

Saturday, June 2, 2018

Genesis 15:6 — *And [Abram] believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*

ABRAM'S FAITH, A TYPE OF OUR OWN (6)

True, saving faith is that which implicitly trusts, lays hold upon, the words and promises of God in the Scriptures.

It may not sound right to human reason that God should declare righteous—forgiven and in right standing with Him—a sinful man who believes on Him, and on the other hand condemn to death a “righteous” man who does not believe the irrational and “impossible.” But Jesus Himself said it one time, didn't He?: “I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Matthew 9:13).

Speaking of Abraham, St. Paul comments (in Romans): “...who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, So shall your descendants be. And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore it was accounted to Him for righteousness” (4:18-20).

This week we have learned anew the central truth of Christianity that a sinner is saved NOT by any goodness or merit in himself, but alone through faith in the promises of God. God keep us true children of Abraham now and forever.

Lord, let at last Thine angels come,
To Abr'ham's bosom bear me home,
That I may die unfearing;
And in its narrow chamber keep My body safe in peaceful sleep
Until Thy reappearing.
And then from death awaken me,
That these mine eyes with joy may see,
O Son of God, Thy glorious face, My Savior and my fount of grace.
Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer attend, my prayer attend,
And I will praise thee without end. (*Lutheran Service Book, 708:3*)

The WORD Jesus Christ

John 1

Daily Devotions in God's Word

March 5, 2018 — June 2, 2018



Devotions taken from a collection of brief meditations written by several pastors in the Church of the Lutheran Confession. You can subscribe to daily devotions via email at: <http://www.redeemerclc.info/ministries>

Monday, March 5, 2018

Psalm 22:1-5 — *My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, And from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; And in the night season, and am not silent. But You are holy, Enthroned in the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in You; They trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; They trusted in You, and were not ashamed.*

WHY ME?

This question isn't normally heard when things are going well. When Jesus spoke on the cross "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me," I wonder why it didn't ring a bell with the Jews who undoubtedly knew this Psalm of David! After all, it was the God of Israel, whose strength and unfailing mercy delivered their forefathers again and again. Those who trusted in Him were never ashamed, never disappointed in their Almighty LORD!

When I'm tempted to question "why me" when something seemingly negative happens, I want to remember what Jesus Himself told His disciples, "Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (Luke 24:44). Jesus recalls the fact that His Father never forsakes those who trust in Him. My Savior took comfort knowing even though His Father forsook Him on the cross for my sake, He would go on not only to approve of His payment of sin with His death, but glorify Him in raising Him from the dead! In considering this Lenten/Passion season I may ask positively the typical negative question "why me?" A simple question, answered with God's simple Word of Love.

Jesus, I will ponder now On Thy holy Passion;
With Thy Spirit me endow For such meditation.
Grant that I in love and faith May the image cherish
Of Thy suffering, pain, and death, That I may not perish.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 140:1)

Friday, June 1, 2018

Genesis 15:6 — *And [Abram] believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*

ABRAM'S FAITH, A TYPE OF OUR OWN (5)

Abram bared his soul to God and found welcome relief. He now believed that God would bring life to the dead womb of Sarah.

This passage of our text has been called the most important verse in the Bible. It stands out like a mountain peak, forming the great divide between all other religions and the one true religion of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul makes this verse the very keynote of his theology. The New Testament books of Romans and Galatians are long and holy arguments in defense of the Christian teaching that BY FAITH a person is justified, saved, NOT by works.

Certainly all the great heroes of our Christian faith were NOT that on the basis of their works, or their noble character or good deeds—yet all were accounted righteous by God BECAUSE, in spite of their failings, they were found trusting in the promises of God, all of which have their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

We believe that God became man in Jesus Christ through the miracle of the virgin birth, that Christ died for our sins and rose again for the redemption of the world—all of which is more impossible to believe than that a barren woman (Abram's wife Sarai) would bring forth a son in her old age.

Yet this is the MIRACLE OF SPIRIT-WROUGHT FAITH, fellow children of Abraham!

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.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 375:4)

ABRAM'S FAITH, A TYPE OF OUR OWN (4)

Someone has said that God is the number one psychiatrist. He begins a conversation that opened the door for Abram to unburden something God knew was weighing on his heart.

After hearing God's wonderful promise, Abram opened his heart: "Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus? ... Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"

To which the Heavenly Counselor responded: "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

Those words are exactly what Abram's sorely tested faith needed—not by his servant, but one begotten by his own body would be his heir! Abram can continue to hope and believe that as impossible as it seems God, the Creator, could and would give him offspring from the womb of his barren wife Sarai! Yes, God can do the "impossible."

Are we, like Abram, afflicted with doubt and despair? Be reassured that God is also our Shield, our great Reward, our Strength and Stay, our Rock and Fortress!

Father, Oh, hear me, Pardon and spare me;
Calm all my terrors, Blot out my errors
That by Your eyes they may no more be scanned.
Order my goings; Direct all my doings.
As best it may be, Retain or release me;
All I commit to Your fatherly hand.

(Worship Supplement 2000, 782:2)

Tuesday, March 6, 2018

Psalm 22:6-10 — *But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see Me mock Me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue Him. Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him." Yet you brought Me out of the womb; you made Me trust in You even at My mother's breast. From birth I was cast upon You; from My mother's womb You have been My God.*

WILL THE LORD RESCUE ME?

I remember some very clear images growing up in the Midwest. When it rained hard, you not only saw it, you smelled it—worms! Yuck. Is that memory a little too graphic? Not as a description of what my Savior endured both physically and spiritually on the cross for me! Those who stood before Jesus' cross reveal mankind's logic at best. God could rescue Jesus if He wanted to. God wasn't rescuing Him. Therefore, God obviously doesn't approve of Him. This same reasoning sounds so often like my own! My Lord tells me to "Ask and it will be given to me, seek and I will find, knock and it will be opened to you." Well, I have often asked and the Lord hasn't given! I have sought answers I didn't find! I have knocked at hopeful opportunities and the door didn't open! God must not be there! But, I ought to know better. Am I asking according to God's will in the first place?

Jesus teaches me to recall my Heavenly Father's helping hand throughout my own earthly life. He didn't need to ask the question "Will the LORD Rescue Me?" He knew. His Father was faithful. He would be delivered from this veil of tears, from the suffering and agony of hanging on those nails, from enduring the sins of the world. How horrible it would be if the Father had rescued Jesus there on the cross! How horrible it would have been if Jesus had made use of His divine power and come down from the cross—just as His mockers taunted Him to do! Had Jesus gotten off that cross, His mission would not have been finished! Our glorious victory not won. Therefore, I might joyfully consider how the trials or suffering I go through today not only have a God-intended victory for me, but also a way to glorify Him.

Wednesday, March 7, 2018

No one likes a fair fight. When it comes to sports, I like watching the underdog win. When it comes to history, I like to recall battles that were won despite amazing odds. When it comes to movies, it seems every situation the chances aren't even remotely in favor of the star! When it comes to a fair fight, it isn't one that usually seems to grab much attention. I consider today's verses from Psalm 22

Psalm 22:11-18 — *Be not far from Me, For trouble is near; For there is none to help. Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me with their mouths, Like a raging and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.*

WHAT SURROUNDS ME?

What types of "animals" threaten my life? There are people, situations, and struggles right now that present me with some serious anxiety and pressure. Increasing responsibilities weigh heavily on my heart pulling all my strength. I often feel so helpless and without relief. But I continue to be reminded of what my Savior went through on the road to and on the cross; the ridicule and the unimaginable pain. I consider how blest I am that whatever surrounds me and fights against me in this present world, I am surrounded by the amazing power and love of my Lord God! He continually knows exactly what I'm going through and is always with me. And with my Savior at my side, it's never a fair fight.

"But You, O LORD, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me! Deliver Me from the sword, My precious life from the power of the dog. Save Me from the lion's mouth And from the horns of the wild oxen! You have answered Me" (Psalm 22:19-21).

dragging it along with you, making of your misfortune two, yea, three or a hundred. Whatever it may be, cast it on a heap before Him as when you open your heart to a good friend."

In a word, dear Christian, open up your heart to God, as a trusting child does to its parents, trust His Word and promises, and hear Him assure also you: "Fear not, I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

As the hymnwriter paraphrases it:

"Fear not! I am with you, oh, be not dismayed;
For I am your God and will still give you aid;
I'll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand,
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.

"The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose
I will not, I will not, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never, forsake!"

(Lutheran Service Book, 728:2-3)

Thursday, May 31, 2018

Genesis 15:1-6 — *After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." But Abram said, "Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*

stronger one's Christian faith, the greater may be its testing under some special cross for Christ's sake.

"Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12). So it was with Abram; his faith-life was being sorely tested that his trust in God might grow even stronger.

Who would share Abraham's blessing
Must Abraham's path pursue,
A stranger and a pilgrim
Like him, must journey thro'.
The foes must be encountered,
The dangers must be passed;
A faithful soldier only
Receives the crown at last.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 586:3-4)

Wednesday, May 30, 2018

Genesis 15:1 — *After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."*

ABRAM'S FAITH, A TYPE OF OUR OWN (3)

In our text Abram, the father of believers, is deeply troubled by something. Today we note that God took the initiative and gave His troubled servant a wonderful word of promise: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

Fellow Christian, does our oft-wavering and sorely tempted faith begin to imagine, like Abram, that the only solution to that mountain looming before us is a human one?

Let's hear what Dr. Luther writes in his Large Catechism: "You must learn to call [to God], not sitting by yourself or lying on your couch, hanging and shaking your head, gnawing and biting yourself with your thoughts, worrying and seeking how you may be rid of them; but up...fall on your knees and...pray a psalm or the Lord's Prayer, and bring your trouble and your tears before God....He wants you to lay your trouble before Him and not leave it resting upon yourself as a burden and

Thursday, March 8, 2018

Psalm 22:21-25 — *You have answered Me. I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise You. You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, And fear Him, all you offspring of Israel! For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Nor has He hidden His face from Him; But when He cried to Him, He heard. My praise shall be of You in the great assembly; I will pay My vows before those who fear Him.*

LORD, YOU HAVE ANSWERED ME!

The chorus of a song is usually a point in the song where there is a great climax being sung. The past 20 verses before today's psalmody were Jesus' continual thoughts and prayers from the cross. I might similarly recall the chorus of angels who sang at the announcement of Jesus' birth. I might recall the words of our Heavenly Father who beautifully spoke of how this Jesus Christ is His beloved Son! I would do very well to recall the many songs and prayers of thanksgiving throughout the Bible that sing joyfully of God's deliverance!

Christ's "Song of Passion" for Old Testament believers was one of hope and great anticipation of the coming Messiah. As a New Testament believer, I sing the same song of hope with possession and realization that this Song of Passion has already been played! Lord, You have answered my prayers! You have saved me from my sin! The Christ has borne my grief for me on the cross, and has also risen from the dead to give me peace and joy in allowing me to hear and sing about His glorification!

So as I continue to live day by day in this short life here on earth, I might often get frustrated at times with the repetitive nature of many things. However, my Lord Jesus continually blesses me as I speak and sing of this very passionate song that my Savior wrote for me! Praise God that through His Word of deliverance He teaches each one of us to say: Lord, You have answered me!

Friday, March 9, 2018

The simple things in life are often the best aren't they? I really enjoy going for a run or a walk to clear my head and get that energizing exercise for my body. Sitting down on a soft chair or couch, or laying my head down on my pillow at night often gives such simple peace to me at the end of a long day. Or what about looking at God's Word and seeing how a particular section gives me the exact remedy I needed at that moment, whether I remembered it later or not. The final verses of Psalm 22 I see will not only be a remedy for whatever ails me today or even this week, but each day I am blessed with here on this earth.

Psalm 22:26-31 — *The poor shall eat and be satisfied; Those who seek Him will praise the LORD. Let your heart live forever! All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the nations Shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the LORD's, and He rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth shall eat and worship; all those who go down to the dust shall bow before Him, even he who cannot keep himself alive. A posterity shall serve Him. It will be recounted of the Lord to the next generation, they will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this.*

WHY YOU DON'T HAVE TO ASK QUESTIONS!

Questions that are of greatest importance are the questions that have to do with Jesus Christ. I know that the answers to those questions will lead me to praise Him here on earth and forever in heaven. Verse 26 reminds me that the poor shall eat and be satisfied. My food is that Bread of Life that I have through my Lord Jesus Christ. It is because of the Lord's love that I continually want to seek Him and have Him nourish me daily with the satisfaction of His Gospel. I may have a sweet tooth, and it may get me in trouble at times, but may my teeth always be as Psalm 119 speaks of when it says: How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! A hope that rests on the simple sweetness of the Gospel of Christ is one that is satisfied! It is a hope that in a world of questions does not have to question why.

Thy righteousness, O Christ, Alone can cover me;
No righteousness avails Save that which is of Thee.
To whom save Thee, who canst alone For sin atone, Lord, shall I flee?
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 380:1, 5)

Tuesday, May 29, 2018

Genesis 15:1-6 — *After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." But Abram said, "Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*

ABRAM'S FAITH, A TYPE OF OUR OWN (2)

The immediate background for this text is Abram going to war with some heathen kings to free his nephew Lot who had been taken captive. With his 318 armed servants, and with the Lord's blessing, Abram successfully freed his nephew.

