

Jesus, I will ponder now
On Thy holy Passion;
With Thy Spirit me endow
For such meditation.
Grant that I in love and faith
May the image cherish
Of Thy suffering, pain, and death,
That I may not perish.

If my sins give me alarm
And my conscience grieve me,
Let Thy cross my fear disarm,
Peace of conscience give me.
Grant that I may trust in Thee
And Thy holy Passion.
If His Son so loveth me,
God must have compassion.

The Lutheran Hymnal 140

Author: Sigismund v. Birken, 1653
Translated by: August Crull, 1923, alt.

God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Galatians 6:14 NKJV

Three Crucifixions

The first is “the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” On that cross Jesus accomplished the payment for all the sin of the world by His death and thus gave the gift of eternal life freely to all who are led to trust in Him alone. It is this teaching in which all Christ-believers “glory”. We glory in this great substitution: our sin imputed to the innocent Jesus. We glory in it because we have trusted our souls to it for all eternity. The death of Christ on a cross, alone, will put away sin. Those who glory in it have resolved to drive sin out of their lives.

The second crucifixion mentioned here is “the world has been crucified to me.” “The world” is the same one that crucified Jesus, its Savior, its God. The world is blind and did not know its God when He came to save it from its sins. We are told, “This is the 21st century!” and thus should put much stock in “public opinion”, “popular beliefs” and “the spirit of the times.” But by crucifying its God, the world has shown that its judgment and opinion is a poor thing. We should follow God and His Word, and let the world be a crucified thing to us. Christ-believers are not governed by the world’s spirit, do not seek the world’s approval, and do not fear the world’s threats. We should tell the world the truth, sacrifice for our neighbor’s good, but not ask the world to tell us what to believe.

The third crucifixion mentioned here is “I to the world.” Christ-believers find that they are often crucified by the unbelieving world for their belief in Jesus and the Bible. They get the cold shoulder. Old friends become open enemies. Even in their own families they may have foes. However, if others reject you, you are bearing your crucifixion in your poor, humble way, after the manner of Christ Himself.

Lord Jesus, help me to take up my cross daily and follow Thee.
Amen.

Thus says the LORD; “In an acceptable time I have heard You, and in the day of salvation I have helped You; I will preserve You and give You as a covenant to the people.” Isaiah 49:8

Why the Cross?

When man devised crucifixion as a means of execution, man’s unkindness sank to a new depth of cruelty. The cross was an implement of torture. After victims hands and feet were nailed to the cross, the cross was then hoisted up and planted in the ground, with the feet of the victim barely clearing the ground, so that he would be in full reach of every hand that might choose to strike him. There the victim hung in agony, starvation, insufferable heat and thirst during the day and cold at night until dead.

Of all the symbols the Christian Church might have adopted—perhaps a shepherd’s staff, a dove, and empty tomb, a star, a lamb—why did the early Christians choose a cross, a stake driven into the ground upon which a person was nailed until dead?

In the Bible verse today God is speaking to the Messiah, a prophecy about Jesus. The Messiah is calling upon His Father for help and God answers the pleas, “In an acceptable time I have heard You, and in the day of salvation I have helped You.” Here is a prophecy, some 700 years before, of the suffering of Jesus upon the cross, crying for help from God the Father. The prophecy was that the Father would answer Jesus and enable Him to go through all the suffering necessary to accomplish mankind’s salvation.

In a midweek Lenten worship, when the last bit of light had faded from the sun coming through the church windows, the preacher announced his sermon would be “the love of God”. He then took a lighted candle, walked to a statue of Christ hanging on the cross and held the candle beside the wounded hands, then feet, then side of the statue. That was the end of the sermon.

Heavenly Father, as Thou didst help Jesus bear His Cross for my sins, so also help me to bear my crosses in life. Amen.

He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. Isaiah 53:12

Numbered with Transgressors

God the Son assumed true human nature and became also the man Jesus Christ. The one difference, however, was that He was not conceived in sin as we are.

About 700 years before God the Son became a man the Old Testament prophet Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would be “numbered with the transgressors.” When Jesus Himself came, He quoted this prophecy of Isaiah as applying to Himself: “This which is written must still be accomplished in Me: ‘And He was numbered with the transgressors’” (Lk. 23:37).

But Jesus was not a transgressor. Christ allowed Himself to be nailed to a cross with the same kind of spikes as that of the criminals to His right and left. But He was not like the others being crucified. The criminals were being punished for their crimes. Jesus had committed no crimes against man’s law, nor any sins against God’s Law. He was being punished for our sins. Jesus is more innocent than the greatest saint as far as His own Person is concerned. Yet He became the greatest thief, murderer, adulterer, desecrator and blasphemer there ever has been anywhere in the world. He was not that because of what He Himself had done, but because He took upon Himself all we have done. He let Himself be “numbered with the transgressors (us)” in order to save us, the real transgressors. Thus the Bible says, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’)” (Gal. 3:13). God the Father “made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Lord Jesus, when I am reproached for Thy name by the world, help me to rejoice, inasmuch as I am a partaker in Thy sufferings. Amen.

You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder,' and whosoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.

Matthew 5:21-22

The Fifth Commandment

Even though we should repent of our sins daily, Lent is a season when repentance is emphasized. The Ten Commandments are our guide to show us what we need to repent of. Jesus here points out that the fifth commandment, “You shall not murder, “ is broader than just physical manslaughter. It includes being angry at someone “without a cause.” Anger is the first step to bodily murder. We “murder” our neighbor at times in our heart and with our tongue. Anger seeks revenge and holds grudges, seeking to get even.

Jesus specifies that all anger is not wrong. Jesus Himself got angry at times. Anger is permitted for God because it is righteous and for a just cause. But all of us must confess we do get angry without just cause often. The Good News is that Jesus, God the Son Himself, has taken the full wrath of God due us for our violation of His commandments upon Himself on the cross. Because of that fact alone we are spared eternal punishment for our times of hatred and unjust anger.

Jesus added that before we seek forgiveness from God we must first make peace with the person we are angry with. Try to remember if you are holding any hostility toward, or have failed to help, someone in need because of your anger at him. Then repent. Make peace with that person you hold ill-will against, and help him if you can. Then go to God through Christ Jesus and seek God’s forgiveness for your bitterness.

God the Holy Ghost, help me, in gratitude to Thee for Thy forgiveness in Christ Jesus, to be slow to anger. Amen

Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? Romans 2:4

Lent Is a Season of Repentance

Jesus said that God “makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good.” Some think God thus does not care how men behave. But God’s goodness to an unbeliever is not to encourage him, but meant to woo him away from sin by God’s loving kindness. God allows people to sin over and over again. They may even sin against their own bodies and bring on sickness. Yet God heals them only to have them sin again more foully than ever. With each blessing God sends them this message: ‘Will you not turn unto Me, and praise the Giver of all goodness? Will you not repent of your sin?’

Some have said God must be hard and cruel to allow all the bad things to exist on the earth. Yet the facts show just the opposite. Here is a person who has lived 40, 50, 60, 70 or 80 years without ever serving His maker. Yet God has allowed this person to be surrounded with earthly comfort. After all that, can you call God hard and cruel? Truly it can be said of God, “He is good: for His mercy endures forever.”

But what does this have to do with those who have already come to repentance and faith in Jesus? What about those who believe in Him who has taken all sins of all people to that cross and there suffered and died to atone for them before God’s justice? Let us not forget that Christ-believers, too, are still sinners in this world. Should Christians not be sorry that they have not kept their Father’s commands in their minds and served Him with their whole heart?

The more we learn of God’s goodness toward us, may it always continue to lead us to repentance, more and more.

God the Holy Ghost, I praise Thee for Thy great mercy, and ask Thee to lead me to greater repentance and faith in Christ. Amen.

But Moses asked God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” He answered, “I will certainly be with you, and this will be the sign to you that I am the one who sent you: when you bring the people out of Egypt, you will all worship God at this mountain.” Exodus 3:11-12 (CSB)

I’m Not Qualified

When God called Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt, Moses made a lot of excuses. Instead of “Here I am LORD, send me!” Moses basically said, “There’s a lot of good reasons why I shouldn’t be the one, LORD.” Since we tend to do the same thing, we should remember how God responded to Moses.

Moses’ first excuse is: “I’m not qualified.” God’s response is: “I know. That’s why I’m coming with you.” Later in the Bible Moses is called the humblest man who ever lived. So, some might think Moses is just being humble here. I’ve got my doubts. Can you ever be humble, when you’re telling the God of the Universe that He’s made a mistake?

But when does God ever search for someone who is qualified? Who could ever be qualified for what Moses was being asked to do? God is looking for someone to stand up to the king of Egypt, tell him what to do, and convince him to let his huge workforce of slaves go free.

God knew Moses wasn’t qualified. That’s why he wasn’t sending him alone. God was planning to go with him. In your life God is going to send you places too. He’s going to give you responsibilities. He might even ask you to be a pastor or a teacher. God lays different responsibilities on all of us. But He won’t ask us to get the job done without Him. He’s coming with us.

Lord God, heavenly Father, speak to us and go with us to give us courage to say yes to your calling. Amen.

Then Moses asked God, "If I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what should I tell them?" God replied to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM., This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you." God also said to Moses, "Say this to the Israelites: The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name forever; this is how I am to be remembered in every generation. Exodus 3:13-15 (CSB)

What if I Don't Have All the Answers?

Moses' second excuse why God shouldn't send him to Egypt is: what if I don't have all the answers? God's response is: True, you don't have all the answers. That's why I'll be giving them to you as we go.

Sometimes we make God too small. As if God was frantically thinking, "I just don't know what to do about the children of Israel! They're stuck in slavery and they need help! If only I could find someone who has a plan. Someone really smart who has all the answers to My questions. Oh, look! Moses! That guy looks like he's got it all figured out."

God's relationship with Moses' ancestors was never about what they could do for Him. It was always about what He could do for them. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all had problems, not answers. Most of all, the problem of a broken heart. A sinful heart that wandered away from God and His will.

God doesn't call us to be part of his family, or to serve in His Kingdom of Grace because we're so smart. He calls us because He loves us. He wants to give us the answers we need. John 1:29 says, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" John 3:18 says, "Whoever believes in Him is not condemned."

We have the most important answer. If God has already given us His word, won't He also give us all the smaller if we need them?

You alone, O Lord God, know the answers before I even ask the question. Provide me with faithful courage to face difficulties, to trust in You, and do Your will. Amen.

Moses answered, “What if they won’t believe me and will not obey me but say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you?’” The Lord asked him, “What is that in your hand?”

“A staff;” he replied. Throw it on the ground,” he said. So Moses threw it on the ground, it became a snake, and he ran from it. Exodus 4:1-3 (CSB)

They Won’t Believe Me

Moses’ third excuse why God shouldn’t send him to Egypt is: “They won’t believe me.” God’s response is: “I’ll do miracles.” Moses’ first two excuses are all about him: I’m not qualified. I don’t know enough. But his third excuse is all about other people.

When people are polled about their greatest fear, you know what tops the list? Public speaking. Why? Because we’re afraid of what other people think of us. We’re afraid of looking stupid. Or clumsy. Or weak.

And if our job has to do with influencing other people, then we get really afraid. How can I make others do the right thing? Or believe the truth? What if I don’t do a good enough job and they don’t? That’s what Moses was afraid of.

But here God reminds us who He is. He’s the God who spoke the matter and energy of the universe into being. He’s the God who said, “Let there be...” and then there was light, order, a place for life, plants, birds, fish, creatures of endless variety and complexity, planets, stars, and the human race fresh and sinless.

He does what we can’t. He does miracles. Whether it’s changing a staff into a snake, or creating faith in a heart that used to be dead. Will they believe Moses? No, they won’t. But the Lord can do what Moses cannot, and through His powerful hand, many will come to believe.

Heavenly Father, work in us the greatest miracle of faith, so that we can see your powerful works and not be afraid. Amen.

But Moses replied to the Lord, “Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent—either in the past or recently or since you have been speaking to your servant—because my mouth and my tongue are sluggish.” The Lord said to him, “Who placed a mouth on humans? Who makes a person mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go! I will help you speak and I will teach you what to say.” Exodus 4:10-12 (CSB)

I Can't Speak Well Enough

Moses' fourth excuse why God shouldn't send him to Egypt is: I can't speak well enough. God says: I made your mouth. I'll help you speak. I'll even give you the words.

