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Devotions for Lent 2023 Hymns of Lent

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Devotions for Lent

2023



Hymns of Lent

Prepared by students of
Concordia Seminary
St. Louis, Missouri
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

St. Paul wrote to the church in Colossae, “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (Col 3:16).

By this statement, St. Paul demonstrates that the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs has many benefits. Singing helps God’s Word dwell in you. Singing is a means of teaching the faith. Singing is even a means of rebuking those who go against the faith. Singing is a way to give praise and thanks to God. Therefore, the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs should be a common practice in our devotional life.

In Advent, we took an in-depth look at four hymns or spiritual songs, namely, the four canticles from the infancy narrative in the Gospel of Luke. To do this, we reflected on the Biblical context and other Bible passages related to these canticles.

This Lent, we will continue reflecting on hymns of faith, namely, some of our most beloved Lenten hymns. 10 such hymns have been chosen to fill the 40(+) days of Lent. Therefore, this devotional, different from previous editions, does not proceed on a weekly basis, but merely flows from one hymn to the next. Also different from previous editions, the devotional reflections are specifically based on the stanzas of the selected hymns. Therefore, each day’s reflection features the text of the hymn stanza, a devotion based on that stanza, a prayer, and then a Scripture passage or passages for further meditation. I pray these reflections may be of edification for you during this Lenten season.

Many thanks to all the CSL and CTSFW students who contributed devotional reflections. A special note of thanks to Jonathan Lackey, who organized this effort at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, who has been a joy to work with and to get to know. A final note of thanks to Rev. Dr. Paul Grime (CTSFW), Rev. Dr. Arthur Just (CTSFW), Rev. Dr. David Lewis (CSL), and Kim Hosier in the print shop for their aid in completing this devotional booklet.

Brennan DeForest

Commemoration of Philemon and Onesimus, 2023

Savior, When in Dust to Thee

February 22, 2023

Daniel Warner (Sem IV, CTSFW)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 419:1)

Savior, when in dust to Thee
Low we bow the adoring knee;
When, repentant, to the skies
Scarce we lift our weeping eyes;
O, by all Thy pains and woe
Suffered Once for us below,
Bending from thy throne on high,
Hear our penitential cry!

Devotion:

The charred ash rests upon your forehead as the shock of reality breaks upon your life of relative comfort. “You are but dust and to dust you shall return.” The material of your very existence is deposited there in raw form. All the pride, all the complaints of life, all the vain pleasures and troubles are pulverized to a finer dust than that which you now adorn. The consequence of sin is apparent. Like the publican (*Lk* 18:13) you dare not raise your eyes to heaven. Yet this ash has no arbitrary form. It is cruciform. It is a visible mark of the one given to you when you were buried with Christ, baptized into death. It is the mark of salvation. While men would die and return to dust, the God-man would take on that same human flesh and on the cross would die. Yet, in the tomb, He would not return to dust, but undo the curse of eternal dust for His creation. In the shock of our frailty, we turn to this Savior, that He would hear our penitential cry!

Prayer:

Eternal Father, in Your wisdom You saw it fit to send Your Son, the Just, for the sake of the unjust, that our eternity might not be spent as dust. Open our ears this Lenten season to hear the call to repentance, that in the forgiveness won by Your Son, we may enjoy the glory of your presence forever; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Scripture for Meditation:

Ezekiel 18:25-32

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 419:2)

By Thy helpless infant years,
By Thy life of want and tears,
By Thy days of deep distress
In the savage wilderness,
By the dread, mysterious hour
Of the insulting tempter's power,
Turn, O turn a favoring eye;
Hear our penitential cry!

Devotion:

We see in Matthew 4 that, before beginning his earthly ministry, Christ was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where he fasted for 40 days. There he faced the devil, who sought to tempt him. At every turn, Christ rebuked the liar's snares by relying wholly on the Father and scripture. As we begin this Lenten season, where is your deep distress? When we orient our prayers upward and offer a penitential cry to the Lord, God who is righteous and merciful will surely hear us. Take a moment to think about the ways the Holy Spirit is working in you, fighting against your rebellious nature, calling you to seek comfort in the Father and not the things of this world. Offering a contrite heart is all we have to give, but that is enough. Whether or not you choose to fast like Christ in the wilderness this season, if you meditate on Scripture for sustenance, when the devil insults you with temptation, you will know where, and to whom, to turn.

Prayer:

Gracious and Merciful Lord, You sent Your son into the wilderness to face and overcome the temptations of the devil in preparation for His earthly ministry. Strengthen our hearts this Lenten season as we meditate on your word and endeavor to cry out to you rather than being tempted by the temporary things of this world; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever.

Scripture for Meditation:

And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. (Deut 8:3)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 419:3)

By Thine hour of dire despair,
By thine agony of prayer,
By the cross, the nail, the thorn,
Piercing spear, and torturing scorn,
By the gloom that veiled the skies
Over the dreadful sacrifice,
Listen to our humble sigh;
Hear our penitential cry!

Devotion:

Stanza three of our hymn, “Savior, When in Dust to Thee,” strings together a frightful list of torture, gloom, and sorrow. *Despair, agony, cross, nails, thorns, piercing, torturing scorn, gloom, dread, and sacrifice*. It’s a list that does not spare the reader any detail; it’s a list that does not ask us to *look away* but a list that asks us instead to *look towards*. Right here, right on the page in front of you, stands the Savior beaten and bloody. *Do not look away*. Do not avert your eyes but rather train them straight on the sight of Christ hanging on the tree and let your busy life come to a screeching stop. Do not deny the pain that you see, do not downplay it or attempt to sweep it away, for there He is suffering for your sin, and He does it in the sight of all. No, the suffering of Christ can be as little ignored as our own sin. There is no hiding it, neither what we have done nor what *He has done for us*. “*Listen to our humble sigh; hear our penitential cry!*”

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, Your Son was not ashamed to bear our guilt on the cross before the eyes of all. Grant that we not attempt to hide our sins before You but that we rather freely confess them and find peace in Your forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord.

Scripture for Meditation:

He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (Isa 53:5-6, NKJV)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 419:4)

By your deep expiring groan,
By the sad sepulchral stone,
By the vault whose dark abode
Held in vain the rising God,
O, from earth to heaven restored,
Mighty, re-ascended Lord,
Bending from your throne on high,
Hear our penitential cry!

Devotion:

It is all too easy in a world of great material comfort to think of Lent as being too dour for the Christian to observe, and, perhaps even more so, Good Friday too macabre to meditate upon. Everyone wishes to skip past the nastiness to the Easter victory. Yet, as our hymn reminds us, true joy and peace comes at a price. The earlier stanzas beautifully illustrate Christ's humiliation on our behalf, until this final stanza reveals that the expiring groan which the world saw as a defeat was indeed a cry of victory. The tomb in which Christ lay was only a temporary resting place until he burst forth, reconciling all in earth and heaven, visible and invisible, to the Father. During Lent, we know and remember that the same Christ, whose lashes, beatings, nails, and cross were begotten out of our sins, is the Christ seated at God's right hand who hears our repentant petition for mercy and then grants us his righteousness. This is true comfort. Blessed Lent.

Prayer:

Father of all goodness and mercy, You sent Your only-begotten Son to be pierced for our transgressions and reconcile all things to Yourself. Hear our penitential cry when we fall into sin, blot out our wrongdoing with His precious blood, and root out our evil desires, so that we may be preserved unto everlasting life with You; through Jesus Christ, Your only Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Scripture for Meditation:

Romans 5:6-11

Christ, the Life of All the Living

February 26, 2023

Jacob Sipes (Sem IV, CSL)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 420:1)

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

Devotion:

It's supposed to be you. Hanging there on that cross. But Jesus is there instead. Jesus. The life of all the living. Dead. Because of you. Because you can't keep it together.

