

# 2016 Lenten Devotional



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# Lenten Devotional

These devotions have been prepared by your fellow students for use during Lententide 2016. The Collects of the Day, given below, are to be prayed each day, together with the devotion and selected hymn stanza(s).

## **Ash Wednesday**

Almighty and everlasting God, You despise nothing You have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and contrite hearts that lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness we may receive from You full pardon and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

## **First Sunday in Lent (Invocavit)**

O Lord God, You led Your ancient people through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. Guide the people of Your Church that following our Savior we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

## **Second Sunday in Lent (Reminiscere)**

O God You see that of ourselves we have no strength. By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

## **Third Sunday in Lent (Oculi)**

O God whose glory it is always to have mercy, be gracious to all who have gone astray from Your ways and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of Your Word; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

### **Fourth Sunday in Lent (Laetare)**

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

### **Fifth Sunday in Lent (Judica)**

Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

### **Palm/Passion Sunday (Palmarum)**

Almighty and everlasting God, You sent Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon Himself our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of His great humility and patience and be made partakers of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.



February 10

Joel 2:12–19

The call to repentance extends to all, from the old and elderly to children and nursing infants. And it extends to all no matter their circumstances, even to the bride and bridegroom at the height of their joy (Joel 2:16), even to pastors in the church, who stand between the congregation and the altar of God, whose duty it is to pray for God's people (v. 17). This call to repentance is not a call to outward displays of piety, not to a formulaic rending of the garments or rubbing of ash on the forehead. It is a call to rend our hearts, to weep and mourn over our sin. The words of our text do not allow for a stoic eschewal of anything that may remind us of Spenser's pious emotionalism. The rending of the heart is a painful thing. It does involve the emotions. And it is good, right, and salutary that we Christians should time and again search our heart and memory, measure our thoughts and desires and deeds against the handwriting of requirements that stands against us in the Law, and contemplate how wretched and selfish and vain we are, even we on whom God has had such great mercy, even we who claim the name of Christ as our own. It is, in fact, in seeing how utterly unworthy we are that we can see our God aright, that he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. It's not too impressive a god who merely loves the good, only loves his friends. But our God loved his enemies, became one with us, taking on our flesh, and spilling his blood for our sake. So we begin this Lent by rending our hearts to such a God. Kyrie eleison!

Christian Preus

**Prayer:** Ash Wednesday

**Hymn:** "Jesus Refuge of the Weary" (*LSB* 423:2)

Do we pass that cross unheeding,  
Breathing no repentant vow?  
Though we see Thee wounded, bleeding,  
See Thy thorn encircled brow?  
Yet Thy sinless death hath brought us  
Life eternal, peace, and rest.  
Only what Thy grace hath taught us  
Calms the sinner's stormy breast!

February 11

1 John 1:5–9

In John 8:12 Jesus says, “I am the light of the world.” We in the 21st century might hear this and say, “Oh, that’s nice.” If we’re driving across the state at night, we have headlights that guide our way. When we’re camping, we carry a flashlight to guide us in the dark woods. If we wake up in the middle of the night and hear our baby crying, we flick a switch—*voilà*—light. But if a fuse blows in our car, our battery dies or there is a power outage, things change, the light is not as easy to come by.

In first-century Palestine, they knew exactly what Jesus was talking about. Light in the darkness was not easy to come by. Travel by night was dangerous; there were no portable electric flash lights to guide your way. If people woke up in the middle of the night and needed light, they might have a small oil lamp that hopefully hadn’t burned out. Having light was a matter of life or death; to see in the darkness, we need light.

Our scripture is talking about bringing light to the darkness. Darkness in the Scriptures often refers to unbelief. Is this text telling us that we need to be as perfect as Jesus? Do we have to have no sin or be perfect? No, this scripture is telling us we need to have faith in that light, faith in Jesus. We don’t need to look around for batteries or fix your own car to get light. We don’t need to find a flint and try to start a burned out oil lamp. The light comes to us. Jesus calls us by the Gospel. When you are baptized and you have faith that you are only saved because of your faith in Jesus, you are walking in the light. Jesus knows that there will be times that you walk as if you are in the dark and stumble, but as we read in verse 9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Mark Hartsough

**Prayer:** Ash Wednesday

**Hymn:** O Christ, Our True and Only Light (*LSB* 839:1)

O Christ, our true and only light,  
Enlighten those who sit in night;  
Let those afar now hear Your voice  
And in your fold with us rejoice.

It's a common practice among Christians today to give something up for Lent as a sort of fast. Fasting can be a very holy and right practice, as Luther admonishes in his treatise *The Freedom of a Christian*. In today's scripture lesson, it appears Jesus is a Lutheran as well, encouraging us not to lay up for ourselves treasures on earth. Jesus instead directs us to lay up for ourselves heavenly treasures, "for," Jesus says, "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." I would encourage you to take some time and reflect on the treasures you have accumulated in this life, even as seminarians. What sort of treasures do you have? You might have a vehicle, a phone, entertainment systems, living arrangements, books, clothes, food, and your list can go on and on. We value our earthly treasures so much we even go to great lengths to insure our treasures so as not to lose them for very long. So when you hear Jesus' words, ask yourself where your heart truly is.

The crazy thing is, when we do recognize that our hearts are in the wrong place and we decide to take up fasting, we do it for forty days (plus Sundays), all the while complaining, whining, and bragging about how terrible it is to give up something so mundane as candies. Then once Easter hits, we forget about the fast and return to gorging ourselves. Dear Christian, repent of your wickedness! For your Father in heaven has prepared the greatest treasure for you which is Jesus Christ in the flesh. This Lamb of God came to earth not to indulge his lusts but to be laden with the sins of the earth, your sins. He did not fast in false piety for forty days; rather, he spent his entire earthly life journeying patiently, though weak and faint, to slaughter without complaint. While we moan and groan when the Wifi is too slow, this Lamb bears stripes, wounds, and lies and merely replies "all this I gladly suffer." Jesus, the Lamb of God, the only valuable treasure there is, delivers himself to you, dear Christian, in his almighty and glorious word which occupies humble pages of paper for you to read. He attaches this word to plain and ordinary water, wine, and bread so that our sinful flesh may be declared sinful no more. So as we spend the remainder of Lent (and of our lives) in repentance, let our hearts ever rejoice in the only treasure we need: The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, Jesus Christ.

John Koopman

**Prayer:** Ash Wednesday

**Hymn:** "A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth" (*LSB* 438:1)

A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth,  
The guilt of sinners bearing  
And laden with the sins of earth,  
None else the burden sharing;

Goes patient on, grows weak and faint,  
To slaughter led with out complaint,  
That spotless life to offer,  
He bears the stripes, the wounds, the lies,  
The mockery and yet replies,

I'm drowning in the waters, sinking in the mire that takes my life. My enemy is too mighty and my body too weak. The flood of affliction has turned my cry into a sigh as I wait for God to act, as I gasp for deliverance. My trouble is great and insufferable.... O God, where are You? There is no foothold. I drop to my knees and recall my wrongs, all of them known to You. There's evil within and evil without. Your wrath is relentless and Your absence ferocious. I am alone. Is there mercy? Is there grace? Is there love?

A light dances across the waters, illuminating the mire. I squint at its brightness and feel a semblance of heat. God, is that You? Can it possibly be? Are You hiding? "Yes." You brought me to my knees in affliction, and in trouble evoked my cry! This flood isn't disfavor. You're establishing my trust in You—the One immeasurably benevolent in the death of Christ Jesus. Surely my confidence would lead to blasphemy; surely my presumption would lead to damnation. The sinner absent affliction becomes self-assured. And now my sighing reveals Your work in me. My protest for mercy is belief in mercy.... Your grace lies beneath this mire.... Your love is always at work. I neglect Your salvation, yet this affliction restores my appreciation. Draw near to my soul, O God; redeem me! Your cross is ever-present, declaring that You are for me. You intervene according to Your wisdom and establish my trust in You.

Gregory Bauch

**Prayer:** Ash Wednesday

**Hymn:** "Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me" (*LSB* 756:2, 3)

When life's troubles rise to meet me, Though their weight May be great, They will not defeat me. God, my loving Savior, sends them; He who knows All my woes Knows how best to end them.	God gives me my days of gladness, And I will Trust Him still When He sends me sadness. God is good; His love attends me Day by day, Come what may, Guides me and defends me.
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February 14

Matthew 4:1–11

It is an amazing realization to know that our Lord, immediately after His baptism, is confronted with the full force of Satan's tempting power. With each of the three temptations, our Lord is faced with the things that cause the rest of us to stumble and fall time and again. He is met with the selfish desire to put His needs first in being told to turn stones into bread. He is met with a test of His faith in the admonition of Satan to throw Himself down and allow His angels to care for Him. Finally, He is tempted to worship a false god instead of the true God and it is in this temptation that our Lord can take no more of Satan's games for in the temptation to break the First Commandment, He commands Satan to leave.

In our lives we encounter these same temptations each and every day. We have constant pressure to put ourselves first. We are told that we should not deny our base passions of food, drink, sex, material goods. Our faith is tested through a society that tells us to keep our faith private and tolerate the murdering of children and the perversion of God's institution of marriage. We are always tempted to look to another god, whether money, whether leaders, whether ourselves, for all good things and for protection in times of trouble. And unlike our Lord who survived Satan's personal, in-your-face temptations and attacks, we fail time and again.

As we begin our Lenten journey to the foot of the cross of Christ, let us remember just what it is that our Lord has done and just why it was necessary for Him to do these things. Let us give thanks for His victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil. Let us remember that He suffered temptation that we could not possibly fathom; that Satan used everything he had to get our Lord to fall and yet He won the victory as we are reminded when we sing,

Brandon Koble

**Prayer:** Lent 1

**Hymn:** "O Lord, throughout These Forty Days: (*LSB* 418:1, 3, 4)

O Lord, throughout these forty days	You strove with Satan, and You won;
You prayed and kept the fast;	Your faithfulness endured;
Inspire repentance for our sin,	Lend us Your nerve, Your skill and trust
And free us from our past.	In God's eternal Word.

Be with us through this season, Lord,  
And all our earthly days,  
That when the final Easter dawns,  
We join in heaven's praise.

