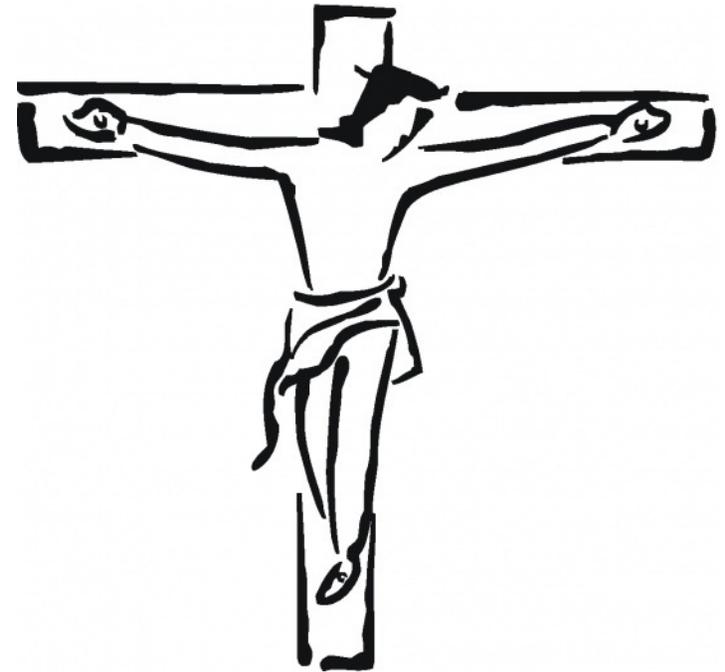


IOWA DISTRICT EAST DEVOTIONS



LENT 2015

2015 LENTEN DEVOTIONS

Iowa District East is pleased to provide these devotions for the season of Lent. These devotions were written by pastors in the Cedar Rapids, Benton, and Waterloo Circuits.

These Devotions cover Monday through Saturday of each week in Lent, beginning on Ash Wednesday (February 18) and ending on Easter Sunday (April 5).

EASTER SUNDAY

April 5, 2015

Today's Reading: Mark 16:1-8

"He has risen; he is not here." – Mark 16:6

For the two Marys who went to the tomb early that Sunday morning. It must have seemed like the end. They went there to finish preparing the body for burial, a task that had been interrupted on Friday afternoon. When they reached the tomb, Jesus' body was nowhere to be found and an angel announced to them "He is risen; he is not here." Although they initially didn't understand what had happened and fled in fear and confusion, in a short time they and the other followers of Jesus would come to understand the truth. Jesus was no longer dead. He was alive. Their journey with Him, which they had thought was over, really wasn't over at all. Jesus' resurrection validated everything He had done and taught them. He was alive and would be for eternity. And that meant that they would have eternal life as well.

A short time before His own death and resurrection, Jesus raised His friend Lazarus from the dead and said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." (John 11:25). Several decades later St. Paul would write, "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep." (1 Cor. 15:20). Just as Christ died and rose again, we too have the assurance of our own resurrection and eternal life. We are connected to Christ's death and resurrection in Baptism, in which all who believe receive forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, and eternal salvation.

Although our physical death may seem to be the end, it really isn't. Instead, in Christ it is a continuation of our journey with Him that began at Baptism and will continue forever. And so today, Easter Sunday is not an end either, but a blessed beginning. A beginning we celebrate over and over again every Sunday of every week. May you be richly blessed by God as you continue the journey with Christ for eternity.

Prayer: *If Christ still lay within the tomb Then death would be the end, And we should face our final doom With neither guide nor friend. But now the Savior is raised up, So when a Christian dies We mourn, yet look to God in hope—In Christ the saints arise!" (If Christ Had Not Been Raised From Death, LSB 486:2).*

This devotion was written by Rev. David Hansen, pastor at King of Glory Lutheran Church in Swisher, IA and Saint John Lutheran Church in Center Point, IA.

HOLY SATURDAY

April 4, 2015

Today's Reading: Matthew 27:57-66

"So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard." - Matthew 27:66

"We now commit the body of our (brother/sister) to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust..." (*LSB Agenda*). We have all stood at the grave of a loved one. Our hearts break. The goodbye seems so final, the separation so permanent—if not for the resurrection.

What must the disciples and the faithful women have been thinking and feeling? "O sorrow dread! Our God is dead..." (LSB 448:2). "I will come again and will take you to myself ..." (John 14:3). "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me" (John 16:16). Oh, Jesus, *will* we see You again? When?!

On that Friday we call "good," when for our sins Jesus died the death we deserved, His body was taken from the cross and placed in the newly-hewn tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. The great stone rolled across the entrance was secured by the governor's seal. No one was getting in or out. It appeared that the door to God was closed! The two Marys sat and watched and waited and wondered.

Death does *not* have the final word! The goodbye is not final nor the separation permanent. The coming dawn will prove to all that the grave could not hold Him and neither will it hold us!

Prayer: O darkest woe! Ye tears, forth flow! Has earth so sad a wonder? God the Father's only Son Now is buried yonder. O Jesus Christ, Who sacrificed Thy life for lifeless mortals: Be my life in death and bring Me to heaven's portals! (*O Darkest Woe*, LSB 448:1, 7)

This devotion was written by Rev. David Renfro, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Cedar Rapids, IA.

ASH WEDNESDAY

February 18, 2015

Today's Reading: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven." – Matthew 6:1

I recently visited a theater with two very different employees. Based on her behavior, one employee relished the public eye. The other employee would rather endure water-boarding than him having to speak in public. Outwardly these people seemed very different, but they were actually driven by the same belief: "What other people think about them matters!" He gloried in what he believed other people thought of him, while she dreaded it.

You may not be standing on a soap box telling everyone how good you are, but that doesn't mean your "righteousness" isn't being driven by the opinions of others. When we say nothing because we're afraid of being noticed, when we go along with the crowd because we're afraid of standing out, our "righteousness" is being driven by others. Hypocrites come in all personality types: the loud and boastful, but also the shy and meek.

Hypocrisy is driven by the pursuit of a righteousness that cannot be attained. Sinful human beings, with their ever changing and dishonest opinions, are never fully satisfied. You please someone one day, but the next they have changed their minds. You think you made someone happy, only to discover that this same person is saying terrible things about you behind your back. You do a loving deed for someone, but they become angry having imagined some evil motive for your actions.

The only righteousness that brings peace to the human heart is the righteousness that comes as a gift. It is not a righteousness rooted in what we do, but rooted in the payment Christ made on the cross for our sins. It is not a righteousness rooted in pleasing man with his ever changing opinions and ideas, but in pleasing our changeless and merciful God.

Prayer: Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness My beauty are, my glorious dress; Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, With joy shall I lift up my head. (*Jesus Thy Blood and Righteousness*, LSB 563:1).

This devotion was written by Rev. Daniel Krueger, pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Hiawatha, IA.

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

February 19, 2015

Today's Reading: Genesis 22:1-18

"And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, 'My father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' He said, 'Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?'" – Genesis 22:6-7

The similarities between Abraham and God are easily seen in this account from Abraham's life. There are, however, great similarities between the sons that are quite often overlooked.

Isaac has laid upon him the wood for the sacrifice and carries it up the mountain to the place where the sacrifice is to be carried out. He goes willingly and without question. He knows only that his father, Abraham, has told him that "God will provide" There is no struggle as he is bound. No words are spoken asking what Abraham is about to do. Then just at the right time, God provides a ram as the substitute sacrifice. Isaac's life is spared.

Jesus also had the wood for the sacrifice placed upon Him. He carried it up to the place where the sacrifice was to be carried out. He went willingly and without question, knowing only that God would provide the Lamb for the sacrifice. There was no struggle as He was bound and led away to Golgotha. No words were spoken asking what was about to happen. And at just the right time, the Lamb of God was provided as the sacrifice for your sins so that your life is spared.

