

# Fourth Sunday in Lent



March 22, 2020

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# Holy Cross Lutheran Church

*Our Mission: To know, live, and share the love of Christ*

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The Rev. Thomas L. Weitzel, Interim Pastor

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***Lent is the special time of year** when we begin our preparations for Easter by stripping away the non-essential and the unimportant, by listening in quietness to the groaning of a sinful creation, and by reflecting on our own sinfulness and on God's gift of forgiveness, which comes through his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. In our service, you will note a longer act of confession at the beginning of each service, and more reflective songs and hymns with themes of the cross and grace. In this way, we prepare ourselves spiritually to walk the way of the cross with our Lord and Savior and to rise with him in the victory of Easter.*

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## GATHERING

PRELUDE

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

*All may make the sign of the cross in remembrance of baptism.*

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen**

God is our refuge and strength,  
**a very present help in trouble.**

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,  
**though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;**

though its waters roar and foam,  
**though the mountains tremble with its tumult.**

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
**the holy habitation of the Most High.**

God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;  
**God will help it when the morning dawns.**

The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;  
**he utters his voice, the earth melts.**

The Lord of hosts is with us;  
**the God of Jacob is our refuge.** *(Psalm 46:1-7)*

Let us confess our sins before the Lord.

*Silence for reflection and self-examination.*

Gracious God,

**We confess that we have turned from you and given ourselves into the power of sin. We are truly sorry and humbly repent. In your compassion forgive us our sins, known and unknown, things we have done and things we have failed to do. Turn us again to you, and uphold us by your Spirit, so that we may live and serve you in newness of life through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.  
Amen**

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy upon us, and for the sake of the sufferings, death and resurrection of his dear Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, forgives us all our sins. As a minister of the Church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen**

GATHERING SONG:

“God, Whose Almighty Word”

- 1 God, whose almighty word chaos and darkness heard  
and took their flight:  
hear us, we humbly pray, and where the gospel day  
sheds not its glorious ray, let there be light.**
- 2 Christ, who once came to bring, on your redeeming wing,  
healing and sight;  
health to the troubled mind, sight where illusions blind;  
oh, now to humankind let there be light.**

- 3 Spirit of truth and love, life-giving, holy dove,  
speed forth your flight;  
move on the water's face bearing the lamp of grace,  
and in earth's darkest place let there be light.**
- 4 Holy and blessed three, glorious Trinity,  
Wisdom, Love, Might:  
boundless as ocean's tide, rolling in fullest pride,  
through the earth, far and wide, let there be light.**

Text: John Marriott, 1780-1825, alt.

#### GREETING & PRAYER OF THE DAY

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

Let us pray. Bend your ear to our prayers, Lord Christ, and come among us. By your gracious life and death for us, bring light into the darkness of our hearts, and anoint us with your Spirit, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen**

#### BISHOP SUAREZ PRAYER FOR THE PANDEMIC

Merciful God,

**We know that your heart overflows with compassion for your whole creation. Pour out your Spirit on all people living with this illness, or who are living with anxiety about this illness. Be with those who tend to the needs of the sick. Strengthen us all in body and spirit, console us when we are anxious, comfort us in grief, and hearten us in discouragement. Help to remind us that you claim us as your own, and are with us wherever we go. Through Christ, our healer and Lord. Amen.**

## WORD

FIRST READING: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

<sup>1</sup>The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his

sons." <sup>2</sup>Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' <sup>3</sup>Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." <sup>4</sup>Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" <sup>5</sup>He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

<sup>6</sup>When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." <sup>7</sup>But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." <sup>8</sup>Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." <sup>9</sup>Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." <sup>10</sup>Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." <sup>11</sup>Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." <sup>12</sup>He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." <sup>13</sup>Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

The Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING: Ephesians 5:8-14

<sup>8</sup>Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—<sup>9</sup>for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. <sup>10</sup>Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. <sup>11</sup>Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. <sup>12</sup>For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; <sup>13</sup>but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, <sup>14</sup>for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

The Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

## GOSPEL SONG

**Refrain: There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole;  
there is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.**

**1. Sometimes I feel discouraged and think my work's in vain,  
But then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again. (Refrain)**

GOSPEL READING: John 9:1-7,35b-39  
The Holy Gospel according to St. John  
**Glory to you, O Lord.**

<sup>1</sup>As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup>His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. <sup>4</sup>We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup>As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." <sup>6</sup>When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, <sup>7</sup>saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

Jesus said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" <sup>36</sup>He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." <sup>37</sup>Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." <sup>38</sup>He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. <sup>39</sup>Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind."