February 15

Genesis 22:1–14

This account of Abraham and Isaac provides one of the most disturbing images of the Old Testament. A father leads his only beloved son up a mountain, ties him up, and lays him upon wood on an altar in order to sacrifice him. As the image plays out in our minds, we ask ourselves, “How could any father do such violence to his own son?” And sympathizing with Isaac we ask, “What has this boy done to deserve this?”

We don’t want anyone to be sacrificed. We want to live and let live. We want a peaceful resolution with no bloodshed. What we really want is to deny the reality of sin and its consequences. Just like Adam and all of his offspring, Abraham and Isaac were sinners. The wages of sin is death. As difficult as it is to accept, this young boy, Isaac, deserved to die a bloody death for his sin. And not only Isaac—every one of us too. The altar of sacrifice serves as a reminder that we can’t ignore the ultimate consequence of sin.

In his mercy, God spared Isaac’s life. We hear of the ram caught in the thicket, and we breathe a sigh of relief. How quickly we put away the horror of sin’s consequence, thinking, “Well, at least it was only a ram that had to die!” But the death of a ram in Isaac’s place isn’t enough to cover Abraham’s sins, Isaac’s sins, or anyone else’s sins. This sacrifice was but one in a long list of sacrifices that pointed to an even greater sacrifice - a Substitute whose death is sufficient to cover all sins.

God provided this substitute on the mountain of Calvary by sending his only begotten, beloved Son, Jesus. There he was bound to the wood of a cross as a final sacrifice on our behalf. Again we ask, “What has this boy done to deserve this?” Answer: Nothing. “How could the Father do such violence to his own Son?” Answer: Because God loves you more than you can possibly imagine. By the shedding of Jesus’ blood, all of your sins have been forgiven. God has raised his Son from the dead, and by his resurrection, you can be sure that your death is conquered too. Jesus is your substitute. He has taken your death, and in him, you have eternal life.

Joel Oschwald

**Prayer:** Lent 1

**Hymn:** “Not All the Blood of Beasts” (*LSB* 431:1, 2)

Not all the blood of beasts  
On Jewish altars slain  
Could give the guilty conscience peace  
Or wash away the stain.

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

Being a Christian is not always a pleasant and easy task. Scripture reveals that you will be “treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything” (6:8b–10 ESV).

This was certainly true during the time of the apostles and disciples and is just as applicable today. The apostle Paul was frequently accused of being “crazy” during his mission travels throughout the Roman Empire. Those who heard him speak witnessed firsthand his commitment to the gospel of Jesus. They were amazed at his willingness to remove himself from earthly pleasures and thus believed him to be “crazy.” Scripture reveals to us that while Paul was defending himself in the sight of King Agrippa, Festus, a Roman governor, had this to say, “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind” (Acts 26:24).

This day our world is filled with those who believe that you too are “out of your mind and crazy” because you dedicate your life to Christ and the mission of His gospel. As a servant of God, you have dedicated yourself to the very purpose for which Christ was conceived and born. With great endurance, in troubling times, hardships, and distresses; you proclaim Christ crucified with understanding, patience and kindness. You have been anointed in baptism with the Holy Spirit and through Him you are sincere in truthful speech as you travel about proclaiming the forgiveness of sins that have been purchased for you with the precious blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Oh, what a blessings it is to be a Christians, those who is crazy and out of their mind!

Bradley Ferch

**Prayer:** Lent 1

**Hymn:** “On My Heart Imprint Your Image” (*LSB* 422)

On my heart imprint Your image,  
 Blessèd Jesus, King of grace,  
 That life’s riches, cares, and pleasures  
 Never may Your work erase;  
 Let the clear inscription be:  
 Jesus, crucified for me,  
 Is my life, my hope’s foundation,  
 And my glory and salvation!

See here dear friends how our God mightily guards and defends us. He has sent forth His eternal Word, the mighty rock and fortress of His people to guard and protect them. With our Lord Jesus Christ at our side, neither pestilence nor famine, war nor any terror may dismay us. For Jesus Christ is our refuge, and He has promised never to leave nor forsake those who call upon Him in trouble. Therefore, look carefully to the example of the Psalmist. The devil who is the enemy of all Christians shoots his fiery darts, but the Psalmist says, “What of that? In holy Baptism I have been given the shield of faith, and the righteousness of Christ makes me invulnerable to such feeble attacks.” The Psalmist, puts all of his trust not in His works, but simply in goodness of God. It is God who will guard and protect the psalmist. It is God who has placed His love upon him. And it is God who will satisfy him will long life.

I would be amiss, if I failed to point out that devil tries to use the words of this very Psalm against our Lord in the wilderness. The devil would twist Holy Scripture and turn Christ into a theologian of glory. He would say, “Do not go to the cross, rather take now what your God has promised you, is it not written, “He shall give His angels charge concerning you, to keep you in all Your ways. In their hands they will bear you up lest you dash Your foot against a stone.” See here the devil’s insolence. He would quote the Word of God to the Word of God. Our Lord however will have none of it and simply replies, “It is written, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” Indeed, one simple word from our Lord disarms the devil of all his might. Therefore, we should follow our Lord’s example, for He defeats the devil not as omnipotent God, but as a Christian who trusts in the goodness of His heavenly Father. Christ uses God’s Word to win the day, for a theologian of the cross will always hold the battle field against the devil and all theologians of glory. Theologians of glory always seek their own good, as Adam did in the Garden, but a theologian of the cross trusts in God to rescue from all terrors that come by night and arrows that fly by day. Thus it is that our Lord does what Adam did not, Christ says, “I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust.” So it is that our Mighty Savior crushes the devil’s head by going to the cross. He tramples sin and the powers hell under His pierced feet, and pleased with His sacrifice God raises our Lord to life again on the third day, as it is written, “Because He has set His love on Me, therefore I will deliver Him; I will set Him on high because He has known My name. May God in His mercy grant us such faith to steadfastly look to Him in times of trouble, both this Lenten season and all our earthly lives. In Jesus name + Amen

Winston Grieser

**Prayer:** Lent 1

**Hymn:** “Rise to Arms with Prayer Employ You” (LSB 668)

February 18

Exodus 24:12–18

God is a devouring fire! This does not sound very loving does it? The imagery of mountain, cloud, glory, and fire is terrifying. It terrified the Israelites and rightfully so since they were a sinful and rebellious people. This imagery is certainly not the popular way of depicting God today. Sinners do not like thinking of God as a devouring fire because that means God is angry with us and our sinful lives. We would prefer to believe God blesses us in our sin because, after all, God is love, right? As fallen human beings we have even distorted the meaning of the word love, but God is love precisely because He consumes sin and evil. God would not be a good and loving God if He did not consume sin. He would be a wicked god! We see the manifestation of God's great love for us on the cross where He consumed the greatest sinner of all time and all sin with Him. On the cross, Jesus bore every sin of thought, word, and deed. Yes, every single sin! He became sin for us and took our place under God's consuming wrath. When God's Law came around with all of its thunders, terrors, and accusations it found only one sinner, namely God Himself. God is a devouring fire, but we, like Moses and the elders, can come before God because we have been washed and cleansed of our sin in the blood of Christ. *"But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed"* (Isaiah 53:5).

Jens Jenson

**Prayer:** Lent 1

**Hymn:** "A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth" (*LSB* 438:1)

This Lamb is Christ, the soul's great friend,  
The Lamb of God, our Savior,  
Whom God the Father chose to send  
To gain for us His favor.  
"Go forth, My Son," the Father said,  
"And free My children from their dread  
Of guilt and condemnation.  
The wrath and stripes are hard to bear,  
But by Your passion they will share  
The fruit of Your salvation."

“It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” I’m sure we have all, at same point in our lives, felt like Elijah as he speaks these words. Perhaps these words are more grim companions to us than mere ghostly strangers. We know what it’s like to feel the pain of losing a loved one, the heartache of helplessly watching a friend suffer, and the despair of getting “beaten up” by this world time and time again. Although we don’t have armies of soldiers searching to kill us, as Elijah faced in our text from the ruthless Jezebel, we certainly, at the heart of it, face the same foe. Satan torments us, God’s children, with his armies of demons. Though we may feel alone during these times, we are comforted by our Father’s promise given to us in our baptism, a promise that we are His beloved children and we share in His own divine name.

As we somberly make our way through this Lenten season, we are reminded that Christ Himself was no stranger to Satan’s temptations. Christ agonizes in the garden that this cup be taken from Him and He cries out on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” But He, even as He undertakes all of the sins of the world, of you and of me, remains faithful until death, even death on a cross. In His glorious resurrection, Christ Himself assures us that He has conquered sin, death, and the power of Satan. Through our Savior’s atoning sacrifice, we are clothed with His own righteousness. Therefore, when we begin to feel like Elijah, when we beg that God would take us to Himself in Heaven now, when the odds seem to be stacked against us, we are assured through God’s Word and His Sacraments that He is always with us, and that, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Brian Heller

**Prayer:** Lent 1

**Hymn:** “Jesus I Will Ponder Now” (*LSB* 440:5)

Jesus, Lord, my heart renew,  
 Let me bear my crosses,  
 Learning humbleness from you,  
 Peace despite my losses.  
 May I give you love for love!  
 Hear me, O my Savior,  
 That I may in heaven above  
 Sing your praise forever.

February 20

Mathew 12:38–50

The Church is a week and a half into Lent. Purple still adorns our sanctuary. Saturdays are, of course, days of preparation for the Lord's Supper. However, during Lent such preparation is added to an already penitent spirit. Perhaps you've given up chocolate or you've decided to watch less television. Or maybe you've taken on no specific fast, but the spirit of Lent is inescapable. Today's reading from St. Matthew brings to mind again the image of sack cloth and ash. Jonah's preaching inspired a fast in all of Nineveh. When pressed for a sign, Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees that he would only give them the sign of Jonah. Just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish, so too Jesus would spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Unlike the Ninevites, however, this generation would not repent. Even more embarrassing than that, the queen of the south would rise and condemn this generation. Even gentiles were more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees. All of Judea was less than the gentiles in the eyes of Christ.

