

# Words of Life

## 2017 Lenten Devotional



**Grace Lutheran Church**  
205 S Garner St, State College, PA 16801  
[www.glcpa.org](http://www.glcpa.org)

## Lenten/Easter Special Events and Services

Tuesday, February 28 - **Shrove Tuesday** Meal, 6:00 PM

Wednesday, March 1 - **Ash Wednesday** services, 12:15 PM and 7:30 PM

(communion and imposition of ashes at both services)

Wednesday, March 1—Bible Study Theme-Faith, 11:00 AM & 6:15 PM

Wednesday, March 8—Bible Study Theme-Law, 11:00 AM & 6:15 PM

Wednesday, March 15—Bible Study Theme-Gospel, 11:00 AM & 6:15 PM

Wednesday, March 22—Bible Study Theme-Grace, 11:00 AM & 6:15 PM

Wednesday, March 29—Bible Study Theme-Justification/Salvation, 11:00 AM & 6:15 PM

Wednesday, April 5—Bible Study Theme-Church, 11:00 AM & 6:15 PM

Sunday, April 9 - **Palm Sunday**, 8:00, 9:00 and 10:30 AM services

6:00 PM Contemporary Worship

Wednesday, April 12 - **Holy Wednesday Program**, *Faith Proclaimed in Song: 500 Years Of Reformation, Renewal and Reconciliation*, 7:30 PM in the Sanctuary

Thursday, April 13, **Maundy Thursday** Worship, 7:30 PM

Friday, April 14, **Good Friday** Worship, 7:30 PM

Sunday, April 16 - **Easter Sunday**

6:30 AM—Sunrise Service

7:30 AM—Easter Breakfast, Harkins Hall

8:00, 9:00 and 10:30 AM—Worship Services

6:00 PM—Contemporary Worship

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**12:15 p.m. Wednesday Luchtime Lenten Worship (until 12:45 p.m.)**

*with weekly celebration of Holy Communion. This short service should fit into a working lunch hour as well as allow our shut-ins the opportunity to attend weekday worship with out nighttime travel.*

**7:30 p.m. Lent Mid-Week Wednesday Evening Worship**

*This mid-week evening service is designed so that all Sunday worshipers will find many similarities, but there will also be some differences as well. Come and make these Wednesday worship opportunities part of your Lenten discipline.*

**MID-WEEK LENTEN SERIES: Six Words of Life from the Reformation**

March 1—Faith

March 8—Law

March 15—Gospel

March 22—Grace

March 29—Justification/Salvation

April 5—Church

## Welcome!

Welcome to the 2017 edition of Grace Lutheran's member-written Lenten devotional. In celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, this year our devotions center on words that were important to Martin Luther as he uncovered the unconditional Gospel of Grace. Specifically, we will be exploring the meaning of six words: **Faith, Law, Gospel, Grace, Justification/Salvation and Church**. Open these pages and see how these words have touched some of our members – members who range in age from 9 to 92. Additionally, we invite you to attend mid-week Lenten services and Bible study where each word will also be explored. (The complete schedule of services/Bible studies is included in this booklet.) It is our hope that you will hear God's voice as you meditate on these words.

In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther made a point of making spirituality accessible to everyone. He translated the Bible into the language of the people. He encouraged Bible study and prayer. He set the words of his hymns to current popular tunes. I think he would be happy to hear what twenty-first century Lutherans have to say about these words.

You may notice as you use this devotional that more pages are devoted to the word Grace than any other word. Is that because the concept of grace has more meaning to people or maybe because we are Grace Lutheran? In the spirit of grace, we decided to include them all. We have also changed the format of the booklet from a word a day to a word a week. In this way, you may read the individual devotions at your own pace. You may also notice that during the last week of Lent, four of the devotions are based on the scriptures particular to that day of Holy Week.

May all of the devotions add to your preparation for Easter as you contemplate the life, death and resurrection of our savior, Jesus Christ. Thank you to every contributor who helped make this devotional a reality.

Lois Lynn, Coordinator, Congregational Care

# Faith

March 1 – March 7, 2017



“Faith: belief that is not based on proof.” When we as Christians talk about our faith we are usually speaking about this type of faith. We believe in God and know he works in our lives even though we cannot prove that God exists. We believe that Jesus rose from the dead to save us from our sins even though we were not there to see it. I am confident in this belief. I can say “I believe in God. I have seen the things he can do. I have experience God's presence in my life.” I was born a believer, raised a believer and cannot remember a time I didn't believe. I am good with this definition of faith.

But there is another definition of faith that I would like to explore. “Faith: confidence or trust in a person or a thing.” Now, this definition is one with which I struggle. I struggle with trusting people and dare I admit it - I struggle with trusting in God. Pastor Lynn has said in more than one Bible study and sermon that worry is wasteful. (Yes, PL, I listen to your sermons.) We should give it up to God and trust in him. Ok - easier said than done for us control freaks, right?

So here's the part where I give you the answer. Tell you how to have more confidence in God. Explain how to have faith in him. Problem is, I do not have an answer. I don't know how to be better at this type of faith. So I am going to use this Lenten season to pray about it and contemplate this definition of faith. I invite you to do the same. If faith is not something you struggle with, I ask you to explore the other life-giving words of Martin Luther (law, gospel, grace, justification/ salvation and church). Maybe you struggle in a different area. I encourage you to use the quiet days of the Lenten season to explore your struggle and pray about it. I have faith that God will hear and help.

Let us pray:

Dear God, help me to discern my struggles in this world. Help me to see my challenges more clearly and give me the courage to make positive change in my life. Help me to trust you more. Help me to have faith - not only belief in you but trust in you as well. Amen.

Rachel Griel

Growing up, my life wasn't *Walton's Mountain*. Chaos and dysfunction were mixed in with love and people trying to do the best with what they were equipped to provide. As my siblings made unhealthy choices to fill voids, my faith kicked in. I didn't have words for it, but I still remember as a young child having an awareness that my life could be better and would be better. That's faith. I had no idea how or what life would look like, but I knew there was someone who would be with me always and would always look out for me, even when life looked dark. I now recognize that figure as God.

True faith, for me, is when the lights go out and hope seems to be hanging on by a thread, you know that God is never leaving your side. When my brother, Ricky, passed away Feb. 20, 2016, at the age of 29, my world went dark. I felt I failed him and immediately went into panic mode over if Ricky was scared in Heaven. Did he understand what was happening? Was he lonely? Was he scared? But through the help of many, especially God, I turned the lights back on and relied on faith. I have complete faith that it didn't matter that church and faith weren't priorities in our house growing up. Ricky was welcomed into Heaven with sheer delight, excitement, love, and open arms. I have total faith that his pain is now gone, his mind is clear, he is surrounded by the purest of love, and even that he is able to help others.

One day we'll have answers, but the answers really won't matter. Faith is not needing to have answers but allows us to make connections that help us feel safe in a world that can at times seem really scary. Faith is knowing that our real life begins after we breathe our last breath on Earth. I know one day I'll be with my brother and maybe I'll get to ask him questions and maybe he'll answer them...or keep me guessing. Either way, we are beloved.

Let us pray:

Dear God, thank you for being the light in dark times and for never leaving my side, even when I try to run in the opposite direction. Thank you for showering me and the world with your love, grace, kindness, and forgiveness. Help us all find protection in our faith and love in your arms. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen!

Jen Pencek

*And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

*1 Corinthians 13:13 NIV*

Most everyone is familiar with this Bible verse. Depending on the version, the beginning changes (these three things abide, remain, stay, etc.) and the end varies from love to charity. But in all versions faith and hope stay the same; they always appear and they always appear in that order. They are often overlooked as we rush through the reading of this verse to get to the important part, "the greatest of these ...". What if, instead of rushing past faith and hope to get to love, we stop and focus on them instead? What if we begin to consider these two as necessary stepping stones, as building blocks on the way to love? What if true, biblical charity/love can only be achieved on a foundational stone of faith?

How do we get faith? I believe faith is a gift from the Holy Spirit. It is a gift that is not just given, it must also be received, and then chosen, over and over again. My experience was to be born into a family of faithful Christians that no doubt played a strong role in my faith. Some people are drawn to search for faith without any church background. Still others are introduced to faith by friends. But others have one or the other of these same experiences, and yet do not go on to become people of faith.

Faith is not gifted to us full grown and mature, and it never remains static. Faith always ebbs or grows and we are responsible for choosing to either stem the ebb or support the flow. Our lives present many opportunities to choose faith, or to choose unbelief. When our faith feels weak, when we are challenged by hardship, we must make the choice to nurture this gift until our faith is once again strong and sure.

My lifelong experience of faith has been not unlike that of the father in Mark 9:24. Jesus questions his faith and *"Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"* NIV

Faith, and lack of faith, are both within us. Life assails us, and only with the help of God, are we enabled to snatch back and hold onto the precious gift of faith.

Let us pray:

Lord God, thank you for the gift of faith, for the privilege of knowing and loving you. Give me the wisdom and strength to ask for your help to sustain this precious gift. Amen.

Alice Griffin

God has provided me with a good life, one with family, friends and a wonderful church family. He satisfies my needs enough for a comfortable life. For all this, I am truly grateful.

How could I not have faith and fully trust that He will continue to take care of and love me? Whether I have enough faith is not something I worry about. It is a part of my life and God is in control.

