Foreword

The season of Lent for the Christian is a time of preparation. We prepare to hear again the heart wrenching account of our Savior’s suffering at the hands of those he came to save. We prepare to remember how the Giver of life died on a cross. We prepare to celebrate once again the victorious resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday.

Lent, then, is a time of somber reflection as we plunge into the depths of our own sinfulness and ponder our tremendous need for a Savior. We marvel again at God’s grace and love for us – that he would send his only Son to wage war against Satan on our behalf, to pay the price of death and damnation that was hanging over our heads.

God has revealed himself to us that we might stand in awe of him and praise his name. So great is our God, so beyond our understanding, that when we consider who he is and what he tells us about himself, our rational minds struggle to grasp just how it is possible: that Jesus is both God and man, that he is both Lord and Servant, that he, the Creator, could die at the hands of his own creation. These paradoxes challenge our finite logic, yet when we consider what they mean for us, we find great value and comfort for our souls.

It is our prayer that as you read these devotions the Holy Spirit will increase your faith and open your mind to the amazing paradox that is Jesus Christ.

How to Use These Devotions

The devotions in this booklet were intended to complement the regular weekly worship of your congregation. The paradox theme for each week is directly tied to the theme of the Sunday sermon for that week.

You will also notice that these devotions follow a pattern from week to week. On Monday and Tuesday there are devotions to read. On Wednesday there is no devotion, but there are some suggestions to help you reflect personally on the theme of the week. We also strongly encourage all Christians to join their fellow believers in worship each Wednesday during Lent. On Thursday, Friday and Saturday, in place of devotions, we have included questions and answers to help you prepare for worship on Sunday. Thursday focuses on the First Lesson, Friday focuses on the Second Lesson, and Saturday focuses on the Gospel. There is no devotion for Sunday.
Acknowledgements:

The Christus Paradox Lenten Series was developed by the pastors of the South Circuit of the Redwing Conference of the Minnesota District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. We thank the following contributors:

- **Project Coordinator & Editor**: Steven Wall
- **Devotion Booklet Cover Art**: Matt Luetke
- **Devotions**: Roger Vomhof, Jon Wolff, Dennis Harbach, Steve Meyer, Matt Luetke, Brian Kom, Larry Cross & Paul Ibsich.
- **Sermons**: Paul Baldauf, Dean Gunn, Bob Seifert, Jon Bitter, James Grabitzke, Jeff Limpert, Tom Schultz.

The worship preparation questions and answers (Thursday – Saturday) are from the “Lectionary Study Guides” produced by the South Atlantic District of the WELS. The full collection of their lectionary study guides can be found online at the WELS website: www.wels.net. (To access the study guides, type in the jumpword WORSHIP and press Enter. Then select “Lectionary Study Guides – South Atlantic District” from the column on the right side of the screen.)

All Bible texts in the devotion booklet are taken from the New International Version (NIV), c1984, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Maundy Thursday, April 21 - 7pm
We Preach Christ Crucified in His Holy Supper

Good Friday Tenebrae, April 22 - 7pm

Easter Sunday, April 24 -
Easter Breakfast 8:30-9:45am
Easter Service 10am

German Service 11:30am
Matthew 17:1-4 After six days Jesus took with Him Peter, James and John, the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

What an Awesome Sight!

Whenever we travel west and see Pike’s Peak, the Rocky Mountains, the Grand Canyon or one of our national parks, we may say: “What an awesome sight!”

When the disciples Peter, James and John saw Jesus transfigured before them, they saw an awesome sight. Jesus’ face was shining as bright as the sun. “His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them” (Mark 9:3). At this time Jesus was displaying His divine glory before His three disciples. He always had this divine glory, but during His earthly life His glory was hidden and veiled within His human body. Here was one occasion when Jesus let His disciples see His divine glory.

As the disciples were viewing this awesome sight, they recognized two Old Testament people, Moses and Elijah, standing at Jesus’ side. The disciples heard Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus about the final outcome of His future suffering and death (Luke 9:30). Peter was so impressed with this awesome sight that he wanted to preserve it by building three shelters— one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. But such a glorious sight could not be preserved here on earth.

Here Jesus was displaying His divine glory. On Maundy Thursday night we find Jesus in His deepest humiliation entering the Garden of Gethsemane, being overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death and deeply troubled. On Good Friday morning He is whipped, crowned with thorns, nailed to the cross and crucified. What an awesome sight!

When our Lord calls us home to heaven, we will see Jesus face to face with nail-pierced hands, but displaying His divine glory before us forever. What an awesome sight that will be for us!

Prayer: Gracious Lord Jesus, we thank You for displaying Your divine glory to three of Your disciples and for revealing this truth to us in Your Word. May the Holy Spirit keep us in the true faith that
we always believe in You as our Savior and keep us faithful to You until the end of our life that we may see You in Your divine glory in heaven for all eternity. In Your Name we pray. Amen.

Tues, Mar 8        Week 1: Clothed in Light, Stripped of Might

Matthew 17:5 While (Peter) was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is My Son, Whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!”

What an Awesome Testimony!

When we hear some speaker like the President of our country, a politician, a coach or a pastor deliver a message to the citizens of our country or to the athletes on the team or the people in the pew, we may say: “What an awesome testimony!”

God gave such an awesome testimony at the time when Jesus was transformed before Peter, James and John. These three disciples heard the voice of God the Father from the cloud that had surrounded them saying to them, “This is My Son, Whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.” God gave a clear testimony that Jesus is His Son. He made it clear that He loved His Son Jesus and was well pleased with His perfect life of obedience to His Commandments and to His willingness to continue to carry out His mission “to save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21) and “to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). What an awesome testimony God gave regarding His Son Jesus.

Now God added a very important command to His disciples and to us when He said, “Listen to Him.” Jesus had a very important message to proclaim. He was telling people the good news that they could obtain forgiveness for their sins and have salvation and eternal life through faith in Him. We must say with Peter who said on another occasion, “You have the words of eternal life. We know and believe that You are the Holy One of God” (John 6:68-69).

Jesus gave an awesome testimony on Good Friday afternoon when He said: “It is finished” (John 19:30). The work of saving us from our sins and of winning salvation for us in heaven has been completed. “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). May we always listen to the awesome testimony of our God and of His Son Jesus.

Prayer: Gracious God, we thank and praise You for the awesome testimony You gave regarding Jesus when You said, “This is My Son, Whom I love; with Him I am well pleased” and when Jesus said, “It is
finished.” Lead us to listen to Jesus as He teaches us Your will and Your plan of salvation to us in Your Word. May You lead us through the working of Your Holy Spirit to always believe and to trust in Jesus as our Savior and to confess Him to be Your Son, our loving Lord, our only Savior from sin and our only Source of salvation, through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Wed, Mar 9 Week 1: Clothed in Light, Stripped of Might

*** No devotion today. Reminder: Today is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. Make worship a priority in your life! Midweek Lenten services begin tonight. Check your church calendar for service times.

Thurs, Mar 10 Week 1: Clothed in Light, Stripped of Might

Preparing for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: Lent 1

Introduction: The season of Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, which we observed yesterday. Historically, it was a period of time during which the Christian would deny himself certain luxuries or behaviors in order to focus more clearly on the tremendous sacrifice that Christ made for us on the cross. Technically, the Sundays during Lent are not considered part of the forty-day season, and, therefore, the passion history itself is not generally part of the Scripture lessons appointed for these days. This coming week’s lessons remind us of the stark contrast between God’s perfection and our sin-stained imperfection, but also of the victory Christ has won on our behalf and has credited to us.

