



*“O Lord Throughout
These Forty Days”*

A Lenten Devotional Companion
composed by Seminarians of Concordia
Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne,
Indiana and Concordia Seminary, St.
Louis, Missouri comprised of devotions
reflecting the treasury of Lenten
hymnody.

Ash Wednesday – March 9 – Joel 2:12-19
Sem. Jonathan Kern, 4th Year

“Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.”

It’s remarkable how effective an approaching deadline can be at lighting a fire underneath a seminarian. What’s even more remarkable is how productive a seminarian can be once he or she has locked eyes with an encroaching deadline. Only three days left to knock out that exegetical? No sweat! One night to crank out a fifteen-page paper on Augustine? The night’s still young!

But today is only the first Wednesday of the new quarter, months away from any serious deadline. If time were gold, we’d all be kings! The refrain “there’s always tomorrow” echoes through our minds as we choose today’s activities.

But today is also the first Wednesday of Lent, and Joel is calling all “kings” to start living by a different tune. There is a deadline approaching, and the time for action is now. The day of the Lord is coming, and there’s not a moment to lose. The Lord is calling us to turn back to him with repentant hearts, with hearts that are torn from the anguish of our sins. Today is the day, not tomorrow.

Today, with the cold reminder of our mortality brushed across our foreheads, we begin our forty-day journey to the cross. And, unlike most other journeys that begin with a step toward the goal, this journey begins with an about face and our knees falling to the dust from which we came. Turn and see the cross. Turn and see a God who is gracious and merciful. Turn and see your God, who is slow to anger and is abounding in steadfast love. Turn and see a God who, even now, declares his love for you.

Savior, when in dust to Thee low we bow the adoring knee;
When, repentant, to the skies scarce we lift our weeping eyes;
O, by all Thy pains and woe suffered once for us below,
Bending from Thy throne on high, hear our penitential cry!
“Savior, When in Dust to Thee” LSB 419

Thursday after Ash Wednesday – March 10 – Scripture Luke 4:1-13
Sem. Andy Wright, 4th Year

Man indeed shall not live by bread alone. Bread satisfies hunger for but a little while only to return again some hours later and then the next day. The first Adam doubted the words of his heavenly Father and ate of the temptation that was set before him. During the forty days in the wilderness our Lord ate nothing answering temptation with righteousness. He trusts the words of His heavenly Father and remains faithful where man is not. “Man shall not live by bread alone” but man shall live by the Bread of Life alone who feeds and sustains him giving him all he needs to support this body and life. Oh what manna from heaven! Our Lord’s forty day fast fills us so that now we may not go hungry and waste away in our sin in the wilderness of hell. We fix our eyes at the beginning of this season toward Golgotha and the empty tomb on Easter morning. But now as the alleluia’s have gone and we see Christ in the wilderness standing face to face with Satan, our faith clings to Him who cannot fall. The mighty fortress has faced the evil foe and covers us with the victorious robe of His righteousness and the garments of salvation. Taste and see that the Lord is good. He commands His angels concerning us to guard us in all our ways.

Tho’ devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill, They shall not over pow’r us.
This world’s prince may still Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none, He judged; the deed is done;
The kingdom ours remaineth. Amen. (TLH 262:3)

Friday after Ash Wednesday – March 11 – John 19:26-27
Sem. Mark Squire, 4th Year

“Woman, behold your son!” We’ve heard these words before, and we know the situation. John and Mary are standing by the cross, and Jesus seeks to take care of those whom he loved. To Mary: “Woman, behold your son,” and to John: “Behold, your mother!” With only a few simple words, Christ gives Mary into the care of John, the “disciple whom he loved,” to assure that his mother is taken care of. Even on the cross, Christ’s concern is not for himself, but for those whom he loves.

But these words also hold some irony. These words, “Behold, your son!” are familiar to Mary. “Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son.” As Mary is standing at the foot of the cross, weeping at the sight of her firstborn – whom she had once wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid comfortably in a manger – unwrapped and in pain, those words are striking. She can’t stand to behold the sight of her son, bleeding, dying. Just as when the angel visited her long ago, she was “greatly troubled” at these words. “How can this be?” she had to have been thinking as she beheld her son on the cross, “since he was supposed to reign over the house of Jacob forever?” But, even as her son is dying, the words from on high – “Behold, your son!” – cause Mary to respond in the same way as before. “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And from that hour she was taken into the care of John. As we behold the Son this Lent, may our faith answer likewise, that we may be cared for by the Christ, the Son of God.

May we all Thy loved ones be,
All one holy family,
Loving for the love of Thee:
Hear us, holy Jesus.
(TLH 182, *Jesus Loving to the End*)

Saturday after Ash Wednesday – March 12 – Acts 3:13-15
Sem. Don Johnson, 2nd Yr.

The Author of Life is what Paul calls Jesus. The very one from whom we all have our very life. He gives it to us freely. We never have to ask Him for it, He does it freely, simply because He loves us poor people. What do we do in return? We scream and cry for His crucifixion. He comes to us and gives to us everything and we ask for a murderer. Jesus stands before the people He came to save and they scream for His crucifixion. He stands there loving them and they have no idea.

As Samuel Crossman says in the hymn “My Song is Love Unknown”, “Love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be.” Jesus stood there and listened to the insults and the cries for His death and He said nothing. “Then Crucify, is all their breath and for His death they thirst and cry.”

Why did He do it? He had done nothing wrong. He deserved no punishment. And “Yet cheerful He to suffering goes.” He goes to the cross because He loves us. He goes because it is the only way for us poor miserable sinners to be reconciled to God. Even though “Never was grief like Thine” He does it all so that we can be with Him.

Dear Father in heaven, You sent Your Son to be crucified for us, we ask that during this season of Lent that we be reminded of all that You have done for us through Jesus Christ Your only Son our Lord, Amen.

1st Sunday in Lent – Month 28 – 1 Peter 2:24
Sem. Carl Deardoff, 2nd Year

“Later tonight, we uncover the shocking details of a young child’s murder, who was chopped to pieces by a local lumberjack and thrown into the city’s sewer system.” As a Journalist, I could see a news director admitting how horrifying this tragedy is, but that it makes good news. Why? Because we are obsessed with shock value. Awful and gruesome details of people’s lives and deaths surface in the news, books, and movies, and on the internet. Shocking divorces and deaths serve as mass entertainment as long as it doesn’t affect our lives. People often ask themselves, what would happen if this was in my life? How would I react? It is relatively easy to see and hear the shocking details of other people’s lives – as long as it doesn’t affect us. The movie industry has shock value down to a science. Of all the movies ever made, the Passion of the Christ is the most shocking movie I have seen. Anyone who has ever seen this movie understands what I mean. I remember whincing and looking away from the screen as the Roman guards tortured Jesus. The guard raised his whip with nails and glass on the end and plunged it into the skin of Jesus. People in the theater were crying. The scene reaches a climax when the whip gets stuck in Jesus’ rib cage and the guard rips it out, spraying blood everywhere. Every strike, every hit, and every whip tears back the layers of Christ’s flesh. The wounds of Christ are no longer hidden in the black ink of your Bible, but are vividly revealed in gruesome detail.

The worst part is that we know why Christ was stripped of dignity, tortured, and placed on that cross. As 1 Peter 2:24 says, Christ bore our sins. Every deed, every action, and every sin we ever committed was placed on Jesus. This lent we solemnly embrace the consequences of our sin while God strongly embraces us with his grace. The verse finishes by saying, by his wounds you have been healed. Christ bore our sin because we were not able to do so. Throughout lent, I dare you to daily contemplate the consequences of your sins, confess, and repent. Our sins may shock us, but God’s grace will surprise us even more.

Jesus, grant that balm and healing, In Thy holy wounds I find,
Every hour that I am feeling, Pains of body and of mind.
Should some evil thought within, Tempt my treacherous heart to sin,
Show the peril, and from sinning, Keep me ere its first beginning.

1st Monday in Lent - March 14 – I John 1:7
Sem. Alex Post, 2nd Year

Fellowship potlucks and bowling outings are often advertised on the big, well-lit signs on the front lawn of churches. Meeting and eating is a wonderful aspect of our life together as Christians. We have the greatest fellowship together in the Lord’s Supper, where the cleansing blood and saving body of Jesus Christ remove our sins and give us life abundantly.

We walk in the light because God’s “word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Ps. 119:105) Jesus Christ is the “light of the world.” Because we are in Him, we do not walk in darkness. The bright streetlight exposes the crime and filth of a dark alley, just as the Light of the World exposes all of our sin and guilt. Christ’s death on the cross banishes our sins as quickly and fully as the darkness vanishes when we turn the light on in a room. Now, “we walk in the light, as he is in the light.”

Jesus’ glorious death and resurrection has transformed us into “the light of the world.” (Mt. 5:14) We were dead in sins, and now are alive in Christ; we were chained in the darkness of self-centeredness, and now are unshackled and free to bask in the warm light of the Gospel. “We have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” Thanks be to God for the perfect gift of His Son’s sacrifice and His cleansing blood which He gives to us, His children of the light.