There have been challenges along my path of life. Some challenges I didn't know how I could get past. I learned God is always there with me. He does not always protect us from troubles, but cares for us in spite of them. We can't underestimate Jesus' power to handle the crises in our lives. There are times I don't understand why things happen the way they do, but I know God helps me through rough times and His way is always best. I tend to be a fix-it now person, so I need to concentrate on what God has given me to do and leave the rest to Him. I don't want to limit what God can do by thinking I alone can handle everything or fail to put my faith in Him.

Faith is believing in God's character, in His promises – that He will do what He says. We have to believe that even though we don't understand – He does.

Faith says we can't measure up to God's standards – we need help. Faith is based on our relationship to God, not on how we perform for Him. It is God's gift to us through baptism. Accept it!

Let us pray:

Our Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your love you so graciously offer us through our baptism. Please be with us every day as we struggle to honor Your love and respond in ways that will glorify Your Name. In Your Son's Name we pray. Amen.

Bonnie Burris

Faith - why do some people have it and never profess doubts, others have doubts, and still others are confirmed atheists?

I started thinking about that after watching a talk show on TV where the guest was an atheist but the host described himself as a "religious person."

After listening to their conversation, I thought about how often I have doubts but I've never heard an atheist say he/she has any. Don't they? Or do they just not express them? The lack of existence of God cannot be proven any easier than the existence of God can be.

What makes me believe and also doubt? The doubt comes from inconsistencies in scripture. When should it be taken literally vs. figuratively? Do I really believe that an epic flood covered the entire earth? No. Do I believe that a virgin gave birth? I'm not sure. Does that matter?

What makes me believe? I'm not sure. Other people, certainly. The peaceful, contentment that I feel in church and the natural world. The details of aspects of Jesus' life and teachings that are recorded. Why would he choose followers among lowly fishermen rather than the powerful or connected? Why would he mention women and children in a time when they had no rights? Why would the men who recorded those details include women (e.g. the first to see Jesus after the resurrection) if it didn't happen that way?

All those things make me believe, even though I do still sometimes have doubts and questions that can't be completely answered.

Let us pray:

Dear God,

Help us to grow in our faith in you and find support and strength in each other as we travel our faith journeys together. Amen

Carla Rossi

## A Lesson in Faith and Trust

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Proverbs 3:5-6*

Many members of Grace know we have a cat named Phantom. Like most cats, she generally calls all the shots in our home. She eats when she wants to, she often refuses to acknowledge visitors, and she NEVER comes when called. She is happy being her own independent self. But last fall, she recognized her need for a higher power and taught me a lesson about trust and faith.

Phantom became ill. She would not eat and became listless and lethargic. That necessitated a visit to the vet and many repeat visits for blood work and procedures. It also caused her to need oral medication daily. Let me tell you, giving a cat a pill is not easy. It's a two man job and often requires repeat maneuvers during the same pill administration. Over time, this procedure has become easier. Phantom, I think, trusts her owners. I think she believes this unpleasantness must be necessary.

As Steve and I get Phantom in her carrier for yet another trip to the vet, she willingly allows it to occur. She rides in the car looking around, appearing almost interested in the scenery. At the vet's office, however, bad things often happen to her. Even so, when it's time for the next vet visit, there she is looking around and being relatively content during the 20 minute ride. She makes the best of a bad situation.

I think Phantom trusts her owners. She knows we have her best interest at heart. She knows that we do not wish her hurt or pain. Perhaps I need to have that kind of trust in God. Like Phantom, I need to see the joy in the moment. I need to know that bad things may happen, but God will get me through it. When necessary, I need to submit to the care and help of others and realize that my independence is not always in my best interest.

Can God teach me things using an old, standoffish cat? I guess he can.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, when life gets hard, help me to trust in you. Thank you for pets and the joy they provide. Amen

Lois Lynn

**Law**  
**March 8 – March 14, 2017**



Why did God want us to have the Ten Commandments? Why those particular commandments?

When I read over the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1-17, I definitely see the theme of Love God and Love Neighbor. The first four commandments are about how to love and respect God and the last six commandments are about how to love and respect other people. So, when Jesus was asked, "which is the greatest commandment in the law?", his answer in Matthew 22:37-40 basically indicates to me that all ten of the commandments are important. It seems that God has been trying to tell us this message of love for a long time by giving us the Ten Commandments and all the prophets. In Matthew 22:40 Jesus said, "On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."

Sometimes rules are seen as things that restrict us and make things "no fun," but I think the Ten Commandments are the opposite of that. I think the Ten Commandments, if followed, are meant to make us happy. If we love God and have no other gods before the Lord our God, then we love God above material goods and money. If material goods and money are our "god" then we are driven to acquire more and more stuff and get more and more money and true happiness and contentment alludes us. With the commandment on the Sabbath, we are encouraged to find serenity in rest and rejuvenation.

Can you imagine what life would be like if we all loved our neighbors as ourselves? How peaceful and happy that would be! If we follow the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment and honor and respect people who try to guide us and teach us such as our parents, it can lead to a better life. With guidance and teaching from those who lived before us, we can make better decisions and maybe avoid that poisonous mushroom. If we kill someone else out of anger or revenge, then we may be subject to revenge in return from their family members, clan, or fellow countrymen. Then it is just a vicious cycle of revenge killings back and forth, which does not bring happiness to anyone. When we spend time coveting what our neighbors have, we are not being happy and content in our own lives.

Of course we may find ourselves falling short of following the Ten Commandments and thankfully we have grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Does that mean we do not need the Ten Commandments anymore? Maybe now instead of seeing the Ten Commandments as being the difference between life and death, we can see them as a "Guide for Better Living." Maybe the challenge is for us to follow them as best we can in order to strive for "thy kingdom come on earth as in heaven."

Let us pray:

Dear Father in Heaven, thank you for the Ten Commandments and thank you for the guidance on how to live well as a society. Please help me to follow your Ten Commandments. Please forgive me when I fall short of loving you and loving my neighbor. I thank you for the love and forgiveness promised through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Susan Buda

## Law: A Sign Post

Since the law has only a shadow the good things to come and not the true form of these realities... Hebrews 10:1

When it was decided by the pastors to center this year's devotional on the words of Luther, I was excited. After all, without Luther, where would our church be? All his words are surely important! Then, I saw some of the selected words. What can be said about law? What is law, besides "do this" and "don't do that"? Law means following the rules. It means being obedient and good. Either you follow the law or you don't follow the law. It allows no compromise. That is often a difficult prescription to follow. It is one where we can easily feel defeated.

Then I read a devotion in the current edition of our church's Word in Season. The author of the devotion, Pastor Caroline Mowchan, emphasized the importance of the Holy Spirit in helping us to understand and follow the law. She used the verse above from Hebrews to frame her devotion. She said that the law is not just to make us feel guilty about all that we have done wrong. It is "to call us to our knees in prayer." Prayer connects us to God, our source of power. That power helps us as we struggle to do the right thing. The Holy Spirit can help us change and grow into the person God wants us to be.

When I think of the law, I often think of traffic laws. I think of stop signs and red lights; yield signs and speed limit signs. I now can envision a special sign when I think of God's law. It is a one way sign directing me to my source of power when I fail – Jesus Christ. It is a sign that connects me to the Holy Spirit and helps me realize that when I fail, I am forgiven, and if I fail again and again, I am still forgiven. I thank God for that and in my thanksgiving I try to change. I try to be the disciple God wants me to be.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, thank you for rules that provide order and guidance to my life, but even more than that thank you for your forgiveness and understanding when I fail. Fill me with the power of the Holy Spirit so that when I fail I can try again to do your will. Amen

Lois Lynn

As Lutherans, we live by laws—laws of faith—many of them set forth by Martin Luther 500 years ago. In his Small Catechism, he teaches us about our faith and how to live it through the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and more. But how do these teachings translate into everyday life? How do we hold God in our hearts each day? For me, those questions were answered one way in an unexpected moment.

One summer day a few years ago, my husband and I were visiting our favorite New England village, Concord, Massachusetts. Surrounded by history and literature, we walked the quaint streets, marveling at both. At one point we found ourselves standing in front of a charming, white clapboard church. On the marquee welcoming visitors were these words by the American statesman Thomas Paine: "*I am a citizen of the world, and my religion is to do good.*" We were both struck by the eloquence and simplicity and meaning in those words—and we walked away, quite moved.

For weeks, we discussed what Paine's words meant—and if they had meaning for us. What if we began thinking of ourselves as not simply citizens of State College and of the United States, but as citizens of the world? Would this global perspective change us? What if we saw our purpose, our most basic purpose, as helping others? Could it be that those words were at the center of Christianity, I wondered.

Turning to the Bible, I found my answer. I remembered I Corinthians and words I had grown up hearing (and that were read at our wedding over 40 years ago): "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love." Suddenly it occurred to me that those words were at the heart of my faith. Could it be that simple? And that difficult?

Sometimes it's difficult to love others. Sometimes it's difficult to forgive. Sometimes it's difficult not to judge. Sometimes it's difficult to live our faith and be a Christian and follow God's laws.

But could I try? Could we try? We could live our faith by feeding the hungry in the poorest parts of the world, by marching for justice for all people, by welcoming immigrants to our communities, by working for peace everywhere. I remembered Jesus' words, ones often shared by our pastors: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of those who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Perhaps my husband and I didn't simply "find ourselves" standing in front of that church. Perhaps God had something to do with it. In fact, I believe He did. He drew us to His word, reminding us of His laws of faith crystallized in one simple quote. And I believe He will continue to guide us—if only we will listen.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, help us remember your words and our laws of faith by sharing your gift of love with others everywhere. And help us to listen—really listen—for your word in unexpected places. Amen.