I heard a story about a summer camp. It was a Christian camp. The kids went away for the week and did obstacle courses, studied the Bible, canoeing, and other fun stuff. At the end of camp they had a talent night with skits and music for the parents to see. Part of the tradition was that the kids would choose one kid to give a speech to the big room of people.

Sadly, kids are mean. They elected a young boy they had picked on the whole week. He had Down syndrome, and they thought the way he talked sounded really funny. The night came, and the talent show happened. And the room was filled with parents. The little boy with Down syndrome nervously got up to give his speech. The room was tense. Just then this nervous, Down syndrome sounding voice sounded in the room. Everyone heard him and understood the message. With his clumsy tongue and with a drawn out cadence that certainly wasn't eloquent, he said, “Jesus loves me. And I love Jesus.” And the room was wrecked. There wasn't a dry eye in the place. God had taken an ugly act, and through His word had spoken to the hearts of all present.

The Lord says, “I made your mouth. I'll help you speak. I'll even give you the words.”

O Lord, give us the words to speak and the humble heart to speak them faithfully to Your glory. Amen.

Moses said, "Please, Lord, send someone else." Then the Lord's anger burned against Moses, and he said, "Isn't Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, he is on his way now to meet you. He will rejoice when he sees you. You will speak with him and tell him what to say. I will help both you and him to speak and will teach you both what to do. Exodus 4:13-15 (CSB)

Send Someone Else

Moses gave God five excuses why God shouldn't send him to Egypt. The last excuse is the lamest. He just says: "Send someone else." But God says: "No. I'm sending you."

In my life I seldom feel in control. Most of the time I feel like I'm on a surfboard cruising down a huge wave—but this is the first time I've ever surfed. I certainly don't know what I'm doing, and this isn't going to end well. But God doesn't send His wave to hurt me, He sends it to take me where I need to go.

Why did God make me a pastor? Maybe because He knew I needed to be that close to the Word all the time, or else I wasn't going to make it. Sometimes He gives us a difficult task, so that we will benefit from it.

Moses didn't want to go. But when it was all over, he was the Bible-proclaimed, humblest man who ever lived. He was a great hero of the Old Testament. And honor of honors, he himself had been a foreshadowing of the Messiah.

Moses led the people out of slavery, through endless impossible trials, to the Promised Land. Later, Jesus would do this in a greater sense. Leading sinners out of the slavery of sin, and to God's heaven, through His death on the cross.

Thank God that He doesn't take "no" for an answer. He does not want us to sabotage ourselves, and duck out of His blessings. "No, Moses," He says. "I won't send someone else. This is for you."

Thank You Lord God that You are persistent in Your mission. Through every difficulty You work blessings. Help us to see those blessings and glorify Your name. Amen.

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Pray (or write out a prayer) for your pastor to have courage and faithfulness to his calling. If you are so inclined, tell your pastor that you have been praying for him and ask him more specifically how you can pray for him in the week ahead.
2. Think about the excuses you make for avoiding speaking up about Jesus or your faith. List out these excuses. Pray for the Lord to overcome them and give you encouragement with His promised presence.
3. Pray for yourself or anyone who is at a stage in life where they are thinking about their career in life. Pray for the Lord to call laborers into the harvest of preaching, teaching, and evangelist ministries.
4. Look up this hymn, "Hark the Voice of Jesus Crying." (TLH 496 or <https://hymnary.org/hymn/LH1941/496>). Even you are not called into the ministry, there are still many ways that you can be involved in God's mission. Note any phrases in this hymn that give examples of what you can do even if you are not a pastor or missionary.

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, know that the testing of your faith produces patience.

James 1:2-3

The Purpose of Trials

Universally people want a life that is without problems, but problems arise even for believers. There will be disease, hunger, sorrow, arguments, physical and mental illness, and the list goes on. Why would a loving God allow such things to happen to His children?

God's plan is for you to have the eternal bliss of heaven, not a life of ease and comfort on earth. When life is good, the tendency is for people to focus on the things of the earth rather than setting their minds on things above. There are times that we need trials to regain our focus. In fact, James says to rejoice in them.

The following devotions focus on the trials of the Children of Israel. They had many hardships during their forty-year sojourn in the wilderness. Their complaints are typical of any person alive today. We will focus on their Spirit-led repentance and God's abundant grace and mercy.

Heavenly Father, lead us to rejoice in trials and help us understand Your heavenly purpose. Amen.

Then they said to Moses, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness?"

Exodus 14:11

Trial #1: Danger

The Children of Israel witnessed the mighty hand of God as He visited Egypt with ten plagues. No one had seen such calamities before or since. Certainly, God gave proof of His power but also of His love as He spared His people from the worst of the plagues.

Yet soon after they left Egypt, they were caught between Pharaoh's army on one side and the Red Sea on the other. They despaired. They did so with anger and even sarcasm. They forgot the power of God that they had so recently witnessed. Moses responded by telling them, "The Lord shall fight for you." (Exodus 14:14) And He did. He opened the Red Sea for the Israelites and closed it on Pharaoh's army.

Christians face an enemy even more fierce than Pharaoh. Satan is crafty and destructive, intent on your destruction. Remember that the Lord will fight for you. You are a child of God through faith in Jesus who defeated sin, death, and the devil on the cross. Satan wants you to be afraid and despair. Be confident in Christ.

And by His footsteps led, My path I safely tread.

In spite of ills that threaten may, I walk with Jesus all the way.

The Lutheran Hymnal 413:5

“Our soul loathes this worthless bread.” Numbers 21:5

Trial #2: Lack of Food

The Lord graciously provided food for the Children of Israel in a wilderness where none was available. The LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you.” (Exodus 16:4) He sent them Manna every morning. Manna is described as tasting like wafers made with honey. Certainly, something that was enjoyable to eat. In addition, He sent quail every evening. This was their diet during their forty-year sojourn.

However, they became dissatisfied with it. Would we not feel the same way? Consider having your favorite meal day after day for an entire month or an entire year. What would your reaction be?

God supplies our needs in the quantity and quality of His choosing. Some have much and some have little according to what is in their best interest as God sees it. The Father’s goal is that His children would have the eternal joy of heaven, not a life of ease during this temporary life. Focusing on the spiritual rather than physical needs leads to satisfaction. Focusing on the eternal rather than the temporary leads to hopefulness.

God provides something much better than the miracle of Manna. He gives us Living Bread from heaven in the person of Jesus Christ who feeds our soul. Knowing that Jesus provides forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation leads us to trust in His provision of our earthly needs.

Heavenly Father, lead us to be content and appreciative with what You have given us. Amen.

Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Exodus 15:23

Trial #3: Lack of Water

As the Children of Israel traveled in the wilderness, they came upon a crisis by any definition. There was no water available. There were millions of people that were thirsty. When they finally came upon water, it was undrinkable. They complained against God as we likely would. Moses interceded for them and God made the bitter waters sweet.

How do we handle a crisis? With worry? Complaint? How many times have we witnessed the love of God in our lives, but still find ourselves doubting His goodness? No doubt more often than we would care to admit.

God reminds us that He and His love are unchangeable. He always wants the best for us. The best for us is to be with Him in heaven, and God does not want anything getting in the way. We know the love of God is genuine and deep. The same God who sacrificed His Son for sinners to save souls will lovingly provide for all our needs.

Lord, forgive us when we complain. Lead us to trust in Your goodness. Amen.

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us." Exodus 32:1

Trial #4: Perceived Abandonment by God

As Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the law of God, the people chose another god. They created a golden calf to replace the God who created them. They perceived that God had abandoned them. By all rights God could have destroyed them for such disobedience, and in fact He threatened this very thing. However, He was true to His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and relented. He chose to remain with His people.

There are times that we may feel abandoned by God. We may despair when our health is compromised. We may become overwhelmed by grief when a loved one dies. We may wither in the face of adversity or financial struggles. In such times, we are tempted to find a different source of solace and confidence, replacing God in the number one position in our hearts. However, God is faithful in His promises to you. Jesus says, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20) Through the apostle Paul He also says, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself." (2 Timothy 2:13) Why turn anywhere else than such a God as this?

Lord, give us such a faith as this;
And then whate'er may come,
We'll taste e'en now the hallowed bliss
Of an eternal home.

The Lutheran Hymnal 396:6

Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." Exodus 34:5-7

See God's Glory in the Face of Sin

Have you ever been disappointed when you got to this point in the narrative? Moses had asked to see God's glory. God told him plainly, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live." (Exodus 33:20) Yet God promised, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen." (Verses 21-23) Moses got up early the next morning, eager with anticipation, and went up the mountain to see God!

When I was young, I was also excited to hear about what Moses saw. What does God's glory look like? But Moses doesn't describe what he saw, only what he heard. Yet, when you know the holy wrath of God against your sin and you hear God say He wanted to destroy His sinful people and make a great nation from Moses, then there is nothing more glorious than this description of God's grace and mercy. This week we want to learn to see God's glory in this revelation of His nature.

O most gracious LORD, show us your glory in your grace and mercy in the face of our sinfulness. Fill us with joy and gladness in your glory. Amen.

And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious.” Exodus 34:6

See the Glory of God’s Grace and Mercy

It had only been a month since God spoke His commandments in the hearing of all the people, beginning with the first, “You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.” (Exodus 20:3-5) All the people promised to keep these commands. Yet now, right there in the presence of God before the mountain, they made a golden calf to worship. They were dancing around it and calling it the god who brought them out of Egypt.

God’s anger burned hot. He told Moses to leave Him alone that He might consume them and then He would start over and make a great nation out of Moses. (Exodus 32:7-10) When we know the hot anger of the Lord against sin; when we see how, because of the sins of the people, God destroyed the whole world in a flood, and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in fire and brimstone; when we know that even our own hatred of a brother makes us guilty of murder before God (1 John 3:15) and our anger and derogatory words towards another makes us worthy of the fires of hell (Matthew 5:21-22), then there is nothing more amazing and reassuring than knowing that the LORD God is “merciful and gracious.” He would much rather forgive than punish. He has compassion and pity on our lost estate.

Both of these Hebrew words are used only of God. Only He is truly gracious as He chose to sacrifice His own Son for our sins instead of punishing us. Call upon God for His grace and mercy and you will see the glory of His forgiveness in Christ.

O God, be merciful to me, the sinner. Let me see and know your grace and mercy. Amen.

And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering."

Exodus 34:6

See God's Glorious Longsuffering

We are usually ready to forgive and bear with people if they wrong us once or twice. Peter very generously suggested even seven times. But do any of us really forgive seventy times seven times? (Matthew 18:22) Not even close. We quickly tire of such abuse and turn away from an aggressor.

The most amazing evidence of God's grace and mercy is that He went with His rebellious people into the wilderness. God was so angry with Israel that He wanted to destroy them. Moses pleaded for them and God relented. "But," He said, "I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people." (Exodus 33:3)

Moses pleaded again saying, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us?" (Exodus 33:15-16) Again God listened and promised to go with them.

The fact that God is gracious and merciful does not suggest that God does not care about our sins. He definitely does! But God is longsuffering! He bears with our abuse.

Even when Israel refused to go in and take possession of the Promised Land and accused God of evil intent in delivering them from their slavery in Egypt and God banished them to 40 years in the harsh wilderness, God still went with them into the desert. He endured their abuse, their sin and rebellion time and time again.

Oh rejoice in the longsuffering character of God's grace! How much abuse have you heaped upon your loving, faithful God? Yet He has borne it patiently; Christ actually bore those sins in His own body on the cross. He did so that we "might live for righteousness." (1 Peter 2:24)

Dear Father, we confess that we have often abused Your longsuffering mercy. Be merciful Lord and move us to rejoice and praise You for Your grace with a life of joyful obedience. Amen.

And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.”

Exodus 36:6

See the Glory of God’s Abundant Goodness

Let’s say someone has seriously wronged you and you say you have forgiven them. Do you treat them differently than before? Do you show kindness and goodness? If you do treat them differently, then have you truly forgiven them?