Because of the spirit of unrepentance, the evil spirits multiply. Lent provides the Christian with a time of reflection. Gazing inwardly at the self will only produce more guilt. It will only multiply those evil spirits. The extra church service in the middle of the week, the extra time spent in prayer and meditation, all these add time to reflect on sin. How the soul aches when the reflected sin is left to sit and fester. This recognition of sin leads the Christian to repentance. How sweet the Gospel is to that broken soul, especially during the time of Lent! The sins are confessed in the heart, and God hears these prayers and forgives. The Christian confesses his sins to his pastor, he confesses with the whole congregation during the divine service and receives forgiveness. Forgiveness is poured out again and again and again. Those who live a life of repentance are called Jesus' brothers and sisters and mother. This repentant heart trusts in God, a strong abode and looks in love to Christ above! This heart is not oppressed by fear, and receives hope from its Dear Lord. The Christian trusts in Christ, the Good Shepherd, who will protect his sheep from the evil one.

On this day, know that the Lord is near. Tomorrow you will hear His Word and, God willing, receive His body and blood. And as you look to the coming Sunday and meditate on St. Matthew's gospel, take comfort in the final stanza of the hymn, knowing that it is through Jesus' saving merit that you can stand strong when temptation and doubt arise.

Jacob Benson

**Prayer:** Lent 1

**Hymn:** Rise, My Soul, to Watch and Pray (LSB 663)

February 21

Mathew 15:21–28

The very first words out of the Canaanite woman's mouth are “ἐλέησόν με, κύριε!” Or, as we're more accustomed to saying, “Lord, have mercy!” She recognized Jesus as the Son of David, the promised Messiah, and she trusts that he has the power to drive out the demon from her daughter. His response, however, is hardly what we would expect. First, he doesn't say anything, then he tells her that he was not sent to her, but to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Our Lord is not as gentle as we would like him to be. He doesn't immediately answer her prayer, but instead prompts and prods her, nudging her closer to the right answer, to a purer faith, as a good teacher does. And she no longer prays, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David, my daughter is harshly possessed by a demon,” but she simplifies her prayer. While her initial prayer is a good, pious, and faithful one on behalf of her daughter, Jesus' prompting moves her to a simpler, more direct prayer: “Lord, help me!” We can certainly understand her frustration, as we ourselves are hardly strangers to unanswered prayers; to anguish, misery, and heartache.

Gone is her assumption that her daughter's affliction is of primary importance, gone is her assumption that she can convince Jesus to do her will, and gone is her assumption that her daughter, and not she herself, is the one in most urgent need of help. He takes her initial plea, and he clarifies and sharpens her faith through questioning and trial. He makes it clear to her and to us that our real problems are not illness, suffering, or pain. Our real problem is sin, and in sin lie the roots of all our afflictions, our anguish, and our heartache.

But with the diagnosis, Jesus also gives a remedy. He speaks of the bread intended for the children of Israel—the bread of the kingdom of heaven. And in our Lenten pilgrimage, we continue to be sustained by those scraps of bread which our Master graciously gives to us: the holy sacrament, which is a foretaste of the heavenly feast to come.

Stefan Gramenz

**Prayer:** Lent 2

**Hymn:** “When in the Hour of Deepest Need” (*LSB* 615:5)

Oh, from our sins, Lord, turn Your face;  
Absolve us through Your boundless grace.  
Be with us in our anguish still;  
Free us at last from ev'ry ill.

February 22

Exodus 33:12–23

Moses has a tough job. He is the mediator between the Most Holy God and the stiff-necked sinful people of Israel. It is unenviable position to say the least. Israel sinned in the eyes of the Lord by worshipping the golden calf. And God was ready to destroy the people of Israel, save Moses. However, Moses being the mediator for the people of Israel comes to God on their behalf. Moses wants to make sure that God remembers his promises that God made to the people of Israel. Had God taken away his presence from the people of Israel? Has Israel lost favor with God? Was His name still with them? The questions that Moses asks in Exodus 33 are questions that might arise in our own lives. Israel sinned in the sight of the Lord straying away from God and worshipping the golden calf. We too can place our trust in the things of this world rather than in God. Perhaps it's the newest up and coming politician who promises safety and prosperity that we place our trust in rather than in our Heavenly Father. If this is so, we need to repent of sin of idolatry just like the Israelites needed to repent.

But that does not mean that the Lord our God has deserted us. As a matter of fact, God became like us that we might be reconciled to Him and made his people once again. This is how His glory was manifested in the world. Jesus Christ, the Father's only begotten Son, went to the cross to die for you that you might be set free from sin and death. Christ the greater mediator has come between us and God to take God's righteous judgment upon himself.

Because Jesus mediates on your behalf, you have been saved. The work that Jesus did for you on the cross is given to you at Baptism. There you received the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit marking you as one redeemed by the blood of Christ. At Baptism you were made into the distinct people of God. God goes with you as He promises. Do no fear, the Lord goes with you and shows you His presence in the Son's blessed Supper where you feast on the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Behold you are God's chosen people. His presence goes with you now and forevermore. Amen.

Jacob Hercamp

**Prayer:** Lent 2

**Hymn:** "Savior When in Dust to Thee" (*LSB* 419:1)

Savior, when in dust to Thee  
Low we bow the adoring knee,  
When, repentant, to the skies  
Scarce we lift our weeping eyes,

Oh, by all Thy pains and woe  
Suffered once for man below,  
Bending from Thy throne on high,  
Hear our solemn litany!

In today's reading, Paul is not reaching out to a group of people who are secure in their sin and have no regard for God and His Word, but instead he is writing to Christians that are living the walk of faith. He encourages us as believers to live a sanctified life, abstaining from the temptations that surround us. One of the biggest temptations that these early Christians in Thessalonica faced was the sin of sexual immorality because of the ritual of fornication that surrounded them in their culture that promoted Cabirus, the city deity who promoted fertility. Likewise, we are surrounded by sexual immorality and other temptations, too, whether it is on the television, websites, or magazine racks. Knowing that we struggle with these temptations to sin, Paul encourages us to continue to live holy lives stating "that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you."

Despite Paul's encouragement there is no way we can control our bodies because they are found constantly pursuing after sinful desires, lusts, and immorality, instead of God and His Word. To put this in more simple terms, we are all sinful human beings. As a result, we each deserve the full vengeance of God upon us like Paul wrote: "the Lord is an avenger in all these things," which ends in eternal damnation. Yet, Paul's words do not end there. He continues on to say, "For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness." In other words, God does not give us what we sinful creatures deserve, instead He calls to each one of us out of this life of sin, death, and damnation into a new life full of forgiveness, life, and salvation, through His Son, Jesus Christ, and His perfect life, death on the cross, and resurrection from the grave. Jesus makes us into sanctified sinner by the waters of Holy Baptism and sustains us in this new sanctified life with His Word and His true body and true blood in the Lord's Supper. And eventually, the Lord will call each of us to Heaven to be with Him forever, where there will be no longer the struggles of sin, corrupt flesh, the Devil, and this world.

Jason E. Gullidge

**Prayer:** Lent 2

**Hymn:** "Awake, O Sleeper, Rise from Death" (*LSB* 697:4)

For us Christ lived, for us He died,  
And conquered in the strife;  
Awake, arise, go forth in faith,  
And Christ shall give you life.

Psalm 25 perfectly characterizes the Christian life. It defies summary and demands deliberate engagement. It is a prayer pleading for God's instruction in the way of righteousness. It is a song of praise, which acknowledges the faithfulness and strength of God. And it is a prayer which pleads for God's intervention to protect us from our adversaries. Above all of these things, it is a prayer for mercy. For God to do what God loves to do. A prayer for the forgiveness of sins, for the putting away of trespasses. More than anything else, we Christians are forgiveness of sins people.

Everything is understood chiefly in light of the sure and certain declaration that in the death and resurrection of Christ, the penalty for the sins of the world has been satisfied, and God has declared this sacrifice acceptable and reconciled the world to Himself—that this forgiveness of sins won by Christ is applied to all who believe this. This is the heart of the Christian life. But just as Psalm 25 is not *only* about the forgiveness of our sins neither is the Christian faith limited to declarations of God's favor. The same Lord who is so good as to redeem us while we were still sinners also instructs us. **He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.** During this season of Lent, let us humble ourselves. Let us remember that we are sinners, and undeserving of the mercy bestowed upon us. Let us repent, and learn from the Lord His way. Let us meditate on the Law of God and recognize it as the good and perfect will of our Savior. But above all of that, let us not lose sight of the proper work of God, our redemption in Christ, who has paid the penalty for all our sins.

Cody Norton

**Prayer:**

**Hymn:** "O Dearest Jesus, What Law Hast Thou Broken: (*LSB* 439: 4, 5)

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.

The sinless Son of God must die in sadness;  
 The sinful child of man may live in gladness;  
 Man forfeited his life and is acquitted;  
 God is committed.

The wicked have made it into David's court, "who speak peace with their neighbors while evil is in their hearts," pretending to be David's faithful allies when they were really trying to kill David and take his power and riches. We have the wicked in our lives and in our world, too. They claim to be righteous and "good people," but they outrageously sin in their lives. They sin to get ahead in life, they sin against us, and they sin against God without a care in the world. Worst of all, they sin against God's Word, and so they try to kill us by destroying our faith in His Word. In this case, the justice of God doesn't comfort us; it scares us. Though we don't sin as badly on the outside, on the inside we are still sinners like the wicked. If God is just, he will punish all sinners. Thus, David prays: "Do not drag me off with the wicked."

We don't trust in how much better we are than the wicked. Instead, like David, we trust in God's mercy, and so we pray: "Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy!" We trust in the "works of the Lord... the work of His hands," to save us, that is, His work of dying on the cross to forgive our sins. God even gives us faith to believe this work by giving us the Holy Spirit through Baptism and through Law and Gospel preaching. The wicked, on the other hand, have no regard or faith for the works of the Lord: they don't care if Christ died for them or not, so they keep on sinning. Without faith, God will repay them for their sin, "For the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23).

God has saved us from our sins, and God will save us from the wicked. God has promised to hear us, so with David we confidently say: "He has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy!" We therefore praise God, saying, "The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped;" and we continue to pray to him, "Oh, save your people and bless your heritage! Be their shepherd and carry them forever!"

Mark Blakemen

**Prayer:** Lent 2

**Hymn:** "Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word" (*LSB* 655:1, 2)

Lord, keep us steadfast in your Word;  
Curb those who by deceit or sword  
Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son  
And bring to naught all He has done.