Wouldn't that have strengthened Abram's faith? Wouldn't such a wartime victory have left him with a firm trust in his God? Yet our text shows a different facet of his personality. Like the rest of God's children, Abram too harbored fears and doubts.

One thing we learn here is that no Christian is without testing or temptation. We learn too that as believers we, like the great man of faith Abram, still need training in believing.

Take comfort, fellow Christian. It remains true that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Indeed, the

Monday, May 28, 2018

Genesis 15:1-6 — *After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.” But Abram said, “Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!” And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.” Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*

ABRAM’S FAITH, A TYPE OF OUR OWN (1)

Under the Spirit’s divine guidance, many of the New Testament writers, and the apostle Paul in particular, refer to Abraham and events in his life. In both the Old and the New Testaments Abraham (or Abram) is referenced 230 times. Let’s take a bit closer look at the “father of believers” this week.

To begin with, we note that the Bible doesn’t mask or hide the fallacies of its heroes of faith. It tells us (for example) that Noah got drunk, Moses murdered an Egyptian, David committed adultery and murder, Peter cursed with an oath, Jacob deceived his aged father Isaac to receive a blessing, and Paul before his conversion was a persecutor of Christians. And as this text reveals, Abraham is shown to be one who at times doubted God, His Word and His ways.

Yet all these men were great in the eyes of God, not because of but in spite of their failings. They were great because they acknowledged their sins and their sinfulness, trusted in God and His Son Jesus Christ, and for their faith were counted as righteous before God.

These heroes of faith would happily sing along with us:

Thy works, not mine, O Christ, Speak gladness to this heart;
They tell me all is done, They bid my fear depart.
To whom save Thee, who canst alone For sin atone, Lord shall I flee?

Saturday, March 10, 2018

Psalm 23:1 — *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

When I look at verse one of Psalm 23, what immediately grabs my attention? Is it the word “LORD” in all caps, or the fact that the LORD God Almighty is personified as our “shepherd?” Both are important points, but in my humble opinion there is another important word in the first line: “is.” How sad and unfortunate would it be if I were to read that “The LORD was my shepherd”! The one true LORD God is real and is active as my ever present help in trouble.

LENTEN CONSIDERATION: THE LORD IS . . .

Psalm 23 comes very fittingly after Psalm 22 and the description of the one and only sacrificial Lamb of God—who is now shown to be my Good Shepherd. He truly IS the God of action! Without this first assertive statement, the rest of the psalm really comes into question, doesn’t it? If the LORD maybe is my shepherd, then hopefully I won’t ever be in want or need. No, rather I confidently rejoice with David that “the LORD is my shepherd. I shall not want.” I will not lack anything that I need. This is an expression of faith! It is a simple trust in the words of a loving Savior, words that continue to move me (a stubborn sheep) to consider what He has done for me as well as giving me the eager desire to listen and learn from Him more and more.

The Lord my Shepherd is, I shall be well supplied.
Since He is mine and I am His, What can I want beside?

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 426:1)

Monday, March 12, 2018

John 18:37 — *Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. . . . Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."*

A KING

Jesus admitted it. "As you say! I am a king." And yet He stands alone, with no earthly kingdom. All His followers have forsaken Him and run away. He is poor, a member of a downtrodden people, and even among them He has nowhere to lay His head. Yet He admits to having followers in another "world." In that kingdom His followers would fight any encroachment of His power. And that is really what they are doing right now, in the spiritual realm.

Why did He not stay in His own realm? He was born and He has come into this world for one purpose: to testify to the truth.

Why is the truth so important? Isn't it all relative? The truth of Jesus' innocence did not settle the issue for Pilate. He thought more like: "Whatever works for one, whatever gets and keeps the wealth, honor, power, and position, that's good enough to be truth for him?"

Of course, Jesus came to say that it is not! Like day old bakery, the wealth and power of this world is every hour closer to decay and destruction. The truth is that all of us will one day stand before the judgment seat of God and answer for how we have used our authority.

But our King came to be with us, with no worldly kingdom, power, wealth, honor, or soldiers. He who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in connection with Him. He will stand with us before the throne of God, and He will be our truth, and righteousness, and salvation!

a couple of minutes, and do something else? The Lord has much to say, all of which is relevant to each of us today. We need to hear it all: the uncomfortable, humbling truth of our sin, and the life-giving message of Christ crucified and risen for our salvation. May the Spirit grant us grace to be good listeners!

Saturday, May 26, 2018

2 Peter 3:18 — *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.*

NEVER STOP LEARNING!

Have you attended a graduation ceremony this spring? Students and parents alike breathe a sigh of relief in celebrating an educational milestone. Courses are completed, passing grades are recorded, and mortarboards are happily tossed into the air.

Still, hopefully, it is not the end of a person's education. God created us with the senses and abilities to learn throughout our lives. There is joy in discovery, whether it's a kindergartner learning to tie his shoelaces or a grad student researching and writing a doctoral thesis. Do you ever surf the net just to see what's new in gardening, cars, electronics, or something else which interests you? How often do you say or text someone: "Did you know...?"

If we get excited about learning new things from other people, how much more reason do we have to eagerly soak up all that our Lord has to teach us in His Word! At the end of his second letter, Peter writes: "Keep growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). It is to be a daily, lifelong activity. There is so much the Lord has to share: so much comfort, guidance, joy, and hope. "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33). We could spend 100 years studying Scripture and there would still be more spiritual insights and treasures from the Lord waiting for us. May we never stop learning!

Greek means literally “wind” or “breath.” With the news of Christ crucified and risen and the assurance that sinners are now reconciled with God, the Spirit has made us members of God’s kingdom and heirs of heaven.

We recently celebrated the life-giving work of the Spirit, whose coming upon the apostles was marked by the sound of a rushing, mighty wind on the first Pentecost. So take a slow, deep breath. Thank the Lord for the breath upon which our lives depend. Then offer a prayer of praise for the much greater Breath of God, the Holy Spirit, who gives and preserves the life which never ends.

Friday, May 25, 2018

John 10:27 — [Jesus said], *“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”*

ARE YOU A GOOD LISTENER?

Are you a good listener? It’s not as easy as it might seem. Do you multi-task while talking on the phone, and then find yourself saying later, “Now what did she say, and what did I say I was going to do?” In face-to-face conversation do you become impatient, have trouble letting the other person finish their thought, and interrupt with what you want to say? In our world of short attention spans and information overload, listening is not easy. But it is vitally important. Daydream while directions for a test are given, and you may fail it. If the doctor prescribes a medication and tells you to take one pill twice a day with a full glass of water for two weeks, and all you hear is, “Take these pills,” you may put your health in danger.

Listening is even more critical when it is the Lord speaking about our relationship with Him and our eternal wellbeing. Yet many listen only casually or not at all. Some hear only what they want to hear. Others tire of listening, interrupt, and try to correct God. How well do we listen? Do we give our full attention to what we read and hear in the Word? Do we listen to everything the Lord has to say, or do we become impatient after

Tuesday, March 13, 2018

John 19:13-14 — *So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour.*

CRUCIAL HOUR

Whenever a judge passes sentence, it is a crucial time for the prisoner. But when Pilate passed sentence upon Jesus, it was a crucial hour for Pilate.

You see, the verdict of the court had been “not guilty.” Pilate had declared it more than once. Moreover, Pilate knew right from wrong, and knew there was a God. But when the Jews brought up Caesar’s name, it was no longer Jesus on trial, but Pilate himself who was being threatened. He knew that there were charges that could be made against him before Tiberius Caesar. And so Pilate succumbed, not because of ignorance, but because of pressure, pressure that he himself had helped to create by his past actions.

And what about us? We, too, have past sins that could be brought up against us, don’t we? We too have fears about losing our position in the eyes of other people, not to mention possessions and power.

Yet in the hour of sentencing, the way of the cross was set before Jesus, and now He says, “Trust me. I gave my life for you. I will never desert you. I will be with you always. Follow me. Do not run away or try to shift the blame for those past sins. Repent of them. They were laid on me. There is forgiveness for them. I give life to those in the grave, those whom positions and possessions and power and friends can never help. Trust me. Come follow me.”

Wednesday, March 14, 2018

John 19:26 — *When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!”*

STANDING BY THE CROSS . . .

Here we see the dying Savior providing a family, even for this life. He is not content with preparing an eternal place for us after our death. He also promises His presence in this time of our life.

And the family that our dying Savior provides is a close one. It is closer than blood ties because it is His Word that unites his mother and John as He says, “Woman behold your son. Behold your mother.”

People who are only related by blood can go in opposite directions, can have completely opposite views of life and morality, of God and man. But Christ’s Word binds together, gives people a common outlook on life, a common goal for their life, a unity in the things that really make up a life.

At the same time the Spirit of Christ gives many different gifts to many different people, and allows for a wide difference in meat and drink, clothing, and material things—things of which a man’s life and the kingdom of God do not consist.

The family that our dying Savior creates with His Word is a caring family. Mary now faced that time of which Simeon had spoken so many years before in the temple: and a sword was piercing her innermost being and life. In that time of need, John took her into his own home. So the Lord, through His Word continues to gather people together and through each other they are helped in their times of need, and trouble, and joined in times of joy.

Where do we get it? Left to ourselves, we would quickly give up. Yet the determination we need is not an impossibility. It is as close as the Lord’s Word. In the selfless, single-minded determination of Christ we receive the strength of faith we need to trust Him and live for Him. Scripture tells us that, “When the time had come for Him to be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). Jesus was determined to continue on the path set out for Him, even though He knew it would led to His death. On Palm Sunday He entered Jerusalem knowing that in a matter of days He would be crucified. His love for the world was so great that for Him, there was no turning back. He was determined to carry out His saving work to the very end, that we might not die, but have eternal life with Him.

When the path of your faith-life seems hard, maybe even hopeless, and you’re tempted to turn back from following the Lord, recall again all that Jesus did and the victory He won and has given to you. In Jesus, Paul says, you are already more than a conqueror! Why then would you ever want to turn back? Rather, count on the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament for the strength and determination you need for each step of the way. The Lord who died for you won’t let you down.

Thursday, May 24, 2018

THE BREATH OF GOD

There is one thing we have all done today. In fact, we have done it all our lives. On average we do it over 17,000 times each and every day. We breathe. God created us in such a marvelous way that our lungs continually and automatically take in breaths of life-sustaining oxygen needed by every cell in our body. It began with Adam: “God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). We can’t survive without breathing. It’s as simple as that.

It is likewise true that without a “breathing” faith, there is no salvation. Our spiritual life is a gift of God, just as our physical life is. The Holy Spirit has “breathed” new life into our sin-dead hearts. The word “spirit” in

through with daily exercises on a permanent basis to prevent further problems.

Because we continually sin, daily repentance is vital to our spiritual health. Time in the Word at home and in the Lord's house to receive again and again the assurance that Jesus' blood cleanses us from all unrighteousness is essential in order for us to continue walking in the paths of the Lord with firm, steady steps. "Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come'" (Isaiah 35:3). The Lord promises it and He will do it—through His Word!

Wednesday, May 23, 2018

Philippians 3:14 — *I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

NO TURNING BACK!

Remember January 1st? How are the New Year's resolutions coming along? Maybe you set a goal of losing weight, exercising more, spending time with family, enrolling in a class, or taking up a new hobby or musical instrument. It's fun to dream and set goals, but then reality sets in. It's not as easy as you imagined to keep at it everyday. Unforeseen obstacles cropped up. Your march toward the goal stalled or you backtracked and gave up. We've all been there. What we need is the determination which says, "There's no turning back!"

The same is true for our lives as children of God. We want to live for Him. We love the Lord and we want to demonstrate it. But it's often harder than we anticipated. There always seem to be distractions which get in the way of seeking first the kingdom of God. The prospect of embarrassment or losing friends or missing out on something "fun" for Jesus' sake becomes a major obstacle in our path. As Paul said: "I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out" (Romans 7:18). What we need is determination to say, "There's no turning back!"

Thursday, March 15, 2018

John 19:27 — *Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.*

ONE WHOM JESUS LOVED

Mary was not the only one standing by the cross with needs. Just a few hours before, John had leaned on Jesus at supper. Now the one who loved him was dying.

Jesus knew what John needed. He gave John someone to care for and comfort. One of our greatest needs is to serve others, and no one is childless in the family that Jesus' Word brings together. The Lord always provides children to think of and to pray for. Nor is anyone an orphan in this family.

Christianity is not based on outward circumstances, but on the heart, so there will always be those believers who are in need, those whom we could treat as our own parents in their needs, or brothers and sisters who are afflicted, or children who look up to us.

Just weeks before, John had seen Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah. Then a luminous cloud and the Father's voice had come. When he looked up again, he saw only Jesus—but that was enough! One man and God are a majority. Alone with God was good enough for Elijah facing the 450 prophets of Baal, enough for Daniel in the lions' den, enough for Martin Luther at Worms. To have no one with you except Jesus only is enough for us to face life ... or death.

