

Monday, June 21, 2021

Read John 1:1-5

### In the Beginning...again

**“In the beginning...”** Those are the first words of the Book of Genesis...and the first words of John’s Gospel. Those words set the stage for all human history. And those words set the stage to tell the story of Jesus. It is not by accident that John connects Jesus (the Word) to the creation account, and not just because **“all things were made through him, and without him not anything made that was made.”**

We can sometimes read the Bible as a bunch of disconnected stories. God made the world. Jonah was swallowed by a fish. David defeated Goliath. Jesus fed the 5,000. Without seeing the larger framework, it can seem that these are just random stories about God and people.

John wants to break us from this habit. If you are going to understand Jesus, the Word, you need to understand that Jesus’ story connects to “in the beginning.” The God, who in the beginning said, “let there be light,” has come to bring light once more to the darkness. In view of the darkness of sin and death, God comes once more speaking, but now in the personal Word, Jesus Christ.

In the beginning, God spoke and brought all things into being. Order was arranged from chaos. From darkness and lifelessness came light and life as God spoke. Yet the reality of sin allowed chaos, darkness, and death to invade what God had created very good. So, God comes to speak again. Finally. Decisively. Before He spoke through prophets, but now, He comes to speak Himself bringing light and life. And make no mistake, the darkness has not overcome it.

In Jesus, we don’t get a new story. God speaks to restore the story of His work. In the Word, He will **“make all things new (Rev. 21:5).”**

Prayer – Dear God, help me see how You make all things, even me, new in Christ.  
Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Read John 1:6-13

### Light Has Come

The true light came to me! What a surprise - oh, I knew Him from early childhood in baptism, but then He was familiar, I didn't know, didn't realize who He was. But God came to me and is with me now! How important that fact is! The most important reality of my life.

Light brings to aware the goodness of God. Light guides me in knowing the Truth. I don't bring my own light on anything. No, light must come to me from elsewhere. When I try to understand, try to do on my own, I am unable to make a decision, but simply follow the world in its dismal decay. No, I have the true Light. Goodness has come to me, changed me, and leads me in the truth.

I am God's child; He has made me His. Now there is a truth. God has come into the world, He has conquered the world, He has intervened. Yes, the world still complains, wrongness still is trying to bring down what is good. But now it is clear - when God acts the conclusion is sure. All the badness that tries to inveigle me in, that tries concealing its foolish pride, is exposed by the true Light.

When I act on my own, I see only the shadows, I can only fail - but now that God has brought light into the world, I am amazed at the clarity, I am thrilled with the reality, I am His, not alone, not lost but God's child. And He did it all.

Prayer: Thank you God for being the light for me and others. Thank you for your presence in my life, my thoughts, and my actions. Thank you for my life, both here and now and with You forever. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, June 23, 2021

Read John 1:14-18

### A Different Kind of Glory

When the people of Israel left their bondage in Egypt and traveled in the wilderness, they were led by God. A pillar of fire by day and a pillar of fire by night were the manifestations of God that guided them. Whenever the people made camp, they were to construct the tabernacle directly in the middle. You can think of the tabernacle as a mobile temple. When the tabernacle was standing, the presence of God, the glory of God was seen descending on the temple. It was clear that God was in the midst of His people, and by prayer and sacrifice was to be approached.

John uses this language to describe the Word, Jesus. **“the Word became flesh and dwelt (literally tabernacled) among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”** Again, John connects Jesus to the great history of God and His people. First, the Word is spoken of in relation to Creation. Now, He is connected to the tabernacle – the place of sacrifice and the presence of God.

We have seen his glory. In taking on human flesh, the Word has tabernacled in the midst of His people in the most intimate way. He has taken on our condition to share His grace, His undeserved mercy by becoming the tabernacle, becoming the sacrifice. This means His glory will not be seen in the manner we usually consider glory. Victory and power and all the trappings we associate with glory will be absent. His glory will come in being defeated and being emptied of power. That we may receive grace upon grace upon grace upon grace... Grace sufficient to cover our sin upon sin upon sin upon sin...

His cross isn't glory as we usually think of glory. But from our perspective as forgiven people of God, could anything be more glorious?

Prayer – Dear Jesus, may I always be in awe of the upside-down glory of Your coming and cross. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Thursday, June 24, 2021

Read John 1:19-23

Who is John the Baptizer? Who is Christ?

*He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." John 1:23*

Many thought John the Baptizer to be the Christ, or Elijah, or the Prophet. John is asked and s clearly says, "**I am not**" and "**no**" to each assumption the priests and Levites posed. John is proclaiming the Word of Yahweh written by the prophet Isaiah, "**A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God'**" (Isaiah 40:3). John the Baptizer is loudly declaring and proclaiming the glory of Yahweh to be revealed; The Word become flesh, the only and eternal Son of God, Christ Jesus, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

John the Baptizer, as we see in John 1:7, 15, "**came as a witness . . . [and] bore witness about**" Jesus; Who is Yahweh in the flesh. The Jewish council-Sanhedrin, who sent the priests and Levites, wanted to know if John was the Christ. They were looking for the Christ. And John preached God's Word loudly, declaring, "**I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'make straight the way of the Lord.'**"

*The way of the Lord* is God revealed in Jesus Christ: The glory "**as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth**" (John 1:15). Jesus is our only hope for redemption and justification before Yahweh, as we "**were dead in our trespasses and sins**" (Ephesians 2:1). We are by nature sinful and unclean, and "**were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind**" (Eph. 2:3). Yet, we are not without hope, as the eternal Word of God loudly proclaims the grace and mercy of God in Christ crucified and risen for us. The Good News is preached, and declared loudly to you and me;

**"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 [endeiknumi – [will] show (by word and act), prove and demonstrate] the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus"** (Eph. 2:4-7).