Polly Dee Keiser McWilliams

When I picked up one of the tip sheets about writing one of these devotionals, one thing stood out to me. With each of the six words that we are examining this Lenten season — Faith, Law, Gospel, Grace, Justification/Salvation, and Church — there was a paragraph defining the word, Bible verses where you could read about the word, and Hymns.

Except for Law — there were/are no hymns about Law. It makes sense since who wants to sing about things we *can't* do. And that's what laws are mostly for — whether you're talking about Ten Commandments, Constitutional, or anything else. Laws are put in place to limit what we can do.

The Ten Commandments are basically a series of “thou shall not(s).” They provide insight into how God would like us to live. But we know — and He knows — that we fall way short of living that life. We are sinners — and as Paul wrote in Romans 7:7, “I would not have known what sin was except through the law.”

God's laws serve as a mirror for us. We can see our flaws, our sinful nature, our brokenness. It's all there for us to stare at and realize that we need to be saved from ourselves.

And once we recognize that, we can turn away from the mirror and look toward the cross — look toward Jesus. He's there on that cross, beaten and dying — for us! He's on that cross to bear our sins and save us.

God's laws may not inspire us to sing a hymn, but they do point us in the direction we need to go. We need both Law and Gospel. As the Lutheran theologian Gerhard Forde wrote, “The Law without the Gospel creates despair. The Gospel without the Law devolves into a saccharin sentimentality, because there is nothing for you to be saved from.”

We should try to live how God wants us to live, but knowing that we won't, we don't have to feel despair because God still loves us — and on that cross and in that empty tomb, He saved us!

Let us pray:

Dear God. While You gave us instructions on how You want us to live through Your commandments, You knew we wouldn't follow them, and that we sin against You every day. But after helping us to recognize our sinful nature, You show us your limitless love in the form of Jesus, our Savior. During this Lenten season, help us to continue to look at ourselves but then look to the cross and the empty tomb and know of your grace so that we can serve You and serve others in Your name. Amen.

David Pencek

## The Law - A Yardstick and a Compass

Too often I believe we as Lutherans tend to relegate "The Law" to junk mail status in the email of life. We so focus on Grace and how our salvation is a done deal that we forget how much "The Law" should impact our lives.

Any doubt of the importance of "The Law" should be immediately dispelled when hearing Jesus' words in Matthew 5: 17-18 *"Do not think that I have come to abolish 'The Law' or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. <sup>18</sup>For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter,\* not one stroke of a letter, will pass from 'The Law' until all is accomplished."*

Jesus then continues on in his discourse in the following verses to raise the standard of the original Ten Commandments to a level none of us can ever hope to attain.

When I included yardstick in my title it was my point to show us "The Law" should ever be before us to measure us and show us of just how far we miss the mark of being the daughter or son God desires us to be. It should also be a constant reminder of just how much we stand in need of a Savior. Any thought of the unimportance of "The Law" only cheapens the Grace God freely bestows on us all.

I also used compass in the title. It was my point to show "The Law" should ever be before us showing what being God's daughter or son means. Our Lutheran Confessions state "The Law" is important in having a purpose to not only "lead us to knowledge of our sins" but also to "have a fixed rule according to which we regulate our whole life".

Using "The Law" as a compass to direct our lives certainly means so much more than just resting on our confidence in our salvation. "The Law" can help us define what truly loving God and our neighbor really means.

God gave the children of Israel the Ten Commandments to show them what being God's children was all about. It should be the same for us.

Lent is an excellent time for us to measure ourselves using this yardstick and committing to be guided by this compass in our life as God's children.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord,

Help me to measure my life daily against the standard of being worthy to be called your child. Orient my direction in a path consistent to your will. Help me to love both you and my neighbor more than myself using Jesus' interpretation of "The Law" as my yardstick. Amen

Don Widener

It is said that the Old Testament describes the God of Law and the New Testament describes the God of Love. But aren't these the same God? Yes.

Are we parents of law or love? Yes. We give our children laws and guidance because we love them. By giving them laws and guidance, we teach them discipline, judgement, and consideration. If we did not love them, we would let them wander the streets without purpose and discipline. Not very loving.

When my children were young, there were rules at home such as when snacks could be eaten and when to go to bed. But when we visited grandparents, all rules were put aside. At one grandparents' house, there was one countertop full of salty snacks: chips, crackers, and nuts. And another countertop full of sweet snacks: candy, cookies, and cake. Meal preparation was done on the kitchen table because that was the only space available! If I was asked by a child or grandma if it's OK to have a snack, I would always say "Yes, we are on vacation". All rules were postponed. Of course, my children (and myself!) ate as much of the snack food as they wanted and any time they wanted. There also was no bedtime and most of the extended family stayed up to 2 AM. You can guess what happened: tired grumpy children with stomachaches. It was good to return home where there was a routine and rules.

God also gives us guidance because he loves us. He gave us the Ten Commandments because he loves us. He does not want us to be in broken relationships with selfishness and hate that are manifested in stealing, killing, adultery, and coveting. He wants better for us. God teaches us love through his law described in the Old Testament which was then taught, explained, and lived by Jesus.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, teach us your law so we can know your love. Amen

Laura Pauley

**Gospel**  
**March 15 – March 21, 2017**



*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that who so ever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:16*

It was such an honor to journey with him as he took those last breaths. There was no gasp or fight, no tear or question why. As I recall, the air slowly flowed from between his lips as he lay quietly looking out the window to the fluffy clouds and blue sky just outside his room. I have no doubt that he was at peace. An even stronger recollection for me were Allen's words just before the silence: "Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so." We had sung that song together several times since we first met. It was a strong and clear reminder that he wasn't alone, that while I sat and listened to his story, the good news was that God in Christ Jesus was with him. He had not been forgotten. As we reflect upon our own journey through life, stories such as this may come to mind for you as well.

In this Lenten season, where pain and suffering, darkness and yes even fear stand center stage, we are reminded that the bright light of the gospel breaks into the darkness that we fear. This is incredibly good news as we are reminded anew that death does not have the last word. Life, eternal life in Christ is the final word. Martin Luther, whose life we remember and celebrate on this 500th anniversary, once wrote that the words of John 3:16 were "the gospel in miniature." We will not be forgotten; we will never be alone. That nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. These words are good news to us who follow another who came, died and rose again for you and me. Thinking about Allen and all the Allens I have been blessed to journey with, my faith is supported, strengthened and renewed. It is because I am reminded of just how much Jesus loves us.

Let us pray:

Precious Lord,

As we make our way through this Lenten time, remind us always that we are never alone. That in the darkness and in the light, you journey with us. May we have the courage and strength to share the gospel, the good news of your love with all whom we meet. In so doing may we remember and share Allen's words: "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Amen

Dennis Snider

## The Light of the Gospel

We Lutherans sometimes think about our “Lenten Journey” as if it were a spiritual pilgrimage filled with solemn disciplines that we must suffer through in order to prepare ourselves for Easter. If we pray more often, read our Bible in earnest, and give up chocolate during Lent we will somehow be better prepared to joyfully celebrate Jesus’s glorious resurrection on Easter. But if these Lenten disciplines become our sole focus, we can get lost in the darkness of our shortcomings. Instead, we need to travel on our Lenten journey enlightened by the Gospel. The light of the Gospel also shines brightly during the solemnity of Lent and guides us on our Lenten journey. Like a moth attracted to a bright light, we should travel through Lent led by the light of the Gospel. Our journey of prayer, meditation and service to others is not a dark journey of Lenten discipline. Instead it is a GPS directed journey - a God’s Plan of Salvation (GPS) journey - that directs and enlightens us no matter how difficult our pathways in life.

Martin Luther, during his early life as a young monk, often felt the intense burden of unworthiness that led him on dark, exhaustive journeys filled with intense struggles to try to get closer to God. Finally, after years of personal struggle, the Gospel words from Romans 3:28 burst through Luther’s darkness “.....For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.....”. The light of the Gospel transformed Martin Luther’s dark early journeys in life into a Gospel enlightened journey of faith that directs us to the foot of the cross and to the brightness of the empty tomb on Easter morning.

Let us pray: May our Lenten journey and our journey in life be GPS directed with the light of God’s Plan of Salvation guiding us along the way. Amen

Bob Voigt

Have you ever done something bad and asked yourself, "Does God still love me?" We have to trust that God WILL love and protect us no matter what we do. In Romans 8:38-39 the Bible says:

*"I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created."* I think this says: nothing can stop us from being with and accepted by Jesus Christ because he will always love you.

Now, I am just 9 years old, and sometimes I ask myself questions like: "Why would God listen to me?" But along with God's everlasting love for us also comes the ability to listen. He doesn't care if you're poor or if you live in a mansion! He cares about what's inside of you and loves whatever that is. I am also the type of person to be afraid of what people think about what I say. But, Jesus isn't like that. You can pour out your heart and soul to Christ, God embraces everything you do and say. God will always love you.

Let us pray:

Dear God, thank you for loving me even when I do wrong, and helping me in everything I do. Amen

Emily Whitney

“The word gospel means ‘good news’ and the gospel message is good news. It is a specific good news – the news that Jesus Christ was crucified, died, and raised for you. Because the gospel is ‘good news,’ it can only be delivered in ways that the audience will hear it as good news. In the history of the church, Christians baptized or converted people by force. During the Civil Rights conflict in America, Christians burned crosses as messages of hate. THIS IS NOT THE GOSPEL.”

