

# MOUNT OLIVET LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2025



# Why Lutheran?





Our 2025 Lent series, *Why Lutheran?*, includes scriptures and themes that highlight and explore the ways Lutherans imagine God. In this devotional, our pastors will dive a bit deeper into the theme the week following the sermon. They will look at supporting scriptures to help us all learn more about our shared Lutheran faith: how we, as Lutherans, imagine God; how God works in our lives and how God wants us to live in the world today.

### Weekly Lent Themes

Ash Wednesday, March 5-Saturday, March 8: Because God will do anything to save us.

Week of March 9: Because God wants us to love one another.

Week of March 16: Because God will not give up on us.

Week of March 23: Because God is more like a parent than a king.

Week of March 30: Because God loves/justifies sinners.

Week of April 6: Because God intends to forgive and restore us.

Week of April 13 (Holy Week): Because God will pay any cost to save us.

Written by:

Pastor Lose, Senior Pastor

Pastor Kalland

Pastor Hammersten

Pastor Dixon

Pastor Freeman

Pastor Cieslik

Pastor Grangaard

Pastor Olson Popp

Rev. Dr. Theresa Latini

Pastor MacLean



ASH WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WILL DO ANYTHING TO SAVE US.**

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*When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.*

LUKE 9:51

**T**his verse is the turning point in the story Luke tells. It occurs right near the middle of the narrative, when Jesus, fully aware of the timing of his destiny, sets his face to go to Jerusalem.

If this were a movie, there would be a certain amount of everyday hubbub going on around Jesus when all of a sudden he hears something no one else can hear and all grows quiet as he turns his head and looks down the long road toward Jerusalem, the camera telescoping across the miles until we can see the city and just beyond it, outside its gates, a hill with three crosses on it. That's the drama Luke intends that we sense at this point in the story.

I've heard it said that there are two kinds of bravery. One is the kind of instinctive, momentary bravery called forth in a crisis. A child follows a ball into the street and into the path of an oncoming car and a bystander jumps out to push the child out of harm's way. The other kind of bravery is when you see something dangerous or difficult ahead and do not turn away but purposefully set out to meet it. It may be the harder of the two because it requires not just momentary courage but courageous determination for the long haul.

This is what we see in the passage above. Jesus knows what is ahead of him: the cross and all the humiliation and suffering it entails. He does not turn away. Rather, he faces it, turns from what he is doing, and sets his face to go to Jerusalem. For us. For the world. To demonstrate the power of grace. To demonstrate just how much God loves us. It is the beginning of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, and the beginning of our Lenten journey alongside him. Let's make sure to pay attention.

— PASTOR LOSE

*Dear God, fasten our eyes on the purposeful pilgrimage of your son from Galilee to Jerusalem, from heaven to earth, from his glory to our sin, from life to death...and through death to life again. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



THURSDAY, MARCH 6, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WILL DO ANYTHING TO SAVE US.**

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*If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, and sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.*

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-8

**J**esus, having all the power and angels and forces of heaven on his side, does the unthinkable. He forgoes it all, and humbles himself, to the point of death. For us. It is difficult for us to even begin to wrap our human brains around this. Hanging from the cross, Jesus somehow manages, through his pain, to utter the words “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they are doing.” Can you even begin to imagine a situation where you might follow God’s will, even if it means being crucified, and to do so with such faith and love? For others?

We throw ourselves into many things in life, sometimes to the point of exhaustion, or, in the Apostle Paul’s words, emptying ourselves. For things that are good and true, and for things that won’t matter in the least to us when our days on earth are nearing their end. Have you ever become so singularly focused on one goal, that you lose sight of everything, and everyone, around you?

We are God’s singular focus! Jesus did this for us! For God! We are the people for whom He emptied himself, even to the point of death.

– PASTOR HAMMERSTEN

*Dear Lord, the enormity of your gift is unfathomable. We give you thanks. Help us to live our lives as you did, not for our own personal gain, but for all those you place in our path. Amen*



FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WILL DO ANYTHING TO SAVE US.**

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*Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'*

JOHN 14:16

In these words from John's gospel, Christ is assuring his disciples and assuring us that he will go the way for us – a way we cannot go on our own, to be our truth and our life.

Too often, these words are used to exclude and make a narrow way to God that we have to travel. These words, in light of the whole gospel, in light of the witness of scripture, tell us again and again that it is God in Christ Jesus who has come for us, and Christ who will take us to God.

Let's read it this way.

**No one comes to the Father.**

**Except through me.**

**I am the way, and the truth, and the life.**

**No one comes to the Father.** As Lutherans, we confess that all of us are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We cannot find God on our own, but need God always to come to us. Sin separates everyone from God; no one has a special in.

But sin does not have the last word.

**Except through me.** Here, a window opens, a new way forward. What sin has closed off, Jesus opens back up. God has sent Jesus to make a way for the world.

**I am the way, and the truth, and the life.** Jesus goes the way to become the way. His way will be the way of the cross, through death and resurrection. Jesus goes the way to bring us into relationship with God. Faith trusts these promises and the God who gives them in and through Christ.

In these words, Christ is assuring us that God will do anything to save us. There is space for us with him forever. It is Christ through the Holy Spirit who will remain with us and for us in this life, and take us into his life in the next.

– PASTOR GRANGAARD

*Dear God, you have gone the way for us and desire to bring us to yourself. Give us faith to trust your way, truth and life for us. Amen.*



SATURDAY, MARCH 8, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WILL DO ANYTHING TO SAVE US.**

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*But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.*

*All we like sheep have gone astray, we have all turned to our own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

ISAIAH 53:5-6

**W**hat is the difference between a consequence and a punishment? Consequences arise naturally from an action, punishments do not. The *consequence* of a lifetime of smoking might be blackened lungs, for example. Whereas, if mom or dad catch you smoking, the *punishment* might be that you can't go to prom. So often we talk about Jesus as if he saved us from punishment, and that word appears in this translation, but what if we thought in terms of consequences?

This world, this life we share, is full of the consequences of our global sinfulness. All the lies, all the tricks, all the pollution, all the greed – it all adds up and makes the world less trustworthy, less safe, less healthy, less pure, and we absorb the harmful consequences of all that in countless ways.

If we imagine sin brings consequence rather than an arbitrary punishment, I think it actually makes Jesus' sacrifice for our sake even more gracious and more necessary. If it were just a punishment, God could simply cancel it out of mercy. And if God chose not to, Jesus' crucifixion and death would seem pointlessly (mercilessly) cruel. This is what some people call "penal substitutionary atonement" (google it). And whether or not people have ever heard that phrase, it has turned a lot of people away from faith, because it makes the Gospel story into a cruel kind of horror.

Christ is not a body shield standing between us and the firing squad. Christ is an organ donor. He went under the knife and gave us his body, his life. This sacrificial act left wounds (like surgical scars) he bore for our transgressions. It is absurd for a healthy person to offer up their life in this way to save a dying person. But God would do even this to save us. Indeed, Jesus did.

– PASTOR DIXON

*God, you have given us life when the consequences of our sin should be death. Help us to receive your gracious gift in faith.  
Amen.*

# First Sunday in Lent

MARCH 9, 2025

WORSHIP:

MPLS: 9, 10 & 11AM

WEST: 9, 10 & 11AM

SCRIPTURE:

*LUKE 10:25-37*

*WHY LUTHERAN?*

*BECAUSE GOD WANTS US TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.*





MONDAY, MARCH 10, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WANTS US TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.**

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*Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother,*

*"Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother."*

*And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.*

JOHN 19:25-27

In the Gospel of John, Jesus offers three words from the cross. One that fulfills the prophecy about the Messiah. One that signals the triumphant conclusion of his mission. And this one, the first word that he says, instructs two of the witnesses of his death to love and care for each other.