Prayer – Thank You Yahweh God, for Your mercy and grace given for us in Christ Jesus, which made us alive together in Him. The One who John the Baptizer proclaimed and pointed to for all to see, the forgiveness of all our sins and trespasses, given for us in His precious Name. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch*

Friday, June 25, 2021

Read John 1:24-28

### Who Are You?

The Pharisees came to John to find out who he was. Clearly, he was a mighty man of God, one of the figures that the prophets had foretold who would do God's work for God's people. They must have been both excited and suspicious. John's message was harsh but clear: "The Kingdom of God is drawing near, it's the time to repent." John was upsetting the status quo and the Pharisees were the status quo, they figured if anything was against them, it was probably against God but they also knew that the Christ and Elijah and the Prophet to come would all shake things up in a big way. They had to make sure of what they were dealing with so they came to John to ask him. And he said he wasn't the one that the Pharisees were looking for, he was just the messenger who was supposed to prepare the way for the one to come. The Pharisees recognized that John was a great man, but they would be shocked to hear that he was just the entree to a greater man, one so great that John was not good enough even to bend down and serve him by taking off his shoe.

We ourselves are a lot like John in this passage. As Christians, we are called to live in such a way that we proclaim the One who is to come. If we walk the path of righteousness that God has laid before us, people will take notice and ask who we are that we act this way. And we will have the chance to tell them of Jesus, Whom we are not fit even to bend down and serve. Nevertheless, Jesus is not only gracious enough to let us serve Him, but He is so great precisely because He came not to be served but to serve and to give Himself as a ransom for many. Like John, we are not special because of who we are but because of the One we proclaim with our words and deeds, Jesus Christ Who is and was and will be forever.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, dwell with us and lead us so that we live lives that bring glory to You. We thank You for giving us a place in Your kingdom to serve You. Come quickly Lord and bring the Kingdom in all fullness that we may dwell with You forever. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Saturday, June 26, 2021

Read John 1:29-34

### Law, meet the Gospel

John the Baptist was the last of the Old Testament prophets: he spoke directly to God, he proclaimed God's message to the people, and sadly, he died a martyr's death as did so many prophets. He had been chosen by God, even before he was conceived, to prepare the way for the Lord. He was raised eating no bread and drinking no wine, he lived in the desert, wore animal skins and ate locusts and honey. And now, John had **"appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."**

But in today's reading, John's cousin, Jesus, was approaching him and the veil was removed from his eyes. For the first time in his life, he saw Jesus for Who He really is: **"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"** Until that moment, when the Holy Spirit revealed Jesus as the Son of God by descending on Him, Jesus was just his cousin. Jesus was born shortly after he was and they'd probably grown up knowing each other.

Can you imagine though – coming face to face with the promised Messiah?! To be the one to "prepare the way" for the Savior, promised to mankind for 4,000 years? This was truly a meeting of the Old Testament with the New, the Law with the Gospel. John proclaimed the Law – judgement and repentance, a message that, while essential and good, never delivered salvation. Every person since Adam and Eve had failed to keep the Law; all had sinned and fallen short. But, before him stood God's answer: grace upon grace; the Word made flesh; full of truth and grace.

But John was an extraordinary person. Even Jesus said of him, **"Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist."** Who else could be so filled with the Spirit to proclaim Jesus to the world, to see His Spirit with his own eyes, to level the high and low places? Jesus answered that question (again from Matthew 11): **"Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."**

You and I have seen and been touched by that same Holy Spirit through the waters of our baptisms. We've seen His grace and truth in our lives, in worship, and in others through faith. And, like John, you and I can point to Jesus and say, **"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"**

Prayer: Lord of Salvation, thank You for protecting us from evil, for revealing Your will, and for showing our need for a savior through Your holy Law. And, thank You for sending Jesus to graciously save us from our sins. In His Name, Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, June 28, 2021

Read John 1:35-42

### Behold

The word has always been there, but I guess I just skipped over it before. “Behold, the Lamb of God!” Two days in a row, John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and called him the Lamb of God, the sacrifice to make payment for the sin of the world. Yet, I neglected that other word.

Behold!

Look!

Don't miss Him!

John the Baptist tells two of his disciples. They leave John and follow the Lamb of God. One of those two is Andrew, who goes to tell his brother Simon. Andrew gives a similarly simple invitation. “We have found the Messiah.” Come. Behold. The anointed One, the One selected and sent by God to save. Then Andrew “brought him to Jesus,” and Jesus gave Simon a new name – Cephas, which is just the Aramaic version of the name that you know him by, Peter.

There is a great benefit in learning how to share the good news of Jesus. And yet, sometimes the best invitation is the simplest. Behold – Jesus. Look – the answer to sin. See – the One to rescue us. Behold – the One to rescue all who trust in Him.

Prayer – Dear Jesus, Lamb of God, point me to You as my hope, and help me to point others to You, as well. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Wednesday, June 30, 2021

Read John 2:1-12

## Signs

Signs can do a great deal. They can tell you where to go. They can tell you about a person or a company. They point out things that you don't want to miss, but might if your attention is not focused.