From: Crazy Talk: A Not-So-Stuffey Dictionary of Theological Terms by Rolf A. Jacobson, ©2008

When I lived in Texas there was a man who walked the streets dragging a ginormous wooden cross on wheels around town. He carried a megaphone and would scream through it. His message: Humanity needs to repent because Christ's return is near and people are going to burn in the fiery pits of hell after they have received their judgment if they don't.

His nickname was the “Curbside Prophet” and he was particularly notorious for showing up at the large Trunk-or-Treat that took place at the Methodist Church every Halloween. He would yell at small children telling them they were participating in a Pagan practice and would be punished for it.

I desperately wanted to engage him in a theological throw-down and tell him: a) he's a creeper who was scaring children; and b) he's WRONG! That isn't how God works. I never did because I knew I would be stooping to his level and I wouldn't change his mind.

Our world has millions of Curbside Prophets telling us we are not good enough. Not deserving enough. Not hardworking enough. They can be hard to silence. This doesn't change the fact that they are still wrong. THIS IS NOT THE GOSPEL!

In the Gospel of John, we are told that God loved the world so much, that God sent God's only son into our world, to experience everything that we experience as humans; to live, to suffer, to die – so that we are released from all of this and have eternal life.

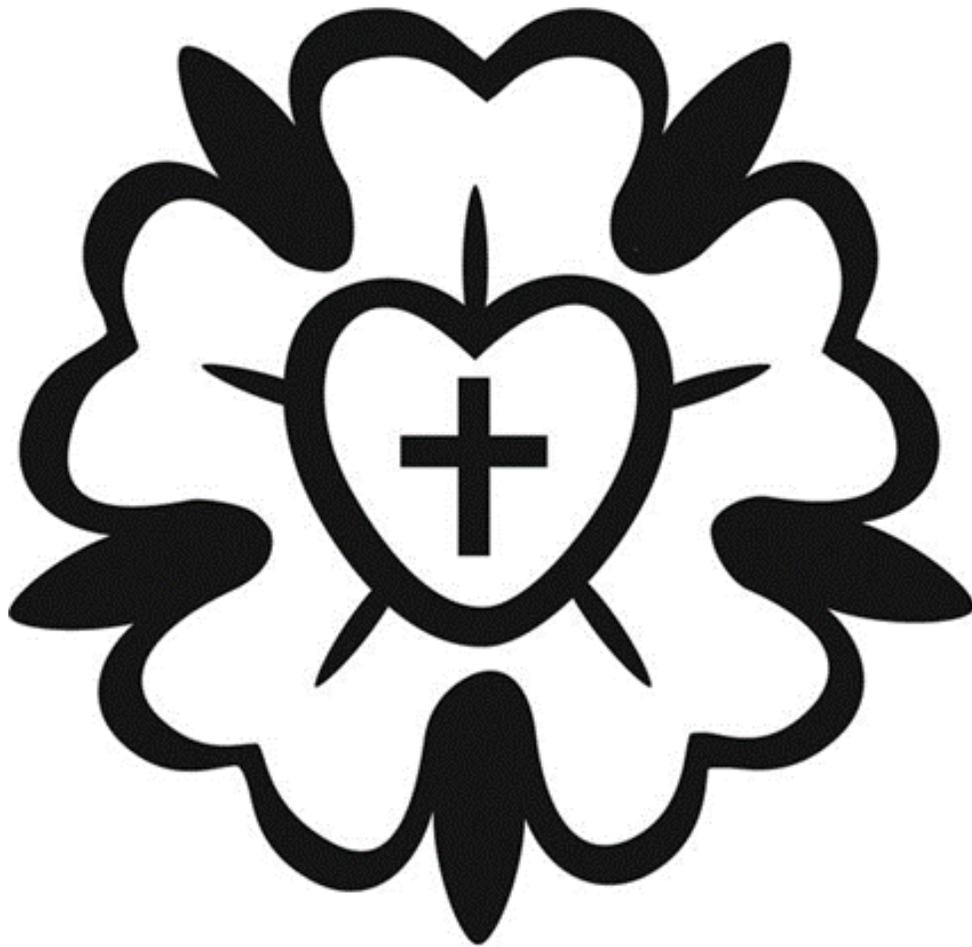
This is amazing news. It isn't a menacing message telling us to shape up or we will be punished. It is a message of love, redemption, salvation, and beauty. THIS IS THE GOSPEL.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, over and over again you show us your love. Through the words of the Gospel we have a constant reminder of our never ending relationship with you. Thank you for inspiring this good news so that we might be reminded that we are loved. We pray all these things through Jesus Christ, our savior and Lord. Amen.

Vicar Ariel

**Grace**  
**March 22 – March 28, 2017**



When I was a teenager, I was hateful to my dad. For reasons that are lost to me now, I found my father irritating, embarrassing, and intolerable. I am ashamed to remember how I acted toward him in those years. I can remember refusing his help in simple household chores, rolling my eyes at his comments or jokes, and even storming out of the car and stomping into the house after we drove home together from his work and my summer job, complaining to my mom about something my dad did or said.

Despite my awful behavior, my dad never missed a beat. Through my rudeness, impatience, and childish behavior, my dad was the same kind, gentle, patient, and generous man. And all these years later, he tells me he really doesn't remember me treating him all that badly. Well, I was there, and I have very clear memories of the disrespectful and hurtful ways I acted. To my dad, it was no big deal.

My dad was able to forgive me long before I even realized how awful I was, and in recent years when I asked for his forgiveness for my behavior, he told me there is nothing to forgive. That is grace.

### **Luke 15:11-24**

*Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup>The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup>A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. <sup>14</sup>When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup>So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. <sup>16</sup>He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup>But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! <sup>18</sup>I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." ' <sup>20</sup>So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup>Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' <sup>22</sup>But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe — the best one — and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup>And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; <sup>24</sup>for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.*

Alicia Anderson

Measure twice cut once. How many times did I hear my dad use that phrase as we would work on a small construction project. Sometimes the reminder came as we measured and before we cut, but more often it came after we made a mistake and needed to redo our work. Redoing sometimes cost us very little in time and materials. Other times it might require more creativity to make the project work, or lots of time and materials. But no matter the “penalty” we would finish the project...maybe with modifications

God's GRACE can be that way for me. Merrily rolling through life, I make countless choices, entertain a myriad of thoughts. Time speeds along and so often I'm oblivious to choices I make that stray from God's boundaries for me. Mismeasurements and consequences draw me back to God's Word to re-examine my thoughts and actions and consider again God's expectations and guidance. But no matter how the situation might not turn out, EVERYTIME I know God's grace is there for me. Did you measure twice and cut once today? Or did you need a do-over? EVERYTIME, EVERYDAY, God's GRACE will see you through.

Let us pray:

Lord, help me today to reflect twice and act once. And when I miscalculate, thank you for your GRACE. Amen.

Dotty Delafield

“By your spirit show us the things we ought to do, and give us the grace and power to do them.”\*

Abraham struggled with himself and his own thoughts when he led his only son up the mountain, but then—

Grace and Yes!

Mary struggled with herself and her own fears as she tried to answer the angel's question, but then—

Grace and Yes!

At Gethsemane, Jesus struggled with Himself and His own dread as he prayed to do God's will, but then—

Grace and Yes!

We struggle with ourselves to answer God's call. We fear to make a commitment and think that we're not good enough or smart enough, but then—

Grace and Yes!

## **It's All Grace**

Barbara Hackenberry

\*GLC Sunday Bulletin, Prayer of the Day, Feb. 5, 2017

My word for Lent is one we are familiar with. It is Grace, our undeserved Godly gift. Two memories come to mind for this word. When I was nine years old my father died in a mining accident and my mother struggled to keep our family together. She did a good job. Shortly after my Dad's accident she placed a wall plaque in our hallway. It was 2 Corinthians 12:9, "my grace is sufficient for you." I saw this every morning for ten years coming down those stairs. I'm not certain that it was meaningful to that nine-year-old boy, but I know it was to my mother. And now it is to this old man. Her steadfast faith held our family together.

Years later in life, my own family moved from Western New York to Texas from Abiding Savior Lutheran to Lamb of God Lutheran. Aren't these great, graceful church names?

My 20 mile Texas commute often took over an hour and I developed the habit of listening to a gospel music radio station. Yes, there are many such stations in Texas. Several times a week I heard the gospel song, "Sinner Saved by Grace" and often I found myself singing the first verse to myself as I drove. I still do. Some songs just stick in your brain. You might know it:

If you could see  
What I once was  
If you could go with me  
Back to where I started from  
Then, I know you would see  
A miracle of love that took me  
In its sweet embrace  
And made me what I am today  
An old sinner saved by grace.

And now here I am, writing a Lenten article for our church home-Grace Lutheran. From Abiding Savior to Lamb of God to Grace. Seems like an appropriate journey. And along the way I have learned that the second part of that Corinthian verse has the real power. I like to think my Mom knew this.

Let us pray:

"For my power is made perfect in weakness." May the knowledge of God's grace strengthen us in our weakness in this Lenten season and always. Amen

Herman Harrington

God's logic seems to make no sense in light of human logic.