The Gospel of the Lord.  
**Praise to you, O Christ.**

## SERMON

### A Little Light for Our Darkness

The Rev. Thomas L. Weitzel  
Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Spring Hill, FL

Did you notice that opening Prayer of the Day? It was so filled with compassion. "Bend your ear to our prayers, Lord Christ, and come among us."

Oh my, yes. Isn't that just precisely our prayer right about now as we are all trying to adjust to a whole new way of living in the face of such unknowns with this corona virus.

And that second part of the prayer too. "Bring light into the darkness of our hearts."

How true that is also. Those unknowns are truly dark and scary unknowns. It's a whole new virus. Nobody has ever had it before. There is no treatment for it. There are no vaccines against it. The experts aren't entirely sure about transmission. Or how long it may last on surfaces. On and on the unknowns go.

And if that's not enough, we've got plenty of folks out there who just don't seem to be taking this whole thing very seriously. Spring break beach revelers from college communities having "end of the world" parties. Scam artists and price gougers out to make a quick buck on the hysteria. People ignoring the CDC's call to distance and stay home as if their actions don't affect you and me. On and on that list goes too.

"Bring light into the darkness" Lord Christ.

Yes. We could use a little light right about now, especially as it is dawning on most of us that this thing could go on for quite a while.

I found a little light this week when a friend of mine from Cincinnati sent me the weekly newsletter from her church that was sent to her email. (That's how everybody is communicating these days in churches all over, you realize -- including ours. Email and computers and smart phones are our life line and connection to those we love in a world that has had to embrace social distancing and new stay-home practices.)

Well, it seems that the Congregational Care Coordinator for Knox Presbyterian Church, Becky Borsage by name, did some reflecting on what all our cancellations and postponements and social distancing is going to mean for us as we adjust to a "new normal" during this virus crisis. Let me read you some of the things that she wrote in her reflection piece on this.

"It occurred to me," she said, "as I was learning about and informing people of cancellations and postponements, that the spiritual life is never cancelled! Never postponed! I'm wondering how we might bring a contemplative spirit to these strange times and come out of this not merely 'back to normal' but changed, having grown closer to God, each other, and even our deepest selves."

Isn't that a great idea! A plan to come out stronger, maybe even changed in a positive way by what we are having to do.

"When our spirits are feeling unsettled," she goes on to say, "the best thing we might do is to make spaces in our day for prayerful pauses.... some ways I am going to try and pause; to open myself up to a deeper, more loving Reality; to remind my spirit that no matter what, I am held by Love. I invite you to join me!"

Ms. Borsage then goes on to list what she calls "Prayerful Pauses."

First pause. "Turn the things we have to do – cancelling gatherings, social distancing, and handwashing -- into prayer:

"When you start feeling anxious about isolation and social distancing, stop and pray for all those who will benefit from this act of compassion." I like that! Social distancing and staying home as an "act of compassion" for others.

Reframing in such a way can mean that pulling back can become a reaching out at the same time.

To do that, she says, “Imagine God’s loving, healing light surrounding healthcare workers, teachers and students, older adults, those with health conditions that make them vulnerable. Say names or groups of people out loud or write them down. Imagine them bathed in God’s loving, healing light.”

Another pause: “Occasionally, when you wash your hands, make it a contemplative, mindful experience. Pause before you start and feel your feet on the rug or floor; feel the cool sink; listen to the water running; feel the temperature changing; feel the soap between your palms and fingers. As you wash, pray a version of the [ancient] loving-kindness prayer: May all beings be safe; may all beings be well; may all beings be at peace; may all beings be loved.”

Another pause: “We can also pause in ways that lift us out of the turmoil for a bit.”

For that, she gives a whole list of websites and phone apps that provide for daily prayer and devotions, many of which include beautiful visuals and soft meditative music. Among those she lists are:

SacredSpace.ie or the Sacred Space app, which not only has great things to read, but has audio files with meditations accompanied by lovely background music.

D365.org or the D365 app, which is a daily devotional that goes a bit deeper than our current Christ in our Home devotions.