“Here we rest in wonder, viewing
All our sins on Jesus laid;
Here we see redemption flowing
From the sacrifice He made.”

- Sweet the Moments, Rich in Blessings (TLH 155)

1st Tuesday in Lent – March 15 –Romans 8:29
Sem. Lucas Witt, 1st Year

You meet a man with a turban, a untrimmed beard, a golden band around his right wrist and maybe a sheaf holding a machete. What crosses your mind as you pass him? Arab Immigrant? Jihad?

This man is dressed to show he is Sikh. The Sikh dress distinctly and overtly as a practice to be bold and proud in their religious convictions. One cannot be ashamed and deny their Sikhistic belief. Upon reflection, this really isn't a foreign concept to us - priests may wear collars, Jews have worn phylacteries. Yet Christians do not have a dress code in our secular lives. What identifies us, and how do we distinguish ourselves? Our daily lives are lived as a witness to our faith.

So daydreams of galloping up into the pulpit in a flowing robe while wearing the metaphorical crown of Christ may be the vision in our dreams, but our daily lives are more often lived in the trenches than on the mountain tops. The image of Christ is the cross – his purpose for incarnationally joining us here in the trenches. That image is the one we bear.

Note how all actions in this verse and hymn are passive: *God* has predestined those *He* conforms, *He* imprints the image of his Son. Our first priority is not to create our own image but to adhere to the one we are being molded into.

On my heart imprint your image,
Blessed Jesus, king of grace,
That life's riches, cares, and pleasures
Never may your work erase;
Let the clear inscription be:
Jesus, crucified for me,
Is my life, my hope's foundation,
And my glory and salvation!
(LSB 422 - On My Heart Imprint Your Image)

1st Wednesday in Lent – March 16 – Zechariah 13:1
Sem. David Appold, 1st Year

There are many times in our lives when we need a good washing. Children in particular are often told that. Before they can sit down to eat, they must go to the bathroom to wash, and in many cases, rewash their hands. Hands, especially little ones, touch all kinds of unclean objects, so naturally these hands become unclean themselves. Water alone may make the hands appear clean, but a quick sniff reveals that the hands bear an invisible stain which needs more than a dip under the water. Children can not wash their hands enough times in simple water, no matter how pure, to satisfy parental eyes and noses and earn a seat at the table.

The Lord revealed to Zechariah a day when a fountain would be opened. This was not a fountain for hand-washing before dinner, but a fountain which would cleanse the bodies and souls of those washed in it from sin and uncleanness. Such a fountain would not be filled with mere water, but with the blood of him who was pierced, Jesus Christ. No amount of scrubbing with water can remove the sinful and unclean nature that lurks within all of us. We may appear clean, but our sinful nature betrays that appearance before the nose of the Lord. And so it was that Jesus, the Son of God, came into this world, to pour out his blood as a sacrifice for the sin of the world. The spotless Lamb of God, without blemish, there on the cross offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for us all. And when it was finished and the soldiers pierced his side, the fountain was opened. The blood of the lamb poured forth mingled with water to cleanse the sin of the world and all our uncleanness.

On that day a fountain was opened, not only for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but for all people. This fountain is the font of your baptism. There you were washed by the water and blood that flowed from the side of the crucified one on the cross. On that day, baptized by water and the Word, you were made a child of God. Your baptism made you clean before your Father in heaven. And now you stand before His throne, cleansed and clothed in your baptismal robe, made white by the blood of the Lamb.

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains. (TLH #157 stz. 1)

St. Patrick – March 17 – 2 Corinthians 8:9
Vicar Jacob Mueller, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Lockwood, MO

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”

American history is full of “rags to riches” stories. We find them inspiring or at least interesting. It’s the American dream and people still come here from all over the world with the hope of writing their own “rags to riches” story.

In a world caught up with these upward aspirations, a “riches to rags” story seems completely out of place. But this is exactly what God has given us in Christ’s Passion.

Think of it: the Word of God who spoke all things into existence, struggles for breath. The Almighty Lord, who holds all things together, is nailed to a cross and will not help himself. The Creator, who owns all things, is stripped naked. The Eternal God, who has no beginning or end, draws his last breath and dies.

Why? He loves you! He sees that you are poor and have nothing of yourself. In your baptism he gave you all the riches of his grace and made you an heir of his kingdom! You were connected with his death and resurrection to make you rich with his love.

It was this love that motivated a man named Patrick to go to Ireland and lead the small flock of Christians there. His ministry would change that country forever. He brought the good news of the “grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” to many on the Emerald Island. Thousands were baptized. Monasteries began which would spiritually lead not only Ireland, but extend their influence throughout Europe and the world.

If you’re like me (German and Irish) then it’s quite possible that St. Patrick was the first to tell someone in your family about Jesus. For that I praise God and remember the words attributed to him:

I bind this day to me forever, By pow’r of faith,
Christ’s incarnation, His Baptism in the Jordan River,
His cross of death for my salvation,
His bursting from the spiced tomb, his riding up the heav’nly way,
His coming at the day of doom, I bind unto myself today.

I bind unto myself the name, The invocation of the same,
The Three in One and One in Three, Of whom all nature has creation,
Eternal Father Spirit, Word. Praise to the Lord of my salvation;
Salvation is of Christ the Lord!

Attributed to St. Patrick LSB 604 verses 2, 5

1st Friday in Lent – March 18 – John 19:30
Sem. Peter J. Eckardt, 2nd Year

In the death of every Christian we see a dim reflection of the death of Our Lord. To watch a loved one suffer, whether from a debilitating sickness or from old age, is difficult to bear, and when that last breathe is taken, there is, amid many emotions, relief. Relief that the loved one is no longer in pain. Relief that it is finished

But the only reason we are able to experience any true relief at all is that we know that Jesus endured all this first Himself, for our sake. For *he took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses*. Upon Himself He carried the pains and illnesses of the world, and with them their source – all our sin. He died a painful, sorrowful death. Even as the contagion of our sin ravaged His ever-weakening body, He forgave us, cleansed and healed us, and gladly died for us. And there on the cross, in breathing His last, He finished the work necessary to save us, to win for us everlasting peace and comfort.

Let us then meditate on the cross of Jesus – here our loved ones in Christ receive eternal healing, and here we may find relief from our sorrow. The Son of Man, who had *no place to lay His head*, found repose finally on the hard wood of the cross. He rested, for He had finished His work of salvation. So find relief in Him and receive the life that He gave.

O perfect life of love!
All, all is finished now,
All that He left His throne above
To do for us below.
(TLH 170)

2nd Saturday in Lent – March 19 – Acts 4:11-12
Sem. Aaron Kuehn, STM

Rejection. We are all too familiar with the word and the feeling. Rejection comes in being abandoned by friends, the loss of a job, shattered relationships, or just feeling as though we are alone in the world. Being rejected causes us feel marginal, disposable, and insignificant. Even if we have all the friends one could ask for, a successful and secure job, and a family who loves us, there is still a fear that cuts to the core of who we are – a fear of rejection. When you experience the cold reality of being rejected, know that there is one who wants you as you are – one who wants to make you His own and has done so by being rejected.

Rejection. It was the only way for unconditional love to become the new reality to the broken hearted and marginal. On the tree of Calvary *stricken* by the hands of man, *smitten* by the words of man, and *afflicted* with the sin of man, Jesus endured the darkest, most despairing rejection of all. As the Father turned his back on his Son who bore the awful load of the world's sin, Christ endured the ultimate rejection that you will never have to endure. It is His redemption that brought you life. It is your transgression for which He paid the price. By His wounds you are healed, made whole, and shown the sacrificial love that is offered to those whom the broken world seeks to cast away. In His rejection we find acceptance and in His death we are given life.

Here we have a firm foundation, Here the refuge of the lost:
Christ, the Rock of our salvation, is the name of which we boast;
Lamb of God, for sinners wounded, Sacrifice to cancel guilt!
None shall ever be confounded who on Him their hope have built.
Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted (LSB 451, v4)

2nd Sunday in Lent – March 20 – Hebrews 10:4
Sem. Zelwyn Heide, 1st Year

Slaughtering an animal is a grisly affair. No matter how the animal is stunned, the blood must still be poured out. If you find yourself squeamish at the idea of a few drops of blood, imagine the several gallons of blood that gush forth from the bull's cut throat. Now multiply that by several thousand and you might begin to fathom the sheer volume of blood that was poured out in sacrifice. Yet, those thousands, even millions, of gallons of blood poured out in the Temple accomplished nothing toward true redemption.

Certainly, such an image is gruesome and repulsive to our sentiments. The sight, let alone the unmistakable smell, is enough to drive us away in disgust. Yet we offer up other kinds of sacrifices that are no less in volume and certainly no less in repulsiveness. Do you trust in your possessions? Repent. Do you trust in your good works? Repent. Do you trust in your knowledge or wisdom? Repent. Do you trust in your status as a pastor or a seminarian? Repent. If the commanded sacrifices of God redeemed no one, then how much less do your self-appointed works count toward redemption? Repent!