First Lesson: Genesis 2:7-9, 15-17, 3:1-7

Questions to Ponder:
1. Why do you think God did not want Adam to eat from the tree of good and evil?
2. What did God mean when He said “when you eat of it, you will surely die”?
3. What was the devil really trying to do when he asked Eve, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”
4. What was the devil saying to Eve when he said, “You will not surely die. … For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”?
5. Why do you think Eve ate of that forbidden fruit?

Answers to Questions
1. God was testing Adam’s obedience to see if he would willingly do what He commanded and avoid what He commanded him not to do.
2. God meant that Adam would suffer spiritual death, that his soul would be living apart from God while on earth. This could lead to eternal death of being separated from God forever in body and soul.
3. The devil was trying to raise doubt in Eve’s mind about the truth of God’s Word.
4. The devil was telling lies to Eve by this statement. He was tempting her to disobey God’s Word and command.
5. Eve ate the forbidden fruit because she believed the devil was telling her the truth and that God was withholding something good from her that would make her wise like Him.

Prayer: Almighty God, we thank and praise You for sending Jesus to suffer and die for all our sins of disobedience to Your Word and Commandments. Through the work of Your Holy Spirit keep us strong in faith and help us to overcome every temptation that the devil, the ungodly people of the world and our sinful flesh set before us, through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Fri, Mar 11 Week 1: Clothed in Light, Stripped of Might

Preparing for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: Lent 1

Second Lesson: Romans 5: 12-19

Questions to Ponder:
6. What is the result of Adam’s sin?
7. Was there a difference between Adam, who had a specific command from God, and those who lived after him who did not have the Law that was given to Moses on Mount Sinai?

8. What did Christ’s gift of righteousness bring?

9. Who will reign in life through the one Man Jesus Christ?

10. What is the result of Christ’s act of righteousness and His life of obedience?

11. What moved God to forgive and pardon us guilty sinners?

**Answers to Questions**

6. The result of Adam’s sin is that all people will die a physical death and will face God’s judgment and condemnation.

7. There was no difference. “Before the Law was given, sin was in the world.” All people were sinners by nature because all people inherited Adam’s sin, which we call original sin.

8. Christ’s gift brought justification and life.

9. Only believers who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness will have eternal life. God’s abundant provision of grace and gift of righteousness are available to all people, but only the believers in Christ will actually receive it. Christ’s earnest warning is true: “Whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

10. Christ’s act of righteousness and life of obedience have brought justification for all people. Through His perfect life of obedience and His substitutionary suffering and death Christ has made all people righteous before God. God has declared all people just, forgiven and pardoned and He looks at them as if they now are without sin. Only believers who put their faith in Christ stand righteous before God.

11. God’s grace and Christ’s all-atoning death moved Him to forgive us all our sins and to pardon us of all guilt. How thankful we should be for God’s grace and for Christ’s work.

**Prayer:** Merciful God, we thank and praise You for Your marvelous grace which moved You to send Jesus to be our Savior, to send Him to the cross to suffer and die for us, and to declare us forgiven and pardoned of all sin and guilt. Lead us to believe in Jesus as our Savior and to accept the forgiveness, righteousness and salvation that He has won for us. We ask this in Jesus’ Name. Amen.
Preparation for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: Lent 1

Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11

Questions to Ponder:

12. What did the devil want Jesus to prove when he told Him “tell these stones to be made into bread”?
13. What does Jesus’ answer to the first temptation prove?
14. What did the devil want Jesus to prove when he quoted the words of Psalm 91 following his temptation to jump down from the highest point of the temple building?
15. What does Jesus’ answer to the second temptation prove?
16. What did the devil want Jesus to do when he promised to give Him all the kingdoms of this world if He would bow down and worship him?
17. What does Jesus’ answer to the third temptation prove?

Answers to Questions

12. The result of Adam’s sin is that all people will die a physical death and will face God’s judgment and condemnation.
13. There was no difference. “Before the Law was given, sin was in the world.” All people were sinners by nature because all people inherited Adam’s sin, which we call original sin.
15. Only believers who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness will have eternal life. God’s abundant provision of grace and gift of righteousness are available to all people, but only the believers in Christ will actually receive it. Christ’s earnest warning is true: “Whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).
16. Christ’s act of righteousness and life of obedience have brought justification for all people. Through His perfect life of obedience and His substitutionary suffering and death Christ has made all people righteous before God. God has declared all people just, forgiven and pardoned and He looks at them as if they now are
without sin. Only believers who put their faith in Christ stand righteous before God. 

17. God’s grace and Christ’s all-atoning death moved Him to forgive us all our sins and to pardon us of all guilt. How thankful we should be for God’s grace and for Christ’s work.

Prayer: Almighty God, we thank and praise You for Your Word of Truth. As Jesus used Scripture to overcome the devil’s temptations, may we be well-versed and grounded in the truth of Scripture that we use Scriptural truths to overcome all temptations that the devil sets before us daily and that we remain faithful to You and to Your Word until death, through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Mon, Mar 14

Hebrews 4:15-16

\[15\]For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. \[16\]Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Temptation Defeated!

The Lord God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. Is there a shoe horn big enough to slip him inside of a finite human body? Our human reason says no. God’s Word says yes. The Son of God became incarnate that is he took on human flesh. This was not a flight of whimsy, but done on purpose so that Jesus would fight against sin, death and the Devil. In the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus won the rematch of the temptation in the Garden of Eden.

Yet, our sinful nature would like us to doubt the circumstances of this rematch. If Jesus is also true God, could you say that he was really tempted as we are tempted? Remember that Adam and Eve were originally without sin. The sinful nature was not a part of our human creation. The sinful nature came with the fall into sin which thoroughly corrupted our souls. It was a corruption that no human born in the natural way could escape. Being dead in trespasses and sins, we were helpless to help ourselves. But God who created us, could create us anew again through the work of a substitute. “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive,” (1 Cor. 15:22). Jesus, born into the
world by the power of God’s Word, did take on a human body and soul, but without the corruption of sin since God can never be corrupted.

So on one hand, the temptation to Jesus’ humanity was very real, because humanity had fallen once before. Being that human in our place, Jesus did not resort to the power of his divine nature to defeat temptation. He resorted to the power of God’s divine Word which every human has to defeat temptation. On the other hand, God was not going to lose this rematch. Jesus’ divine nature was the guarantee that God would save us from our sins just as he promised.

God’s one-two punch of Jesus’ human nature and divine nature in one person defeated the Devil and his power of temptation. Yes, we still have our sinful weaknesses, but we have our substitute, our high priest, who speaks for us before God. The God to human connection is unbreakable through the God-man Jesus Christ. So that when the Devil comes tempting, we are armed and ready with Jesus’ victory to turn away temptation. If we fall to temptation, we fall back upon the victory of Christ in repentance and renewal. Whatever our situation we can always “find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Application Questions:

We know that we should avoid temptation. However, temptation is never completely unavoidable. Why? (cf. Mark 7:20-23). What then must be our daily practice? (cf. Eph. 4:22-24).