Throughout this season, we reflect on Jesus' death in a tone that may be uncomfortable for some. We are regretful for our sins that sent our Savior to the cross. We remember, "I could have died, but Jesus saved me." Often, we forget our sins deserve death. We "sin boldly" in a vain attempt to exercise Christian freedom. We sin. We nail Jesus to the cross. Jesus' death does not give us a "hall pass" to sin more. "By no means!" Paul says. Jesus' blessed suffering and death gives all who believe in him life and salvation. And where there is life and salvation, there is eternal life. Once on the path of life, one should never choose a path of death and condemnation again. Choose life. Every day. Choose life.

Prayer:

Merciful and gracious heavenly Father, You gave Your Son, Jesus Christ, the Life of the world, to die in our place. In this truth, draw us nearer to You. With thankful hearts, may we always render thousands upon thousands of thanks to You, Lord God. We ask this in the dearest name of Jesus.

Scripture for Meditation:

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor 5:21)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 420:2)

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

Devotion:

This can be a difficult hymn to sing. Indeed, it seems like all Lenten hymns can be difficult to sing. The minor key, the heavy content, the contemplation of our sin and mortality... it can prove to be a weighty task. But this hymn can be heavy because you just want to stop, after just one line even, and think. You want to meditate on the words (might we even say “inwardly digest?”) But you must not do this. You must carry forward with the singing as Christ carried forward with his holy task of redemption. There will be time to meditate later, just as there was time for Christ to rest in the tomb. As he said in the garden, “Then he came to the disciples and said to them, ‘Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners’” (Matthew 26:45).

Prayer:

Gracious and heavenly Father, Your Son Jesus Christ bore our sins on the tree of the holy cross. Grant that we may be ever mindful of this sacrifice, so we do not forget the cost of our salvation; through Him we pray.

Scripture for Meditation:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (1 Pet 2:24)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 420:3)

Thou hast borne the smiting only
That my wounds might all be whole;
Thou hast suffered, sad and lonely,
Rest to give my weary soul;
Yea, the curse of God enduring,
Blessing unto me securing.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto thee.

Devotion:

Lent is the season of repentance, but for many it is also a season of loss. Long after the compassion of friends and family has petered out, we grieve and mourn what could and perhaps should have been. Your child will never meet their grandma. Your friends have drifted away. No one seems to understand your sorrow. It is for these moments that our Lord “suffered, sad and lonely.” Abandoned by his friends, rejected by his own people, Jesus is no stranger to sorrow or the pain of loneliness. Even as your eyes are clouded with tears, know that Jesus has wept too. Take heart, for Jesus suffered on the cross that you may have rest for your weary soul. In time, you will be able to thank him again, even a thousand thousand times.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, Your Son Jesus Christ took our sorrows, our griefs, and our loneliness upon Himself in His sufferings and death on the cross. Grant Your people comfort and peace in the face of loss of every kind, that they may find peace for their souls and gratitude in their hearts; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Scripture for Meditation:

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (Isa 53:3)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 420:4)

Heartless scoffers did surround Thee,
 Treating Thee with shameful scorn
And with piercing thorns they crowned Thee.
 All disgrace thou, Lord, hast borne,
That as Thine Thou mightest own me
And with heavenly glory crown me.
 Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
 Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

Devotion:

Scoffers gather to laugh and make fun of him, mockingly weaving a crown of thorns to crown him as “their king.” The disgrace, the agony, the crown that should be atop our own heads being taken away and placed on him who knew no sin and who is King and Lord. Jesus, taking our place upon that cross, bearing our sin and shame, paying the price of our sin with his very own blood, gives us a gift. Not a gift of payback or revenge, but he graciously gives us a crown, a new crown - a heavenly crown. This crown makes us a child of God, an inheritance that we could never get on our own, and one that is freely given. Thousand upon thousand of thanks we offer in worship and praise as Jesus took the place of us all.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, Your Son, Jesus Christ, died a shameful and painful death and took our place upon the cross. Make us bold in our worship, casting all worries, fears, and all things before You as we worship Your holy name, that we might grow closer to You in thought, word, and deed, more clearly seeing the magnificent crown You have given to us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Scripture for Meditation:

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. (Isa 53:5)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB 420:5*)

Thou hast suffered men to bruise Thee,
That from pain I might be free;
Falsely did Thy foes accuse Thee:
Thence I gain security;
Comfortless Thy soul did languish
Me to comfort in my anguish
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

Devotion:

Jesus suffered oppression and affliction patiently. He suffered it for you, and He does not even think of vengeance; He sets you free. Jesus has freed us from our iniquities and laid them upon Himself. A thousand thanks shall be, dearest Jesus, unto Thee. He stands silent like a lamb as foes accuse Him. Accusations that should be directed to us, Jesus takes upon Himself willingly. The chastisement placed upon Him brought us peace and security. Even though we turned from Jesus and went astray, Jesus turns to us and says to the Father, forgive them. A thousand thanks shall be, dearest Jesus, unto Thee. So often, we are quick to accuse or seek vengeance for some wrong committed against us. Jesus could have done the same to us when we, like sheep, have all gone astray. Yet He didn't. Jesus did the opposite. He took the vengeance and accusations upon Himself. A thousand thanks shall be, dearest Jesus, unto Thee. May God grant us this same patience and a forgiving heart toward our neighbor!

Prayer:

Atoning Lord, Your innocent Son, Jesus Christ, took upon Himself the sufferings and accusations we deserved and freed us from eternal death. Help us to treasure rightly in our hearts what our Lord has borne for our sakes that, after His example, we may bear with patience those things that are adverse to us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Scripture for Meditation:

Isaiah 53:5-7

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 420:6)

Thou hast suffered great affliction,
And hast borne it patiently,
Even death by crucifixion,
Fully to atone for me;
Thou didst choose to be tormented
That my doom should be prevented.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

Devotion:

The ancient Roman practice of crucifixion was reserved for the harshest of criminals. With the charge of “King of the Jews” above his head for all to see, Jesus has been sentenced to die.

Luther writes, “We crucified Him with our sins. We are still far from suffering what he suffered.”

Paul writes to the church in Rome “For the wages of sin is death.” Death is the consequence of a broken world. This consequence or debt must be paid to regain a righteous relationship with God. It was not the sins of Jesus but our sins that Jesus died for. We are now dead to sin and alive to righteousness. It is through Christ’s suffering and death we have new life in Him. By His wounds, we have been healed. “But the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.” As we journey to the cross during this Lenten season let us not forget that through the ultimate suffering on the cross, we receive the greatest free gift; eternal life in Jesus Christ.

“Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, dearest Jesus unto thee.”

Prayer:

Almighty Father, You sent Your only Son into a world plagued by brokenness and darkness to pay the ultimate sacrifice. It is through this death that we have new life. May we ever be mindful of the ultimate sacrifice paid on our behalf, that we may be bold in proclaiming the good news of Your Son’s resurrection; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Scripture for Meditation:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (1 Pet 2:24)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 420:7)

Then, for all that wrought my pardon,
 For thy sorrows deep and sore,
For thine anguish in the Garden,
 I will thank Thee evermore,
Thank Thee for Thy groaning, sighing,
For Thy bleeding and Thy dying,
 For that last triumphant cry,
 And shall praise Thee, Lord, on high.

Devotion:

Perhaps, in a season of repentance and the contemplation of our Lord's suffering, thanksgiving is not the first impulse of our hearts. Yet, this is ultimately the aim and purpose of this season. A reflection on our own sin leads to an open-handed repentance, but this is not an end in itself – rather, it leads us to thanksgiving for “all that wrought my pardon” – Christ's sorrow, anguish, groaning, sighing, bleeding, and dying. It is for this that even the angels in heaven praise him, the Lamb who was slain (Rev. 5:11). He is worthy of all praise and thanksgiving, as the one whose victory came through death upon a cross. Our thanksgiving, therefore, is the ultimate expression of our empty-handed need, recognizing the gift that fills it. Sorrow over sin is blended with praise to the one who has wrought our pardon. We repent and are thankful, all at once, with open hands, to receive every good and gracious gift from him forevermore.