One of those two is his mother, the other, the disciple repeatedly described as "the disciple Jesus loved." Together, they will form what some have called "the first Christian family," a family created not by the ties of blood or kinship, but rather by love and service.

It strikes me as important that in this, his moment of greatest suffering and isolation, Jesus' words to his mother and disciple echo words he said earlier: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). And they do. Inspired by Jesus' example, they love one another.

That was Jesus' call then. That is Jesus' call today. To see those around us, no matter how different, as God's children and, therefore, as our family. It is not an easy call to follow. We are too easily inclined to mistrust those who are different, to fear those we do not know, to try to safeguard our future by keeping what we have to ourselves. But that is not the way of Christ. Rather, we are called to love one another. Of all the words Jesus offers from the cross, it is the single command he speaks: love one another. Inspired by his example, let us do our best to obey.

— PASTOR LOSE

*Dear God, grant us eyes to see all people as your beloved children and as our siblings in Christ. Grant us hearts eager to share your love with them. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



TUESDAY, MARCH 11, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WANTS US TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.**

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*I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.*

AMOS 5:21-24

**T**he prophets don't pull punches. When they've got something to say, they say it, and Amos is no exception. As the Lord's mouthpiece, Amos critiques the people's worship life. He says that God hates their festivals and their celebrations. God hates their offerings. God hates the people's songs. For a congregation like ours, where worship figures so centrally in what we do together, these can be tough words to hear. How can God hate the praise of the people?

The issue for Amos' audience is really the same for us. Our worship life is formative. That is, at its best, worship forms us into the people God has called us to be. We come together to pray, sing, and listen, so that we can be reminded of just how much God loves us and that we are called to be bearers of that love in this world. If worship doesn't change how we show up in the world, then it kind of misses the point. It's just noise. But when we allow ourselves to be changed by the promises of God we hear in worship, then God's mercy, love, and justice can't help but flow out of us and nourish the dry places in this world.

Worship doesn't exist just for its own sake, or because God is a needy deity, rather worship is for a purpose. So that God's mercy might be shared with our neighbor.

– PASTOR CIESLIK

*God when we come together, change our hearts, so that your righteousness might flow through us in all we do. Amen.*



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WANTS US TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.**

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*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*

*Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.*

1 JOHN 4:7-12

**W**hen I lived in the L'Arche community, our founder commonly reminded us that, "Celebration and forgiveness are the two faces of love." It was important for us to hear this because living with other human beings in a community can be just plain hard – whether that be with our family, our workplace, our church, our city, our state, our country, or our world. Only love makes it possible to live peaceably with one another. Since God is love, only God makes it possible to live peaceably with one another. And love is not just a feeling. Love is action.

Eugene Peterson defines love beautifully in his translation of 1 Corinthians 13, and shows us what love (celebration and forgiveness) looks like in real time – "*Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have. Love doesn't strut, doesn't have a swelled head, doesn't force itself on others, isn't always "me first," doesn't fly off the handle, doesn't keep score of the sins of others, doesn't revel when others grovel, takes pleasure in the flowering of truth, puts up with anything, trusts god always, always looks for the best, never looks back, but keeps going to the end.*"

God is love. When we love one another, God is known.

– PASTOR FREEMAN

*Dear God, You are love. In your Spirit, help us to love one another. Amen.*



THURSDAY, MARCH 13, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WANTS US TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.**

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*“Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you? And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”*

MATTHEW 25:34-40

**O**n January 20, one of the coldest nights of the year, a group of Mount Olivet parishioners hopped in their shivering cars and drove to Eagan to don not-so-attractive hair nets and gloves, and to ladle vitamins, veggies, soy, and rice into packets. The packets were then sealed and boxed for their long journey to a foreign land. Over 19,000 meals were packed that night, enough food to feed 52 children for a *year*.

At the end of the evening, we laid our hands on the boxes and prayed over food that would make its way to Haiti. It struck me that even though we had no idea who the sweet little hands were that would eagerly reach out for a desperately needed meal, nor did they have any idea that a bunch of Minnesota Lutherans gathered that cold night to pray for them, that we were all gathered together by the Holy Spirit! From the packers to the truck drivers to the pilots, to the folks who will prepare and serve the kiddos their warm meal at school, we are all ONE. Gathered by the Holy Spirit, doing what we can do to love one another as God has loved us. And isn't that what faith is all about?

– PASTOR HAMMERSTEN

*Dear God, remind us each day that loving one another is loving YOU. Amen.*



FRIDAY, MARCH 14, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WANTS US TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.**

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*As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.*

JOHN 15:9-11

**J**oy, as biblical faith understands it, isn't affected by external circumstances. Joy is rooted in faith – trust in the living God. And it leads to peace. The Apostle Paul speaks of joy that transcends our outward circumstances. Joy is born of trust and confidence in the God who will see us through the darkest and toughest times. God will be faithful and present to us, working ultimately for good in our lives, no matter what happens.

In John's Gospel, Jesus speaks of this same kind of joy when he says, "I have spoken these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." Jesus spoke these words on the night before he died, as he said farewell to his disciples.

Jesus also says that for our joy to be full, we are to abide or remain in his love. And when we do that, it leads us to love one another and to love the world. This is the well-known passage in John's Gospel where Jesus says earlier, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide or remain in relationship with me – those who stay connected to the vine – bear much fruit. They bear the fruit of love for others."

But this love and joy do not come easily to us human beings. They are not our natural inclination. That's why Jesus says, "Abide in my love; stay connected to me; watch me, listen to me, learn from me." Just as the branches of a vine or tree bear fruit by staying connected to the main vine or trunk of the tree, the power to love as Jesus loved comes from staying connected to Jesus the Vine.

– PASTOR MACLEAN

*Lord, today as I look out at the beauty of your creation, I thank you for the goodness of life, for family and friends, for the fullness and joy of all of life, even with its burdens and challenges. Amen.*



SATURDAY, MARCH 15, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WANTS US TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.**

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*Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*

ROMANS 15:7

Usually when someone says “thank you,” we respond by saying “you’re welcome.” The gospel reverses this order. In Christ we hear and feel God’s welcome, and our best response is to give thanks, praise, and glory to God.

“Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” Paul wrote these words to a church of ordinary believers who gathered in Rome in praise of God. Their believing spilled out into the lives of non-Jewish people, the Gentiles, who then became believers. Their church blesses us still through this letter.

“Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” There were no commas in the original Greek. Roy A. Harrisville Jr. notes that “many editors insert a comma after the pronoun [you] so as to yield this sense: ‘Welcome one another for the glory of God.’” Martin Luther reminds us that “The law says do this and it is never done. The gospel says believe this and it is done already.”

Christ’s welcome is bigger and truer than our own. When Christ says “welcome,” the heavens open, mercy abides, grace resounds, and the soul feels its worth. A welcome that is left only in our hands can fall short, miss its mark, and lose its way. Welcome has often meant fitting in and following suit – or choosing sides or signs or slogans. When welcome or belonging or unity comes in addition to Christ or apart from Christ...it might give us a reason to gather, but we will run out of table space.

“Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” Glory also means praise and hope. When we praise, we give thanks, we trust, we have hope. Christ’s welcome comes first, then our thanks. Like the Romans, faith spills out. Our thanks stem from the welcome that we hold, but more clearly holds us. Before we can say please...or thank you. We are told: welcome. Welcome.

Christ has welcomed you for the glory of – praise of, hope of – God.

Therefore welcome one another.

– PASTOR GRANGAARD

*Dear God, Thank you for welcoming all in Christ Jesus. Help us to love one another and share your welcoming grace in Jesus. Amen.*

# Second Sunday in Lent

MARCH 16, 2025

WORSHIP:

MPLS: 9, 10 & 11AM

WEST: 9, 10 & 11AM

SCRIPTURE:

*LUKE 15:1-10*

*WHY LUTHERAN?*

*BECAUSE GOD WILL NOT GIVE UP ON US.*



MONDAY, MARCH 17, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WILL NOT GIVE UP ON US.**

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*Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel: “Be strong and bold, for you are the one who will go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their ancestors to give them; and you will put them in possession of it. It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”*

DEUTERONOMY 31:7-8

**T**hese two verses depict one of the most significant leadership transitions in the history of Israel. To this point, Moses has been pretty much everything to the Israelites. He led them out of Egypt. He brought the Ten Commandments down the mountain. He interceded for the people with God when they were frightened. And he led the Israelites through trial and tribulation until they were on the brink of the Promised Land.

But he will not accompany them into the Land itself. Instead, Joshua will lead. And so, in the sight of all the people, Moses commissions Joshua to be his successor. It is a HUGE job. So first, Moses offers encouragement: “Be strong and bold,” he tells Joshua. Then, he gives his blessing: “You are the one who will go with this people.” But then, perhaps sensing just how daunted Joshua might be by this task, he makes a promise: “It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.”

That promise – that God will never abandon Joshua – is the same promise God makes to us in baptism and is rooted in Jesus’ death and resurrection. God will be with us, hold onto us, and stay with us. Always. Which means that when we feel daunted or afraid, overwhelmed or outmatched, we can also remember that God will never give up on us. Ever. And that promise, in turn, helps us be bold, strong, courageous, and compassionate in our lives of faith.

– PASTOR LOSE

*Dear God, remind us that you are with us and will never give up on us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*





TUESDAY, MARCH 18, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WILL NOT GIVE UP ON US.**

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*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.*

PSALM 23

**F**or most of my life, I was confused by this beloved Psalm. Specifically, how a shepherd's rod and staff could be comforting. I'm hoping I'm not the only one who has been perplexed by how a stick could have the same soothing qualities of a blanket.

It was only after an English monk explained this metaphor to me that I finally understood. A shepherd's rod is used to lead sheep in the right direction and defend against animals and other predators who could harm them. A shepherd's staff is designed to pull sheep out of dangerous and precarious situations, the curve of the staff literally meant to wrap around their necks to wrench them out of holes, get them off the road, and keep them out of harm's way.

This beautiful Psalm describes a God whose rod is there to lead us to abundant life and whose staff will pull us back in when we stray. No matter when or how we lose our way, our Good Shepherd will wrap that staff around our stubborn and aloof necks to bring us back into the fold, welcome us back into community, and hold us in the loving arms of God. Time and time again, God will bring us back from our wandering ways so that we can be close to our Shepherd. That is comforting indeed!

- PASTOR OLSON POPP

*Shepherding God, we thank you for pulling us back to You, time and time again. Amen.*



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WILL NOT GIVE UP ON US.**

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*But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life;  
he was lost and has been found.*

LUKE 15:32

In Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, God's love is personified by the Father who runs to greet his son with the finest robe and the fatted calf after his son spends all his inheritance. It's the Gospel in a nutshell - God's love for us does not depend on our faithfulness. Whether we squander the gifts we've been given or become resentful of God's unending grace, God persists. God will not give up on us. God forgives us, God celebrates us, and God welcomes us with open arms. It's the very essence of God's being and God leads us to live with one another in the same way.

— PASTOR FREEMAN

*Dear God, thank you for your unending love that never gives up on us and never leaves us alone. Amen.*



THURSDAY, MARCH 20, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WILL NOT GIVE UP ON US.**

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*“Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven. What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of your father in heaven that one of these little ones be lost.”*

MATTHEW 18:10-14

In our society, we seem to be obsessed with having everything just so. We want 100% perfection and feel like failures if we fall short. Yet I wonder: *What is perfection anyway?* I think that contrary to how it might look, we like the real thing better. That even though we spend a large chunk of our lives working on getting everything just right, the reality is: we like approachable, we like real. Even though we paint and mow and trim and buy and replace and strive and accomplish, people like flaws. We like homemade, we like comfortable. From apple pie to relationships, wouldn't we choose real and comfortable over manufactured and flawless? A perfectly nice casual acquaintance where you have shared little with one another, or a deep trusting relationship built on years of hurdles and bumps and life?

Jesus loved those that the world deemed imperfect. He didn't flock to the wealthy and the shiny and the dent-free. He befriended the woman at the well. He walked with the poor and the uneducated, the old and the dying, the leper, the criminal and the pariah. Jesus did not single out the perfect or the accomplished to receive forgiveness. Jesus chose us. The old, the ordinary, the procrastinators, the less-than-perfect. We are the children of God. Each one of us in all our beautiful imperfections. It's called Grace. Body of Christ, given for you child of God, just as you are.

– PASTOR HAMMERSTEN

*Dear God, the next time we find ourselves spending way too much precious time and energy trying to make ourselves and our lives look perfect and flawless, help us to look at ourselves and our lives through Your loving eyes, that we might find peace in You and our beautifully imperfect lives. Amen.*



FRIDAY, MARCH 21, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WILL NOT GIVE UP ON US.**

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*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

ROMANS 8:38-39

**T**he Jesuit priest and writer Anthony de Mello made an extensive study of good luck / bad luck stories from various cultures. He drew two basic conclusions from this story. First, we humans are in no position to make final judgments on the things that happen to us. A certain event may have every appearance of the bad at the time it occurs. And yet, in the mysterious unfolding of life, who knows how the story will finally turn out?

De Mello's second conclusion was this: God is at work for good in our lives. The One who created the universe and gives us humans great freedom to act for good or for evil, is a God who is capable of taking the worst of things and working the best out of them. We can have confidence in this One who wills nothing but good for those who love him. This is what the Apostle Paul is saying right before today's verse in Romans: "We know...we believe by faith...that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purposes (RSV)."

Paul is boldly proclaiming that God has destined good for God's faithful people and for the whole creation. Is there suffering and tragedy that is unexplainable? Yes. But in every tragedy or loss God is still there, and God moves our lives and all of history ultimately toward what is good. God takes the worst that can happen and refuses to let it be the final word. God goes beyond death to life. Paul concludes later that "nothing...neither death nor life...nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Our lives from beginning to end are secure in the hands of a gracious God.

— PASTOR MACLEAN

*Loving and gracious God, we give you thanks that through Jesus we can know and believe that through all things your love is ultimately at work for good. We can count on that always. Amen.*



SATURDAY, MARCH 22, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WILL NOT GIVE UP ON US.**

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*How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim, for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.*

HOSEA 11:8-10

**H**osea is a tough book. It's violent and angry. It's filled with marital imagery that is difficult to read. But there are some really tender moments, especially in chapter eleven. The prophet Hosea makes it clear just how much God loves Israel, also called Ephraim, and yet Ephraim has been unfaithful. They've worshiped other Gods, they put their trust in political leaders and other countries rather than the Lord. In many ways the people and their leaders had all but abandoned the Lord.