John doesn't refer to any miracles in his Gospel. They are signs. They tell us where to go – inviting us to follow Jesus. They tell us all about a person – illustrating the glory of Jesus. They point out things that we don't want to miss, but might – consider that the only ones who saw the miracle were lowly servants. The master of the feast may have thought saving the best wine was either a mistake or an extraordinary act of kindness. We know even more...from the sign.

There's something else that we wouldn't want to miss. What does Jesus want to tell us in this sign?

Perhaps, He wants us to treasure and rejoice in the gift of marriage as He created it between man and woman.

Perhaps, we are to see the abundance of wine as a fulfillment of God's promises of a new, glorious kingdom as Isaiah 25:6 describes, **“On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.”**

Perhaps, we should look ahead to the marriage feast of Christ and His bride, the Church.

Perhaps, the wine simply tells us that when Jesus comes there is an abundant reason to celebrate.

Or perhaps, He uses a sign precisely to point to all of these to **“manifest his glory.”**

Prayer – Dear Jesus, help me rejoice in all that You wish to teach us through Your signs. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*



Thursday, July 1, 2021

Read John 2:13-22

### He Has Risen For Us!

*Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (John 2:19)*

What consumes our hearts and minds? While writing this, I cannot count the times I checked my email, bank account, etcetera . . . God certainly knows what consumes our hearts and minds daily. Yahweh, have mercy on me, a sinner! When reading and hearing Jesus cleansing the temple, one might wonder at Jesus whipping and driving things out in amazement, shock, or something else. Jesus speaks of the "zeal" He has for His Father's House. Psalm 69:9 is a clear and true Word of the Son of God, "**For zeal for your house has consumed me**" (see v. 17). How wonderful it is for the eternal Son of God to have "zeal" for His Father's house!

One might imagine the Jew's reaction to Jesus cleansing the temple with the sheep, oxen, pigeons, money-changing tables turning. Jesus drove these things out, saying, "**Take these things away; do not make My Father's house a house of trade**" (v. 16). The Jews want a sign. And later condemned Jesus to death for saying, "**you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven**" (Matthew 26:64), and "**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up**" (v. 19; see Matthew 26:61).

*Simul iustus et peccator – simultaneously righteous and sinner*, is the struggle all Christians have in this realm on earth. We are called to be holy and sanctified to God in Christ. Because we are declared righteous and set free from sin, death, and the power of Satan on account of Christ Jesus death and resurrection given for us. God is with us in our struggle and will bring faith to have "zeal" for His house, His sanctified church, the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit reminds us of Christ crucified and risen for us. "**When therefore He was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken**" (v. 22).

Prayer – Yahweh God. You have forgiven us, declared us righteous and sanctified us on account of Christ. Even though we still sin and struggle on this side of eternity daily. You call us Yours in Baptism. Help us to have zeal for Your house that will consume our hearts and minds in Jesus. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch*

Friday, July 2, 2021

Read John 2:23-25

### He Knew What Was in a Man

Like so many other passages in John's Gospel, this short passage is mysterious and somewhat confusing. Jesus has just begun His ministry by doing a sign at the wedding of Cana and by cleansing the temple. He must have done other things we don't hear about because today's passage says that many people believed in His name because of the signs He was doing. But though He was getting a positive reception from the people, John tells us that Jesus was a bit aloof because He knew what was in man. He did not entrust Himself to the crowd who believed because He knew their weakness. Not only did He know that people are untrustworthy, something we're all aware of, but Jesus knew precisely the depth and the weight of our sin. Jesus did His signs and ministry knowing that He could never truly trust or rely on those around Him.

We can imagine that Jesus' ministry was very difficult for Him. He faced external opposition and wasn't able to fully trust those around them because they were sinful humans like you and me. Luckily for us, Jesus was able to do it alone. He was able to overcome even death for our sake. Our Lord was sufficient to overcome what is in man, entrusting Himself only to the Father's will. We can follow Jesus in His example of not trusting in man because we know what is in us. We can follow Him also in trusting God for our salvation and guidance, for we know what is in Him. Where man is unfaithful, God is always faithful. Jesus was faithful unto death to overcome our unfaithfulness and He overcame death to change what is in us, to remove our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh, hearts that trust in God's unwavering faithfulness.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, have mercy on us, for You know the sin that is within us. We thank You that You entrusted Yourself to the will of the Father and overcame our sin and our death so that we might have life. Send us Your Spirit to strengthen our faith to trust forever in You, Who are ever faithful. Amen

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Saturday, July 3, 2021

Read John 3:1-8

### Water and Spirit

Throughout His ministry, Jesus explained the Kingdom of Heaven to just about everyone. Jews and Samaritans, rich and poor; tax collectors, prostitutes, and other sinners – Jesus spoke to all. In today’s reading, He even spoke to Nicodemus: a Pharisee, a respected teacher, and a religious leader of the Jews. Nicodemus wasn’t the normal, “brood of vipers” kind of Pharisee. His heart was open, and in our reading, he professed Jesus to be “a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.”

Thank You, God, for including characters like Nicodemus in Your Word! Because he, like Peter, is not worried in the slightest to ask obviously dumb questions. When Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God”, Nicodemus asked the question that all the rest of us would be too afraid to ask: “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?”