God proved His long-suffering grace and mercy by continuing to abound in goodness and truth. When Israel was trapped at the Red Sea, they didn’t pray for God’s deliverance. They accused God of bringing them out simply to die in the wilderness. Yet God was good to them and provided one of the most dramatic, miraculous rescues of all time. When they ran out of water and food instead of trusting God and calling on Him, they again complained and blamed God. Yet God abounded in goodness and provided enough food and water in the desert for them all.

For forty years the people grumbled and complained, they rebelled and disobeyed, God chastised them to teach them, but He always forgave their “iniquity and transgression and sin.” He continued to show His forgiveness and ongoing goodness to them.

Isn’t your life also abounding with God’s goodness and truth? That certainly is not because you have been so good to the Lord that He can’t help but bless you. It is only because of God’s grace and mercy, His long-suffering nature and His desire to show you His goodness and truth. Let us rejoice and praise Him for His goodness.

Dear Father, we thank you that in spite of our many sins, you bear with us, forgive us and show us Your goodness every day. We praise you for Jesus’ sake that Your “goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.” Amen (Psalm 23:6)

“By no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.” Exodus 34:7

See the Glory of God’s Holiness

God is gracious and merciful. He is longsuffering. He wants nothing more than to forgive, to heal, to restore and to save. But He also is holy! And that’s good! The fact that He is holy means that He cannot go back on His word or break a promise. His holiness is the source of His faithfulness.

However, for those who despise and reject His forgiveness by continuing in their sin, He cannot clear them of their guilt. His holiness prevents Him from ever excusing, overlooking, or clearing even a single sin. Every sin, even eating a piece of forbidden fruit, is a breaking of God’s law and must be punished. However, in His grace and mercy He has provided a substitute—His own Son, Jesus Christ. He bore the punishment for our sins. God’s holiness guarantees that He will NEVER punish those who receive Christ’s sacrifice in their place by repentant faith. They are covered with Christ’s righteousness.

Those who do not receive the sacrifice of Christ and His forgiveness by faith remain in their guilt and sin and will suffer God’s punishment for their own sins. Therefore may we all respond to this revelation of God’s glory the way Moses did. “So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped. Then he said, “If now I have found grace in Your sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray, go among us, even though we are a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance.” (Exodus 34:8-9) Rejoice that God is holy and will do as He promises.

Dear Father, I confess that I too, am stiff-necked and stubbornly sin against you. Forgive me, I pray, for the sake of Jesus’ sacrifice in my place. Take me as your inheritance and go with me throughout my life and lead me safely to my eternal home with you. Amen.

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read Psalm 106 to see a wonderful description of God's longsuffering grace and mercy. The Psalmist recounts God's faithful dealing with His rebellious people in the wilderness and God's faithfulness in spite of their great sin. Consider how your life has been like Israel in the wilderness and how God has been faithful to you through it all. Write down any phrases or promises that stand out to you or that apply positively also to your life.

The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?"... One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.
John 1:37-38a,40 (ESV)

Can I Help You?

Our theme this week is following Jesus, and including accounts of some who left things behind to follow Jesus.

Today we learn about two disciples who were students of John the Baptist. As they stood with their teacher near the Jordan River, they saw John pointing out a man walking by. He said, "Look! The Lamb of God!" It was the same thing that their teacher had said the day before. This man was the Lamb chosen by God to bear the sins of the world. They left John behind and followed Jesus.

Jesus didn't need anyone to tell him that there were two men following Him. He turned and asked them what they were seeking. He then invited them to come with Him to the place He was staying. They left John the Baptist and went to follow Jesus for the next 3 years. They came to know that Jesus was the Son of God.

Andrew and John believed that they were following the Messiah, even though they didn't fully understand what the Messiah had come to do. We wouldn't know either, except that we have the words that He spoke in the Gospels. It is in the Scriptures we learn that Jesus is indeed the Christ of God and the Savior of Humankind.

Jesus stops and turns to us in His Word, and asks, "Can I help you?" Then He does.

Then cleansed be ev'ry Christian breast
And furnished for so great a Guest.
Yea, let us each our hearts prepare
For Christ to come and enter there

The Lutheran Hymnal 63:1

And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. Matthew 4:21-22 (ESV)

Something Smells Fishy

They were engaged in the family business when Jesus found them again. Peter and John were casting a net into the sea when Jesus called them to follow Him. They left their nets and followed Jesus down the beach. They came upon their fishing partners, James and John, who were mending their nets with their father Zebedee. They too left their boat along with their father, and followed Jesus.

I wonder what their father, Zebedee, thought about it. Did he call out, “Where are you two going? We have work to do! Nets don’t mend themselves!” Jesus’ word comes with power. Jesus’ word enables those who hear to arise and follow Him. Which is why we don’t go about fishing for men with our own baits and lures. Our evangelism plans aren’t successful because we’ve carefully thought them out and figured out how to get past the defenses of other men. Our plans can only be successful if we speak the Word of Christ.

We have all been given a special occupation by the Savior Jesus, to be fishers of men. We are to cast His Word into the sea of our world and let Christ draw men to Himself. The message of Christ smells sweet to those who have come to see themselves for who they are – hopelessly lost sinners. There will be those who will not listen. It is not our concern to convince them with logic and reason. It is for us to present Jesus to them, the Savior of Sinners, and let Him catch them for time and eternity by His grace and love.

If you cannot speak like angels,
 If you cannot preach like Paul,
 You can tell the love of Jesus,
 You can say He died for all.
 If you cannot rouse the wicked
 With the Judgment’s dread alarms,
 You can lead the little children
 To the Savior’s waiting arms.

The Lutheran Hymnal 496:2

After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me." And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.

Luke 5:27-28 (ESV)

The Only Following that Really Pays Off

I don't think that Matthew was the favorite among Jesus' disciples. He probably dressed better than any of the fishermen who followed Jesus. He probably smelled better too. Most of all, he was despised for his former occupation as a tax collector. Tax collectors were considered scumbags by the people of Jesus day because some of them collected a little extra to pad their own pockets.

When Jesus called Matthew/Levi to follow Him, he left behind his life as a tax collector. He left the tax booth that he had built for himself. He left his soft bed to sleep wherever Jesus stopped for the night. He sat, not collecting taxes, but wisdom from the mouth of the Son of God. He went from being hated by all, to being loved by Jesus.

Following Jesus results in feeding on the bread of life and obtaining the gift of forgiveness and life eternal. Following Jesus doesn't come with piles of cash, but we know by faith that our Father provides all that we need for this life and then some more. Following Jesus isn't without heartbreak from time to time, but Jesus' love is real, lasting, and following Him leads to eternal life. No one can buy that.

Feed Thy children, God most holy,
Comfort sinners poor and lowly;

O Thou Bread of Life from heaven,
Bless the food Thou hast given!

As these gifts the body nourish,
May our souls in graces flourish

Till with saints in heav'nly splendor
At Thy feast due thanks we render.

The Lutheran Hymnal 659

And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight." And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way. Mark 10:51-52 ESV

The First to See

He was a man dependent on others to get to his place each day. Bartimaeus the son of Timaeus was a blind man from Jericho, who was sitting by the road begging when Jesus came by, surrounded by a crowd. He couldn't have followed the crowd very well, much less followed Jesus. What he could do was cry out to Jesus, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Bartimaeus saw Jesus by faith. He called Jesus the Son of David and asked Him to have mercy on him. He saw more in this traveling preacher than some. It may be that he believed Jesus to be the Messiah, the Promised Savior. The extent of his faith is unknown, but that he believed Jesus could help him is indisputable.

What did he want? It seems almost a stupid question. He wanted to see with his own eyes again. He heard Jesus say, "Go. Your faith has made you well." Then immediately he received his sight. The first person he saw in his new life was Jesus. He left behind his life as a blind beggar and followed Jesus.

We are born spiritually blind, unable to see and understand what God has done for us in His Son. God opened our eyes and cleansed us of sin at baptism. We've been following Jesus ever since, seeing Him better and better through His Word. One day we will close our eyes in death and then open them again to see Him. Now we follow, one day He will stop, turn, and embrace us.

**He comes, from thickest films of vice To clear the mental ray
And on the eye-balls of the blind To pour celestial day.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 66:3

While he was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, “My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.” And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples.

Matthew 9:18-19 (ESV)

Jesus Followed Him

Jesus met a man who was the ruler of the synagogue, a man of authority, a man the people respected. The ruler came to Jesus not to demand, but to fall down at His feet. As a father, my heart breaks when I place myself in his sandals. His daughter was dead. There was nothing he could do for her, but if Jesus would come and put His hand on her, she would live again. He was sure of it.

The question was, would Jesus follow him back to the house? Would this busy man who had places to be and people to see turn aside and come to his home? Yes, Jesus got up and followed Jairus. Jesus’ disciples got up and followed Jesus. In faith, we follow this little procession. We witness Jesus take the girl tenderly by the hand and raise her from death.

On this occasion, Jesus followed a man in need. He in mercy gave the man what he didn’t deserve. He overcame death for him and gave his little girl back alive. As those who follow Jesus, we know that following Him results in life eternal. The day is coming when all who are in the graves will hear his voice and rise up again at His voice. It’s why those first two disciples followed Jesus and left John. It’s why Peter and Andrew, James and John and Levi left occupations, nets and stacks of money behind. It’s why the formerly blind man got up and followed Him.

He loves me and He has power over sin, death and the grave. Nothing is more important than following Him.

**Visit, then, this soul of mine, Pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
Fill me, Radiancy Divine, Scatter all my unbelief.
More and more Thyself display, Shining to the perfect day.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 359:3

For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. Matthew 15:19

What is the Old Adam?

You are driving down the highway when suddenly your car makes an awful noise, the “Check Engine” light comes on, and smoke starts billowing from underneath the hood. You pull over, but instead of opening the hood and trying to find the source of the problem, you merely kick the tires, check the body for dents and scratches, maybe look to see if the muffler is still attached. Satisfied that everything looks alright, you continue on your way. You probably will not make it very far.

Few people would be so foolish with automobiles, but so many are prone to do a similar thing in spiritual matters. People are aware of sin, but they don’t open the hood and look inside. It is a great temptation to lay the blame of sin on outside influences—our environment, our society. But Jesus teaches us that the problem of sin can be pin-pointed to each person’s heart. We each have what is called the Old Adam within us. This is our sinful nature which leads us to do sinful things. It is deep-seated in our hearts and is capable of producing every kind of evil.

Now, if my car started to act funny, I would pull over and have a look under the hood. But since I’m not too knowledgeable about its inner workings, it is unlikely I would be able to find the problem. That’s true of us in regard to our Old Adam. We could hardly diagnose the full problem of sin if Christ did not show us exactly what the issue was. He shows us the heart of the matter so that it can be fixed. He shows us how the sinful nature in us is such a big problem that we have no way to fix it ourselves. But Jesus can and has fixed it with His perfect life and innocent death. Our focus this week is the wonderful way our God does away with our Old Adam and creates in us a New Man.

Holy Spirit, show us the severity of our sin and show us our Savior that we may trust in Him. Amen.

Since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him. Colossians 3:9-10

What is to Happen to the Old Adam?

In Matthew 22, Jesus tells a parable about the wedding feast in the kingdom of heaven. At the end of the parable, the king hosting the feast finds a man who is not wearing the proper wedding garment. The man is swiftly thrown into the outer darkness.

We cannot enter the kingdom of heaven without new clothes. Our old clothes are not acceptable to our heavenly Father. In Colossians, Paul tells us that our old clothing is our Old Adam. It is a uniform of sorts. The Old Adam is the uniform of a sinner. When we wear our Old Adam, we do all the evil deeds of those who will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. We need to daily take off our Old Adam and put on the New Man. But we are more likely to change our own skin than to change our natures. This has to be a work of God. It is God who changes us, renewing us according to His image.

Scripture and our Confessions also speak of this process as killing the Old Adam. That sounds violent, and for good reason. To give us unblemished new robes, Jesus had to put on all the Old Adams of the world and suffer and die for all our evil deeds. By that sacrificial death our sins have been forgiven. The Old Adam has died. In Jesus' resurrection we receive robes washed in His own blood which, when the wedding feast commences in heaven, will be the only clothes we will ever wear for all eternity.

Holy Spirit, change me daily out of my sinful Old Adam. Renew me with the clothing of the New Man created in Your own image. Amen.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise.