Why is it so dangerous to think that “little” temptations are not as serious as the “big temptations? (cf. James 2:10)

Prayer: Dear Jesus, my high priest before God, speak before the throne of grace in my behalf. Temptations lay waiting about me and all too often entrap me. Give me insight and wisdom to recognize and avoid temptation whenever I can. Whenever I fall into sin, lead me to repentance and to trust in your forgiveness. Dearest Jesus be my strength, confidence and hope throughout my life. Amen.

Tues, Mar 15

1 Corinthians 10:13 13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.
Is God Picking on You?

You forgot to set your alarm. In a desperate hurry to get work on time, you jump in the car and it won’t start. A flurry of unbecoming words comes out of your mouth. You quick go back into the house to find your spouse who is in hurry to drop off the kids for daycare and then go to work. An argument breaks out as who has the greatest need. Out of this argument, a whole series of marital conflicts arise during that week before there is repentance and peace.

I am sure everyone has a story to tell how something went wrong and then how it multiplied into chaos, sin, and despair. Job has a story like this to tell. One day he loses his wealth and his children. The next day he loses his health and his wife tells him to “Curse God and die!” Then his friends come to tell him that he must have really done something bad for God to pick on him this way. Finally Job caves into temptation and accuses God of being unfair.

Temptation that happens to us because of our own sinful indulgences and desires is easier to comprehend than when then when it comes to us through the accidents of the world. Through no fault of our own, we are thrown into a situation that tests and tempts us at the same time. Often we throw our hands up to heaven and say, “Why me?” Do you feel that God is picking on you?

James tells us: “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed,” (James 1:13, 14). What you are experiencing is what is common to man. This is the hazard of living in a sinful world where the Devil is throwing all sorts of obstacles into our path to steer us away from God. Certainly, God is not powerless in this situation. We know from Job’s story that God limited the actions of Satan. And so we are told that “he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.” But you struggle with the wisdom of God’s choice of limitations. You are frustrated, because it seems far beyond what you can bear.

Our frustration comes from our plans being waylaid, from our lack of ability to control our future. What we need to remind ourselves of at that point is that we are not God. We cannot be independent from God and survive much less be the master of our destiny. We must return to the throne of God’s grace and ask for his will to be done in our lives. Also, we must pray that God would increase our trust in his will. For no matter how wrong something seems to go in our lives, as long as our faith is in Jesus we can be confident that God is working all things for our eternal good.
Application Questions:

1. James 4:15 says: “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” Could you use this advice daily? Why?

2. “Prevention is worth a pound of cure, as the saying goes. What could help us from getting frustrated? (See Matthew 6:33, 34).

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father make me to realize that I need to make plans subject to your plan of salvation. Keep me from frustration and worry by leading me to totally lean upon Jesus as my Savior. Your will be done. Amen.

Wed, Mar 16 Week 2: Jesus, both God and man

*** No devotion today. Reminder: Don’t forget to join your Christian brothers and sisters in worship today. Take time to pray for someone in your congregation, and tell them you are thinking about them and praying for them.

Thurs, Mar 17 Week 2: Jesus, both God and man

Preparing for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: Lent 2

Introduction: How are we saved? For most of us who have been acquainted with Christian teachings for many years, it’s an easy question. Answer: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. But for thousands of years, people didn’t have the knowledge of Jesus Christ. They knew only of a Messiah to come. Nonetheless, their faith was placed in the promise of God to send a Savior, and that faith—a forward-looking faith—was credited to them as the righteousness that God demands to enter heaven.

First Lesson: Genesis 12:1-8

Questions to Ponder:

19. How did God “appear to Abram”? (v 7) Why does he not appear visibly to us today?

**Answers to Questions**

18. If faith is “being certain of what we do not see,” then Abraham is a prime example. He left home at God’s command to go to a destination he didn’t know; he believed without question in the incredible promise of child in his old age through whom the Savior would come; he proceeded unwaveringly when God asked him to sacrifice that very child. Oh, for the faith of Abraham!

19. We’re not sure of the exact appearance, but it seems to be visibly. Today God reveals himself to us in his Word, though he could at any time reveal himself to us in another way.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, we marvel at the tremendous faith of Abraham, who gave up everything to follow your command. Help us to imitate Abraham's faith – to trust in you and follow your word wholeheartedly. And even though questions and doubts may sometimes rise in our minds, help us to find the answers in your word and help us never to question the power of your love, the forgiveness we have in Jesus, and the certainty we have of eternal life with you in heaven. Amen.

Fri, Mar 18

Week 2: Jesus, both God and man

**Preparing for Worship – Upcoming Sunday:** Lent 2

**Second Lesson:** Romans 4:1-5,13-17

**Questions to Ponder:**

20. According to Paul, how was Abraham justified? (compare Galatians 3:6-9)

21. The promised Seed was intended for the children of Abraham. Are we included?

**Answers to Questions**

20. The Jews taught that Abraham was a model of good works and was justified through them. But Paul is clear that Abraham was justified in God’s sight by faith in God’s promises.
21. While we may not be “blood” descendants of Abraham (ethnic Jews), Scripture says we are all Abraham’s children through faith. The promises given to him are ensured for us.

**Prayer:** Dearest Jesus, help us to put to death every day the idea that we might become righteous by our own deeds or works. Remind us to look to you alone for the righteousness we need. By faith in you, we are children of Abraham, who believed the promises which you gave to him. Strengthen our faith in you that we also may always receive the blessings you have promised to us. Amen.

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**Preparation for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: Lent 2**

**Gospel:** John 4:5-26

**Questions to Ponder:**
22. How was Samaritan woman a recipient of God’s grace?
23. Explain how “salvation is from the Jews”? (v 22)

**Answers to Questions**
22. As for all of us, she received God’s grace by faith in the Savior. Her background was as part of a people opposed to Jewish customs, especially those concerning worship, but Jesus tells her that ethnic background nor worship practices make any real difference. It is faith alone in the promised Savior, and Jesus declares, “I am he.”
23. The Jews were God’s chosen people in the Old Testament to be the physical ancestors of the Messiah. It was from their line that the Savior would come.

**Prayer:** Almighty Savior, at Jacob’s Well, you reached across cultural and ethnic barriers to a Samaritan woman who was lost in sin. Yet by faith she was awaiting the Messiah who would explain everything. Lord Jesus, reveal yourself to us, just as you revealed yourself to the Samaritan woman. Break down the barriers of sin in our lives and strengthen our faith in you. Amen.
Romans 5:1 1Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peace through a sword?

When you think of Jesus which of the two images first comes to mind: a peace-maker or a sword-bringer? Jesus clearly loves peace. Isaiah calls Him the “Prince of peace.” Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” (Mt 5:9) Jesus told his disciples, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.” (John 14:27) Obviously, Jesus stands for peace. Of course, elsewhere Jesus says, “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” (Mt 10:34) John describes Jesus in the book of Revelation with the words, “Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword.” (Rv 19:15) Paul even urges believers to defend themselves with the sword of the Spirit.” (Eph 6:17) Christ also packs a sword. This is another great paradox.

We need to understand the sword. Put away images of Captain Jack Sparrow and his Caribbean sword. Instead, consider the “sword” of a surgeon, like a scalpel. A skillful physician uses a knife to cut out what is harmful—the impacted wisdom tooth, the growing tumor, the cancerous growth. No one wants to “go under the knife,” but we do want the desired effect—to be healthy and whole. We don’t want to lie awake at night worrying about the disease, Instead, we want the peace that comes from a successful surgery. In the same way Jesus brings peace also. This peace comes from exposing and excising sin through the Word. This is the peace that passes all understanding. But it comes after we are cut to the heart. Consider today’s lesson.