Truth be told, Jesus is difficult for the world to understand. The world knows darkness. It knows deceit, trickery, and death. It understands and craves power, might, and idolatry. And here is this Man, performing miraculous signs before the world, talking about being “born again”? But the Spirit was moving within Nicodemus and inspired him to come (at night) to see Jesus and ask more questions.

The Greek word for “Spirit” is the same word used for “wind” or “air”. Those all seem to be slippery, invisible, insignificant things. And that’s why Nicodemus didn’t understand it with his mind. Just as air is necessary for life, and a tornado can blow a straw into a tree like a nail, the Spirit can fill a dark and blackened soul with light. He can give a sinner sight to see the kingdom of God.

Prayer: Spirit of Light, thank you for giving me new birth through water and Your Word. Help me to know Your truth through Jesus. In His Name, Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, July 5, 2021

Read John 3:9-15

### The Curse Becomes the Cure

As Jesus continues to teach the teacher Nicodemus, he points back to Numbers 21:4-9. The story is a pretty simple one. The Israelites did what they often did – they grumbled. They complained about being rescued from bondage in Egypt. Their sinful ingratitude was followed by a plague of poisonous snakes. The people pleaded for help, and what they got looked just like the curse.

You can imagine the outcry: we are not going to worship a snake! That's what bit me! How could that help?!?

Yet the Lord had directed Moses. So, "Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live" (Numbers 21:9). Fiery serpents brought death. A fired serpent—made from bronze and placed on a pole provided the cure for those who looked to it, and believed God's Word.

This is precisely what goes on with Jesus. The cross, an instrument of death and torture, would become the focal point of life and healing. **"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."** Though we should perish for our sins eternally, once more God makes the curse into the cure. By His death, we have life.

Prayer – Dear Jesus, thank You for becoming the curse on the cross in order to be the cure for my sin. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, July 6, 2021

Read John 3:16-21

### Believe and Be Saved

Believing comes distorted so often! People think it to be a matter of profession, a matter of simple allegiance, a meaningless statement of assent; but no! It is so much more.

Believing starts with a knowledge of the truth, perhaps first, with a knowledge that there is such a thing as TRUTH. While the world is filled with fake statements, with deceptions and concealment, yet truth stands brightening the world around it, dispelling the hidden errors.

That truth is the God has intervened in the world (and continues to intervene). God Himself has come to us as Jesus. Jesus, who lived and died being and displaying the truth, showing in words and deeds that God has cared for us and has solved sins, the animosity of the world to God on the Cross, and the empty tomb where Jesus paid for our badness.

Belief is recognizing the truth that Jesus is the TRUTH, that Jesus has paid for sins and freely gives it to one. Belief also knows that this truth is the power of God, that there is no power in resisting or in attempting to add to it and knowing that this power is given to ME for me.

So, Belief has knowledge but there is a step more. Belief implies, requires that one take what is true and apply it to ourselves. The acceptance is a gift from God - but with that gift He gives the option to reject, to deny to ourselves the truth that belief carries. That rejection is not-believing. Without the acceptance, one has no belief, no matter if one has the knowledge. So Jesus comes and saves - while those loving deceit hide their own knowledge from them dying from that lack of belief.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ then, and be saved!

Prayer: Please Lord, Please keep me near to You. It is easy to believe only the knowledge but reserve the commitment. Keep me believing! I know I will see You continuing to act in my life and around me. Thank You. Amen

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, July 7, 2021

Read John 3:22-36

**“He Must Increase, But I Must Decrease”**

John the Baptist’s words are just as true for us. John was making the point that he had only come to prepare the way for the greater One, the Christ. At Jesus’ appearance, John would recede into the background. It made sense, John was only the messenger or, as he says here “the bridegroom’s friend.” John’s message was never about John, but about Jesus and His mercy. After all, the one who followed only John would have nothing, but **“whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.”**

There is something more for us to learn from John’s attitude also. In our lives, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” After all, **“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”** (Gal. 2:20) We do not hold to John’s teaching, and likewise, we do not cling to our own righteousness. Our life is in Christ. His desires and His grace are our very life.

This is a hard word. We would prefer to hold on to our own good works as though they earn something before God. In our sin, we would prefer to live by our own desires, our own rules, our own prerogatives. Yet Christ is our life! (Eph 3:4) **“We are not our own, we were bought at a price”** – the very blood of our Savior Jesus. (1 Cor. 6:19-20) So desiring to become more like the One who is our life, we pray with John the Baptist every day.

Prayer – Dear Jesus, by Your Spirit, may I decrease, and You increase, that You may be glorified in my life. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Thursday, July 8, 2021

Read John 4:1-15

### Living Water

*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)*

Jesus knows the Pharisees were growing more troubled and jealous over Him **"making and baptizing more disciples than John"** (v.1). Jesus is said not to have baptized himself **"but only His disciples"** (v.2). Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit. As John the Baptizer said, **"He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit"** (John 1:33; see Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16).

On the way to Galilee from Judea, Jesus stops at Jacob's well around noon in Samaria and asks a Samaritan woman to give Him a drink. The Samaritans and the Jews had **"no dealings"** with one another. The Samaritan woman asked Jesus, **"How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria? . . . Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water"**" (v. 9, 10). The Samaritan woman asked an excellent question to Jesus, **"Where do you get that living water?"** See (vv. 14-15).