Psalms 51:17

In What Way is the Old Adam to be Killed?

The waters of Lake Michigan are usually quite chilly. You have to steel your nerves before taking the plunge, yet you get used to it quickly. Then once you come out and warm up in the sun, it's awfully hard to get back in. Kids don't seem to notice this. My kids think nothing of going in and coming out dozens of times.

We should have that same childlike attitude when it comes to repeatedly plunging into the waters of our baptism. Baptism was the moment for most Christians when their Old Adam was first drowned and the Holy Spirit first created in them a New Man. Yet, since the Old Man still clings to us—since we still sin daily—we need to keep diving into those saving waters.

Martin Luther explains in the Small Catechism that baptism means “that the Old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition (sorrow over sin) and repentance (turning from sin to Christ) and die with all sins and evil desires.” Though King David lived before the institution of baptism, he knew God loved the sacrifice of sinners admitting their daily sins and turning to Him for salvation.

It's always worth it once you jump into one of the Great Lakes. How much more refreshing is it to wash away your Old Adam in the living waters of baptism! Sure, sorrow over and confession of sins is painful, but nothing compares to the comfort God gives to broken and contrite hearts for the sake of the death and resurrection of His Son. Dive into the waters of your baptism every day!

Holy Spirit, remind me every day of my sinfulness so that I may turn to You for help. Remind me daily also of my baptism when all my sins were washed away. Amen.

And be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:23-24

What is the New Man?

What's the difference between a redeemed child of God and someone who doesn't believe in Christ's redemption? For us humans who cannot look into the heart, it can be difficult to tell the difference. We see people who vocally deny the existence of God, yet they don't appear to be manifest sinners. You may know an unbeliever yourself who doesn't struggle at all with some of the temptations that plague you the most.

So many irreligious people may seem to live righteous and holy lives, but what you see is not true righteousness and holiness. They are, just as Paul says the Ephesians Christians once were, dead in their trespasses and sins. They still wear the Old Adam, and all their works of righteousness are like filthy rags to God.

But when you have put off the Old Adam, God clothes you in the New Man. The New Man is a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17) It is a complete renewal of the mind that causes us to think and act according to God. Colossians 3:10 says that this New Man is none other than the restored image of God in which Adam and Eve were created before the fall into sin.

We must kill the Old Adam every day because it still clings to us, and we must call upon the Holy Spirit to daily renew the New Man in us. One day, however, when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again, the image of God will be fully, perfectly and eternally restored in us. Until then, we can daily get a foretaste of true righteousness and holiness in the forgiveness of our sins.

Holy Spirit, cause a New Man to daily appear and arise in me, so that I may live eternally before God in righteousness and purity. Amen.

And He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

2 Corinthians 5:15

How does the New Man Affect Us?

No one will ever be able to truthfully accuse God of being unclear about what His will is for people. Not only is His law fully laid out in the Bible and summarized plainly in the Ten Commandments, but He has also laid His law in the hearts of all people so that everyone has at least a basic concept of right and wrong.

Despite that knowledge and despite our natural desire to avoid the wrath of God, every person who lives according to the Old Man is entirely unable to do God's will. That's because the Old Adam only ever lives for himself, and his self is only evil continually. (Genesis 6:5)

But the New Man, created anew daily, does do the will of God because he doesn't live for himself. He lives for Christ who died for him and rose again. When we look at Jesus, we see the one person who was always eager to do God's will. He gladly denied Himself the sinful pleasures of things prohibited by God and rejoiced to do those good things God requires of mankind.

When we put on the New Man, we are actually putting on Christ Himself. So all His righteous work and perfect holiness are credited to us by the Father who is reconciled to us by Jesus' atoning death. This also makes us eager to do what God wants us to do. We do this not only out of thankfulness to God, but because we are truly living a new life, with a new mind and heart. May our Old Man always die everyday. Long live the New Man to the glory of our God!

Holy Spirit, teach us to ever walk in the newness of life, following our Savior to the glories of heaven. Amen.

“Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour?’ But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.” John 12:27-28

Holy Monday

Do you have a “bucket list” (things to do before you ‘kick the bucket’)? As we count down the days to Jesus’ death (today is T-4), we will look at His bucket list. Some people want to use their final days to travel. Jesus was determined to travel to the cross!

My wife and I grew up in Arizona. Thus, her boss asked her about visiting the Grand Canyon. He told her that he will be taking a helicopter tour through it. My wife agreed that a helicopter tour would be ideal. Standing on the rim of the canyon, “it’s just too big to get your head around.” She actually enjoyed other smaller canyons more, because then you can grasp their beauty. The Grand Canyon is just too big (unless, perhaps, you travel into it).

Our sins are like that. They separate us from God with a gulf bigger than the Grand Canyon. And most people don’t even realize how big that gulf truly is. I once had someone tell me that the more he studied the Bible, the more sinful he became. Actually, we are all sin-full from birth, but we don’t even realize it until we study God’s Word. Then we see the canyon. A canyon nobody can cross. Nobody, that is, except the God-man Jesus. He was determined to make that journey to “cross” out our sins.

Our text makes it clear that Jesus’ soul was indeed “troubled” by the thought of the cross. Yet he knew that this was His whole purpose in life: to glorify God by becoming our vicarious sacrifice. God assured Him: “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.” May we never tire of worshiping Jesus for His life, death, and resurrection for our salvation. May we also glorify Him with our daily walk of life—wherever we travel.

Wash me and take away each stain;

Let nothing of my sin remain.

For cleansing, though it be through pain,

Christ Crucified, I come.

The Lutheran Hymnal 390:3

For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days.

Mark 13:19-20

Holy Tuesday

People with a bucket list sometimes try to prolong their days. They fight off death as long as possible and at any cost (I knew a guy who tried bee-sting therapy). As Jesus approaches His death (T-3), He does not try to prolong it. In fact, as we will see tomorrow, Jesus makes it happen on God's time-table. What I find very interesting is that not only did Jesus accept His fate, but He also tells us that He has shortened the days for the sake of the elect!

On Tuesday evening of Holy Week, after a day of teaching at the temple, the disciples commented on the beauty of that temple. Jesus told them plainly that it would soon be destroyed. When they asked about when that would happen and the signs accompanying it, Jesus gave His famous Olivet Discourse.

Not all are agreed when exactly Jesus makes the transition (in the text) from the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem, to the destruction of the world at the end of time. But one thing is clear: both events would have "tribulation." You can read a history book to see how ugly things became in 70 AD, when the temple was destroyed. You can read the Bible to see how ugly things will get before the Last Day.

Jesus doesn't want you to worry about such things. Rather, He wants you, with sober judgment, to trust God to take care of you through them. He was willing to destroy His own body—the true temple—to save us from our sins. He also knows what we are going through in our daily lives. And He promises to cut the days short so that we can sooner enjoy life with Him forever in heaven.

**O God, be with us, for the night is falling;
For Thy protection we to Thee are calling;
Beneath Thy shadow to our rest we yield us;
Thou, Lord, wilt shield us.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 556:1

After two days it was the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put Him to death. But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people." Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him.
Mark 14:1-2, 10-11

Holy Wednesday

Many people have on their bucket list spending time with family, friends, and loved ones. As Jesus looks to His own death (T-2), He does spend time with His disciples. One of those disciples would betray Him.

It is interesting to note that the "chief priests"—people you would expect to be of high moral character—wanted to "put Him to death." They knew that even the common people would recognize their malice and uproar, so their plan was to wait until after the Passover Festival before murdering Jesus.

Jesus had other plans. He knew that He must die soon. In fact, Jesus says to Judas in John 13:27, "What you are about to do, do more quickly." (EHV) Jesus seems to force Judas and the chief priests to move up their time-table!

We have a tendency to love those who love us, and those who hate us. Some plan revenge ("best served cold") and others ignore them in hopes that "they will just leave me alone." Jesus did neither. Jesus sought earnestly to warn them of their sin, and tried to get them to repent. Even when given Judas' kiss, Jesus asked him, "Friend, why have you come?" (Matthew 26:50)

The truth of the matter is that Jesus came to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Jesus came to save sinners like us.

Whence come these sorrows, whence this mortal anguish?
It is my sins for which Thou, Lord, must languish;
Yea, all the wrath, the woe, Thou dost inherit,
This I do merit.

The Lutheran Hymnal 143:3

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Maundy Thursday

Many people have on their bucket list trying new food. As Jesus looked to His own death (T-1), He offered new food. But he offered more than food.

In Luke 22:19 Jesus said, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." Notice that Jesus did not say "will be given" but "is given." This suggests that the process was already taking place. The same is true with His blood which "is shed for many." As we mentioned yesterday, Jesus was following God's time-table. His death was already in the works. He would soon be arrested, spend the night in a mock trial, and by the next morning, He would be crucified.

This Passover was more than just His "last meal." It was His "covenant," (His last will and testament). Jesus bequeaths "the forgiveness of sins" through this sacrament. It is true that we have forgiveness even without the supper. However the Lord's Supper offers assurance. It not only is it a personal covenant of forgiveness, placed in your hands and mouth, but it is also a "remembrance." Every time we commune, we vividly recall Jesus' passion. It is also a "proclamation." Our actions confess that we believe that Jesus gave His body and shed His blood for us for the forgiveness of our sins.

Is this for me? I am forgiven and set free!
I do believe That I receive
His very body and His blood. O taste and see—the Lord is good.

Worship Supplement 755:5

So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

John 19:30

Good Friday

At 9:00 A.M., the time of the morning sacrifice, Jesus was crucified. To everyone's amazement, He said "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). He offered forgiveness even to the thief on the cross when He assured him "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." His concern for His mother was evident when Jesus gave her to John's care.

At noon, the sun stopped shining, and Jesus cried in agony "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46). To fulfill Psalm 69:21, Jesus said "I thirst!" But He said this "knowing that all things were now accomplished" (John 19:28). Thus, Jesus said "It is finished," and died at 3:00 P.M., the time of the evening sacrifice.

The Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV) Study Bible has a fantastic note regarding the words "it is finished":

This was a cry of victory. Jesus' triumphant cry indicates that he had completed all the redeeming work he had set out to do and that all Scripture had been fulfilled (verse 28). As High Priest and Lamb of God, Jesus had completely paid the full price for all sin and for all sinners, and as a result the door to heaven was open. This was demonstrated by the event that immediately followed Jesus' cry. The temple curtain, which showed that sinners were barred from access to the holy God, was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). The door to heaven was now open. The Greek verb (tetelestai), which is the perfect tense, indicates that the work of salvation was complete, with results that continue to eternal life. Jesus' triumphant cry is the declaration that the debt of sin has been paid in full. The tearing of the temple veil was the receipt that the payment had been received and accepted. The resurrection provided further testimony.

O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us and grant us Thy peace. Amen.

The Lutheran Hymnal, page 28

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

Jesus' Resurrection: An Historical Fact!

Is Jesus' resurrection an historical fact or is it merely pious fiction? Was that resurrection a physical event, or was it merely spiritual? Those are questions Christians have had to answer since the first century. Thirty years after Jesus' bodily resurrection people within the Christian congregation in Corinth were denying the possibility of any bodily resurrection from the dead, including the resurrection of Jesus. Today it is not uncommon for Christians, including trained pastors and seminary professors, to deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus. How sad that two-thousand years after the fact, we still find it necessary to defend the historical truth of Jesus' resurrection!

There really should be no doubts in anyone's mind that Jesus' resurrection is an historical fact! As Paul points out there were many eyewitnesses to this fact. He mentions six: Jesus appeared personally after His resurrection to Cephas (Peter); to the twelve disciples; to over five hundred brethren in Galilee, the greater part of them still living when Paul wrote these words; to James; to all the apostles; and, finally, to Paul himself (1 Corinthians 15:5-8).

If Jesus were only seen by one person following His resurrection, we might have reason to doubt that person's account. One person can be mistaken about what he believes he has seen or heard, but multiple eyewitness accounts verify something as being factual! That is why both Paul and the four evangelists of our new testament were all moved by the Spirit to record multiple eyewitness accounts. Our Savior God wants us to be certain that Jesus' resurrection is an historical fact! He does not want us to doubt that Jesus now lives, that Jesus now rules, and that Jesus now saves! Without doubt Jesus arose from the dead! Hallelujah and Amen!