Prayer:

Almighty and everlasting God, Your Son wrought our pardon through his sorrow, anguish, suffering, and death on a cross. Move our hearts to repentant joy, that we might praise and thank Him evermore; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Scripture for Meditation:

For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. (2 Cor. 4:15)

Jesus, Refuge of the Weary

March 5, 2023

Daniel Kinley (Sem II, CTSFW)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB 423:1*)

Jesus, refuge of the weary,
 Blest Redeemer whom we love,
Fountain in life's desert dreary,
 Savior from the world above:
Often have Your eyes, offended,
 Gazed upon the sinners fall;
Yet upon the cross extended,
 You have borne the pain of all.

Devotion:

The environment Christians find themselves in is hostile to the things of God. Our normal existence can resemble that of survivors in a life raft. Though lucky to have been saved from the sinking ship of sin and death, we still find ourselves in the maelstrom of this fallen world. Against such odds, our strength will wane. And so Jesus calls to us, saying, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28). For those in the raft, surrounded by violent waves, the briny water of the sea is as inhospitable as an arid wasteland. Imbibing it would only cause death, as would ingesting the forbidden fruit of this alien world. Christ alone can quench our thirst. Salvation can not be gained from the dreadful sea. Though our sins stand abhorrent in the eyes of the Almighty, they have been atoned for on a roughly hewn cross by the blood of God Himself. And so we continue, faithfully clinging to Christ, gaining strength in Word and Sacrament. After all, the storms of this life are but for a time. Life in Christ is eternal.

Prayer:

O Almighty God, outside of You there is darkness, terror, the howling of storms, and ruin. With you there is light, peace, silence, and refuge. Help us to ever seek You, so that we may be refreshed, renewed, and strengthened to bravely face the hostility that surrounds us; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer.

Scripture for Meditation:

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." (Rom. 8:18)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 423:2)

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

Devotion:

Those who passed by the cross scoffed at our crucified Lord. The Jewish leaders mocked Him to each other. Even the robbers being crucified alongside Him reviled Christ.

As we pass by the crosses adorning the walls of our homes, we see our sin resulting in the wounding of the Holy One of God. When we go by the crosses in our schools and workplaces, we see our sin leading to His bloody hands, feet, and side. When we see the crucifixes in our churches, we see the crown of thorns upon the head of the King of Glory. We can only offer this plea for mercy: "I am heartily sorry for my sins and sincerely repent of them." The sinless death of Jesus, however, calms our despairing hearts. He bore our sins so that we might receive eternal life, peace, and rest in Him. Then, every cross we pass by also becomes a reminder of these gifts and the hope we have in our crucified Savior and Lord.

Prayer:

Almighty God, Your Son, Jesus, was nailed to the cross for the forgiveness of my sins and the sins of the whole world. Grant me a repentant heart and Your Holy Spirit that I may live a life pleasing to You and look only to You for life eternal, peace, and rest; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Scripture for Meditation:

Mark 15:27-32

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 423:3)

Jesus, may our hearts be burning
 With more fervent love for You;
May our eyes be every turning
 To behold Your cross anew
Till in glory, parted never
 From the blessed Savior's side,
Graven in our hearts forever,
 Dwell the cross, the Crucified.

Devotion:

In this stanza, we pray to our Savior, that our faith, granted to us in our Baptism, may burn with more fervent love. This fervent love that we ask for is a love which is, as Solomon writes, “strong as death” (Song of Solomon 8:6). This love which is strong as death is on full display when Christ goes willingly to the cross to suffer and die for the sake of the world. This cross, which once was a brutal Roman execution device, is now beheld by us anew. For it is on the cross that Christ gives us an example of the love that is stronger than death. It is here that we have the image of the glorified Christ, the crucified and risen King, engraved on our hearts. We pray that we might have our eyes opened like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, so that we can recognize our blessed Savior and let our hearts burn with the love that defies death.

Prayer:

Blessed Savior, just as You opened the eyes of the two men on the road to Emmaus, let our eyes be opened and our heart be burning with the love that overcomes death, so that we may proclaim You, the crucified and glorified King; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Scripture for Meditation:

Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities (Isa 53:11).

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

March 8, 2023

Josh Kintz (Sem IV, CSL)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB 425:1*)

When I survey the wonderous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Devotion:

In engineering school, I took a drafting course. If you were even mildly artistically inclined, then this course was a welcomed respite in a STEM oriented course of study. I remember spending the first couple weeks on the proper pointing of letters. Choosing where to place your letters, and how and when to pick up your pen, required a precision in each stroke of the pen long before ever making a calculation. Turning a technical survey of a parking lot into a certified blueprint took some imagination, but a lot more focus and dedication on the *details*.

“When I survey the wonderous cross,” I take in the *details*. The details of Christ’s passion or the technicalities of a broken relationship that only God could restore. The details of Christ’s emptying of himself or how His blood was shed for you. When I survey the cross and take in the details, how could I *possibly* boast of any position, gain any reputation, or wield any kind of power in the presence of such selflessness?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, the Prince of Glory, Your Son, Jesus Christ, came into this world in the form of a servant and through His obedience unto death gained for us reconciliation with You. Through Your Spirit, guard our hearts and minds against a puffed-up pride in order that we might survey the details of our broken condition and hold fast to the wondrous resolution in Him; through the same, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Scripture for Meditation:

1 Corinthians 1:31, Galatians 6:14, Philippians 2:6-8

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 425:2)

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

Devotion:

Our past experiences lend us surety so that we can perform with confidence the routine. When we step out from the old and into the new we can at times become filled with the uncertainty of ambiguities. We are no longer in Kansas and the hands which we once felt so competent now appear to fail us in our present need. But, brothers and sisters in Christ, God made these hands of ours. If we were once sure in them on account of our ability, how much more so ought we be when considering God works his will by the bodies he blessed us with. There is wisdom here that all things come to us from God and His works will endure past our own fumbling hands. What we struggle in vain to build will be laid waste in time, but there is comfort in knowing the evils which oppress us are also as ashen as our works. Nothing can prevail against God and nothing can outlast the eternity promised to us by our salvation through Jesus Christ at the cross. This world will not endure, instead God will remake it and raise us to new bodies. On that last day, the salvation we now trust in by faith in Christ will be made known to us with surety in the presence of God for all eternity.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, You found favor with Your servant King Solomon and blessed his reign over Your people with great wisdom. Grant to us also great wisdom to lead our lives in fervent love towards You and one another, that we might find our surety in Your acts and not our own and with the faith You work within us we might grow as human means of your wondrous works; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord.

Scripture for Meditation:

I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him. That which is, already has been, that which is to be, already has been, and God seeks what has been driven away. (Eccl 3:14-15)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 425:3)

See, from His Head, His Hands, His feet
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did ever such love and sorrow meet
Or thorns compose so rich a crown

Devotion:

Love and sorrow mingled. Shame and glory mingled. Power and helplessness mingled. The cross of Christ is a great mingling of seemingly contradictory parts. The cross makes no sense to human reason. Even many so-called Christians in the early Church could not endure the blow which the cross delivered to their reason, so they explained it away. “Christ only appeared to have a human body; he only appeared to suffer and die on the Cross, but this is not the reality.” The Church roundly rejected such godless notions. “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). To Caesar belongs the ethereal laurel wreath crown, to Christ the profane crown of thorns. Yet from the ethereal laurel wreath crown flows wrath, bitterness, and death; but from the profane crown of thorns flows forth love, grace, peace, and salvation.

Prayer:

O God most wise, by the death of Your Son Jesus Christ You made the wise foolish and made the simple wise unto salvation. Grant that we Your children may be ignorant to the world and its seductions and that we be made wise unto salvation in the cross of Your Christ; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Scripture for Meditation:

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:9-10)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 425:4)

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
 That were a tribute far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
 Demands my soul, my life, my all!