Consider the Bible story of the vineyard owner (Matthew 20:1-16) who paid those who had been hired late in the day the same wage as those who had toiled for many hours. If we were the ones who had spent the long, hot day doing back-breaking work we could be very angry. To human logic the owner was totally unfair to those hired early in the day.

Or consider the parable of the lost son (Luke 15:11-32). One son works faithfully for his father through the years while his brother blows his part of the family inheritance on wild living. Then the prodigal brother reappears after completely depleting all he was given and the father forgives him. To make matters worse, the father calls for an elaborate celebration to welcome the wayward son home. How unfair can a father be to the son who has been faithful!

The problem is that we are operating from the perspective of human logic. God's logic, unlike ours, is based on "grace." He IS the generous vineyard owner, the loving, forgiving father. His grace is infinite, given to us through his only son Jesus who loves, forgives, and offers his own life for our redemption even though we do not deserve it.

Romans 3:23-24 says it best. "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God but are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

Forget logic then. We need to live by grace, God's forgiving, redeeming love given us through Jesus, a grace that leads to salvation. Thanks be to God!

Let us pray:

Lord, please open our hearts and minds to receive the gift of your forgiving, loving grace. Amen

Nancy Reinert

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 3: 23-24*

As we mark the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, we reflect on Martin Luther's theological teachings which form the foundation of our faith. Luther strongly believed in the all-encompassing grace of God and the all-sufficient merit of Christ. Our salvation is given through God's grace alone, which is received as a gift through faith without our own works or merit.

"Amazing grace how sweet the sound..... I once was lost by now am found..... How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed," the favorite hymn reminds us. Because we believe, we are favored with His grace and given eternal life. All that we do when we say we believe is in response to God's amazing grace.

Are we doing all that we can to show our faith in God? Do we find ourselves too busy to come to worship each Sunday? Have we thought about giving time to a ministry team, but just never seem to sign up? Or do we have a special gift which remains waiting for the right opportunity? As we reflect on our faith during this Lenten season, seek God's guidance for renewed involvement to show our faith and love for Jesus Christ who shed his blood for our salvation.

How appropriate that we worship at Grace Lutheran Church. The name of our congregation reminds us what Martin Luther taught. Salvation is by grace alone for Christ's sake alone. As faithful members, all that we do is a testament to God's never-ending grace.

Let us pray:

O God, thank you for loving us so much that you gave your only son to die for us and through our faith you give us your grace for our salvation. Strengthen our faith and help us to see things we ought to do in response to your grace. Amen.

Anne Rohrbach

Many years ago, a friend approached me to talk about why his wife left him. He was obsessed with finding out what his ex-wife was "doing." When I questioned him about why he wanted to know such things, he stated, "I have to know what I'm forgiving her for!" I was a little taken aback; he wasn't meant to be forgiving actions; he was meant to be forgiving of a person so that HE could move along with HIS life.

For me, the forgiveness of others is, in a sense, forgiveness of our selves; letting go of the angst and anger brought on by the frictions of daily life. That's a good word, Angst: an intense feeling of apprehension, anxiety, or inner turmoil.\*

During our Sunday worship, we are forgiven our sins (known and unknown, seen and unseen) at the beginning of the service. This helps me to start letting go of the angsts in life. Through the Forgiveness of Sins, God wipes our slates clean, no matter how wide-reaching or heavy those sins may be to us.

Yet, I continue scribbling on my slate: Did I lock the car? Do my socks match? I wish that "they" weren't in "my" pew! As Sunday worship continues, I take a breath and try to stop "angst-ing." Later, when I daydream during the sermon, I remember that God did not leave any of that "angst" on my slate, either. On the way home, I can forgive that student for running across the street, and forgive myself for being anxious, helping God to keep my slate clean. No matter how hard I try, though, the entries on my slate keep multiplying. Maybe I need to be reminded that God works with me to keep my slate clean; I am not alone.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, my greatest thanks is that, through the gift of Jesus Christ, you wipe my slate clean over and over and over. No matter how noisy my inner angst, may you continue to give me your forgiveness, and give me the faith to follow your lead, forgiving others as you have forgiven me. Amen

Hymn:

"There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea. There's a kindness in God's justice, which is more than liberty." from There's a Wideness in God's Mercy --- Frederick William Faber (1862)

\*Merriam-Webster Dictionary

Barbara Vogler

## AMAZING GRACE

Here's something that no one really tells you before you have a baby: You will love that child more than you ever dreamed was possible—but there will be times that they won't make it super easy to do so!

For example: When your colicky baby keeps you up through the wee hours of the morning night after night and nothing you do seems to comfort them... Or when they are going through the "Terrible Twos" and throw an epic temper tantrum at the grocery store... And certainly when they reach the inevitable eye-rolling, door-slamming, back-talking teen years...

Indeed, these are times when our own children can seem "unlovable." But, as their parents, we never do stop loving them. We may get frustrated or angry, we may feel disappointed or sad, we may worry that they are going to grow up to be serial killers—but the love is always there. In fact, we wouldn't feel the negative feelings so strongly if we didn't love them so much. It's the kind of love that means we would sacrifice absolutely anything for them, even our own lives, if it came right down to it.

I imagine this is what God feels like as he watches us blunder about our daily lives. We don't make it easy for Him, that's for sure. But if we—sinful, flawed humans—are able to unconditionally love our own children through their most unlovable stages, imagine how perfect and deep God's love for us really is! He showed us that perfect love with the ultimate sacrifice, when He died on the cross to pay for our sins and save us from death itself.

Here's the amazing thing about unconditional love: When a child feels secure in a parent's love, they grow up with the confidence to blossom into the person they are meant to be. Likewise, whenever I remember how much Jesus loves me (the most important reminder I take away from every Pastor Lynn sermon), it helps me to blossom as a Christian, because it makes me feel secure and capable of bringing His love to others.

Let us pray:

Loving God, thank you for your unconditional love and the gift of grace. Help us to blossom in the security of your love so that we may be a blessing to others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Karen Walker

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Romans 3:23-24*

Grace is one of our most fundamental tenants as Lutherans. So what does it mean? As a noun it can mean anything from an elegance or refinement of motion, an address to a duke or duchess (ie: His Grace, The Duke of York) or even the prayer we say before a meal. As a verb, it means to do credit to someone or something by one's presence. With regards to us as Lutherans, grace means something different than the definitions mentioned so far.

As people of God, we are given the blessing of freedom to choose. Unfortunately, for us, it is this blessing which allows us to sin. And let's face it, none of us is free from sin. There is not one of us, by the weight of our sin, who is better or worse than the other. A sin is a sin, no matter what that sin may be. Fortunately for us, the grace of God is bigger than our sins.

As Lutherans, grace refers to the blessings we receive from God that we do not deserve. The portal of this grace came to us through the ultimate sacrifice, the death on the cross. Through death on the cross, God, in the form of Jesus, gave us his grace by paying for our sins. Perhaps it is the enormity of this gift which counterbalances the weight of our sins. There is no greater gift than the sacrifice of a life to save another. Fortunately for us, God loves us so much that he gives us gifts of love, forgiveness and salvation even though we do not deserve them. God's grace is with us every day. God graces us, not only with his presence on a daily basis, but in the forgiveness of our sins. Thanks be to God!

Let us pray:

Dear God, I thank you for the gift of your grace for the forgiveness of my sins. I ask the grace of your presence to guide me today to be an example of your grace as I go through my day. In Jesus name, Amen.

Lester C. Griel, III

# **Justification & Salvation**

**March 29 – April 4, 2017**



## Justification and Salvation: Which comes first? Does it matter?

Justification has always been an elusive concept for me. Repeatedly I have tried to be righteous in as much as my mind and heart are able, hoping to please God. In recent years, my focus has changed to giving thanks for the gift of salvation, trying to respond with my whole heart in a caring and obedient way to God's bounteous gift of grace.

When we fully embrace the gift of salvation proffered to us by God through Christ Jesus, we typically desire to be good, virtuous, and decent to others. I believe this means seeing each person as God's blessed creation, regardless of how incompatible their world views are from ours. After all, God purposefully made us different. We are as unique as snowflakes---isn't it wonderful?---and yet each of us, no matter how dissimilar we are, is *still* made in God's image. Assuming that is true, surely that means each of us is beautiful, even when we make errant choices. [In this past election year, perhaps we should remind ourselves that whoever we did *not* vote for is *still* a child of God, made in his image.]

The Beatitudes have made a strong impression on me since my childhood. My own poetic version, used in a song I composed several years ago, puts Jesus's powerful words into a simply stated series of goals I can strive for with God's help. Perhaps they will strike a chord with you:

*Strive to be humble, have mercy, and keep your heart pure;*

*If you make peace with others, God's joy will be yours.*

*Fill your heart with His goodness, so you may know His grace:*

*Then in the world all around you, you'll see His face.*

Salvation supercedes justification. I will never be fully justified, but I am fully saved in spite of it...and in response to it, I strive to be righteous.

Let us pray:

Dear God, help me to be humble and keep my heart pure. Help me to love others wholly and unconditionally. Let me see your face in each person you have created. Though I may never be completely justified, help me to be just. Though I cannot save myself or others, help me to rejoice in your saving grace. AMEN.