Prayer: The Lamb, the Lamb. O Father, where's the sacrifice? Faith sees, believes God will provide the Lamb of price. Worthy is the Lamb whose death makes me His own! The Lamb is reigning on His Throne! (*The Lamb*, LSB 547:1).

This devotion was written by Rev. Brad Brown, pastor of Concordia Lutheran Church in Cedar Rapids, IA.

GOOD FRIDAY

April 3, 2015

Today's Reading: John 19:17-30

"It is finished!" – John 19:30

In the beginning - darkness. The earth - without form, void. Then, the Word ordered the universe into existence. Light overcame darkness. Everything was perfect. Man, created in the image of God, was immortal, living by the very Word of God that had brought him into existence.

But, man turned away from God's Word of life to heed Satan's word of death. The perfect, immortal man had become imperfect, sinful, mortal. But the God of love had compassion on his dying man. He had a plan. God became Man - Perfect Man, immortal, like the first man. And then He took that first man's sin, your sin, and every human's sin into His holy flesh in order that He might endure the eternal death all sinners deserve. There He hung - God on a cross. Abandoned, for you. In thick darkness the earth shook and rocks split. It was as if God's creation was coming apart. And then the God-Man died. He who was immortal had sacrificed Himself for all mortals – for you! "It is finished." Having completed His new creation, the Word rested in His tomb on the Sabbath to arise the next - the first day of His new creation – for you!

Prayer: To Thee, eternal Three in One, let homage meet by all be done; as by the cross Thou dost restore, so guide and keep us evermore. Amen. (*The Royal Banners Forward Go*, LSB 455:6).

This devotion was written by Rev. Terry Small, pastor at Saint John Lutheran Church in Amana, IA and Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Wellman, IA.

HOLY THURSDAY

April 2, 2015

Today's Reading: Mark 14:12-26

And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."

– Mark 14:22-24

Jesus' body and blood poured out for many. You need this. You are tempted by the world, the flesh, and the devil. You give in. You make yourself god. You disobey authority. You hate and murder. You lust. You steal. You lie. You covet. You daily sin much. Your sins leave you feeling guilty, ashamed, and weak. You need God's forgiveness, His life, His salvation.

Jesus won those gifts for you when He bore your sins on Calvary's cross. He took the punishment that you deserve for your sins. The punishment is death, the death by which he poured out His body and blood for you as sacrifice for all your sins.

And get this: Jesus doesn't just win you those gifts. He gives them to you. Jesus gives you the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation as he gives you His body and blood with the bread and wine of the Holy Communion. It's just like the words of distribution say, "Take, eat; this is the true body of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, given into death for your sins.... Take, drink; this is the true blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, shed for the remission of your sins." And where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. You need this and Jesus gives it to you.

Prayer: Thy body giv'n for me, O Savior, Thy blood which Thou for me didst shed, These are my life and strength forever, By them my hungry soul is fed. Lord, may Thy body and Thy blood Be for my soul the highest good! (*Thy Body, Given for Me, O Savior, LSB 619:1*).

This devotion was written by Rev. W. Max Mons, pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Chapel in Iowa City, IA.

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

February 20, 2015

Today's Reading: James 1:12-18

"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him." – James 1:12

What a great blessing is promised to us: the crown of life. Remain steadfast under trial, withstand the test, and you will inherit the kingdom of life. It is a great blessing, but a mixed blessing for us sinners. As St. James goes on to say, "Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death." We have all experienced this growth of death. When the trials and tests come, we are undone by our own warped desires.

We must be steadfast and withstand the test, but we cannot do so ourselves. Rather, "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father." Jesus, God's good and perfect gift, is the one Man who has remained steadfast under every trial and withstood every test. And faithful to the end, He accepted the crown of thorns so that we might receive the crown of life. Having received Him, we are strengthened against the attacks of the evil one and our own sin, and we are rescued when we fall. And so by clinging to Jesus, we are brought through every trial and test until we come to the kingdom of life.

Prayer: O my Savior, help afford By Your Spirit and Your Word! When my wayward heart would stray, Keep me in the narrow way; Grace in time of need supply While I live and when I die. (*Chief of Sinners Though I Be, LSB 611:5*).

This devotion was written by Rev. Sean Hanson, pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Mount Vernon, IA.

SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

February 21, 2015

Today's Reading: Mark 1:9-15

"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" - Mark 1:15

"Wake up, kids, we're there!" So often these words come from the front seat to slumbering children in the back at the end of a long, draining road trip. At first they waken slowly, perhaps even grumbling about being stirred from dreamland. Then, excitement fills their eyes as they fully awake and realize their restraints and confinement in the car are about to end. Awareness sinks in that the long road trip is coming to an end along with the bickering, poking, boredom, fights, complaining and confinement. Things are about to change!

Jesus is announcing to bickering, complaining, confined Israel that change is on the way. The long years of wandering in legalism are about to come to an end. "The time has come...the kingdom of God is right here; stop, turn, lift up your heads, and look!" But they do not see a parade or palace indicating the presence of a King to show them a Kingdom. Instead, they see a person. It is not what they expect. Confusion, disappointment, and indifference greet the announcement but only momentarily. Then, the power of the Word and its King sets in. They are turned and at last they see!

"Repent and believe the good news" is not an invitation to examine the evidence or make a decision to turn away from sin. Sin is much too strong for us to turn away from. It has us chained and we cannot free ourselves. No, this is not an appeal to turn ourselves around (repent) and to commit ourselves to Christ (believe). Jesus words are not law but Gospel. They, in and of themselves, have the power to turn us from Satan to our Savior. This is the good news and the Kingdom of God is freely given us for the sake of Jesus Christ, the King who grants us citizenship in His Realm.

Are we there yet? Through the gift of faith, we are there!

Prayer: We humbly pray, heavenly Father, that You would guide us through the darkness of this evil world and open our eyes and hearts through the gift of faith. Guard us and hold us close to You and Your truth, especially the truth that membership in your Kingdom is freely granted through Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

This devotion was written by Rev. Mark Halvorson pastor of King of Kings Lutheran Church in Cedar Rapids, IA.

HOLY WEDNESDAY

April 1, 2015

Today's Reading: John 13:16-38

"...I will lay down my life for you." – John 13:37b

"You're a chip off the old block!" I have heard that more than once. "You're just like your father." Admittedly, part of the time it is a compliment. I love my father. He is God's gift to me. But sometimes people don't mean it as a good thing.

Well, I say to you, "You're just like Peter!" Ever impetuous, Peter cannot afford to let the Lord go. He says, "I will lay down my life for you." The Word of the Lord is true, and when Jesus says that Peter will deny Him, we see that is exactly what happens.

Peter says, "I will lay down my life for you." And you said the same exact thing. On your Confirmation Day you confessed that you would not fall away from your confession or the Church, and yet you have. You have reminded silent when you should have spoken. You have denied the Lord.

"You're just like Peter!" Not only have you failed like Peter, but you are repentant and forgiven like Peter. Being like Peter is also a good thing. Know, without a doubt, the Word of the Lord is true. You are forgiven!

Prayer: Praise for Your great apostle; So eager and so bold, Thrice falling, yet repentant, Thrice charged to feed Your fold. Lord, make Your pastors faithful; To guard Your flock from harm, And hold them when they waver With Your almighty arm. (*By All Your Saints in Warfare*, LSB 517:10).

This devotion was written by Rev. Brent Hartwig, pastor at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Iowa City, IA.

HOLY TUESDAY

March 31, 2015

Today's Reading: John 12:23-50

These passages bring us to the end of Jesus' public ministry. That is, from this point on, He will be teaching His disciples and close followers in private. But this is also only the end of the first half of John's Gospel of Christ. The entire second half will concern Thursday's Passover meal through the resurrection and appearances just beyond.

