply etched in my mind for a reason that you may not guess. When I was in fifth grade, just having started to attend Trinity Lutheran School in Sawyer, Michigan, we were given the assignment to draw a picture of the fiery serpent on a pole in the wilderness. I was stumped. I didn’t know how to complete this assignment. At nine going on ten, I had no idea what a serpent was and I was too shy to ask and reveal my ignorance!

After observing my classmates’ masterpieces, I discarded my first attempt and quickly drew a picture of a snake on a pole. After the trauma of that experience, I have never forgotten this engaging account.

Here we find ungrateful people complaining against God! They were free from slavery. God provided for their needs but still, they complained. In fact, they even called God’s daily gift of manna worthless.

In punishment for their ingratitude, God sent snakes among the people. Their bite was fatal!

The people came to their senses and repented! I often wonder if the hardships we face today aren’t a similar call to repentance.

In answer to Moses’ prayer for the people, God directed him to place a bronze snake on a pole. When the people were bitten by snakes, they looked at this snake and lived.

It took faith to do something so simple and expect to be healed. It would have been easy to reject Moses’ plea and God’s promise.

In the Gospel lesson for today, Jesus compares the cross and His crucifixion to the snake in the wilderness. He goes on to say that those who believe in Him will have eternal life.

We have been bitten by the snake of sin. It leads to death. We are given the promise of life through faith. Let us not reject it.

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for the perfect healing from sin that you grant to us by Christ crucified. Send Your Holy Spirit that we may never doubt Your gift of grace, 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: Joel 2:13; John 3:16

- L** Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
C For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, 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.

Ephesians 2:1–10

¹And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

The beginning verses to Ephesians chapter 2 are well worth noting. Verse 1 declares a truth that is often ignored. Without Christ, we are dead in trespasses and sins!

A common thought among Christians is that sin isn't so bad. Human nature is basically good but has only been wounded by sin. If we would just try harder, we could eliminate sin from our lives. If we were to get on the right program of self-improvement, all would be well.

These thoughts ignore what God says in His word. Sin doesn't merely wound and weaken us. Sin kills us. It makes us spiritually dead!

There is nothing that we can do to bring life into our souls! In retirement, I have taken up the vice of golf. I am always hopeful that my golf partners know CPR. If something were to happen to me on the course, my knowledge of CPR is useless. I would need someone to come and restore me to life.

This imperfect example is a reminder that without God coming to our rescue, there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. We cannot even help! "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing." Faith itself, it a gift of God!

No one in heaven will boast that they contributed to bringing themselves back from death to life! We have been made alive by God's grace in Christ!

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for Your gift of grace and faith. Prevent us from boasting and grant that we would always give You all the glory for our salvation, 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: Joel 2:13; John 3:16

- L** Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
C **For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, 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.**

Our verse for this week is John 3:16. It is often called the “Gospel in a Nut Shell” meaning that it is the core teaching of our faith!

This brings me to a reminder of an interesting encounter I had many years ago with a clergyman of another denomination. In an age where many Christians are indifferent to doctrine and teaching, it underscores the difference among churches.

Pastors from five different denominations were present at a meeting I hosted in my home. The discussion waxed long about the importance of the Gospel. After a while, some parts of the conversation didn’t seem to make sense. So to clarify things I asked a pastor from another denomination this question, “What is the Gospel?” His answer shocked me but made it clear why we served in separate denominations.

Here is his answer, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39). If you have Lutheran roots, you know why this answer is shocking. In our way of thinking, this isn’t the Gospel at all. It is pure Law.

It’s not Good News. No one can love God in this way! No one can truly love their neighbor as themselves. Every time we try, we fail.

No, Good News is “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” No matter how often you fail in loving God and your neighbor, Jesus is there with forgiveness, life, and salvation! That’s why He came and died on the cross.

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for Jesus and His cross of salvation. Grant that we would come to Him in faith and receive eternal life, through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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