However, there is another sacrifice that is also repulsive and gruesome, yet it accomplished once for all that which all the others could never do. Christ Jesus offered up Himself on the cross to the Father as the perfect atoning sacrifice. Christ was taken away like an animal to slaughter. Like skinning a bull, His flesh was torn away from His body through the floggings and scourging He endured. Like hanging up a bull to bleed it out, He was raised up above the earth on the cross. Like cutting the bull's throat, His side was pierced and His hands and feet were nailed. Like the sacrifices of old, His blood was poured out. Unlike all of this, however, the blood of Christ gives us forgiveness. In Jesus' + Name. Amen.

But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they.
TLH #156, stanza 2

2nd Monday in Lent – March 21 – Exodus 12:5
Sem. Joseph Signore, 2nd Year

A lamb. When God gave Israel instructions, he was very particular about the Passover sacrifice. It had to be a lamb, not a pig or a cow, a chicken or a deer. I wonder if any Israelites said, “What if I don’t want to eat a lamb?” I imagine the answer would go something like what my mom would say when she wouldn’t give me what I wanted as a child: “Tough.” And it couldn’t be just any lamb, you see. It had to be a lamb without blemish. It had to be perfect. It couldn’t be sick or crippled. It couldn’t be discolored or balding. No birth or “beauty” marks. I could just hear a politically correct (or is the term “culturally competent” now?) Israelite complain, “But God, it’s what’s on the *inside* that counts!” There’s more. The Passover Lamb had to be a male, and it had to be one year old. What are we to make of this God who discriminates on the basis of personal preference, appearance, gender, and age?

I don’t think any of the Israelites really asked the questions I posed above. Why? Because the same God who made these very particular Passover requirements was also very selective of the nation he chose to rescue. Out of all the nations of the earth, God chose Israel to redeem and to be his people. When God instituted the Passover, it was on the eve of Israel’s deliverance from the slavery of Egypt. Yes, God is king of discrimination, even today. His partial eyes selected his Son for the sacrifice for your sins instead of you. Jesus was that favored, perfect young man that we call our “Passover Lamb.” In spite of who you are or what you’ve done, God specifically chooses *you* to be his child.

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.”
LSB 438 v. 1

Tuesday after 2nd Sunday in Lent – March 22nd – Galatians 2:20
Sem. Aaron Uphoff, 1st Year

In Martin Luther’s “Christian Questions with their Answers,” found in the Small Catechism, he tells us what we ought to do if we feel no desire for the Sacrament of the Altar. He points us to Romans 7 and Galatians 5 where we are reminded that “nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh (Romans 7:18)” and “the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit (Galatians 5:17).” Surely these words confirm what you already know: in your fallen state, your sinful flesh ceaselessly battles against the Holy Spirit. You try to do good, that is, love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself, but you don’t succeed. You try to refrain from evil thoughts, words, and deeds, but you can’t completely. An honest examination of your life reveals that you are truly a “poor miserable sinner”. But take heart! For though you deserve no good thing from God because of your unrighteousness, you receive every good thing from God because of Christ’s righteousness. Through your Baptism you and your sinful flesh have truly been “crucified with Christ”. Your punishment has been taken up by Him on the cross, and the merits of His righteousness have been accounted to you. So now the life you “live in the flesh” is spiritually sustained by receiving and believing in God’s forgiveness. Christ comes to you and continually dwells in you through the Sacrament of the Altar where you eat and drink His flesh and blood for the remission of your sins: “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him (John 6:56).” Let this be your hope and joy this Lenten Season!

When the woes of life o’er take me, Hopes deceive, and fears annoy,
Never shall the Cross forsake me; Lo, it glows with peace and joy.

LSB 427

2nd Wednesday in Lent – March 23rd - Isaiah 53:6-7
Sem. J. A. De Beir, 1st Year

God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as many as the stars in the heavens, as many as grains of sand on the seashore. God's plan continues to unfold. Abraham's descendants continue to be born on earth every day.

In fact, according to the US Census Bureau for the year 2011, every 4.2 seconds a child is born. If you are an average reader, it will take you about ninety seconds to read this devotion. So in the time you read this, 378 children have been born. All of these 378 children are born dead - to sin. But yet, as scripture teaches us, the Father wishes all people to be saved. God has a plan for His people.

Even though they are already born dead to sin, Christ suffered and died quietly for them all ... and for us.

Just as babies are unable to think beyond their slowly developing view of their world; we too are unable to get past our sinful selves. Like the boy who had to stay in a plastic bubble to prevent catching a disease, we are born in an inescapable bubble of original sin. We are absolutely incapable of puncturing this bubble on our own. We need a Savior to free us, to restore us, to reconcile us, to forgive us; we are justified by grace through faith in Christ. The power of the Holy Spirit sustains the faith given to us in our Baptism.

Christ's atoning work on the cross was done for us and each of the 4.2 babies born each second. Christ's suffering and death was also for each child that has lived before us, and each child to be born in the future.

Jesus bore our sin on the cross. As the scripture reading informs us, all of us like sheep have gone astray, we have all sinned. Yet, despite our sin He quietly and willingly accepted it all, every sin in our past, present, and future. Amen.

Lamb of God, pure and Holy, Who on the cross didst Suffer
Ever patient and lowly, Thyself to scorn didst offer.
All sins Thou borest for us, Else had despair reigned o'er us:
Have mercy on us, O Jesus! O Jesus!

2nd Thursday in Lent – March 24 – Ephesians 1:6-8
Sem. Aaron T. Schian, 4th Year

St. Paul uses redemption language in these verses. Redemption language is business and transaction language. God the Father is in the salvation business and He does a transaction – a cosmic transaction – because we weren't His possession anymore. We became the possession of another businessman named Satan. And, Satan is all about the damnation business. Slick Salesman Satan conned Adam and Eve along with us into thinking we could do it without God. Make it on our own. Go it Lone Ranger Style. And, what was the outcome of our listening to the Father-of-Lies Satan? We sold ourselves into slavery to sin and death. We made ourselves children of wrath. Dead in our trespasses. Possessions of Satan. Damned to hell. And, here's the kicker: we couldn't do anything about it!

And, that's the point. We're not in the salvation business anyway. If we try, we will always go bankrupt. Broke. Belly up. God the Father goes into the salvation business and succeeds for us with one and only one transaction – a transaction that took place at the cross. This one transaction is highlighted by Luther in the meaning of the Second Article of the Creed: "Jesus has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, 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." God the Father purchased us and bought us back with Divine Currency – with Jesus' blood as the Divine Currency – so that we are sons and daughters of God having received the forgiveness of all our sins. And, here's the Good News: where there's the forgiveness of sins, there's life and salvation.

Glory be to Jesus,
Who in better pains
Poured for me the lifeblood
From His sacred veins! Amen.

The Annunciation of Our Lord – March 25 – Matthew 27:46
Seminarian Dustin Beck, 4th Year

“You’re going to be a daddy.” The words rolled off my wife’s lips this past Christmas Eve—a long embrace, the joys of telling family, and the months of sickness, planning, sickness, expectation, sickness, excitement, sickness, and the countdown to that blessed day. And even so, all this falls short of the blessed announcement of our Savior’s birth. Today, in the midst of Lent, we pause and take an Adventide look toward a young girl, an angel, and the news that changed the world.

It was in this announcement that God proclaimed that His people would be alone no longer. It was in this announcement that God would truly visit His people. It was this day that the birth announcement of the Son of God was uttered among His people.

Some years later, this God who visits His people would abandon them again. He would abandon them by forsaking their representative, the very God-man who had made His dwelling place among them. The promise of the Annunciation is that God has not abandoned His people, that He is here for you. The promise of Jesus’ word from the cross, “Eli, Eli, Lema Sabachthani” is that He is abandoned so that you will not be.

May you have cause to celebrate in the midst of this Lenten season—know that God *has* visited His people, that Christ has come, and that you’re an heir of the Kingdom of Your God.

*Though no Father seem to hear,
Though no light our spirits cheer,
May we know that God is near:
Hear us, holy Jesus.*

TLH 183v3 Jesus Whelmed in Fears Unknown

2nd Saturday in Lent – March 26 – Philippians 3:8
Sem. Stephen Preus, 4th Year

Paul had it all. He was “circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.” Yet, Paul writes, “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

Paul was no heathen before he was a Christian. His righteous life was impressive, and before the Jewish world, worth more than anything. Paul didn’t just give up some free-living American lifestyle when he abandoned his former life. He rejected his rigorous beliefs and practices. Instead of a Pharisee, he was an apostle to the unclean Gentiles. Instead of a persecutor of the church, he was persecuted for her sake. Instead of righteousness under the law, he clung to the righteousness of faith.

No pious attitude brought Paul to this. Left to himself, Paul would have continued in the glory of his heritage. No, Jesus brought Paul to this. On the road to Damascus Jesus showed Paul what all his righteousness was worth. He showed him that God was being blasphemed by the very works Paul thought were true worship. Jesus revealed Paul’s loss, but only to give him the gain which is for all people: His righteousness.

