

The Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 29, 2020

Hymn: Glory Be to Jesus, Lutheran Service Book 433, Lutheran Worship 98, The Lutheran Hymnal 158

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

C Amen.

L Holy God, holy and most gracious Father,

C have mercy and hear us.

L Since we have gathered to hear God's Word, let us consider our unworthiness and confess before God and one another that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition. Together as His people let us take refuge in the infinite mercy of God, our heavenly Father, seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, and saying:

C God, be merciful to me, a sinner, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life. Amen.

L Almighty God, merciful Father, in Holy Baptism You declared us to be Your children and gathered us into Your one, holy Church, in which 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

Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his saints.

**I love the LORD, because he has heard
my voice and my pleas for mercy.**

Because he inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

**The snares of death encompassed me; the
pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I suffered distress and anguish.**

Then I called on the name of the LORD:

Ps. 116:1-4, 8; antiphon: Ps. 116:15

"O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!"

**For you have delivered my soul from death,
my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.**

**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.

Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his saints.

Kyrie

C Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Collect of the Day

L Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

Ezekiel 37:1-14

¹The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. ²And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. ³And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴Then he said to me, "Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will

cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD.” ⁷So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” ¹⁰So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

¹¹Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.’” ¹²Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.”

Gradual

Heb. 12:2

O come, let us fix our eyes on 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.

Romans 8:1-11

¹There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Verse of the Day I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live

John 11:25

John 11:17-53

¹⁷When Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” ²³Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” ²⁴Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” ²⁵Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

²⁸When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” ²⁹And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹When the Jews who were with her in the

house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³²Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. ³⁴And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵Jesus wept. ³⁶So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.” ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.” ⁴³When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” ⁴⁴The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

⁴⁵Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, ⁴⁶but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the Council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. ⁴⁸If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” ⁴⁹But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” ⁵¹He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, ⁵²and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. ⁵³So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

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.

Hymn: My Song Is Love Unknown, Lutheran Service Book 430, Lutheran Worship 91, The Lutheran Hymnal *n/a*

Devotional Thoughts

L I cry to You, O Lord;

C in the morning my prayer comes before You.

L Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,

C and uphold me with a willing spirit.

L My mouth is filled with Your praise,

C and with Your glory all the day.

L Every day I will bless You
C and praise Your name forever and ever.

L By awesome deeds You answer us with righteousness,
C O God of our salvation, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.

L Bless the Lord, O my soul;
C and all that is within me, bless His holy name!

L He redeems your life from the pit
C and crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.

L Hear my prayer, O Lord;
C let my cry come to You.

L Let us pray.
Spare Your people, O Lord! Preserve us from this and every illness. Give healing and strength to those who are sick, protect those who care for them, and grant us steady minds and calm hearts in the face of fear. Comfort and protect those we hold dear in our hearts and especially those who are far from us. You have borne our infirmities in this human flesh and purchased us with Your own blood. Keep us in this faith and embolden us in love; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

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.

Hymn: My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less, Lutheran Service Book 575, Lutheran Worship 368, The Lutheran Hymnal 370

Suggested Hymns:

433 Glory Be to Jesus



1 Glo - ry be to Je - sus, Who in bit - ter pains
2 Grace and life e - ter - nal In that blood I find;
3 Blest through end - less a - ges Be the pre - cious stream
4 A - bel's blood for ven - geance Plead - ed to the skies;



Poured for me the life - blood From His sa - cred veins!
Blest be His com - pas - sion, In - fi - nite - ly kind!
Which from end - less tor - ment Did the world re - deem!
But the blood of Je - sus For our par - don cries.

5 Oft as earth exulting
Wafts its praise on high,
Angel hosts rejoicing
Make their glad reply.

6 Lift we, then, our voices,
Swell the mighty flood;
Louder still and louder
Praise the precious blood!

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430 My Song Is Love Unknown

1 My song is love unknown,
My Savior's love to me,
Love to the loveless shown
That they might lovely be.

Oh, who am I
That for my sake
My Lord should take
Frail flesh and die?