But our dear Savior provides even more! He gives us a family, bound together by the same Word that was powerful enough to create the universe. He gives us a family to care for us and to be cared for by us— in His name.

Friday, March 16, 2018

John 19:30 — *When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

BOWED HIS HEAD

When we were called by the Gospel, whether young or old, it was a wonderful day. His forgiveness and life brought joy. But as time goes by, we may also come to times of disappointment and dryness, times when our cherished hopes seem at an end, and we seem to have little strength or desire to go on. For such crossroads of life, we need strength to stand, to lift up our heads and walk lively in the way of our Master. We find such strength in the hanging head of our dearest Friend, made meaningful through His victorious cry.

When Jesus was mocked, scourged, and crucified, He could not have appeared more helpless. But when the time of His departure came, He laid down His life as He said He would. "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself" (John 10).

Not many of us have such a choice in our life, to lay down our life for a friend. For us it's more like "a few minutes of our life here, a couple of hours there, a few dollars of our life elsewhere." We may know some who have lost their lives defending their country, or trying to rescue others. But for most of us, the call may come when we are not able to be much help to our friends.

Jesus, however, not only laid down His life to rescue us, but He did it when we were not even His friends. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). He did it willingly, and He did it completely.

Tuesday, May 22, 2018

John 6:63 — [Jesus said], *"The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."*

PT FOR THE SOUL

Chances are if you have ever sprained an ankle, torn a tendon, had a joint replaced or suffered from back pain, you also had a course of PT (physical therapy). The exercise routines under the guidance of trained experts can work wonders. But a major key to success is keeping at it over a period of weeks or even months. If you go to the first appointment, but then neglect to follow through with the exercises the therapist prescribes, you probably won't see much improvement. If you use that as an excuse to cancel the next appointment and to give up on the exercises completely, you obviously won't progress. You might blame the PT and say, "It just didn't work for me," but that wouldn't be true.

How many people take the same view toward God's Word? "I went to church once, but it didn't do anything for me ... I read the Bible once when I was in trouble, but it didn't help ... I was confirmed, so I know what I need to know about God."

The Word is spiritual PT. God intends it to be an ongoing blessing. We need it continually, because sin is a constant presence in our lives and even within us. His Word is always effective. It is living and active. It cuts through all our excuses and exposes our sin. We can make ourselves look fairly good to others. We can keep thoughts to ourselves and hide things we don't want others to see. But God sees and knows it all. Every sin condemns us to eternal death. "'There is no peace,' says God 'for the wicked'" (Isaiah 57:21).

Dead in sin, we desperately need the new life only God can give through the message of Christ crucified. Jesus took on our guilt. He paid the penalty we deserved. He promises, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63). As Nathan told David after his confession of guilt, "The LORD has taken away your sin," so the Lord assures us of forgiveness and peace.

We might think that we can get by with one simple PT session. The reality may be that we need weeks of therapy, and will need to follow

Monday, May 21, 2018

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 — *But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

CALLED THROUGH THE GOSPEL

“Hey, stop what you’re doing!” Many a parent has spoken these words while the child is running wildly through the house throwing toys around to the destruction of other things in the room. But children aren’t the only ones who run around wildly leaving a damage trail in their wake. Adults do it too. Ask the Apostle Paul who once helped to kill God’s preacher, Stephen. Ask Zacchaeus who once was a thief and a cheat.

The fact is, every one of us from birth was running wild through the world—wild in our sins. We can all say along with King David, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). Someone had to call to us too. Someone had to say, “Hey, stop what you’re doing!” And someone did.

The Holy Spirit called to you. Using the voice of the Scriptures He said, “Stop! Come to Jesus and find rest for your souls!” The Spirit told us the answer to our sinful lives. It is the Christ whose death and resurrection cleanses us from all unrighteousness before God. The Holy Spirit called us out of the darkness of our unbelief to a life of faith and hope in our Savior that we too might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Saturday, March 17, 2018

IT IS FINISHED

A poet known as “The Cripple” once wrote:

Dear God, though every shining door of life
Be ever closed ‘gainst my infirmity,
I know one portal standeth wide
When I have reached the margin of earth’s strife.

And this I pray, that if I languished here,
Tortured in flesh, and mocked of mine own soul,
That there, my spirit and my body whole,
I shall find work, and finding, hold it dear.

O give me, as life’s recompense, to bring
My new-found strength within Thy vineyard fair!
I have so longed for work. God, let me bear
Its stress and strain, my offering to my King.

If we met that poet, we might say, “Work? Why in heaven we shall rest from our labors.” Or we might remind the poet that there is much to be done right now, for “the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16). As long as your heart beats and your brain thinks, you can pray for all people, for your fellow-believers, for your congregation, for attendance on the Word of Grace, for all those who are so busy using their mind and body whole, that they think they don’t have time to pray. Yes, pray for us! If your heart is praying, whatever limb or voice you may have that still functions will find the opportunity which the Lord puts in front of it.

But how shall we answer that spirit of cheerful giving? Our Lord completed our Salvation with crippled hands and feet, looking to the resurrection. Would it not be wonderful if we, also looking forward to the resurrection, might even now have some way to show our love to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us, if we might even now have some work to do, some stress to bear, some strain to endure, our offering to our King?!

Monday, March 19, 2018

John 18:11 — *Jesus commanded Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”*

JESUS IS NO FOOL

Many who do not believe in Christ or His mission think that there are many different ways a soul can be saved. To them, it doesn't matter which false god you follow as long as you “believe in something.” To them, Buddha, Allah, or any number of a thousand others are sufficient for gaining rest and comfort after death.

If it is really true that there are many paths to heaven, then Jesus was a fool for going to the cross, wasn't He? If Baal could take care of business just as well, then why go for the crown of thorns? Why endure the flogging, the mockery, and the torment to save a world lost in sin if the job had already been done by someone else? Would a scientist today spend a lifetime of sweat and toil to create an incandescent light bulb when Edison already found the way a hundred years ago? What a fool Jesus looks hanging on that cross if salvation can really be found elsewhere.

But Jesus is no fool. He knew there was only one death valuable enough to pay for the sin-guilt of the entire earth. He knew that if He did not bear the wickedness of mankind in His own body on the tree, nobody else would. He knew that the Heavenly Father had not sent a thousand saviors, He had sent only One.

For this reason, in a most supreme act of wisdom and love, Jesus drank the cup of bitterness to the very bottom.

Saturday, May 19, 2018

Acts 1:11 — *Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.*

REJOICE! CHRIST HAS ASCENDED TO RETURN IN GLORY!

After the forgiveness of sins, this is perhaps the believer's greatest comfort, for Scripture is clear as to what will happen to believers when Christ returns: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Imagine that! “We shall always be with the Lord.” Always! Never-ending! Eternity with our God and Savior! Believers may truly rejoice that Jesus has gone into heaven before them! Not only has He gone to prepare a place in the eternal dwelling place of heaven, but He will return to take us—you, me, and all believers—into the eternal bliss of heaven!

No matter how bad things become on this earth, the believer may always find comfort in the fact that eternal life in heaven awaits. Christ tells us in John 14:2-3, “In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

While He is gone from us visibly, He still is with us, for He assures us at the end of the Gospel of Matthew (28:20) “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.” Until that Day when He returns visibly, Christ rules His people, believers as our Prophet, preaching the Gospel through us, as our Priest, speaking in our behalf before the Father, and as our King, protecting our faith, protecting our soul, from the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh.

Until that Day, we wait with longing eyes, hoping for the day that we behold our Savior with our physical eyes, as we have already, by the grace of God, beheld Him with eyes of faith.

Friday, May 18, 2018

John 16:7 — [Jesus said], *“Nevertheless, I tell You the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper [or, the Comforter] will not come to you. But if I depart, I will send Him to you.”*

REJOICE! JESUS ASCENDED TO SEND THE COMFORTER!

As our Prophet, Priest, and King, Christ Jesus preaches to us and through us, prays for us, and rules over all things for us. But how does Christ work, not only for us, but through us?

In John 6:13-15 Jesus also promised His disciples that “When He, the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.”

Even as Jesus taught His disciples while He walked with them, the Holy Spirit would teach believers with the same Word and the same teachings that Christ Himself taught. This message the Holy Spirit would proclaim through the Apostles and in the New Testament Scriptures, even as He had proclaimed the same will of God through the writers of the Old Testament, for “... no Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21).

By that Word we believe and trust that the forgiveness of sins that Christ won for all people on the cross, is ours through faith. We read in 2 Corinthians 5:19 that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them...” And in 1 John 1:7 we read that “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” This is the comfort that the Comforter brings us through Word and Sacrament.

Tuesday, March 20, 2018

Genesis 3:15 — *He will crush your head!*

SNAKE BEATER

I remember it well. I was part of a work crew digging footings near Tioga, North Dakota, when suddenly I spied a big rattlesnake slithering by my foot. Instinctively I backed away. The fella’ I was working with, however, grabbed his hammer from his tool belt, and with lightning speed and perfect aim starting beating on the head of the slithering beast. In a matter of moments it was dead. After the deed was done, my partner looked at me, placed his hammer back in his tool belt like a gunfighter from the ol’ West, and said: “I hate snakes. I see one, I crush it!”

During these Lenten days we look upon our dear Savior, beaten and bloodied. But we know He is no helpless victim. He’s our Snake Beater. He came to crush the head of that Old Serpent, called the devil. On the cross he bore all sin in His own body, paying for every last sin of every last person. On the Third Day He rose in victory over sin, death, and hell. As they say, “He crushed it!” He crushed Satan’s power to accuse you of sin and to destroy you in hell.

Jesus’ work to save us is finished! Nothing more needs to be done. However, Satan is still after us. He’d love to sink his deadly fangs into us and to poison our faith. But God has not left His believers without a way to deal with the Father of Lies. He’s given us His Word. His Word is something like my partner’s hammer. When the Serpent slithers in your direction, get your hammer out and beat the enemy down. God’s Word of salvation is a painful reminder on the head of that snake Satan that He’s already been beaten.

Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us.
We tremble not, we fear no ill, They shall not overpower us.
This world’s prince may still Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none, He’s judged; the deed is done;
One little word can fell him.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 262:3)

Wednesday, March 21, 2018

Luke 22:42 — *Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death."*

OVERWHELMED

Even when we consider the fact that the destruction meant for sinful flesh was bearing down on Jesus' sinless humanity we still might question why our Lord should be so overwhelmed at the prospect of dying. Haven't numerous martyrs faced excruciating torture and a shameful death without sigh or shudder—through faith in Jesus' name? Was Christ less courageous than they?

Hardly. Jesus' death was far different than that of brave believers martyred for their faith. Christ's crucifixion took the sting out of the martyrs' deaths. With sin's curse gone they knew death had been transformed from a wall into a door—a door opening into eternal joy at Jesus' side. But in Gethsemane Christ looks forward to dying under sin's full curse, its sting not diminished but multiplied countless times over. He was to taste the bitter dregs of sin's curse not once, but thousands upon thousands of times. He was going to the cross in the place of every sinner ever. The sin and the guilt, the punishment, due the whole world was bearing down on Him.

In the darkness of Gethsemane Jesus was not in agony for fear of mental or physical suffering to come but because of the spiritual suffering that awaited Him and the spiritual death. The horror of hell—that was what caused Jesus' agony of soul in the Garden. It was not dread of dying but of Death itself. Death as separation from God. Death, the final penalty for all of the accumulated guilt of humanity from Adam to the last person yet to be born.

Christ, the Life of all the living, Christ, the Death of death, our foe,
Who, Thyself for me once giving To the darkest depths of woe,
Through thy sufferings, death, and merit I eternal life inherit:
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 151:1)

world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.' Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are you a king then?' Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.'"

It is the responsibility of king to defend the citizens of his kingdom, and so Christ, "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them triumphing over them in [the cross]" (Colossians 2:15).

As our King, Christ conquered all of our spiritual enemies when He died upon the cross—all of them—sin, death, and the devil were overcome in one blow at Christ's death. We read in 1 John 3:8, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."

Having ascended into Heaven, "[God]...seated [Christ] at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power ... And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church..." (Colossians 1:20-22). Christ continues to carry out His office as King, not only ruling in the hearts of His people with His Word, but ruling over all things for His Church! Only the King of all Creation could make and *keep* this Promise: "... all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

So Paul wrote these reassuring words to the Citizens of God's Kingdom: "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself" (Hebrews 7:26-27).

But a Priest does not only offer sacrifice. Having offered Himself once for all, Christ continues to work as our High Priest today. Another job of the priests was to pray on behalf of the people. This is what Jesus does for us in eternity. He speaks in our behalf before the Father.

We read in 1 John 2:1-2 that "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate [i.e. Someone to argue in our behalf] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." As our High Priest Christ continues to appeal to His sacrifice in our behalf before God so that, "[Whenever] we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Rejoice! Christ sacrificed Himself to pay for your sin, and has risen and ascended bodily to pray to the Father for you!