Jesus lives! To Him my heart draws with ever new delight.
Earthly vanities, depart, hinder not my heavenward flight.
Let this spirit ever rise to its Magnet in the skies. Amen.

The Lutheran Hymnal 188:5

If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins! 1 Corinthians 15:17

Jesus' Resurrection: A Vital Truth!

How important is the truth that Jesus arose from the dead? Jesus' resurrection is a vital truth! Indeed, Paul informs us that "if Christ is not risen" our faith as Christians is "futile," that is false and worthless! We would still be left in sin!

Our Christian faith is based upon a promise by God, first voiced in the garden. There God promised to send the Seed of the woman whose heel Satan would bruise, but who in turn would crush Satan's head (Genesis 3:15). Had Jesus not risen from the dead, Satan would have won that battle for our souls, but that is not the case!

The Bible, which is the inspired and inerrant Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21), contains more than three hundred prophecies foretelling Jesus' person and work. Among those three hundred are powerful prophecies, which the apostles cited under the Spirit's guidance as foretelling His resurrection.

David says the LORD told His promised Savior: "You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance" (Psalm 2:7-8). Paul cites these verses and specifically David's use of the word "begotten" to refer to Jesus' resurrection (Acts 13:33-34). Paul, then, cites more of David's words to confirm the vital truth of Jesus' resurrection: "You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption" (Psalm 16:10).

Jesus' resurrection was foretold in Old Testament times, so that when it happened, we might know that our Savior God had fulfilled His plan for our salvation! God does not want us to live in fear or with guilt. No, His "perfect love" is intended to cast out all fear from our hearts, so that we might live before Him with confidence! Indeed, Jesus' resurrection is a vital truth for you and for me!

**Jesus lives! I know full well naught from me His love shall sever.
Life nor death nor powers of hell part me now from Christ forever.
God will be a sure Defense; This shall be my confidence. Amen.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 201:4

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.” 1 Corinthians 15:22

Jesus' Resurrection: An Assurance for Us All!

What happens after you die? Is that the end of your existence, or is there something beyond the grave? Those can be and often are troubling questions for many in our world. That need not be the case for the Christian who has been led by the Spirit to believe in our risen Savior! Paul assures us that “in Christ all shall be made alive!” Paul first mentions death’s source—the sin of Adam, our first father. In the garden Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and eat of the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:6). Because of that act both sin and death entered the world, infecting and affecting every human being ever born into this world.

But Jesus Christ came to the rescue. Because of our heavenly Father’s love, Jesus came to live and to die for us. He had the power to lay down His life, but also had the power to take that life back again (John 10:18). This He did on the third day when He arose from the dead. Thereby He destroyed death’s hold on us human beings. He destroyed Satan’s power to use the fear of death to bind our human hearts and minds (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Now, even though we may die, we do so, knowing that Jesus, as Paul states, “has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20). Our bodies will indeed be placed in a grave but will not remain there forever. They will be raised from the dead to live forever in God’s presence, just as Jesus promised. When He stated to Martha after her brother Lazarus’ death: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). Jesus’ resurrection is an assurance for us all!

**Jesus lives! The vict’ry’s won!
Death no longer can appall me;
Jesus lives! Death’s reign is done!
From the grave Christ will recall me.
Brighter scenes will then commence;
this shall be my confidence. Amen.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 201:1

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52

Jesus' Resurrection: A Change to Incorruptibility!

When Jesus called for the stone covering Lazarus' grave to be removed, Martha objected: "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days" (John 11:39). We all know it, even if we have never experienced it: dead bodies decay. They produce a distinctive foul odor. They eventually dissolve and turn to dust.

But all that will change when Jesus returns and calls all His departed believers to rise from their graves and join those saints who are still alive as they all meet Jesus in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Then and forever thereafter there will be no corruption. As Paul indicates: "The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. ... And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man" (1 Corinthians 15:42, 49).

What a marvelous life we will then live! "There will be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things (will) have passed away!" (Revelation 21:4). Our bodies will no longer face cancer or heart disease or any illness of any kind! There will be no more glasses, or hearing aids, or canes, or walkers! All those things will be in the past, never to be considered again!

Whereas Jesus must warn us of moth, rust, and thieves in this world (Matthew 6:20), He will have no need to do so in the next, for our risen Savior will walk among us bringing us light, life, joy, and supreme happiness! My dear friends, Jesus' resurrection will lead to a change to incorruptibility! One can hardly wait!

Then take comfort and rejoice, for His members Christ will cherish. Fear not, they will hear His voice; dying they shall never perish; For the very grave is stirred when the trumpet's blast is heard. Amen.

The Lutheran Hymnal 206:8

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! 1 Corinthians 15:57

Jesus' Resurrection: A Certain Victory!

Victory or defeat? Those two possibilities confront us throughout our lives. This is true whether we are talking about something as seemingly insignificant as a grade school basketball game or something as earth-shatteringly significant as the outcome of a world war.

Thankfully, we do not have to live in suspense when it comes to the outcome of God's plan for our eternal salvation. Paul concludes this great resurrection chapter of 1 Corinthians by pointing out that Jesus' resurrection leads to a certain victory for every believer!

This is not a victory earned, but rather a victory given by God's grace and based on Jesus' redemptive work. This work was planned in eternity. Paul writes: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Ephesians 1:3-4). This work was completed in time when Jesus came "not...to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). He ransomed us on Calvary's cross and, thereafter, cried out victoriously: "It is finished!" (John 19:30)

Three days later the success of that great work was certified by God, when He restored His Son to life, thereby assuring us of A CERTAIN VICTORY! That victory becomes ours through faith. Paul testifies: "It (the blessings of Christ's victory) shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:24-25).

May our lives be filled with thanksgiving to our gracious God and our Savior Jesus Christ for that certain victory!

**Thanks to Thee, O Christ victorious! Thanks to Thee, O Lord of Life!
Death hath now no power o'er us, Thou hast conquered in the strife.
Thanks because Thou didst arise and hast opened Paradise!
None can fully sing the glory of the resurrection story! Amen.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 207:2

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth... being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. Acts 2:22-24

Christ Is Risen

Every year, almost exactly 50 days after Easter, we celebrate Pentecost. It was no different 50 days after the first Easter. But that Pentecost, while a regular celebration day on the historic Jewish calendar, was a first for Jesus’ initial disciples. It was the day they experienced the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to send the Holy Spirit upon them in a very special way—with very special blessings.

A sound like “a mighty rushing wind” attracted a big crowd. Then Peter preached the first sermon of the New Testament era. He emphasized how Jesus rose from the tomb in which His crucified body had been laid. Not only had that earth-shaking event taken place only some seven weeks earlier, it also emphatically declared Jesus to be the Son of God and the Messiah. (Acts 2:36)

Many who heard Peter’s Pentecost preaching that day, were led by the Holy Spirit to repent of their sins and turn to Jesus for forgiveness. Many of them became members of that first Christian congregation in Jerusalem. Others returned to their homes throughout the Mediterranean world with the good news that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the world’s Redeemer. All of them joined Peter and their fellow Christ-believers in bearing witness to the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead. All who trust in Him could be confident that their sins have been forgiven.

The same Spirit who worked through Peter’s preaching of Jesus’ resurrection works through the same message today, so that we too would trust in Christ our Lord. Now we join those first believers in telling others how the resurrection of the crucified Jesus is the best good news ever. It changes everything.

Holy Spirit, use the wondrous fact of Jesus’ Resurrection to move me to speak of this great good news to others. Amen.

“Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.” Acts 3:12-15

He Lives To Bless With His Love

In the days shortly after Pentecost Peter and John healed a man lame from birth. This happened in the Temple at three in the afternoon. It was hard to miss. The Temple worshippers passed this crippled beggar every day as they entered the Gate Beautiful. Only now this fellow was running and jumping and praising God. When asked for details, he laughed and pointed. Then a crowd gathered in the Temple courtyard. They were staring at Peter and John, expecting some explanation.

Peter did not beat around the bush. He told the crowd that this miracle had been done by none other than the same Jesus they killed. Some of these same worshipers were there, no doubt, along with the leaders of the nation, when the mob shouted for the release of Barabbas, not Jesus, was on trial before Pilate.

Jesus is still alive today. He is here for us in our physical afflictions. It is by His power and authority that in times of bodily ailments—we are healed. Whether it is by means of medicine or surgery, or we simply pray to the Lord, it is the same risen Jesus at work.

When healing happens in our lives, let us, like Peter, openly give Jesus the credit. Especially when we go up to our place of worship.

He lives to bless me with His love,

He lives to plead for me above.

He lives my hungry soul to feed,

He lives to help in time of need.

The Lutheran Hymnal 200:3

“Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole... Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:10,12

Resurrection-preaching Is Forgiveness-preaching

When Peter and John healed a 38-year-old man crippled from birth, it drew a crowd. Peter told the amazed throng something even more amazing. This healing was the work of a man whom God had brought back from the dead—Jesus of Nazareth.

Peter pointed to this Jesus as the Messiah promised by God through Moses and the Prophets. But as he and John urged the people to repent of their sins and turn to Jesus for forgiveness, they were interrupted by a group of serious-looking men with long beards and longer faces. They were the religious and political leaders of the nation. They were very upset—not because a man long-crippled could now walk, but because Christ’s men were telling the people that the crucified Jesus had risen from the dead. The Temple Guard arrested and jailed Peter and John. They left them bound over for trial in the morning.

The next day the two apostles were brought before the Sanhedrin—the same Jewish High Court that had condemned Jesus to death a few months earlier. Their interrogation centered on one question: “By what power or by what name have you done this?” Peter’s answer is above in our text: “It was by the name of Jesus.”

When we today tell others about Jesus and how all He’s done for us is sealed and certified by His resurrection, we should not be surprised if some become upset. Proclaiming Jesus’ resurrection raises the issue of why He died. Then we’re talking about sin – all people’s sin. This is a subject people do not like facing on a personal level. Yet they need to, so they can then be shown that Jesus is the substitutionary sacrifice for the sin-guilt of all. His resurrection certifies He paid our sin-debt in full. (1 Cor 15:17-20)

Holy Spirit, fill my heart with Easter joy every day. Help me to daily speak boldly of that joy. Amen.

But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. Acts 5:29-31

The Message Worth Suffering For

When Peter and John were hauled into court for preaching Jesus’ resurrection, they were commanded to stop—and beaten for emphasis. (Acts 4:23-31) That back-fired. The two apostles gathered the church and together they all prayed for the strength and ability to keep on preaching with boldness: Jesus is the Christ, crucified and risen.

The Holy Spirit answered those prayers. The apostles continued to boldly preach the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Sanhedrin then rounded up a group of Jesus’ apostles and jailed them—holding them over for trial in the morning. During the night God sent an angel and initiated an “early release” unbeknownst to the prison guards. The angel told the apostles, “Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.” (Acts 5:20)

In the morning, after finding the cell empty, the commander of the temple guard finally located the apostles teaching in the temple. He requested their presence before the Sanhedrin. They came. The high priest pointedly asked them, “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name?” (Acts 5:28)

The apostles’ said they were simply acting in obedience to God. For Jesus, whom the Sanhedrin had murdered, had been raised from the dead by God the Father and exalted to His right hand. Indeed, the risen Savior wanted those who murdered Him to repent and receive forgiveness.

We sometimes note how Peter’s words about obeying God rather than men should be applied when someone demands we do something God forbids. There are more times when we should remember the original context of Peter’s statement. We also need to give witness to the resurrection of Jesus and how this historic fact seals the forgiveness of sins and resurrection to eternal life for believing hearts.

Holy Spirit, do not let any threat keep us from speaking to others about our Living Lord. Amen.

“We ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, “We will hear you again on this matter.” Acts 17:29-32

Everyone Needs to Know About Jesus’ Resurrection

On his missionary journeys the Apostle Paul, upon entering a community, first approached the Jews. In his preaching he used the Old Testament to show that the crucified and risen Jesus is indeed the Messiah (the Christ). Paul would then bring the Gospel to the Gentiles of the city as well.

At Athens the Apostle varied his approach. It appears there were no Jews meeting for worship there, so Paul went directly to the Gentiles of the city. Instead of using the Old Testament as a pathway to the truth about Jesus, he used the writings, practices and culture of the Greeks to approach them with a call to repentance. He called them to faith in the one true God and in Jesus the Man of Righteousness that had been raised from the dead.