But God won't let anger win. God won't abandon God's people. Throughout the story of God and God's people, things get bad, but time and again God comes anew to God's people. God renews covenants, reiterates promises, rescues, and restores the people. God is different. God is indefatigably grace-filled. God doesn't give up on you, on us, on this world.

– PASTOR CIESLIK

*God, when things are hard and dark and we worry that we've strayed too far, remind us again of the deep well of love you have for us and this world. Amen.*

# Third Sunday in Lent

MARCH 23, 2025

WORSHIP:

MPLS: 9, 10 & 11AM

WEST: 9, 10 & 11AM

SCRIPTURE:

*LUKE 15:11-32*

*WHY LUTHERAN?*

*BECAUSE GOD IS MORE LIKE A PARENT THAN A KING*



MONDAY, MARCH 24, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD IS MORE LIKE A PARENT THAN A KING.**

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*I am the Lord your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.  
I give Egypt as your ransom,  
Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.  
Because you are precious in my sight,  
and honored, and I love you,  
I give people in return for you,  
nations in exchange for your life.*

ISAIAH 43:3-4

**T**he context of this passage is crucial to understanding its importance and power. These words, recorded by Isaiah, come at the close of a long period of exile. The Israelites are desperate, likely believing that God has given up on them, perhaps that God sent them into exile in the first place as punishment for their lack of faith.

In response to all of this, Isaiah shares God's words of comfort and love, and they are among the most passionate and vulnerable words in all of Scripture. God sounds not so much like the creator of the universe – although God is! – but rather like a parent who will do absolutely anything to save God's children. God speaks of being willing to do anything, pay anything, sacrifice anything, to redeem Israel.

Why? God's answer again sounds so palpably parental: "Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you." These are the words we say when our kids are in danger, or haunted by addiction, or trapped in a bad relationship, or have wandered far from our influence and love. These are the words we say when we want, more than anything, for our kids to know how important they are to us and how much we love them.

These are God's words for Israel at this time of fear and need, and these are God's words for us. When we are afraid. When we have lost confidence in ourselves. When we have settled for far too little. When we wonder if we are worthy of love. When we struggle to believe we have value or dignity. Read them again, this time out loud, and hear them addressed to you: "I will give anything for you, whole countries in exchange for you. Why? Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you."

– PASTOR LOSE

*Dear God, help us to believe and trust just how much you love us. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD IS MORE LIKE A PARENT THAN A KING.**

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*When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.  
The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols.  
Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them.  
I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love.  
I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks.  
I bent down to them and fed them.*

HOSEA 11:1-4

**W**e often think that a prophet is one who can tell the future. But a better understanding of a prophet is one who is a messenger of God – one whom God has called to speak God’s words to the people.

In prophetic writing, the rabbi and scholar Abraham Heschel notes that “God is not only the Lord who demands justice; God is also a God who is in love with his people.” What will God do with the pain and brokenness of the world? God will judge it – and then heal it; God will work for justice – and also mercy.

Hosea grants us a striking image of God as a parent, one who loves his children, one who holds us in his arms, teaches us how to walk, feeds us, lifts us up to the divine cheek – indeed one who smells the tops of our heads.

And yet, the prophet notes, the more God called his people, the more they went away from him. Hosea was writing to a specific people at a specific time, but there is also something universal about our straying. “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love,” sings the hymn *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*.

This separation grieves God’s heart and shows us God’s own suffering. What parent hasn’t suffered the same? What parent hasn’t worried about the repercussions of their child’s actions? Why would God put himself in that kind of position? Because God is more like a parent than a king. God wants to be in relationship with us.

– PASTOR GRANGAARD

*Dear God, thank you for loving us like a parent. Thank you for never giving up on us and never letting us go. Amen.*





WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD IS MORE LIKE A PARENT THAN A KING.**

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*Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy,  
all you who mourn over her – that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast;  
that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious bosom.  
For thus says the Lord: I will extend prosperity to her like a river,  
and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream;  
and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees.  
As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you;  
you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.*

ISAIAH 66:10-13

I'm a pretty ok Dad. But when our kids are sick, or hurt, or afraid, they want their Mom. I was the same way. So I suppose it shouldn't be surprising that when God's people are at their lowest, when everything that could go wrong has gone wrong, the prophet Isaiah offers the people an image of a mothering God. The second part of the book of Isaiah begins in chapter forty where God says, "Comfort, O comfort my people... Speak tenderly to Jerusalem." Can you imagine a more tender image than a mother feeding her child? Those first days of infancy are so hard, but so beautiful. The child depends on the mother for everything, for life. And God promises to be that for us too. God is the source of every good gift in this world, even life itself. And we – God's beloved children – get to dandle on her knees. How beautiful and fun is that?

– PASTOR CIESLIK

*For your tender mercy mothering God that gives us life we give you thanks. For all the ways our lives and the life of all creation flow from you, we give you thanks. Keep us close to you so that we may know your care and your love always.  
Amen.*



THURSDAY, MARCH 27, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD IS MORE LIKE A PARENT THAN A KING.**

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*But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me.' Can a woman forget her nursing-child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me. Your builders outdo your destroyers, and those who laid you waste go away from you. Lift up your eyes all around and see; they all gather, they come to you. As I live, says the Lord, you shall put all of them on like an ornament, and like a bride you shall bind them on.*

ISAIAH 49:14-18

Isaiah 40-66 contains some of the most tender images of God. Here God is compared to a pregnant woman and a nursing mother – one who gives her very body to nourish and sustain her child. God's maternal self-giving love is so profound that it changes not only us, but also God.

I remember vividly the night I brought home my dog Sandy, an apricot-colored labradoodle. I woke up repeatedly, checking to make sure she was breathing. That experience was nothing compared to the sleepless nights after bringing my premature daughter home from the hospital. She needed to nurse and bottle-feed every 2-3 hours. Her needs disrupted my sleep and reoriented my entire life.

"Can a woman forget her nursing child?" The answer is obvious: no – or only in the most extreme and tragic circumstances. But it is always impossible for God to forget us or treat us with indifference. Even if we feel abandoned or neglected, God promises us: "I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands."

After giving birth, a mother retains some of her child's DNA in her bloodstream – a lasting physical change. Likewise, God's love for us is indelible. When Jesus appeared to Thomas after the resurrection, he still bore the marks of the nails. Those scars proclaim, "Look. Touch. Trust."

God's love marks us and God forever. It's a love that nurtures, sacrifices, and remembers. Lift up your eyes and see: you are etched into the life of God.

– REVEREND DR. THERESA LATINI

*Let us pray: Compassionate God, thank you for your nurturing and self-giving love. When we feel forgotten or alone, remind us of your unbreakable bond with us. Mark our lives with your grace and help us rest in your care. Amen.*



FRIDAY, MARCH 28, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD IS MORE LIKE A PARENT THAN A KING.**

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*‘So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!’*

LUKE 11:9-13

In this passage, Jesus shows us that even imperfect human fathers know to give good things to their children. So, how much more will God, who is perfect, give good things to us?

You’ve heard me talk about it before, but when I was growing up, my parents led us in a devotional routine after dinner that closed with these words, “We thank thee, Lord, for Thou art good; Thy mercy endureth forever and ever. Amen.”