Thursday, May 17, 2018

Luke 24:46-47, 51 — *Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" ... Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven.*

REJOICE! JESUS HAS ASCENDED TO BE YOUR KING!

When He was on this earth, Christ fulfilled what we call His three offices, namely those of Prophet, Priest, and King. He fulfilled those offices on earth, but He did not abandon them when His redemptive work was done. He continues to carry out these offices in eternity in behalf of the Church.

When Christ came into the world He left His throne in heaven, but He did not abdicate that throne. Jesus told Pilate, "My Kingdom is not of this

Thursday, March 22, 2018

1 Corinthians 1:18 — *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

THE POWER OF GOD

Several years ago our family took a tour of Gettysburg battlefield in south central Pennsylvania, where, over 150 years ago, Union and Confederate forces fought in what is considered the turning point of the Civil War. Today there are monuments all over that battlefield, marking where particular regiments fought, or indicating how on a certain spot something very important took place during the battle. For example, during the battle Colonel Joshua Chamberlin of the 20th Maine led a daring bayonet charge. After driving back wave after wave of Confederate assaults, his regiment found itself completely out of ammunition. It was either surrender or charge. He chose to charge! The rebels were driven back, and the Union Army was saved from disaster. Today you can find a monument commemorating that famous charge.

Nearly 2000 years ago, a great battle took place on the cross of Christ, with Jesus, the Captain of our Salvation, coming out the winner over sin, death, and hell. But the cross is more than a monument to mark a great battle. The cross is, and remains, an unstoppable power which continues to set free and change the lives of countless millions. The message of the cross, as Paul reminds us, is the power of God. Jesus continues to touch and conquer hearts by this good news, this precious Gospel message of the cross and empty tomb!

He has touched your heart, dear Christian, and He continues to touch your heart through the preaching of the Cross. The cross is a power in your life. It has freed you to no longer serve sin, pleasure, money, or Satan. The message of the cross is a power that sets you free to live for God and neighbor! It's your power to charge into the world with the mighty weapon of God's Word of love, sharing it with any and all.

Friday, March 23, 2018

Psalm 22:1 — *My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*

Psalm 23:1 — *The LORD is my shepherd.*

THE SHEPHERD SUBSTITUTE

In Psalm 23 God's sheep boast in the fact that their Shepherd is the LORD! But back up. Consider Psalm 22! That Psalm tells us how we came to live in the pastures of the Good Shepherd in the first place. It speaks to us of the incredible price God had to pay to make us His own sheep.

As straying sheep, we had no loyalty to the LORD. We were His very enemies. Our sin earned us a one-way ticket to hell. In living color, however, prophetic Psalm 22 pictures someone else being damned in our place. Our Substitute is the Shepherd of Psalm 23, the LORD Himself. In deepest anguish He cries to His Father, "My God, My God, Why have you forsaken Me?" The Holy Shepherd God becomes "the Worm", as all the stink and stench of the entire human race is flung upon Him.

Look closely. See your personal sin slithering all over Him as well. See Him shed His blood to pay the full ransom price. He has redeemed you a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won you from all sin, from death and from the power of the devil.

The Maker of Heaven and Earth takes on our flesh and is cursed with our sin. Why? Turn the page! Go forward to Psalm 23. The LORD became our sin because He wanted to be your Shepherd! He wanted to lead you everyday into the quiet and peace of His Word and Sacrament. He wanted to guide you into a life which honors His name! He wanted you to be fearless as you walk with Him in the dark valleys. Finally He wanted you to dwell with Him in His house forever!

What punishment so strange is suffered yonder!
The Shepherd dies for sheep that loved to wander.
The sinless Son of God must die in sadness;
The sinful child of man may live in gladness.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 143:4)

In our churches, Christ's words of eternal life are proclaimed in our hymns, our Scripture readings, and in the sermon. Christ is preaching through you when you tell others about your Savior either person-to-person or indirectly, through your Mission contributions, which promote the spread of the Gospel in far away places.

Boldly proclaim His Word, for He has ascended, but still preaches through you, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20).

Wednesday, May 16, 2018

Luke 24:46-47, 51 — *Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" ... Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven.*

REJOICE! JESUS HAS ASCENDED TO BE YOUR PRIEST!

When He was on this earth, Christ fulfilled what we call His three offices, namely those of Prophet, Priest, and King. He fulfilled those offices on earth, but He did not abandon them when His redemptive work was done. He continues to carry out these offices in eternity in behalf of the Church.

Christ also fulfilled and continues to occupy the office of High Priest. He carried out the office of High Priest while here on this earth when He willingly sacrificed Himself, upon the cross for the sins of all people. Christ was both the Priest and the Sacrifice. John the Baptist called Jesus "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

The writer to the Hebrews wrote of Christ that "such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests [i.e. in the temple], to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins

Tuesday, May 15, 2018

Luke 24:44-45, 51 — *Then He said to them, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.” And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures ... Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven.*

REJOICE! CHRIST HAS ASCENDED TO BE YOUR PROPHET!

When He was on this earth, Christ fulfilled what we call His three offices, namely those of Prophet, Priest, and King. He fulfilled those offices on earth, but He did not abandon them when His redemptive work was done. He continues to carry out these offices in eternity in behalf of the Church.

Christ fulfilled His office as Prophet, which God prophesied through Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15. He told the people, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.” Obviously, Jesus fulfilled this prophecy. We know that many crowds turned out to hear Christ preach. For example, we read in Matthew 5:1-2 that “seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them.”

What did He teach them? Jesus opened the Scriptures to them. He taught them the Law and the Gospel. Simon Peter asked Jesus in John 6:68, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Jesus spoke words of eternal life to His followers. And He still does!

When Jesus ascended into heaven He did not stop preaching. Before He ascended, Jesus said to His apostles, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46-48). Christ continues to carry out His office as Prophet through His Holy Word, which He proclaims through you, His people!

Saturday, March 24, 2018

Matthew 21:5 — *Tell the daughter of Zion, “Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

THE DONKEY AND THE CROSS

Did you know that most donkeys have a cross on their backs? Most, if not all, donkeys have a narrow strip of hair that runs down their backs and across each of their shoulders in a darker shade than the rest of their coat. This naturally makes the shape of a cross.

On Palm Sunday Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Did Jesus’ donkey have the shape of a cross on its back? We don’t know, and it really doesn’t matter. But what does matter is that the donkey did have on its back the One Who would soon be nailed to a cross. Jesus rode on a donkey into town for the purpose of going to the cross to pay for the sins of the world. The simple and beautiful truth of Palm Sunday is that the Son of God rode into Jerusalem to die for a world in rebellion against Him!

Tomorrow as we sing our “hosannas” and listen to God’s Word, let it be with a reawakened sense of our own personal sin, but also with a renewed awe over God’s indescribable love for us poor sinners. And, as the shape of a cross is there on the back of a donkey for all to see, may God give us boldness to display the cross in our words and actions before a lost and fallen world.

Ride on, ride on, in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die.
O Christ, Thy triumphs now begin
O’er captive death and conquered sin.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 162:2)

Monday, March 26, 2018

Isaiah 53:3 — *He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and we hid, as it were, our faces from Him. He was despised and we did not esteem Him.*

THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF THE LORD (1)

For Holy Week 2017, we turn to this great chapter of Holy Scripture, Isaiah 53, to behold THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF THE LORD.

We need to be careful about romanticizing the scenes of the Passion history. Most depictions of the Savior in Gethsemane have Him kneeling in prayer, with folded hands resting on a rock, with a beautiful, flowing robe. Not very realistic, when we think of the Gospel record telling us that Jesus fell on His face, His spirit and soul in great distress, sweat like drops of blood pouring from Him. He was suffering more as a worm than a man.

Isaiah describes the SERVANT OF THE LORD as a “man of sorrows.” Fitting, for every stop along the way, grief, sorrow, suffering characterized Him. After being taken captive in the Garden, He was brought before Annas, then to Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, back again to Pilate, then out to Golgotha, and finally to the cross. And what was it all? All along the way, suffering, anguish, pain of body and of soul.

With that, what this classic chapter from Isaiah, “the Old Testament evangelist,” makes powerfully clear is that everything the Savior endured was on account of our sins, to rescue and redeem us from the consequences we deserved! With Paul Gerhardt we unworthy ones, therefore, rejoice to sing:

A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth,
The guilt of all men 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;
Bears shame, and stripes, and wounds and death,
Anguish and mockery, and saith, “Willing all this I suffer.”

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 142:1)

Monday, May 14, 2018

Luke 24:51-53 — *Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.*

REJOICE! JESUS HAS GONE AWAY!

While last Thursday, Ascension Day, may have passed without much notice, Ascension is one of the more important festivals of the Church Year. It was at Christ’s ascension that He returned to heaven to fulfill many promises, some of which He is fulfilling as we speak, others that have yet to be fulfilled.

Ascension Day certainly was a turning point for the Apostles. Remember how they were in the days following Christ’s crucifixion? Even after His resurrection we can see that they still were timid and unsure of themselves, uncertain as to what the future held for their Lord and for themselves. But after the Ascension, we are told that the disciples, having witnessed the historical fact of Christ’s ascension, “worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God.”

It is said that, “Parting is such sweet sorrow,” and so you would think that the disciples would have been sorrowful when they saw the Lord depart bodily from them. But they knew, as do we, that we, as believers, have reason to REJOICE! Jesus has gone into heaven! He has gone into heaven to rule His Church to rule over all things *for* His Church! Rejoice, He’s gone to send the Comforter! And having ascended, His promise is to return one Day in glory to take us into the eternal bliss of heaven.

Saturday, May 12, 2018

John 21:15 — *When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?”*

DO YOU LOVE ME?

In the afterglow of that first Easter, as Jesus finished breakfast with His apostles by the shore of Galilee, He reinstated Peter to tend and feed His lambs and sheep.

He said, “Do you love ME?” Do you consider me your greatest treasure? “I am the bread of life”—what will you feed my lambs if you do not consider me to be of value? Will you have them call upon their own inner strength, their mental toughness, in the day of trouble, that they may deliver themselves and glorify themselves?

No, it is recognizing Jesus as our greatest, our priceless Treasure that will help us stand if we ever find ourselves in the high priest’s courtyard, our security threatened, and our confession challenged. And that is the love we want to bring to others, lambs or sheep: not just affection for Him who provides food for us, but a love which goes beyond that, a love which remembers how He laid down His life for us to bring us to God. Such a love will see Him as a treasure worth dying for. That is the love which Jesus seeks in His representatives, whether they are called servants or calling servants.

Do we love Him? Yes, but how we wish that love were stronger! How can it be increased? By being with Him on Galilee’s shore for breakfast ... lunch ... dinner! By looking to Him always, listening to Him always, for then we will know Him better. If we know Him better, we will love Him more, follow Him always—yes, feed His lambs and tend His sheep!

Tuesday, March 27, 2018

Isaiah 53:4-5 — *Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.*

THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF THE LORD (2)

Isaiah chapter 53 is unsurpassed in all the Old Testament for its gospel content. These two verses are the high point, setting forth that it was not Jesus’ own guilt but ours that was laid on Him, the Servant of the Lord, our DIVINE SUBSTITUTE.

We know what a substitute is—one who takes another’s place. In baseball there are pinch hitters and relief pitchers etc. On a much higher level, the Divine Substitute takes our place under God’s wrath and bears a punishment that is ours.

Note carefully the changes in the pronouns from the third person to the first.

“Surely HE has borne OUR griefs and carried OUR sorrows.” The griefs and sorrows which are the consequences of sin were ours, but the Servant-Lord took them on Himself.

“But HE was wounded for OUR transgressions.” Again, the transgressions are OURS, but the Divine Substitute was wounded for us.

“The chastisement of OUR peace was upon HIM...” The chastisement or punishment that procured peace with God for us was upon Him. It should have been on us, but again, He took our place.

“And by HIS stripes WE are healed...” The suffering Servant got stripes and lashes from the whips; we got blessing from those stripes, for He took our place.

With Paul Gerhardt, we sing with penitent hearts:

'Tis I who should be smitten, My doom should here be written:
Bound hand and foot in hell. The fetters and the scourging,
The floods around Thee surging, 'Tis I who have deserved them well.

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.

(The Lutheran Hymnal 171:5, 8)

Wednesday, March 28, 2018

Isaiah 53:4-5 — *Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.*

THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF THE LORD (3)

It is either HE FOR US or it is EVERYONE FOR HIMSELF. The latter is plain heathenism and eternal death. HE FOR US is the truth on which rests the gospel of righteousness by faith without the works of the law. St. Paul testifies to this again and again:

“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:3-4).

Friday, May 11, 2018

Luke 24:52-53 — *And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.*

JOYFUL RETURN

The disciples could return to Jerusalem without a visible Jesus but with great joy because He could still bless them even when visibly parted from them! We too often trust our own eyes to tell us whether or not Christ is with us and able to bless us, don't we?

But if we stand this day with the disciples on the Mount of Olives and see Jesus parted from us, but never stopping His blessing of us, then we too will be able to face to our tasks with great joy and comfort.