2 He came from His blest throne
Salvation to bestow;
But men made strange, and none
The longed-for Christ would know.
But, oh, my friend,
My friend indeed,
Who at my need
His life did spend!

3 Sometimes they strew His way
And His sweet praises sing;
Resounding all the day
Hosannas to their King.
Then "Crucify!"
Is all their breath,
And for His death
They thirst and cry.

4 Why, what hath my Lord done?
What makes this rage and spite?
He made the lame to run,
He gave the blind their sight.
Sweet injuries!

Yet they at these
Themselves displease
And 'gainst Him rise.

5 They rise and needs will have
My dear Lord made away;
A murderer they save,
The Prince of Life they slay.
Yet cheerful He
To suff'ring goes
That He His foes
From thence might free.

6 In life no house, no home
My Lord on earth might have;
In death no friendly tomb
But what a stranger gave.
What may I say?
Heav'n was His home
But mine the tomb
Wherein He lay.

7 Here might I stay and sing,
No story so divine!
Never was love, dear King,
Never was grief like Thine.
This is my friend,
In whose sweet praise
I all my days
Could gladly spend!

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575 My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less



1 My hope is built on nothing less Than Je - sus'
2 When dark - ness veils His love - ly face, I rest on
3 His oath, His cov - e - nant and blood Sup - port me
4 When He shall come with trum - pet sound, Oh, may I



blood and righ - teous - ness; No mer - it of my
His un - chang - ing grace; In ev - 'ry high and
in the rag - ing flood; When ev - 'ry earth - ly
then in Him be found, Clothed in His righ - teous -



own I claim But whol - ly lean on Je - sus' name.
storm - y gale My an - chor holds with - in the veil.
prop gives way, He then is all my hope and stay.
ness a - lone, Re - deemed to stand be - fore His throne!

Refrain



On Christ, the sol - id rock, I stand; All oth - er ground is sink - ing sand.

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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.

Devotional thoughts:

“Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones. Now hear the word of the Lord.” There are many times when we may feel like those bones. All life has been drained from your bones, thoughts and spirit. This may be such a time with dreadful national news, stress on families and finances and new personal challenges everyday just to provide for the necessities of life.

It may be that you are feeling a bit like Martha as she saw her brother fading day after day, wondering to herself, “Where is Jesus?”. Then finally for Martha, the awful day came when Lazarus drew his last breath. Martha together with her sister Mary was faced with the terrible task of preparing their dear brother for burial. He was gently and tenderly placed in the tomb and a stone was rolled to block the entrance. Life would never be the same.

When the next day dawned, Mary and Martha again were weighed down by grief and weeping. We can well imagine them seeking to console each other to no avail. Again and again they were overwhelmed with tears. Four days of sobbing and crying followed one after the other.

Such is life in a sinful and dying world. Even without a worldwide pandemic, suffering and death are daily realities. It is not without merit that long ago someone described our world as a “vale of tears.” We who remain are often left to pick our way through a valley of dry bones where the only moisture to be found is the saltiness of tears on our cheeks.

So it was when Jesus arrived at Bethany. He, too, is inundated by grief as Scripture reports, “He was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.” As you may have done many times, “Jesus wept.”

This short passage of Scripture puts to rest the notion that Christians are required to be happy when a loved one dies. It seems as though Jesus would find it odd to declare funerals, “celebrations.” There is nothing joyous about death. God never intended for people to die. Death is the terrible, irrefutable consequence of sin.

Yes, mourning is real. But the Apostle Paul writes words of comfort so that “you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). What is the comfort that Paul gives? It is the same comfort given by Jesus in John 11:25, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.” This comfort is the promise of the resurrection from the dead!

Although Lazarus had been in the tomb four days already, Jesus called him back to life to demonstrate His power over death. Grief and sadness may have their day, but they come to an end through Jesus.

Can you imagine the celebration of life when Lazarus stepped out of the grave? Can you imagine the festive spirit at dinner that day?