Application Questions:

God gives peace. But first He cuts sinful attitudes and activities from our life. Often that process is painful as God wrenches these “false lovers” from our life. Give several reasons why believers feel better about it later on?

We have peace with God through Christ. How will that peace affect you today?

a. You will remember that you are on your way to heaven?
   b. You will quickly confess sin and trust you are fully forgiven immediately.
   c. You will see yourself for who you really are, a full fledged child of God.
d. You will be confident, hopeful, and optimistic today because God is good.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, help us to not only hear the law but also to listen to it so that we might be cut to the heart and ready to listen to your words of peace, joy and hope in the gospel. Fill us with faith and confidence in the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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**Tue., Mar 22**

**Week 3: Jesus, Peace-maker & Sword bringer**

**John 14:1-2** 1“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

**Branches Everywhere**

I couldn’t believe it. Hack. Slice. Cut. Whack Away. “Look out, Dad is after that grape vine again!” When I grew up my father planted one Concord grape vine in the garden. As September and October approached it was always fun to watch as the grapes were transformed from a dull green to brilliant purple. Occasionally my sister and I would even eat some before the complete harvest took place. (Warning: the green ones are sour!) I was always amazed at how many grapes could grow from that one little shoot. I was also amazed at what my father did to that plant one fall. He was merciless! It wasn’t until I was a bit older that I finally understood. If you want a good harvest, you have to clip away those branches. It seems counterproductive, even silly at the time. And it’s hard work. But time and time again it works. And everyone loves the harvest.

Jesus tells us today that God does the same things in our lives. He clips away the unproductive “growths” in our life. We know that not all growth is good. How many times haven’t we landed in the urgent care because of some kind of bacterial growth. There’s a growth we all want out of our lives. On the other hand some growths we have trouble letting go of. Our old sinful nature is always sprouting new evil desires and thoughts. We have trouble letting go of worry and anxiety over things we cannot control. We have trouble letting go of grudges and bitterness over events long past. Sometimes little pockets of cancerous pet sins grow undetected within us and we aren’t really looking to treat them. Then they spread.
Thankfully, God does treat them. He severs these things from our lives. He must. It’s hard work—because our sinful nature does not want to let go. But why does he do it? He wants the big harvest. Jesus wants our lives to be full—full of things like love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, and even peace. Jesus is the peace bringer. Jesus didn’t create us so that we could toss and turn all night filled with worry over our jobs, our mortgage, our growing children or our aging parents. He doesn’t feed, clothe, and give us free oxygen every day so that we can just exist through another day burdened by all kinds of troubles from life on earth. Jesus wants us to grow and produce a big harvest. And we do to. Knowing that Christ’s love, forgiveness and peace are not only real but they are ours we look forward to tomorrow—wherever God takes us. At times our lives may look like “branches everywhere.” But God has a plan. While He may be doing some pruning now, one day we will all see the outgrowth of living for him on this earth. It’s OK to be a vine when God is the gardener!

**Application Questions:**

Think for a few moments over the last few years of life. What are some areas that God has pruned? Are there any areas that He is pruning now?

Sometimes we struggle through the pruning process because we can’t see the bigger picture. How does knowing that God is a loving, forgiving Gardener help you to accept times of pruning and change? Why is it important to remember the bigger picture?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, I confess I don’t like being pruned. Thank you for loving me anyway and always wanting what is best for me. Give me a stronger trust and keep my feet on the path of growth and eternal life. In my Savior’s name, Amen.

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**Wed., Mar 23**  Week 3: Jesus, Peace-maker & Sword bringer

*** No devotion today. Reminder: Don’t forget to join your Christian brothers and sisters in worship today and to ponder your Savior’s passion and suffering. Also, take time to identify at least one particular sinful weakness or habit in your life. Confess that sin to God and ask for his forgiveness. Write down a strategy for avoiding that temptation, including at least 3 specific things you
will do. Pray for others who are also struggling with a particular sin. If you fall back into that sin, write it down, keeping a list. Also write down why you fell into sin and how you can avoid it in the future.

Thu., Mar 24

Preventing for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: Lent 3

Introduction: The difference between walking in faith and walking in unbelief is like the difference between light and darkness. We were born in spiritual darkness, in our blindness unable to guide ourselves on the way to heaven. But Christ has shined his light into our lives, and our faith makes us sighted spiritually. Now we can see clearly the path that we are to follow, and we can be the agents to guide others to the true light that gives life to every man.

The Servant leads the servants

In our first lesson this Sunday, we see how Israel was blind, and couldn’t find their way. But God promised his grace. He would send a Servant to lead the servants. In this way all will really be servants of the Lord. Christ is the Light of the world.

First Lesson: Isaiah 42:14-21

Questions to Ponder:
24. Who is the servant of the Lord? (v 19)
25. In what ways was this “servant” blind?
26. What promises does God give regarding these blind servants?

Answers to Questions
24. The people of Israel
25. Israel’s history shows a distinct ignorance of the obvious. Consider how often Israel complained while wandering in the wilderness, many times just shortly after God’s amazing display of providence and protection. Most sadly, many of God’s chosen people
disregarded his promise of a spiritual Savior and would miss seeing
Jesus, the fulfillment of that promise.

26. He says, “I will lead the blind...turn the darkness into light...I will
not forsake them.” (v 16) What patience! What grace!

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, as you darkness into light every
morning so you also turn your people to your Son. Keep opening my
eyes and turning me around that I may live by faith and find hope in
your promises. Amen.

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**Fri., Mar 25**

**Week 3: Jesus, Peace-maker & Sword bringer**

### Preparing for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: Lent 3

**Who Lights up Your Life**

This Sunday we will see how Christ is our light. By God’s grace we
have been changed from children of darkness into children of light.
Don’t ever forget that. Now that you know Jesus you are different. The
Apostle Paul calls us to live out what we are, “Children of Light.”

**Second Lesson: Ephesians 5:8-14**

**Questions to Ponder:**

27. How has our life changed now that we are found in the light?
28. What is our role to be regarding those still in darkness?

**Answers to Questions**

27. No longer is our life filled with the “fruitless deeds of darkness,”
(compare Galatians 5:19-21); rather we are now concerned with
doing that “which pleases the Lord.” (compare Galatians 5:22-23).
28. We are to be the law-bearers and expose those fruitless deeds of
darkness in those around us, not dwelling on those evils. We must
also be gospel-bearers, offering full and free forgiveness to those
who hear our message!

**Prayer:** Loving Lord, we thank you for being our light, showing us
the way, filling us with life and light. Help us to reflect your light to
others in the world. Amen.

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Preparing for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: Lent 3

I Can See!

It’s amazing what a good pair of glasses, contacts, or laser surgery can do to our vision. There are few greater blessings that being able to see clearly every day. But really we have two sets of eyes. Some times we can see, but are blind. Other times we could be blind but see. Watch Jesus today as he provides both kinds of sight.

Gospel: John 9:1-7,13-17,34-39

Questions to Ponder:
29. Restoring this man’s physical sight is a metaphor for what other change that occurred?
30. How is our reception of spiritual sight seen in this man’s experience?