While the upshot of Paul’s “Sermon on Mars Hill” was more negative than positive, there are nonetheless important things for us to take to heart. One is this: when presenting the Gospel to others, the fact of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is always key. It opens the door to primary truths. At the empty tomb we see Jesus is indeed the eternal Son of God and the promised Savior from sin and death. His Word is utterly reliable. The gift of forgiveness of sin and the believers’ resurrection to eternal life is at the heart of the Gospel.

**Praise the Lord, His reign commences, Reign of life and liberty
Paschal Lamb, for our offenses, Slain and raised to set us free!
Evermore Bow before Christ, the Lord of Life adore!**

Worship Supplement 729:4

*The sting of death is sin, and the strength 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*

Victory Over Sin and Death

In the history of warfare there are many accounts of victories won against overwhelming odds. The opposing army was greater in number, superior in training and equipment, yet the smaller force prevailed. Victories over mighty enemies—though difficult and costly—are sometimes still possible.

Here Paul tells of a victory that was in no way humanly possible. The enemy was death, and if there is one enemy that wins every time it is death. Sometimes it can be pushed back or slowed down, but ultimately it will prevail. Human strength must finally yield before its advance.

Paul states the reason for death's stranglehold on human life. It is sin. The sin of Adam brought death into the world and spread its infection into the entire human race descended from him. Sin is the cause of death. And sin has strength because of God's law. Sin is the violation of God's holy will that does not change to accommodate human sin. Victory over death by human means was out of reach for all the descendants of Adam.

Yet here Paul celebrates victory over death. For us sinners that victory was impossible, yet wonderfully the victory over sin is ours because God has given it to us. It wasn't impossible for Him. He has given us the victory through Jesus Christ. The Son of God came down from heaven, took on our human nature and became our brother. He took our place and fulfilled God's holy law so that it can no longer condemn us. He took our sins on Himself and offered His perfect life as sacrifice to atone for them. The victory over death is ours.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:57

Our Lord Jesus Christ

In the season of Lent we hear the reading of the passion history, how our Lord was arrested, put on trial and condemned, subjected to shameful abuse, and finally taken to Calvary and put to death by crucifixion. We see Him shrouded in that three-hour darkness and hear Him cry out to the Father, “Why have You forsaken Me?” We see Him buried in Joseph’s tomb. Then on Easter morning we hear of how the women went to the tomb and found it empty. Instead of the lifeless body of Jesus they saw angels who told them, “He is risen.” We hear of how Jesus Himself appeared to His disciples for forty days before ascending into heaven.

We hear these things not merely as students of history reading about historical figures like kings, queens, military leaders, inventors, and others who did notable things. Jesus, the central character in this history is not just a figure from the distant past. No, He is what Paul calls Him here: “our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul here uses the full name and title of the Savior. He isn’t only the man named Jesus; He is the Lord from heaven. He is the Christ, the anointed one, the promised Savior who came in the fullness of time and carried out the divine plan for our salvation from sin and death. And He is ours; how precious is that little word that Paul uses here. The Lord Jesus Christ who died and rose again is ours, for by the grace of the Holy Spirit we believe in Him, confess Him, and praise Him as our Lord and Savior. He is the one through Whom God has given us the victory.

I am content! My Jesus is my Lord,
 My Prince of Life and Peace;
 His heart is yearning for my future bliss
 And for my soul’s release.
 The home where He, my Master, liveth
 He also to His servant giveth.

The Lutheran Hymnal 196:3

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable...

1 Corinthians 15:58

Since He is Risen Be Steadfast

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul teaches Christ's resurrection as a fact of history, an event that has been confirmed by the testimony of many independent witnesses that saw Jesus alive after He had been put to death and buried. Like every other undeniable event of history, the resurrection cannot be changed. It stands as a rebuke to all who say that such a thing is impossible.

Because Christ's resurrection is an established fact, all that follows from it also cannot be overthrown. He "is risen from the dead and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." (v. 20) His resurrection is God the Father's declaration that He has accepted His Son's sacrifice for our sins. The cause of our death has been removed. Because He lives we and all who believe in Him will live also. (John 14:19)

In the last verse of this great chapter Paul tells us what the resurrection means for our lives as believers. It is a solid rock on which we are to stand. Since Christ's rising from the dead is a fact that cannot be overthrown, we can be steadfast and immovable in our faith in it and our confession of it. We don't have to spend our lives in uncertainty about what we should believe. We don't have to experiment with religious ideas that come our way as if there might be something better. We can be firmly fixed in our convictions, "grounded and steadfast, not moved away from the hope of the gospel." (Colossians 1:23)

The hope of eternal life that we have in the resurrection is something that we can hold throughout life and in the hour of our death. Our hope is anchored in the living Christ.

Lord Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit keep before our eyes at all times Your victory over death. Amen.

Always abounding in the work of the Lord...

1 Corinthians 15:58

Since He is Risen Abound in the Lord's Work Always

We sometimes hear retired people complain that too many demands are made on their time. Their days end up being busier than they had hoped. But others say that they have too little to do. They had been looking forward to leisurely days without the pressures of work, only to find that having day after day without much to do is unsatisfying. Work is a blessing, for God designed us to be active, to use our minds and bodies, according to the strength and ability that He gives to each individual.

Here it is not just work in general that the apostle Paul encourages but “the work of the Lord.” All whom God in His grace has blessed with saving faith in Jesus Christ have work to do for Him. This is so because Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. He has freed us from our sins and from the death and condemnation that we deserved because of our sins. He has given us new life, new strength and power that can be used to serve Him. He has given us the resurrection Gospel to give to the lost and dying in the world. He has given us the certain hope of everlasting life that we can share with fellow believers, building up one another as we hear God's Word, pray, and sing together.

Paul encourages us not only to do this work but to abound in it. Our part in spreading the saving Gospel is important work that is worthy of our time and effort; not to be done half-heartedly but with zeal and joy. The work of the Lord is ongoing, to be carried on “always,” in youth and in old age, in pleasant times and in hard times.

Lord Jesus, give us strength and joy to work for You, spreading the hope and strength that we have from Your victory over death. Amen

Knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 15:58

Since He is Risen Your Work for Him is Never in Vain

The Bible contains many unqualified promises. They are wonderful and amazing, so different from the uncertain promises of this world. Good things that are promised may come our way, or they may not. But when God promises something it is certain, for “the mouth of the Lord has spoken it” (Isaiah 40:5), and “the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform it.” (Isaiah 9:7)

We have one such promise here. After encouraging his readers to remain steadfast and abound in the Lord’s work, Paul adds the promise that such work will not be in vain. This is not an uncertain thing but something we are to “know.” And it is stated as an unqualified promise. Our work for the Lord is not in vain, ever. What we do “in the Lord” will never be for nothing.

Labor done in the Lord is everything we do because of our faith-connection with Christ, as He promises, “He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit.” (John 14:5) It is work done in response to Christ’s word and by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is showing the love of Christ in our dealings with our neighbors. It is bringing up children in the training and admonition of the Lord. It is doing and supporting the work of the church with your prayers, offerings, and time.

All this will never be in vain; which is to say that it will be abundantly fruitful and wonderfully productive. We won’t always see it, for the fruit of our labor in the Lord is growth in faith and love that takes place in the heart. But we know that our work is not in vain because Christ has conquered sin and death, and He lives to fulfill His promises to His people.

O risen and ascended Lord, keep us mindful of Your promise to bless the work that we do in Your name. Amen.

Know that the LORD, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Psalm 100:3

Jesus is Our Good Shepherd: We are His Sheep.

There are many reasons we are compared to sheep, and many of them are not good. Sheep are often considered dumb, with no sense of proper guidance. They are considered helpless. They get stuck easily. They settle for what's bad for them instead of enduring for good water and pasture. They can't heal themselves when hurt. Yet, sheep, if properly cared for, travel in flocks guided by a shepherd. If this is done properly, the sheep will have proper guidance, someone to defend them, someone to turn them over when they are stuck on their backs, someone to guide them to better water and better pasture, and someone to take care of them when they are hurt.

When we are mired in sin and mistakes, we can't turn ourselves over. To think so would be foolishness. All we can do is shout, "I'm sorry!" And does Jesus leave you with an empty, "get yourself up!" No. Does He leave you with a "only if you believe in me hard enough will I get you up!" No, He gets you up immediately. He forgives you and puts you right back on your feet. And can such a fact be true? Is our tremendous guilt really that simple to overcome? Only in Jesus Christ is it this way.

Jesus took upon His body on the tree of the cross all our sin. Jesus, in your place, let Himself, the Lamb of God, be cast down so that He could endure all the punishment your sins deserved. Jesus truly did forgive you, and for your comfort He reassures you by saying, "peace be with you." Remember that from the upper room? Remember that that was spoken by the Risen Lord Jesus. Your Shepherd died and rose again all so that when He lifts you up, He really does raise you up in forgiveness.

**Not we, but the Lord is our Maker, our God; Glory be to God!
His people we are, and the sheep led by His rod;
Sing praise unto God out of Zion!**

The Lutheran Hymnal 44: 2

“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.” John 10:10-11

Jesus is our Good Shepherd: He Protects His Sheep

Jesus says of Himself very emphatically that He is the good Shepherd. He says, “I am the Good Shepherd,” the one and only. He is the only way to salvation. He says, “I am the Good Shepherd.” He is pure in everything that He does. He is skilled, loving, and is known as the beautiful Savior and His craft reflects it. He says, “I am the Good Shepherd.” Unlike the hired hand, He doesn’t run away from danger. He lays down His life for the Sheep! On His behalf do the sheep benefit.

We, like sheep, are not very bright. We would be taken down by wolves if it were up to us. If our faith is put in the hands of worldly philosophers, mere hired hands, then, when times get tough, we would be scattered and destroyed, but Jesus doesn’t run from robbers and wolves. He gets us through every hardship. He lays down His life for us. Jesus puts Himself in between us and the dangers of the world. He went to the cross to destroy those who would try to destroy the flock, namely the devil and his evil forces. The Shepherd, Jesus Christ, is Good. Your Good Shepherd will never run from you. He will be with you even during the wolf attacks of life. When hope seems lost, when loved ones die, when betrayal from friends come, when times are tough and we are vulnerable, Jesus is there to assure us that He has given us safety. By Him do we have peace and hope for joy and life eternal.

In Your promise firm we stand;
None can take us from Your hand.
Speak! We hear! At Your command,
We will follow you.

Worship Supplement 783:2

“I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.”

John 10:14-15

Jesus is our Good Shepherd: He Knows Us

Another blessing of having Jesus as our Good Shepherd is that He knows us. As a Good Shepherd, He knows each member of the flock very closely. He knows each sheep’s needs. I once saw a painting where Jesus was portrayed as a shepherd, and around Him were many different looking sheep. One was a lamb with a bandaged limb, limping alongside Him. One was a mother, leading her young. One was a gruff ram with big horns and a stoic expression. One was a playful ram. One was a black sheep who seemed different from the rest. One was a lamb in the arms of Jesus Christ. This painting depicted the differences of the sheep, but Jesus knows all these differences.

Jesus knows what His sheep all need, and He provides His love accordingly. The sheep are also said to know Him. Because the shepherd loved them and cared for them, the sheep learned by instinct to trust their shepherd and expect His love. Christ knows each one of us and gives us everything we need. He knows all our situations in life. From the meek lambs to the gruff rams among us, we receive the blessings of Jesus as He performs His work as Good Shepherd. How do we know Him? Because His voice, that is His Word, has entered our hearts, creating a loving, trusting faith in the Good Shepherd. This relationship between Jesus and us as the flock is so strong that it is even likened by Jesus Himself to the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. That is a strong bond that only Jesus, the Good Shepherd, can create. Look at how He has created such a trusting bond.

“I know Mine own, Mine own know Me;

Ye, not the world, My face shall see.

My peace I leave with you.” Amen.

The Lutheran Hymnal 467:7b

“Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again.” John 10:17

Jesus is Our Good Shepherd: Risen!