The disciples knew that nothing on earth could part them from the blessing of Christ, not the cloud, nor anything else—for their minds had been opened to understand the Scriptures: “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead....”

The disciples had seen that not even the death and burial of their dear Lord had stood in the way of His blessing them with more than they were able to think or ask.

The disciples had seen, and so have we also seen through their testimony, that “neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

The disciples could return to a doomed Jerusalem with great joy because they knew, as we also know, that “Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us, ... He's by our side ...” Amen!

Thursday, May 10, 2018

Luke 24:50-51 — *And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.*

ASCENSION

What sort of a blessing was it? We don't have the words of that ascension day blessing, but we have many other blessings of the Lord throughout the New Testament. There Jesus says, through the apostles:

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 1:7).

"May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you" (Romans 16:24).

"Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love" (Ephesians 6:23).

"Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance" (Jude 2).

Grace. Mercy. Peace. Love. One of these is a part of every blessing spoken in the New Testament, and all of these are the result of the Savior's work. The grace of God was shown in sending His Son to die for us. It was mercy that saw our needs and moved to help. In the blood of Christ we were cleansed from sin and the hostility with God was ended: Peace. And hereby know we the love of God, that He sent His only Son into the world.

Grace. Mercy. Peace. Love. Surely this was also the content of Jesus' blessing that day.

Paul wrote to the Romans: "The God of peace be with you all!" (Romans 15:33) and Jesus said, "And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). So we already know His answer when we sing: "Abide with me ..."

"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree)" (Galatians 3:13).

The apostle Peter testifies of Jesus: *"Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed"* (1 Peter 2:24).

Behold the Suffering Servant of the Lord, our Divine Substitute!

My burden in Thy Passion, Lord, Thou hast borne for me,
For it was my transgression Which bro't this woe on Thee.
I cast me down before Thee; Wrath were my rightful lot.
Have mercy, I implore Thee; Redeemer, spurn me not!

What language shall I borrow To thank Thee, dearest Friend,
For this Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end?
Oh, make me Thine forever! And should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never, Outlive my love for Thee.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 172:4, 8)

Thursday, March 29, 2018

Isaiah 53:5 — *The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.*

THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF THE LORD (4)

Sin is no light matter. Sin destroyed peace between God and man. It made us enemies of God, for sin offends God's holiness.

Reconciliation was needed before peace could be reestablished between sinners and God. For reconciliation to happen, blood had to be shed, for "without shedding blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22).

However, not just any blood would do, for "none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him—for the redemption of their souls is costly..." (Psalm 49:7 f.).

What was needed was the blood of the Lamb of God—The Servant of the Lord who shed His holy, precious blood in the sinner’s stead. His beaten, bleeding body brought Him grief, but brought us healing—spiritual healing from the leprosy of sin, and its consequences, death and hell.

The result is peace restored. Through faith in Christ we are no longer vessels of God’s wrath but objects of His mercy. We have been reconciled! Paul writes: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

Whenever we read or hear the Passion story, may we see in it suffering for the Lord’s Servant, but blessing for us.

Thou, ah! Thou, hast taken on Thee Bonds and stripes, a cruel rod;
Pain and scorn were heaped upon Thee, O Thou sinless Son of God!
Thus didst Thou my soul deliver From the bonds of sin forever.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 151:2)

Friday, March 30, 2018

Isaiah 53:6 — *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, everyone, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF THE LORD (5)

Shepherd and their sheep were common in the holy land. Most of the country was hilly, full of valleys, rocks, and boulders. Sheep could easily get lost or become victims of preying animals or flooding gullies. Picture a flock of sheep in such country without a shepherd. This depicts each of us by nature: “ALL WE like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, EVERYONE, to his own way...” Each and every member of the human race—yes, including the newborn infant—have gone astray, sinned. The situation could not have been more desperate, until: “...And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

Wednesday, May 9, 2018

Luke 24:21 — *But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.*

SOLID HOPE

“We had hoped . . . “ What a world of misery is contained in those words of the Emmaus disciples! When we lose our forward look, we lose the strength to go on. That is why those who have pinned their hopes to earthly riches, or health, or friends, or other material things are in such despair when these things pass away. Not just any “hope” is worth hanging our heart on.

But where can a solid, secure future be found, a hope that will impel them all the way back to Jerusalem without supper? Not merely from the experience of seeing Jesus with our own two eyes, because our eyes can be fooled. These disciples did not even recognize Jesus when they first saw him.

Nor did Jesus tell them to look hard at Him, or ask if they recognized Him. He wanted them to remember what the Bible said! And from all the prophets since Samuel, Jesus showed those disciples how God was still in control. God had not failed! Jesus had not failed! Both victory and also suffering were promised to the coming Christ in those ancient writings. This is what made their hearts burn with joy and with new hope. This Bible Truth made sense out of all that they had seen in the past week, but had not recognized.

They could not get enough of this stranger’s Word, and invited Him in. Then it happened! He was no longer the guest, but the host (as He had been all along). Suddenly He was gone! But this time their hope was not gone with their vision, for it was firmly grounded in the Word of God.

Tuesday, May 8, 2018

Luke 24:8 — *Then they remembered his words.*

CRUCIAL HOUR

There are so many things that we don't need in order to have the peace and joy of Easter in our hearts. It does not matter whether it is Saturday night or Sunday morning, or Tuesday morning, whether we are early or late in our life, or whether we even know. The angels will find us, no matter when or where our grave may be, and our grave, too, will one day be empty. For He is the First Fruits of them that sleep (1 Corinthians 15).

Nor do we need to worry about the greatness of our sin, which, like a stone, would keep us from God and all joy. The whole world could put its solemn seal on that stone, testifying to our unworthiness, but that would not prevent our Savior from suffering in our place, and rolling that monstrous stone aside.

And when we stand before God, we will not need the sweet spices that we have prepared! For it will not be because of works that we have done, but because of God's own great goodness in Christ that our sins will be declared "punished," our debts "paid in full." All that is really needed is to *remember* how He told us, when He was with us this day: "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven." "Because I live, you shall live also."

Everything that was needed He has done, and His resurrection hands to us the victory over death, sin, and hell. No sickness, no injury, no test or trouble, no sorrow or disappointment, none of the storms and setbacks of this life can take this victory from us. Remember how he told you...

In the passion account neither the soldiers, nor Pilate, could have had any power against Christ by themselves. But it was the will of the Lord Jehovah God that His Son bear the guilt and punishment for "the iniquity of us all." Without our help God undertook and completed the blessed work of rescuing and redeeming the world of us aimless, wandering sheep. As Paul writes, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation..." (2 Corinthians 5:19). The climactic moment came when on the cross the dying Savior exclaimed, "It is finished!" Sin is atoned for. Sinners have been redeemed. "...We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14).

On Good Friday and every day we sing:

On my heart imprint Thine image, Blessed Jesus, King of Grace,
That life's riches, cares, and pleasures Have no pow'r Thee to efface.
This the superscription be: Jesus, crucified for me,
Is my Life, my hope's Foundation, And my Glory and Salvation.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 179)

Saturday, March 31, 2018

Isaiah 53:7 — *He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.*

THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF THE LORD (6)

How fitting for the prophet to use this picture of Jesus, the Servant of the Lord, as a lamb brought to slaughter. The animal waits its turn patiently, whether for shearing or for slaughter. Similarly, the passion account records how in order to save us Jesus suffered patiently, willingly, silently.

Jesus is truly the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep. He came to suffer and die that we, the wandering sheep, by faith in Him might have life and have it more abundantly. For in Him we have

forgiveness of all sins, and thus peace with God now and eternal life As Jesus said one time: “My sheep hear My voice and I know them, and they follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27f).

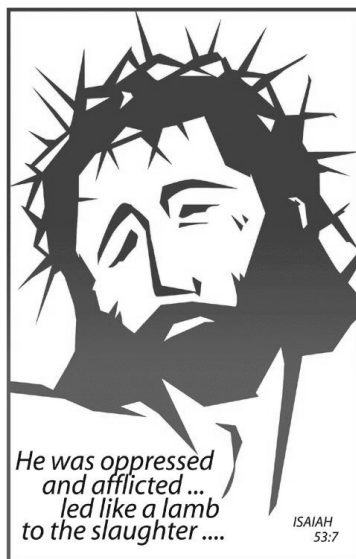
This Holy Saturday the Holy Spirit would etch that picture on our heart of hearts: the patient Lamb of God willingly suffering and dying to save the wandering sheep.

What punishment so strange is suffered yonder!
The Shepherd dies for sheep that loved to wander;
The Master pays the debt His servants owe Him,
Who would not know Him.

O mighty King, no time can dim Thy glory!
How shall I spread abroad Thy wondrous story?
How shall I find some worthy gifts to proffer?
What dare I offer?

I'll think upon Thy mercy without ceasing.
That earth's vain joys to me no more be pleasing;
To do Thy will shall be my sole endeavor
Henceforth forever.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 143:4, 8, 12)



prayers, however, we have good cause for constant communication with our loving God. Take full advantage of the gift of prayer today. Talk to the Lord about the things which haven't gone right. Confess the sins and praise the Savior for taking away your guilt by His death on the cross. Pray for the Lord's blessings upon your day, that He would protect you from temptation and other harm, and provide you with meaningful work and refreshing recreation according to His good will. Pray that His kingdom would come to many others through the message of the gospel.

Monday, May 7, 2018

Luke 24:1 — *On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.*

WHAT IS NEEDED?

Perhaps you have heard it said that “every Sunday is a little Easter.” And surely the Resurrection was a reason for choosing the first day of the week as a worship day. However, in the early centuries of the New Testament era, some wanted to celebrate Easter on the same date every year (as we do with Christmas), no matter what day of the week that fell on. The bishop of Rome declared that all the churches must celebrate Easter on the same day, and at the end of the fourth century the Emperor Theodosius passed a law that threatened death to those who held Easter worship on a different day. Do you think that was needed?

And what about time of service? You know, the women did not *need* to go to the tomb at dawn. They had prepared the spices already on Friday afternoon. When the Sabbath was over at sundown, they probably thought it too dark to go into a tomb, so they waited about twelve hours until the first day of the week, until the sky was starting to get gray. But they didn't *need* to go right then. After waiting that long, they could have waited another hour. They could have waited until 8:00 or 10:05. No doubt, however, they could think of nothing better to do at dawn because of their great love for Jesus. That love was something they definitely did need in order to start out just before dawn, while it was still dark. Lord, help us so to love you always!

picks us up and gives us new confidence to keep going. His grace makes new territory something to anticipate, for we know He will be there to bless us in love.

Saturday, May 5, 2018

Romans 8:26-27 — *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.*

BEST WIRELESS PLAN EVER!

I like my cell phone. I appreciate the convenience of checking in at home from wherever I might be. There's security in knowing that if the car breaks down in the middle of nowhere, a tow is only a call away. On the other hand, my phone has its share of drawbacks too. The monthly plan charge is money I could put toward a vacation trip. And there are times when the phone distracts from things more important, such as driving or a conversation with someone in person.

So now imagine a plan with all the advantages and none of the drawbacks. It would provide free communication from anywhere at any time without the distraction of having to dial a number or buy equipment. That is what God gives us with the privilege of prayer. The Father invites us to come to Him at any time with whatever is on our minds and hearts. He is never too busy. He never tells us our concerns are too trivial for His ears. There is no danger of ever using up our "minutes." Paul says: "In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

I have noticed people who, even when they're driving or shopping never seem to take the phone from their ear. What do they have to constantly talk about? Could it be that important? When it comes to our

Monday, April 2, 2018

Mark 16:1-6 — *Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away—for it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him."*

HE IS RISEN!

The first announcement of the resurrection of Christ was made by the angel to the women who went early to the tomb to anoint the dead body of the Lord. This was before Christ showed himself to them and talked with them; as he wanted to reveal his resurrection through the Word, even before they should see him and experience the power of his resurrection.

The historical record of the Lord's resurrection relates the events as they occurred, together with the different circumstances and how he revealed himself alive in various appearances; so that we might have a sure record and testimony of everything as a foundation and support of our faith. For this article of faith: the resurrection of Jesus from the dead— this is the chief truth upon which our salvation is finally based, and without which all others would be useless and altogether fruitless.

This is the true Gospel, which bestows life, strength, power and marrow, and of which all the passages of Scripture speak. Therefore seek and learn to know Christ aright, for the whole Scriptures confer upon us the righteousness of the true knowledge of Christ.

—Martin Luther

Tuesday, April 3, 2018

Romans 4:25 — *Christ was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification.*

CHRIST WAS RAISED FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION

Paul is indeed the man who extols Christ in a masterly manner, telling us exactly why and for what purpose he suffered— namely, that he died for our sins.

But just as it is not sufficient simply to know and believe that Christ has died, so it will not suffice to know and believe that he rose with a glorified body and is now in a state of joy and blessedness, no longer subject to mortality, for all this by itself would profit me nothing or very little. But when I come to understand the fact that all the works God does in Christ are done for me, indeed, they are bestowed upon and given to me, the effect of his resurrection being that I also will arise and live with him; that causes me to rejoice.