By your best guess, if the story of your life were being written out in 21 chapters, what chapter would you be on right now? Not all, but most of us would find ourselves in the second half of life. We might even be on the last paragraph of the last chapter and not even know it.

Yet, the story of our lives is written in two parts: one extremely short chapter called, "Before I was baptized," followed by all of the rest. A first chapter of fear, darkness, and death is summed up in a very few words and then chapters and chapters of life in the forgiveness and hope that is Jesus Christ follow. The dividing point between our life of death and our life of Christ is faith in Jesus, found in the moments, seconds even, it took to pour water over you in the Name of the Holy Trinity. This is but an extension of the moment Christ called out, *It is finished!* from the cross and died, and another moment, a few days later, when Jesus rose from the dead. How long do you think it took Jesus to rise from the dead? An instant? Yet, have we used up even a small portion of the words needed to praise and extol that moment?

In the reading for today, when Jesus hears that Gentiles are asking to see Him, He immediately identifies a new chapter has begun, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be gloried." It is crucifixion talk. He says, "... for this is the purpose I have come to this hour." A chapter is about to begin that will be the greatest of them all, a chapter that will be included in our lives as well. "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself."

Read these few words from John's Gospel and know that in Christ Jesus though a few chapters of your life lay behind you, volumes uncountable stretch before you. With Christ's return, the Day of Resurrection, and the New World before us, there are not enough books in the world to record what is yet to come.

For at the end of chapter 12, as chapter 13 is about to begin, Jesus says of those who believe in Him, "For I did not come to judge the world but to save it."

Prayer: *Father in Heaven, You sent Your Son to add not a few hours, a couple of chapters, to my life. You sent Your Son to be lifted up on a cross and die in my place that my book of life would have no end. In Baptism You washed me clean of sin and death and now I will live a life of praise and thanksgiving to you forever more. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

This devotion was written by Rev. Dr. Mitch Otto, pastor at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Coralville, IA.

MONDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

February 23, 2015

Today's Reading: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

"I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless." – Genesis 17:1

Impossible. God tells Abram that he is to "be blameless." Abram who told his wife Sarai to lie to Pharaoh and claim that she was Abram's sister. Abram who fathered a son through Sarai's servant, Hagar, in order to "help God out." Abram, be blameless? Impossible!

But it's not just Abram who fails to be blameless before God. So do we. We try our hardest to *appear* blameless, by passing the blame on to others, but God is not fooled.

Our gracious God had a plan whereby we sinners would be declared blameless on the basis of the truly blameless One taking the blame for us. That sounds impossible, except the Lord said to Abram, "I am *El Shaddai*—God Almighty." Here is He who is able to do the impossible: like causing a 90-year-old woman to bear a son, and from that son to finally bring forth the ultimate Son. That Son, Jesus, died bearing all our sin and all the blame; now God declares you blameless before Him. Impossible? Not with *El Shaddai*.

Prayer: *Thou, ah! Thou hast taken on Thee Bonds and stripes, a cruel rod; Pain and scorn were heaped upon Thee, O Thou sinless Son of God! Thus didst Thou my soul deliver From the bonds of sin forever. Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, Dearest Jesus unto Thee. (From LSB 420:2 - Christ, the Life of All the Living).*

This devotion was written by Rev. Mark Leckband, pastor at Zion Lutheran Church in Shellsburg, IA and St. Mark Lutheran Church in Garrison, IA.

TUESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

February 24, 2015

Today's Reading: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

"I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you." - Genesis 17:6

God's promise to Abram gets repeated and expanded. When he was 75, Abram was initially informed that the Lord would "make of [him] a great nation" (Gen 12:2). Then, he was told that his offspring would be "as the dust of the earth" (13:16) and as numerous as the stars (15:5). Now, twenty-four years after the original promise, the Lord tells Abram, "I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you."

Faith rests on the sure promises of God. So, God repeats and expands His promise to nourish Abram's faith. He even gives Abram and Sarai new names that will remind them of the promise—Abraham, "father of a multitude," for by faith all true believers from all nations become spiritual children of Abraham (Rom 4:12-17); and Sarah, "princess," who would be the ancestress of kings.

Faith grasps hold of God's promise—not merely the promise of a son, Isaac, but to *the* Son of Abraham (Matt 1:1), Jesus. Through His death, Jesus now brings us forgiveness and makes us Abraham's spiritual children. God's promise continues to expand.

Prayer: In perfect love He dies; For me He dies, for me. O all-atoning Sacrifice, I cling by faith to Thee. (*O Perfect Life of Love*, LSB 452:5).

This devotion was written by Rev. Mark Leckband, pastor at Zion Lutheran Church in Shellsburg, IA and St. Mark Lutheran Church in Garrison, IA.

HOLY MONDAY

March 30, 2015

Today's Reading: John 12:1-11

Mary had previously "sat at the Lord's feet and listened to His teaching" (Luke 10:39) and she was commended by Jesus for choosing the good portion, which will not be taken away from her. Here again she is at the Lord's feet, but for a different reason. Tonight she anoints His feet with genuine and very precious nard oil. Having heard His Word she believes and responds in all love and humility. Here is Jesus. Here is faith and love. And the house smelled like heaven itself.

But then Judas speaks up, that enemy of the Gospel. He laments this divine worship. "There's \$35,000 soaking into feet and hair and bare floor! Why this waste?" The oil was wasted, but only on Judas. To the other disciples it was a glorious and welcome fragrance. The same thing was about to happen again. Jesus was about to suffer. A thousand thorns would bring forth His precious blood and anoint His body. Beatings and lashings would open up His sacred veins and the wells of salvation would flow freely. Nails would pierce His hands and feet and there would be much more than \$35,000 being poured out.

Some, like Judas, would waste this blood. They would lament it and go their own way. But the Church holds her cup to her Lord's pierced side and believes His Word, "this cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Where that blood is received, there is Jesus: gracious, merciful, and alive. There is faith and love. There is heaven itself.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, poured out His precious blood on behalf of sinners. Grant us faith to believe His Word and receive His sacred blood for the forgiveness of sins. Protect us from unbelief, and all the plots of the evil one, that we would not neglect so great a gift; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

This devotion was written by Rev. Andrew Richard, pastor of St. Silas Lutheran Church in North Liberty, IA.

SATURDAY OF THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

March 28, 2015

Today's Reading: John 12:12-19

"Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" - John 12:15

There was fear in the Garden of Eden as the God of creation came looking for the "would be" gods Adam and Eve. There was fear when that same God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and again when He made His presence known to the Israelites in fire and cloud on Mt. Sinai. There was fear when God's glory filled the temple and Isaiah trembled in His presence. There was fear among the shepherds when the angels announced this God's birth in Bethlehem. Why was there fear? Because the ones to whom this God makes His presence known were sinners deserving His judgment.

Tomorrow begins Holy Week and God says to you, "Fear not, daughter of Zion; . . . your king is coming." When King Jesus entered Jerusalem on that Sunday so long ago, the people, and even His disciples did not know what lay ahead for Jesus. He had told them but they weren't listening. *"From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."* (Matthew 16:21)

Like Adam and Eve, Moses, the Israelites, Isaiah, and the shepherds, you have good reason to fear. You, like them, are sinners to whom this King comes.

Are you listening? "Fear not," baptized child of God. The Catechism teaches you to pray that this King, "has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness."

Prayer: *This Lamb is Christ, the soul's great friend, the Lamb of God, our Savior. Whom God the Father chose to send to gain for us His favor. "Go forth, My Son," the Father said, "And free My children from their dread of guilt and condemnation. The wrath and stripes are hard to bear, but by Your passion they will share the fruit of Your salvation."* (From "A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth" LSB 438:2)

This devotion was written by Rev. Michael Knox, pastor of Our Redeemer in Cedar Falls, IA, Christ Lutheran in Waterloo Iowa, and Peace Lutheran in Shell Rock, IA.

WEDNESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

February 25, 2015

Today's Reading: Romans 5:1-11

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." -Romans 5:1

In our lives, we value peace and security but apart from Christ, we have no peace, security, or even hope. Sin and its consequences are so encompassing that they engulf us and define our identity. We have no peace whatsoever and everything we see, we see blinded and tainted by sin. Without Jesus, there's no hope and God is not our friend. We stand condemned and under His wrath and that is far from peaceful for us. The call to repentance is a call to examine ourselves and who it is that we are and in whom it is we place our trust.

Having been justified by faith we have peace with God through Jesus and that's real peace. God justifies you through faith in Christ and you have obtained the forgiveness of your sins. So you can stand with confidence before your God, now and on the Last Day. This Good News is your hope that the Lord speaks to you and in this word, you will never be put to shame even in the midst of suffering and death itself. Rejoice, your conscious is clean; you are justified by faith.

Prayer: Thy holy body into death was given, Life to win for us in heaven. No greater love than this to Thee could bind us; May this feast thereof remind us! O Lord, have mercy! Lord, Thy kindness did so constrain Thee That Thy blood should bless and sustain me. All our debt Thou hast paid; Peace with God once more is made; O Lord, have mercy! (*O Lord, We praise Thee*, LSB 617:2)

This devotion was written by Rev. Andy Wright, pastor of St. John Lutheran Church in Keystone, IA.

THURSDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK IN LENT

February 26, 2015

Today's Reading: Romans 5:1-11

*"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
- Romans 5:8*

We don't like to think of ourselves as being weak. If we are weak, then we are helpless. Take that further; we do not like to think of ourselves as unworthy or undeserving. We like to be strong and we like to think that we are entitled to things even the things of God. The law of God, however, has a different judgment on us and our self-assessment isn't as we think. To examine ourselves is to see our sin and know what it is that we truly deserve: the judgment of hell.

In the midst of weakness of the cross, God is at work having compassion on us in Christ. "At the right time Christ died for the ungodly." Jesus died for us who are far from deserving or entitled and that's wonderful. The beauty of the Gospel can sometimes be short and sweet. St. Paul preaches to us in these simple words that give us the very person they point us to: Jesus. To trust in Christ is to empty ourselves and cling solely and completely on Him. He who is our righteousness who died for us, the unrighteous. While we were yet enemies of God, he saw fit to reconcile us to Himself in Christ.

Prayer: Thou hast suffered great affliction And hast borne it patiently, even death by crucifixion, Fully to atone for me; Thou didst choose to be tormented That my doom should be prevented. Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, Dearest Jesus, unto Thee. (*Christ, the Life of All the Living*, LSB 420:6)

This devotion was written by Rev. Andy Wright, pastor of St. John Lutheran Church in Keystone, IA.

FRIDAY OF THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

March 27, 2015

Today's Reading: John 12:12-19

"Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" - John 12:13b

You don't make the words of worship up. The Liturgy of the Church today, like the prayer of the people who greeted Jesus on Palm Sunday, comes from the Scriptures. In this case from the Psalms.

They knew them by heart because the Psalms were prayed in the Synagogue and in their homes. The Psalms were prayed in the Temple and prayed as they travelled "up" to Jerusalem to keep the feasts of Passover, Weeks, and Booths.

It is the time of the Passover. Jesus has recently raised Lazarus from the dead and the word of this miracle has spread. Jesus, the one who heals the sick, gives sight to the blind, drives out demons, and even raises the dead is coming to Jerusalem to keep the Feast. Filled with hope, the people join together in prayer with words taken straight from Psalm 118.

They may not have fully understood the words or even what they were asking. But the words were true and the words were faithful. "Hosanna!" - Lord save us. "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

The King of Israel is blessed for He comes to save, humble and lowly, by His suffering and death. That same King still comes to save but now He comes humbly and lowly "in, with, and under" bread and wine to give Himself in His body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. So the Church still sings, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

Prayer: *A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth, the guilt of sinners bearing. And, laden with the sins of earth, none else the burden sharing; Goes patient on, grows weak and faint, to slaughter led without complaint, that spotless life to offer, He bears the stripes, the wounds, the lies, the mockery, and yet replies, "All this I gladly suffer." (From "A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth" LSB 438:1)*

This devotion was written by Rev. Michael Knox, pastor of Our Redeemer in Cedar Falls, IA, Christ Lutheran in Waterloo Iowa, and Peace Lutheran in Shell Rock, IA.

THURSDAY OF THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

March 26, 2015

Today's Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

"So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth." Philippians 2:11

"End Zone Worship", that's what some people call it. The receiver runs hard, makes a cut, loses the defender, makes a spectacular catch, sprints to the end zone, and bows the knee to give glory to God. He may even point to the heavens. What a dramatic display of faith and devotion for all the world to see. What a tremendous witness!

Have you ever noticed that these displays of faith and gratitude rarely take place outside of the end zone? No bowing the knee when the same receiver makes a crucial block to open the way for the running back to score. Nor when the receiver makes a simple catch, drops a pass, or misses a block. Yet he still gets to play and he gets paid well for doing it. Is he only grateful when the result is measured in success?

"At the name of Jesus every knee should bow." This means everybody, all the time, in every circumstance. As sinful and redeemed children of God we are continually and eternally thankful for all our blessings, especially those of grace, faith, and salvation. Our knees are in a constant state of bending as we bow in repentance and reverence. Unlike the Pharisee in the Temple and the receiver in the end zone, we humbly bow the knee at the name above every name - the name of Jesus - because He saves His people from their sins.

Prayer: At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, every tongue confess Him King of glory now. 'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call Him Lord, who from the beginning was the mighty Word. (*At the Name of Jesus*, LSB 512:1)

This devotion was written by Reverend Larry Feldt, pastor of St. John's Lutheran in Denver, IA.

FRIDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

February 27, 2015

Today's Reading: Mark 8:27-38

"And he asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Christ'" - Mark 8:29

Christ means "Anointed One." St. Peter calls Jesus "the Christ" because he believes that Jesus is the One anointed by God the Father to save this world. St. Peter is right. At His Baptism, God anointed His Son Jesus with the Holy Spirit, sending Him forth to be our Priest and King.

In the Old Testament the priests were anointed to intercede for the Israelites, to offer sacrifices for their sins on the Lord's altar. As God's anointed Priest, Jesus interceded for all people, sacrificing Himself as the Lamb of God on the altar of the cross for the sins of the world.

Kings, too, were anointed in the Old Testament to exercise authority over the people on God's behalf. As God's anointed King, Jesus ruled humbly by hiding His divine son-ship in order to be crowned with thorns, offering His royal life in your place upon the throne of the cross, rising triumphantly, and ruling over you with His grace and forgiveness.

You are Christians. That means you are anointed ones too. You are royal priests anointed with the Holy Spirit in Holy Baptism (1 Peter 2:9; Acts 2:28). You are called to intercede now for your neighbor and to lay claim to your royal status as God's children through faith in Jesus. For through faith in Jesus as the Christ you too, like St. Peter, stand upon the Rock of our Salvation. Like St. Peter, your confession as a Christian is that Jesus is your High Priest who by His blood has won access for you into the heavenly holy place. Your confession is that Jesus is your King who has passed through death for you and now lives to govern you by His grace.

Prayer: My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus' blood and righteousness; No merit of my own I claim But wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand (*My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*, LSB 575:1).

This devotion was written by Rev. Stephen Preus, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Vinton, IA.

SATURDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

February 28, 2015

Today's Reading: Mark 8:27-38

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." - Mark 8:34

We are saved by faith alone. Yet today many Christians are tempted to think that this means the same thing as the platitude of the eighties pop singer: "You just gotta have faith!" Like other clichés passing for Scripture these days, Jesus never actually says that. Along with faith in Christ comes denial of self and a cross to bear.