Jesus is a very good shepherd indeed. He keeps us safe from evil ways and gives us many blessings. He protects us from every evil, He knows each of us personally, and He has gathered us into His flock, His Church, with His voice. Yet, these aren't even the greatest works of His craft. The greatest work of His craft is the center point of all these blessings. It's what keeps us safe from spiritual dangers. It's the center of our individual spiritual needs. It is the message that has gathered us into the flock. It's why God the Father loves Him and is pleased with Him as shepherd. And this is it: because He laid down His life that He may take it up again. No one takes it from Him, but He lays it down of His own accord. He has authority to lay it down, and He has authority to take it up again. This charge He has received from His Father.

Jesus laid down His life. He is the Good Shepherd. The eternal Son of God. No one could force His death. No wolf could overcome Him if they tried. No Roman legion, nor Jewish mob could do this...unless He let them. He had to let them. He had to die. How else could the sheep be safe, cared for, and gathered?

The sheep were helpless. They couldn't do anything. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned, everyone, to His own way, but the Lord laid on Him, Jesus, the iniquity of us all. Jesus offered up His perfect life in our place. He kept every will and command of our Lord on our behalf and He suffered and died. He laid down His life for us so that we would have all these blessings. He gave up His sinless life to give heaven to us forgiven sheep.

**Now may He who from the dead
Bro't the Shepherd of the sheep,**

**Jesus Christ, our King and Head,
all our souls in safety keep!**

The Lutheran Hymnal 51:1

“No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.” John 10:18

Jesus is Our Good Shepherd: and He has Proven It

How do we know that this isn't another thief climbing over to take us away to our doom? How do we know that this perfect life and sacrificial death of Jesus did the trick? Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is the only Good Shepherd, because He died, yes, but also because He had the power to rise again. He rose from the dead, assuring us of all these blessings! No one can ever do this except for Him. No thief or hireling has this power. The Good Shepherd does, and He was raised from the dead.

After the flock had seen that Jesus had died, He came back from His three-day journey to say, “Do not worry! I just had to make sure that you were safe and secure. I'm back now, and I'm not going anywhere.” And He hasn't gone anywhere. He died and rose again for our salvation. He built the gate of the protected pasture with His cross and empty grave, and He now keeps us safe. He fights off the robbers and wolves, He doesn't run away like a hired hand, and He knows us personally. He has gathered us into the kingdom of Heaven.

He has saved us eternally. He is the Good Shepherd.

He lives and grants me daily breath;

He lives, and I shall conquer death;

He lives my mansion to prepare;

He lives to bring me safely there.

He lives, all glory to His name!

He lives, my Jesus, still the same.

Oh, the sweet joy this sentence gives,

“I know that my Redeemer lives!”

The Lutheran Hymnal 200:7&8

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed. Write down, circle, or underline all the blessings that your Good Shepherd gave you.
2. Hymnist Francis Rous wrote a beautiful hymn based on Psalm 23. His hymn focuses on us as sheep and the blessings we receive from our Good Shepherd. Read Hymn 436 from The Lutheran Hymnal, "The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want." Put each stanza in your own words and comment on the comfort these verses give to you.
3. Time for an Easter review. Christ's resurrection gives us many assurances. Write down four assurances that the resurrection gives us. Check Luther's Small Catechism (Sydow Edition pages 127-128, question 159) when you're done.

*Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched,
He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.*

Acts 1:9

God Has Spoken

For forty days, the most surprising thing happened: the Man who was brutally crucified to death in front of many witnesses now walked the earth once again, fully alive! While there were markings on His flesh that gave testimony of a wretched death, His resurrection now gave testimony to a glorious and eternal life.

Jesus left a testimony of His great ascension in other places too. He had prepared His disciples through His word and teaching. As the time of His death drew near, He continued to prepare His disciples for what was to come. “For He taught His disciples and said to them, ‘The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.’” (Mark 9:31)

This was no last-minute revelation: God had laid the groundwork through His word that His Son would ascend on high. “You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, even from the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell there.” (Psalm 68:18) “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’” (Psalm 110:1)

Jesus promised them that the Helper would come when He had left (John 14:16-28). In Acts 1, He reminds them of this promise. They would not be left alone. “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things.” (Hebrews 1:1-2) Jesus is now in His rightful spot, where He rules for all eternity!

**Look, ye saints, the sight is glorious;
see the Man of sorrows now!**

**From the fight returned victorious,
ev’ry knee to Him shall bow.**

Crown Him! Crown Him! Crowns become the Victor’s brow.

The Lutheran Hymnal 222:1

Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. Luke 24:51

God Has Blessed

Every Sunday, you probably hear one of two blessings that are recorded in the Bible. One is an Old Testament blessing from God, prescribed to the priests to bless the children of Israel: “The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.” (Numbers 6:24-26) In the New Testament, we hear the Apostolic blessing: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.” (2 Corinthians 13:14)

Blessings take on many forms. God blessed the first man and woman, telling them to “Be fruitful and multiply.” (Genesis 1:22) God blessed the patriarchs in many ways—with descendants, with land, with safety, and with other valuable gifts and resources. Jesus preached the beatitudes, each one beginning with Blessed are . . . (Matthew 5:3-10)

We are not told specifically what Jesus said in Luke 24, but we do have a number of His words from before His ascension. One of the most important was the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20. “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

What a wonderful blessing it is that God offers the sacrament of baptism, entrusted to His Church. How comforting too—to know that He is with us, even to the end of the age!

While He lifts His hands in blessing,
He is parted from His friends;

While their eager eyes behold Him,
He upon the clouds ascends.

He who walked with God and pleased Him,
preaching truth and doom to come,
He, our Enoch, is translated to His everlasting Home.

The Lutheran Hymnal 218.3

God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Psalm 47:5

God Has Gone Up

The beginning of Psalm 47:1-2, which is a psalm of the sons of Korah, joyfully goes: “Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph! For the LORD Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth.” Throughout the nine-verse psalm, they recount how the Lord God ruled justly and graciously in the past. In addition to this awesome wonder, they look ahead at His triumphant rule in future times and eternity. The middle verse sees God going up to His rightful place.

This is accompanied by “a shout” and a “sound of the trumpet.” The Hebrew word for “shout” pictures a literal shouting or a loud blast of an instrument. But this was no call to war, something the war often denotes. No, this was a shout of victory and acclamation! The King was home! The victory won! The trumpets fill in the rest of the picture for us. These were royal trumpets that let those around them know that a kingly procession was near.

One can imagine the shouts of joy at the ascension. Luke records that the disciples “returned with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God.” (Luke 24:52-53) This was not just a bunch of whooping and hollering about seeing the miraculous sight; they were praising and blessing God! He had done all that He said He would. Now He had ascended to heaven. Soon He would send the Holy Spirit, and in the tongues of many people, they would proclaim the good news to all people.

God has gone up . . . For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with understanding. (Psalm 47:5, 7)

With joy is heav'n resounding Christ's glad return to see;
Behold the saints surrounding the Lord who set them free.
Bright myriads, thronging, come; the cherub band rejoices,
And loud seraphic voices all welcome Jesus home.

The Lutheran Hymnal 214.2

And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen. Luke 24:52-53

God Has Remained

This passage was alluded to in the previous devotion. We have looked at how Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven. Yet, there is also the fact that He remains. It's a head-scratcher, but by faith, we understand that though Jesus rules at the right hand of the Father in heaven, He remains here with us through the faith that the Holy Spirit works in your hearts. Is it any wonder that the disciples went away at Jesus' words and "continually" spent their time in God's house, waiting for the time of the Holy Spirit to come at Pentecost?

We have promises from Jesus Himself. "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20) The context of the verse is about discipline, but it is a discipline carried out by believers in His name. Jesus is very much in the presence of believers. He is near when you worship Him with other believers. He is near when you ask Him to "be our guest" at the kitchen table. He watches over you in His grace and mercy. He is the Mediator between God and you (1 Timothy 2:5).

The great joy of Christ's ascension into heaven is that we have a loving Ruler who judges us by the metrics of grace. But our great joy is also that He is still close. He has not retreated to a castle and shut Himself within it. He is personally involved in your lives, working all things together for good to those who love God, "to those who are the called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28) One day, the King will return in glory to bring you home. Then we will know Him face to face, no longer just by faith (1 Corinthians 13:12-13). He remains our Hope, and our hope remains in Him until that wonderful Day.

Still for us He intercedes;
His prevailing death He pleads,
Near Himself prepares our place,
Harbinger of human race.

The Lutheran Hymnal 213.5

*“Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven?
This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven,
will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”*

Acts 1:11

God Will Come Again

We could not live perfect lives. We all sinned and we all fell short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). In our place, our Substitute kept the law of God. He did not sin. He did not fall short in any way. We deserved death and damnation. Jesus suffered hell (Matthew 27:46) and died in our place (Isaiah 53:5). God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21) Our sins were fully put to death in His death. His death was our death to sin. His life is ours by His grace. And with that assurance comes the assurance of a resurrection too (1 Corinthians 15:20).

The ascension account in Acts 2 ends with two men clad in white apparel. This usually indicated angels or glorified people (such as Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration or the saints pictured in Revelation). The disciples looked in awe up at the heavens for a look at their departed Savior, but they were told that they would not see Him there. This was no cause for sadness. Rather, it was a statement packed with the greatest of news!

At Jesus’ resurrection, the angel told the women “He is not here; for He is risen, as He said.” (Matthew 28:6) Now they brought the glorious message to the disciples again: He’s not here! “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

Jesus will come again. His resurrection and ascension will be yours as you, too, are brought home at the last!

**On Christ’s ascension I now build the hope of mine ascension;
This hope alone has ever stilled all doubt and apprehension;
For where the Head is, there full well
I know His members are to dwell
When Christ shall come and call them.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 216.1

“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

John 8:31-32

“Be True to Yourself”

I came across an article on social media that got my attention. It was titled, “Five things Jesus never said”. If you look that up online, you will come across a similar list. You probably wouldn’t be shocked that Jesus never said these things. What’s shocking is that anyone would even think these sayings have anything to do with Jesus.

The idea of being true to yourself is not a new idea. Perhaps it is most famously stated in the Shakespearian drama, “Hamlet”. “This above all: to thine own self be true.” Above all, be true to yourself? What is the problem with that? The problem is that we are not good judges of what is true and what isn’t. That statement makes me the one who determines what is true and what is not. My truth is subjective, my truth is sinful, and my truth enslaves me to sin.

Jesus says nothing like that. Instead, He shows us the truth in His Word. The truth of His Word sets us free.

So may we join Thy name to bless,
 Thy grace adore, Thy power confess,
 From sin and strife to flee.
 One is our calling, one our name,
 The end of all our hopes the same,
 A crown of life with Thee.

The Lutheran Hymnal 412:2

Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it." Luke 9:23-24

“Follow Your Heart”

“Follow your heart” seems like good advice. It’s probably the way most people live their lives. How am I to choose between two different jobs? How am I to choose whether or not the person I am dating is the one I should marry? How am I to choose what to eat for dinner tonight? Well, follow your heart!

Can the heart be trusted? What does Jesus say about it? “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.” (Mark 7:21-22) Is my heart what I should be following? No, you shouldn’t be following your heart. Then what should I be following? Jesus! What does that involve? The opposite of following your heart. It involves denial. It involves losing your life for His sake. That means being willing to suffer the burdens of being a Christian.

The sufferings of Christ brings a burden that you can bear. His yoke is easy, His burden is light. Following Jesus truly lightens and lifts all burdens off the soul. Following Him means trusting Him for all things. It means believing that He fulfilled the Law for me. It means that I am at peace with God because of what Jesus did. Following Him means losing your earthly life. It also means gaining eternal life. Following Him isn’t a burden, it’s a privilege. May He help us to follow Him no matter the cost!

Oh, guide and lead me, Lord,
While here below I wander

That I may follow Thee
Till I shall see Thee yonder.

For if I led myself,
I soon would go astray;

But if Thou leadest me,
I keep the narrow way.

The Lutheran Hymnal 417:6

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.” John 14:1

“Believe in Yourself”

“Believe in yourself” is a commonly used phrase. Most of the time this phrase is used to encourage others. It is used to build confidence and self-respect. But should we believe in ourselves? I like Martin Luther’s thoughts in his explanation to the Third Article: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him.” (Luther’s Small Catechism, Sydow edition)

When it comes to believing start with the truth. Romans 7:18 says, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.” Thankfully, the source of my beliefs is not from within me. Luther goes on, “But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified, and kept me in true faith.”