Laurel Sanders

Did I become a secretary because I liked order, or do I like order because I spent many years as a secretary? The answer probably isn't as important as the fact that I have a yearning for order. And that shows itself in my daily devotions. An order for my prayer time was suggested to me once based on the acronym ACTS:

- Adoration
- Confession
- Thanksgiving
- Supplication

Pastor Lynn says he likes confession first which would be CATS :-)

At first adoration was important for me because I felt it missing from my prayer time. However, confession has become a more dominant part of my devotions today. Christ who made the supreme sacrifice paid the price for my sins. As I pray now I feel that forgiveness. It helps to "clean" the beginning of the day for me.

What aspect of prayer pulls at your heart?

Adoration? Confession? Thanksgiving?

Supplication?

Which one challenges you?

Let us Pray: Have thine own way, Lord. Have thine own way. Thou are the potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me, after thy will. While I am waiting, yielded and still. Amen

Ruth Kistler

*I serve a risen Saviour, He's in the world today.  
I know that He is living, whatever men may say.*

While I do not remember ever *not* being a Christian I *do*, however, remember a time when I questioned the legitimacy of my salvation.

The daughter of devoutly Christian parents and grandparents, I was baptized, confirmed, attended Vacation Bible School, sang in choirs, and participated in youth groups. Daily, I watched my parents and grandparents read their bibles and pray with and for me. When I faced challenges, I knew God's presence as surely as I knew the love of my parents.

Despite being securely raised and grounded in faith, when I grew into my teenage years, I began to question the surety of my conviction. The *Jesus Movement* was sweeping across the country, firing up some of my friends while others were influenced by Campus Crusade and its "four spiritual laws." "Are you saved?" was a recurring spiritual question. I wondered...was I? I was unable to pinpoint a moment when I said yes--it seemed yes had always been there. Was that legitimate? I wasn't sure. At one point when a speaker from the Billy Graham crusade issued an altar call, I walked forward. There. The i's were dotted and the t's crossed. I could claim with accuracy and assurance *the* moment when I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Saviour; truly, I was saved.

Now in my 60's, I look back at that time of soul searching and consider my dramatic walk in response to an altar call not as a moment of salvation but merely a public affirmation of what I already knew, believed, and lived. Raised by godly parents in a Christ-filled home, I had long ago been saved by God's grace through infinitesimal moments of testimony, instruction, experience, and practice and through my heartfelt response to them all. My salvation, unlike Paul's, did not occur along a Damascus road but rather within the quiet, constant, all encompassing love of a Christian home. No matter how Jesus calls us, we are all ultimately saved and redeemed by His grace and His love.

Prayer in Song:

*He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!*

*He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.*

*He lives, He lives, Salvation to impart!*

*You ask me how I know He lives?*

*He lives within my heart.*

-Ellen Herman Campbell

*Get Right With God.* This declaration was posted on the four members of a large wooden cross, similar to the one in this picture, that was along a roadside my family frequently traveled when I was a child. There were a lot of roadside signs then on the two lane road that has since been replaced by an interstate. This particular one always drew my attention. It was not only because of its large size, and to me confusing message, but because the company that erected it had their name across the bottom. Along the bottom of the cross it said "Patton Bros" and Patton was my maiden name. I took note of the cross each time we drove by it and it became a milestone for me along that oft traveled route



I didn't know the "Patton Bros." who erected the cross, but I wondered about them as I drove with our car full of Pattons past their sign. And I also wondered about their message. I was young, and regularly attended Sunday School and church, but did not understand the words on the cross. If anything, I considered them a warning, *Get Right With God ....or else....* But, what should I do to get right? What should all those driving by be doing? How did you know if you were right with God?

Now I see that cross in my mind's eye and understand these words as a simple definition of a difficult theological concept, justification. At its most basic, justification is being right with God, and there is nothing I can do to achieve this justification on my own. I have been justified by Christ's atoning death for my sin. The words on the roadside cross are a reminder of this gift, and a reminder to respond to this gift by trying to live a life that is *Right with God*.

Let us pray:

Lord God, help me never to lose the desire to strive to Get Right with God. Amen

Alice Griffin

“Let me talk to you about Jesus.” During my college days at Penn State, I would be out with a group of friends either enjoying a good movie or good conversation or a good beer or a good scotch until much later than I’m sure I should have been. And walking down Beaver Avenue back to my apartment, I would encounter a fellow student who said he had a calling. He said that after asking for a mission while at college, Jesus told him to get out into the streets and talk to his fellow students. And his greeting line was always the same, “Let me talk to you about Jesus.” I walked and talked with him several times and I got the distinct feeling that he was focused saving as many lost, drunk, wayward souls as possible. Those conversations always sat uneasy with me, growing up Lutheran. What of those who had been saved in baptism and therefore connected to Jesus’ saving actions on the cross? Was it really that black and white, that you are either not saved or saved?

It brought me to the thought of being saved for something, that something else good and Godly might come from my (really our) salvation. I was reminded that salvation is not only about me and my walk with God, but salvation is about how others might benefit from my struggles and the places where I feel God has moved and reshaped my life.

I felt redeemed, renewed so I might continue to show Christ’s light to the world. In baptism we are redeemed, just like you redeem a coupon to get its full worth and use, we are full of worth and use for the kingdom of God. And the really good news, this coupon doesn’t expire and never gets lost. Jesus’ coupon is always on our foreheads in the sign of the cross that he put there in our baptism. Even when we feel lost or of little worth, Jesus still redeems us and calls us his own.

Let us pray: Gracious God, thank you for the gift of your Son, in his life, death, and resurrection. Continue to grant to us the strength, worth, and love to do your work and to spread the good news of Jesus to all we me. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Peter Horn

Driving on the highways of Texas and New Mexico, the neon crosses and stark billboards would loom in the distance for miles before you could read them: "Jesus Saves."

Or in the street, at a park, or at a public event, a stranger with a handful of tracts might ask, "Are you saved?"

For most of my life, and especially in my years away from the church, my internal reply has been "saved from WHAT?" From burning in hell, which is what the people asking seemed to be asking about? I was pretty sure I didn't believe in hell, or at least in a hell that was a place, with fire, and maybe a devil in a red suit. Those seemed like bogeyman stories to me. They seemed like things TV preachers warned about, or (on the more cultured end of the spectrum) things Dante wrote about. I've never been scared of hell. Concerns about the afterlife are not why I'm a Christian.

So as an adult, even as I have grown to love Jesus and know him more and more, the idea that he was *saving* me has always seemed a bit abstract. I have problems, yes, but am I in danger that he must rescue me? I sin, no doubt, but somehow I've never been afraid of ending up in hell; I believed it when Jesus said that he loved me and redeemed me.

But in truth, there are many, daily times I need saving, times I long for rescue from something. I long for rescue from my own bad moods. From my pessimism. From my incessant judgment of myself and, consequently, of others. From racing thoughts. From persistent, needling worry. From that "stuck" feeling I get-- stuck in a situation, or with a person, or with a problem. Stuck with my same old self doing the same old patterns. Times when it seems nothing I do will make a difference. Overwhelmed, I long for rescue.

*That's* how Jesus saves me. He swoops in to be with me when I'm really not fit to be with. He lifts me out of my own head. He lets me glimpse here and there how God sees things, restoring some perspective. He accompanies me through the bad moments until I'm unstuck.

I have no doubt that Jesus also saves me in the afterlife. Through Jesus we will have eternal life. But we also have life NOW through Jesus as he saves us NOW from the hells we make for ourselves. It is as Psalm 23 says: "He restores my soul." And it is also as that same Psalm says: he restores it "all the days of my life", not just after it has ended.

Let us pray: God, save us when we need it. Restore our perspective. Keep us close. Amen.

Anne Whitney

# Church

April 5 – April 11, 2017



One of the troubling aspects of being part of a church these days is that there is an abundance of, how shall I put it, an abundance of a lack of energy. Part of this, I suspect, might be attributable to a dearth of young people – the millennials. Yesterday on Facebook I came across an enlightening piece by a schoolteacher who falls into that millennial category, and who declared at the outset “from the depth of my heart, I want to love the church. I want to be head-over-heels for church like the unshakeable Ned Flanders.” (Ned of The Simpsons fame)

His professed love of Jesus led him to write the piece in the hopes that millennials and those who resonate to their concerns would sit up and take notice. What he said made me seriously ponder what our mission truly is. Pastor Lynn said recently that when he encountered a neighbor of Grace's at a local convenience store she reeled off the things she knew about us – “Oh, you're the little preacher,” she said, and then went on to describe the traffic caused by our parking lot on football weekends and the construction mess during the building of our addition. Wouldn't it be terrific if we were known for other things, he challenged – things truly in keeping with being the hands and feet of Jesus?

So what follows are some thoughts from Sam Eaton (abridged) when he wrestles with why almost 60 percent of millennials raised in the church have dropped out:

- 1) *“Nobody's listening to us.”*
- 2) *“We're sick of values and mission statements. Love God. Love others. Task completed.” (Or, as our daughters like to say, Done and Done.)*
- 3) *“We want you to talk to us about controversial issues (because no one is).”*
- 4) *“We want to be mentored, not preached at.”*
- 5) My favorite (because it hits home):  
*“We're tired of you blaming the culture. Explicitly teach us how our lives should differ from the culture.”*

At the risk of sounding simplistic (after all, this is the generation that communicates in 140 characters), Sam does make a lot of thought-provoking points. When he holds up a mirror and says, *You're complacent, irrelevant, and approaching extinction*, we need to listen.