Answers to Questions
29. This man had more importantly received spiritual sight, that is, faith in Christ.
30. This man’s understanding of Jesus progressed from seeing him as a man (v 11) to a prophet (v 17) to one worthy of being followed (v 27) to one who was “from God” (v 33) to worship (v 38). So our understanding of Jesus also grows as we learn more of what he has said and done through study of his Word. Our faith is strengthened; our spiritual sight is made more acu
te.

Prayer: Dear Savior, thank you for giving me sight to see you as my Lord. Provide me a clear vision of what you would have me during my earthly walk until I see you and love your complete love in heaven. Amen.

Mon., Mar 28

Isaiah 42:16 16I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.
Only the Blind Can See Jesus

How much would you do to help a blind friend see? How much work and time, effort and encouragement would you give your friend so that they could open their eyes and view all you regularly take for granted?

The LORD looked at his people Israel and knew they had a severe vision problem. They could not see his love and wisdom and power. Their blindness prevented them from seeing and grasping God’s salvation. And so, the LORD mercifully let the blind see his power and love, his wisdom and salvation. He had brought them out of Egypt with his mighty outstretched arm. He had recently delivered Judah from the siege attack of Assyria. The LORD had clearly shown them his power, love, wisdom and salvation.

But they quickly went blind. Moral and spiritual decay ate away at God’s chosen people. And sadly, most did not even realize it. So, he let them see their wretched state. God booted them out of the Promised Land so they could clearly see their sin. And, God made sure they saw their salvation, too. He would rescue his people from Babylon and bring them back. He did not forsake them, but sent THE salvation – his Son that he had promised.

How’s your eyesight doing? God’s not going to send you off packing to Babylon so that you can come to your senses and see your sin. But, he does send you to his Word where honest examination reveals our sin and our great need for a Savior. Is your sight of your sin getting blurry? Sit down with God’s law and honestly examine your life – all of it. How do all your actions look? How do all your words and thoughts appear? Pure, holy and God-pleasing? Or, sinfully, despicable and ugly?

Don’t stop your looking with God’s law. Look to what the LORD does for the blind. He gives them sight. Do you see: Jesus living as your perfect substitute? Jesus suffering and dying for you and for your sins? Jesus’ resurrection – his victory over sin and death and the seal of God’s declaration of you as not guilty?

God has not forsaken you. He saved you through Jesus Christ. God will not forsake you. Jesus will return to take you to eternal glory.

Application Questions:

When someone is spiritually blind, what don’t they see?

Think back to Sunday’s sermon (based on John 9). The religious leaders thought they could see. How were they actually blind?
The formerly blind man was told that he was still blind. What kind of sight did Jesus give him?

When the Spirit works faith in someone, he enlightens them and gives them spiritual sight. Make a list of things you see by your Spirit-given faith?

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, Thank you for given me faith by the power of the Holy Spirit. Lead me to regularly hear, study and believe your Word. Send your Holy Spirit to increase my understanding of your Word. Grant me the wisdom to see clearly your salvation and will. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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**Tue., Mar 29**

**Week 4: Jesus, Whom We Scorn & Crave**

**Ephesians 5:8-14** For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

**Standing in the Light**

If a tree falls in the forest and no one and nothing is around to hear it fall, does it still make a sound? It might seem like a silly question. Of course it makes a sound!

If all the world is swearing up a storm and a Christian mutters a few foul words, are those words still bad? If everyone else cheats on taxes, will anyone notice if a few numbers are fudged? If all your neighbors sleep in on Sunday morning, will anyone notice that your car never left the garage? If there are a bunch of people who seem to sin a lot more than you, does your sin really matter all that much? These might seem like silly questions. However, too often we make “will anyone notice” the test for whether or not we should do something. God’s Word for today clearly exposes the foolishness and sinfulness of that approach. That approach is dark and sinful.

What a contrast God’s Word shines! God’s Word exposes our sins as sins. Its light clearly shows the darkness of sins. And, the Word points to THE Light of the World, Jesus. When the world was hating
God, God in Christ was loving the world. While sinners filled the air with foul and hateful words, Jesus clearly spoke in love and proclaimed the will of the one who sent him. When all the world was selfishly worried about itself, Jesus was selflessly living, serving, dying and saving the world. When others were desperately trying to hold onto their own lives, Jesus laid down his life and took it up again so that they would have life. Wow! That light, THE Light shone!

Has anyone noticed? You’ve seen, haven’t you? You see, know and believe in Jesus as your Savior. Now, to those who’ve seen the Light, to those that God has made “light in the Lord” (v. 8), God gives this command: “Live as children of light.” What kind of living is that? “Find out what pleases the Lord.” And, “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.” That’s your assignment, dear light in the Lord. Now, get to work. And, why? Your Light has completed his assignment and done his work.

Application Questions:

Paul commands the Ephesians to “Find out what pleases the Lord.” What specific things will you continue to do to make sure you are doing this? What do you need to add or get rid of in your regular schedule to do this work?

What “fruitless deeds of darkness” have been a snare to you? What practical steps can you take to make sure you will have nothing to do with them?

God calls you “children of light.” What does that tell you about your relationship to the world? Your relationship to God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You have made me your child. Give me the strength to know and flee the deeds of darkness that you hate. Give me the faithfulness to do what pleases you. Use your Word and your Spirit to work in me the wisdom and zeal to live as your child. Amen.

Wed., Mar 30 Week 4: Jesus, Whom We Scorn & Crave

*** No devotion today. Reminder: Don’t forget to join your Christian brothers and sisters in worship today, and to ponder your Savior’s passion and suffering. Take time to write down three or more times when you have scorned God and did something you knew was wrong and sinful in his eyes. Confess your sins to God and ask for his forgiveness. Rejoice that God has forgiven
you and continues to welcome you as his own dear child. Ask him for strength to obey his will and do what is right, even when it doesn’t seem desirable or pleasurable.

Thu., Mar 31

Week 4: Jesus, Whom We Scorn & Crave

Preparing for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: Lent 4

Introduction: As Christians, we have nothing to fear! The condemnation of the Law was removed by Christ’s life and death on our behalf. Reassured of God’s forgiveness on a daily basis, we can live our lives to his glory by serving others.

First Lesson: Hosea 5:15-6:3

Questions to Ponder:

31. How had God threatened his people?
32. What did Hosea plead? What was his confidence?

Answers to Questions

31. God threatened to turn away from his people because of their sin. Our sins separate us from our God, and separation from God is described as “misery” (5:15).
32. Hosea pleaded that his people “return to the Lord.” (6:1) Repentance has connected to it the idea of turning away from our sin back to the Lord. Hosea stated confidently that God will “bind up our wounds…revive us…restore us…as surely as the sun rises.” (6:2,3)

Prayer: LORD God, you are holy and just. Too often I turned away from you and into sin. Too often I piled up guilt and shame. I am sorry. For the sake of your Son, Jesus, turn to me and forgive me. Revive and restore, heal and comfort me. Lead me to always acknowledge you - as I turn to you for forgiveness and as you lead me in paths of righteousness throughout my life. Amen.

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Preparing for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: Lent 4

Second Lesson: Romans 8:1-10

Questions to Ponder:

33. Why are the opening words (v 1) so triumphant?
34. While the Law no longer condemns us, it still has a function. What is the Law’s purpose for us now? (v 4)?