Whatever you think you’ve gained in this world, it couldn’t be better than what Paul had. Paul’s comparison first points out that your righteousness is nothing compared to his. Then he reminds you that *all things* he gained in this world he counted “as rubbish, in order that [he] may gain Christ.” Don’t let the righteousness of works fool you. God is not mocked. Nor does He bring your righteousness to nothing, only to leave you in the mire of your sin. No, in His mercy He exchanges His righteousness for your sin upon the cross. He gives you His gain through faith.

All righteousness by works is vain;
The Law brings condemnation.
True righteousness by faith I gain;
Christ’s work is my salvation.
His death, that perfect sacrifice,
Has paid the all sufficient price;
In Him my hope is anchored.
(LSB, 568)

3rd Sunday in Lent – March 27
Revelation 5:6-14

⁶ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. ¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." ¹¹ Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ¹² In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" ¹³ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" ¹⁴ The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

<i>Not all the blood of beasts On Jewish altars slain Could give the guilty conscience peace Or wash away the stain. My faith would lay its hand On that dear head divine As penitently here I stand, Confessing guilt is mine.</i>	<i>But Christ, the heavenly Lamb, Takes all our sins away; A sacrifice of nobler name And richer blood than they. My soul looks back to see The burden you did bear When hanging on the cursed tree; I know my guilt was there. Believing, we rejoice To see the curse remove; We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice And sing his bleeding love.</i>
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Not All the Blood of Beasts LSB 431

3rd Monday in Lent – March 28 – Hebrews 2:18
Sem. Andrew Herzberg, 2nd Year

“For because He himself has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.”

How often do you find yourself wandering? Simply walking around aimlessly with no real destination in mind? Of course we don't do that...who has time for that? We always have a place to be, a book to read, a class to get to, we never wander...right? As it turns out we wander around all the time. We wander down the path of sin constantly. We are continually tempted to take a little side journey down the path of "fun". This "fun" is generally something that looks good and looks like we won't get caught but at the end is always the same; the ancient foe is waiting for us to devour us.

This temptation that we experience is a daily battle for us. We are always confronted with things that tempt us to sin and wander, and sometimes these are hard to stand up to. The writer of Hebrews tells us that we have help. Jesus Christ has come to us and has been tempted just as we have been. He has seen the paths that are there for us to wander and he has not taken them. He has walked straight to the cross for us and there he died for us that he might strengthen us as we experience temptation. We receive this strength in the Word, in absolution, and in the sacraments. As the pastor announces to us in the dismissal, "The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you in body and soul to life everlasting."

Lord Jesus, as you endure temptation and did not succumb to it in the desert, so help and strengthen us to stand up to the temptations of the evil one that we may live with you forever in paradise, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Tuesday – March 29th – Hebrews 10:14
Sem. Rod Lindemann, SMP 2009 Cohort

Often in life enough is never enough. To the over powering employer who sets high demands on his employees, workers soon discover they can on no occasion achieve perfection. Though hard as one tries he can never achieve his absolute best. Eventually the heart is broken, the drive is gone and the weight and burden of perfection destroys any hope of satisfaction. Life becomes a state of sorrow and grief with no hope.

The same is true in our battle to live a sinless life. The demands are high and the expectation is perfection. The Law points out our imperfections, our faults, and our inability to be perfect. The weight of sin places us in a state of sorrow. While we are imperfect, there is One who makes us perfect forever. “Because by one sacrifice [Jesus] has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (Hebrews 10:14).

Recognizing we cannot on our own reach perfection in the sight of God, Jesus invites us to bring our heavy heart and sorrow to Him. Christ calls us to look to Him for a perfection that lasts. Identifying our imperfection opens the way for the blood of Christ to take the eternal pain and sorrow of guilt away.

It is through the One sacrifice we receive this perfection, the cleansing of our sin, which has been accomplished once and for all. “Lord, I look to thee” are powerful words to be sung when one considers the comfort of a repentant heart. As we continue to walk with Christ to Calvary prepare to lay your sins at the foot of the cross confessing your imperfections as your receive peace and comfort in Christ.

Lord, I will look to Thee
And hence my comfort borrow
That Thou wast slain for me;
Yea, Lord, Thy precious blood was spilt
For me, O most unworthy,
To take away my guilt.

When o'er My Sins I Sorrow, TLH-152

3rd Wednesday in Lent – March 30 – 1 Peter 1:18-19
Sem. Jordan McKinley, 3rd Year

“You have been ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers.” Thus begins our reading. This calls to mind Paul’s words to the Galatian Christians, “In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.” Luther defines these elementary principles as the Law (AE 26:362). As the old saying goes, “Like father, like son.” We weren’t raised with the strict civil and ceremonial laws of the old covenant, but were born with the Decalogue undiminished, with every iota intact. This Law functioned to kill us. We were born dead in our trespasses. However, even after baptism, we still have the Law. Even that “Third Use of the Law” that the Formula of Concord (FC SD VI) teaches accuses us of our sins. Through it, the Holy Spirit is constantly putting our Old Man to death. God does not kill without reason, though. He kills to make alive again!

That’s where that little word, “ransomed,” comes in. This is from the Greek verb, λυτρόω; looking at the Greek helps us understand the full implications of Peter’s words. We were freed by the one who paid a ransom. What is that ransom? St. Peter goes on to say, “not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” Thanks be to God that He pays that redemption price for us! While we would be unwilling to give up our perishable gold or silver, the Father did not hesitate to give His beloved Son for our redemption price. As St. Matthew tells us, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for the many” (Matthew 20:28). From what did he save us? Luther explains this in the Second Article: “[He] purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil.” For what purpose? “That I may be his own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.”

Jesus, the Lord, the mighty God,
An all-sufficient ransom paid.
O matchless price! His precious blood
For vile, rebellious traitors shed.

-TLH 141, “Enslaved in Sin and Bound in Chains” st. 3

4th Thursday of Lent—March 31—1 John 4:8-10

Sem. Adam Douthwaite, 2nd Year

Blues-rock artist Huey Lewis of *Back to the Future* fame once wrote, “The power of love is a curious thing.” As Calvary comes steadily into focus, these words ring especially true. God’s love, made manifest to us in the person of Jesus Christ, is truly a curious thing.

It is curious that God would make His love known in such a cruel and violent way—that the cross, an instrument of torture, would become a tool of mercy.

It is curious that Jesus’ innocent blood would pay the price for *our* sin—that the Father would break His only Son upon that cross for sinners like you and me. And it is curious that He would demand nothing from us in return.

God’s love don’t take money, it don’t take fame. You don’t need a credit card to ride this train. It’s strong and it’s sudden; and it can be cruel sometimes.

But through the faith given you by God’s Holy Spirit, it has saved your life.

In all of this is love, not that *we* have loved God but that *he loved us* and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. See, love is not some shallow, superficial emotion. It is *action*—God’s curious action—and sacrifice. The power of God’s love makes the world go ‘round. It rescues sinners from the power of death and the devil. And it stands for everyone for all time.

Huey was right. More than a feeling—*that’s* the power of love.

Inscribed upon the cross we see

In shining letters, “God is love.”

He bears our sins upon the tree;

He brings us mercy from above.

LSB 429

3rd Friday in Lent – April 1 - Psalm 96: 10

Sem. Ryan Ogrodowicz, Vicar

A glance at any news outlet quickly reveals a world shaken by catastrophe. Earthquakes, famine, and tyranny—these and other forms of suffering appear to never cease and extend to all corners of the globe. No one is exempt from tribulation. At times out of our sinful weakness we are tempted to question God’s promise declared to us in Psalm 96: 10, which says: “The Lord reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved.” Yet to us the world is tossed in ways baffling our minds. Our lives are filled with unexpected trails resembling anything but a world established and ruled by an omnipotent God.

However, creation is the wrong place to look when seeking God’s peace, establishment, and restoration. Rather than fixating on the unpredictable God directs us to the establishment of an unmovable world in the cross of Jesus Christ. It is at the crucifixion we see our suffering Lord shed His blood to mend the sinful rift between humanity and God. It is in the suffering of Christ, who took our sins upon His body that the price for our sin has been paid and we can now live as new creations, sinners justified by faith in the living Son of God. The Lenten season provides the setting to humbly give thanks for Jesus’ sacrificial death, as seen in stanza seven of “The Royal Banners Forward Go.” By remembering what Christ has done the believer can sing in confidence

To Thee, eternal Three in One,
Let homage meet by all be done
Whom by the cross Thou dost restore,
Preserve, and govern evermore.

3rd Saturday in Lent – April 2nd
Andrew Tessone

I think most people know what it's like to be guilty of something. The evening news presents the stories of people who are guilty of crimes, but we know what it's like to be guilty in our own lives. Guilty of breaking someone else's things, guilty of forgetting an important event, guilty of failing a loved one. We know what it's like to be guilty, and it's not a pleasant feeling.

The thief on the cross next to Jesus was guilty. He was a robber sentenced to death for his crimes. He knew he was guilty, and he knew he was getting what his guilt deserved. He also realized the man next to him was not guilty. Jesus had done nothing wrong. He cried out to Jesus in faith to remember him in His kingdom, and Jesus meets that faith with the promise of Paradise.