Lord Jesus Christ, Your pow'r make known,  
For You are Lord of lords alone;  
Defend Your holy Church that we  
May sing Your praise eternally.

It may seem easy to condemn John and James as shortsighted and naïve, poor disciples of Jesus and lustful for worldly glory. What sly trickery they employ that it should be their mother and not themselves who makes the request! Should you or I have been one of the ten, would we not be indignant also? But perhaps this was actually their mother's idea, an ill-conceived idea but one born of maternal concern for her sons, that they would have a secure future with the Son of Man. Truly, they did not know what they were asking! Yet, we cannot condemn them as if they were somehow worse than us; if anything, we are far worse than they because we know how Christ Jesus' kingdom is established and yet our sinful eyes still wander to the riches, cares, and pleasures of this world. Even in the midst of His kingdom, do we not maneuver and scheme for the church office that we seek, perhaps even asking another to nominate us for it, lest our false humility be betrayed? To entertain such ideas and to covet the office of another is to shift our eyes from the Cross and to return to the ways of the world from which our Lord has lifted us. Therefore, we must time and time again flee to our Lord Jesus Christ and plead for His mercy and forgiveness. Therefore, as you proceed on your Lenten journey, fix your eyes to the cross and behold Jesus crucified for you, and there you will find comfort and relief. He is your hope's foundation—your true glory and salvation.

Doug Griebenaw

**Prayer:** Lent 2

**Hymn:** "O Jesus King of Glory" (*TLH* 130:1, 3, 4, 5)

1. O Jesus, King of Glory,  
Both David's Lord and Son!  
Thy realm endures forever,  
In heaven is fixed Thy throne.  
Help that in earth's dominions,  
Throughout from pole to pole,  
Thy reign may spread salvation  
To each benighted soul.

3. Thou art a mighty Monarch,  
As by Thy Word is told,  
Yet carest Thou but little  
For earthly goods or gold;  
On no proud steed Thou ridest,  
Thou wear'st no jeweled crown  
Nor dwell'st in lordly castle,  
But bearest scoff and frown.

4. Yet art Thou decked with beauty,  
With rays of glorious light;  
Thy works proclaim Thy goodness,  
And all Thy ways are right.  
Vouchsafe to shield Thy people  
With Thine almighty arm  
That they may dwell in safety  
From those who mean them harm.

5. Ah, look on me with pity  
Though I am weak and poor;  
Admit me to Thy kingdom  
To dwell there, blest and sure.  
I pray Thee, guide and keep me  
Safe from my bitter foes,  
From sin and death and Satan;  
Free me from all my woes.

February 27

Psalm 103:1–10

The Lord knows all things and sees all things. Does that intimidate you? There is literally nothing you have thought, said, or done that the Lord God has not known. When we are reminded of the depths of our sinfulness...this truth is terrifying. This fact certainly does not cause us to rejoice. However, in the reading for the day the Psalmist rejoices. How can we rejoice when the Lord knows and sees all our sin? We rejoice that the Lord has remembered His promises to us. We rejoice in the Good News that in Christ all our sin has been forgiven and put away. Because of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Lord does not deal with us according to our sins nor repay us according to our iniquities. In your Baptism you were joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus and in the Lord's Supper you are fed the Bread of Life and forgiven your sins. Therefore, when your sins and iniquities stare you in the face and the devil brings an accusation against you, rejoice that in Christ the Lord has remembered His promises and He remembers your sins no more. "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!" In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Tysen Bibb

**Prayer:** Lent 2

**Hymn:** "Jesus Refuge of the Weary" (*LSB* 423:1, 2)

Jesus, Refuge of the weary,  
Blest Redeemer, whom we love,  
Fountain in life's desert dreary,  
Savior from the world above,  
Oh, how oft Thine eyes, offended,  
Gaze upon the sinner's fall!  
Yet, upon the cross extended,  
Thou didst bear the pain of all.

Do we pass that cross unheeding,  
Breathing no repentant vow,  
Though we see Thee wounded, bleeding,  
See Thy thorn-encircled brow?  
Yet Thy sinless death hath brought us  
Life eternal, peace, and rest;  
Only what Thy grace hath taught us  
Calms the sinner's stormy breast.

Why can't some people accept Jesus for who He is? He's the Son of God, born of the Blessed Virgin. He showed signs and healed many. In today's devotional text, we have another wondrous moment of Christ's divinity manifesting itself in His casting out a demon from a man that was mute. At the casting out of the demon that had possessed the man, the man spoke and the people marveled. And yet, some scoffed at it and accused Jesus of casting out the demon by the power of the prince of demons.

They wanted more signs, as if casting out the demon and making a mute man speak wasn't enough. It's never enough for those who remain in and defend their doubt. It's never enough for those who refuse to admit that Almighty God is here, joined Himself to our flesh and took all of our sins upon Himself on that terrible, bloody cross and was indeed raised from the dead on Easter morning. We pray that their hardened hearts would be softened by the Holy Spirit and that all doubt from all people would be cast out of them, just as the demon was casted out in today's reading.

As we continue through this Lenten season and contemplate the cost that it took for Christ to leave His heavenly throne and to become man, to save humanity from their damnation, we listen to the last words of this devotional text as recorded in St. Luke: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" Christ brings eternal blessings. Despite humanity messing up our Heavenly Father's plan for creation in the Fall and all sins added thereto, the only-begotten Son of God became Man to pay our price. The one who had no sin, became sin for us. He has sent His Holy Spirit to enable you to hear the word of God and keep it! It is our fervent prayer that all people, including the doubters and scoffers would receive these eternal blessings from Christ Jesus.

At the end of this Lenten season, we will have that glorious Easter celebration, marking another anniversary of Christ's victory over death and the devil. As we gather around the altar on this Sunday, rejoice in the feast of that victory through which you have the hope of life eternal in heaven above with all the ransomed saints through the merits of Jesus Christ. Amen.

John Zimmerman

**Prayer:** Lent 3

**Hymn:** "Lamb of God, Pure and Holy" (*LSB* 434)

Lamb of God, pure and holy,  
Who on the cross didst suffer,  
Ever patient and lowly,  
Thyself to scorn didst offer.

All sins Thou borest for us,  
Else had despair reigned o'er us:  
Have mercy on us, O Jesus!  
Thy peace be with us, O Jesus!

February 29

Ephesians 5:1–9

Brothers and sisters in Christ, called to be imitators of God as dear children. We have not been called to live as beasts and fulfill the desires of our sinful flesh, but to walk as children of light. Therefore though the world around us would have us join them in coarse jesting, fornication, idolatry and all other types of uncleanness, saying that by doing these things we will be “truly free,” we must recognize these words for what they are. They are empty words as St. Paul says, and their works are evil and stir up the wrath of God. St. Paul warns us here not to be partakers with them, saying, “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore repent, do not walk in the darkness of sin as the sons of disobedience, but walk as children of light. Christ has sent His Holy Spirit to call you by water and Word out of darkness into His wonderful light. You are no longer sons of disobedience, but children of God by Holy Baptism. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God,” to Him be glory, honor, and dominion now and forever. Amen

Reed Shoaff

**Prayer:** Lent 3

**Hymn:** “Rejoice My Heart Be Glad and Sing” (*LSB* 737:1, 4, 5)

Rejoice, my heart, be glad and sing,  
A cheerful trust maintain;  
For God, the Source of everything,  
Thy Portion shall remain.

Did not His love and truth and power  
Watch o’er thy childhood day?  
Has He not oft in threatening hour  
Turned dreaded ills away?

He ever will with patience chide,  
His rod falls gently down,  
And all thy sins He casts aside  
And in the sea doth drown.

## March 1

## Jeremiah 26:1–15

The Word of the Lord provokes reaction. More often than not, God's Word elicits a hostile reaction. Even when Jeremiah received his message from God, God implied that Jeremiah's audience probably would not listen. The Lord explained to Jeremiah that perhaps these people might listen to you and repent from their evil ways, but God knew that Israel's track record was not good.

Not surprisingly, Jeremiah's prophecy was not well received. In fact, it was so potent and offensive to those who heard him, that they were ready to kill him right then and there! However, their angry and passionate desire did not come to fruition because the Lord's hand was upon Jeremiah to protect him.

Fast forward many years and we see that hidden behind Jeremiah's difficult situation is Christ's fulfillment of the prophetic lives of Jeremiah and the other prophets. Jesus Christ, the Word of God in flesh, came to live among His own but His own would not receive Him. He came bearing the message of His Father—a message of repentance and mercy for those who repented. But it was His message that brought His hearers to anger even to the point of killing Him. Unlike Jeremiah, Christ's life was not spared.

Thanks be to God that Christ willing gave up His life for you and for me! For without Christ's death and resurrection, God's Word would be empty, promising mercy and forgiveness that would not have been able to be delivered to us. We would have still been stuck in our sins.

Dear Christian do not run and hide from God's Word this Lenten season. Listen to it and believe what it declares you to be! For its message is two-fold: you are guilty of sin, specific sin, which God's Word makes very clear, repent! But for Christ's sake your sins are forgiven, in a very real and specific way. Through Christ God's mercy is given to you, rejoice!

Dan Sheafer

### **Prayer:** Lent 3

### **Hymn:** "Jesus I Will Ponder Now" (*LSB* 440:4, 5)

Grant that I Your passion view  
With repentant grieving  
Let me not bring shame to You  
By unholy living.  
How could I refuse to shun  
Ev'ry sinful pleasure  
Since for me God's only Son  
Suffered without measure?

If my sins give me alarm  
And my conscience grieve me,  
Let your cross my fear disarm;  
Peace of conscience give me.  
Help me see forgiveness won  
By Your holy passion.  
If for me He slays His Son,  
God must have compassion!

March 2

Psalm 103:11–22

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so great is His mercy toward us.” Within these words are the very heart and soul of the Christian faith. God is merciful to sinners and declares them righteous for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ, who atoned for our sins upon the cross and rose for our justification on the third day. What a great wonder, that “as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” Therefore fear not you who are weary and heavily burdened by your sin and the cares of this world. Flee to the cross of your Lord Jesus Christ and find forgiveness and rest for your weary souls. As Christians we dwell under the shadow of our Lord’s wings—that is the shadow of His holy cross—when we hear God’s Word preached and receive the fruit of His holy passion when we eat and drink His body and blood. It is in these blessed gifts, His Word and Sacraments, that we receive strength for the journey, relief from our burdens, and life everlasting. “For where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.” In Jesus name. Amen.