Devotion:

As we contemplate the wondrous cross of Christ, the last stanza of this hymn may bring various thoughts to our minds. We may think of Philippians 3:8 – that the value of “the whole realm of nature” is nothing compared to life in Christ. We might as well count ourselves dead to the world because we cannot belong to Jesus half-way. On the other hand, this stanza does not simply depict the whole realm of nature as a possession we might have for ourselves, but imagines it as a “tribute” for Christ. Even if we had all creation to offer Him, it would never be a fitting return for His life spent on the cross. And yet... this amazing, divine love does not demand the whole world from us. The blood of the Lamb is spent *for us*. For our souls, our lives, our all. The Son of the living God lays down His spotless life, taking up the sin of those who would be worth nothing apart from His love. We serve a God who may have what He pleases, and He demands to have us.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, Your Son gave His life for sinners with nothing to return. Grant us to know Your amazing, divine love, that we may count everything else as loss and live as those purchased by His precious blood, with our eyes always toward the wondrous cross; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Scripture for Meditation:

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ. (Phil 3:8)

Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Pet 1:18-19)

My Song Is Love Unknown

March 12, 2023

Dale Krienke (Sem IV, CTSFW)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 430:1)

My song is love unknown,
My Savior's love to me,
Love to the loveless shown
That they might lovely be.
Oh, who am I
That for my sake
My Lord should take
Frail flesh and die?

Devotion:

We are all selfish and ignorant. We love ourselves and do not have time for others and their problems. We are loveless. Yet, God is love (1 John 4:8). God's love would mean nothing to us except if we knew about it. Therefore, it was manifested by His Son Jesus Christ on the cross. God's mission of sending His Son to us was that we might live and love through Him (1 John 4:9). His love means life. So also, His love is the source of our love. Christ was the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10). He actively sought us out to turn our selfishness into loveliness. He loves the loveless to make them lovely. Though our selfishness will never be eliminated in this life, neither will our Savior's love for us. Christ's love for you and me is made known through His Word and Sacraments. Jesus fulfilled God's demands of obedience once and for all. He suffered and died as payment for our sins, but by His resurrection, lives for all eternity. God has bestowed life and love on us and this is worth affirming. This is truly love unknown.

Prayer:

Almighty God, Your Son Jesus Christ gave Himself on the cross to show His love for us and save us from all our sins. Grant us by Your Holy Spirit that in our weak flesh we may have a sincere love for You and one another, so that we may continue to proclaim God's Word to those in need and freely receive Your continued grace and love until life everlasting; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Scripture for Meditation:

1 John 4:9-10

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 430:2)

He came from His blest throne
 Salvation to bestow;
But men made strange, and none
 The longed-for Christ would know.
But, oh, my friend,
 My Friend indeed,
 Who at my need
His life did spend!

Devotion:

Who among us men know the joy of a genuine friend? The one who knows us intimately, completely, better than we ourselves, who loves us despite our flaws and failures, who is ever present in our despair and need, who would lay down his life for us. Such friendship comes from the love which knows no earthly origin, but rather was bestowed by Him who knit our bones and sinews together, gave His only begotten Son over to death, and sent His Spirit into our hearts.

St. John Chrysostom writes, *“He who loves does not wish to command, nor to rule, but is rather obliged when he is ruled and commanded: he wishes rather to bestow a favour than to receive one, for he loves, and feels as one who has not satisfied his desire.”* Thus is the love of the One who is betrayed, despised, and rejected, who bears our griefs and carries our sorrows. He, who paid the price, endured the pain, and served as the sacrifice to save us from eternal separation from the Father, came for and loved all. To those who Him receive, Christ our Lord and King, a friend well-known, indeed.

Prayer:

Gracious Father of steadfast love and mercy, you sent Your Son Jesus Christ to save us. Grant that we strive to live as He did, showing real love and friendship to all who are placed in our path, that together we may live as you desire, in unity, not as men made strange, but as men of one heart and soul; through Christ Jesus, our Lord, Amen.

Scripture for Meditation:

Romans 5:6-11; John 1:10-11; Psalm 139

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 430:3)

Sometimes they strew His way
 And His sweet praises sing;
Resounding all the day
 Hosannas to their King.
Then “Crucify!”
 Is all their breath,
 And for His death
They thirst and cry.

Devotion:

In reading the Gospel of John, the contrast between this stanza’s two parts couldn’t be clearer. In His Triumphal Entry, the people of Jerusalem were literally calling Him, “the King of Israel” (John 12:13). Next, in chapter 19, Jesus was on trial before Pilate, and all that the people present could think about was, “crucify him, crucify him!” (John 18:6; see 7, 12, 15). When Pilate asks whether he should crucify their king, they respond, “we have no king but Caesar.”

This contrast depicts how we often are, even as Christians. On Sunday we sing “Hosanna!” while on Monday and throughout the week we manifest our sinful selves. By our sins, we depict our rejection of Jesus in the sinful flesh and show forth the reason He was crucified in the first place. During this penitential season, may we stop to ponder our culpability in Christ’s death. At the same time let us take refuge in the Lord’s “saving” us through that very death, as the meaning of “Hosanna” itself implies.

Prayer:

O God, You sent Your Son Jesus into the world to be our life and salvation. Give us the gift of eternal life through the forgiveness of our sins, that though we ourselves sin daily, we may be strengthened by Your Holy Ghost to live in peace and godliness; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Scripture for Meditation:

John 19:12-16

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 430:4)

Why, what hath my Lord done?
 What makes this rage and spite?
He made the lame to run,
 He gave the blind their sight!
Sweet injuries!
 Yet they at these
 Themselves displease
And against Him rise.

Devotion:

What, indeed, hath my Lord done? He has done what only my Lord could do. He made the lame to run; He made us who could not walk for our constant darkened fumbling to run without stumbling. He gave the blind their sight, not only those physically blind, but also all we who cannot on our own see the paths of righteousness nor recognize our Lord Jesus Christ and rest our gaze upon Him. He was made sin who knew no sin, exchanging our sin for His righteousness. Yet, some remained lame and blind, bearing their sin. Though they rose up against Him, they brought themselves low, while He, who they would send to the depths of Sheol, was lifted up on the cross and exalted. They injured Him, who is in Himself invincible, that by His wounds we might be healed, and so we are. Let us no longer burn with rage and spite, but see with enlightened eyes our own guilt and repent, and so rest in the sweet balm of His forgiveness.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, You suffered the unjust rage and bitter spite of Your own people and bore all our sickness and sin in Your body. Give us ready feet and faithful eyes, that we would follow You steadfastly in all affliction and see Your love in all things; You who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Scripture for Meditation:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed (1 Pet. 2:24)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 430:5)

They rise and needs will have

 My dear Lord made away;

A murderer they save,

 The Prince of Life they slay.

Yet cheerful He

 To suffering goes

 That He His foes

From thence might free.

Devotion:

The Psalmist declares of the LORD, “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you” (Ps 89:14). One does not have to possess a law degree to see how blatantly unjust the scene in this hymn stanza is. In Micah 6 the LORD brings His case against His people. The evidence is damning. Wicked Israel, indeed we ourselves, must be destroyed for our sins. However, Christ our Savior, the one who alone is righteous, takes the injustice and the abominations that are rightly ours. For these He is declared guilty, and for them He dies. He is the one who is struck brutally with palm and fist, flogged, and made to be an appalling site. He is the one mocked by all the nations (Mic 6:13, 18). He does not demand justice for Himself, but for us who, in sin, are His foes. By His blood, justice is satisfied and the LORD becomes our righteousness (Jer 33:16). Thus, righteousness and justice are the foundation of the throne of the cross.