Denial of self is contrary to sinful nature. We would rather justify our sinful thoughts, words, and actions because we hate denying ourselves the pleasure of being right, even when we are wrong. Like when Peter denied Jesus, our lives often reveal that we'd rather deny our Lord than our own comfort. Bearing the cross is difficult. If Jesus had said, "Take up your resurrection," we'd be more willing to follow Him. Resurrection means no sorrow, only joy. But not the cross.

Christ has given new meaning to the cross, however. Our smug selfishness and our cowardice when God calls for confession are sins of commission and omission. These sins Christ Jesus selflessly paid for by His death on the cross. The cross you bear as a Christian includes this Good News. You are saved through faith alone in the self-giving sacrifice Christ made for you on the cross. You are saved through faith alone in Christ alone, even and especially when your selfish sin and heavy cross are too much for you to handle. Cling to Christ's cross in such times. Follow Him and you will endure, like Him, unto the resurrection.

Prayer: Yea, Lord, 'twas Thy rich bounty gave My body, soul, and all I have In this poor life of labor. Lord, grant that I in ev'ry place May glorify Thy lavish grace And help and serve my neighbor. Let no false doctrine me beguile; Let Satan not my soul defile. Give strength and patience unto me To bear my cross and follow Thee. Lord Jesus Christ, my God and Lord, my God and Lord, In death Thy comfort still afford. (*Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart*, LSB 708:2).

This devotion was written by Rev. Stephen Preus, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Vinton, IA.

WEDNESDAY OF THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

March 25, 2015

Today's Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

"but made Himself (Jesus) nothing, taking on the form of a (bond)servant, being born in the likeness of men." - Philippians 2:7

Let's see, what would I like to be when I grow up: a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher, an astronaut, fireman, policeman, pastor? At some point every child has asked himself/herself that question. We have all been there. The one vocation that is never chosen is that of a "bondservant". Webster defines bondservant as "*one bound to service without wages*" or simply put; a slave.

This is however, the vocation that Jesus chose. In the days when Jesus walked the earth bondservants were in great supply. Even though their conditions may have been better than in this country in the days of slavery, the service was the same. The bondservant did all the work and the one he served received all the benefit.

That is exactly the vocation Jesus has fulfilled. He came to earth to serve us, to do the work of salvation that we cannot do for ourselves. He did all the heavy lifting. He is the One who got down and dirty, even falling to the ground beneath the weight of the cross on the *Via Delarosa* on the way to Calvary's mountain, suffering through it all so we could benefit from His effort. And we do.

We are saved by His grace and receive all the benefits of that grace in baptism, where we are buried and rise again with Him. As He was born in our likeness, we are born from above, in His likeness. His grace not only saves us, but empowers us to live like Him, to love our neighbor and serve our brother.

Prayer: Since Christ has full atonement made and brought to us salvation, each Christian therefore may be glad and build on this foundation. Your grace alone, dear Lord, I plead, Your death is now my life indeed. For You have paid my ransom. (*Salvation Unto Us Has Come*, LSB 555:6)

This devotion was written by Reverend Larry Feldt, pastor of St. John's Lutheran in Denver, IA.

TUESDAY OF THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

March 24, 2015

Today's Reading: Zechariah 9:9-12

*"As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit." - Zechariah 9:11*

Zechariah prophesied the coming of a new and different kind of king at a time when God's people didn't even have a king. Zedekiah's reign didn't end well as the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem. When it was over *"the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land."* (II Kings 25:3) Eventually the wall of Jerusalem was broken down, the city plundered, the temple destroyed, and many of the people were taken into captivity in Babylon.

Now after 70 years in Babylonian captivity God had kept His promise. The exiles have returned, the wall is being rebuilt, and the temple is being restored. With the failure of previous kings why would they want another king? After all, weren't they now free?

No. They had not yet been set free from the *"waterless pit."* The waterless pit of Zechariah's prophecy was like the dry cistern in which Joseph found himself before his brothers sold him into slavery (Gen. 37:24) or into which Jeremiah the prophet was cast. (Jer. 38:6-9) It is a pit from which one cannot set himself free.

This pit is not a physical one but spiritual. It is the pit of death in which not only the exiles found themselves but in which you and all mankind are trapped because of sin. Yet this coming King makes a covenant with mankind in His own blood. This King now sets you free from the waterless pit in the water filled bath of Holy Baptism.

Prayer: Fast bound in Satan's chains I lay; death brooded darkly o'er me. Sin was my torment night and day; in sin my mother bore me. But daily deeper still I fell; my life became a living hell, so firmly sin possessed me. (*From Dear Christians, One And All, Rejoice* LSB 586:2)

This devotion was written by Rev. Michael Knox, pastor of Our Redeemer in Cedar Falls, IA, Christ Lutheran in Waterloo Iowa, and Peace Lutheran in Shell Rock, IA.

MONDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF LENT

March 2, 2015

Today's reading: Exodus 20:1-17

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" - Exodus 20:2

Context is a very important. That is why the verse that precedes the Ten Commandments is so important. It tells us why the Children of Israel were to love God above everything else and their neighbor as themselves.

All the commands that follow that verse were not simply the directives of a God making His people behave. They are commands that flow from God's loving action that delivered His people from slavery in Egypt. The Exodus was the salvation event of the Old Testament and the behavior of God's people was set in that context.

Those same Commandments apply to us. Our obedience is set in the context of what God has done for us. Romans 12 says, "I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices. . ." We seek to keep the commands of God, not to save ourselves but in view of God's mercy.

God brought us out of our slavery to sin. We have been set free through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. That is the context for our lives as we journey to the Promised Land. God's mercy is the proper context for loving God and our neighbor.

Prayer: The Gospel shows the Father's grace, who sent His Son to save our race, Proclaims how Jesus lived and died that we might thus be justified. (*The Gospel Shows the Father's Grace*, LSB 580:1).

This devotion was written by Rev. Steven Rempfer, pastor of St. John Lutheran Church in Newhall, IA.

TUESDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF LENT

March 3, 2015

Today's reading: Exodus 20: 1-17

"You shall have no other gods before me." - Exodus 20:3

The newspaper headline read, "Parents say sacrifices worth it for children's athletic careers." Some parents have a new god, children's sports. Some give up hosting relatives; one spent \$100,000 all for athletic success. The creed of this new religion is, "You have kids so you can support them through these years."

What are we to do with all these people who are worshipping at the altar of a new god and trumpeting the theology of a new religion?

First, realize "there is nothing new under the sun." People have been taking good things, like their children's athletics, and making them the priority in life since the Garden.

Secondly, realize this is precisely what the first commandment is a talking about: taking something God created, something good, and making it number one.

Thirdly, apply the First Commandment to yourself. What are the good things in your life that have become number one and are now false gods? We are called to repent of worshipping false gods.

Finally, remember that God loved his children so much he gave His Son Jesus that we might be forgiven for taking what is good and making it god. The only true God has had mercy on us His children. Now that's real parental love.

Prayer: I am alone your God, the Lord: No other gods shall be adored. But you shall fully trust in Me and love Me whole heartedly. Have mercy, Lord! (*These Are the Holy Ten Commands*, LSB 581:2).

This devotion was written by Rev. Steven Rempfer, pastor at St. John Lutheran Church in Newhall, IA.

MONDAY OF THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

March 23, 2015

Today's Reading: Zechariah 9:9-12

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he" - Zechariah 9:9

One after another, the kings of Israel and Judah had failed to live up to the expectations of both God and His people. There were 41 kings, and one queen, who ruled over the people for a period of approximately 464 years.