Answers to Questions

33. Paul has already discoursed at length on the reality of sin and its consequences as well as on God’s faithfulness and his gracious forgiveness in Christ. As Christians, he acknowledged that are still struggling daily with the sinful nature that is part of us, but that we are being rescued by Jesus Christ (7:21-25). Now the triumphant confidence naturally follows: THERE IS NO CONDEMNATION FOR THOSE FOUND IN CHRIST! What a comfort! What a relief for sin-challenged Christians!

34. The “righteous requirements of the law” speak not of achieving God’s demanded perfection. Remember that there is no condemnation in Christ! This use of the Law is referred to as the “guide” or “rule,” which we obey out of love for God through the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives!

Prayer: Almighty God, you rule over all and judge all. We deserve condemnation for our sins. Thank you declaring the opposite verdict on us. Because of Jesus Christ you declare us not condemned. Thank you for this free gift of your grace for me in Christ. Thank you also for sending and filling me with the Holy Spirit. Through his work in my heart, you have made me alive and righteous. Help me to live according to your commands and in a way that brings you praise and honor. Amen.
Preparing for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: Lent 4

Gospel: Matthew 20:17-28

Questions to Ponder:
35. What was the “cup” of which Jesus spoke?
36. Why is pride such a dangerous sin?
37. How do Jesus’ life and ministry provide a model for us?

Answers to Questions
35. The cup was Jesus’ suffering and death, which he was headed to Jerusalem to drink.
36. It is incorrect to consider one sin more punishable than another, but pride causes a person to ignore his need for spiritual help, and that can be a damning mistake.
37. Jesus gave the ultimate model: Serve others!

Prayer: King of kings and Lord of lords, you alone are the perfect king and servant. Forgive me for the times I have tried to bully others, tried to avoid serving others or labeled others’ sins as worse than my own sins. Give me forgiveness, peace and joy in know that you came to serve and to give up your life as the perfect ransom for sinners - for me! In your grace, you place many opportunities before me to serve you by serving and loving others. Give me the motivation and strength to humbly serve others. Amen.

Mon., Apr 4 Week 5: Jesus, both Prince and Slave

Isaiah 7:14, quoted in Matthew 1:23 23“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”

God Is with Us

God with Us. That’s the name given to Jesus at his birth and that’s who he is. Yet even if the entire world were a 1,000 times more precious and coated in gold it still would not have been an appropriate throne for a prince named God with Us. That’s OK. He didn’t come to earth because
the world was a worthy place for him to set up his kingdom. He came to be our slave. That’s why his bed is a manger, his chariot of victory is the cross, and our weak hearts are his throne.

How does it make you feel to know that your slave is God with Us? No doubt you are very happy—just imagine what our slave can do for us!—and perhaps a little hesitant as well. Can we really call Jesus our slave? Aren’t we supposed to serve him? In truth, the title of slave fits Jesus well. He came to serve us in every way—even to the point of death on the cross. We should have been on that cross but our slave took our place.

In olden days princes would sometimes have a servant called a whipping boy. If the prince disobeyed, the whipping boy would be beaten in his place. You’ve probably never heard of a prince who had a king as his whipping boy yet I can think of at least 6 billion living princes and princesses who have the Almighty God as their whipping boy.

That doesn’t sound right. It almost sounds wrong to say it. And yet it is so very right! God with Us is our slave! May we all our days serve him who served us.

**Prayer:** Lord, we praise you for being God with Us. We thank you for serving us in the most blessed way—with your perfect life and innocent death. Amen.

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**Galatians 4:4-7**  
But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

## No longer a slave

Over the centuries millions of people have been slaves. One of the many curses of this wicked institution is the fact that most slaves couldn’t earn enough to buy their own freedom. The few slave owners who paid their slaves usually charged so much for housing and food that there was no way for slaves to save any money. Once a slave, always a slave. On the other hand, wealthy people handed down their money to their children. Once wealthy, always wealthy.
Jesus came to break that cycle in the spiritual world. If left to ourselves we’d always be slaves to sin. Jesus (the wealthy Prince of heaven!) became a servant. As He took our sin and gave us His perfection He freed us. More than that, He made us heirs of God’s forgiveness, peace, joy, and heavenly home!

This week we are talking about the paradox that Jesus is both Prince and Slave. As a result of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection we can say that we are no longer slaves … but princes! To God be glory!

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for breaking the cycle of sin. In this most holy season of the year let me reflect on your amazing grace. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

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**Wed., Apr 6**

Week 5: Jesus, both Prince and Slave

*** No devotion today. Reminder: Don’t forget to join your Christian brothers and sisters in worship today and ponder your Savior’s passion and suffering. Take time to identify 5 ways you can imitate Jesus’ example as a servant – 5 ways you can serve your neighbor. At the top of the list put “Pray for my neighbor.” Take time to pray for those in need spiritually, physically, financially, and emotionally. Don’t forget to fill in 4 more ways to serve your neighbor. Then work this week to carry them out.

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**Thu., Apr 7**

Week 5: Jesus, both Prince and Slave

**Preparing for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: Lent 5**

**Introduction:** We are drawing ever closer to Holy Week, when Jesus undergoes the incredible events of his Passion. This Sunday, one week before Holy Week begins, we hear about our progress from death to life. Through faith in Jesus, we are raised from our spiritual death to a new life in Christ, and we are nurtured in this new life through the Word and Sacraments.

**First Lesson:** Ezekiel 37:1-14
Questions to Ponder:
38. How does the vision of the dry bones characterize God’s people in Ezekiel’s time?
39. What tool was used in restoring life to the dead bones?

Answers to Questions
38. The bones were many and very dry. This indicates the widespread condition of God’s people as they were exiled in Babylon. Their unfaithfulness had brought about God’s judgment, and they seemed beyond the point of resuscitation. Yet God’s grace is apparent.
39. The same tool we use today—the Word of God. “Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.”

Prayer: Lord God, you brought us to life by the power of your Word. Fill our hearts with your life-giving message that we may remain alive in your Word all the days of our lives. Help us also to see the “dry bones” around us who have yet to be brought to life by your Word. They need to hear your message. Use us to do that, Lord. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Fri., Apr 8 Week 5: Jesus, both Prince and Slave

Preparing for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: Lent 5

Second Lesson: Romans 8:11-19

Questions to Ponder:
40. Through his Spirit, Paul says, God has breathed new life into our mortal bodies (v 11). What changes does that bring about?
41. Though life in Christ Jesus means sharing his suffering, what other observation is made?

Answers to Questions
40. Paul previously had said that those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires (vv 5-8). We now seek to put to death the misdeeds of the body (v 13) and willingly share in Christ’s suffering with a view also to sharing in his glory (v 17).
41. Paul suggests a wise perspective: our present sufferings are “not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” As a runner endures the pain of the exertion by keeping his eyes focused on the finish line, so the Christian’s perspective will always be goal-oriented. What waits for us at the end far outshines the clouds that we encounter along the way!

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for breathing on us with your Spirit to give us life through faith. Keep us alive by your Spirit. Do not allow the temptations of the world to kill our faith. May we all the days of our life call you “Abba, Father.” Amen.