St. Augustine wrote, "What He [Jesus] was promising them was a certain feeding and abundant fullness of the Holy Spirit: but the woman did not yet understand, how did she answer? 'The woman said unto Him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.' Want forced her to labor, and her weakness was pleading against the toil. Would that she would hear the invitation, 'Come to me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you!' This is, in fact, what Jesus was saying to her, that she might no longer labor: but she did not yet understand."

Later Jesus said, **"Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'"** (John 7:38). The Holy Spirit is **"the gift of God"** Jesus promises. We received in Baptism **"living water"** into our hearts according to the Word of Christ. The Holy Spirit is given to us by God, by grace through faith on account of Christ crucified, risen, and ascended to the Father's right hand for us.

Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit with water and His Word through His disciples worldwide today, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer – Thank You, Jesus. For giving me living water, the forgiveness of sins, and everlasting life in Your Name. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch*

Friday, July 9, 2021

Read John 4:16-26

### The Woman at the Well

This story is one of the more familiar readings from John's Gospel. Yet, every time I hear it, Jesus's exchange about this Samaritan woman's marital history strikes me. He tells the woman to go and call her husband, knowing full well her sin and its depth. Instead of trying to evade Jesus's condemnation by retrieving the man she was presently living with, the woman confessed to Jesus that she had no husband. Perhaps this was less than the full truth, but it was as much of a confession as she could handle. Even this seemingly innocent statement meant a great deal for that woman. In the first place, she was clearly of the age that she should have had a husband and not having a husband would have been a badge of shame for her. Jesus completes the confession for her. He says plainly what she said in only a veiled way: this woman had lived in sin. This sin, both her own and the sins of the men who had divorced her, had beaten her down and made her feel worthless. Nevertheless, a prophet had come to her and offered her spiritual respite. When Jesus first offered her Living Water, she did not know what it was she needed. As Jesus spoke, she must have surely realized just what her true thirst was and just what it was that Jesus offered her.

I have been a Christian my whole life. The Living Water has always been held out to me, but so often it is when I realize the depths of my sin that Jesus love is the most refreshing. Even when my confession is small, Jesus knows that it is like an iceberg and the greater portion is below the water. Nevertheless, His love is all the greater and has overcome all our sins. Just like the woman at the well, Jesus has offered to us an immeasurable gift, and He has also graciously shown to us our sins so that we might more fervently come to Him for mercy and grace.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give to us the Living Water so that we might never thirst again. We thank You that when we did not know our thirst, You showed it to us to draw us near to You so that we might not reject Your grace but cling to it all the more. Increase in us the thirst for You, so that we ever seek You and the many blessings You offer. Amen

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*



Saturday, July 10, 2021

Read John 4:27-38

*“The fields are white for harvest”*

When we divide up a story like “The Samaritan Woman at the Well” into four sections, you notice things you normally wouldn’t. In today’s portion, we witness Jesus’ “teaching moment” with His disciples. At the beginning, the disciples return from town, having bought some food while Jesus rested from the journey at Jacob’s well. They were shocked to see their beloved Rabbi (a Jewish man) engaged in conversation with a Samaritan woman.

Remember, times were different – Jews considered Samaritans to have been corrupted by intermarriage with foreigners and so far from the Jewish faith as to be no better than godless pagans. Jews wouldn’t ordinarily have even looked a Samaritan in the face. When the woman left, they must have concluded that Jesus was delirious from sitting in the sun too long, and they encouraged Him to eat. And now – the teaching moment:

This trip they were on wasn’t simply to get them from Judea to Galilee. The disciples thought it unfortunate that they had to pass through the land of the Samaritans in order to get to their destination, but Jesus had His own agenda (“**for God so loved the world...**”). He said to them, “**Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.**” They didn’t yet understand that the reason this shameful, scandalous, sinful woman had totally forgotten to bring her water jug when she hastily left to return to town, was that Jesus had healed her heart and restored her hope in God.

The disciples believed their mission was to get to Galilee as quickly as possible, where surely the Lord’s work awaited them amongst the Jews. Jesus explained to them that He didn’t need their food because He was nourished by doing His Father’s will (amongst the Samaritans!). You’ll find out Monday the results of His conversation with the woman, but the lesson is simple: while we might think we know what God would have us do with our lives, the harvest is all around us.

Prayer: Lord of the Harvest, fill me with faith and hope like You did the Samaritan woman. Like her, inspire me to tell my neighbors about You. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, July 12, 2021

Read John 4:39-45

### The Ripple Effect

You have certainly seen one drop of water fall onto a still body of water, and from just one drop the effects ripple out seemingly forever.

Jesus stopped to get a drink of water and to share life-giving water with one solitary woman at the well. But then – what a ripple effect! **“Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony...he stayed there two more days. And many more believed because of his word.”**

From the one woman who was changed by the grace of Jesus, many more heard, and then many, many more heard. And the result? They told the woman, **“we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”** Not the Savior of Israel or Samaria, but the world.

For just this reason, Jesus came. For the world. For the Samaritan woman and the many in town who wanted nothing to do with her before. For you, for me, for every person that you have or ever will meet. Jesus came for all. Jesus died for all. Jesus rose for all. For all. For the world.