I didn’t always understand the King James language of the prayer, but the words were repeated every night and somehow sank deep down into my bones and have helped me trust the goodness of God to this day. I may not always understand faith. I may not always understand why things happen the way they do. But one thing I do know for sure is this – God is good and God’s mercy endures forever and ever.

We hear this over and over in scripture and in Luther’s Catechism, and yet, the dominant voices in our culture often reflect the opposite of this goodness. Fear is the motivator that tricks us into believing things that counter the voice of God, which is why this passage encourages us to talk to God. Because the more we talk to God, the more familiar we become with God’s voice of goodness and love, and the more we trust that God wants goodness for us.

The intricacies of faith in God may feel beyond our grasp and understanding, but this one thing I am sure of – God is good. Just like a loving parent, God is constantly giving good things – not just to some of us but to all of us, forever and ever.

– PASTOR FREEMAN

*We thank thee, Lord, for Thou art good; Thy mercy endureth forever and ever. Amen.*



SATURDAY, MARCH 29, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD IS MORE LIKE A PARENT THAN A KING.**

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*He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever.*

*He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.*

*As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.*

*For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.*

PSALM 103:9-10, 13-14

**W**hy did Jesus encourage us to imagine God as a loving parent (“our Father”) when he taught the disciples how to pray? Why not instruct them to address God as “Your Royal Highness” or “Your Majesty”? God certainly is a divine ruler. We are told in the tenth Psalm that “the Lord is king forever and ever,” and Isaiah praises God as “the majestic one.” While both these aspects of God are true (parent and king), Jesus understood that they inspire totally different relationships. His preference for the parental image should make us stop and think.

While both a king and a parent can be merciful, a loving parent almost by definition is merciful. And there is no better illustration of this than...the family road trip.

The sins of the crowded backseat include yelling, arguing, “I’m-not-touching-you,” constant ETA inquiries (“are we there yet”), and excessive bathroom break requests. By rights, almost every kid in history should have been kicked out of almost every car at some point in almost every road trip.

And yet parent(s) in the front seat(s) never kick the kids out of the car. They suffer the backseat sins, they provide counsel, they issue commandments, and of course they take great joy in the journey they share with their children. In other words, they don’t keep their anger forever, but instead they have compassion for their children.

This is our circumstance. We are crowded into this blue-green family roadster, hurtling through space on a most epic road trip. Our iniquities are great but our Father looks on us with kindness and compassion, and would never, ever kick us out of the car.

– PASTOR DIXON

*God, thanks for keeping us in the car and promising to get us to our destination.*

# Fourth Sunday in Lent

MARCH 30, 2025

WORSHIP:

MPLS: 9, 10 & 11AM

WEST: 9, 10 & 11AM

SCRIPTURE:

*LUKE 18:9-14*

*WHY LUTHERAN?*

*BECAUSE GOD LOVES SINNERS.*



MONDAY, MARCH 31, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD LOVES SINNERS.**

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*But now, irrespective of law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; all are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.*

ROMANS 3:21-26

**All.**

It may be the most important word of this passage. Many, including Martin Luther, find in these verses the heart of the Gospel, the promise that we do not have to earn God's love, acceptance, or forgiveness, but rather that God justifies us – that is, counts us as righteous – by grace alone because God loves us.

There's a lot going on in this passage, but the single word that grabs my attention most is "all." All have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. That is literally what "sin" means, to fall short of God's intentions, to miss the mark, to not live into God's hopes for us. And we have all done that. Which means that, when we sin, disappointing ourselves or others, we are in good company!

At the same time, all are now justified by grace as a gift. None of us deserves grace. None of us have earned our place at God's table. None of us is better than the other. God is the parent who plays no favorites. All have fallen short. All are justified and redeemed. All are loved. All are redeemed.

All. A single word that levels, equalizes, and ultimately unifies and comforts. Because we – all of us – and all those around us, are beloved of God. Thanks be to God!

– PASTOR LOSE

*Dear God, let us find our identity not in what separates us from others but in what unites us, the fact that all of us have fallen short of your hopes and the promise that all of us are loved and redeemed in grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



TUESDAY, APRIL 1, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD LOVES SINNERS.**

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*Whoever corrects a scoffer wins abuse; whoever rebukes the wicked gets hurt. A scoffer who is rebuked will only hate you, the wise when rebuked, will love you. Give instruction to the wise, and they will become wiser still; teach the righteous and they will gain in learning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.*

PROVERBS 9:7-10

**H**appy April Fool's Day. I've done plenty of foolish things in my life. How about you? Gunnery Sergeant Ryan (more than once!) shared in a way that only a Drill Instructor can, "Kalland, God has given everyone the right to be stupid, let's not abuse that privilege today!"

For years I did the same thing over and over again expecting different results. It helps if we learn from our critics; it's the path to wisdom. Wisdom begins with knowing God. It wasn't until I surrendered my will and my life over to the care of God that the fog began to lift. It's important for me to continue to do that every day. I don't have all the answers, none of us do. As it says in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "Now we see through a mirror dimly, but then face to face." God continues to give insight into living because He created us and loves us. Yes, God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. The Scriptures are good reminders for us not to allow our behaviors to stray into fools' territory.

— PASTOR KALLAND

*Thank you, Lord, for Your consistent love for us, even when we do foolish things. We are so grateful that Your love for us is not based on our performance. Please help us today to learn what it is You want us to learn and apply it so we can be of maximum service to You and others. Amen.*



WEDNESDAY, APRIL 2, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD LOVES SINNERS.**

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*And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous but sinners."*

MARK 2:15-17

**O**ne of my favorite modern-day definitions of sin comes from author David Brooks. He defines sin – albeit for a secular audience – as “disordered love,” or when we prioritize our loves incorrectly.

For example, in this text in Mark, the scribes and Pharisees clearly see the disordered love of the tax collectors – people who put their love of money and greed above the love of their neighbor. They don't understand why Jesus would spend time with such awful sinners. However, in doing that, they then become sinners, putting their love of right-ness and piety over the love of their neighbor. Given Brooks' definition, it's not just the sinners and tax collectors who have disordered love, but also the scribes and Pharisees. Everyone in this passage is a sinner, having put something above the love of God and others.

That's where the beauty lies in how Jesus responds. When Jesus says he has come to call not the righteous, but the sinners, he didn't divide anyone into groups. He names that he came for all who face the human liability of disordered love. To me, that includes the surprising dinner guests around Jesus' table and also the righteous scribes and Pharisees. In short, Jesus came for us all and will love us even and especially when our loves are mixed up.

– PASTOR OLSON POPP

*Thank you, God, for loving us. Whether we are sinners with an aura of righteousness or are on the outside in desperate need of a physician, you are there to love all of us back to wholeness. Amen.*





THURSDAY, APRIL 3, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD LOVES SINNERS.**

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*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*

*"The Lord is my portion," says my soul, therefore I will hope in Him.*

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

**W**e have all experienced sadness and sorrow, a day when it feels like you are walking on your face. Jeremiah, who gets credit for writing the book of Lamentations, is called the "weeping prophet." His tears flowed from a broken heart. They were tears of empathy and sympathy and sorrow. The people of God had rejected the Lord, Jerusalem was destroyed, and the people of God had been taken into captivity. In the midst of all that, Jeremiah saw a ray of hope. In a world of darkness and sin and sorrow, he knew of God's faithfulness, steadfast love, and mercy. God's love is a constant. Thank goodness, God's love for us is not based on us or our performance or the circumstances of the world. God has promised to be with us always. You see, it's about God, always has been. His mercies never end; they are new every morning. Even when life is tough, God is still good and faithful.

