

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

March 14, 2021 – 9:30 a.m.

PRELUDE “My Faith Looks Up to Thee”

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

Pastor: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen.

Pastor: Our help is in the name of the Lord,

People: who made heaven and earth.

Pastor: If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?

People: But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared.

Pastor: Since we are gathered to hear God’s Word, call upon Him in prayer and praise, and receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the fellowship of this altar, let us first consider our unworthiness and confess before God and one another that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition. Together as His people let us take refuge in the infinite mercy of God, our heavenly Father, seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, and saying: God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

People: Almighty God, have mercy upon us, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life. Amen.

Pastor: Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen.

SALUTATION AND COLLECT OF THE DAY

Pastor: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

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

People: Amen.

FIRST READING *Numbers 21:4–9*

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.” Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

Pastor: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

EPISTLE *Ephesians 2:1–10*

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among

whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Pastor: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

HOLY GOSPEL *John 3:14–21*

Pastor: The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the third chapter.

People: Glory to You, O Lord.

[Jesus said:] “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God.”

Pastor: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

People: Praise to You, O Christ.

APOSTLES’ CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

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

SERMON “Take A Bite” John 3:16

- I. “For God...”
 - What is the subject of the sentence? Why is that important?
- II. “...so loved...”
 - What does this word for *love* mean? How would you describe it?
- III. “...the world...”
 - What is the world like in John’s Gospel?
 - How does God treat the world?
- IV. “...that He gave His only-begotten Son...”
 - What passage is alluded to here?
- V. “...that whoever believes in Him should not perish...”
 - What faith saves?
- VI. “...but have eternal life...”
 - What is significant about the verb?

Growing up, I remember my Great Grandfather talking about an event he once spoke at. It was a sending event for a missionary, and he was one of the people chosen to tell them a Bible verse. As he went up to speak, he said, “The first thing that came to my mind to tell you was John 3:16, the most important verse in the entire Bible. It is the message that you will proclaim, and the message that you cannot forget, but I know that *you* know this...so I will tell you another one, instead.” I don’t recall the second verse, but His observation always stuck with me. He is right. John 3:16 is one of the most important verses in the entire Bible, *if not*, the most important. As one commentator says, “[John 3:16 is] a burst of Gospel-preaching which is without equal in the world’s literature, which, in fact, summarizes the entire Gospel in one sentence.”

For our sermon this morning, I want to approach this well-known and important verse a little bit differently. The approach is like eating a sweet dessert. When eating a dessert, you don’t want to eat too much at once, or to scarf it down. Rather, you want to take small bites. You want to savor the richness of the flavors. You want your mouth to experience all of the tastes. You want to enjoy the sweetness, the frosting, the coolness, and chocolate. Taking big bites prevents that. Taking big bites will prevent that. Instead, taking small bites is the key to enjoying it. The same goes for John 3:16. We want to take it in chunks, in bite-sized pieces, so we can fully take it in. Doing so will allow us to enjoy the richness, depth, and beauty of the Bible’s greatest passage.

Let’s take our first bite. **“For God....”** With our first bite, we are introduced to the subject and focus of the entire sentence, God. He is the subject of the sentence. John tells us that the origin and initiative in salvation lies with God, not us. He does it all; we have no part to play in salvation. We simply receive.

One thing that Lutheran theology does so well is that it gets the subject and object, right. If you mess that up, your entire theology will be skewed, and it will inevitably be wrong. In theology, God is the subject. He is the actor, the doer. He does the action. He is the subject of the verbs. And the objects? Us. We are the objects. All we do is receive. We are passive. God acts *to us and for us*.

A great example of this is our Epistle text, Ephesians 2:4-10. In this passage, notice the subject of the verbs. Notice *who* is the object. **“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which HE LOVED US, even when we were dead in our trespasses, MADE US ALIVE TOGETHER with Christ-by grace YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED-and RAISED US UP WITH HIM and SEATED US WITH HIM in the heavenly places in Jesus Christ. [For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift God, not a result of works, so that no one boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”** God is the subject. We are the objects. In the Bible’s most famous and important passage, God is the subject and actor. Let’s take our next bite.

“...so loved....” The English language has the most words of any language in the world. The number of words in the English language? One million. The number of words for *love*? Just, one. In Greek, there are four words for love, and the one used here is *agape*. *Agape* is an unconditional love; it is a sacrificial love. A “spontaneous, unmerited, and creative love.” This love is more than a feeling. It is a action and resolve. This love doesn’t dream passively. It acts purposefully. It doesn’t act on the likability or worthiness of the object, but it acts for the interest of the object. This is the love that God has. That is important to keep in mind as we take our next bite. Savor this last point because this next bite doesn’t go down as smooth.