Winston Grieser

**Prayer:** Lent 3

**Hymn:** “Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me?” (*LSB* 756:4, 5)

Hopeful, cheerful, and undaunted  
Everywhere  
They appear  
Who in Christ are planted.  
Death itself cannot appall them,  
They rejoice  
When the voice  
Of their Lord doth call them.

Death cannot destroy forever;  
From our fears,  
Cares, and tears  
It will us deliver.  
It will close life’s mournful story,  
Make a way  
That we may  
Enter heavenly glory.

March 3

Exodus 20:12–24

When the children of God saw Moses return from the mountain and beheld the Ten Commandments of the Lord, they became afraid. The demands of the Lord seemed too much. How could they keep them? How could they live up to the standards of God who is perfect? How could they earn the approval and love of God? With all these questions swirling through their minds they feared God and asked Moses to act as a mediator between God and them.

The Ten Commandments are just as relative today as they were back in the time of Moses. God still demands that we keep His Law. Because of this the same questions that haunted the Israelites can haunt us today too. We worry that we're not good enough to receive the love of God. We've not done enough good to earn His favor and a spot in heaven. Because of our sinfulness we ought fear the Lord as the Israelites did. However, just as God reminded the Israelites through Moses of His love and mercy, He reminds us of His love for us and the mercy He has promised to show us. We are sinners and on this side of heaven that is not going to change.

Thankfully, God sent Jesus Christ as a man to live the perfect life, die the death we deserve, and be resurrected for all mankind's sake. Now, on account of all Christ has done for us, we are blessed with the promise of salvation. We are saved! Just as Moses acted as a mediator between God and the Israelites, God has given us His only Son Jesus Christ to be our great mediator. On account of Christ's atonement He earned for us, we have a restored relationship with our heavenly Father who now looks upon us as sinless and holy beings. We received the blessings and love of God which we do not deserve. We will live eternally with our wonderful God. It will be glorious and perfect!

Logan Landes

**Prayer:** Lent 3

**Hymn:** "These Are the Holy Ten Commandments" (*LSB* 581:11, 12)

You have this Law to see therein  
That you have not been free from sin  
But also that you clearly see  
How pure toward God life should be.  
Have mercy, Lord!

Our works cannot salvation gain:  
They merit only endless pain.  
Forgive us, Lord! To Christ we flee,  
Who pleads for us endlessly.  
Have mercy, Lord!

March 4

Matthew 15:1–20

Many times, when I read a story about Jesus confronting someone, at least half of me is cheering Him on: “Yeah, Jesus, that’s right. Go get ‘em.” It takes a little more reading and studying to better grasp the exact nature of the individual or group’s position, and more of the Spirit bending me to toward what Jesus is getting at. So when Jesus breaks it down for the pharisees, initially, I really want Jesus to stick it to those hypocrites. Then I try to consider what they are approaching Jesus about and why. Okay, maybe I see their point about the disciples habits, but it is still seems ridiculous. They are experts in the Law and Word of God, they should know better, right?

Sin is dreadfully subtle. How easily I can call out sin in others, but completely miss what is happening within my own being. That is what the pharisees and disciples miss, too. Not only do they not know as they should, it is impossible for them to know better. The Father sends the Son to do just this, to do what is impossible for pharisees, and for us. He comes to reveal what everyone else missed about sin, death, grace, life, the Father, the Spirit, and Messiah. He comes as Messiah to call His people back to Himself. As Lent continues, God grant that us the Spirit and faith to see Jesus as Messiah, and faithfully follow the One who saves from sin and death by graciously laying down His own life.

Chris Troxel

**Prayer:** Lent 3

**Hymn:** “Jesus in Your Dying Woes” (*LSB* 447:1)

Jesus, in your dying woes,  
Even while your lifeblood flows,  
Craving pardon from your foes:  
Hear us, holy Jesus.

March 5

Psalm 31:1–22

David’s words cause us to ask ourselves some serious questions: Where do you turn for refuge? Who leads and guides you? In whom do you trust? Put simply: David here is asking us some first commandment questions (“You shall have no other gods”). Therefore, as we reflect upon the spirit of this season, as you— together with Christ’s church—intensify your prayer and devotion, intensify also your trust.

It’s easy to turn to other places for refuge or for guidance. Most especially, it’s easy to turn in on ourselves for refuge and guidance and as the only one in whom we’ll trust. The devil works hard on God’s people. He wants us to turn in on ourselves; because, when we do, we drown in distress, we waste away from our grief, we wallow in sorrow and our strength fails us as we waste away. But—our times are in God’s hand. Our trust is in Him. When our trust is in Him, our prayer echoes that of Psalm 31 (words repeated in the Compline responsory), “Into your hand I commit my spirit” (v.5), words uttered by our Lord on the cross.

The Lord truly has wondrously shown us His steadfast love to us in Christ— both on the cross and, especially, in the empty tomb. In Christ, we know the love of God. In Christ, we have the blessed assurance of what is to come: Christ will come again. Until that time, we also know that in Christ we are heard. He hears as we call out—and He is our refuge. May our prayer be David’s prayer: “But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my God.’ My times are in your hand” (vss.14–15a).

Lee Hopf

**Prayer:** Lent 3

**Hymn:** “Jesus in Your Dying Woes” (LSB 447:2)

Savior, for our pardon sue  
When our sins your pangs renew,  
For we know not what we do:  
Hear us, holy Jesus.

During this part of his journey that will ultimately lead him to his passion in Jerusalem, Jesus actually moves *away* from Jerusalem (he goes to the area near Bethsaida, on the north side of the Sea of Galilee). But this is during the Passover feast, when many good Jews would be heading *into* Jerusalem to celebrate the sacred meal which pointed to, and even enacted, the key salvific event of Israel's history: God delivering his people from slavery in Egypt. If most people were going *toward* Jerusalem, why did Jesus head in the opposite direction?

I believe the answer is twofold. On the one hand, it was not yet time for him to be glorified in Jerusalem. At the end of this passage, we see that the people who saw his signs understood him to be the long-promised Prophet, and they would have him be inaugurated as king if he would but allow them. But it was not yet his time. He had much left to do in his ministry. And so he delayed going to his ultimate destination.

On the other hand, it seems that, in moving away from Jerusalem and yet celebrating a great feast, Jesus is redefining the Passover. Now that Jesus has come, the pinnacle of God's deliverance is no longer to be located in the exodus. Now that Jesus is revealing himself with signs and wonders, the signs of Moses—the snake-stick, the leprous hand, the plagues—all fade into the background. Now that Jesus is breaking bread with the people of God, all other sacred meals pale in comparison.

Dear friends in Christ, Jesus has come. He is fully in control of his own fate—as shown in his delay in going to Jerusalem—and of our fate, as well. Moreover, he desires good things for us—green grass, feasting, and thanksgiving—and he is fully able to provide. Some of these good things will come along the way—nibbles of the bread of life in the midst of the wilderness—and some of them will not fully be ours until the great eschatological feast, when we meet Jesus and his Father in the New Jerusalem. May the Lord who sustained his people in the wilderness keep us steadfast in the true faith unto life everlasting. Amen.

Micah Bauer

**Prayer:** Lent 4

**Hymn:** “Jesus in Your Dying Woes” (LSB 447: 3)

Oh, may we, who mercy need,  
 Be like you in heart and deed,  
 When with wrong our spirits bleed:  
 Hear us, holy Jesus.

March 7

Isaiah 55:1–7

Lent is a penitential season of the church year, where we are confronted with the reality our sins and the great lengths that Christ went to in order to wash us clean. But even during this somber season we are given moments of spiritual refreshment and joy. The fourth Sunday of Lent is known as “Laetare” Sunday, taken from the first word of the introit meaning “Rejoice.” Here we encounter the love and hope of God in an unexpected turn [one does not expect to come across a soda-shop in the middle of the scorching desert]. Isaiah says:

*“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”*

Like a street vendor eager to sell you his wares, we hear the voice of God beckoning us toward him, except he is not asking you to pay a price, for the price has already been paid. This text from Isaiah 55 is an invitation to the feast and a share in the riches of God’s new creation. And our seat at the table is made possible because Jesus, the Suffering Servant willingly experienced spitting, mocking, whipping, nailing, bleeding, sweating, dying, and rising. Lent is a time of spiritual discipline, fasting if you will. We are broken down and asked to dig deep into our faith as we wrestle with the gravity of the cross. But after fasting comes the feast, and this feasting table has been set by the victorious King Jesus. So keep walking that road to Calvary and let the wounds of Christ have their way with you, but today look toward the feast, when there will only be rejoicing and peace.

Dan Merz

**Prayer:** Lent 4

**Hymn:** “Jesus in Your Dying Woes” (LSB 447:3)

Jesus, pitying the sighs  
Of the thief, who near you dies,  
Promising him paradise:  
Hear us, holy Jesus.

March 8

Galatians 4:21–31

Looking back into Genesis, you might scratch your head wondering why the Father of Isaac, Jacob and the nation of Israel would take to having a child, not with his wife Sarah, to whom he is married, but with her handmaiden, to whom he is not married. We could sit and stare at the red flag for the adultery that took place, but Paul is looking at something bigger. Paul is not focused on the act of adultery, so much as the lineages of the Isaac and Ishmael.

Through Hagar, Ishmael is born out of flesh and without God's blessing. God said that Abraham and Sarah would have many sons, but after years of trying, they had lost hope in God's promise and, without relying on God, took matters into their own hands, and the hands of Hagar. Thus, they tried to fulfill what God had said outside of the bounds of His Promise. Isaac on the other hand, is born out of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah. Yes, God fulfilled His promise and plan of providing an heir to Abraham through the barren Sarah. Thus, Isaac is born with God's blessing surrounding him.

When we are baptized we become children of God, and heirs to His promise; and, as children of promise, Paul says that we are no longer children of Hagar, or a "slave woman." That identity is cast aside, and we are made children of Sarah, or the "free woman." We are brothers and sisters, free in Christ. And, as Christians, we are covered by God's blessing and promise of eternal life with Him through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is not a matter we can take into our own hands. We instead fully rely on God and trust in His word and promise.