Prayer:

O Lord, Jesus Christ, You unjustly suffered the wrath and punishment that rightly belonged to us because of our sin. Grant that, by faithfully meditating on and pondering Your holy passion, we may learn to abhor our sin and live lives in true repentance and thanksgiving for our redemption. In Your most holy and precious name we pray.

Scripture for Meditation:

John 10:18; Romans 5:6-11; 1 Peter 2:24

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 430:6)

In life no house, no home,
 My Lord on earth might have;
In death no friendly tomb
 But what a stranger gave.
What may I say?
 Heaven was his home
 But mine the tomb
Wherein he lay.

Devotion:

What may we say? What can we say? Are there words appropriate for what it is that God has done for us?

There was no place, Christ said, that he could lay head. The fox might have had a den of dirt and the little birdy might have had a nest even of nettles, but this was still more than what the Son of Man possessed in his life on earth. A dead man, though lacking life itself, still has a headstone ready for him at his burial. Praise and exaltation and power and dominion belonged to Christ, but he denied it. He denied life itself, even though he was the author and source of it, so that we could once again live. He took the hell and horror of our lives upon himself so that we could take the paradise of his. There is nothing that we may say of ourselves. He is our Word and all.

Prayer:

Jesus, our Redeemer, You left Your throne in heaven to hang upon the cross and lay in the tomb so that we might live with You forever. Remain our source of joy and peace in this life so that we might not get distracted by any temptation of this life and forget the life which has been given us; together with the Father and Holy Spirit.

Scripture for Meditation:

Romans 8:1-27

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 430:7)

Here might I stay and sing
 No story so divine!
Never was love, dear King,
 Never was grief like Thine.
This is my friend,
 In whose sweet praise
 I all my days
Could gladly spend!

Devotion:

“And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” (Matt 6:27). Jesus often healed people and then sternly instructed them not to tell anyone. In one particular case, two blind men come to Jesus to be healed. After he heals them, Jesus (using a play on words) instructs them to be silent, “And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, ‘See that no one knows about it’” (Matt 9:30). Many people saw Jesus as only a miracle worker and not also the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world. This is why Jesus was stern towards many. We too fall into this temptation. We anxiously demand: heal my cancer, take away my pregnancy pains, abolish plagues, etc. There were probably thousands of blind men and women who were never healed by Jesus. However, what they did see with their ears was the salvific work of our Lord Jesus Christ that he won on the cross, “So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us” (1 Jn 4:16). Therefore, see what Jesus instructs, “...seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matt 6:33).

Prayer:

Almighty Father, You gave us Your Son to be a propitiation for the sins of the world. Point us to how You taught us to pray, so that we may see and trust in Your promises and know what is meet and right to do; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Scripture for Meditation:

Matthew 6:9-13

Not All the Blood of Beasts

March 19, 2023

Drew Oswald (Sem IV, CSL)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 431:1)

Not all the blood of beasts,
 On Jewish altars slain;
Could give the guilty conscience peace
 Or wipe away its stain.

Devotion:

Growing up on a hog farm, I got dirty. This wasn't a "I am a bit unkempt, I should shower" type of dirty. This was a "I am caked with sweat, grime, and manure, I may never be clean again" type of dirty. Dirty, filthy, stained.

You may feel like that during Lent. Not from a day with the pigs, but because you, like me, were conceived and born guilty, deeply filthy from sin's stain. And, like me, you've added plenty of grimy, stinky sins since then. Think for a moment. What sins make you feel dirty? You probably don't have to think long. The stain of sin troubles our conscience.

Unlike the farm, no amount of scrubbing will make us clean; neither doctrinal knowledge nor good intentions can wash away sin. The Old Testament sacrifices couldn't cleanse God's people forever. You need something more purifying. You need the blood of Jesus. His blood cleanses you. Because of Jesus' blood, your conscience is clean. You can live now in peace knowing that Jesus cleanses you.

Prayer:

Lamb of God, You shed Your blood to cleanse the world from sin. Grant that we who suffer from dirty consciences because of our sins may receive confidence in our cleanliness that, having been set free from fear and shame, we may live with peaceful minds and satisfied souls; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Scripture for Meditation:

...the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.(1 John 1:7b)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 431:2)

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

Devotion:

Unfortunately, as a result of the fall, we are now slaves to sin. As slaves to sin, we are by extension slaves to death. From dust were we created and to dust we shall return. In order to atone for sins, sacrifices were offered up to God. Any sin, no matter how trivial is now a transgression of the Law and we are accountable to God.

Jesus' death on the cross, makes us righteous again, free from the curse of the Law. It is this redeeming act that looses the bondage of sin, death, and the devil, and grants us eternal life. As we journey to the cross this Lenten season, let us be mindful that our salvation has been won through the ultimate sacrifice, Jesus' death on the cross; a sacrifice that takes all our sins away. May we be strengthened in our faith as we celebrate this new life won for us.

Prayer:

O Almighty God, Your Son, Jesus Christ was sent to earth as the ultimate sacrifice, a sacrifice of nobler name. Grant us comfort in knowing that our debt has been paid through the blood of Your Son, that it may strengthen us in faith and in fervent love to You; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Scripture for Meditation:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. (Gal 3:13-14)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 431:3)

My faith would lay its hand
 On that dear head of Thine,
While as a penitent I stand,
 And there confess my sin.

Devotion:

A hand laid on a head. It could be a gentle act, a gesture of comfort, compassion, and peace. Not so for the people of Israel. A hand laid on a head meant death. When an animal was to be sacrificed, the priests laid their hands on its head. When a person profaned the name of the Lord, the people would lay their hands on that person's head, and then stone them (Lev. 24:14). Through the hands, the crown is burdened by the weight of sin and death. This is no gentle act.

By faith, with our besmirched hands, we lay hold of the most glorious head of all and let Him bear the weight of our guilt and shame upon His thorn-pierced brow. And He becomes our every living head.

Thus, we see the act anew. When a pastor lays his hand upon the brow of the freshly baptized, or the one who has confessed, or the child at the rail, by Christ, the hand which meant sin and death, now means pardon and life.

Prayer:

Merciful God, You have given Your precious Son to bear our sin and have raised Him up as our source of life and peace. Strengthen our faith, through Your gifts, that we may ever lay our sins upon Jesus and take firm hold of His sure gifts of grace and eternal life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, Our Lord.

Scripture for Meditation:

He shall lay his hand on the head of the goat and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offering before the Lord; it is a sin offering (Lev 4:24)

He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent (Col 1:18)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 431:4)

My soul looks back to see
 The burden Thou didst bear
When hanging on the cursed tree;
 I know my guilt was there.

Devotion:

When we as fallen creatures feel the crushing weight of despair brought forth by the law, our only refuge is looking to the cross. Our flesh tempts us to set our eyes on the letter of the law as if it can save us. But the law was given to imprison us under sin that we would faithfully look alone to the saving grace that God has provided us through His Son (Gal. 3:22). The Word who knew no sin was made our sin (2 Cor. 5:21), becoming accursed upon a tree to redeem us from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13). The wisdom of the world would have us avert our eyes from Calvary and pursue glory through our good deeds. But truly, we can render nothing to God but to witness our guilt imputed to His Son on the cross, in order that we might receive His Spirit through faith (Gal. 3:14). Therefore, we gaze upon the humiliation of our Lord, not with despair, but with hope.

Prayer:

O Almighty God, You sent Your Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer and die with our sins imputed to Him, so that we may die to the curse of the law and be resurrected in Christ's righteousness. Continue to point us to the cross against all temptation to live by the works of the law, helping us instead to live by faith in the Name above all names, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Scripture for Meditation:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree", so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. (Gal 3:13-14)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 431:5)

Believing we rejoice

To see the curse remove

We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice

And sing His bleeding love.