Pray-As-You-Go.org or the app version – this one I notice has some lovely, peaceful meditations that you can view on the topics like Lent, which is timely, and on Loneliness, which is something that is likely to hit us as a result of all our social distancing and staying home.

LoyolaPress.com offers a little “3 minute retreat” link on their main page that takes you to just what it says, a “3-minute retreat” that changes daily. This too offers meditations with lovely music and visuals for your retreat. Look for 3-minute Retreat in your phone’s app store too.

Finally she mentions CommonPrayer.net or Common Prayer in your app store. This offers a lovely liturgical order for prayer that also changes daily.

I’ve included all these websites and app names in the written version of this sermon that was sent with the printed liturgy for today so that you can consult it and spend time looking them up for your own use.

The point that Ms. Borage brings to us is that this current interruption in our lives – which certainly has the potential for being much more than just a pause -- doesn’t have to be a period of wasted time filled with anxiety, worry and loneliness. Turn it into an opportunity to truly find that light in the darkness that our Prayer of the Day prayed for.

God indeed is ready to bend his ear to our prayers through his Son, and help us by bringing light into our darkness. Make this time a truly spiritual time.

And realize the presence of God with you, bathing you in his life-giving and healing light.

#### HYMN OF THE DAY

“Amazing Grace”

- 1 Amazing grace! how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.**
- 2 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;  
how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!**
- 3 Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come;  
'tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.**
- 4 The Lord has promised good to me; his word my hope secures;  
he will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.**
- 5 When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun,  
we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun.**

Text: John Newton, 1725-1807, alt., sts. 1-4; anonymous, st. 5

#### OFFERING

*Please remember to mail your weekly offering to the church office. Or click the “Donate Now” button on our website to make an online donation. That will assist us to keep up with bills that will continue to come in.*

#### THE SMALL CATECHISM OF MARTIN LUTHER

In ancient and modern times, Lent has been the time for instruction of candidates preparing for their baptism at Easter. At the same time, the whole Church anticipates Easter through acts of repentance and spiritual renewal. It is therefore appropriate that we review the basics of our faith during these Sundays in Lent by making use of Martin Luther's teaching on the Ten Commandments in his *Small Catechism*, and in so doing be renewed in our baptismal covenant and made ready for the celebration of Easter.

The Seventh Commandment says: "You shall not steal." What does this mean for us?

**We are to fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor's money or property, or get them in any dishonest way, but help her to improve and protect her property and means of making a living.**

The Eighth Commandment says: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." What does this mean for us?

**We are to fear and love God so that we do not betray, slander, or lie about our neighbor, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain his actions in the kindest way.**

#### PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Turning our hearts to God who is gracious and merciful, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

*A brief silence.*

God of insight, open the hearts of the church and the world to all who testify to your deeds of power. Raise up voices in your church that are often silenced or overlooked due to age, gender expression, race, or economic status. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

God of insight, empower us to care for the land and all living things that dwell in it and beneath it. Provide rich soil for crops to grow. Bring rain to lands suffering drought. Protect hills and shorelines from damage caused by erosion. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

God of insight, bring peace to all people and nations. Anoint leaders who seek goodness, righteousness, and truth on behalf of all. Frustrate the efforts of those who would seek to cause violence or terror. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

God of insight, you care for our needs even before we ask. Come quickly to all who seek prayer this day, *especially those affected by the Covid-19 virus, those in our prayer list and those we name in our hearts before you now....* Accomplish healing through the work of doctors, nurses, physical therapists, nutritionists, researchers and all who tend to human bodies. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

God of insight, help this our congregation to lift up the unique gifts of each person who comes among us, no matter their physical capacity, cognitive

ability, or sensory need. Help us to be creative and brave in making our facilities and our ministries accessible to all. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

God of insight, you call out to those who are asleep and awaken them to new life with you. We give thanks for your saints. Join us together with them as your children in this world and the next. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

According to your steadfast love, O God, hear these and all our prayers as we commend them to you; through Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## SENDING

### BLESSING & DISMISSAL

Jesus took the form of a servant and was obedient to death, even death on a cross. May you follow in his way and share in the resurrection. And may almighty God, Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.

**Amen**

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

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**Our Church Building is closed and  
all activities are canceled  
until further notice.**



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**STAY  
HOME  
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