

Fifth Sunday in Lent



March 29, 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

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.

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:

"Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing"

- 1 Come, thou Fount of ev'ry blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise.
While the hope of endless glory fills my heart with joy and love,
teach me ever to adore thee; may I still thy goodness prove.**
- 2 Here I raise my Ebenezer: "Hither by thy help I've come";
and I hope, by thy good pleasure, safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger, wand'ring from the fold of God;
he, to rescue me from danger, interposed his precious blood.**

**3 Oh, to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be;
let that grace now like a fetter bind my wand'ring heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love.
Here's my heart, oh, take and seal it; seal it for thy courts above.**

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. Almighty God, your Son came into the world to free us all from sin and death. Breathe upon us the power of your Spirit, that we may be raised to new life in Christ and serve you in righteousness all our days, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you 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: Ezekiel 37:1-14

¹The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ²He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put

breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD."

⁷So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

¹¹Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.'

¹²Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD."

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING: Romans 8:6-11

⁶To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, ⁸and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

¹⁰But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in 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 11:17-27, 33-45
The Holy Gospel according to St. John
Glory to you, O Lord.

¹⁷When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" ³⁸Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." ⁴⁵Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

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

SERMON

Jesus Wept

The Rev. Thomas L. Weitzel

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Spring Hill, FL

Our gospel for today contains one of the shortest verses in the whole Bible. And one of the most moving. It's verse 35: "Jesus began to weep." Older translations like the King James said it even more succinctly: "Jesus wept."

Here, on the brink of Holy Week and just a matter of days away from the triumphal entry and the passion, Jesus stands before the tomb of his friend Lazarus, weeping because of what death has done to him and to his grieving sisters. The Christ, who has already set his own face toward Jerusalem, where he knows his own destiny and destruction lay in wait, at this point takes time out to grieve and mourn and join in the pain that life has dealt to those he loves.

It's a picture of Christ that we do not usually conjure up in our minds: a weeping Savior.

We usually see the triumphant Christ sitting at God's right hand, crowned in glory, having been raised from the dead by the Father. We usually see the self-assured Jesus of John's gospel, who knows everything before it happens, and even in the midst of his own trials and tribulations still stands in control, able to dash all those who would arrest him to the ground -- yet restraining himself and offering his own life on the cross in order to do the Father's bidding.

It's a rare moment to see such a Savior as we are used to seeing reduced to tears -- just as WE are so often reduced to tears in the midst of pain and suffering such as we know.

Who can KEEP from crying at some point? One day, all is right with the world. And the next, the whole world is turned upside down and dealing with a pandemic.

Can there be a dry eye when we hear about how this new disease has run rampant through nursing homes in Washington and New Jersey and claimed so many victims who were just so vulnerable to start with?

Can there be a dry eye when we hear how families of the dead are having to make hard choices, because it's simply not safe for people to gather, not even for funerals, to properly mourn their loved ones?

Can there be a dry eye when we hear of how some are taking matters into their own hands to treat their illness with drugs not yet tested or approved, only to find that they die anyway from this latest contagion that has been unleashed on the world?

It's enough to make a grown man cry. It's enough to make a Savior weep. And that's what we see in the gospel for today.

Not only do we see Christ weeping simply for his friend, we see Christ weeping in the face of the same vulnerability, the same powerlessness, the same devastation, the same loss of life and humanity and dignity that I have

been talking about. We see Christ weeping before the assaults of life brought on by death and disease and sin. We see Christ weeping, with US.

I know a Savior who weeps with me when I weep. I know a Savior who knows my hurts and your hurts, and hurts with us, out of his tremendous love for us.

Never will you see a more compassionate picture of Christ than this one of Jesus weeping before the tomb of Lazarus. Never will you read so few words in the Bible that have more power or meaning than this verse where Jesus wept. It embodies the whole point of the gospel and of the incarnation: God with us, feeling, hurting, weeping, as we feel, hurt and weep.

But weeping is not the point of this story. For all our tears, for all of Jesus' tears, weeping is not the point of the story.

The point is what Jesus said to Mary and to Martha before the tomb of their brother: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me, even though they die, will live. Do you believe this?"