The story of how and why the Israelites were ruled by kings is told in 1 Samuel. Even when God warned them it would not end well, they refused to listen. Samuel could not have made it any clearer: *"And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day."* (1 Sam. 8:18)

These kings and the people over whom they ruled had something in common with each other and with you; they turned aside from the word of the Lord. Therefore they had something else in common with you, the need for a savior. Zechariah foretells the coming of this savior. He is the King who comes *"righteous and having salvation."*

Martin Luther's magnificent hymn, "Dear Christians, One And All, Rejoice" (LSB 586), tells the story of what makes this king so different. He rehearses the sinful condition of all humanity. But God in His mercy sends forth a king, His beloved Son. This king will serve God's people in faithfulness and righteousness forever.

Prayer: *Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice, with exultation springing, and with united heart and voice and holy rapture singing, proclaim the wonders God has done, how His right arm the vict'ry won; what price our ransom cost Him! (From "Dear Christians, One And All, Rejoice" LSB 586:1)*

This devotion was written by Rev. Michael Knox, pastor of Our Redeemer in Cedar Falls, IA, Christ Lutheran in Waterloo Iowa, and Peace Lutheran in Shell Rock, IA.

SATURDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

March 21, 2015

Today's Reading: Mark 10:32-45

Jesus is on the road going to Jerusalem. His reaction is much different than those that are with Him. They are amazed at Him and yet they are afraid of what appears to be ahead on the journey.

If that's not enough, now Jesus says they are going up to Jerusalem for Him to be delivered to those in authority. What kind of mission must He be on to be handed over to the Gentiles? Now they will spit on Him, mock Him, flog Him and kill Him. Can this be the way the Father brings in His kingdom? If it ends there, indeed it will never be enough to fulfill the old covenant and bring in the new covenant.

But it does not end there. After three days He will rise again. But even if it ends there, without you being baptized into His death and resurrection, how could the new covenant be fulfilled for you? If one is baptized into His death and resurrection, how can there be any peace if you do not live daily in the baptismal gifts? Can you stay in your baptism and not be called to repent and eat at the Lord's altar? Without doing so do you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes?

To live in one's baptism you are served at the altar! For the Lord, Jesus Christ, comes into Jerusalem to die. He comes to serve you with the blood of the covenant. He gives His life that He might take it up again. This is your eternal ransom.

Prayer: Ride on, ride on in majesty! In lowly pomp ride on to die. O Christ, Thy triumphs now begin O'er captive death and conquered sin. (*Ride On, Ride On in Majesty*, LSB 441:2)

This devotion was written by Reverend David Steege, pastor at Concordia in Waterloo, IA and St. Paul in Evansdale, IA.

WEDNESDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF LENT

March 4, 2015

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." – 1 Corinthians 1:18

Mankind has produced many men who were considered wise by this world's standards. Franklin Delano Roosevelt said, "All we have to fear is fear itself." John F. Kennedy said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." Martin Luther King began his speech, "I have a dream..."

Ben Franklin gave us unforgettable words of wisdom: "A stitch in time saves nine," "A penny saved is a penny earned," and "Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise."

French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre stated, "To be is to do," while German philosopher Immanuel Kant proclaimed, "To do is to be." American singer Frank Sinatra sang simply, "Do be do be do." Next to God's wisdom, Sinatra's jingle is equal foolishness to the others.

One cannot know God through the world's wisdom and ways. Philosophies cannot change hearts. God saves us through a crucified Savior!

During this season of Lent we focus on the cross of Christ. Reflected there are men's foolish attempts at wisdom. Proclaimed there is the power of God working in our lives. In the cross is the foolishness and wisdom of God. Foolishness because we can't understand it; wisdom because it is God's power to forgive sins and to change the hearts of people.

Prayer: Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes; Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies. Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee; In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me. (*Abide with Me*, LSB 878:6).

This devotion was written by Rev. Douglas Woltemath pastor of Saint Stephen's Lutheran Church in Atkins, IA.

THURSDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF LENT

March 5, 2015

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18–31

"For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles," – 1 Corinthians 1:22–23

People trust in things they can see. They look for signs of God's grace in material possessions. Even Christians consider such things as healings, financial stability, and emotional happiness to be signs of God's favor. But what happens when these things don't come to fruition? What happens when they're taken away or never appear in the first place?

Some people depend on reason and wisdom. Human wisdom, though, hasn't solved the many problems of society, education, family, finances, and government. It hasn't brought peace to the world and food to the hungry.

That is why Paul says, "we preach Christ crucified." This is the one message so desperately needed. When things are tough, when you feel terribly alone, when you find yourself plagued with guilt over things you can't undo, Jesus on the cross demonstrates that you have a Lord who knows and understands your deepest needs and fills them with redemption. When in doubt about God's love for you, your real wisdom and strength is Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

*I know my faith is founded On Jesus Christ, my God and Lord;
And this my faith confessing, Unmoved I stand on His sure Word.
Our reason cannot fathom The truth of God profound;
Who trusts in human wisdom Relies on shifting ground.
God's Word is all-sufficient, It makes divinely sure;
And trusting in its wisdom, My faith shall rest secure. (LSB 587:1)*

Prayer: *Increase my faith, dear Savior, For Satan seeks by night and day To rob me of this treasure And take my hope of bliss away. But, Lord, with You beside me, I shall be undismayed; And led by Your good Spirit, I shall be unafraid. Abide with me, O Savior, A firmer faith bestow; Then I shall bid defiance To ev'ry evil foe. (I Know My Faith Is Founded, LSB 587:2).*

This devotion was written by Rev. Douglas Woltemath pastor of Saint Stephen's Lutheran Church in Atkins, IA.

FRIDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

March 20, 2015

Today's Reading: Mark 10:32–45

In this text we have a contrast between Jesus and His disciples. Can anyone fulfill what Jesus speaks in Mark 10:45 except He, Himself? "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many."

Isn't it fascinating how people squabble over what they think is important and forget the importance of this statement of Jesus? James and John want a special place. The rest of the disciples don't want anyone to have a more important place. Jesus teaches them, "look at the gentiles who fight for all these places of importance. Yours is not their journey." To the disciples He says, "You are called to serve, whoever wants to be great among you shall be your servant." Today in the church, the Lord sends people to serve at His altar. This is a gift. Yet for all of God's children today what is served is the eternal gift.

Yet I don't believe the dull disciples, you and I, ever get it. Some 24 hours ago, my brother died. It was expected. But somehow as we look to the things of this world, Jesus' statement becomes even more vivid. I have not come to be served but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many.

It is so comforting that Jesus serves His church at the altar and has served you by washing you at the font. Somehow chasing things here on earth, though vocationally necessary, can't in any way offer the comfort of this child of Mary. Wait patiently for Him to help you in all of your sufferings here on earth. Yet know before you ask He is already serving you, His children.

Prayer: *My song is love unknown, My Savior's love to me, Love to the loveless shown That they might lovely be. Oh, who am I That for my sake My Lord should take Frail flesh and die? (My Song Is Love Unknown, LSB 430)*

This devotion was written by Reverend David Steege, pastor at Concordia Waterloo and St. Paul Evansdale.

THURSDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

March 19, 2015

Today's Reading: Hebrews 5:1-10

"Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears." – Hebrews 5:7a

Jesus is so human that it makes us squirm. How embarrassing it is to see our God weeping in the face of death. Man up and take it with some dignity! Jesus certainly does not die with dignity. He dies crying out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" (Mark 15:34b) All this was without sin. All of the groaning, crying out, and weeping was without sin. As he lived in the days of His flesh, Jesus the Christ kept obedience to His Father in heaven.

His perfection as man from conception to death is the sources of salvation for all who believe it. Do not let that little word in verse 9, "obey," cast doubt on your salvation. "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness." (Rom. 4:3b) Faith receives that human obedience of Jesus that gives you salvation. That human obedience of Jesus with its loud cries and tears was heard because it was without sin. Now, you have that credited to your eternal account. The very humanity of Jesus, which is so embarrassing, proclaims His righteousness. He wept. He is human. So are you.