Indeed, God will ultimately bring to an end our current difficult times. We will experience great celebrations and festivities. Of course, new sorrows will come. Yet through all of this we confidently proclaim, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4 KJV).

Our earthly troubles and sorrows are but temporary. They will come to an end as Paul writes, “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:56-57).

However, there is a certain irony to the raising of Lazarus. It is this very miracle that causes the chief priests and the Pharisees to redouble their efforts to put Jesus to death. Among other things, it is Lazarus’ life that brings Jesus’ death! Just as it is Jesus’ death on the cross that brings our life!

Mary and Martha may have wondered, “Where is Jesus?” You may wonder the same. When we experience trouble and heartache, it doesn’t mean that Jesus is not here or He doesn’t care. We may never know why God allows this present disastrous time to fall upon us but we do know that He is able to turn curse to blessing, trouble to joy, death to life.

As we seek to show patience as we await the end of this crisis, let us look forward to the celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord on Easter, now just two short weeks away. During this time I ask that you remember a passage from Joshua that I often assigned as a confirmation verse (maybe it’s yours), “Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest” (Joshua 1:9 KJV).

P.S. For comfort in times of grieving read the great resurrection chapter of the Bible 1 Corinthians 15.

God’s richest blessings to you in Christ.

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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

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 hope 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

The introit is usually a Psalm or a part of a Psalm. It provides our first glimpse of the theme for our worship. It is said or sung as we enter into God's presence to sing His praise and hear His holy word.

Our introit for this week is Psalm 116:1-4, 8; antiphon: Psalm 116:15. Antiphon may be a new word to you. It is simply a special verse selected to be used as the beginning and end of the introit or Psalm. Sometimes it can be used multiple times like a refrain.

Read the introit below. See if you can pick out a theme.

Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his saints.
I love the LORD, because he has heard
my voice and my pleas for mercy.
Because he inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.
The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I suffered distress and anguish.
Then I called on the name of the LORD:
"O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!"
For you have delivered my soul from death,
my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.
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.
Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his saints.

Did you notice the antiphon? "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15). Did you wonder who "His saints" are? It is popular to think of saints as special people who live better lives than everyone else. Fortunately, this is not what the Bible says. The word "saints" comes from the Greek word that means "holy ones." I suppose from that you can see how it would be easy to assume that these are people

that are holier than the rest of this. You might be surprised to learn that when the Bible uses the word saints, it is speaking of you or people like you. It is a way to refer to Christian people who believe in Jesus as their savior.

A good place to start learning about saints is in the book of Ephesians. The Apostle Paul (or as we sometimes refer to him, St. Paul) addresses the whole church in Ephesus with these words, "To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 1:1). Every single believer in Ephesus was a saint! Imagine that! How can they be "holy ones"? Aren't they sinful just like you and me? Indeed they are! But just like you and me, their sins have been forgiven. Their sins are taken away by Jesus' death on the cross. Through faith in Him, they are free from sin in God's eyes. Hence, they, like you, are holy! Imagine that!

I served as a vicar (intern) for Pastor Eldor Haake at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Moline, IL. One of his favorite Bible passages was, Psalm 103:12, "as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." When your sins and transgressions get you down, remember that through faith in Christ, God has removed your sins as far away from you as possible. That's why the Bible can refer to you as a saint! This is why the Apostle (Saint) Paul can write these words, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19).

Reread the words of the introit with this in mind. Look for the words of comfort that God gives you there. Notice how He hears your cry for mercy. See His deliverance. Be reminded of how His love takes your bitter tears away.

Prayer: O Lord, let me meditate on Your wonderful words and works day and night. Help me to see your love and forgiveness in Jesus. During this time of stress and anxiety remind me again that I am precious in your sight through Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior. Amen.

Tuesday

The Collect of the Day is the first prayer of the service. It collects all our thoughts into a one sentence prayer (although sometimes it has more than one sentence because modern people prefer short sentences). The Collect of Day is often a good place to find the theme of the day.