This must be brought home to our hearts, and we must not merely hear it with the ears or just confess it with our mouth. When Paul says: “Christ was raised for our justification.” his words should come closer home to our hearts and comfort us more. Here the Lamb is truly revealed, of whom John the Baptist testifies, when he says in John 1:29, “Behold, the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world.”

Here is fulfilled that which was spoken to the serpent:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed: he shall crush your head,” which means that for all those who believe in him, hell, death, and the devil and sin have been destroyed. All this is done, I say, by faith. For if you believe that by this Seed the serpent has been slain, then it is slain for you. For each one individually should have crushed the serpent under foot and redeemed himself from the curse, but that would have been too difficult, no, impossible for us. But now it has been done easily, namely, by Christ, who has crushed the serpent once and for all for us.

—Martin Luther

Friday, May 4, 2018

John 10:27 — [Jesus said], *“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”*

NEW TERRITORY

Remember your first day of Kindergarten, a move to a new town, or your first real job? It was new territory, exciting, but a little intimidating too, right? What should I be doing? Will it turn out the way I want it to? What if I mess up?

What helps tremendously is to know that you’re not alone. As you walked into a classroom full of strangers, Mom was there to assure you she would be waiting when the school day was over. A teacher’s smile gave you the confidence that she was on your side. A coworker took you under their wing and filled you in on workplace procedures.

Really, every day is new territory. No matter how familiar our routine may be and how well-planned our schedule, we have no guarantee that the day will unfold according to our expectations. Thinking of that uncertainty, do you ever dread what may be coming? Do you wonder, “What if I mess up? What if something goes wrong?” Do you envy those who confidently welcome whatever comes as a new adventure?

When the Israelites were on the verge of crossing the Jordan and entering the Promised Land, I’m sure there were many who wondered what awaited them in this new territory. Would they survive? Would they like their new home? How would they know what to do?

They had no reason to worry. Their leaders gave them these orders: “When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God...you are to...follow it. Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before” (Joshua 3:3-4).

Are you facing new territory: new challenges, decisions, situations you haven’t encountered before? Afraid you will mess up? You’re not alone. The Lord is always at hand. His Word is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. He has been this way before. Jesus lived here and faced all the dangers and difficulties we meet. He even died and rose again for us. He now calls, “Follow Me.” When we stumble along the way, He forgives,

who will teach, correct, and provide for children? Without them, where can we find constant companionship, unconditional commitment, and help in times of need?

Family is a gift of God. “God sets the lonely in families” (Psalm 68:6). But it takes work. Neglect it and it can quickly fall apart. That’s where the kitchen table comes in. One way of nurturing family ties is by taking the time to share meals and talk about the joys and problems of one another. A concern for one member is something that matters to the whole family.

It is especially true for our spiritual family. By faith in Christ we are blood-bought children of God and fellow members of His family. “There is one body and one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all” (Ephesians 4:4-5). No matter how different we may be in other ways, we are one family in Christ. It’s a great blessing, but it too takes conscious effort to preserve. The writer to the Hebrews says, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25).

Let’s make good use of the “kitchen table” of family devotions, Sunday worship, Bible class, and the Lord’s Supper, which all provide opportunities for us to strengthen our ties with our heavenly Father by hearing His Word of forgiveness and peace in Jesus. Let’s look for ways to encourage, correct, and share with one another the joys and struggles of the Christian life. As a result, the faith and joy of the entire family is increased. It takes planning and effort, but it’s worth it. It’s what the Lord made us for, and He has promised to bless it.

Wednesday, April 4, 2018

Romans 4:25 — *Christ was raised for our justification.*

THE LORD LAID ON HIM THE INIQUITY OF US ALL

Here Paul turns my eyes away from my sins and directs them to Christ, for if I look at my sins, they will destroy me. Therefore I must look to Christ who has taken my sins upon himself, crushed the head of the serpent and become the blessing. Now these sins no longer burden my conscience, but rest upon Christ, whom they try to destroy.

Let us see how they treat him. They hurl him to the ground and kill him. O God; where is now my Christ and my Saviour? But then God appears, delivers Christ and makes him alive; and not only does he make him alive, but he translates him into heaven and lets him rule over all.

What has now become of sin? There it lies under his feet. If I then cling to this, I have a cheerful conscience like Christ, because I am without sin. Now I can defy death, the devil, sin and hell to do me any harm. As I am a child of Adam, sin does indeed lead to my death. But since Christ has taken my sins upon himself, has died for them, has suffered himself to be slain on account of my sins, they can no longer harm me; for Christ is too strong for them. They cannot hold him. He breaks forth and overpowers them, ascends into heaven, taking sin and sorrow captive, and rules there over all throughout eternity.

Now I have a clear conscience, am joyful and happy and am no longer afraid of this tyrant, for Christ has taken my sins away from me and made them his own. But they cannot remain upon him; what then becomes of them? They must disappear and be destroyed. This then is the effect of faith. He who believes that Christ has taken away our sin, is without sin, like Christ himself, and death, the devil and hell are vanquished as far as they are concerned and they can no longer harm us.

—Martin Luther

Thursday, April 5, 2018

1 Corinthians 15:55 — *O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?*

VICTORY!

Paul quotes Hosea 13:14 in reference to the victory that Christ has won by his resurrection and by which he has conquered sin, death, hell and all our enemies. Paul says that death is swallowed up in this victory, and he defies death with these words: “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

In effect he says: “In times past, sin and death, you were mighty, terrible foes, before whom everyone—no matter how holy and pious—had to tremble and despair; but where are you now? How did I lose you so completely? O death, where are your teeth? Come, bite off one of my fingers. Before you had a spear, what has become of it now? Christ has taken it from you. Sin, where is now the edge of your sword and your power?”

Paul says that the power of sin is the law. The more clearly we understand the law, the more sin oppresses and stings us. For this reason Paul says that Christ has completely destroyed the spear of death. Why, Paul replies, everything is swallowed up and completely drowned in a victory. But where is the victory, or whose is the victory?

“Thanks be to God,” he further replies (v. 51), “He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Now, this Gospel he has not taken with him into heaven, but he caused it to be preached throughout the world, so that for him who believes in Christ, spear and whetstone, nay, sin and death, should be destroyed. But this must be brought about by the Holy Spirit. Let us therefore pray God that his Gospel may prosper, that we all may truly learn to know Christ and thus rise with him and be honored by God as he was honored.

—Martin Luther

It’s unsettling to wonder whom we can trust. It hurts when someone we trust betrays that trust. It’s devastating when someone you may have put your complete confidence in proves false. But thankfully, we never have to fear that when it comes to God. We know that His Word, the Bible, is true for “All Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16). The fact that some do not trust God does not put His trustworthiness into question. Paul writes: “Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar” (Romans 3:3-4).

No matter what, God can be trusted. When He says, “I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31:3), believe it. It’s true. When He warns you about sin and says, “The soul who sins is the one who will die” (Ezekiel 18:20), trust it. It’s true. When He tells us that He punished Jesus for our sins, that we might have forgiveness, peace, and eternal life, cherish it. It’s our salvation. And when Jesus promises, “Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:19), rejoice, for it’s eternal fact. As David says: “No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame” (Psalm 25:3).

Thursday, May 3, 2018

1 John 1:3 — *We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*

WHO NEEDS A KITCHEN TABLE?

Do you have a kitchen table? Or more specifically, do you sit down together at the table for meals? In many homes today that rarely happens. Family members live in the same house, but seldom spend enough time together to even share a meal. Each person goes their own way to a practice, work, or other event. Even if they are home at the same time, they are off doing their own thing without any thought of one another.

It might be a sign of the times, but it’s not an encouraging one. The Lord created us for involved, loving, family relationships. Without them,

from the dead and whether it really happened, double-check it. Go back to 1 Corinthians 15 and read again for yourself: “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.” When it seems as though the Lord must have forgotten you because you’re facing so many questions and have so few answers, go back to His promise: “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast....Though she may forget, I will not forget you!” (Isaiah 49:15).

Wednesday, May 2, 2018

John 20:27-29 — *Then [Jesus] said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

A CRISIS OF TRUST

Some time ago a woman from the area feared for her life, all because she trusted someone. She was looking for a car on Craigslist. She phoned a contact and after some negotiating agreed on a price. The contact gave her an address at which she could meet him and pick up the car. When she arrived, a man pointed a gun at her, told her to walk away, and then stole the car in which she had come.

Whom can you trust? There are accounts of senior citizens being defrauded of their retirement funds. Accusations of police abusing their authority have been rampant lately. Credit card numbers have been stolen by unscrupulous store clerks. It’s not surprising that the motto of many is: “Trust no one!”

Should that skepticism and suspicion be directed toward God too? People are quick to point out that the Bible was written by men, and therefore what they say about God is not any more reliable than the author. We know that they were far from perfect individuals. Why should their thoughts be given any more credence than what we might think and conclude about God?

Friday, April 6, 2018

Romans 4:25 — *He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.*

LIVING OUR EASTER FAITH

The question now arises: If Christ has taken away death and our sins by his resurrection and has justified us, why do we then still feel sin within us? For our sins torment us still, we are stung by our conscience, and this evil conscience creates the fear of hell.

To this I reply: I have often said before that feeling and faith are two different things. It is the nature of faith not to feel, to lay aside reason and close the eyes, to submit absolutely to the Word, and follow it in life and death. Feeling however does not extend beyond that which may be apprehended by reason and the senses, which may be heard, seen, felt and known by the outward senses.

For this cause feeling is opposed to faith and faith is opposed to feeling. For if we would see Christ visibly in heaven, like the visible sun, we would not need to believe it. But since Christ died for our sins and was raised for our justification, we cannot see it nor feel it, neither can we comprehend it with our reason. Therefore we must disregard our feeling and accept only the Word, write it into our heart and cling to it, even though it seems as if my sins were not taken from me, and even though I still feel them within me.

For although we feel that sin is still in us, it is only permitted that our faith may be developed and strengthened, that in spite of all our feelings we accept the Word, and that we unite our hearts and consciences more and more to Christ. Thus faith leads us quietly, contrary to all feeling and comprehension of reason, through sin, through death and through hell. Then we shall see salvation before our eyes, and then we shall know perfectly what we have believed, namely, that death and all sorrow have been conquered.

—Martin Luther

Saturday, April 7, 2018

1 Corinthians 15:55-57 — *Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

SING ALLELUIA!

In 1435 the Council of Basil forbid the singing of hymns in the vernacular during the church service. Parts of some older hymns, however, still lived in the memory of the common people and were sung outside of the church, when people went on pilgrimages and processions, or buried their dead. Luther revived some of these old medieval hymns, when he and the other reformers reintroduced congregational singing in worship services.

Luther's resurrection song "Christ ist erstanden" ("Christ is Arisen," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 187) is one such hymn. It was included in the first Lutheran hymnal under the section "Songs, made by the elders." The German words seem unwieldy and even strange to the modern ear (though they are rooted in the Scriptures), but the song exudes Easter energy.

Jesus was in the prison of death for our crimes and He paid the price for our sins. But death could not hold the Lord of Life. Jesus wins that terrible struggle as our victorious sacrifice. So it is that we the redeemed of every age sing ALLELUIA to the Lord whose victorious rising declares His gift of eternal life to every believing heart!

"Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands" by Martin Luther:

Christ lay in Death's dark prison, It was our sin that bound Him;
This day hath He arisen, And sheds new life around Him.
Therefore let us joyful be And praise our God right heartily.
So sing we Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

O'er Death no man could prevail, If mortal e'er came near him;
Through guilt all our strength would fail, Our sinful hearts did fear him.
Therefore Death did gain the day, And lead in triumph us away,
Henceforth to dwell imprisoned. Hallelujah!

from hopeless to glorious. With His daily presence in our lives in the Word, He gives each of us a new career of reflecting His light into this dark world.

Let's praise our Savior for the transformation He has worked in us. Let's embrace the new life and purpose He has given. May we gladly live for Him who died for us.

Tuesday, May 1, 2018

Luke 24:39 — *Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.*

BE SURE!

I was in full panic mode. Heading out the door, I went to grab my wallet from the desk, and it wasn't there! I checked the bedroom dresser, no luck. I mentally retraced my steps from the day before, and still didn't have the foggiest idea of where I might have left it. Finally, in desperation, I checked the pockets of the pants I had worn the day before, and there it was. Since then, I check and double-check to make sure I know exactly where my wallet is.

If something is important, it's worthwhile checking and double-checking, whether it's a wallet, car keys, or what time the doctor's appointment is. That's especially true for faith. Many of us have known the truths of our salvation from little on. We've heard and read the accounts of Jesus' crucifixion and His glorious resurrection on Easter morning. But like a familiar wallet, we can take those truths for granted and even "misplace" them. Satan tries to instill doubts in our minds, just as he did when he asked Eve, "Did God really say?" Ignore it long enough, and we could lose the gospel entirely.