Devotion:

We rejoice! That isn't typical Lenten posture, but don't discount this. In conjunction with this rejoicing, contemplate the curse that is removed, and the flowing blood from the Lamb, Jesus. Since Adam first tasted of the fruit that was forbidden, all mankind, all creation has been under the curse of death. Everything resigned to perpetual decay. Even after the death of the body, humans would suffer death eternally in hell. It is an unending, unmanageable, unmitigated curse. There is no relief, no getting used to it, but constant degradation swirling towards annihilation but never getting that release. This is the curse which the world found itself under, the same curse that still bites at our heels and tries to prey on you, your loved ones, your friends, and neighbors. Worst of all you are helpless against it. But rejoice, for the Lamb's blood flowed from the cross! It bled into all creation, purging the curse from you and making you an inheritor of the glorious resurrection that you might live forever, incorruptible, eternally glad and contented with the Lamb in His kingdom forever. Amen.

Prayer:

O Blessed Jesus, You took upon Yourself the curse with which we had inflicted upon ourselves in rebellion and brought blessing and life out of curse. Gently guide us to everlasting life and turn our hearts toward You when death draws near, that we may rejoice with You in eternity in Your victorious kingdom; for the sake of your blessed name.

Scripture for Meditation:

No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Rev 22:3-5)

Come to Calvary's Holy Mountain

March 24, 2023

Benjamin Wessel (Sem II, CTSFW)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 435:1)

Come to Calvary's holy mountain,
Sinners, ruined by the fall;
Here a pure and healing fountain
Flows for you, for me, for all,
In a full, perpetual tide,
Opened when our Savior died.

Devotion:

Come, sinners ruined by the fall! Come to the holy mountain! Come to Calvary! This mountain is not like Mount Sinai, with its thunder and lightning and judgment. This mountain is not like Eden, from whence we were exiled by the fall. This mountain is a mountain of forgiveness, grace and mercy. This mountain is a mountain of peace. From this mountain flows a healing fountain, a fountain that heals us from all the ruin of the fall. This fountain of healing was opened when Christ our Savior died, bringing forth blood and water for the salvation of the world (John 19:34). From this fountain we once again partake in the baptismal water of life, and drink deeply of the fruit of the Tree of Life. So drink deeply of this fountain, O Christian! Here is healing for all of your ills. Here you are welcomed back into Paradise!

Prayer:

Blessed Savior, Jesus Christ, in Your death You destroyed death, and by Your sacrifice You have made atonement for all of my sins. Grant, O gracious Savior, the abundance of Your mercy, that feasting on the riches of Your grace, I may be made whole from all my iniquities; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, One God now and forever.

Scripture for Meditation:

The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 435:2)

Come in poverty and meanness,
 Come defiled, without, within;
From infection and uncleanness,
 From the leprosy of sin,
Wash your robes and make them white;
Ye shall walk with God in light.

Devotion:

We often feel that we can hide our sins, our wretchedness, and our unholiness from the world. We believe that we can keep our faults and failures hidden in the recesses of our hearts from even those closest to us. However, our God sees past all of the barriers, stories, and misdirection. He sees that we are sinners who are stained by our thoughts, words, and deeds, beyond the point of being able to clean ourselves up. He sees the sin that lies within us all.

God also sees us as His dear creation, whom He greatly loves. He sees you as the one that He desires to cleanse from all sin and defilement. He sees you as the one that He wishes to walk with as your Heavenly Father. He is the one who has given you His Son, Jesus Christ, who has died in your place, that his blood might wash away your sins. God sees you as His dearly beloved child, and He welcomes you to walk in the light with Him, now and forevermore.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, You have given Your Son Jesus Christ to pay for our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Bring us to You daily through the power of Your Holy Spirit, that we may walk with You in the light, all the days of our life; through Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.

Scripture for Meditation:

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 435:3)

Come in sorrow and contrition,
 Wounded, impotent, and blind;
Here the guilty, free remission,
 Here the troubled, peace may find.
Health this fountain will restore;
They that drink shall thirst no more.

Devotion:

We come before Jesus in sorrow and contrition, guilty of an uncountable number of sins. So many sins that we are blind to most of them. We are wounded by sin, but incapable of doing anything to heal ourselves. The guilt we have makes us troubled beyond consoling.

We come before Jesus in sorrow and contrition, confessing all that we have done wrong in thought, word, and deed. He offers free remission from all guilt. He gives water not to quench the thirst of this life, but to give eternal life. He provides health to the wounded and sight to the blind. Here, at Calvary's Holy Mountain, Christ died for sinners and atoned for all sins.

We come before Jesus in sorrow and contrition, leaving forgiven and filled with the peace that only Christ can give. His grace has restored us to a new life now and eternal life with Him in His kingdom.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, in the waters of Baptism You forgave all our sin. Give to us the water that satisfies all thirst, that we may live eternally in Your kingdom; where You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Scripture for Meditation:

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:13-14)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 435:4)

They that drink shall live forever;
 'Tis a soul-renewing flood.
God is faithful; God will never
 Break His covenant of blood,
Signed when our Redeemer died,
Sealed when He was glorified.

Devotion:

When God made a covenant, His promise was always sealed by the shedding of blood, usually a lamb or a bull. When God made the new covenant, it was in Jesus's blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. In the past, drinking the blood was always forbidden, since the life was in the blood. Now, in this new covenant, the drinking of Jesus's blood is what gives life. This blood of Jesus floods over us, covering all our sins. This blood of Jesus is God's pledge that He is faithful to you, that He will never leave or forsake you. This blood of Jesus renews all who drink in faith, trusting Jesus to forgive. The death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus assure us that God will not back out on His promises. He will raise you from death and give you new life. Your God, your Jesus is faithful, He will surely bring you to the new heavens and new earth with Him forever.

Prayer:

Lord God, heavenly Father, Your Son has given us the new covenant in His blood in His holy Supper. Grant us faith to receive His blood as a pledge of life forever, that we might rejoice in Your eternal Kingdom; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Scripture for Meditation:

Hebrews 9:11-28

Go to Dark Gethsemane

March 28, 2023

Aidan Moon (Sem IV, CSL)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 436:1)

Go to dark Gethsemane,
All who feel the tempter's power;
Your Redeemer's conflict see,
Watch with Him one bitter hour;
Turn not from His griefs away;
Learn from Jesus Christ to pray.

Devotion:

C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*, “Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is... Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means — the only complete realist.” For those in Christ, temptation bears with it a greater struggle. Those who battle the impulses within them, whether of lust, anger, pride, or despair, are those who begin to experience their true weight. Yet, the hymnwriter urges us, if we are to find relief from this burden, it is in Christ's example that we might learn how this battle is to be fought: on our knees. Christ, the one who has truly experienced and borne the full weight of the tempter's power for us, alone can be our strength in the times of temptation. May his struggle in the garden teach us to pray, as he taught us, against the powers of sin, death, and the evil one, that we might be delivered from them. May his suffering be our hope. May we trust in his holy, innocent, bitter suffering and death as our rescue from all evil.

Prayer:

Lord God, You sent an angel to strengthen Jesus in the garden. Strengthen us in the time of temptation, that we might be delivered by Your mighty power to do Your holy will; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Scripture for Meditation:

Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Matt 26:41)

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (Matt 6:13)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 436:2)

Follow to the judgment hall,
View the Lord of life arraigned.
Oh, the wormwood and the gall!
Oh, the pangs his soul sustained!
Shun not suffering, shame, or loss;
Help us, Lord, to bear our cross.

Devotion:

By this time, we are all deep in the Lenten season. Thus, we are heavily reflecting and meditating on what we know is to come. As each day inches forward to Good Friday, our hearts and souls grow heavier with realization. Even more so, we know that our most gracious Lord, Jesus Christ, knew that the time was drawing near. As he was arraigned on that cross, the pain inflicted upon his very human and divine nature is what was supposed to be inflicted upon us. He bore the cross for our salvation, but we are called to bear our own crosses for the sake of the Kingdom. Help us, O Lord, by your grace and by the examples of your saints, to bear our cross in all that we do.