Christian Jones

**Prayer:** Lent 4

**Hymn:** "Jesus in Your Dying Woes" (LSB 447:4)

May we in our guilt and shame  
Still your love and mercy claim,  
Calling humbly on your name:  
Hear us, holy Jesus.

March 9

Ezekiel 36:23–28

We are in need of a transplant, a transplant of our heart. In this passage from Ezekiel, Yahweh is telling the Israelites why He is going to “remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” (Ez: 36–26). Yahweh is giving the transplant needed and so much more. The people of Israel had been displaced, most were living in difficult conditions, under the rule of others that were not believers in Yahweh. Through this the Israelites endured a lot, and from the text had begun giving up; “I (Yahweh) will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them.” (Ez: 36:23)

Yahweh’s people were waiting for the Messiah to come. They were waiting to be rescued from the difficulties they were enduring. But that wait was long; some were doubting; some were profaning Yahweh’s name. How much different is this from our lives today? Our lives are not easy, we have struggles with those around us, struggles with the leaders over us, and doubts about it getting any better. We run from God and put our focus and trust in ourselves and in what we can do to make it better. Through this, our hearts become stone.

In Lent we focus on repentance for these and other misdoings of our lives. We see the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as the way our sins are atoned for, knowing that without this sacrifice we would not have salvation. But so often we continue and go about our lives in the same way, profaning God through our words and actions. Through repentance and forgiveness, God transplants your heart of stone with a heart of flesh. God places the Holy Spirit within you. Giving you new life with Jesus Christ. What will you do with your transplant today?

John Stransky

**Prayer:** Lent 4

**Hymn:** “Jesus in Your Dying Woes” (LSB 447:6)

May our hearts to you incline  
And their thoughts your cross entwine.  
Cheer our souls with hope divine:  
Hear us, holy Jesus.

March 10

Isaiah 1:16–19

“Out damned spot, out I say!” These are the words we hear Lady MacBeth cry out in the middle of the night as she relentlessly attempts to wash the imaginary blood off of her hands. She is guilty of murder, along with her husband, and this scene reveals how her guilt is dramatically affecting her. Shakespeare certainly knew how deeply sin and guilt affect us as humans who constantly find ourselves in midst of evil deeds before the eyes of the Lord.

As I read our text for today, which includes harsh demands from God for the people of Israel, I immediately recalled this famous scene from Shakespeare’s MacBeth. As the people of God, we attempt to live godly lives, strive for the kingdom of God, desire for evil to cease, seek the good, and correct oppression. However, we constantly find ourselves falling short of these goals. Research papers do not get completed on time, our family gets neglected, and we fall short of God’s strict demands for us in so many ways. Isaiah’s word to us today causes us too to cry: “Out damned spot, out I say.”

Thanks be to God that he has heard our cry. God washes the blood off of our hands through the precious blood of His Son Jesus Christ. The blood of Jesus has taken away all of our guilt and shame. Our hands are clean. Though our sins had stained us far deeper red Kool-Aid on a white carpet or blood-soaked hands, Jesus has made us as whiter than snow or pure wool. What a wonderful message that is for us, especially during this season of Lent. This season, as we know and ponder the guilt and shame that we placed on the cross of Jesus Christ, we can know that our hands are clean.

Jarod Koenig

**Prayer:** Lent 4

**Hymn:** “Jesus in Your Dying Woes” (LSB 447:7)

Jesus, loving to the end  
Her whose heart your sorrows rend,  
And your dearest human friend:  
Hear us, holy Jesus.

The opening words of John’s gospel account are so familiar to us: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Too often, however, are these words all the more common in our experience: “He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” We hear this sentiment echoed in John 9:29 with the words: “We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” Far too many in our world doubt the Church’s account of Jesus’ origin. Our hard hearts invent all kinds of reasons why Jesus can’t be trusted.

As John’s gospel account goes, people don’t know where Jesus is from, but Jesus tells them where he’s going. Three times he tells them his destination: he will be “lifted up” in an excruciating execution—and on that cross, he will draw all people to himself.

During Lent, we journey together keeping our eyes on that cross at the other end of Holy Week. Our diverse origins lead to a common destination. Wherever you’re from, wherever you’ve been, in and through Christ, we know where we’re going. As Jesus is lifted up on the cross, we’re buried in the waters of baptism. Baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Jesus draws us to himself. At the cross, he takes our sin and gives us his own righteousness. He takes our death and gives us his own life. Now each day, we set out from that cross, for baptismal life finds its origin at the cross and empty tomb to which Lent leads.

Aaron Bueltmann

**Prayer:** Lent 4

**Hymn:** “Jesus in Your Dying Woes” (LSB 447:8)

May we in your sorrows share,  
 For your sake all peril dare,  
 And enjoy your tender care:  
     Hear us, holy Jesus.

I can't love the introduction to the psalm: "A psalm of David when he pretended to be out of his mind, before Abimelech, so that he drove him out and he departed." I certainly remember situations in life that made me crazy! Think of David here: on the run from Saul who is trying to kill him, runs to Gath and the Philistines- the enemies- the ones who used to have Goliath years ago when David was a bit younger? Yeah, those Philistines. For some reason, David believes he'll find refuge there. In Abimelech's presence, David acts crazy to escape.... All this likely happened well before writing the psalm and we see no mention of it in the psalm, nor any praise for acting this way to get away from Abimelech. So what do we see? David praises God for deliverance and invites those with him to do the same. Vs. 3: "Magnify Yahweh with me, and let us exalt his name together!"

How often do we forget to invite others to exalt the name of the God with us? We often may do it on a one-on-one basis with God through prayer, or even sing with others who are already doing it in their own one-on-one relationship near us—but how often do we invite and encourage others to come and exalt the name of the Lord with us? God has done so much good for those who fear him, David writes. Look at the verbs David uses: Yahweh... answered, delivered, heard, saved, encamps with, rescues, delivers, delivers, delivers...protects, redeems! Many are the distresses of the righteous, but Yahweh delivers him out of them all (v. 19).

God meets you in your distress, encamps with you, and delivers you out of the times in life that make you crazy because you are in the Righteous One—Jesus Christ, through your Baptism he has brought you into his fold. He has redeemed and protected you.

Come, magnify Yahweh with me, and let us exalt His name together!

Matt Knauss

**Prayer:** Lent 4

**Hymn:** "Jesus in Your Dying Woes" (LSB 447:0)

May we all your loved ones be,  
 All one holy family,  
 Loving, since your love we see:  
 Hear us, holy Jesus.

Be careful what you say. A pastor once talked about the prospects of speaking in public. He said that every time you open your mouth before an audience, you open yourself up to being misquoted, misunderstood, criticized, ridiculed, marginalized, and ostracized. Once a word has left your mouth, you have very little control over what is done with it.

Jesus knew something about this. In His case, when He opened His mouth, He opened Himself up to be called a liar, a blasphemer, the subject of demon possession (either for spouting false truths or for just talking crazy). He was the victim of attempted murder, and eventually, successfully accomplished murder.

When we experience this kind of response to our speaking, we often chalk it up to communication errors that lead to misunderstanding and confusion. But when Jesus experiences this, there is no misunderstanding. When He speaks to the Jews in John 8, it is quite plain what He is saying and that He is being understood.

When He says that they are not of God, they hear Him loud and clear. When they heard that the faithful will not see death, they are confounded specifically because they understand what He is saying and believe it to wrong. And when He says to them, “Before Abraham was, I am,” they hear exactly what He intended to say—that He is the Great ‘I Am,’ one with Father, begotten before Abraham and before all worlds. This is precisely the teaching that causes them to seek His death.

That pastor said that every time you speak, you open yourself up to negative reactions. However, you also open up opportunities for God to bless, to heal; to extend grace, mercy, life, forgiveness, and salvation. Jesus spoke to the Jews in such a way that led to His death; yet for those who received His words and keep them, they are the very means by which God saves us and keeps us with Him now and forever.

Lord Jesus, thank you for speaking your truth and love to us. Empower your servants to do the same in all situations. Amen.

Brent Satkowiak

**Prayer:** Lent 5

**Hymn:** “Jesus in Your Dying Woes” (LSB 447:10)

Jesus,whelmed in fears unknown,  
 With our evil left alone,  
 While no light from heaven is shown:  
 Hear us, holy Jesus.

March 14

Numbers 21:4–9

I love to travel. One of my favorite activities with my friends and family is to go on long road trips. Road trips provide great opportunity to grow close as family or friends. But let's be honest, after a while in the car, especially towards the end of a trip, you begin to go stir crazy. You can't wait to get home and eat a home-cooked meal! You begin to lose your temper and you get anxious.

In Numbers 21, the Israelites are moving from Mount Hor near Kadesh Barnea to the Plains of Moab. The Promised Land is so close! They are beginning to see the end of their journey but lose their temper and complain about the provisions that the LORD has given them. They are no longer content. They're tired of the food and wandering through hot, treacherous wilderness. They rebel against the LORD. The Israelites forget where the LORD has brought them and where He will bring them. Sometimes we rebel in the same way. We are no longer content and complain about our circumstances. We forget where to look for our hope. Instead of looking to our Creator and Provider, we look to what cannot sustain us.

But for the first time in Numbers, the Israelites recognize their sin after God sends snakes to bite the people. God saves Israel when they *look* to the serpent lifted upon a pole. Jesus is the culmination of Numbers 21. Instead of looking to what cannot sustain us in this life, God saves us by lifting His Son upon the cross on Calvary. All who *look* upon Jesus lifted on the cross and believe in Him will be saved. So as we walk through this life we look to the Son of Man who was lifted up to save us.

Noah Kegley

**Prayer:** Lent 5

**Hymn:** "Jesus in Your Dying Woes" (LSB 447:11)

When we seem in vain to pray  
And our hope seems far away,  
In the darkness be our stay:  
Hear us, holy Jesus.