If we live long enough, we will experience loss and grief in our personal lives and in the world. What is it that causes us to weep? Where do you turn during the storms of life? Take it to the Lord in prayer. Remember this, life's darkest trials and life's hardest losses cannot fully dim the light of Christ Jesus.

God promises to be faithful. He promises to never leave us. He promises to take the challenges and pains that we face and walk with us through the struggle.

God's faithfulness is a constant.

— PASTOR KALLAND

*Gracious Lord God, help us to be open and honest with You. Help us, like Jeremiah, to bring everything to You, the highs and lows, the happy and the sad. Help us to hold back nothing. Thank you for always walking with us. Remind us that*

*Your mercies are new every morning.*



FRIDAY, APRIL 4, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD LOVES SINNERS.**

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*Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right spirit within me.  
Do not cast me away from your presence,  
and do not take your holy spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

PSALM 51:10-12

**B**iblically to have sinned is to miss the mark like an archer with a misaimed arrow. It's to have gone astray. To have wandered off track. So you might ask – is there a lot about sin in the Bible? Actually not as much as you might think. Of the collection of 150 Psalms there are only seven penitential Psalms, psalms that express regret, and only three of those clearly confess sin and request forgiveness – only three. The most famous of the confessional psalms is this one from Psalm 51. Some worship communities sing these words every single week allowing their beautiful confessional tone to shape them as a community of hope.

I'm sure that each of us has regret over things we've said or done. Perhaps there's a person who deserved better from us. Or perhaps we've sinned against groups whose needs greatly outweigh our own, but whom we've largely disregarded. Or perhaps we've most tragically sinned against ourselves – discounting our unique gifts, talents, qualities that might have brought goodness or help or joy to the world around us.

I looked through the Gospels this week to remind myself that Jesus actually mentions sin only a handful of times. But he spends a lot of time and pays a lot of attention to the likes of the prodigal son and the lost sheep that return. So it seems to me he's a lot more interested in return than retribution, more interested in forgiveness than fault finding, more interested in goodness than guilt, more interested in our safety than in our sin, and more interested in loving us than leaving us. Holding on to sin and guilt is more punishing than anything God demands of us. Perhaps when we've wandered off track, when we ask God for a clean heart and renewed spirit, our lives can be changed. The road back from our mistakes may be tough, but the destination is glorious.

– PASTOR MACLEAN

*Lord, even though we try to avoid the word "sin" in our language, the language of your love for us through Jesus Christ and the forgiveness you offer each of us is a language we should speak every day. Amen.*



SATURDAY, APRIL 5, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD LOVES SINNERS.**

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*But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*

ROMANS 5:8

**T**he artist Salvador Dalí was recently a clue in a New York Times crossword puzzle (that I did not finish—yet). Four letters: “Have no \_\_\_\_ of perfection – you’ll never reach it.” (The answer is FEAR).

Dalí’s quote turns the idea of perfection upside down. First that we might be afraid of perfection; and second, that we cannot reach it. We are flooded with images of perfection – often cultivated or manipulated and disconnected from our actual lives.

Faith makes a difference in our lives. Faith changes us and helps us grow. And, the life of faith is not about climbing higher or attaining perfection. Faith is about trust – trust that God in Christ has come for you.

Romans 5:8 is one of my lighthouse verses. It guides me when it’s dark and I can’t see as well as in the light. It cuts through the noise of ideas and distractions. It offers me a clear sense of the gospel: God loves us, no matter what!

When we have everything to offer...God loves us.

When we have nothing to offer...God loves us.

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners, Christ died for us.

Paul writes these words to the Church in Rome, a generation after Jesus. It’s his first letter in the bible by order, but the last letter by his hand. It is his magnum opus. His crowning achievement. His last will and testament. His abiding word to the church about Jesus Christ – and who we are: sinners forgiven in Christ.

We often think of sin as a dirty word. It is used to put people down or out. Being Lutheran turns the power of sin on its head. Sin simply means to miss the mark, fall short, err. We confess each week that we do just that – often despite our best intentions. We don’t have to be afraid of perfection – or of falling short.

Sin boldly – or as Martin Luther actually wrote to his friend and co-Reformer Philipp Melanchthon: Be a sinner. Let your sins be strong, but let your trust in Christ be stronger.

– PASTOR GRANGAARD

*Dear God, help us to trust in your love for us.*

# Fifth Sunday in Lent

APRIL 6, 2025

WORSHIP:

MPLS: 9, 10 & 11AM

WEST: 9, 10 & 11AM

SCRIPTURE:

*LUKE 19:1-10*

*WHY LUTHERAN?*

*BECAUSE GOD INTENDS TO FORGIVE & RESTORE US.*



MONDAY, APRIL 7, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD INTENDS TO FORGIVE & RESTORE US.**

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*Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham."*

LUKE 19:8-9

**T**hroughout these devotions, we've been letting the Sunday reading from St. Luke be the "anchor passage" that highlights the week's main theme. The rest of the devotions reflect more deeply on the theme by choosing different passages. But I can't help it. I want to say just one more thing about Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus.

Notice that Zacchaeus speaks in the future tense: "Half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone, I will pay back four times as much." Zacchaeus, it appears, is signaling a change in behavior as a result of his encounter with Jesus. Which Jesus affirms in the next verse: "Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.'" Makes total sense. Except...

Except that Luke doesn't record Zacchaeus as speaking in the future tense. The verb he uses – *didomi* – is a present tense verb. Which means it should be translated, "Half of my possessions, Lord, I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone, I pay back four times as much." Zacchaeus isn't promising a change in behavior but reporting what he is already doing.

Why are Zacchaeus' words translated as the future tense? I think it's because we so desperately want this story to be one of repentance first, then forgiveness and acceptance. That's the formula we expect. Zacchaeus, remember, is a tax collector, someone in cahoots with the Romans and despised by his neighbors. He, of all people, should be expected to repent first.

But maybe we've got it wrong. Maybe Zacchaeus, despite his profession, is living faithfully. Appearances sometimes deceive. And perhaps Jesus' final words aren't addressed to Zacchaeus but to his neighbors. (The Greek word translated "him" can also be translated "them.") Maybe Jesus is reminding these good folks – and us! – that God loves everyone, not just those who conform to our expectations, including this tax collector.

– PASTOR LOSE

*Dear God, help us to see all people as your beloved children. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD INTENDS TO FORGIVE & RESTORE US.**

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*Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and, making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."*

JOHN 8:2-11

I love the physicality of this story. I picture the scribes and Pharisees bringing this woman to Jesus, pushing her through the crowds to the front so she can be examined. Once there, it's just her, a woman standing alone surrounded by a group of men who think she should be killed. I imagine her head bowed low, her body bent in on herself in shame, wishing she were invisible.

This is what guilt, shame, and sin do to us. We can feel like we're on trial within our own souls. We're all alone, ready to be sentenced. This often feels like punishment enough.

How does Jesus respond to this? He bends down, ignoring the talk of her sins that surrounds her, and disproves it. Then he stands up to face a woman free of the judgment that once surrounded her and tells her to go forth and live in this freedom. I'm sure she stood up a little taller before walking away. What a beautiful image of forgiveness and restoration.