As Christ drops His grace into our lives, he invites us to share His grace in the simple, joyful manner of the Samaritan woman. She didn’t argue with people. She simply declared, **“He told me all that I ever did.”** The Lord Jesus knew her. Fully. And loved and forgave her anyway. Such astounding mercy has rippled into our lives. The Lord Jesus knows you. Fully. And loves and forgives you anyway. Let others know. Invite them to hear His word, and **“know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”**

Prayer – Dear Jesus, Savior of the World, as Your love and forgiveness has rippled to me by Your Word, help me to share the news with the joy of the Samaritan woman. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, July 13, 2021

Read John 4:46-54

## Faith

Faith is wonderful! Trusting without demanding personal proof! Trusting on the Word of the One who can do anything.

There are those who say: "Put your trust (or faith) in ....". But they don't know what they are talking about. Faith is not something you can put somewhere. Faith just is. I just trust God; I don't debate, don't wishy-washy the thought. No, I trust Him.

What faith that noble man expressed. He trusted Jesus enough to come to Him, to exert himself to, as it were, humble himself to accept his need, and address that need to Jesus. Then when He did address Jesus, Jesus didn't do as He was usually expected to, Jesus did not travel with the man, instead, He simply assured Him of the fulfilling of his desires.

Now, this is the person I trust as well! He has assured me of my place in heaven - no action needed, unlike the bank, no debt established to pay off. No, He promised me a gift, and I trust Him. This is faith - the condition of living and acting upon the assumption that something is true. And I do spend my life with Jesus, trusting Him to work it all out.

The man trusted Jesus for the life of his child - and I trust Him for my life. That man is an example for my faith - and an example of how Jesus keeps the promises He makes.

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus. Thank you for being someone I can trust. Thank you for promising me that which I have, a home in heaven. Trusting you I know I can live here with You and receive Your promise always. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, July 14, 2021

Read John 5:1-9

### Do You Want to Be Healed?

This has to be one of the easiest questions ever to answer! Of course, he does. He's been laying there for 38 years. He's been hoping to get into the "magical" pool first and be healed. But others of the fraternity of invalids – "the blind, lame, and paralyzed" – were faster than him. The man, 38 years an invalid, believed his problem could be solved by the water.

If only he would have been in Samaria, and heard the woman who ran around telling everyone about the man who gives water. He gives, and you are never thirsty again. He gives, and you are truly healed.

Every one of Jesus' signs reminds us that those with physical ailments are just showing the common ailment of sin and decay in their bodies. We all do eventually. We all need healing for more than lacking eyesight, weak legs, or paralysis. We need healing from the One who gives living water. We need restoration from the One who makes the blind see, the lame walk, and the paralyzed strong. We need a spiritual healing to see our Savior, walk with Him, and stand in His kingdom – for apart from His healing, we are too weak, too broken, too sinful.

Lord Jesus, WE want to be healed! Forgive us. Renew us. Cleanse us. Make us new by Your Spirit.

And at His Word it is so. You are forgiven. You are healed. You have new life, now, by His blood and through His Spirit.

Prayer – Dear Jesus, I continue to be disabled by sin. Heal me by Your forgiveness to rise and walk with You. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Thursday, July 15, 2021

Read John 5:9-17

### Sin No More

Maybe we've been asked not to share Jesus in public or agree not to share "religion" (namely Jesus). Is our redemption in Christ persecuted and considered unlawful by the world?

The sick man was healed "at once" by Jesus. The Jews persecuted the man for carrying his bed mat "**working**" on the Sabbath. Later, Jesus found the man "**in the temple and said to him, 'See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.'** The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, '**My Father is working until now, and I am working.**'" (v. 14-17). Some believe sin caused this man's illness, and perhaps it was. Do we overlook the punishment and consequences of our sins?

Saint Chrysostom wrote, "A fearful thing is sin, fearful, and the ruin of the soul, and the mischief oftentimes through its excess has overflowed and attacked men's bodies also. For since the most part when the soul is diseased, we feel no pain, but when but if the body receive though but a little hurt, we use every exertion to free it from its infirmity, because we are sensible of the infirmity . . . What hope of salvation have we, when inhabiting God's earth we care not for the things of God, when bidden to be aliens from earthly things we are aliens from heaven and citizens of earth? What can be worse than this insensibility, when hearing each day the Judgment of the Kingdom, we imitate the men in the days of Noah, and those of Sodom, waiting to learn all by actual experience? Yet for this purpose were all those things written, that if anyone believe not that which is to come, he may, from what has already been, get certain proof of what shall be."

Saint Paul wrote,

**"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too [live and] walk in newness of life. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been [declared righteous] from sin"** (Romans 6:1-7).

Prayer – Yahweh God, grant us to hear Your Word and do Your will that we may sin no more for the sake of Christ Jesus. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch*

Friday, July 16, 2021

Read John 5:18

### His Father's Work

It is very strange to us when we read John's Gospel that we see the Jews upset at Jesus because of when He does His work. Jesus has just healed a paralyzed man and the Jews are complaining that Jesus did so on the wrong day of the week. Jesus responded that God, His Father, works at all times and so He does too. This only further angered the Jews because Jesus had, for all intents and purposes, equated Himself with God. And in His following teaching, this is precisely what Jesus says, that He has the same authority as the Father and the same will and work as the Father. The Jews thought that they were the true followers of God's will and were careful to do those things that God had asked of them. But they became confused and began to add to God's will. Originally, they thought if they were more careful than God required, they wouldn't even get close to breaking the Law. Their intentions were good, but eventually they had added to God's will so much they could not even recognize the God who gave them the Law when He was in their presence. The Law was to love God and love the neighbor and the Jews from today's reading sought to kill God because He had done a loving thing for a neighbor. They became so concerned with the Sabbath that they forgot what the Sabbath was for: giving rest to God's people.