So let's check and double-check faith by daily going back to Scripture. Never imagine that tonight's family devotion or tomorrow's service is a waste of time. After all, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). When you wonder about things like Jesus' rising

Monday, April 30, 2018

Acts 9:17-18 — *Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized.*

LIFE TRANSFORMED!

What would cause a successful corporate executive to quit her job, buy a farm in Wisconsin, and raise goats and vegetables? In this case it was a desire for a simpler, less stressful, and more active life. Have you ever thought of "reinventing" yourself? What if you were to move overseas or make some other dramatic lifestyle change? Impossible? Maybe not. Those changes might not only be possible, but refreshing and rejuvenating.

Some believe that they can also reinvent themselves spiritually, that they have the wisdom and power to decide to believe in Jesus on their own and be masters of their own spiritual destiny. That is not merely wishful, it is false, harmful thinking. When it comes to faith in Jesus, we have no ability or even desire to change. "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Romans 8:7). By nature we are His enemies. We want nothing to do with Him. We want Him to leave us alone. We think we can find our way to eternal life by our own efforts and goodness. It's all a delusion of Satan and our sinful flesh. People dead in sin can't lift a finger to help themselves.

That's where the transforming power of God's grace comes in. In love Jesus called His disciples to faith in Him and to service in His kingdom. He transformed them from enemies to friends. He has done the same in our lives. "For I know the plans I have for you....plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11). In baptism He transformed us from outsiders to family. With the message of His payment for sin on the cross, He transforms us from sinners to saints. Through the thrilling news of His resurrection, He has changed our future

Now Jesus Christ, the Son of God, For our defence hath risen.
Our grievous guilt He hath removed, And Death hath bound in prison.
All his might Death must forego. For now he's nought but idle show,
His sting is lost for ever. Hallelujah!

How fierce and dreadful was the strife When Life with Death
contended;
For Death was swallowed up by Life And all his power was ended.
God of old, the Scriptures show, Did promise that it should be so.
O Death, where's now thy victory? Hallelujah!

The Paschal Victim here we see, Whereof God's Word hath spoken;
He hangs upon the cruel tree. Of saving love the token.
His blood ransoms us from sin, And Death no more can enter in.
Now Satan cannot harm us. Hallelujah!

So keep we all this holy feast. Where every joy invites us;
Our Sun is rising in the East, It is our Lord Who lights us.
Through the glory of His grace Our darkness will to-day give place.
The night of sin is over. Hallelujah!

With grateful hearts we all are met To eat the bread of gladness.
The ancient leaven now forget, And every thought of sadness.
Christ Himself the feast hath spread, By Him the hungry soul is fed,
And He alone can feed us. Hallelujah!

Monday, April 9, 2018

1 Corinthians 15:17 — *If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins!*

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION—OUR PROOF

What do you suppose the disciples thought about that Friday night after Jesus' crucifixion and all day Saturday as they huddled together behind locked doors in fear and bewilderment? I'm sure many things went through their minds, but it was all gloom and doom. The Emmaus disciples summed it up, "But we had hoped that it was He who was going to redeem Israel." Now they lost all hope of that. Jesus was dead.

I would guess, as much as they may have tried to suppress it, the haunting words of Deuteronomy 21:23 kept popping up in their minds: "Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse." The man they had believed to be their Messiah and Lord; the man they had confessed to be the Son of the living God; had died by being hung on a tree. What other conclusion could they come to but that Jesus died under the curse of God? That's what Scripture says.

How could Jesus possibly be the Son of God and the Messiah sent by God, if He died under God's curse? Could they believe anything Jesus taught? Was it all just a lie? What about everything He said about God's forgiveness? Was that a lie also? How could Jesus give God's forgiveness if He Himself was under God's curse?

What a horrible few days that must have been for disciples! What a horrible life it would be for us if Jesus had not risen from the dead.

But Paul goes on to confidently say, "But now Christ is risen from the dead!" (v. 20) And if we want further proof, he gives us the whole list of eye witnesses. Well over 500 people saw Jesus alive from the dead and confirm the fact of His resurrection for us.

That changes everything. Jesus' resurrection is our proof of everything Jesus ever said and did. During the Easter season we explore the many things that Christ's resurrection proves for us. Truly it is reason for us to rejoice. He is Risen indeed! Hallelujah!

Saturday, April 28, 2018

PAIN

No one likes to be in pain. That's why Tylenol, Ibuprofen, and countless other drugs are a multi-billion dollar business. But no matter how many pain-management options there are, no one ever has a pain-free life. One proof of sin are the aches and pains which come to everyone during this earthly journey. Anyone who promises a pain-free life will quickly be shown to be a liar.

The same is true of anyone who promises that the Christian life is pain-free. The claim goes: "Follow Jesus and you will have money, health, friends, and anything else you desire." It sounds good. Who of us looks forward to pain? Yet it just isn't true. All we have to do is look at Jesus. His life was anything but pain-free. Throughout His ministry He suffered the ridicule and rejection of many. But most of all, nothing can compare to the agony, both physical and spiritual, He endured on the cross for us. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The servant is not above his master, the Lord says. If He suffered, then those who follow Him can expect to suffer as well.

The Lord doesn't tell us this to discourage us, but to prepare us for the reality of discipleship. He died that we might live for Him. We shouldn't be surprised when others put us down for saying we believe in Jesus as the Savior from sin. It shouldn't be a total shock if we are ignored or rejected by some for following the Lord's will, rather than going along with what is accepted as good and normal by society.

Don't let it discourage you or prevent you from living your faith. Peter writes: "But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you" (1 Peter 4:13-14). Following Jesus, we can be sure of where we are, to whom we belong, and where we are going. With Jesus as our Good Shepherd, it's great to be a sheep!

moved with compassion on them because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd (cf. Matthew 9:36).

How wonderful then for all of you who have heard the voice of the Good Shepherd and learned to follow that voice and only that voice ... for has He not led you into green pastures and beside the still waters of His Word and Sacraments? How soul-satisfying are not the eternal truths found in His holy Word, compared with the parched, barren, and fruitless thinking and notions of the would-be-wise of this Earth? Here you may lie down to rest; here you can drink to your heart's content from the Rivers of Salvation.

—*Lutheran Spokesman*, April 2003

Friday, April 27, 2018

Psalm 23:6 — *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

GOODNESS AND MERCY ALL MY DAYS

Since the LORD is my shepherd, how cannot but goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my life; and no enemy—no Satanic accuser, no conscience, no law, no moralist—will ever be able to snatch me from the tender care of this Shepherd.

Shall I tell you what I think? “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” He is even now leading me to that heavenly house. He has told me: “In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know” (John 14:2 f).

Yes, I will dwell with my Shepherd in the eternal fold. That is my faith. That I believe and confess in this psalm, which is now mine. May the Good Shepherd strengthen and keep you in that faith, and “*when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away*” (1 Peter 5:4). Amen.

—*Lutheran Spokesman*, May 2003.

Tuesday, April 10, 2018

Matthew 12:39 — [Jesus said], “*An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.*”

CHRIST’S RESURRECTION IS OUR PROOF: JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD

If Jesus had not risen from the dead, then there would be only one conclusion we could come to, Jesus was a fraud and everything he said was a lie, therefore He died under God’s curse. Since Jesus did rise from the dead, there is also only one conclusion we can come to: Jesus truly is the Son of God. We read in Romans 1:4 “Jesus Christ our Lord ... was declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” His resurrection proves that He is who He claimed to be.

Remember how, on several occasions, when His enemies demanded that Jesus give them some sign to prove that he really had been sent from God, Jesus said he would only give them the sign of the prophet Jonah, “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

That may not have seemed like a very great sign to them. There was nothing for them to see at the time when Jesus told His detractors this. But it was in fact the greatest sign and proof that Jesus could give—but they would have to wait for it. He was telling them that he would die and spend three days in the belly of the earth, then He would rise again. If Jesus could pull that off, what more powerful sign could there be that He was from God and He was telling the truth?

As we know, Jesus did rise from the dead, exactly when He said He would. What greater proof could we have that Jesus is the Messiah sent from God? Beyond a doubt, Jesus is the Son of God.

Do you have times of doubt? Do you have times when you would like some sign, some proof to know our Christian faith is real? Look to the empty tomb and the risen Christ. Listen to all the Scripture eye witnesses who testify Jesus is risen indeed. What greater proof could we ask for? Jesus is the Son of God and your only Savior. Hallelujah!

Wednesday, April 11, 2018

Luke 23:34 — [Jesus said], *“Father, forgive them.”*

CHRIST’S RESURRECTION IS OUR PROOF: THE FATHER HAS FORGIVEN US

Jesus prayed for our forgiveness. Have you ever wondered how can we really know for sure if God has forgiven us? How can we tell? It’s not something we can feel. We can’t see our sins clinging to our soul so we can see if they are taken away. Christ’s resurrection is our proof of forgiveness. If Jesus had not risen from the dead, then we would not have forgiveness. If Christ had not risen, then He must have had to die for His own sin. As Paul said, *“If Christ is not risen ... you are still in your sins!”* (1 Corinthians 15:17).

The fact is, Jesus did die under the curse of God. That was necessary according to the Scriptures. The letter to the Galatians explains, *“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them’”* (Galatians 3:10). We were under God’s curse because we had not continued to do everything written in God’s law. We sinned and brought God’s curse upon ourselves. But then God continues with the good news, *“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.’)”* Christ bore that curse for us. He suffered the cursed death in our place.

That is why Christ had to suffer. It was the only way to save us. Jesus’ resurrection proves that God accepted the sacrifice Christ made. Jesus is not still under the curse of God, but is raised glorious and forever. God thereby declared our debt to be *“Paid in Full!”* The sentence against us was complete. Christ was released from the prison of death, and since He died for us, we too are released with Him.

Truly the Father has forgiven us! Christ’s Resurrection from the dead is our proof of that fact. Your sins do not separate you from God any more. They do not bring God’s curse upon you. You are forgiven. Hallelujah!

advice and before they brought a single child into the world, Adam and Eve brought sin and death into the world (Genesis 2:17, 3:6; Romans 5:12).

Isaiah describes how all of Adam’s children have lived ever since: *“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way ...”* (Isaiah 53:6).

But Jesus has hope for us wandering sinners. The Devil came into the world to steal, kill and destroy. But the Good Shepherd came to win life and salvation for the wandering sheep. Through the death of the Good Shepherd, the Devil was defeated and our sins were erased.

But how well would a flock do with a dead shepherd! And, of course, that’s why Jesus didn’t stay dead for long. He has a flock to tend and life to distribute. So, do not fret my fellow sheep. Abundant life is ours today in Christ. Though unseen, He stands powerfully beside us as The Good Shepherd. Listen for His voice in the Scriptures and follow that voice, for it leads on to pastures beyond what we can imagine.

Thursday, April 26, 2018

Psalm 23: 1-2 — *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul . . .*

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD!

People everywhere are wandering about shepherdless, without direction, aimlessly living out their pitiful lives without the advantages of real food for their souls, real waters to satisfy their thirst. The solutions which they find prove to be mirages; their philosophies are inadequate and vain; their latest notions and schemes are unworkable; yea, man’s noblest aspirations and attainments never satisfy, and their finest morals are immoral to the eyes and mind of their Creator. Men and women become weary in their search. And when Jesus descended upon this Earth to become their Shepherd, we are told that—in His travels of teaching and preaching and healing—when He beheld the multitudes, He was

were not feeding the flock, and were instead feeding themselves. The LORD's concern for His sheep is made clear. He promises to feed His sheep continually in good pasture.

The LORD our Shepherd feeds us with His Word here in this life, giving us the healing and the strength we need to withstand the temptations of the Devil, the world and our own sinful flesh. Throughout this life, He is there beside us guiding us and leading us in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Through His Word He comforts us with the assurance that all our sins have been forgiven.

The Lord my pasture shall prepare
And feed me with a shepherd's care;
His presence shall my wants supply
And guard me with a watchful eye;
My noonday walks He shall attend
And all my midnight hours defend.

(*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 368:1)

Wednesday, April 25, 2018

John 10:10 — [Jesus said], *“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber ... The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”*

THE SHEEP-KILLER

The Devil himself was the first sheep-killer. He climbed over the walls of the Garden of Eden and wearing the form of a serpent, he whispered lies in Eve's ear. He came to steal what was rightfully God's. He came to kill what the Creator loved dearly. And he came to destroy God's perfect creation, starting with the crown of that creation, human beings.

Sadly, Eve did not recognize the stranger's voice. She did not flee from the Serpent like a frightened lamb. Instead she listened to his damning

Thursday, April 12, 2018

Luke 24:44 — *On Easter Evening Jesus appeared to the disciples who were gathered in the upper room behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. After He showed them that it was really Him, alive from the dead, and not a ghost or some vision, Jesus said: “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.”*

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION IS OUR PROOF: EVERYTHING JESUS SAID IS TRUE

Jesus had been telling the disciples all along what was going to happen. Everything did happen as He said. That is sure proof that Jesus' word is true and reliable. More than that, Jesus' teaching was in perfect harmony with all the Scriptures. Jesus fulfilled everything that Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms had written about Him. He explained that that is why it was “necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day.”