March 15

Hebrews 9:11–15

“Could you imagine it? Could you imagine all of the blood, the smells, the sounds. All of the work to offer up a sacrifice to God. Goats and bulls being butchered to atone for the sins of Israel. Since the fall, transgressions required payment. The wages of sin is death, and God provided the means to atone for those sins through the sacrificial system. God provided priests to sacrifice on everyone’s account...over...and over...and over. The author of Hebrews, starting at verse one of chapter nine reminds the readers of all that goes into the sacrificial system; the priests, the tabernacle, the sacrifices themselves. But when the reader gets to verses 11–15 all of that history is shown to be a shadow of what was to be done perfectly, once and for all.

In essence, “That’s how it used to be...but when Christ appeared...” When Christ appeared he came in a perfect tent not made of hands, not even a part of creation. When Christ appeared he entered the Holy Place one time, and he did it for everyone. He didn’t enter with the blood of goats or bulls, but using his own blood. There’s no need for another sacrifice, it is finished, just as we hear from the lips of our Lord as he breathed his last breath upon the cross. The author of Hebrews reminds us, today, that if the blood of goats and bulls was used to purify people, think how much more the blood of Christ (the perfect one without blemish) has done for us. Praise be to God that we need not fear sin and death because Jesus is our mediator so that all who are called, indeed, receive that eternal inheritance because Christ has taken our place and redeemed everyone who trusts in him once for all.”

Merritt Dempski

**Prayer:** Lent 5

**Hymn:** “Jesus in Your Dying Woes” (LSB 447:12)

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

“Hope.” It is a word that is thrown around a lot today. We hear it all the time and use it all the time. In conversations with classmates: “I hope I make it through this semester, hope I finish school.” Talking with brothers in the ministry: “I hope I write all these Lenten sermons.” Thinking of family: “I hope my parents, siblings, and kids are well.” When traveling and that little gas light comes on, and suddenly remember the road sign 30 miles back: “Next gas 60 miles,” and say to ourselves, “I hope I don’t run out of gas.” We constantly use it for our favorite sports teams. And with yesterday’s start of NCAA Basketball March Madness, I am saying, “I hope UNC (University of North Carolina) wins this year!” Yes, *hope* is a word so frequently used in our vocabulary. And what a great word it is!

Hope is a powerful word. It doesn’t consider things possible; Hope expects them. Awaits things to happen; it’s eager for them to come. Today, we hear hope used by the psalmist, and he says this: “Hope in God.” Hope. In. God. The psalmists tell us, not what to put our hope, but whom. And this is what Lent is about: *hope*. Hope in Jesus. So be eager...eagerly awaiting, eagerly expecting. Hope. Because in less than ten days Jesus will do exactly as he promised. “He will be handed over...they will kill him...on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day *he will rise*” (Lk 18:32–3). ***And he does.*** And he promises *he’s coming back again!* So be eager. Eagerly expecting. Eagerly awaiting *his return*. For again we shall praise him. Our God and our salvation. ***Hope in God!***

Shea Pennington

**Prayer:** Lent 5

**Hymn:** “Jesus in Your Dying Woes” (LSB 447:13)

Jesus, in your thirst and pain,  
While you wounds your lifeblood drain,  
Thirsting more our love to gain:  
Hear us, holy Jesus.

March 17

Jonah 3:1–10

This is one of the most amazing accounts in the Old Testament. Many people may agree because Jonah gets swallowed and spit out by a “great fish.” But that was in the previous chapter. This Bible account, to me, is even more extraordinary. Why you ask? Jonah is sent to Nineveh, an “exceedingly great city”. Big deal. However, we should probably add the adjectives—a great, powerful, pagan city. It doesn’t take much imagination to understand why Jonah would have run in the first place.

This time, the second time, the LORD commands Jonah to go, and he does. After walking for three days, he proclaims that the city will be overthrown. This proclamation would certainly not be a popular message. But all it took was Jonah to preach five, simple Hebrew words...”and the people of Nineveh believed God.” Wow! In fact, it gets better than that, the entire city, including the king repents of their sin and turn to God. If only our sermons, conversations, relationships, missions could be as effective as Jonah.

There’s the thing...they can. As Lutherans, we believe that the Holy Spirit is giving us the words to say when we proclaim the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. Not knowing exactly “what to do,” or “what to say,” is not an excuse. Go tell people you know and people you don’t know, no matter how powerful they are in your life, about Jesus Himself. The LORD may not make your first five words as effective. But somehow we know, believe and confess that He is still in control of His Word and His church. And who knows? Maybe your simple conversation about Jesus will lead them to repentance also. A truly Lenten thought indeed.

Chris Jung

**Prayer:** Lent 5

**Hymn:** “Jesus in Your Dying Woes” (LSB 447:14)

Thirst for us in mercy still;  
All your holy work fulfill;  
Satisfy your loving will:  
Hear us, holy Jesus.

Tension mounted day by day as the crowds contemplated whether this Jesus was the Christ, and the Pharisees persisted in their conspicuous plot to arrest Him. Many had gathered in Jerusalem for the great Festival of Booths to remember the time the Israelites lived in temporary wilderness shelters after the Lord delivered them from Egypt. A seven-day water parade began each morning of this celebration; the priests would dip their golden pitchers into the Pool of Siloam and march toward the temple and around the altar. As the shofar sounded through the streets, psalms of thanksgiving filled the air. On the final day of the feast, this water procession occurred seven times, but the songs and trumpet blasts were accompanied by another, far more significant outburst.

The One whom the Pharisees were seeking to arrest stood up and shouted, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink!” The impact of this pronouncement surely stunned the crowds. All those gathered for the celebration were aware that none other than the Lord Himself had provided for the thirsty Israelites so many generations ago. Could Jesus really be the source of life for all who thirst? He continued his public proclamation, “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” Not only would Jesus quench the thirst of those who came to Him, He would soon pour out His Spirit upon the nations. By the continued proclamation of the Gospel, this same Spirit has drawn you to Jesus through the waters of Baptism. You once were thirsty and have been given the gift of the most wonderful drink. Now, filled with this living water, Jesus’ promise during the Feast of Booths is active in your life. You believe in Jesus! How do these rivers of living water flow from your heart today? Who near you is thirsty?

Mark Harris

**Prayer:** Lent 5

**Hymn:** “Jesus in Your Dying Woes” (LSB 447:15)

May we thirst your love to know;  
Lead us in our sin and woe  
Where the healing waters flow:  
Hear us, holy Jesus.

Jesus' journey to the cross is the focus of the Lenten season. During this time we remember what drove Jesus to the cross and finally what it took to remain there. As we consider this we look to the Psalms—the prayer book of the Bible. The prayer book of Jesus. It's not hard to imagine Jesus praying this psalm. The imagery of Jesus struggling and having the people of the world against him is reflected in David's words of his oppression and fear.

Take a minute and imagine Jesus praying the opening verses of this Psalm, "Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me; my enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly." This is what the Lenten journey looked like for Christ—non-stop oppression and attack. Just as it was in Jesus day, it is today. Jesus was oppressed by a sinful world that should not have been that way. We are oppressed by a sinful world that should not be this way. Our interactions with this world are littered with oppressive talk against Christians. We are being oppressed. And yet, our oppression in this present age is nothing to mourn or shy away from. We should persist all the more knowing that we are not promised ease and good things but persecution on behalf of our Lord and Savior. Jesus was persecuted on our behalf and we should do no less than be persecuted on his. Because, no matter how much persecution we face, we too can take comfort in the words of the psalm, "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?"

Justin Kumfer

**Prayer:** Lent 5

**Hymn:** "Jesus in Your Dying Woes" (LSB 447:16)

Jesus, all our ransom paid,  
All your Father's will obeyed;  
By your sufferings perfect made:  
Hear us, holy Jesus.

When the President of the United States visits a city today, there is often a lot of fanfare. Highways and roads shut down, security is increased, and people come from all over for a chance to him in person. When Jesus enters Jerusalem, this is the sense we get. He makes what today we call the “triumphal entry,” that is, He enters like a victorious king. There would have already been an influx of pilgrims in the city for the Passover festival, as many as a million people or more! Add to this the arrival of the heralded Jesus, and it results in a noisy, boisterous, joyful event. The scene depicted from Matthew’s Gospel is one of great fanfare. Jesus enters not only as a king, but also as the promised Messiah, the Savior of the people. He enters on a donkey, just as the prophet Zechariah foretold. People shout, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” They acknowledge that Jesus is the promised one from David’s line, the one who would save God’s people from oppression. They spread their cloaks and branches from trees before Him.

Which is why it is worth our attention that, in quoting the prophecy that Jesus was truly fulfilling, a prophecy that gives us a wonderful depiction of God’s justice and power to save, Matthew mentions only one defining characteristic from Zechariah 9:9—humility. “Your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey.” What does it mean that Jesus comes in humility?

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus spends a lot of time talking about the kingdom of heaven. And, more often than not, we see that God’s kingdom comes and works in unexpected ways. Immediately before this triumphal entry, Jesus spends time teaching His disciples what it means to be great in His kingdom (Matt. 20:25–28). While many of the disciples thought that great honor and power were coming their way in Jesus’ kingdom, Jesus tells them, “But whoever would be great among you must be your servant.” And then Jesus makes a statement fit for a humble King, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Jesus was showing His disciples, and shows us today, that He is our humble King. He came into Jerusalem that day not to be lauded and praised, although those things are certainly appropriate for the Son of God. Jesus came so that, in the ultimate act of humility, He could serve and give His life as a ransom for the entire world. And He died five days later. By His death Jesus forgives all sin, and by His resurrection Jesus displays power over sin and death for our sake. This is truly unexpected. Hosanna to the Son of David.

Joe Polzin

**Prayer:** Collect for Palm/Passion Sunday

**Hymn:** “Jesus in Your Dying Woes” (LSB 447:17)

Save us in our soul’s distress;  
Be our help to cheer and bless

While we grow in holiness:  
Hear us, holy Jesus.

March 21

John 12:1–9

The hour has now come. Jesus is acting precisely according to the Father's timetable. St. John makes it clear: "6 days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany." Six days until crucifixion and a week until Jesus lays dead in the grave. Right now in the story Jesus is close to marking his entry into Jerusalem and beginning the chain of events that will lead to his death. But for now, he comes to a feast held in his honor. That's what you do after all when someone is raised from the dead, you throw a feast! But this feast is all about the Lamb of God being prepared for burial. Mary anoints Jesus with her own jar of perfume, and a very expensive type of perfume at that! One that costs nearly a year of a workers wages!