We are also so often guilty of the same sins as the Jews from today's text, we can confuse our well-meaning rules for the love that God asks us to show. This passage should be a warning to us that Jesus is about His Father's work when and how He pleases, and we should be careful not to try and hamper that work because it does not conform to our expectations. At the same time, it is a comfort to us that Jesus is equal to the Father both in authority and in mercy. There is no opposition that can stop Him from the work of healing and forgiving that He so loves to do for us. It is the Father's will to heal us and give us rest, on the Sabbath or on any day.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, Son of God, we praise You for fulfilling Your Father's will in everything You did and, in doing so, gave us also the chance to be children of God. Lead us to always follow the true will of Your Father and ours and never to stand in the way of Your healing work. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Saturday, July 17, 2021

Read John 5:19-24

### Truly, Truly I Say to You

I've noticed that, in recent years, the word "so" has taken on a new meaning. It's become a placeholder that people put at the beginning of a sentence to let you know they're speaking. They might say, "So, it's a nice day, isn't it?" It doesn't really mean anything, it's just there. Today's reading begins with the word "so", but it has great meaning: "**So Jesus said to them...**"

Jesus had just made a man walk who'd been crippled for 38 years, who was able to move only so slowly that all the other invalids (the blind, lame, and paralyzed) beat him into the healing waters of Bethesda, every time. For 38 years. Do you suppose he had hope? But Jesus healed him. But now, rather than bowing down and worshipping Him, or praising Jesus for His miraculous healing, or even asking how they could be saved, the Jews criticized Jesus for doing this good thing on the wrong day of the week. We're told they wanted to kill Jesus because He was doing and saying things that only God should do or say.

I repeat all this because that word "so" at the beginning of our reading means that what Jesus was about to say was His response to their demonstrated blindness. He still had hope for them. He tells them of the inseparable, intertwined nature of how He and His Father can only do the same things. Jesus' turning water into wine, saving the official's son from death, and healing this lame man are only small signs compared to what they will see. "**For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.**" In other words, "You ain't seen nothin' yet!"

He appeals to these Jews: "**Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.**" He knows they've studied the Words of His Father. He knows that their misdirected efforts to add to God's Word to avoid breaking His Commands show they want to live according to the Father's will. But they're missing what's before their very eyes: the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk. Jesus' Words and Deeds are the fulfillment of all Scripture. So: hear His Word. See His forgiveness. Taste the life He gives you.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to know Your Son, Jesus, through Your Word and actions in our life. Make us conscious of the eternal life that even now we're living. In His Name, Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, July 19, 2021

Read John 5:25-29

### An Hour is Coming, and is Now Here

Now! Immediately. Not in the future. Not in the past. Here. Present. Today

We often think of salvation as something accomplished long ago by Jesus in the past. It's true that Jesus has already won our salvation by His perfect life, selfless sacrifice, and glorious resurrection. But our salvation is not only won in the past.

We also think of eternal life as a future reality – either when we die or on the day of resurrection when Christ returns, and our bodies are raised perfected. For the fullness of salvation, we wait for that future glory. But our salvation is not only a matter of the future.

Jesus said, **“truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”** YOU have heard the voice of the Son of God! To borrow from St. Paul, **“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”** (Eph. 2:4-5). Now! By faith. When you heard the word of forgiveness and life in your baptism you were made to share in the resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 6). This life You have NOW! Yes, we look to an **“hour...when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out,”** but eternal life has begun already. You've been raised from spiritual death to live in the joy of eternity in Christ today, tomorrow, and forever.

Prayer – Dear Father in heaven, help me to rejoice that eternal life has already begun for me through Jesus. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*



Tuesday, July 20, 2021

Read John 5:30-47

### The Truth

Jesus says the Bible is a strong witness for Him. God's Word is and should be telling us about Jesus and serving as a proof that He is indeed God's Son and the Savior of the world. Here I can read the story of His life. Here I can see how God has guided the world, giving us His promises over the years, and how those promises witness to the truth about Jesus. They keep telling me "He is the truth, He is the source of life, He is the way to receive that truth and life".

But do I use that Bible? Do I read it? Do I listen to what it is saying to me? How easy it is to take that Bible for granted, to let its message sag out of my concern, forgetting first what it tells me about and then forgetting my Savior. I find that easy days fill my mind with other topics, I find that my Savior becomes - unimportant to me. Help me, Lord!

Rather I want that witness to be my daily companion. I want to hear the good news over and over again, seeing that God always brings more to my mind. The more I read; the more I understand. The deeper I consider His Words, the deeper He reaches into my thoughts and actions. Yes, the Bible is a witness to Jesus, a witness that I have available to me all the time. What a gift God has given to me!

Prayer: Thank you, God. Thank you for your gift of Jesus, and then the gift of a witness to be here with me always. Please teach me and help me to use your gifts always. Amen

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, July 21, 2021

Read John 6:1-13

What are they for so many?

Andrew's question is a fair one. The little boy has brought his lunch. His five loaves and two fish are likely the ancient equivalent of a McDonald's Happy Meal. It's not enough food to feed 1 adult. The disciples' heads are spinning at the prospect of trying to finance food for 5,000 men. Plus, likely, that many women. Plus, who knows how many children (except for this boy who brought a meal).