To show God's radical love in this world, we need to be visible. We need to be bold more in deeds than in words. Words -- *if truthfully proclaimed without equivocation* -- still count, but not if they're detached from acts of mercy and kindness.

Let us pray:

Lord, as your servant Martin wrote, “This faith is a living, busy, active, mighty thing. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly.” You know we want to be passionately head-over-heels for church. Ignite that passion within us, and may our works reflect your love and your forgiveness as we love and forgive all, not just those like us, as we welcome the stranger in our midst. Amen

Gina Leon

Our church is like a separate family to me. Once you get involved with the other church members and the pastoral staff, you have a basis for many deeper relationships that you can discuss God's word with and talk about family joys and family troubles.

A church is foremost a place to worship God. But, it entails much more than just worship. When you are a member of a church you belong to a fraternity of individuals who are striving to become better people through worship, Bible study, prayer, and interactions with each other. When something goes wrong in your life or theirs, you have someone to contact and discuss problems with — someone with whom you feel safe. It is great to have people pray with you and for you or your family.

A nonchurch person or an inactive church member is missing so much in their lives. As a church person, you do not have to do everything on your own. Besides God being with you every step of the way, your church family is usually ready and willing to step up to help you. All you need do is let them or the pastors know what is going on in your life. God did not make man to stand alone. He created others to assist us in our journey on earth. Everyone has their special talents, but as a church family there is nothing we cannot accomplish or achieve.

When we gather for baptisms or celebrate holy communion together, I think we are getting a touch of heaven on earth. To have our sins forgiven as a group of average individuals as we meet each Sunday is a very special experience. The church is a group of like-minded individuals in one way but very diverse individuals in many other ways. This is what gets the work of Christ done on the earth. We all have a special place in the church. We must step forward and do our part. Doing so will be to our benefit and the benefit of the church.

Let us pray:

Thank you Lord for giving us the gift of your church. May the church look after us, feed us, and give us the ability with the Holy Spirit's help to do your work on earth. Amen

Don Burris

The church – the building which beckons us, the pastors, the sermons, God's Word, Holy Communion, the members, the fellowship, the lessons, the music, the peace – all things I think of when I try to describe or define the church at first. Deeper thought leads me to the hymn, *The Church's One Foundation*. This hymn reminds me that Jesus Christ is the very foundation, the center, the Lord, of the church. He paid the costly price for the life of the church. Her charter is salvation – one Lord, one faith, one birth. Undeniably, we in the church are a community in Christ. As a community of believers with Jesus at the head, it falls to us to carry the church forward for him by our faith, our worship, or service.

The hymn tells us that the church has prevailed and will prevail through internal struggles, through toil and tribulation and war. The church prevails because Jesus Christ prevails.

The hymn concludes by affirming that the church has union with God, the Three in One – and has communion with those who have passed on to eternal life. As a divine community, we are linked in the church to the saints who have gone before us and our plea is that we like them, may see God face to face. The next time we sing *The Church's One Foundation*, take a moment to let the words embrace you – and feel the strength and spiritual beauty of the church that this hymn declares.

Let us pray:

God, help our church body to walk in a manner worthy of the calling you have given us. Help us in all our interactions with one another to have humble and gentle hearts. Grant us patience for one another, bearing with one another in love. Grant the Body of Christ continued unity. May we walk humbly with You, God, always. Amen. (Prayer from Crosswalk)

Carolyn Fishburn

For life-long churchgoers, the word church is synonymous with a church building - one you've been going to all your life - or memories of being in church with your parents or grandparents, Sunday school, picnics, vacation Bible school. We build church buildings in our Christian faith to praise God, for a place that believers (and non-believers) can come together to commune with God and with each other and to build each other up. We are a community of God's people.

But for those who are not accustomed to going to church, what do we do when we come together? To me, others who are more knowledgeable than ourselves about the scriptures and God's teachings in the Bible educate us, young and old. We sing hymns written to inspire and interpret the scripture reading for that week. Through these teachings, from adults to little ones, we are encouraged to think and share the knowledge we learn. We share the Lord's Supper and we share in fellowship with food, and gatherings, and song. This sharing is Love, given to us from this community of the church we embrace. From this love we share it with others in many different ways in the name of Jesus Christ. In what we hear and do within the walls of a building consecrated in Faith, is our church; your church.

I've been told, and probably said it as a young believer; "I don't need to be in a church building to have God in my life. I can be with nature and have God with me." Yes, but you need to see God in the scriptures, and the hymns, in the bread and the wine, in your time of reflection and confession, and in the face of your neighbor. That is accomplished only by attending the community of believers at a church.

*<sup>41</sup>So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. <sup>42</sup>They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Acts 2:41-42*

Let us pray:

Dear God, Thank you for a community of your people who hunger for your Love and find it within the walls of our church buildings. May your Holy Spirit guide our days this week and always. Amen

*Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 6:23*

Brenda Palmgren

When considering the word “church,” in my thinking, it is not a building; instead, it is the people that constitute the church.

As a child, I was taught the finger play that begins, “Here is the church, here is the steeple, open the door and see the people.” Experiencing and attending several denominations in my lifetime, I have encountered myriads of faces. Some of them have glowed with love and have shared it with all they have encountered. Others, not so much, bearing life’s struggles which have engulfed them.

Thus, they cannot show their love of Christ through the church. It does not mean church attendance is not important to them, but they need the fellowship of people within the church assembly to share the burden and regain the love of Christ. One of these is the sharing of communion (the body and blood of Christ) with others.

A church hymn which comes to mind is “*Blest Be the Tie That Binds.*” As the third stanza states, “We share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear, and often for each other flows the sympathizing tear.” This is the Church — people caring for each other and sharing in the concerns.

In scripture, Acts 2:28 states, “*You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.*”

In the body of the church, the people, this scripture is fulfilled in the love of Christ through his people.

Let us pray for the people of the church and the fellowship they share in Christ's love for each other and the needs they comprehend in others. Amen.

Kathryn T. Mackes

*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 1 Cor. 12:27*

There is Church and there is church, just as there is Communion and communion. The capital C's have to do with ritual and policy, while the small C's share community and caring. I attend Church because of church.

I grew up in Church, but when my father became mortally ill, I saw how church is the foundation that brings Christ to life. My sister and I had already left home for college and my mother was trying to manage a farm and my father's business. Church members stepped in and sat afternoons with my father so that my mother could tend to things outside the home. When I married and moved away, church members stepped in as "family." Deacon meetings during the years that I served in a Presbyterian church were in my home because I was the one with the small child to get to bed and a husband away in graduate school.

Becoming part of a church can seem like you have your own pew. Pew "occupancy" is a gentle and loving way of taking attendance. I look around on Sundays and see who is not there just by which pew is vacant. This observation is not keeping tabs, but missing the person. Is all well? Is there a need? Miss too often and should I call? I want to be part of a church that would miss me, too.

The reasons for being part of a Church often have to do with the people inside, for church is the fellowship of believers trying to follow Christ. It is the fellowship of prayer, of meals, of babysitting, of car shuttling, of sending cards, of shared laughter and of shared tears.

Christ calls us to be part of His fellowship. Come to Church, be the church.

My grandmother was organist in her Methodist church and one special hymn she taught me is: "*Give Me Oil in My Lamp.*" My closing prayer comes from the verses:

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, help me to be part of your church. Give me oil in my lamp and keep me burning, give me love in my heart and keep me sharing, give me joy in my heart and keep me singing, give me faith in my heart and keep me praying.  
Amen

June Walter

## Pillars

*Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel. Phil 1: 27*

They are pillars of our church. In the pew, in Sunday school, Super Wednesday, mid-week Lenten Services, their beaming faces shine in our congregational collage. Outside the confines of Grace, they have consistently established a presence that reflects their abiding love of God, offering comfort as hospital volunteers, attending community Bible studies, visiting the sick, and serving as Christ's ambassadors in all their daily interactions.

But even the strongest are tested, and Mary and Phil are no exception. One Sunday with family gathered around a hospital bed, Phil and Mary faced the news that Mary, suffering from an abdominal aortic aneurysm, required immediate, high-risk surgery. "Eighty-two percent of patients do not survive," the cardiovascular surgeon counseled. The family had a decision to make. They prayed (as Buchers do) and tearfully kissed Mary as she was wheeled away. Hours later, the doctor emerged from the operating room pronouncing, "the surgery was successful!" Speaking of this life and death moment, Phil's voice still trembles as he testifies to the saving power of Jesus in the life of his bride. And he speaks in awe of Mary's calm. Mary, whose faith never wavered throughout the entire ordeal, says that she clung to the verse in Psalms, "*Be still and know that I am God,*" which, as Phil describes, "filled her bleeding heart with peace and love."

Grace is more than our iconic "Dorito" shaped building, more than the list of names in our church directory, or the tally of our ministries and programs. Our church is its people and the witness of the lives we live. We are blessed to have among us those who live life in a manner so worthy. Pillars of the church. Pillars of the faith.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, we are grateful for the lives of all the saints, those who now rest from their labors and those who continue to live and work among us. May our church always be a people who faithfully follow you and bear witness to your everlasting Light. Amen.

Ellen Herman Campbell

(This story was shared with Phil and Mary's permission.)