Belief in self is overrated. At the end of the day it matters little how much self-confidence I have. Rather, my confidence is to be placed in my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I can have confidence that He loves me and died for me. I can be confident that where He is, there I shall be also. I have confidence that He can accomplish in me and through me what He wills.

Do you believe in yourself? It doesn’t matter! Believe in Jesus! That is faith. Jesus is the One you need to believe in, not yourself. Jesus gives you the gift of faith to be able to do this. Praise be to Jesus Christ, the One worth believing in!

This I believe, yea, rather, Of this I make my boast,
That God is my dear Father, The Friend who loves me most,
And that, whate’er betide me, My Savior is at hand
Through stormy seas to guide me And bring me safe to land.

The Lutheran Hymnal 528:2

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." John 14:6

“Live Your Truth”

That statement, “Live Your Truth”, I must admit bothers me the most out of all of these. Would Jesus say something like that? Like with most of these statements, it makes the truth subjective, something that depends on the individual. It is basically saying, “Live how you determine is best for you to live, and I likewise will do what is best for me.”

Jesus and Scripture are not wishy-washy when it comes to what is true and what is not true. Psalm 19 says, “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.” (19:7-9)

Either something is true or it’s not. Jesus says there is just one way: one way, one truth, one life. It is found in Him. There is only one way to the Father, and that is through His Son, Jesus Christ. There is beauty and simplicity in the One and only way. It’s open and available to all people! There are not multiple paths to follow, any of which lead to heaven. One’s way through life does not depend on who or what you are. There is one way. Praise be to God that He has shown us The Way, Jesus Christ. His way is true. His way results in eternal life. We are given this way through His gift of faith. May our gracious and merciful LORD empower us to live His truth!

Thou art the Way; to Thee alone
From sin and death we flee;
And he who would the Father seek
Must seek Him, Lord, by Thee.

Thou art the Way, the Truth, the Life;
Grant us that Way to know,
That Truth to keep, that life Life to win,
Whose joys eternal flow.

The Lutheran Hymnal 355:1&4

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:10*

“As Long as You’re Happy”

Happiness is something that everyone wants. Many would say, “Everyone deserves to be happy.” Even our country’s own declaration of independence states that it is a self-evident truth that all men are endowed by their Creator with an unalienable right to pursue happiness.

Is it true that nothing matters, “as long as you’re happy”? Do you know what makes me happy? An extra-large all-meat pizza. Sugar makes me happy. A 42-ounce Coca-Cola makes me happy. Those things could provide temporary happiness, but that doesn’t mean they are healthy. Taking medicine doesn’t make me happy. Neither does exercising or lifting weights. Eating a salad doesn’t make me happy. But these are healthier choices for me.

Jesus, in His sermon on the mount, repeatedly uses the word “blessed” to describe His followers. That word can mean happy. It seems contradictory. Happy are the poor in spirit, happy are the meek, happy are the persecuted... but it’s true. We are blessed, we are happy when we are His disciples. This happiness is ours when we repent of our sins and trust in Christ for righteousness.

As the world applies it the phrase, “as long as you’re happy” is nonsense. We live in a vale of tears. The happiness the world provides is fleeting. Not being happy is used as an excuse for sin. True happiness is ours as Christ’s disciples. Only Jesus can provide true and lasting happiness. In Jesus, even when we are poor, mourning, or persecuted, we are still happy!

Our happiness, in this world, is not guaranteed. Rather, our happiness is guaranteed in the world to come. Your happiness is won for you by Jesus. True happiness is being dead to sin, and alive to righteousness. Happiness is being forgiven in Christ. Happiness is being justified by grace through faith. Jesus is the One who makes us truly and eternally happy.

O happy day and yet far happier hour,
When wilt thou come at last,
When fearless to my Father’s love and pow’r,
Whose promise standeth fast,
My soul I gladly render? For surely will His hand
Lead her with guidance tender To heav’n, her fatherland.

The Lutheran Hymnal 619:2

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance so that we would walk in them. Ephesians 2:10 EHV

Walk In Good Works

Today we begin a study of the book of Ephesians. The letter to the Ephesians encourages you to not just talk the talk, but walk the walk. This term is used today in sports and life but goes back 2000 years to the New Testament. Your walk is your life as a redeemed child of God. Six times in Ephesians, the Holy Spirit stresses the importance of your walk. Our text follows Paul's hymn of amazing grace in chapter two.

Sometimes we are so concerned about not teaching that good works save us that we hesitate to speak of the necessity of good works. In Luther's day, there was a pastor who went so far as to say that good works are harmful to salvation. The Formula of Concord responded by saying that good works are not necessary for salvation, but they are necessary.

It is even more dangerous to think that what we do or say doesn't make any difference because, after all, God forgives our sins. In Romans 6, Paul dealt with this devilish perversion: Does God's free forgiveness mean that we should sin all the more so that God can forgive us all the more? The answer in the Greek is a strong "God forbid!" or "No Way!" We have been joined to Jesus' death and resurrection by baptism; so just as he was raised from the dead, we too would also walk in a new life.

We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus. By grace, he made us spiritually alive in Christ. He made us a new creation by washing us from our sins and guilt in the blood of the Lamb. God created us as his holy people for good works. What is even more amazing is God prepared these good works in advance. By grace, God created you in Christ for good works.

Grace first inscribed my name In God's eternal book,
And grace has brought me to the Lamb, Who all my sorrows took.
Grace led my wandering feet To tread the heav'nly road,
And grace supplies each hour I meet While pressing on to God.

Worship Supplement 778:2

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called. Ephesians 4:1

Walk Worthy of Your High Calling

What is your high calling? Listen to the Apostle's description of your high calling: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Ephesians 4:4-6)

God the Holy Spirit has called you by the Gospel to be a part of the Church, the glorious Body of all believers. The Bible reveals that there is only one church: The Holy Christian Church, made up of all those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin. Paul compares the Church to the human body. The Church is made up of many different parts or members, and each member has a different but important function.

There is one Spirit. When you confess, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," you are also confessing, "I believe in the Holy Christian Church and the forgiveness of sins." The Holy Spirit brings the Church into existence by calling and bringing individuals to faith in Jesus.

This oneness is expressed in a triad: One Lord, one faith, one baptism. Our oneness centers on Jesus and his cross. Jesus redeemed the Church with his holy and precious blood. All of you are a part of the Holy Christian Church. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

The Apostle urges us to walk the walk worthy of our high calling. This means we are to conduct ourselves with all lowliness or humility. This is summed up with the descriptive phrase "bearing with one another in love." The thing that makes this possible is the love of Christ.

**Church of God, elect and glorious, Holy nation, chosen race;
Called as God's own special people, Royal priests and heirs of grace;
Know the purpose of your calling, Show to all His mighty deeds;
Tell of love that knows no limits, Grace that meets all human needs.**

Worship Supplement 767:1

Therefore, be imitators of God as his dearly loved children. And walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Ephesians 5:1-2 EHV

Walk In Love

“Therefore be imitators of God.” How is this possible? The book of Ephesians stresses that God has made us his dear children in Christ. We could never imitate God’s perfect holiness. The key is that we are to be imitators of God as his dearly loved children. The enabling source of our Christian walk (lifestyle) is the undeserved and total love of God.

We are encouraged to walk in love. We are to walk in love just as Christ loved us. God’s love is the powerful motivator and power in our lives. Jesus loved us and gave himself as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. In this picture from the Old Testament sacrifices, Jesus’ blood and death are the once and for all sacrifice that removes all our sins and gives us everlasting life. It also enables us to be imitators of God.

But the flip side is the warning against a walk or lifestyle contrary to our walk as loved children of God. Chapter five of Ephesians is full of practical examples of a lifestyle which are not proper for those who have been made saints through the love of Jesus.

The sins of the flesh are many. Sexual immorality, impurity, or greed should not even be hinted at in the lives of God’s beloved children. Obscenity, foolish talk, and coarse joking can become commonplace in your life. Don’t be deceived with the empty assurance that these things don’t matter. The world does not believe that God is serious when he warns of his coming wrath on the sons of disobedience.

How can we be imitators of God? Walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us.

Let us ever walk with Jesus, Follow His example pure,
Flee the world, which would deceive us And to sin our souls allure.
Ever in His footsteps treading, Body here, yet soul above,
Full of faith and hope and love, Let us do the Father’s bidding.
Faithful Lord, abide with me; Savior, lead, I follow Thee.

The Lutheran Hymnal 409:1

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. Ephesians 5:8

Walk As Children of Light

The Bible uses this picture of light in a spiritual sense to describe the Christian “walk” or the Christian life. The unbeliever, the person without God, is described as walking in darkness. The Devil has blinded the minds of unbelievers. You, however, are in the light. God has shined into your hearts with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As children of the light, you understand what the will of God is. This is to be reflected in your walk. Make the most of your time. The way that you use your time, the way that you use your material possessions, the way you handle the Word of God are all indications that you are a child of the light.

Do not be drunk with wine. Many people look for answers to life and escape from life in alcohol, drugs, or pornography. This kind of lifestyle only results in pain and destruction. Drinking to excess wastes people’s time, talents, and lives. It ruins relationships. Instead, as children of the light, you are to be filled with the Spirit. Being filled with the Holy Spirit will be revealed as you speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Music is a treasured gift of God and a way of expressing our joy and happiness. Being filled with the Holy Spirit will be revealed in the fact that we are always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of the Lord Jesus. We are able to give thanks in times of illness and job loss because God continues to take care of us.

Learn by the Spirit to live carefully and wisely. Understand what the good and gracious will of God is for you. Make use of the opportunities that God gives you to serve Him in love. Walk the walk as children of the Light for Jesus is the Light of the world.

Lo, on those who dwelt in darkness,
 Dark as night and deep as death,
 Broke the light of Thy salvation,
 Breathed thine own life-giving breath.
 Alleluia, alleluia! Praise to Thee who light dost send!
 Alleluia, alleluia, Alleluia without end!

Worship Supplement 775:2

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Ephesians 6:10

Walk In the Lord's Mighty Power

As the dearly loved children of God, we are urged to walk the walk of God's children. But the question always arises: How can we find the power to live the life described in Ephesians? Be strong in the Lord. To do this you have to put on the entire armor God has provided for the battle.

God has provided the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the sandals of the gospel of peace. The belt of truth is the large waist belt that protected the abdomen from an upward thrust of the sword. The belt that protects us is the truth as revealed in Jesus Christ and his word. Next comes the breastplate of righteousness. This is Jesus' perfect righteousness which is ours through faith. The third items of military gear were the sandals which protected the feet and enabled the soldier to make the long marches. We are given the gospel of peace. Then we have the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation. The shield was the long object that protected the soldier from the spears and javelins thrown by the enemy. Faith is our shield against the attacks of the devil. The helmet protected the head from serious injury. Our helmet is inscribed with the word "salvation." God has saved us from sin and death. This salvation provided without cost protects the Christian.

Finally, we come to the one offensive weapon. All the other weapons are defensive in nature. We have been equipped with the sword of the Spirit. The sword of the Spirit which we wield in this spiritual battle is the word of God. It is a powerful weapon. The word of God is given to us by the Holy Spirit. It is the best offensive weapon that we have. In this struggle to the death, be sure that you are armed with the word of God.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and his mighty power.
 Be strong in the Lord in armor of light!
 With helmet and sword, with shield for the fight;
 On prayer be dependent, belted and shod,
 In breastplate resplendent – the armor of God.

Worship Supplement 768:1

See, the Conqueror mounts in triumph;

See the King in royal state,

Riding on the clouds, His chariot,

To His heavenly palace gate!

Hark, the choirs of angel voices

Joyful alleluias sing,

And the portals high are lifted

To receive their heavenly King.

Glory be to God the Father;

Glory be to God the Son,

Dying, risen, ascending for us,

Who the heavenly realm hath won.

Glory to the Holy Spirit!

To One God in Persons Three

Glory both in earth and heaven,

Glory, endless glory, be.

The Lutheran Hymnal 218

Author: Christopher Wordsworth, 1862, cento