The thief among them who complains, Judas, does not understand. For as the fragrance of the perfume fills the house, the Lamb that takes away the sins of the World becomes an aroma pleasing to Yahweh. The unblemished sacrifice is now ready to be presented.

For the next six days in the story, creation awaits its redemption by the blood of this Lamb's sacrifice. The captives who are trapped in sin, death and the devil's bondage await the ransom that will set them free. The Church past, present and future cries out: Ride on! Ride on in majesty! In lowly pomp ride on to die!"

But now, this slain Lamb, Jesus Christ, lives and reigns forever, and when he returns to raise all the dead, there will be a feast that rings in Creation anew! Many thanks be to God for this pleasing aroma that pardons all sin and creates you anew in Christ!

Andrew Belt

**Prayer:** Collect for Monday in Holy Week

Almighty God, grant that in the midst of our failures and weaknesses we may be restored through the passion and intercession of Your only-begotten Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Hymn:** "Jesus in Your Dying Woes" (LSB 447:18)

Brighten all our heavenward way  
With an ever holier ray  
Till we pass to perfect day:  
Hear us, holy Jesus.

March 22

Mark 14:15–46

Dr. Seuss in the beloved classic, “Oh the Places You’ll Go,” writes about a dreadful place, an awful place, a dreadfully awful place. This dreaded place is the waiting place, filled with people waiting for a bus to come or a plane to go or a variety of other things people wait for. It is a place that all people eventually get stuck in and unfortunately quite a lot.

The apostles found themselves in an incredibly awful waiting place during that first Holy Week. Imagine the dreadful waiting that happened: Waiting for Jesus to be done praying. Waiting for Jesus to walk away from the band of soldiers Judas led to arrest Him. Waiting for Jesus to beat the blasphemy charges that would certainly lead to death. Waiting for Jesus to be set free by Pilate in the face of a ruckus crowd. Imagine that awfully long amount of time waiting for God to intervene and save Jesus from crucifixion. Oh the awfully dreadful waiting!

When the waiting seemed to be over, Jesus in the grave for three days, Christ raised to glorious life. The dreadful waiting of Holy Week had passed a new waiting begun; the wait for Christ to return in glory. There is a difference in this waiting, isn’t there? Instead of waiting and wondering why God won’t act, you wait with joy because God has acted! He has sent His Son to die and rise for you so that you may be His own.

Ben Riley

**Prayer:** Collect for Tuesday in Holy Week

Almighty and everlasting God, grant us by Your grace so to pass through this holy time of our Lord’s passion that we may obtain the forgiveness of our sins; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Hymn:** “Jesus in Your Dying Woes” (LSB 447:19)

Jesus, all your labor vast,  
All your woe and conflict past,  
Yielding up your soul at last:  
Hear us, holy Jesus.

March 23

Luke 22:39—23:53

Before the glorious and bright beams of our Savior's resurrection on Easter Sunday, a dark and sinister shade colors the days leading up to it. Evil wants to have the final say, and it looks like it is having its way. The disciples are sleeping while Jesus is praying. A close apostle denies His Lord. The King of Kings is mocked, stripped, and beaten. The Holy One is forced to march to His own death. The Messiah's death was no quiet and private affair, rather it was a very public and violent event. Jesus suffered tremendously for us.

Whenever I read through the scenes of Holy Week, I always seem to slow down at one in particular: Jesus praying on the Mount of Olives. To be sure, His death is the definite indication of His fully human nature. But I can never get over the moment when we read about our Lord praying with such intensity that Luke describes His sweat trickling off His body like drops of blood. The Son of Man truly fears what He knows is coming: agonizing death.

In this intimate glimpse we get into Jesus' prayer life we see Him praying in a way that calls back to the prayer He taught earlier on in His public ministry (Matthew 6, Luke 11). Christ is praying to be delivered from the evil He is to face up against, "Father...remove this cup from me" (22:42). But true to perfectly faithful form, He then firmly states that in the end...God's will be done (v. 42). Christ was not delivered from evil. He was delivered into the very hands of evil—Satan, sin, and death—a task only God could fully undergo in order to completely defeat it. Yes, our Savior was delivered to evil in order that you and I would be delivered from it. God's Will be done. Not ours. Praise Him for that.

Whenever the Holy Spirit leads us to pray the words that our Lord taught us, it would do us good to remember that He too asked to be delivered from evil. Our Shepherd felt overwhelming fear encompass Him. He knows exactly what it is like to be in distress. He hears and tends to us in ours. Jesus will not let Satan overcome us, for Christ has triumphed over him. For His is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Sam Machonachy

**Prayer:** Collect for Wednesday in Holy Week

Merciful and everlasting God, You did not spare Your only Son but delivered Him up for us all to bear our sins on the cross. Grant that our hearts may be so fixed with steadfast faith in Him that we fear not the power of sin, death, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Hymn:** "Jesus in Your Dying Woes" (LSB 447:20)

When the death shades round us lower,      Keep us in that trial hour:  
Guard us from the tempter's power,      Hear us, holy Jesus.

March 24

1 Corinthians 11:17–26

This was a famous line from Abraham Lincoln’s speech to his republican colleagues in the Hall of Representatives. This speech and especially this phrase caused a lot of repercussions, but it also awakened people to the reality of a divided nation in which they lived. While it didn’t win him the senate seat, it was said that by standing by this phrase he gained the presidency. It was Lincoln’s stance of finding unity in a common confession that would lead him to become the leader of a free nation.

The St. Louis Cardinal’s longest rival has been the Chicago Cubs. Within my family of devout Cardinals fans we “hesitantly” welcomed a Cubs fan, my sister-in-law, into our family. It wasn’t easy to welcome a fan of our rival team into a Cardinal stronghold, but she had other great qualities, above all, she was a God fearing, baptized, and faith filled woman. As much as my family hates the Cubs, we saw Christ in her, which covered any shortcomings in her choice of sports teams.

While this may be silly there is much truth to it. “A house divided cannot stand” and the church is divided. We have found ourselves divided over preferred traditions, one way or another, and drive this wedge in the family of God. But in and through Christ we are given unity. Paul reminds us that we are brought together through the body of Christ. We are fed at God’s table with the same Jesus as the man or woman next to us. We gain our unity at the cross of Christ, as we see, experience, and taste his work for us.

Dear Lord, direct our gaze from the things that divide us, to our unity in the cross of Christ. Amen.

Steve Roma

**Prayer:** Collect for Holy Thursday

O Lord, in this wondrous Sacrament You have left us a remembrance of Your passion. Grant that we may so receive the sacred mystery of Your body and blood that the fruits of Your redemption may continually be manifest in us; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Hymn:** “Jesus in Your Dying Woes” (LSB 447:21)

May your life and death supply  
Grace to live and grace to die,  
Grace to reach the home on high:  
Hear us, holy Jesus.

March 25

John 18:19–42

It was happening, just the way he said it would. Jesus had lived the perfect life. He had perfectly obeyed the will of his Father. Though tempted in every way he never gave in. He was the spotless lamb, without spot or blemish, and he was being sacrificed. The blood of the lamb was being poured out for the sins of the world. He was being lifted up on the cross, dying just as he told them he would.

But hindsight is 20/20. Even though he had told them this was going to happen, when the shepherd was threatened, the sheep scattered. Peter, one of his chief disciples denied that he knew Jesus. He rejected the name by which the world would be saved! Even though Jesus had told him that he would die in this way, he didn't understand. So our Savior was left alone, ashamed, bloody, and beaten to stand trial and be executed on the cross.

But you and I know the whole story. Not to excuse the disciples (certainly not the outright betrayal of Peter), but we know how the story ends. We have been baptized into the death Christ died on Calvary. We receive the same body and blood that was shed on the cross in the Lord's Supper. We have heard the old old story time and time again as the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name has been proclaimed to us. We know that in Jesus' death on the cross he was making payment for the sins of the whole world, and that by his death we have life. So we call this Friday good, as our Savior is lifted up and glorified as he dies for the sins of the world.

Josh Ulm

**Prayer:** Collect for Good Friday

Almighty God, graciously behold this Your family for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed and delivered into the hands of sinful men to suffer death upon the cross; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Hymn:** "O Darkest Woe" (*LSB* 448:1, 2)

O darkest woe!  
Ye tears, forth flow!  
Has earth so sad a wonder?  
God the Father's only Son  
Now is buried yonder.

O sorrow dread!  
God's Son is dead!  
But by His expiation  
Of our guilt upon the cross  
Gained for us salvation.

David seems to have two different feelings in this psalm - frustration and trust. What can he do? It seems that God has forsaken him, he's just a worm, bulls and dogs encompass him, he is poured out like water. And in the midst of this he says: "Yet you are holy." He gives his praise to God in the great congregation. He foretells that everyone will remember and turn to the LORD.

How many times do we feel just like David? We are confronted with hardship and it seems like God has abandoned us, His church and His promises. How many times do we just want to yell out to God for His provision and providence? Yet at the same time, we know that we have rely on God for everything in our lives.

That duality describes the kind of God that we have. We voice our complaint and God can take it. We can have different feelings about God, frustrated that He doesn't work faster and at the same time trust in His promises. As humans we are so fickle. Yet it is God who changes not. "You who fear the LORD praise Him!" Because He has done it. Jesus cried out "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" so that we can receive the fullness and richness of God's love - our eternal salvation and God's continued openness to love His people - even when we are frustrated, even when we don't trust as fully as we know we ought. It's His nature to love us. It has become our nature to know both good and evil. So today, when Jesus is deep in the grave and our Christian confidence can seem shaken - we remain confident of God's promise in tomorrow's resurrection.

Chris Jung

**Prayer:** Collect for Holy Saturday

O God, Creator of heaven and earth, grant that as the crucified body of Your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with Him the coming of the third day, and rise with Him to newness of life, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Hymn:** "O Darkest Woe" (*LSB* 448:5, 7)

O Ground of faith,  
Laid low in death.  
Sweet lips, now silent sleeping!  
Surely all that live must mourn  
Here with bitter weeping.

O Jesus blest,  
My Help and Rest  
With tears I now entreat Thee:  
Make me love Thee to the last,  
Till in heaven I greet Thee!