"Eva" (not her real name), is a 90 year old woman who lives in State College. Health reasons brought her to the short term rehab facility within the nursing home where I work night shifts as an aid. She was in pain, grouchy, and demanding. She rang her call bell frequently to have someone pull her blanket up on her more. She wanted someone to hand her the water glass that was easily within her reach. There seemed to be no good reason for her ringing for us to help her with things she clearly could do on her own. The staff would remind her that if she wanted to go home she needed to do things independently. Eva would snap back, "I'm paying a lot of money to be here so you'll do what I say!" Needless to say, the staff grew to dread the ringing of her call bell.

One night I felt impressed to think of what life must be like from her perspective. I thought perhaps she rings so often because she's really just lonely and wants someone to talk to. I began asking her about her life and family. She became less demanding and would smile when I went to help her. One night she said she'd be going home soon but she didn't want to go. Her kids lived far away and she didn't have company very often. The only person she saw was the home care aid that came a few days a week. Eva said she'd miss the good meals prepared here – at home she lives on frozen dinners. She'd miss the daily activities and eating with people. She wanted to stay.

I passed this information on to the in house social worker who then talked with her about her options. I don't know what will happen next but I'm glad God pushed me to get to know Eva. I'm glad she felt loved and accepted in our little community.

Is there someone in your daily life who just wants to feel loved and accepted? Is that one of the reasons God established the church?

Let us pray:

God of creation, help us to become aware of those in our lives who need a friend. Help us to make everyone we work with or go to school with feel welcomed and accepted. Help us to be the instrument that conveys your love to those you need to touch and help. Amen.

Linda Schul

# Holy Week

April 12 – April 15, 2017



Wednesday, April 12, 2017

*After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do quickly what you are going to do." Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the festival"; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night. John 13:21-30*

This selection of scripture highlights two major issues. First, the scripture highlights what I have always thought was a strange relationship between Jesus and his disciples. The second major question brought forward in this scripture is the long discussed question of the guilt of Judas. Let's deal with both issues.

First, Jesus is asked by Peter to tell the disciples who will betray him. With the straightforwardness of a good storyteller Jesus points out that Judas will be the culprit. Only a totally disengaged observer would miss this point. Yet, the disciples then struggle with determining why Judas suddenly left the table. The reader is left screaming to himself... "Is no one listening here...you are the chosen ones and you are not smart enough to listen." If these 11 (minus Judas who may have understood) could not understand, how can we be expected to understand? The relationship of Jesus to his disciples has always been confusing to me.

There is also the second question in this scriptural passage. Is Judas guilty, or was he simply carrying out his role in the story? If Judas had not provided the betrayal, Easter would not have happened. Was Judas guilty?

In this scriptural account, Judas sets about with his deed of betrayal. This is the New Testament story we know so well. But, if we turn to the Old Testament we find a curious piece of scripture in Zechariah. The scripture (Zach11:12-13) reads "*I then said to them, 'If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.'* So they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. Then the Lord said to me, '*Throw it into the treasury*'—this lordly price at which I was valued by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the treasury in the house of the Lord." Is this a foretelling of the eventual betrayal of Jesus written in the Old Testament? I'm not sure I am scholarly enough to pass judgement here, but could Judas simply be a pawn in a divinely planned episode that had to be played out so that we better understood our faith? Wiser men than I will have to answer that question. However, isn't it interesting to tangle with two such complex questions during this Lenten period in such a brief passage of scripture? This is truly the mystery of FAITH.

Let us pray:

Lord, help us better understand the words in your Book so that we may better understand the plan for us. Amen

Bob Griffin

Maundy Thursday, April 13, 2017

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Maundy Thursday is one of my favorite church festivals for couple of reasons. First, it's a break from the normal. We come to church on a non-Sunday/Wednesday and reflect on a specific moment, a specific night in Jesus' life. Second, it focuses on gathering, specifically the gathering around a table, which would become our practice of communion.

On one occasion, I had the privilege to see a different style of Maundy Thursday service. While we normally have a service in the sanctuary with the washing of feet, Holy Communion, and the stripping of the altar, this service was around the tables of the downstairs social hall.

The building was an old farm town church with a basement that smelled musty for most of the year. But Maundy Thursday night it smelled of baked bread and six different kinds of soup. Before we enjoyed the meal of soup and bread, we did as Jesus and the disciples did so many years before: we broke the bread of salvation and drank the cup of forgiveness. But in this case it wasn't the pastor who stood up front distributing, it was our neighbor seated next to us that became the sharer of Jesus. So I sat and waited for my turn to have someone I had only just met to speak the words "Body of Christ, given for you" and "Blood of Christ, shed for you." When my turn came I felt the awe-inspiring and humbling experience of receiving care from another person. I was transported to the scene where Jesus washes the disciples' feet. Jesus became the servant and cared for those who would care for his church and this stranger just became a picture of Jesus to me.

So Jesus gives us a new commandment, "that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." And how does Jesus love us? He cares for us, provides everything we have, teaches us how to live, and, in the end, dies for the sake of the world. We are to go and do likewise.

Let us pray:

Jesus, show us how to love like you love us. Amen.

Peter Horn

Good Friday, April 14, 2017

*Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). There they crucified him, and with him two others- one on each side and Jesus in the middle. John 19: 17-18*

The title "Good Friday" has always perplexed me. How could the day when God, through his Son, sacrificed himself on the cross be a "Good Friday?" What could possibly be good about a death?

In the medical community, we sometimes talk about someone having a "good" death. No we are not wishing for people to die. So what could we possibly mean by a good death? When I think of a "good death" I think of a few things. Did the person die with a minimum of pain and suffering? Did they die surrounded by loved ones if this was their wish? Had they fought for life on their terms? A good death is very much a personal thing and my definition of this is going to be very different from yours.

From everything I have read about crucifixion and the events surrounding a crucifixion, this in no way, by my definition, could be considered a good death. First, Pilate had Jesus scourged. He was essentially whipped and beaten to the extent that he would have likely required a trauma team to keep him alive. When that did not satisfy the crowd or the Jewish Elders who brought Him to Pilate for judgement, they took him to Golgotha, nailed him to the cross and hung Him up to die a slow and agonizing death. Yet we call this day "Good Friday?" Let's look at what was "good" about Jesus' death on the cross.

The word good can mean to be desired or approved of. It also is a benefit or advantage to someone or something. Certainly, none of us desired the death of Jesus. However, it is the benefit that we as Christians receive through this death that is good. By his death on the cross, we are forgiven of all of our sins. Not just the really little sins or only our greatest sin. All of our sins are forgiven. Let that wash over you for a minute. By the death of His Son, God has promised us the forgiveness of ALL of our sins. I cannot think of a greater good than that!

Let us pray:

Dear God, I thank you this day for the good that you have given me in the forgiveness of my sins through the death of your Son. Please help me to remember the depth of this gift as I move through my day today. In Jesus' name, Amen

Lester C. Griel, III

Holy Saturday, April 15, 2017

Romans 6: 3-11

My confirmation pastor told me that all my sins -- past, present, and future were buried and drowned in the waters of my baptism, and as Jesus was raised from the dead, I will rise out of my baptismal waters to new life in Jesus after I die. What a wonderful word of life and grace and wholeness.

We don't have to be like the first disciples who were grief stricken and in shock on that Saturday after the crucifixion. They didn't know the miracle that was about to happen. But we do! We know what we will celebrate tomorrow. We know that because Jesus lives, we will live too.

There are many ways to hear and know the gospel of Jesus Christ. For example: Jesus' death paid for our sins; or, Jesus was our sacrifice and took our sins upon himself; or, Jesus bore our punishment so we can be forgiven and spend eternity with Jesus. Here's one more way to look at it that is meaningful to me.

Jesus is the man of the unconditional promise. Only Jesus can make unconditional promises. We cannot. I can promise to meet you next Tuesday, but then I could die before that. My death is always a condition upon every promise I make. That's not true for Jesus. Our lesson today reminds us that death no longer has mastery over Jesus. Jesus can promise you that your future is good, that you are heaven bound and that He is with you every day of your earthly life. There is nothing that can stop Jesus from keeping that promise. Jesus is on the other side of death, so death has no control over any promise Jesus makes. That is only true for Jesus. Jesus' promises to you are unconditional. So here is the good Word, the unconditional promise of Jesus to you.

"I love you. I forgive you. You will be with me forever in heaven because I defeated death and there is nothing to stand in the way of me keeping my promise to you. As you were baptized into my death, you also have been baptized into my life. You will become part of that resurrection someday."

There is nothing to keep Jesus from realizing that promise. See you tomorrow as we celebrate the resurrection of the unconditional promises of Jesus Christ to you.

Let us pray:

Dear God, thank you for Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Thank you for making me part of it. Amen.

Pastor Lynn

# PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

# PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

## Organizing Your Devotional Time

Just as there is no one way to prayer, there is no one way to make use of this devotional book. Some will choose to meditate on a devotional each day, at a set hour. Others will read each category at once. Still others will combine these devotional with other discipleship practices. All of those approaches are valid and worthwhile. Do what works best for you.

One suggested format is as follows:

### **1. Pray the Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

### **2. Recite the Apostles' Creed**

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen.

### **3. Read the Devotional**

#### **4. Conclude with either Luther's Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer**

Morning Prayer: I give thanks to you, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have protected me through the night from all harm and danger. I ask that you would also protect me today from sin and all evil, so that my life and actions may please you. Into your hands I commend myself: my body, my soul, and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Evening Prayer: I give thanks to you, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have graciously protected me today. I ask you to forgive me all my sins, where I have done wrong, and graciously to protect me tonight. Into your hands I commend myself: my body, my soul, and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.