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**Sat., Apr 9**

**Week 5: Jesus, both Prince and Slave**

**Preparing for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: Lent 5**

**Gospel:** John 11:17-27,38-45

**Questions to Ponder:**

42. What does Jesus mean by saying that he *is* life?
43. How would Mary and Martha see the glory of God in the raising of Lazarus?

**Answers to Questions**

42. More than saying that he is the source of life or the giver of life, Jesus for the first time (see also 14:6) claims to be life itself. There is no life apart from him. As life itself, final death is impossible for him. The events surrounding the raising of Lazarus occur just days before the Passion events in Jerusalem. What a comfort to know that Jesus was confidently assured of the outcome of his upcoming battle with evil—he would be victorious!

43. Jesus would perform what only God could do—raising someone from death. The glory of God would be seen in Jesus himself both here and then in the future as these events helped to initiate the events leading to the cross, where’s God’s true identity and love were revealed.

**Prayer:** Lord, prepare my heart to worship you tomorrow. I don’t deserve to come into your presence ... but you invite me by your
grace. Fill my heart with joy as I worship with my fellow Christians. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

Mon., Apr 11         Week 6: Jesus, who is both Death & Life

Romans 6:4 4We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Death and Life through Baptism

When Jesus walked the way of the cross he was very clear on the goal of his death becoming life for the world. He was very clear that his resurrection on the third day would mean life for the world. There is no sinner for whom Jesus did not die. There is no sinner for whom he did not rise in victory over death on the third day. He was also very clear that his gift of life and resurrection becomes our personal gift only through faith in Christ.

What comfort God gives when he tells us what is ours through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism - both death and life. “Buried with (Christ Jesus) through Baptism into death.” Everything that Christ’s death paid for and won for us is ours through Baptism. That, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Everything that Christ’s rising from the dead on Easter morning won for us is now fully ours through our Baptism.

We already live through faith in Jesus - alive eternally. We own eternal life through Jesus’ death and resurrection. We have it now. We have it for all eternity - eternal life which also shows itself now. “We too may live a new life.” We are living it now. The Apostle adds, (Rom 6:2-3 NIV) “We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” As we live lives which glorify Jesus we show that the eternal life purchased and given to us by Jesus is alive and well within us.

Prayer: Thank you that you died that we may live! Even as we look forward to life with you in heaven we thank you for the life you give us by faith now. Grow that faith in our hearts as your Spirit leads us by your Word of Scripture. Amen.
2 Cor 2:14-16  But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.  For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.  To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?

Death to the Perishing – Life to Believers

What does Jesus smell like? To many the thought that God would require a sacrifice for their sins is a smelly stench. They are too good to need it. They are offended against a God who would require it. Their pride and their rejection of Jesus are a stench before our God!

The picture in today’s Scripture is the parade in Rome when the conquering general paraded the captives through the streets. To the captives it was the smell of death. To the victors it was the sweet smell of life and victory. To those who reject Jesus it will be the smell of death when they meet him again. To us who believe Jesus is now and will for all eternity be the sweet smell of victory over death and the gift of eternal life.

So now we live for him who died and is risen again. Now, as we share what we believe about Jesus “we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved.” That smells sweet to our God. Amen.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, how pleasant to think about who you are and what you and I like and what you have done and still do for us. Your death pays our debt for sin. Your resurrection guarantees our forgiveness of the sins which brought life and assures us that life is now ours forevermore. Keep us as your sheep and lambs who love to follow you and to serve you. Amen.

Wed., Apr 13

*** No devotion today. Reminder: Don’t forget to join your Christian brothers and sisters in worship today and ponder the passion and suffering of your Savior. Take time to pray for your pastor…Holy Week is the busiest time of year for him and requires the most preparation. Pray also for his family. If possible, offer to help your pastor some time in the next week – baby sit for him,
take him out for breakfast, bake him a casserole, offer to shine his shoes, etc. Take time to pray for all pastors, preachers and missionaries who are preparing to proclaim the greatest most powerful message of all time: Christ crucified for our sins – Christ risen for our justification!

Thu., Apr 14

Preparation for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: Palm Sunday

Introduction: This coming Sunday is Palm Sunday, named for that day 2,000 years ago when Jesus entered Jerusalem to the songs of praise of the people. Laying palm branches in the road, the people honored this prophet from Nazareth as their Savior. Some surely saw their Savior from sin; others likely saw their earthly savior from the Romans’ foreign rule. Either way, the songs rose: “Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is he that comes!”

First Lesson: Zechariah 9:9-10

Questions to Ponder:
44. How is Christ “your king”?
45. How would this king be different than other earthly kings?

Answers to Questions
44. Though he was more than qualified, Jesus never claimed an earthly kingdom like we normally think with the word “king.” Instead, Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world. We often consider him ruling in three kingdoms: the Kingdom of Power (his power places him above all things in heaven and earth), the Kingdom of Grace (where he rules in the hearts of his believers), and the Kingdom of Glory (he rules in heaven and will continue there into all eternity).
45. Our king is gentle and humble, not the ruthless, power-hungry despot of earthly kingdoms. He also extends peace, contrasting the bloody kingdoms of the worldly empires.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are our Lord. You are our king. You are our king because you ransomed us from death to life. You sit at the right
hand of God. Rule in our hearts and rule in our lives as you guide us in the way of holiness. Amen.

Fri., Apr 15

Preparing for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: Palm Sunday

Second Lesson: Philippians 2:5-11

Questions to Ponder:

46. What quality of Christ is stressed as a model for us?
47. Where was Christ’s humility most obvious?
48. What was the end result of Jesus’ humility?

Answers to Questions

46. His humility which caused him willingly to lay aside the full use and constant display of the honor and majesty that were his as God.
47. In the death he died, a form reserved for the worst of criminals, “death on a tree.”
48. “God exalted him to the highest place,” and at his name, “every knee should bow.” Jesus extends the same promise to us when he says that the last shall be first (Mark 10:31).

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your love really is more than we can understand. For us it is mind boggling that you would leave heaven for lowly birth and life and a terrible death – all for us to bring us out of death into life. Be with us every day so that the life you have given may show itself in everything that we say and do. Amen.

Sat., Apr 16

Preparing for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: Palm Sunday

Gospel: Matthew 21:1-11
Questions to Ponder:
49. Of what significance is the fact that Jesus is the Son of David?

Answers to Questions
49. Messiah was foretold to be of David’s family (2 Samuel 7:16), and Jesus could trace his line back to King David through both his mother and his earthly father. The Jewish people knew well that the Messiah must have these credentials.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as we anticipate our worship on Palm Sunday fill our hearts with the same awe and joy voiced by the people of Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday. Preserve in our hearts the faith that you are truly the one of whom they sang, “The Son of David who comes in the name of the Lord.” You are King. Rule in our hearts by your grace. You are our King. Rule in our lives by works which praise you. Amen.

Mon., Apr 18 Week 7: Jesus, Defeated and Victorious

Matthew 27:42-44  
42 “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” 44 In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

Bitterness of Defeat

Do star basketball players ever lose? Of course they do. Being part of a team means that in spite of your best efforts you may have to share in the ultimate failure of your team. You could be the greatest basketball player that ever lived, but the scoreboard still says you lost. You were defeated.