Prayer: *Lord, when Your glory I shall see And taste Your kingdom's pleasure, Your blood my royal robe shall be, My joy beyond all measure! When I appear before Your throne, Your righteousness shall be my crown; With these I need not hide me. And there, in garments richly wrought, As Your own bride shall we be brought To stand in joy beside you. (A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth 438:4)*

This devotion was written by Reverend Troy Peperkorn, pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church in Reinbeck, IA.

FRIDAY OF SECOND WEEK OF LENT

March 6, 2015

Today's Reading: John 2:13-25

"In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables". – John 2:14-15

I grew up in a family with six siblings. Our parents had clear rules that we were to follow. And when we didn't we would experience their anger by being punished. In our house this meant grounding. We were allowed to go to school, but that was it. Anything else was out.

Our parents weren't being cruel; rather, they were showing their love for us in their vocation as our parents.

This is what Jesus was doing when He entered the temple and drove out those who had turned the temple into a place of business instead of a place of worship.

His anger does not arise from hatred; it springs from a love toward God who had founded His temple for the administration of His Word.

His anger also springs from a love for us. Love that ensures that God's house is the place where we learn to properly worship God in the Divine Service as we confess our sins and hear Jesus pronounce His Absolution to us. It is the place where God's Word is read and preached and His Sacraments are rightly administered.

God's house is the place He has appointed to come to us in His love, mercy, and grace. Where he comes to actually give us the gifts He won through suffering the cross in our stead. Those gifts are nothing less than forgiveness, life, and salvation in His name alone!

Prayer: *Were the realm of nature mine, That were a tribute far too small; Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all! (When I Survey the Wondrous Cross, LSB 425:4).*

This devotion was written by Rev. Michael Musick, pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Luzerne, IA. He also serves as the LCMS Hospital Chaplain at the University of Iowa Hospitals.

SATURDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK IN LENT

March 7, 2015

Today's Reading: John 2:13-25

"So the Jews said to him, 'What sign do you show us for doing these things?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'"
– John 2:18-19

We have all had the experience of being told something and thinking we clearly understood what we were being told. Only to find out later we had completely misunderstood what the person had meant.

This is what is happening to the Jews who are questioning Jesus' authority for His actions of driving out the people who had made God's house a place of business rather than a place of worship.

The Jews clearly thought Jesus was talking about the physical building of the temple. A building that had taken forty-six years to build. Though they thought they understood Jesus clearly, they didn't.

Jesus was talking about the temple of His body. The Lord's reply resembles another time He was asked to give them a sign that He was the Messiah. Jesus had told them that no other sign will be given this evil generation "except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matthew 12).

Jesus was a stumbling block for the religious leaders of the Jews because they rejected His message of atonement. They refused to believe Him even though He had performed many miracles that even included raising people from the dead! For many people today, Jesus is still a stumbling block.

But thanks be to God that the words Jesus spoke were true. Taking our sins He willingly went to the cross in our stead and suffered God's wrath for us. Then, by the glory of God the Father, Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day. The temple of His body had been completely restored!

Who can truly understand God's unconditional love, mercy, and grace shown for us in the suffering, death, and resurrection of His dearly beloved Son? It is through God-given faith for Jesus' sake alone that we are now reconciled to God, our sins are forgiven, and we will live eternally in God's kingdom.

Prayer: No binding sign we ask, No wonder from above. Lord help us place our trust alone In Your unswerving love. (*O Christ, You Walked the Road*, LSB 424:3)

This devotion was written by Rev. Michael Musick, pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Luzerne, IA.

WEDNESDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

March 18, 2015

Today's Reading: Hebrews 5:1-10

This side of the resurrection of Jesus, the priesthood is different than before. All believers in Him are priests. They make sacrifices of prayer and thanks all the time. But you see in this Scripture a very human description of the high priest. He was chosen from among men to make sacrifices for sins, but he himself was a sinner. He can deal gently with the ignorant and the straying because of his own sinfulness. Does that remind you of anyone in your life?

Your called and ordained pastor is a priest like you and also a sinner like you. Therefore, he needs the forgiveness of sins like you. He is given authority by God through the congregation to publically forgive sins and retain sins, but he needs it as well. Christ had authority placed on Him by His Father. He was a man under authority and with that authority he did marvelous things. His blood was shed not for His sins but ours. He was appointed to make a sacrifice for all the sins of pastors and priests. He is the high priest forever. Forever, He stands as the sacrifice for all.

Prayer: *The infant Priest was holy born For us unholy and forlorn; From fleshly temple forth came He, Anointed from eternity. The great High Priest in human flesh Was icon of God's righteousness. His hallowed touch brought sanctity; His hand removed impurity.* (The Infant Priest Was Holy Born 624:1-2)

This devotion was written by Reverend Troy Peperkorn, pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church in Reinbeck, IA.

TUESDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

March 17, 2015

Today's Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

*"For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." -
Jeremiah 31:34*

How natural it is to remember the pain that another has caused us. The nature of our Old Adam keeps a mental record of every slight and every offense ever to happen upon us. We catalog them into lesser and greater iniquities. Smaller wrongs can be overlooked but an accumulation can cause relationships to sour and be broken. If the offense is large enough we may even be tempted to say, "I will never forget what you've done to me." This is a way of letting the other party know that our relationship is broken and can never be repaired.

Thanks be to our merciful God that He does not deal with us the way that we deal with others. A part of the "new" covenant that God makes with the House of Israel is to place the guilt and fault for our sins upon His Son. Jesus, *who knew no sin, became sin*. The relationship between God and man that once was broken and beyond human repair has been restored and made whole by the blood of the Lamb. The Son of God has made it possible for us to rejoice in the restored relationship: *"I will be their God, and they shall be my people."* Can there be anything more precious than to hear our Lord say, *"I forgive you, I will remember you sins no more."*

Prayer: *My guilt, O Father, You have laid on Christ Your Son, my Savior. Lord Jesus, You my debt have paid and gained for me God's favor. O Holy Spirit, Fount of grace, the good in me to You I trace; in faith and hope preserve me. (If Your Beloved Son, O Lord LSB 568:5)*

This devotion was written by Rev. Gerald Kapanka, pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Waterloo, IA.

MONDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT

March 9, 2015

Today's Reading: Numbers 21:4-9

"And the people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned'" - Numbers 21:7

In Numbers 21, confession had to be coaxed out of God's people by a hoard of fiery serpents. Their history would reveal not a confession of sins to God but a litany of grumbling against God. They complained about food, water, living conditions, Moses, and more.

As the grumbling went on and on, it was then that God sent fiery snakes among them. When they felt the pain and witnessed the death caused by their grumbling, they were led to confess, "We have sinned."

The snakes were what we refer to as God's "foreign" work. God's "proper" work was showing steadfast love, forgiveness, and mercy through His crucified and risen Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus was foreshadowed by the bronze serpent on the pole. Look to it and live!

God's "foreign" work is only done for the sake of His "proper" work. The fiery snake of the law that wounds us with the sting of guilt and death is indeed God's work. However, as we know and believe that it is necessary and good for us because it leads us to Christ. So we confess, "We have sinned." In fact as Luther suggests, we would be willing to run one hundred miles to confess. Why? We know God's gracious and loving response, "Christ died for you! Look to Him and live!"

Prayer: Lord, I confess my sins and mourn their wretched bands; A contrite heart is sure to find forgiveness at Your hands. (*Your Table I Approach*, LSB 628:2).

This devotion was written by Rev. David Rempfer, pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Blirstown, IA.

TUESDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT

March 10, 2015

Today's Reading: Numbers 21:4-9

"Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live" - Numbers 21:8

Maybe you've seen it on an ambulance or medical uniform: a snake (or two) on a pole. It's a sign for healing, traced back to Greek mythology. Might you see a snake on a pole as artwork in a church? If so, it would be from an artist who had John 3:14 in mind, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life."