You and I are guilty. We are guilty of breaking the Ten Commandments. We have not loved God with all our hearts, and we have not loved our neighbors either. We are guilty. And the punishment for our sins is death, just like the thief. But the same forgiveness that thief received is the forgiveness freely given to you and I. On the cross of Calvary, Jesus offers forgiveness for you and me by paying the price for our guilt. You are guilty, but through faith, Jesus announces that you will be with him in Paradise.

May we in our guilt and shame
Still Thy love and mercy claim,
Calling humbly on Thy name,
Hear us, holy Jesus.
(LH 181, stanza 2)

4th Sunday in Lent – April 3 – Psalm 98:1-2
Sem. Troy Peperkorn, 2nd year

God promised over and over ever since the fall of Adam and Eve that he would reveal a savior for the nations. He promised Adam and Eve that the Christ would crush the devil. He promised the Israelites in the desert by giving them laws concerning the sacrifice of an innocent lamb on behalf of all the people. Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, and the Psalmist reveal the promise repeatedly that a savior would come in the flesh.

He would come to reveal God's righteousness in the salvation of his people through one person. While God delivered his people through battles, those battles were shadows of the battle that His son, Jesus Christ, would win on the cross. All the prophecies and promises are fulfilled in Christ the revealed savior in the sight of his people.

What other song needs to be sung than the song of God's triumph in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? He has worked salvation for his people from the beginning, completed it in Jesus Christ, and continues to save us by keeping his promise to forgive and renew us in his Word and Sacraments. We remember Christ and how his revelation has worked salvation for us forever.

“Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle;
Sing the ending of the fray.
Now above the cross, the trophy,
Sound the loud triumphant lay;
Tell how Christ, the world's redeemer,
As a victim won the day.” (LSB 454:1)

4th Monday in Lent – April 4th -
Seminarian Joshua Errer, 4th Year

If you pass through the doors of Grace Lutheran Church in Fairgrove, MI, you are met with a pleasant surprise. In the narthex, painted in fancy script, the last verse of *Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart*. As you begin to read these words “Lord, let at last Thine angels come, To Abr’ham’s bosom bear me home, That I may die unfearing...” you can’t help but follow them through the narthex and into the sanctuary. When you open the sanctuary doors, the verse continues along the wall “And then from death awaken me, That these mine eyes with joy may see...” and beneath them is a sight that causes you to catch your breath. Running along the wall is a mural. The mural begins with an angel kneeling over an open coffin, surrounding the coffin are eyeglasses, crutches, bandages, markings of the effects of sin, but rising out of that coffin is a parade of people. In the parade, are the heroes of our faith, Abraham, Elizabeth, the Holy Innocents and many others whom you recognize and many whom you do not know; they all join together to process toward the altar. Behind the altar, the vision becomes even more spectacular as your eye beholds a floor to ceiling depiction of the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Son standing with his arms open welcoming you to the altar. Welcoming you to join the people of faith.

When you worship in this space, you cannot help but be overwhelmed by the Communion of Saints for you are surrounded by the visual reminder that that the church is greater than you or I and the that the promise of salvation extends throughout the many generations of the people of God. This message is embedded into our Lenten season as we slowly march toward the great resurrection day. As we go through this time, let us never forget that we do not make this journey alone; we are invited to participate in this journey with the whole church because it is to his church, that God’s promises are given. The promise that, one day, we too will be awakened from death, to rise from the tomb and leave the marks of this sinful world behind that we may live in glory for time without end.

“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 every 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.” Amen.

4th Tuesday in Lent – April 5th – John 3:16
Sem. M. Douglas Peters, 3rd Year-Delayed Vicar

God sends His Son into the world, so that you believe in Jesus, and through this trust in Him, be gifted eternal life. You have heard this before. You have seen these words referenced even at football games. With such repetition and familiarity you would think you might know them.

But you don’t. You and the fallen world can’t. The reason you can’t know truth, is the very motivation for God to act. The Holy Spirit comes to you now! God sends His word which engulfs you in the one faith; a faith that confesses the Christ and Him alone, a faith that cause you to repent.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus reveals what His Father does in love for His creation. These words come to you in your time of reflection and contrition. You know God’s divine love is not a result of your deeds or works. The commandments make clear our never ending transgressions and our unworthiness. What we poor miserable sinners deserve, Jesus our Lord will endure. The punishment for sin is death. Yet it will be your merits, Jesus, counted toward our debt.

You know and trust this divine reality as God’s Word sends His Holy Spirit into you creating faith that causes you to believe. As Jesus is faithfully preached, God continually sends His son into the world. Through His Holy Word you come to know who you are, and the Savior your God has so mercifully sent to rescue you. It is upon His Son, Jesus we will ponder now.

*Graciously my faith renew;
Help me bear my crosses,
Learning humbleness from you,
Peace mid pain and losses.
May I give You Love for love!
Hear me, O my Savior,
That I may in heav’n above
Sing your praise forever. LSB 440: 6*

4th Wednesday in Lent – April 6 – 2 Corinthians 5:21
From Starck’s Prayer Book (A Lenten Prayer)

O Jesus, my Jesus, how great is Your love, which was revealed in Your bitter suffering! You are the only-begotten Son of God. You are the Lamb without spot, the Lord of glory, the Most Holy, in whom there is no sin. And yet You surrendered Yourself into the most shameful death and the most cruel suffering for me, an unrighteous person, a sinner, a child of death. Oh, how great is Your unspeakable mercy! The Holy One bears my unholiness; the Perfect One, my wickedness; the Innocent One, my guilt. My sins were laid on You so that Your righteousness could be laid on me. My Jesus, in Your suffering I behold the wrath of God against sin, the abomination of sin, the punishment of sin. For, if God on account of the iniquities of others and for imputed sins has so miserably afflicted You on the Mount of Olives—You, the innocent Lamb—and has permitted You to become so awfully disfigured by the treatment of Your enemies, how grievously will those be punished in the end who are not moved to repentance and faith by this suffering? How wretched shall they be when they have to pay for their sins themselves!

I will not place this suffering before my eyes, and wherever I may be, it shall be my constant delight. Until body and soul are sundered, Your suffering and death shall ever be enshrined in my heart. The Israelites were free from all guilt and punishment when in faith they brought a lamb for sacrifice before God and beheld the shedding of its warm blood. So I, too, know that I have been pardoned and reconciled to God, when I believe that You, O Jesus, the Lamb of God without spot or blemish, have been slain for me and have poured out Your heart’s blood for me in abundance. Your blood is the true sacrificial blood, the blood of reconciliation, the blood of purification, the blood of atonement.

O my Jesus, when my heart tries to mislead me into sin, I will remember the sufferings You endured and the blood You shed. When the world by its evil example would entice me to follow its ways, I will place before my eyes Your bleeding image on the Mount of Olives, at the scourging, and on the cross. In the terror of my sins, I will flee to Your wounds. When my conscience fills me with fear, I will receive Your blood as my ransom. Yes, in my dying hour I desire to know nothing but You, O Jesus. Your holy name, O Jesus, shall be my last word. Your bleeding image, my last thought. Your last word from the cross, my last sigh in death. With You I will say: “Father, into Your hands I commit my Spirit” In that last hour, Jesus, be my comfort, my joy, my consolation, my defense. Amen.

4th Thursday in Lent – April 7 – St. John 13:1-9
Sem. Adam Koontz, 1st Year

Jesus goes out of this world to be with his Father, so that after he has been glorified on the cross, he can rise from the dead and tell us that the Father is “My Father and *your* Father.” He loves us, his very own, and by his passion we know what love is, “that he laid down his life for us...” (1 John 3:16). Our God gives us His life; the Evil One only uses Judas Iscariot to take the Christ’s life. Yet the Christ knows that all things are in his Father’s hands and that he has been sent by the Father and returns to the Father. There is no uncertainty about his mission or his purpose.

Yet the disciples “do not understand now” what Jesus is doing, nor do we see what God’s purposes are for us when trials come our way. On the night before certain death, would we be so steadfast? But Jesus does not leave us alone. Instead he says, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with Me.” He said as much to Nicodemus, “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (3:5). We have entered into the kingdom of God in Holy Baptism into His death, so when he rises on Easter, he will say to the children of God, “Peace be with you.” His Father is now always *our* Father.