The cheering and crowds of Palm Sunday sometimes seem like fickle fans that can sing and cheer his welcome into Jerusalem one day and a week later be silent huddled under his cross. The voices heard from the crowd that day are the ones jeering, “He saved others, but he can’t save himself.” They are the words of defeat. Jesus can’t save himself, even though he never did anything wrong. He never sinned yet he must taste the bitterness of defeat and death because he came into this world to be one of us. The wages of our sins needed to be paid, and even
though he had the power to come down from the cross, he would not. Jesus felt the crushing weigh of our shortcomings, our flagrant sins, our unkind words and he suffered our defeat for us.

Is it any wonder that on Palm Sunday, when the Pharisees urged Jesus to silence the crowds, Jesus responded, “I tell you…if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”? How could we ever be silent about the one who suffered defeat so that we might taste victory?

Prayer: Dearest Lord, help me to never be false in my praise of you. You came to be a human so that you might be my Savior. You did not turn away from the path that led you to the cross or save yourself because of me. Your love amazes me. May it guard my heart from sin, and may I always share your love with others. Amen.

Tue., Apr 19

1 Peter 3:18-20 18For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, 19through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison 20who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,

Sweet Victory

Students always seem puzzled when they get to the steps of Christ’s humiliation and exaltation. Going through the Second Article of the Apostle’s Creed sounds like a stairway down from God’s glory in heaven. “Conceived by the Holy Spirit,” then take a step down, “born of the virgin Mary.” Palm Sunday seems like it should be exaltation, but it is not. “Suffered under Pontius Pilate,” step down, “was crucified.” The steps down should continue with “died, and was buried. He descended in to hell,” but they don’t.

For many in our world death and hell are the ultimate defeat, but they weren’t for our Lord Jesus. On the cross he proclaimed, “It is finished.” These are words of victory over death and Satan. Our sin had been paid for. No one was more surprised than Satan because he didn’t know the meaning of Jesus’ sacrifice. The devil didn’t know that the debt of sin which made us his possessions was paid in full by Jesus. Jesus’ first step up from death is proclaiming his victory in hell to those imprisoned by Satan. Then Jesus will rise from the dead.
By Jesus’ victory on the cross, our path in life is not one that will go down with sin, Satan, and death; but up with righteousness, Jesus, and eternal life with God. By faith, Jesus shares his victory with us, and believing in him, our path is upward all the way. His victory is our victory. Like the crowd on Palm Sunday, we want to shout, “Hosanna— Save Now!”

**Prayer:** How sweet your victory is for me! Because of you my enemies are defeated and I will have life eternal. Keep me in that precious faith through which I have a share in all you have done for me. Amen.

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**Wed. Apr 20**

*** No devotion today. Reminder: Don’t forget to join your Christian brothers and sisters in worship tomorrow for Maundy Thursday service, and on Friday for Good Friday service. Take time to read through one or more of the passion accounts: Matthew 26-27; Mark 14-15; Luke 22-23; John 18-19. Also read Isaiah 53. Spend time in prayer and meditation. Also, consider fasting on Thursday to prepare to receive the Lord’s Supper. Fasting was commonly practiced by the apostles and many early Christians as an act of devotion and a way to focus thoughts on our Savior’s amazing self-sacrificing love.

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**Maundy Thursday, Apr 21**

**Preparation for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: EASTER!**

**Introduction:** Of all the Sundays of the Church Year, Easter Sunday holds the place of prominence. It is on this glorious day that the church celebrates the resurrection of Christ their Savior from the dead. No longer are they dead in their transgressions and sins, for having been buried in Christ through baptism they are now united with Christ in his resurrection.

**First Lesson:** Jonah 2:2-9
Questions to Ponder:
50. Was this the prayer Jonah prayed while in the belly of the fish, or are these thoughts that came to him later?
51. Why could we describe Jonah's prayer as a prayer of thanks more so than a prayer of confidence?

Answers to Questions
50. Certainly Jonah wrote the prayer's final form at a later date. The flow of thought, however, is consistent with the thoughts of one who has just had a very close brush with death. Jonah recounts his hopeless situation and immediately follows that up with his amazing rescue.
51. When the fish swallowed Jonah he wasn't moving from one danger to another. The fish was a part of the solution. Jonah's time in the fish was similar to the time Jesus spent in the grave (Matthew 12:39-40). When Jesus died, his mission was complete. The grave was not a punishment, but a place to await the Father's exaltation. So it was for Jonah in the belly of the fish.

Prayer: Dear God, because of my sin you abandoned your own Son on the cross as he cried out, “My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?” He felt the pain of defeat that I deserve because of my sin. Yet because of his payment on the cross I belong to you and you will never forsake or abandon me. May these days of Holy Week deepen my faith and love for you. Amen.

Good Friday, Apr 22

Preparing for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: EASTER

Second Lesson: Colossians 3:1-4

Questions to Ponder:
52. What does Paul mean when he says, "You died"? And how is it that our life is now "hidden with Christ in God"?
53. Where should our hearts and thoughts be directed?
Answers to Questions

52. We died when our sinful connection to this earth was put to death on the cross. Our life is now in Christ. That life is hidden to the world that doesn't understand the power of the cross. We now live each day in eager anticipation of Christ's return in glory.

53. We should not think about the sinful things of this world, but resolve to serve only Christ and do that which will glorify him.

Prayer: Dearest Lord, I am reminded today of how you paid for the sins of the whole world. Responsibility for all sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed which fills the minds and lives of humans was laid on you. I think of the burden of my own guilt which you willingly shouldered for me. For me as well as for those soldiers who hammered the nails you prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing?” After suffering the pain of hell itself upon the cross, I hear the words of victory, “It is finished!” In those words I want my old life to end and my life of faith to begin. With the payment made I can in hope look heavenward again, knowing I belong to you. Make my life one of living thanks to you. Amen.

Sat., Apr 23 Week 7: Jesus, both Defeated and Victorious

Preparing for Worship – Upcoming Sunday: EASTER

Gospel: Matthew 28:1-10

Questions to Ponder:

54. Why did the angel roll back the stone from the tomb?
55. How might the angel's words, "He is not here; he has risen, just as he said," have made the women feel ashamed?
56. Why were Jesus' words "my brothers" so comforting to the disciples?

Answers to Questions

54. Certainly not to let Jesus out. It was to prove to the world that Christ had risen
55. Why were they bringing burial spices for their risen Savior? Hadn't Jesus told them on several occasions that he would rise on the third day?
56. Even after they had denied Christ, lived in doubt and fear, Jesus still looked to them as part of his "family."

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, the women who prepared spices and waited in readiness today did not know that death had been defeated. They didn’t know you were alive and would rise to show the world God accepted your sacrifice for sin. I know the truth and can hardly wait to make my wait for Easter. When I hear those precious words, “He’s risen!” May I with all my heart reply, “He is risen indeed!” Help me to share the good news with all I know and as many strangers as I can find. Use my witness to open paradise for others. Amen.

This ends our Lenten journey – tomorrow we rejoice to celebrate the resurrection of our Savior. Be sure to join your brothers and sisters in worshipping our risen Lord, whose love, patience, power and majesty surpass all human understanding. To him be all glory and honor and praise, forever and ever. Amen.

**Maundy Thursday, April 21 - 7pm**
We Preach Christ Crucified in His Holy Supper

**Good Friday Tenebrae, April 22 - 7pm**

**Easter Sunday, April 24 -**
Easter Breakfast 8:30-9:45am
Easter Service 10am
German Service 11:30am