— PASTOR OLSON POPP

*Forgiving God, find us in our most shameful moments and free us back to the fullness of life with you. Amen.*



WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD INTENDS TO FORGIVE & RESTORE US.**

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*But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you.*

ISAIAH 43:1-4A

**T**he contemporary poet Wendell Berry wrote, “When despair of the world grows in me, and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be, I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water.” I do something similar: I walk the prairie trail at Mount Olivet Conference & Retreat Center and immerse myself in the beautiful poetry of the prophet Isaiah, including the passage above.

This section of Isaiah overflows with God’s promises to the people of Israel in the midst of national tragedy. The Israelites had been torn from their land, homes, and families – violently uprooted and carried away to Babylon. They were displaced and defeated, pilloried and powerless. Into the rubble of their lives, God spoke these powerful words: Do not be afraid. You are mine. I treasure you. I will protect you from everything that seeks to destroy you. Your suffering will not annihilate you. For I am your rescuer.

Do you despair for the state of our world? Are you drowning in worry and fear? Are you facing a threatening illness or shocking loss? Are you weary or disheartened? Let God’s words echo in your heart: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine. My love for you is unshakeable, unbreakable, and constant.

– REVEREND DR. THERESA LATINI

*Let us pray: God of comfort, restore our hope when we feel hopeless. Heal us when we are sick. Protect us from all that threatens to undo us. Deepen our trust in your unwavering and unending love. In Christ’s name, Amen.*



THURSDAY, APRIL 10, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD INTENDS TO FORGIVE & RESTORE US.**

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*As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. But Jesus refused, and said to him, 'Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.' And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.*

MARK 5:18-20

**T**he above scripture comes from the tail end of the story of Jesus and the man known as the Gerasene Demoniac. It's a funky little story, maybe you remember. Jesus finds a man who has been living with some kind of demon or mental illness. It's estranged him from his family and friends. It has so isolated him, that the community has tried to restrain him with chains in the graveyard. Well Jesus heals the guy and sends the demons into a herd of pigs, who then run off a cliff. Understandably, after all of this, the guy wants to follow Jesus. Maybe he's afraid or embarrassed to go back home. Maybe he's worried his people won't accept him. So following Jesus to somewhere else seems pretty attractive.

But it seems to me that the point of this story isn't about escape but restoration. The gift that Jesus gives this guy is belonging. Go home Jesus says. Show your face. Let people see you, the real you, the child of God who belongs within the community, not among the tombs.

So often we think about forgiveness as an individual thing, but there's a communal aspect to it too. To be forgiven is to be given a place in the community again. To be forgiven is to be restored to a place of honor. Not because we've earned it, but because of what Jesus has done for us.

– PASTOR CIESLIK

*Gracious God, thanks for the gifts you give us, that bring us back into relationship with you and those around us. Help us to have courage to go where you send us, Amen.*





FRIDAY, APRIL 11, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD INTENDS TO FORGIVE & RESTORE US.**

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*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-21

In Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians, he reminds them, "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. The old has passed and everything has become new."

In baptism, after the waters claim us as God's beloved in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the pastor places a hand on our foreheads and proclaims, "You belong to Christ, in whom you've been baptized."

My grandpa made candleholders for his grandchildren's baptismal candles to be hung above the light switches in our rooms. This became a daily reminder that there is no more important identity than that of being God's beloved child. And in being God's beloved, we have the gift of sharing God's love with others.

The world will try to make us believe we're not enough, that we need to prove our worth. The forces of this world easily try to shame or divide us, but Christ reminds us that in Him, we are made new. It's not always easy to trust this pure grace, but it is the promise that holds us and keeps us in life and in death and it is the promise that allows us to live together peaceably with each other.

When Martin Luther found himself mired in adversity of any kind, he would stop, make the sign of the cross on his forehead, and remind himself, "I am baptized."

In Christ, there is nothing that will separate us from God or from one another, for in Christ, God is always showering us with love and grace to make things new.

— PASTOR FREEMAN

*Dear God, Immerse us in grace and transform us in spirit as you reconcile us to you and to one another in Jesus' name.  
Amen.*



SATURDAY, APRIL 12, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD INTENDS TO FORGIVE & RESTORE US.**

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*Then the Lord said, “You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left and also many animals?”*

JONAH 4:10-11

**T**his is such an incredible scene. Jonah (of big fish fame) is not just “concerned.” He is furious. After the fish spat him out, Jonah finally gave in and accepted God’s call to go to the great city of Nineveh and warn them that God’s wrath was coming. So he complies, but maliciously. He gives a terrible effort. Barely walks into the city, mumbles the message for a little bit, and then gets out of Dodge.

And guess what happens! It totally, inexplicably, comically works. The whole city repents, even the animals! And then God...forgives them. “God did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened” (Jonah 3:10).

This is why Jonah is furious. Why did you make me come here! Why did you make a fool and a liar out of me! I told them you were about to smite them, but I knew this would happen! I knew “that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from punishment” (Jonah 4:2).

In response, we get our scene from this day’s scripture. Jonah has left the city, and is sitting under a shady bush. The next morning, God sends a worm to kill that bush and Jonah is upset. God’s word to him is profound: “You are upset about this bush that you have known for a day. Should I not care for the people and animals of Nineveh?” Even though the people of Nineveh have fallen into corruption and faithlessness, they are God’s creation. God’s intention to love and forgive them sits at the very heart of their existence. It is for this purpose that they were created – to be God’s children.

– PASTOR DIXON

*God, we confess that we are stubbornly sinful. Thank you for being even more stubbornly merciful. Amen.*

# Palm Sunday

APRIL 13, 2025

WORSHIP:

MPLS: 9, 10 & 11AM

WEST: 9, 10 & 11AM

SCRIPTURE:

*LUKE 19:29-40*

*WHY LUTHERAN?*

*BECAUSE GOD WILL PAY ANY COST TO SAVE US.*



MONDAY, APRIL 14, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WILL PAY ANY COST TO SAVE US.**

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*When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set towards Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” But he turned and rebuked them.*

LUKE 9:51-56

If the opening verse in this passage sounds familiar, it should – we began our devotions with it on Ash Wednesday. As we enter Holy Week, it’s time to hear the rest of the story. The opening verse, you may recall, is the turning point of Luke’s Gospel. After traveling here, there, and everywhere proclaiming God’s coming kingdom, suddenly Jesus turns and “sets his face to go to Jerusalem.” From here on out, every step, every word, every encounter will lead him closer to the cross that awaits him.

While that opening verse invites us to marvel at Jesus’ courageous determination, the rest of the scene invites us to notice also how easily his disciples misunderstand his mission. Because when Jesus travels to a Samaritan town that, sensing his determination, does not receive him, James and John are moved to retribution. They think Jesus will accomplish his mission by force; they think God is a God of power and therefore of violence.

But Jesus rebukes them. To bring in God’s kingdom by violence is to betray the character of that kingdom. Strength, as Jesus will soon demonstrate, is expressed more fully in vulnerable sacrifice and mercy than through brute force. It was true then; it’s still true today.

Our theme this week is that “God will pay any price to redeem us.” Notice that it’s God who pays, God who sacrifices, God who suffers. God will pay any price, but will not harm God’s beloved people, even when they refuse to receive him. So here we are, days away from the climax of this story. Jesus is on the road. He has set his face. He is marching forth in courage and mercy to meet his destiny. There is need for nothing more. Except, perhaps, our attention.