The point is what Jesus did in calling Lazarus from death to life in the Father's name, as he calls you and me from our own "walking death," as you might call our miseries and sorrow and grief – calling us to life in his name.

Do YOU believe this? It's not just the question for Mary and Martha. It is the question for US today and the question presented by the whole gospel as we stand in the midst of this coronavirus with more questions than answers, more anxiety than hope.

That gospel proclaims: GOD IS THE GOD OF LIFE. The Bible affirms this again and again. Ezekiel proclaimed it in ages past as we heard it in the first lesson: "I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves," says the Lord. And for those still languishing in the tears of life comes the additional promise: "I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live.... I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord."

And to prove it, he sends his only Son to be our Savior, to join with humanity in our weakness and our tears. To prove it, he sends that Son to raise Lazarus from the dead. To prove it, he sends that Son to give his own life for our sins. And to ultimately and finally prove it, he raises that Son from death to life so that we might all have eternal life, as Jesus said to Mary and Martha.

Do you believe this?

It is difficult at times. Life is difficult at times. Sorrow and grief and pain are hard to bear sometimes. What we are having to endure in this current crisis is hard to bear sometimes.

But the gospel for today ends by saying that many who had seen what Jesus did believed in him. And we, who are Christians, know the resurrection end of Christ's story.

It is for us to believe. God IS the God of life. And life, new life now, is ours to have through that Son who is indeed the resurrection and the life. We will not die in our pool of tears, nor be without hope in the confines of a stay-at-home order. Life stands before us because of that Savior.

Yes, Lord, I believe.

HYMN OF THE DAY

"Faith of Our Fathers"

- 1 Faith of our fathers, living still in spite of dungeon, fire, and sword.
Oh, how our hearts beat high with joy whene'er we hear that glorious word.**

Refrain

Faith of our fathers, holy faith, we will be true to thee till death.

- 2 The martyrs, chained in prisons dark, were still in heart and conscience free;
and blest would be their children's fate if they, like them, should die for thee.**

Refrain

- 3 Faith of our fathers! We will love both friend and foe in all our strife;
proclaim thee too, as love knows how, by saving word and faithful life.**

Refrain

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.

- P** The Ninth and Tenth Commandments say: "You shall not covet." What does this mean for us?

- C** **We are to fear and love God so that we do not desire to get our neighbor's possessions, spouse or workers, by scheming or pretending to have a right to them, but always to help our neighbor keep what is theirs.**

P Regarding all the Commandments, God says: "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." What does this mean for us?

C God warns that he will punish all who break these commandments. Therefore we are to fear his wrath and not disobey him. But he promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore we are to love and trust him, and gladly do what he commands.

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 life, bind your faithful people into one body. Enliven the church with your Spirit and bless the work of those who work for its renewal. Accomplish your work of salvation in us and through us, for the sake of the world. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of life, you love the world you have made and you grieve when creation suffers. Restore polluted lands and waterways. Heal areas of the world ravaged by storms, floods, wildfires, droughts, or other natural disasters. Bring all things to new life. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of life, show redemption to all who watch and wait with eager expectation: those longing for wars to cease, staying home and waiting for their lives to return to normal, those seeking election, and those in dire need of humanitarian relief. Come quickly with your hope. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of life, you weep with those who grieve. Unbind all who are held captive by anxiety, despair, or pain, especially those affected by the Covid-19 outbreak, those in our Prayer List and those we name in our hearts or aloud before you now.... Fill us with compassion and empathy for those who struggle, and keep us faithful in prayer. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of life, we give thanks for opportunities for this congregation to collaborate with our community in caring for the needs of our neighbors, especially through our Food Pantry. Strengthen our ties with other local congregations, agencies, and services. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of life, you are our resurrection. We remember all those who have died and trust that, in you, they will live again. Breathe new life into our dry bones, that we, too, might live with you forever. 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.

POSTLUDE

+

Acknowledgments: Portions of the Liturgy for today were written by the Rev. Thomas L. Weitzel (LiturgyByTLW.com). Lessons and prayers are from Sundays and Seasons.com. Copyright 2012 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission under Augsburg Fortress Liturgies Annual License #24316. New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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



STAY
HOME
SAVE
LIVES