Prayer:

O Almighty God, Your only, true, and adorable Son, Jesus Christ, became incarnate of human flesh to suffer death in place of us, poor, miserable sinners. By Your grace, help us to never take our gaze away from the cross and You, O Holy God, so that we may truly preach Christ crucified for all; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Scripture for Meditation:

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. (1 Pet 2:21)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 436:3)

Calvary's mournful mountain climb,
 There, adoring at His feet,
Mark that miracle of time,
 God's own sacrifice complete,
"It is finished!" hear Him cry;
Learn from Jesus Christ to die.

Devotion:

The Evil One confronts us daily by throwing our sins in our face, tempting us to despair at our unrighteousness. But we must recall what our Lord cried out on the cross, the final words of His Passion, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). This word "finished" also has the sense of *complete* or *perfect*. God's wrath over human sin has been perfectly satisfied because He lovingly gave up His only begotten Son to suffer and die for us (Rom. 8:32). Christ our Passover lamb was sacrificed (1 Cor. 5:7), the miracle of time when God imbedded Himself in our human story to die along with our sins. No more atonement is required, no more temple offerings needed, no more bloodshed demanded. Instead, we now bask in God's grace. For we have now been united to Christ's death in Baptism, so too we will also be united with His resurrection (Rom. 6:5-7). Satan has no hold on us, as we are dead with Christ to every sin.

Prayer:

O Almighty God, You have provided us the perfect sacrifice for the miraculous redemption of the world, Your Son Jesus Christ. Help us to remember that through Holy Baptism we have been united to His death and thus have died to all our sins and are alive in You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever.

Scripture for Meditation:

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. (Rom 6:5-7)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 436:4)

Early hasten to the tomb

Where they laid His breathless clay;

All is solitude and gloom.

Who has taken Him away?

Christ is risen! He meets our eyes.

Savior, teach us so to rise.

Devotion:

“All is solitude and gloom.” How often is that the case? We look around and we see a world out of control. Sickness, disasters, wars, division, on and on it goes. When looking at the world we try to make sense of it all, to see it through our own categories and philosophies. Yet the world continues to show us senselessness. Perhaps you begin to wonder if there really is any meaning to it at all, or if you are just part of the indifferent randomness. “All is solitude and gloom.” Just as you are about to lose hope, just as the feeling of meaninglessness isolates you, again you hear the words of the gospel. Jesus is alive. Christ’s resurrection is the bedrock of our faith, the bedrock of meaning in a broken and confusing world. Because Jesus lives, so do you. Because Jesus has broken the chains of death, purpose and meaning our yours. You are a new creation, no longer isolated, but united to Christ and His church. We now see the world with the sure and certain hope that we too will be raised from death, that we are not alone.

Prayer:

Gracious heavenly Father, Your Son Jesus has defeated death and given meaning to our lives. We ask that You would fix our eyes on the hope we have in Christ, that we may live knowing we are united to Him and will live forever; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Scripture for Meditation:

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Rom 5:5)

No Tramp of Soldiers' Marching Feet

April 1, 2023

Zak Kreitler (Sem II, CTSFW)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 444:1)

No tramp of soldiers' marching feet

With banners and with drums.

No sound of music's martial beat:

"The King of glory comes!"

To greet what pomp of kingly pride

No bells in triumph ring.

No city gates swing open wide:

"Behold, behold your king"

Devotion:

There was no military procession, no sound of trumpets playing, and no self-aggrandizing decorations for the triumphal entry of the King of all creation. The King of glory enters in, welcomed with shouts of Hosanna, yet soon to be crucified by His own whom He seeks to redeem. He enters as a man, humbly. He arrives, not to glorify Himself but to be glorified by His Father in Heaven in place of every man who has fallen short of God's glory. In His humility, He is glorified. The Father willingly sends Him there, on that colt, soon to be rejected on that cross. Behold Him as He enters through the great gates of the golden city. Behold His humility. Behold His glory as He is lifted upon the cross to atone for the sins of the world. There He is glorified. It is foolishness to the world to behold such a thing in awe and reverence. But for you, there is your Lord. Behold Him who opens heavens gates for you by His blood.

Prayer:

Gracious Father, Who did not spare Your only Son but sent Him to bear the sins of the world and die in my place, send Your Holy Spirit into my heart that I would find comfort in this grace, avoid sin, and bear what You appoint for me with patience and love of Your Son's holy name, so that through Him I may enter into eternal glory with You; through Jesus Christ.

Scripture for Meditation:

Matthew 21:9-11

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 444:2)

And yet He comes. The children cheer;
 With palms His path is strown.
With every step the cross draws near.
 The King of glory's throne.
Astride a colt He passes by
 As loud hosannas ring,
Or else the very stones would cry
 "Behold, behold your King!"

Devotion:

The King of glory rides into Jerusalem. Children cheer. Adults cry "Hosanna!" Palms and coats are strewn before him. It's a victorious display. It's also peculiar. The chariots of God are twice ten-thousand (Psalm 68:17), but his Son rides a colt. His face is set like stone. The fresh green palms will be withered and trampled by week's end. The religious leaders demand silence. It's a funeral procession and a parade. Though born of misunderstanding, the shouts of praise ring true. If they be lacking the very stones would cry. This King *has* come to save. But his salvation takes an unexpected shape. His throne is a cross. He does not conquer temporal foes but death itself. We don't understand. Yet, he comes all the same. He comes for you and me. Palm Sunday breaks our somber Lenten fast with a taste of Easter victory. We know He rose victorious! We know the victory is ours as well. But it's not quite *our* Easter yet. The cross of death still lies ahead.

Prayer:

Almighty God, we are quick to relish in temporal pomp and circumstance and forget Christ's cross which won for us salvation. Feed us by Your Word and Holy Supper, that we might be strengthened in Easter hope to take up the cross daily, even unto death, that on the last day we might be raised to share in Christ's eternal victory.

Scripture for Meditation:

Romans 6:5; 1 Corinthians 1:18, 25

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 444:3)

What fading flowers His road adorn;
 The palms, how soon laid down!
No bloom or leaf but only thorn
 The King of glory's crown.
The soldiers mock, the rabble cries,
 The streets with tumult ring,
As Pilate to the mob replies,
 "Behold, behold your King!"

Devotion:

How brief and fickle the favor of the world. The King of glory is mocked and scorned and hung on a cursed tree while hosannas echo in the streets. Where is the crowd that greeted Him with such joy? Even the disciples who followed Him for so many years had abandoned Him. At the end of His life, the climax of His incarnation, the Son of God is left to suffer and die alone. Because we are made a part of His Body through Baptism, the world turns its scorn on us, mocking us as the soldiers mocked Him (John 15:18-19). But Christ's glory is not in the world, and so neither is ours. Though we suffer now, we look forward in hope to the day when we will be united with Him in resurrection (Phil 3:20-21). We don't need to seek the favor of the world, because we have Christ's favor, and His favor is eternal.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, in order to save us from our sins, You took sin upon yourself, becoming despised and cursed for our sake. Keep us in the grace of our Baptisms, so that we may live in Your peace and look forward in hope to the day when You will raise us to Your side in glory. In Your name we pray.

Scripture for Meditation:

For as the sufferings of Christ abound for us, so also our comfort abounds through Christ (2 Cor 1:5).

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 444:4)

Now He who bore for mortal's sake
The cross and all its pains
And chose a servant's form to take
The King of glory reigns.
Hosanna to the Savior's name
Till heaven's rafters ring,
And all the ransomed host proclaim
"Behold, behold, your King!"