– PASTOR LOSE

*Dear God, fasten our eyes on the pilgrimage of your son that we may witness the power of mercy and love. In Jesus’ name,  
Amen.*



TUESDAY, APRIL 15, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WILL PAY ANY COST TO SAVE US.**

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*Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.' And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'*

MARK 8:27-33

**W**hen Jesus spells it like that it sounds pretty awful. It's no wonder Peter pulls Jesus aside. "Didn't we just agree you were the Messiah? Then what's with all this suffering, death, and betrayal?" These are the things that we as human beings try to avoid at all costs. They are the markers of our humanity, and we want nothing to do with them. Which makes Jesus' words and his actions all the more incomprehensible. Really, you're choosing this?

Jesus is kind of flipping the script here. The divine thing that Jesus is referring to is God's willingness to choose to experience all of the things most essential to our humanity. And the human thing is our propensity to think that somehow we can avoid them as though we were divine. So Jesus closes that gap, saves us from ourselves, and experiences our death so that we can forever share in his life.

— PASTOR CIESLIK

*Thank you Jesus for doing the things which we cannot do ourselves. Thank you for coming to us time and again so that there is nothing that can separate us from you and your love for us. Amen.*



WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WILL PAY ANY COST TO SAVE US.**

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*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away – and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.*

JOHN 10:11-15

**W**hen Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, he makes a claim that is both ordinary and extraordinary. On one hand, he identifies with lowly laborers. Known for their grimy work among animals, shepherds occupied the bottom rungs of the social ladder. Jesus' choice to associate himself with these overlooked and denigrated people reveals something profound: to understand him, look to the humble, the marginalized, and the compassionate rather than the powerful or privileged.

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus acts with tender, unwavering concern for his sheep. He knows us fully and loves us completely. He sees us as we are – messy, flawed, and vulnerable, yet infinitely precious. He hears the spoken and unspoken cries of our hearts. He understands our confusion, accompanies us in loneliness, and guides us through life's challenges. His compassion is intimate and restorative.

The Good Shepherd's love is sacrificial. Jesus doesn't flee from danger. He suffers betrayal, humiliation, and death to reconcile us to God and each other. He chooses mercy over judgment, humility over pride, and self-giving over self-preservation.

The Apostle's Creed says that Jesus "descended into hell," the ultimate expression of his love. He endured the agony of separation from God so that we might never experience it. He suffered abandonment so that we could know God's abiding presence. He entered the realm of death and shattered its power, offering us abundant life. Our Good Shepherd goes further than we can imagine, ensuring that nothing – not sin, shame, or death – can separate us from God's love.

– REVEREND DR. THERESA LATINI

*Let us pray: Good Shepherd, thank you for your willingness to pay any cost to bring us home. When we feel lost, guide us. When we feel broken, heal us. Help us to follow your voice, knowing that you have given everything to bring us into your fold. Amen.*



THURSDAY, APRIL 17, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WILL PAY ANY COST TO SAVE US.**

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*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.*

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8

**W**hen someone asks why I'm a Christian, why I believe in Jesus, these verses are a pretty good place to start. The one thing that unites every huckster, trickster, and fraud in religious history is profit. They all benefit from the scam. But Jesus is so completely different.

He could have lived like a king! But he gave all that up and lived modestly, wandering from plain to mount with the shoes on his feet and the cloak on his back. He could have lived, period! But of course he gave that up, too, offering his own life on the cross.

Jesus did not use his power and identity as the son of God to secure riches, or high office, or subservient followers. He didn't secure anything! He faithfully chose a most insecure life. He had no interest in enriching himself, nor even in defending himself. Remember, when the soldiers came to take Jesus, and one of his disciples rushed to defend him with the sword, he commanded him to stop. He would have no one die for his sake; he understood that he was called to die for all of our sakes. That is the kind of leadership, the kind of Lord-ship Jesus embodied and exemplified.

He opened himself up to us, and to the pain and suffering of life in this world. He emptied himself, pouring out even his life for our sake. No profit, no scheme. That is something worth believing in.

– PASTOR DIXON

*God, thank you for sending us your most trustworthy son. Help us to trust in him more and more each day. Amen.*



FRIDAY, APRIL 18, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WILL PAY ANY COST TO SAVE US.**

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*Then Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last.*

LUKE 23:46

**T**oday, we sit with the profound, yet uncomfortable, truth that our God died. God in Jesus was killed by crowds who were shouting his praises just days ago. Just as all of us will eventually do, he breathed his final breath. He came face to face with his mortality. He went the furthest he could go to experience the depths of our life on earth and our human experience.

Why? So that we might be reconciled with God. So that our lives would no longer be defined by our own sin and shortcomings. So that we, no matter what we do or how we stray away, will never be separated from the unconditional love of God. So that even when we face our own death and moments of the cross, we will know that God is there because God was there.

Today could have been an ending. We usually think final breaths are. But God does some of God's greatest work when we think everything is over, and there was nothing that was going to stop Jesus from making that abundantly clear to us all. Not even death.

– PASTOR OLSON POPP

*Crucified God, you cried out in pain, died, and went to the depths of hell, all to show us your profound and unimaginable love for us. Sit with us in our moments of death and endings, as we trust in the promise that you are there. Amen.*





SATURDAY, APRIL 19, 2025

**BECAUSE GOD WILL PAY ANY COST TO SAVE US.**

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*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

JOHN 3:16-17

I wouldn't be surprised if some really cool pastors are snickering at me behind their Bibles for picking these verses. It's kind of like saying The Beatles are your favorite band, or Michael Jordan is your favorite basketball player. These verses have achieved a level of popularity that makes it impossible for them to be the "cool" pick. But there's a reason "the greats" are "the greats." It is because they are...well, great.

There is simply no passage in the Bible that better informs us of God's heart, intentions, or character. Who is God? The smiter-on-high? Absentee landlord? A cold and distant observer? No, there is nothing distant about our God. Our God enters right into our painful, messy, human existence, and does this for our sake even though it will subject him to the utterly un-godly experience of death.

But this is not the full story, and this is not the full cost. It is one thing to sacrifice one's own life. It is entirely another matter to sacrifice (or allow to be sacrificed) the life of one's child. It is unthinkable. And this is what God does. God enters into humanity in the form of a son, Jesus, and in so doing God becomes his father. As a father, God watches his only son, Jesus, walk the faithful path to the cross, suffer, and die for us. Because it turns out, Jesus might not be God's only son (despite our weekly confession of that fact in the Apostles' Creed). We are also God's beloved children, and God would pay any price to save us, including the most terrible price depicted in this great verse.

— PASTOR DIXON

*God, remind us in the midst of our suffering that you are with us, and that you have paid the ultimate price to abide with us even in the valley of the shadow of death. Amen.*

# Easter Sunday

APRIL 20, 2025

WORSHIP:

MPLS: 7, 8, 9, 10 & 11AM

WEST: 7, 8, 9, 10 & 11AM

SCRIPTURE:

*LUKE 24:1-12*

*“THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD”*





# MOUNT OLIVET LUTHERAN CHURCH

MINNEAPOLIS CAMPUS, 5025 KNOX AVE S, MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55419, 612.926.7651

WEST CAMPUS, 7150 ROLLING ACRES RD, VICTORIA, MN 55386, 952.767.1500

[mtolivet.org](http://mtolivet.org)