He that believes and is baptized
Shall see the Lord’s salvation;
Baptized into the death of Christ,
He is a new creation.
Thro’ Christ’s redemption he shall stand
Among the glorious heav’nly band
Of ev’ry tribe and nation. (TLH 301:1)

4th Friday in Lent – April 8

From Johann Gerhard's *Meditations on Divine Mercy*

O HOLYGOD, just Judge, I see Your Son hanging on the cross, streams of blood flowing freely. I look at Him and, behold, I become weak with terror. Those cruel nails are my sins with which I have pierced His hands and feet. Those horrible thorns are my sins with which I have crowned His holy head, the head worshiped and honored by angelic powers. Those sharply pointed lashes are my sins with which I have scourged His faultless body, the permanent temple of divinity. A terrible beast tore to pieces this heavenly Joseph and stained His robe with blood (Genesis 37:33). I, a wretched sinner, am that terrible beast because my sins rushed en masse against this Your beloved Son (Isaiah 53:6). If this, Your obedient Son, suffers in anguish because of the sins of another, what will be meted out to disobedient and wayward children because of their sins? Truly, the wounds of my soul must be great and deadly if they can only be healed because Your only begotten Son is so wretchedly struck down. Truly, the disease of my soul must be great and deadly if it can only be cured because the heavenly Physician, Life itself, dies on a cross. I see the torment of my Savior. I hear His wretched wailings on the cross (Matthew 27:46). He is tormented because of me. He complains loudly that His Father has forsaken Him because of my sins. If the weight of another's sins strikes down the all-powerful Son of God, how unbearable will the wrath of God and His inestimable furor be against the unprofitable servant (Luke 17:10)? O dry and unfruitful wood, sold to the fires of eternal hell, what will be your lot if this is what happens to the green wood (Luke 23:31)? Christ is the green tree of life. Christ is a vigorous tree, rooted in divinity, part and parcel of humanity, famed for His virtues, possessing leaves of holy words, and yielding the fruit of good works. He is the cedar of modesty and the vine of peace, the palm of patience and the olive of mercy. But if the fire of divine wrath burned against this green wood, the tree of life, because of the sins of others, how much more will it completely consume the sinner as a dry tree because of unfruitful works? How great and bloody the letters of my sin appear when written on the body of Christ. How striking, O most righteous God, is Your wrath against my iniquity. How tightly I must have been held in captivity because so precious a ransom was given to release me. How great the stains of my sin must have been because streams of blood from the body of Christ flowed to wash them away (Luke 22:44). O most righteous God, yet most kind Father, behold how unworthily Your Son suffered for me. Forget how unworthily I, Your wretched servant, have acted. Look to Christ's deep wounds and plunge my sins into the deepest depths of the sea of Your mercy (Micah 7:19).

4th Saturday in Lent – April 9 – Isaiah 53:3-5

Sem. Timothy Frank, 4th Year

Each year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would lay his hands on a goat and confess over it the sins of the people. The goat would then be sent away into the wilderness (Leviticus 16). On this day, the people were reminded that their sin would be borne by another, the coming Sin-bearer. Their sin was removed from them and placed on the Innocent One.

Isaiah speaks of the Suffering Servant Who would bear our griefs and carry our sorrows. He would be the great Scapegoat, the great Substitute. He would take upon Himself our chastisement in order to bring us His peace. He was the Innocent One Who would offer Himself on behalf of our guilt.

Luther writes, "These words, OUR, US, FOR US, must be written in letters of gold. (AE 17:221) These words exclude none of us. They are incredibly precious because they are at the heart of true gospel comfort. When our sins trouble us, we know that those very sins were borne for us by Christ. He was stricken, smitten, and afflicted for us in order that we may be given His innocence. His perfect sacrifice cancels our guilt. His death and resurrection is our firm foundation and our refuge.

Here we have a firm foundation,
Here the refuge of the lost:
Christ, the Rock of our salvation,
Is the name of which we boast;
Lamb of God, for sinners wounded,
Sacrifice to cancel guilt!
None shall ever be confounded
Who on Him their hope have built. (LSB 451:4)

5th Sunday in Lent – April 10 – Matthew 15:29-30
Seminarian Dustin Beck, 4th Year

In Matthew 15:29-30, Jesus healed all manner of infirmities and illnesses. The lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others were brought into His presence for healing. Jesus was a physical place of refuge for the wearied and broken of this world.

Where do you go for refuge—for that respite from the world around you? Perhaps you have found a particular pew in the chapel, behind which you kneel, and upon which your tears have poured forth as your prayers are spilled in tired, weary sighs; maybe in the arms of a loved one or the consolation of a dear friend in whom you might catch a glimpse of the compassion of Christ; or perhaps your aching soul finds rest when you join together in sports, lighthearted competition with brothers and sisters in Christ. Lent is a season laden with contemplative rest; a season in which we look to retreat from our desires and our very selves that we might decrease even as Christ increases.

The refuge Christ brings for you this fifth Sunday in Lent is engraved upon your very own heart. Traced in the rite of Holy Baptism, His cross and yes, Christ Himself, remain and abide upon your heart.

And as the disciples on the road to Emmaus' hearts burned within them at Christ's presence, you too will meet this Resurrected Christ in Glory when, for the final time, your refuge in Christ will be manifested among you.

*Jesus, may our hearts be burning
With more fervent love for You;
May our eyes be ever turning
To behold Your cross anew
Till in glory, parted never
From the blessed Savior's side,
Graven in our hearts forever,
Dwell the cross, the Crucified.*

Jesus, Refuge of the Weary, LSB 423v3

5th Monday in Lent – April 11 – John 10:11, 14-15
Sem. Matt Wietfeldt, 4th Year SA President

"I am the Good Shepherd..."

We typically think of these words of Jesus coming during the third or fourth Sunday in Easter, depending on which lectionary you use. However, the Sundays in Lent allow us to see the beautiful words in a different way. Gregory the Great (6th c.) brilliantly and beautifully shows how looking at these words of Christ during Lent sheds new light on them and how we can know who Christ is. He writes,

“He whose goodness is his own nature and not some nonessential gift says, ‘I am the Good Shepherd.’”

The nature of Christ is a nature of Giver. This is not some after thought or as a result of something else but it is who He is. In Creation, the Father speaking all into being through the Word, His Son, giving everything life. When our first persons fell into sin and dragged all of creation with them, the Lord promised to give again. He promised to make everything new and right again just like it was there in Eden - a making new that took Christ to the cross, though He did not deserve it, for you. Christ is the perfect, spotless sacrifice that God gives out of His goodness and mercy toward us. He gives this sacrifice for the forgiveness of all your sins.

So in this Lenten tide, remember, the Good Shepherd is for forgiveness, as He lays down His life for you. When Christ lays down His life, we then really know who He is. His nature is that of Giver. He is the giver of forgiveness - given through His death on the cross. He is the giver of His Name in your Baptism, a Name that forgives all who have it. He is the giver of His holy body and blood in His Holy Supper. All for forgiveness, all by the Giver, all for you.

And when, dear Lord, before Thy throne in heaven
To me the crown of joy at last is given,
Where sweetest hymns Thy saints forever raise Thee,
I, too, shall praise Thee. (LSB 439:15)

5th Tuesday in Lent – April 12th

From J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, Movements 30-40

Ah, now is my Jesus gone!

*Where is then thy friend now departed,
O thou fairest of all the women? Is it granted, can I see him?
Where hath he thy friend gone away? Ah, my lamb in tiger's clutches,
Ah, where is my Jesus gone? We will with thee now go and seek him.
Ah, what shall I say to my spirit when it doth in anguish ask me:
Ah, where is my Jesus gone?...*

*The world hath judged me with deceit, with lying and with false conceit,
With nets and snares in secret. Lord, me regard in this distress,
Guard me from false deceptions...*

*My Jesus keeps amidst false lies his silence,
To show us by example that his dear mercy's full intention
For us to suffer now inclines, in order that within such pain
We should resemble him, in persecution keep our silence.*

*Forbear, thou deceiving tongues may sting me!
Though I suffer, innocent, mocking scorn,
Ah, then may the Lord above
Give my guiltless heart its vengeance.*

*Who hath thee thus so smitten, My health and thee tormented,
So evilly abused? Thou art indeed no sinner like us and our descendants; Of
evil deeds thou knowest not.*

*Have mercy Lord, My God, because of this my weeping!
Look thou here, heart and eyes now weep for Thee bitterly.*

*Though I now have thee forsaken, I will once again return;
For thy Son hath reconciled us through His agony and death.
I deny no whit my guilt; but thy mercy and thy grace
Are much greater than the failings
Which I ever find within me.*

5th Wednesday in Lent - April 13th – Hebrews 13:15

Sem. Jay Hobson, 4th Year

Today, we might ponder the second commandment.

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God: We should fear and love God so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or deceive by his name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

We break this commandment so often by actively misusing the name of our God, but perhaps even more often we break it through sins of omission when we fail to “call upon him in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.” It is an unbelieving heart that does not call upon the name of the Lord when it is in trouble. It is a rebellious heart that refuses to pray in the name of Jesus when the command is made that you shall pray and the promise given that you will be heard. It is an egocentric heart that speaks of what it does in the name of God rather than what God has accomplished for His name's sake through the Christocentric work of salvation. It is an ungrateful heart that fails to give thanks for the name of God which has been placed upon it. How great is the depth of our sin!

Let us repent, and believe on the name of the Lord.

Though we greatly sin against the name of the Lord, our help is in the name of the Lord. By God's triune name, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, our sins are washed clean and our hearts are renewed by the forgiveness that comes through baptism. The very name of Jesus that our sinful hearts despise is also the very name by which we are saved. Indeed, we are washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus. “Through Jesus then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of the lips that acknowledge his name.” For, this name brings us life and salvation forevermore.