Jesus' resurrection not only proves that His own word is true, but it proves the reliability of all the Scriptures. They explained what had to happen and it did. As Jesus testified, “Your Word is truth.” Luke 24 continues, “Jesus opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” That is what we need. We don't need any further proof that the Bible is true, we just need to have our understanding opened to comprehend the Scriptures.

Wouldn't it be nice if we had Jesus here to open our understanding? We do! All the things that Jesus explained to His apostles they have explained to us in the New Testament Scriptures. We also have the Spirit of Christ poured out into our hearts to open our understanding as we study His word. Therefore, “continue in [Jesus'] word,” for then you know “you are Jesus' disciples indeed, you will know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” Hallelujah!

Friday, April 13, 2018

Luke 24:46-47 — *On Easter night, Jesus not only assured the disciples that He was alive, proving that He was the Son of God and their sins were truly forgiven and all of God's word is true, Jesus also gave them a divine mandate for their own mission in life. He said, "It was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."*

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION IS OUR PROOF: OUR MISSION IS FROM GOD

The news of Jesus' resurrection is news that everyone needs to hear. Notice that the preaching of this message of forgiveness in Christ was to "begin at Jerusalem." The people of Jerusalem had sinned against the Father in the worst way: they crucified His own Son. Yet this message of forgiveness was meant for them. Beginning on the day of Pentecost, the disciples proclaimed to the people of Jerusalem that God raised Jesus from the dead, the one they had crucified and that forgiveness is available to them all.

That was such joyous news that 3000 people were baptized into Jesus' name for the forgiveness of their sins on that day and thousands more in the months to come.

Then the disciples brought that message "To all nations." They went to great lengths at great cost to themselves. For many, it cost them their lives to bring the message of repentance and forgiveness to all people. Thousands throughout the world came to faith and were saved because of their preaching.

Now we are the disciples who are to carry this message to the world. Many people today suffer from the torment of guilt. They don't even understand what is wrong. They don't understand that their guilt comes from having sinned against the Eternal Father. Most try to escape that guilt by trying different tricks to deny their guilt or by making excuses for themselves. Others try to deny that there are any real consequences of our sin. All such attempts only cover up the reality of one's guilt.

have to wonder where we stand with God. We don't have to live in dread of what He is going to do to us because of our guilt. We already know. He punished Jesus in our place and pronounced us justified. We know what to do with our daily shortcomings. We can echo David: "I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'—and you forgave the guilt of my sin" (Psalm 32:5).

An Easter lifestyle reflects the truth that we have a risen and living Lord. We don't have to wander aimlessly day to day, swept along with the social tide of what's trending or popular. We have the Lord's Word as a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. By faith we know that a truly meaningful, happy life is one which follows the Lord's will and seeks to honor Him in all that we plan and do. It's a life which reflects Jesus' light into the lives of those around us, that they too may trust Him for forgiveness and life. It's a lifestyle with the ultimate destination of an eternal, heavenly home. It's a lifestyle to embrace and thank God for every day!

Tuesday, April 24, 2018

Ezekiel 34:13b-14a — *I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel.*

THE LORD FEEDS HIS SHEEP

All living things need food. All plants and animals, whether as large as a whale or as small as a carrot seed, need to have food. While the kind of food needed may be different for each living thing, it remains true that without food, any living thing will die. Food is essential to life. This fact is no less true in a Spiritual sense. In order to have and sustain spiritual life, we must have food—spiritual food. The LORD our Shepherd provides for and feeds His sheep through His Word found in the Bible. Without a regular diet of this food from the Word of God we will die spiritually.

The LORD feeds His flock through the pure teaching and preaching of His Word. Once again this is in contrast to the previous shepherds who

the God-man and all He has accomplished by His living and dying and rising, you may have eternal life (John 3:16)!

Is the glass half-empty or half-full? Our cup runs over.

Through the Scriptures we are offered, given, and sealed eternal life in Christ.

Christ is Risen!

Hallelujah!

Monday, April 23, 2018

1 Peter 1:17-21 — *Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.*

THE EASTER LIFESTYLE

What's your lifestyle? Is it an active one? Are you constantly on the move, going from school and work to activities and shopping and then back home to take care of the garden and yard? Maybe because of age or preference, your lifestyle is less hectic. Our income affects lifestyle in terms of where we live and what we can afford to buy. Living in the U. S., we have a lifestyle much different than the average person in a country like Nepal.

But have you ever thought about an Easter lifestyle? Christ's resurrection from the dead really has a greater impact on our attitudes and how we live than anything else. Because Jesus rose, we know beyond a doubt that our sins have been paid for. Peace with God has been won. Think of what a difference that makes in how we look at life. We don't

You can give them the one thing that actually removes guilt, the good news of Easter. You can tell them, "You know, there is a solution for your guilt. Jesus died to take it away. In Christ, the Father has forgiven you. Repent and believe the gospel." We can do that with confidence because we have a divine mandate for our mission—certified with Christ's resurrection. Hallelujah!

Saturday, April 14, 2018

John 6:57 — [Jesus said], *"As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me."*

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION IS OUR PROOF: ETERNAL LIFE IS OURS

The truth of God's word is seen today. He said there would be many scoffers and false prophets who deny the Lord and the final day of resurrection. So it is! The world laughs to scorn the idea of a bodily resurrection from the dead. Sadly, many within the visible realm of Christianity also deny what Jesus said about life after death.

People like Rob Bell, the pastor of a 7000 member mega church in Michigan, has written a book "Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived." In it he challenges the idea that there is any hell. He claims that Jesus' atonement on the cross will save everyone no matter what they believe.

If Jesus' resurrection proves that He was telling the truth about Himself and about God's forgiveness and God's word, it also proves that He was telling the truth when He said, "The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:41-42).

Our hope and assurance is not built on man's imagination of what "a loving God would do." Our faith and hope of eternal life is based on the solid rock of Jesus' resurrection. Because Jesus died and rose from the dead, the Father has forgiven us. Our position as God's children is

secured. Our eternal life with Him is guaranteed. He will come and raise all the dead and give eternal life to all who confess their sins and believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of those sins.

“Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Hallelujah and Amen!

Monday, April 16, 2018

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 — *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.*

THESE ARE THE FACTS:

THIS IS THE VICTORY THROUGH JESUS OUR LORD!

From beginning to end, God’s Word is fact. The Scriptures have been fulfilled.

Christ lived, as promised, the Promised Seed of the woman, who would crush the head of the serpent.

Christ died, as promised, bearing our griefs, wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities.

The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all, and has taken it away, so that it is written, *“The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7).

As the Scriptures show, complete forgiveness of your sins is a fact, for Christ Jesus suffered and died to win that forgiveness for you. Having died, Christ rose as promised, the third day following His death on the cross, God the Father’s seal of approval on His saving work. Thus we are assured doubly that our sins are forgiven. And thus we are assured of eternal life as promised in God’s Word.

Foolishness, Mr. Ventura, is not receiving and searching the word of the Living God.

Christ is Risen!

Hallelujah!

Saturday, April 21, 2018

John 20:30-31 — *And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.*

IS THE GLASS HALF-EMPTY OR HALF-FULL?

It is human nature to be curious. We’d like to know, for example, more about Jesus’ childhood in Nazareth in Galilee. Who were his friends? How was it for them to interact with a perfect, sinless child? Were there signs of His divinity early on? All the Scripture says is that (Luke 2:51) “He went down to Nazareth and was subject to them.”

Question: Why no more information?

Answer: This is all we need to know.

It isn’t wrong to be curious. It’s a good thing to ask questions and consider them. We just need to make sure that the conclusions we reach and the answers we put forward are taken from Holy Scripture alone. We have not been short-changed by our God. We have what we need to know. The Scriptures were not written to satisfy our curiosity, but to save our souls.

Yes, Jesus accomplished many other miracles not recorded in the Scriptures. The things that have been recorded by the Spirit of God have been preserved for a three-fold purpose: 1) so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ (God’s one chosen and anointed savior); 2) so that you may believe that Jesus is the Son of God; 3) so that by faith in Jesus Christ

happen to them. In fact, the first to enter the empty tomb were the women. The first to see the risen Savior were women.

Jesus' tomb didn't need to be robbed that first day of the week. It was already empty.

Christ is Risen!

Hallelujah!

Friday, April 20, 2018

Luke 24:25-26 — Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"

FOOLISHNESS IS NOT BELIEVING IN ALL THAT (the LORD through) THE PROPHETS HAVE SPOKEN

He wasn't the first to express the sentiment. Jesse Ventura, former entertainer and governor of Minnesota, once said: "Organized religion is a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people who need strength in numbers." There have been, and will be others, who will call us foolish for believing what the Scripture says.

When the risen Savior Jesus first spoke the above quoted words to the Emmaus Disciples He was a stranger to them. He called them foolish ones, without understanding and perception, because they were slow to believe all that the Old Testament prophets had foretold by inspiration. Far from making the Old Testament obsolete, the resurrection of Jesus ought to lead us to search those Scriptures anew.

For the Prophets foretold the office of the Christ. They foretold His suffering and death (Isaiah 53). They foretold that (like the Passover Lamb) not a bone would be broken (Psalm 34:20, John 19:36). They foretold that His body would not decompose (Psalm 16:10) in the grave. The Prophets foretold that the Christ would suffer these things and enter into His glory.

Tuesday, April 17, 2018

Luke 24:38-43 — *And [Jesus] said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, "Have you any food here?" So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence.*

SATANIC LIE: JESUS DIDN'T RISE BODILY, BUT AS A SPIRIT

Well, the Father of lies is consistent. He makes regular attempts to silence and sabotage our Easter Joy. It's not just the blatant denials and mockery of the resurrection of Jesus by atheists; it's also in the subtle denial of Biblical truth by so-called Christian teachers.

Have you ever heard someone suggest that Jesus didn't rise from the dead bodily? There are those who suggest such things.

So look at the Scripture above. Did Jesus not make every effort to confirm and prove in more than one way that He had arisen from the dead? He showed them His hands and His feet, upon which were still visible the nail prints. He asked them to touch Him, to confirm that He wasn't a spirit or ghost. He ate in front of them. They recognized Him and were glad (John 20:20).

Christ rose from the dead physically. He took up the same body that had been nailed to the cross, but it was evidently different—glorified. The resurrection of Jesus is the receipt that proves our debt of sin is paid in full.

Christ rose from the dead and like the Old Testament believer Job, we believe that we will be raised up in these bodies to see our redeemer with our own eyes (Job 19:25-27).

Christ is Risen!

Hallelujah!

Wednesday, April 18, 2018

1 Corinthians 15:17, 20 — *And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins . . . But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

SATANIC LIE: IT DOESN'T MATTER IF YOU BELIEVE THAT CHRIST ROSE FROM THE DEAD

Let's face it, we live in a spiritually lukewarm society. There are many who suggest such foolishness as, "It doesn't matter what you believe, so long as you believe something."

Have you ever heard someone say that it doesn't really matter if you believe that Jesus rose from the dead? There are those who suggest such things.

The Apostle Paul states it plainly in a negative way. If Christ is NOT risen ... then your faith is futile, empty ... because you place all your hopes in a dead man who can neither help or save you. If Christ is NOT risen ... then you are still in your sins and you must stand before the judge and be condemned for your sins.

BUT . . . Christ is risen from the dead, the first of many to rise. Thus, the previous negatives are nullified ... since Christ IS Risen, your faith is not empty. Since Christ IS Risen, your sins are forgiven.

Does that sound to you like it doesn't matter? On the contrary, it matters a great deal. Jesus was raised again so that we could be declared "not guilty" of sin (cf. Romans 4:25).

Christ is Risen!

Hallelujah!

Thursday, April 19, 2018

Matthew 28:11-15 — *Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure."*

SATANIC LIE: JESUS' DISCIPLES WERE GRAVE ROBBERS

I'd like to have seen the looks on the faces of the chief priests when the Roman guard told them what had happened at the tomb. The guards that they had received from Pilate (Matthew 27:65) and posted at the tomb were standing before them with helmets in hand explaining how someone, bright as lightning, had opened the tomb before them.

I'd like to have seen the look in the eye of those Roman Soldiers. We don't know if they had seen action or not, but they had surely never seen anything like the Angel of the Lord. Which did they fear more? Seeing the Angel again or the possible consequences of their failed guard?

Whatever their initial response, the resurrection of Jesus was for the chief priests and elders something that needed damage control. They paid off the witnesses. They gave them the story they were to repeat. They promised to satisfy the governor if he heard.

Have you ever heard someone suggest that the disciples were grave robbers and that Jesus never rose? There are those who say such things to this very day.

There is nothing you can say to change their minds. Unbelief is a spiritual blindness. Those who do not believe will simply ignore the facts. Many people saw Jesus alive in different places under different circumstances. Their accounts have been recorded for us in the God-breathed scriptures, which do not change. In the end, only the Spirit of God can change their hearts and minds through His word.

Jesus' disciples were not capable grave robbers. They ran when Jesus was arrested. They hid behind locked doors, terrified of what might