Pray: Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Gospel for Sunday was the raising of Lazarus. It is a wonderful example of God's great goodness. While we may be accustomed to our independence and caring for our own needs, in times like this and especially at the time of death like the death of Lazarus, it is good to remember that ultimately we rely on God's mercy for our every need of body and soul.

You may be anxious when you run to the store and find that the shelves are empty and you can't find what you need. This may be a new experience for you. However, around the world and throughout history running short on the necessities of life has not been uncommon.

Now is a good time to remember that "The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1 KJV). It is good to remember that when we pray "give us our daily bread" that God hears and answers our prayer just as He did when He sent manna to the Children of Israel in the wilderness.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says,

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

³⁴ “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matthew 6:25-34).

God provides for every need of body and life. He provides food through farmers, truckers, grocers, and the like. He provides for our health care needs through doctors, nurses, physician assistants and the rest. He provides us with house and home, field and goods and still preserves them. God may choose to provide for you through miracles but most of His provision comes from the day to day activities of normal folk fulfilling their god-given vocations.

More importantly, God provides for the needs of your soul. The coronavirus and Covid-19 are stark reminders of our mortality. Caring for your soul is much more than relieving your stress and anxiety. Caring for your soul means that God sent you His only-begotten Son to take your mortality upon Himself on the cross. He did it, not because you are better than others, but because of His great love for you.

Because of Jesus, you can be confident of God’s great goodness and mercy for time and eternity.

Prayer: Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul, especially during this time of national emergency and uncertainty bring us the comfort your promises; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Wednesday

An Old Testament Reading is somewhat new to the Sunday service. Until a few decades ago, on most Sundays only an Epistle Lesson and Gospel Lesson were read. Now we also include an Old Testament Lesson that complements the Gospel reading which you may have guessed is always the main focus of the day.

This week we hear again what may be the most famous reading from Ezekiel, his experience of the Dry Bones.

Ezekiel 37:1-14

¹The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. ²And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. ³And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” ⁴Then he said to me, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD.” ⁷So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” ¹⁰So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

¹¹Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.’ ¹²Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.”

As you can see, this reading could occupy us for the entire week. Who are these dry bones? They are the whole house of Israel who have complained, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.” Maybe you are feeling or have felt like this. Your bones are dried up because your hope is lost. I would not be surprised if many people are feeling like this during this time of a national health crisis. It is times like these that can show us how empty and dry life can be without God’s Spirit.

Even when bones are connected one to the other and covered with flesh, without God’s Spirit all we have is

an imitation of real life. Real life is life that is caught up and bound to God Himself. Of course this life is impossible for sinful and corrupt humanity.

Even when we as a nation ought to be pulling together we learn daily of internet scams and fraud. Now is a time when we see how easily it is to love self more than others. No, most people aren't scamming or perpetuating fraud. No, our selfishness manifests itself in hoarding, violating guidance from health professionals, etc.

For us to have real life, we need repentance and restoration that comes through the Holy Spirit. Jesus died on the cross and rose again for our forgiveness, life and salvation. However, this would be all for naught if the Holy Spirit would not bring you to faith and keep you in faith.

God breathes His life into us through His word and sacraments. Whenever we are feeling like lifeless dry bones, we should see it as a reminder of our need for God's Spirit.

Prayer: Lord, you know that many times through the last weeks, news in our nation has been dire and ominous. Let us not lose hope. Fill us with Your Spirit through mediation on Your holy word, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Thursday

The Gradual is an ancient part of the service that is seldom used today. Originally it was sung or said as the pastor walked up steps (*gradus* in Latin) to read the Holy Gospel in a higher place after having read the Epistle Lesson. Now it has been moved to after the Old Testament Lesson. It no longer has to do with going up steps but it does provide us with important themes for the season because unlike the other propers, the gradual changes with the season rather than each Sunday.

During this time of Lent our gradual has been adapted from Heb. 12:2

O come, let us fix our eyes on 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.