“...the world....” In John’s Gospel, the world doesn’t recognize Jesus, or receive Him (1:10-11). In John’s Gospel, the world is the enemy of God. It hates Him. It hates Jesus, and it hates us, His followers (15:18). It is in the world that we will have tribulation (16:33), and Satan is the prince of it. Fortunately, God does not reciprocate those things. He loves the world.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus is the Savior of the world (4:42). He takes away the sin of the world (1:29). He gives His life for the world (6:33). He is the light of the world (8:12). He overcomes the prince of the world, Satan, and overcomes the world (16:33).

That is a comfort because I’m included in it. You are included in it. We are the world. Sadly, that means we don’t always recognize or receive Him. Sadly, it means that often rebel against Him. It means that we can let Satan and our sinful flesh control the direction and priorities of our lives. But, remember, God loves...the world.

God loves the world that He had created, even though the crown of creation, mankind, became corrupted and ruined it all. Our sin did not stop God from loving us. Our sin doesn't stop God from loving us. The sins of Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Pharaoh, Saul and David, Judas and Peter, Paul and John, you and me- God knew them all, and yet, He still loved them and us. He loves us. God loves the world and excludes no one. St. Augustine ties it altogether when he says, "God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love." How amazing. What a bite to savor!

As we take our next one, we notice that it tastes likes something else. We pick up on a new flavor. It reminds us of Genesis 22. "...**He gave His only-begotten Son....**" In Genesis 22, we see a father, Abraham, with his only son, Isaac. Isaac is bound, tied, and ready to be sacrificed by Abraham until the Angel of the Lord tells him, "**Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.**"

There is a story about how the Luther family once read this text for family devotions. Luther's wife, Katie, said, "I do not believe this. God would not have treated His Son like that!" "But, Katie, He did." Luther replied.

Unlike Abraham, God gave His Son for us. He didn't withhold Him, and gave Him on our behalf. He was crucified for us. He bore the wrath that we deserved. He died the death that was supposed to be...ours, and took the punishment we earned. God gave Jesus for a world that opposed Him. He gave Jesus to a world that hated Him, and rebelled against Him. He gave Jesus to a world that didn't know, or recognize Him. Let's take another bite.

"...**that whoever believes in Him should not perish....**" Faith saves. However, not just any faith saves, but faith in Jesus. Faith in Jesus, the One Who is the Son of God. Faith in Jesus, the One Who has given as our sacrifice. Faith in the One Who died for us so that we could live, faith in the One Whose blood paid our ransom and set us free from the powers of sin, death, and the devil. Faith in *this One* saves. We can be certain of that because it is based on Jesus, and His work. We don't have to doubt, worry, or add anything to it. It is complete and finished. We will not perish, be separated from Him. Remember, God is the subject and source of salvation.

Let's take our last bite. "...**have eternal life....**" What a bite. Did you catch something significant here? It is the verb, it is present! We enjoy life with Jesus, *now*. we already have eternal life. We enjoy the life in and with Jesus now that shall never end, but consists of joy and bliss throughout countless ages. We enjoy life with Jesus now, but after death, we will enjoy life in full glory.

John 3:16 is one of the Bible's most important, and beautiful passage, and you can see why. It is the entire Gospel message simply and eloquently in one sentence. "**For God so love the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.**"

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

MUSIC DURING PREPARATION "Chief of Sinners Though I Be"

PREFACE

Pastor: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Pastor: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them to the Lord.

Pastor: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

Pastor: It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who has called His people out of darkness into Your marvelous light. Through His death and resurrection we see through the eyes of faith what You have prepared for us as we partake of Your body and blood given and shed for us. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying:

SANCTUS

**People: Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth adored;
Heav'n and earth with full acclaim shout the glory of Your name.
Sing hosanna in the highest, sing hosanna to the Lord;
Truly blest is He who comes in the name of the Lord!**

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Pastor: Blessed are You, O Lord our God, king of all creation, for You have had mercy on us and given Your only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

In Your righteous judgment You condemned the sin of Adam and Eve, who ate the forbidden fruit, and You justly barred them and all their children from the tree of life. Yet, in Your great mercy, You promised salvation by a second Adam, Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and made His cross a life-giving tree for all who trust in Him.

We give You thanks for the redemption You have prepared for us through Jesus Christ. Grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may faithfully eat and drink of the fruits of His cross and receive the blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation that come to us in His body and blood.

Hear us as we pray in His name and as He has taught us:

LORD'S PRAYER

People: 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.

THE WORDS OF OUR LORD

Pastor: Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."