In John 3, Jesus gives the proper interpretation to the events of Numbers 21. He says it's really all about Him. The Israelites, bitten by poisonous snakes, needed more than a medical doctor. Their snakebites were only the outward sign of the real problem, sin and the eternal death that it brings. Only God could provide the required cure. Thus the fiery serpent was put on a pole with God's promise that whoever saw it would live.

Just as the fiery serpent was lifted high on the pole to give life to all who saw it, so Jesus, God's Son, is lifted high on the cross to give eternal life to all who believe. Heed God's invitation; look to Him in faith and live! Believe God's promises; Jesus took the poison of our sin upon Himself. He experienced the death that our sins deserved. Whoever believes in Him has eternal life.

Prayer: If my sins give me alarm and my conscience grieve me, Let your cross my fear disarm; Peace of conscience give me. (*Jesus I Will Ponder Now*, LSB 440:5)

This devotion was written by Rev. David Rempfer, pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Blaineville, IA.

MONDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

March 16, 2015

Today's Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah," - Jeremiah 31:31

God promises a "new" covenant. The implication in this verse is that there was an "old" covenant. The "old" covenant that will be replaced is the one that God made with Moses on Mt. Sinai. The "old" covenant was the Ten Commandments and the Law. The giving of that covenant was accompanied by "the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking" (Exodus 20:18). A covenant that brought fear and trembling to the people. They were terrified of a righteous God that demanded a righteous obedience. The "old" covenant exposed the reality of sin in the hearts of all people. This failure to keep the commands and the fear of punishment cause the house of Israel to "stand far off" from God and fear Him.

The prophet Jeremiah conveys the promise of a different kind of covenant. A covenant that is described as "new." This new covenant is for the Children of Israel. This will not be like the covenant that God made with Moses at Sinai. This covenant will also be ushered in with grand heavenly signs; but instead of thunder, lightning, and a smoking mountain, the new covenant will be announced with a Star shining in the East.

The new covenant will be internalized as the Law is written on the hearts. This covenant will result in a new relationship between God and His people. God fulfills the Law given on Sinai in this covenant, in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Not only does God fulfill and keep the Law, He then accepts the punishment that was owed to each and every person on earth. This "new" covenant is the promise of God. Because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ he "will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more."

We become partakers in this new covenant when the Holy Spirit calls us to Himself through Baptism.

Prayer: Thou hast suffered great affliction and has borne it patiently. Even death by crucifixion, fully to atone for me; Thou didst choose to be tormented that my doom should be prevented. Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, dearest Jesus unto Thee. (*Christ, the life of All the Living*, LSB 420:6).

This devotion was written by Rev. Gerald Kapanka, pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Waterloo, IA.

SATURDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT

March 14, 2015

Today's Reading: John 3:16-21

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." – John 3:17

God's salvation is both universal and particular. It is universal because no one is exempted from it. God loved the world — the entire human race. It is particular because God's love is located in one place — His only-begotten Son. To paraphrase: God loved the world in this one particular way, He sent His only-begotten Son.

God's purpose in sending His Son was not to condemn the world but to save humanity. However, the reality is that most of humanity rejects God's salvation. They think either it is too good to be true or that there must be some other way. Most people refuse to receive the free gift offered in the Word made flesh. The result is God's judgment, "the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."

In spite of humanity's reaction to God's salvation, God's Son was sent to save humanity not condemn them. In a world plunged into darkness, Jesus is that light that gives life and salvation.

Prayer: Christ Jesus is the ground of faith, who was made flesh and suffered death; All then who trust in Him alone are built on this chief cornerstone (*God Loved the World So That He Gave*, LSB 571:2).

This devotion was written by Rev. Dean Duncan, pastor of First Lutheran in Belle Plaine, IA.

WEDNESDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT

March 11, 2015

Today's Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10

*"Even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved."
- Ephesians 2:5*

A while back there was a movie with the famous line "I see dead people." We can all say the same thing. When we look around at our friends, our families, and especially in the mirror, we too see dead people. We see people who are dead in their trespasses, dead in their sins. We have inherited from our father and mother, Adam and Eve, a terrible disease and curse. We are by nature children of wrath. Left to our own devices, we are dead people walking.

If that were the end of the movie, it would be a terrible tragic thing. But that isn't the end, for those who have been made alive with Christ. For you have been made alive in the life giving waters of your Baptism. The old Adam in you has been drowned and you have been graciously given a new life. You are no longer a dead man walking, but have been made alive together with Christ. You are connected to Christ's death and resurrection in your Baptism. And because you have been made alive in Christ, even though you will die a physical death (unless Jesus returns first), you will live forever.

Prayer: From depths of woe I cry to Thee, In trial and tribulation; Bend down thy gracious ear to me, Lord, hear my supplication. If Thou rememb'rest every sin, who then could heaven ever win or stand before thy presence? (*From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee*, LSB 607:1).

This devotion was written by Reverend David C. Lingard, pastor at St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Van Horn, IA.

THURSDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK IN LENT

March 12, 2015

Today's Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. – Ephesians 2:8-10

Through surveys, thousands of Americans have been asked what they believe about how they get to heaven. The results are stunning. Almost half believe that they get to heaven by some good works on their own, either by keeping the commandments as “best they can” or by being a “good person.” A man asked Jesus once, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Can we ever do enough? How do we know if we do enough?

Now this is not to say that good works are not important. C.F.W. Walther said that, “Faith and works are like the light and heat of a candle; they cannot be separated.” In other words, God created you and prepared you for a life of good works, so that you should walk in them. Martin Luther said, “Good works are works which flow from faith and from the joy of heart that has come to us because we have forgiveness of sins through Christ.” Because Christ first loved us, we in turn love others. The motivation for works is always love, and never personal gain.

The Apostle Paul is quite clear, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing.” Praise be to God our Father that He loved us and sent His Son Jesus who would die on the cross for our sins. Jesus good work is the only one we should ever boast in. Jesus good work is the only thing we cling to and have faith in. For it is Jesus alone that saves you. His good work makes our lives of faith good in the eyes of the Father.

Prayer: Therefore my hope is in the Lord and not in my own merit; It rests upon His faithful Word to them of contrite spirit That he is merciful and just; This is my comfort and my trust. His help I wait with patience. (*From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee*, LSB 607:3)

This devotion was written by Reverend David C. Lingard, pastor at St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Van Horne, IA.

FRIDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT

March 13, 2015

Today's Reading: John 3:14-15

*“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”
– John 3:14-15*

We have been bitten. The ancient serpent's venom has entered our blood stream. The devil's venom (which we call sin) is already at work in us causing spiritual blindness, hard heartedness, and apathy toward God and our neighbor. Eventually this venom will kill us. So how do we deal with this venomous sin problem?

In many ways we are no different than Israel of old. We are impatient. We grumble and complain. We are unthankful. Like ancient Israel, we often suffer the consequences of our unjust lips. Yet for those in Moses' day who were bitten by a venomous snake, everyone who gazed upon the uplifted bronze serpent would be spared death.

Just like the bronze serpent, Jesus became the embodiment of our problem as He hung from the cross. As Israel beheld the bronze serpent, so we must behold the Crucified Christ. We regard Him who was lifted up, confident that Jesus has imbibed the venom that has poisoned us. Jesus has drunk from the cup of God's wrath. We look to Him who was lifted up, trusting that the Living, Crucified Christ suffered, died, and came back to life for us.

Prayer: If you are sick, if death is near, this trust your troubled heart can cheer; Christ Jesus saves your soul from death; that is the firmest ground of faith (*God Loved the World So That He Gave*, LSB 571:5).

This devotion was written by Rev. Dean Duncan, pastor of First Lutheran in Belle Plaine, IA.