Devotion:

In this final stanza of "No Tramp of Soldiers' Marching Feet" Timothy Dudley-Smith encourages us to see the reigning King of glory in the suffering servant who bore our griefs, sorrows, and iniquities (Isaiah 52-53). This is a stumbling block and foolishness to us: Christ's glory is not in his miracles or in his teaching, but in his suffering and death (1 Corinthians 1:22-25). We want Jesus to be our miracle worker who gives us happiness or our teacher who gives us worldly wisdom. We seek a king, but Jesus died a criminal. Yet to us who are being saved this death is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18). When we acknowledge that we are helpless mortals, we see that Jesus' death is the ransom that pays for our release. Our new life begins *now* as we are freed from the terror of death and sin. Let us always confess Christ the crucified as Lord and Savior with Hosannas (Lord save us) until that day in the New Creation where all will confess and praise him (Philippians 2:9-11).

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, You humbled Yourself to the foolishness of the incarnation and the cross for the sake of our salvation. Help us never to be ashamed of the gospel but always acknowledge Your loving sacrifice, that we might bear our crosses with longsuffering unto eternal life; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever.

Scripture for Meditation:

Philippians 2:5-8

Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted

April 5, 2023

Julie Baumann (Deaconess Year I, CSL)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 451:1)

Stricken, smitten, and afflicted,
See Him dying on the tree!
'Tis the Christ by man rejected;
Yes, my soul, 'tis He, 'tis He!
'Tis the long-expected Prophet,
David's Son, yet David's Lord.
Proofs I see sufficient of it;
'Tis the true and faithful Word.

Devotion:

Our God is a God of promises – promises to redeem and sanctify, restore and renew! It should be no wonder that He fulfills His words of promise, yet the way He does so is not how people expected. Isaiah 53 tells us of the Suffering Servant, whose face was so brutally marred that onlookers thought this man couldn't possibly be God's beloved, let alone the prophesied Messiah. Yet even in this bleak moment, His faithfulness to His promises was evident. As the true and faithful Word, Jesus was the fulfillment of all prophecy and had come to redeem and sanctify. By being stricken, smitten, and afflicted, the Fulfillment's blood was shed, and He faithfully kept His Father's promises. His resurrection was proof that He is the Word, by and through Whom we have received grace upon grace. Because of what He has already done for us, we can rest assured that He will continue to be faithful to His Father's promises and will fully restore and renew all of creation back to Himself on the Last Day.

Prayer:

O Almighty God, everlasting Father, Your beloved Son, the Word made flesh, was faithful to the promise of redemption You made to our first parents in the Garden of Eden. Continue to faithfully lead and guide Your people to see the proof of Your great love for them, that they may point others to the foot of the cross where Your Son was stricken, smitten, and afflicted so that they might receive grace upon grace. In Christ's holy name.

Scripture for Meditation:

Isaiah 53:4-5

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 451:2)

Tell me, ye who hear Him groaning,
Was there ever grief like His?
Friends through fear His cause disowning,
Foes insulting His distress;
Many hands were raised to wound Him,
None would intervene to save;
But the deepest stroke that pierced Him
Was the stroke that justice gave.

Devotion:

“The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” So says Isaiah 53. God is not a God who goes back on His promises. He promised that the wages of sin would be death, and death is what befell the God-man who took our place in the judgment of God’s wrath. Abandoned by His disciples, ridiculed by those who should have worshipped Him, and forsaken by His Father, Christ suffered the stroke of judgment that we so rightfully deserve. A perverted, twisted irony... the only truly just man, Jesus Christ, took on the sin of all mankind—took on your sin—and He died an excruciating, criminal’s death. He bore the justice that was rightfully metered out onto a sinful creation. Through Christ, God’s justice gives way to His mercy, for Jesus has atoned for your sin, has brought you out of condemned darkness into the dawn of the resurrection-hope. Groaning gives way to rejoicing, agony into praise... the stroke that justice gave won for us salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ, which washes you clean and redeems you totally. Your rightful place is no longer on the cross but hidden behind the folds of a garment washed clean in the blood of the Lamb.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, Your Son Jesus bore all our iniquity on the cross. Deliver us from despair and the rejection of Your judgment, that we may forever and always believe, teach, and confess the wondrous story of salvation by which we are delivered; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who won for us atonement with You forever.

Scripture for Meditation:

The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isa 53:6b)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 451:3)

Ye who think of sin but lightly
Nor suppose the evil great
Here may view its nature rightly,
Here its guilt may estimate.
Mark the sacrifice appointed,
See who bears the awful load;
'Tis the Word, the Lord's anointed
Son of Man and Son of God.

Devotion:

It's impossible to consider sin without the cross, just as it's impossible to traverse Concordia Seminary without spotting a cross. Perhaps if we walked downcast with eyes averted, or else blinded ourselves, only then would we be apart from Christ. Yet this would come from our willful turning from Christ, that is sin. Yet we rationalize the turn to sin, accusing others of the same, while forgetting the log in our own eye (Matt 7:2-4). That is, if we even recognize our sin. Sometimes we imagine our works exalt us, but paradoxically we are instead exalted by the cross, that image of supreme suffering. Each and every sin is accounted for on the cross and deserves nothing less than the death of thieves and murderers. And yet Jesus Christ, through his own death, miraculously takes up the punishment for all our sins and by his wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:6).

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, You sent Your holy, precious Son to die for us that by His sacrifice on the cross we might have eternal life. Bring us to confront the sin in our lives and turn towards You for our hope for salvation through the cross, that we trust fully in the promise offered through Your Son and encourage our brothers and sisters in the same as one body in Christ; by Your saving grace.

Scripture for Meditation:

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities. upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isa 53:5-6)

Hymn Stanza: (*LSB* 451:4)

Here we have a firm foundation,
Here the refuge of the lost:
Christ the Rock of our salvation,
Is the name of which we boast;
Lamb of God, for sinners wounded,
Sacrifice to cancel guilt!
None shall ever be confounded
Who on Him their hope have built.

Devotion:

What is the foundation of your life? Is it your job, your vocation as worker? Is it your family, your vocation as husband, or wife, or son, or daughter? Perhaps the foundation of your life is your faith? But what is at the center of that faith? What is, so to speak, the foundation of your foundation? The answer should be nothing other than Christ the Son of the living God, and most especially Christ crucified. This was the Christ that we saw on Good Friday yesterday, and it is the Christ that rests in the tomb today. But tomorrow, what is coming? Something even more glorious than we (or the disciples) could have imagined....

Prayer:

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

Scripture for Meditation:

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matt 16:15-16)

The Resurrection of Our Lord

Victimae Paschali (LSB 460)

Christians, to the Pascal Victim
Offer your thankful praises!
The Lamb the sheep has ransomed:
Christ, who only is sinless,
Reconciling sinners to the Father.
Death and life have contended
In that combat stupendous:
The Prince of life, who died
Reigns immortal.

“Speak, Mary, declaring
What you saw when wayfaring.”
“The tomb of Christ, who is living,
The glory of Jesus’ resurrection;
Bright angels attesting,
The shroud and napkin resting.
My Lord, my hope, is arisen;
To Galilee He goes before you.”

Christ indeed from death is risen,
Our new life obtaining.
Have mercy, victor King, ever reigning!
Amen. Alleluia.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Lenten Exhortation and Collect

Dear brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ, on this day the Church begins a holy season of prayerful and penitential reflection. Our attention is especially directed to the holy sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

From ancient times the season of Lent has been kept as a time of special devotion, self-denial, and humble repentance born of a faithful heart that dwells confidently on His Word and draws from it life and hope.

Let us pray that our dear Father in heaven, for the sake of His beloved Son and in the power of His Holy Spirit, might richly bless this Lententide for us so that we may come to Easter with glad hearts and keep the feast in sincerity and truth.

Let us pray.

O God, You desire not the death of sinners, but rather that they turn from their wickedness and live. We implore You to have compassion on the frailty of our mortal nature, for we acknowledge that we are dust and to dust we shall return. Mercifully pardon our sins that we may obtain the promises You have laid up for those who are repentant; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.¹

¹ Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 483-485.