How appropriate for Lent! Let us fix our eyes on Jesus. It is so easy to be distracted with such frightful news day to day. Are stocks up or down? How many have been infected? How many have died? When can I go back to school or work? When will this end?

Now is the time to fix our eyes on Jesus. Our faith rests on Him. He founded it. He completes it!

The cross was not something pleasant. It was certainly worse than most of us can imagine. On it He was forsaken by God the Father and suffered the consequences of sin for all of humanity. Yet He did it for the joy set before Him. What was the joy? It was the joy of bringing you salvation and eternal life in heaven!

Sometimes we are called on to endure suffering. It is neither a pleasant nor a happy experience but like Jesus, it can bring us joy. Suffering can sometimes bring blessing to others for example when we work hard for our children and their health and life. Or it might be when your hardship eases a burden for others. Sometimes we won't know what benefit suffering may bring but we are able to endure it because we know that God will bring us through to the other side and ultimately to be with Him forever in eternity.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for enduring the cross for my sake. It brought you pain and suffering but you endured it with Joy so that I may spend eternity with You. In this time of national difficulty let me also learn to suffer for the sake of others that their burdens and hardships may be eased. Amen.

Friday

Someone jokingly defined an epistle as the wife of an apostle. I suppose we find this to be funny because we use the word epistle so sparingly. Epistle is simply another word for a letter. The epistles in the Bible are letters written to churches and individuals by Peter, Paul, John, and others. Our epistle (letter) today is one written to the first Christian church in Rome by the Apostle Paul. Many churches were founded by Paul but the

church in Rome was founded independently. He had long hoped to visit the Christians in Rome and he wrote this epistle in anticipation of his visit. Little did Paul know that when he visited Rome, he would be under arrest!

Romans 8:1-11

¹There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

These words from St. Paul are as amazing as they are significant. They deserve a Sunday of their own! "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." How are you feeling today? Are you thinking, "God must really hate me to allow this to happen?" or "I'm not worthy." St. Paul chases these thoughts away. In Christ, you are not condemned! Remember you are a saint! Jesus came and fulfilled the entire law of God for us and yet was condemned for our sake.

Now the Spirit of God who raised Christ from the dead gives life to your mortal dry bones! You and I can live confidently knowing that in Christ there is for us no condemnation. Now we may walk according to the Spirit. We can put away our old corrupt and sinful nature as we wait for the day when we will join with all the saints in glory.

Prayer: I thank you my heavenly Father through Jesus Christ my Lord, that you have purchased and won me a lost and condemned sinner not with gold or silver but with the holy and precious blood of Jesus. Amen.

Saturday

As we come to the end of the week we can examine the last of our propers (There is one more, Psalm 130 that we did not use. If you are looking for more, read it to further enhance your meditation on the word of God.). The Verse of the Day comes after the Epistle. It generally is a single Bible passage that summarizes the theme of the day. Like the gradual it is not often used by many churches. Most of the year, the verse of the day is surrounded by "alleluias" but during Lent we give up this joyful word until it sounds forth in all its fullness on Easter. The verse for this week are the words of Jesus recorded in John 11:25, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."

What is this Sunday about? It's about resurrection! It's about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. It's about Jesus dying and rising. It's about your death and resurrection. It's about the death and resurrection of all of God's saints!

In the midst of death, Jesus brings life. In the midst of sorrow, Jesus brings joy. To hopelessness, Jesus brings hope. To dry bones, Jesus brings the spirit.

During this solemn time of Lent we must never forget that the purpose of Lent is to direct our attention to the joy set before Jesus, the salvation of our souls.

Coronavirus and covid-19 are all around us. Who knows what will happen next in this vale of tears? But we know this: In Christ there is now no condemnation. We have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, from the kingdom of death to the kingdom of life. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in him, though he die, yet shall he live!

Prayer: Christ, the life of all the living, Christ, the death of death, our foe, may you grant that we will never lose hope but rather live our lives full of hope and joy during this time of national emergency and stress. Amen.

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