In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying: "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

PAX DOMINI

Pastor: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

People: Amen.

DISTRIBUTION

You are invited to receive the Lord's Supper if you believe and confess that Jesus Christ is your Savior from sin, you are a baptized child of the Triune God, and you believe that He gives you His body and blood in the bread and wine you receive. White grape juice can be found in the center of each tray for those who cannot receive alcohol. Children are welcome to come forward for a blessing.

MUSIC DURING DISTRIBUTION

POST-COMMUNION COLLECT

Pastor: Let us pray. We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

People: Amen.

BENEDICAMUS

Pastor: Let us bless the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

BENEDICTION

Pastor: The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.

People: Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

POSTLUDE “Amazing Grace” *LSB* 744

1 Amazing grace—how sweet the sound—
 That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found,
 Was blind but now I see!

2 The Lord has promised good to me,
 His Word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
 As long as life endures.

3 Through many dangers, toils, and snares
 I have already come;
His grace has brought me safe thus far,
 His grace will lead me home.

4 Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail
 And mortal life shall cease,
Amazing grace shall then prevail
 In heaven’s joy and peace.

5 When we’ve been there ten thousand years,
 Bright shining as the sun,
We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise
 Than when we’d first begun.
Text: Public domain

“Now Thank We All Our God” *LSB* 895

1 Now thank we all our God
 With hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done,
 In whom His world rejoices;
Who from our mothers’ arms
 Has blest us on our way
With countless gifts of love
 And still is ours today.

2 Oh, may this bounteous God
 Through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts
 And blessed peace to cheer us
And keep us in His grace
 And guide us when perplexed
And free us from all ills
 In this world and the next!

3 All praise and thanks to God
 The Father now be given,
The Son, and Him who reigns
 With them in highest heaven,
The one eternal God,
 Whom earth and heav'n adore;
For thus it was, is now,
 And shall be evermore.
Text: Public domain

Acknowledgments

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

GENEROSITY THOUGHTS: *Ephesians 2:10* – “*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*” Even the good we do in this world is a gift from God, prepared beforehand for us to do. And this too is a gift! For isn't doing good also a good thing for the one who does it? So from first to last, from the Lord's free salvation given to us to the good works He's prepared for us to walk in, it is all a gift of God's grace.

LENTEN MIDWEEK WORSHIP will be held at Emmaus on Wednesdays through March 24 at 11:30 a.m. There will be an evening service at Bethel Lutheran Church at 7 p.m. Maundy Thursday (April 1) and Good Friday (April 2) will have the same schedule.

EASTER MEMORIAL GARDEN: The Easter Memorial Garden donation insert in today's bulletin provides an opportunity to remember departed loved ones and contribute toward the cost of Easter decorations. Complete the slip, enclose it in the envelope provided along with your donation and drop in the collection plate or hand to an usher. Those who wish to pick up their Easter lilies may do so after the 9:30 am Easter service.

SEWING NEEDED: The movable dividers that have been used at Emmaus for many years are in need of an update. We have purchased fabric with a Thrivent Action Grant and need a few people to help with sewing the new fabric into panels. If you have the time and ability to help with a couple of panels, please contact Marilyn P. or Molly V.

START SPREADING THE NEWS! WE'RE COLLECTING SHOES: That's right, we are about one month away from the start of our shoe collection. As mentioned in the March newsletter, the youth are collecting new or gently used shoes as a fundraiser. Please think of us as you start cleaning out closets. In addition, mention this to a friend or ten! Watch for more information via the newsletter, bulletins, narthex and our Facebook page. With your help, this will be a splendid (and hopefully not smelly) success for our youth.

PRAYER AND BIBLE STUDY: Wednesdays we will have a prayer and Bible Study group. Please check with Pastor Kooi for the current start time. Each week, we will gather together to pray and study a text. We will be meeting in-person and virtually. For those that attend virtually, we will have you join us via Zoom (contact Pastor Kooi for the link). Please contact Pastor Kooi for more details.

REGISTER FOR CONCORDIA ACADEMY CAMPS: This summer, Concordia Academy offers over 30 sports, arts, and STEM summer camps for elementary, middle, and high school students. New offerings include Cardboard Creations, Coding, Stop Motion Animation, and Sweet Treats & Healthy Eats! Go to www.concordiaacademy.com/camps to get details and register.

HEAR “THE LUTHERAN HOUR” on Sunday mornings at 6:05 a.m. on WCCO 830 AM radio. Next week’s broadcast: “But He Is Strong” Speaker: Rev. Dr. Michael Zeigler. We might not see weakness as a virtue. And yet, weakness is where God's strength is made perfect. (Mark 14:10-72)