Defend us, Lord, from sin and shame;
Help us by Thine almighty name
To bear our crosses patiently,
Consoled by Thy great agony...
(Lord Jesus, We Give Thanks to Thee, TLH 173:3)

5th Thursday in Lent – April 14 – Psalm 8:5
Seminarian John Ramsey

It's so easy to get caught up in the nuts and bolts of life. In our preferred vocations, our attention is riveted on the things that are needed for our success, our satisfaction, our next promotion, the next big sale and the personal and financial rewards for a job well done. The nuts and bolts get larger and the complexity to make them work more intense. The relationships that make life worth living as we produce our nuts and bolts slowly fade into the background.

Perhaps on a late winter or early spring evening, arriving home late again, we are moved by the Holy Spirit to gaze up into the sky. There, stretched out in unending glory, the work of God's fingers is on display. The moon and the stars, the lights of heaven, hold forth their place not with human crafted nuts and bolts, but with the power and purpose of God the Father Almighty.

What am I that God would even have a thought about me? Who am I that God could even stoop to care for me? Especially when I have looked to my nuts and bolts instead of to Him. Especially when my vocation of work has crowded out my vocations of spouse, parent, friend, neighbor, servant, and yes, disciple! King David's rejoinder is so amazing!

Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. Psalm 8:5

Not only has He made us in His image, just below the heavenly beings who constantly worship and serve God the Father, but He has crowned us with glory and honor to rule benevolently over all He has given to us. And what am I doing instead? Spending too much time with my nuts & bolts! In good Lutheran practice and thinking, the Season of Lent brings us to our senses as we ponder another meaning for verse 5—that God the Father has made His Son a little lower than the heavenly beings, and crowned Him with thorns and enthroned Him on a cross, showing the children of creation the nuts and bolts of Christ's work of salvation and resurrection.

A glance toward the heavens, a portion of Scripture, fixing breakfast for the kids, putting aside the nuts and bolts for a few minutes to help a co-worker and suddenly the joy of knowing Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit makes everything begin to fit together again. In the Season of Lent, as we walk with the Lord to Calvary, we can say with the King David *O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!* Psalm 8:9

5th Friday in Lent – April 15 – Hebrews 5:7
Sem. Evan Goeglein, 4th Year

Nothing is certain, the saying goes, but death and taxes. Yet Hebrews says that Jesus prayed with loud cries and tears to Him *who was able to save him from death*. And so, in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prays, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Jesus, who knew no sin, prayed that day in fear of the wrath of God, while we poor miserable sinners, who should fear His wrath, don't. Jesus was found in the garden that day, praying with such fervor, with loud cries and tears, in the place of us sinners. For though we know we sin against God, we don't realize the true cost of our daily transgressions. But Jesus knew the price for sin against God that day. He knew the only way appease the wrath of God for sin is by death, and Jesus would rather spill His holy and perfect blood than to see you perish.

For this reason, Jesus prays with loud cries and tears to God saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." This is the prayer Jesus prays for you. For your constant rebellion from fear, love and trust in God. For the times your spirit may be willing but your flesh is weak. For the times your worship and prayers have faltered. Jesus prays for you, to Him who is able to save from death and is heard because of His reverence. Yet Jesus would not have it that He be the one that escapes death, but rather suffers death upon the cross so that death may be defeated, once for all. He does all this in the place of sinners who cannot. He doesn't do it so that we can know how serious sin is. He does it so that we would be His own. In the death of Jesus, you are forgiven of all your sins so that you are God's adopted children and heirs of the eternal inheritance. So perhaps it should rather be said that nothing is certain but death, taxes and the forgiveness of your sins by the death of Jesus. Amen.

"Father, forgive these men; for, lo,
They truly know not what they do."
So far His love extended.
Forgive us, Lord, for we, too, have
Thro' ignorance offended.

TLH 177:2

5th Week in Lent –Saturday April 16– Colossians 1:19-20
Seminarian Aaron Boerst, 2nd Year

“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”

The 1985 film *Back to the Future* seems to apply to most every situation in life. Oddly enough, it also applies to many theological discussions.

In the film, Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox) is accidentally sent back in time to 1955, when his parents are still in high school. Marty however, quickly learns that in order for him to be able to return to his rightful time in history, he must right his wrongs so that all the necessary events of history still happen. Nevertheless, Marty brings everything back to order, effectively making peace with the space-time continuum, and he actually makes things even better. He gives his father, George, the necessary confidence to stand up for himself and have the courage to earn the affection of his future wife, Lorraine. He even arouses the civil rights movement by inspiring an African-American waiter to run for mayor.

However, no matter how good Marty seems to be at reconciling history, things always seem to go wrong, (making two more *BTTF* sequels necessary).

In our lives, we may have times of success and achievement. But no matter how great things can be they don't always last very long. Success can quickly turn to failure. Sin destroys the peace that we so desperately try to find and make. Our own sins, the sin in the world, and the power of the devil, all weigh us down with a heavy burden.

Sin alienated the creation from the creator. But Christ reconciles all things by bringing everything back to its proper order. Christ reconciles us to his Father. Christ not only restores order in this world by atoning for our sins, but he also promises to restore order to creation when he returns. Jesus' death makes this peace possible in his blood, shed on the cross for you. Faith in Jesus' resurrection makes eternal peace certain because of the power of God's love.

THE PRAYER: *Forgive us, Lord, for our sinfulness. Amen.*

Cross of Jesus, cross of sorrow,
Where the blood of Christ was shed,
Perfect man on thee did suffer,
Perfect God on thee has bled!

Here the King of all the ages,
Throned in light ere worlds could be,
Robed in mortal flesh is dying,
Crucified by sin for me.

Palm Sunday – April 17 – Matthew 21:16
Sem. Sean Daenzer, 4th Year

Out of the mouths of babes and infants comes praise. What sort of praise can a baby offer? It only speaks gurgles and cryings. Its attention seems always fixed on its own desires, not the desires of others. But in Psalm 8, which Jesus quotes to rebuke the priests and scribes, babes and infants have much to offer in their cries for milk, for a change, for help. Their posture is that of children to their dear parents: “Help! Save!” Such confident faith *stills the enemy and the avenger*. So we also have learned to become like little children before our God, always to pray with the boldness of babes, “Have mercy on us, save us Lord, Hosanna to the Son of David!” The Palm Sunday parade is an answer to this prayer, whether babes, infants, crowds and priests knew it or not. It leads not into the temple made with hands, but to the altar of the cross where the Son of David pours Himself out for you. The fruits of His passion He gives as food for fussy infants, for those who are helpless and must depend on His care alone. Our Lord never tires of bestowing His mercy in abundant supply. What praise could be better than to receive it? *Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord.*

All glory, laud, and honor
To Thee, Redeemer, King,
To whom the lips of children
Made sweet hosannas ring.
Thou art the King of Israel,
Thou David's royal Son,
Who in the Lord's name comest,
The King and Blessed One.

TLH 160

Holy Monday – April 18 – Psalm 118:25-26
Sem. Jeffrey Erin Wade, 2nd Year

We have all seen ourselves do this many times. As a student, praying ardently that we do well on a test. As a child, pouring our heart out to God for a snow day. As an adult, reaching out to God for work to go by more quickly. As a parent, praying there will be no quarrel at the dinner table. We often cry out to God to grant us success in the most minor of matters, and then we get angry with God when we get a C on the exam, the snow melts, we stay late at work, or the kids argue at the table. The anger continues to grow when things become more serious. When there has been a car wreck, when one of our kids is failing a class, or a loved one is diagnosed with a terminal disease. Our prayers of “Save us Lord!” and “Give us success Lord!” quickly turn into accusations of “Why didn’t you save us Lord?” and “Why did you let us fail Lord?”

It is in these moments where we can be sure to find the revealed God in the person of Jesus Christ. For He physically heard the cries of “Save us Lord!” and we can be sure that He has in fact snatched us into His hand in our baptism. It is only at the cross where our accusations can find their answers, and the answer they find is that God so loved us, that He died upon the cross for us, so that through Him and His blood we have become restored children of God.

“Hosanna in the highest!” That ancient song we sing;
For Christ is our Redeemer, The Lord of heav’n our King.
Oh, may we ever praise Him, With heart and life and voice;
And in His blissful presence, Eternally rejoice!

Tuesday of Holy Week – April 19 – Isaiah 11:10, 12
Sem. Anthony Dodgers, 4th Year

“The royal banners forward go; the cross shows forth redemption’s flow, where He, by whom our flesh was made, our ransom in His flesh has paid” (LSB 455). Imagine the author of these words, Bishop Fortunatus, hearing them sung as he watched the procession approach, carrying with it a piece of the holy cross itself. And yet, whether this truly happened at a convent in Gaul, or if St. Helena ever found the true cross at all, doesn’t really matter for there was *the cross* and it is the sign of our salvation.

As we follow our Lord in procession through Holy Week, we, with Him, fix our eyes upon the tree of beauty. It was upon this tree that the righteous branch and root of Jesse was hung: God in our flesh dying to pay our ransom. This is the signal for the peoples, a signal even for all the nations. From this tree the Son of David has His reign and by His glorious death He has redeemed Jew and Gentile alike. He has stretched out His hands upon those crimson boughs to recover His people from the whole earth and rescue us from sin, death, and the devil, which held us captive and exiled.

The ransom paid, the spoiler undone, from His resting place upon the cross, the Lord makes His glory known. “Where deep for us the spear was dyed, Life’s torrent rushing from His side, to wash us in the precious flood where flowed the water and the blood.” And so the banners come forward, through all the years of the Church to this day, our day. The procession of the holy cross meets us in water, word, bread and wine. The water and blood spill forth and overflow the font and chalice bringing Life’s torrent rushing into our lives, filling to the brim, absolving, refreshing, and strengthening for our march ahead. These gifts are given to you and the sign of His cross is upon you, so that you may know you are the King’s people, redeemed by His death and kept in His life forever.

O tree of beauty, tree most fair,
Ordained those holy limbs to bear:
Gone is thy shame, each crimsoned bough
Proclaims the King of Glory now. (LSB 455)

Wednesday, April 20, 2011 – Isaiah 25:6-8
Sem. Kory Janneke, Vicar at Faith Lutheran, Sioux Falls, SD

Our Creator Crucified on Calvary

This week, the world celebrates Earth Day (observed this Friday, April 22). As Christians, we too celebrate Earth Day, but knowing that the earth is our Creator's creation and that we are stewards of His world. As the children of God and disciples of Jesus, we have a lot that we're *already* celebrating this week: from the exuberance of Palm Sunday, to the subdued Supper on Maundy Thursday, to the tragedy of our Creator's Crucifixion on Good Friday—not to mention this upcoming weekend!

The same Creator who made all things, from Clayton's "Hi Pointe" to Jerusalem's Mt. Calvary, is crucified by His own creatures on that skullish hill. Our Maker's mangled body hung on a cross meant for us, all because, from our first parents until now, we're not satisfied with living in our Creator's service, because we put our trust in ourselves rather than in our trustworthy Master. Our nature is to serve ourselves first, and then *maybe* get around to meeting our neighbor's needs and worshipping God. This all too often describes me—how about you?

Despite our rebellion against our own Maker, *God entered His creation*, taking on humanity in every way, *to die for that creation*. On "Calvary's holy mountain" Jesus' blood-drenched body became the healing Fountain to cleanse and restore all of God's fallen human creatures. Were it not for this Fountain of Life, we would all face certain and unending death. But in Jesus, death is swallowed up forever (Isaiah 25:8) and eternal life flows for you!

For our iniquities, our Creator was tragically *crushed* (Isaiah 53:5). Yet now as a result of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, we creatures are His New Creations (2 Cor. 5:17), looking forward to *the* New Creation where death and tears and sinful disgrace will be gone, and in which we'll enjoy our Creator's company forever as we feast on the rich banquet He has prepared for all peoples (Isaiah 25:6-8).

*Come to Calvary's holy mountain, sinners ruined by the fall;
Here a pure and healing fountain flows for you, for me, for all.
In a full, perpetual tide, opened when our Savior died.*

LSB 435

Maundy Thursday – April 21 – Lamentations 3:19
Sem. Roger Peters, 2nd Year

The Author of Lamentations recalls his suffering and anguish with wormwood and gall. Wormwood, a plant which grows around the regions of Jerusalem, has very bitter juices, and gall reminds us of the bitter drink offered to Jesus on the cross (Matt. 27:34). And so this is how we often describe the sufferings of Jesus: bitter. So today on Maundy Thursday, we recall the bitter anguish of Jesus as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. We also recall his trial before the high priest and the many false witnesses against him. All these things point us forward to tomorrow, to Jesus' actual crucifixion and death. To say that his suffering is better is perhaps an understatement, but we must remember that He did all these things to win our salvation.

We cannot remember Jesus' crucifixion, however, without remembering his resurrection. And so it is also with the author of Lamentations, who in the midst of all the suffering, in the midst of the "wormwood and gall," just two verses later writes, "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." Likewise in the midst of Holy Week when we contemplate these bitter sufferings and the death of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ, we look forward to Easter and remember the faithfulness of God.

Amen.

Follow to the judgment hall,
View the Lord of life arraigned;
Oh, the wormwood and the Gall!
Oh, the pangs His soul sustained!
Shun not suffering, shame, or loss;
Learn from Him to bear the cross.

Good Friday – April 22 – Hebrews 9:28
Rev. Sem. Matthew R. Gonzalez, 4th Year

We eagerly await.

Yet first, we awaited. From the moment of His birth, given to us in a manger bed to fulfill the promise of a Savior, we awaited. He came and lived among us, giving hearing to the deaf, sight to the blind and healing to all in need. Still, we sought the promises of God and hoped for their fulfillment.

And so, we awaited. From the moment of His arrest, his time finally at hand as he was taken to fulfill the promise of a Savior, we awaited. He allowed himself to be questioned, beaten, tortured, spat upon and punished- sentenced to death on our behalf. For we remember His passion and death on this Good Friday not because of our actions, but because he was *offered once to bear the sins of many* upon the cross extended. Yes, we sought that which He brought- the promises of God and the hope of their fulfillment.

And so, we awaited. From the moment of His death upon a cross to His glorious resurrection, fulfilling the promise of a Savior, we awaited. He claimed victory over death and rose from the dead for us. He rose to life, saving us from suffering. He bore our shame and scorn, then covered it with his precious blood. For He gave Himself and died, so that we now live. He brought and fulfilled the promises of God... He fulfilled our hope.

And now, we eagerly await. From the moment of His Ascension to sit at the right hand of the Father until this very day, we await. We look forward to that day where all of the pain and suffering, all of the shame and scorn, all of the evil will be vanquished as He returns to judge us righteous, bringing us to the new creation to dwell with Him forever.

We eagerly await.

Thy cords of love, my Savior, Bind me to Thee forever,
I am no longer mine.
To Thee I gladly tender, All that my life can render
And all I have to Thee resign.
(TLH 171- "Upon the Cross Extended")

Holy Saturday – April 23 – Ephesians 2:4-6
Sem. Samuel Wirgau, 2nd Year

The Christian does not deny sin. God's holy Law convicts you that you are sinners. You have broken His just decrees; you have profaned His holy name. More than mere criminals, you sinners are dead. Dead in your trespasses, you cannot rely upon good works or holy living. Dead in your sins, you cannot look to yourselves; you can only look to God's grace.

You ought not be so arrogant as to think that there could be another way, a better way. God has showed His love to you in this, even though you were dead in your trespasses, God sent forth His Son to give you life. God's grace is this: Jesus Christ gave His life for the lifeless; He died for the dead, that they may have life.

The Christian does not deny death. It is foolishness to the world that God should die. You know the price of your sins; because of your trespasses you deserve death. Grace is not cheap. It cost the Son of God His life. The death of God is a sad and sorrow-filled wonder, but through His death and from His cross comes the very gift of life. You are not entitled to such riches, but God gives them to you as a gift.

The Christian rejoices in this gift, for it is by grace that you have been saved. Christ has given His life for you out of love. God loves you and sent forth His Son; the Son loves you and gave Himself into death for you. He is now your life, even in the midst of death. Though you wait just a little longer, for Christ's Resurrection on Easter morning and for your resurrection from the dead, Christ is your life and will bring you to Himself in Heaven.

O Jesus blest,
My Help and Rest,
With tears I now entreat Thee:
Make me love Thee to the last,
Till in heaven I greet Thee. (TLH 167:7)

Resurrection of Our Lord- April 24- Matthew 28:6
Seminarian Joshua Errer, 4th Year

Christ Has Risen! He Has Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

“It smells like Easter.” Growing up, in southern Michigan, this meant that if you breathed the outside air, you could smell the dampness of the muddy yard, the pollen of the just bloomed and freshly budded maple trees, the faint hint of a late daffodil or early tulip and the dirt of a freshly worked field. If you breathed the inside air, you could just make out the smell of Easter lilies through the scent of the hyacinths placed on the church altar by the altar guild. These floral smells would mix with those of new shoes and clothes, with the air from window pushed open in order to capture some of the fresh spring air and then, at about the time of the sermon on Easter morning, Easter began to smell like the pancakes and sausage being prepared by the church softball team for the Easter congregational breakfast. Breathe deep. What does Easter smell like for you?

For the women who approached the tomb on Easter morning, they probably thought Easter would smell like anything but maple buds and pancakes. They had seen their Lord crucified, nailed to a tree. They had watched him die and helped take his body to lay it in the tomb. Now, the Sabbath had ended and they were going back to grieve the one they loved. On that first Easter morning, the women expected Easter to smell like death; decaying flesh and burial spices. To their surprise, Easter smelt a whole lot different. When they arrived at the tomb that morning, the odor of death did not violate their nostrils. Instead, the clean smell of an empty tomb on an early morning confirmed what their eyes could not believe, and their ears were shocked to hear, “He is not here, for he has risen, as he said.” The tomb was empty, Jesus had risen just as he said he had promised. Breathe deep. The scent rushing into your nostrils this morning is not death; it is the smell of life confirming what our eyes may be reluctant to see and our ears reluctant to believe:

Christ Has Risen! He Has Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

Heavenly Father, the Giver of Life, we celebrate with the joy this day that the women felt upon learning that their Lord was alive. Send your holy angels to guard and keep us until the day when we too are raised from the dead when your Son returns again on the next great Easter day. Amen