Jesus acts like this is just a regular meal. He gives thanks. He hands out the food. He makes sure that the leftovers get picked up.

Obviously, this is no regular meal! One Happy Meal makes 15,000 happy and satisfied. No wonder this sign is discussed not just in John's Gospel but is the only miracle (besides the resurrection) to appear in all four Gospels.

Many things could be said about this extraordinary account, but for today, let's focus on just one thing – Andrew's question. Andrew looked at the five little loaves and two measly fish and asked, "what are they for so many?" The better direction to look was not to the meager resources, but Jesus. We bring nothing to speak of, and by His Word, Christ forgives, feeds, enlivens, cleanses, and so much more. His feeding of the crowd is a sign that points to the deeper feeding He will discuss through the rest of the chapter. For us, it is good to remember as His people, that we do not put our hope in our abilities or resources, but our hope every day and forever is in the One who made thousands happy through one Happy Meal.

Prayer – Dear Jesus, help me to look to You alone to accomplish Your purposes, even through me. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Thursday, July 24, 2021

Read John 6:14-15

### Jesus Withdraws

*When the people saw the sign that He had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" (John 6:14)*

Jesus knew the crowd's intentions to **"take Him by force and make Him king"** (v. 14). The people said of Jesus; He was the "Prophet" to come. Here we are directed to the promise and Word of God through Moses, **"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—"** (Deuteronomy 18:15). It seems that the people believed Jesus was this "Prophet," and maybe, some believed Jesus is Messiah. Interestingly, the people wanted to seize Jesus and make Him king. Perhaps they were not listening? They may have thought Jesus had come for an earthly kingdom reign. And The intentions of the people had been known by God, and He **"withdrew again to the mountain by Himself"** (v. 15).

Saint Chrysostom preached, "'When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force to make Him a king, He departed again into a mountain.'

Wonderful! How great is the tyranny of gluttony, how great the fickleness of men's minds! No longer do they vindicate the Law, no longer do they care for violation of the Sabbath, no longer are they zealous for God; such all considerations are thrown aside, when their bellies have been filled; He was a prophet in their eyes, and they were about to choose Him for a king. But Christ flees."

Before we further withdraw to the mountain with Jesus, we remember and saw in the first chapter that the Jewish council asked John the Baptizer if he was the Messiah, then Elijah, and then the "Prophet" (see John 1:12-22). He was not. Yet, John **"came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world"** (John 1:7-9). Jesus is indeed the Word of God who came for us in the flesh, "the true light" of the world to come, the "Prophet" to come, "the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31; 11:27; see Matthew 16:16; Mark 8:29). Jesus came down from Heaven for our redemption from eternal death and condemnation through the cross on Calvary.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Help up for Your Name's sake to see always You and Your power in Your suffering, death, and Resurrection given for us for the forgiveness of our sins. Help us live in You as You have promised to be in with us always. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch*

Friday, July 23, 2021

Read John 6:16-21

### Do Not Fear

This story of Jesus walking on water caught me off guard. When I read about Jesus' walking on water, usually I think of the accounts in Matthew and Mark where Peter walks on water or where the wind stops when Jesus gets in the boat. John chooses a different focus for his telling of the story though. It starts in much the same way with the disciples go on ahead of Jesus across the sea in a boat, seemingly a normal trip for them. But it got dark, and the wind picked up and stirred up the waves and Jesus still wasn't with them yet.

Surely, they were already scared at this point. They were in the middle of the sea in the middle of the night and Jesus was nowhere to be found. So now when they see this mysterious shadowy figure coming to them across the sea, it wasn't particularly comforting. Maybe the disciples should have known that Jesus would take care of them and keep them safe, but we can hardly blame them for being scared. After all, how often do we feel alone in an uncertain situation. We know Jesus is somewhere, but we don't see him here with us.

But the centerpiece of this passage when I read it today wasn't the disciples' fear or even Jesus' miraculous water-walking. No, what stood out to me were the words of Jesus. He commands the disciples not to fear. The disciples were filled with fear and filled with doubt. They had seen Jesus do miracles and they had just seen Him feed a huge crowd with just about no food, but they must have figured that their luck had run out. Jesus had done enough for them, but He wasn't going to save them this time. They had forgotten what God had told them over and over in so many different ways: trust and do not be afraid.

Jesus words here are not a new commandment but one that bears repeating: Do not fear. And Jesus gives us good reason not to fear: "It is I." He comes to the disciples in the darkness in the storm-tossed sea, and He reminds them of who He is. If Jesus is near us, we have no reason to doubt and no reason to fear. After all, He never commanded us to doubt and fear but to trust and not be afraid.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we know that You are always near to us. Forgive us when we doubt this and when we are afraid. We thank You that You join us in the darkness that surrounds us. Teach us never to fear any evil, even death, knowing that You are with us to comfort us, guide us, and bring us safely to shore. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Saturday, July 24, 2021

Read John 6:22-35

### Bread of Life

**“Then [the Jews] said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?”**

This group of Jewish people had been following Jesus for some time now. They’d just been convinced to crown Him the new King of Israel after He’d fed the crowd of over 5,000. But, after vanishing mysteriously, they tracked Him down the next day, baffled by Jesus’ unpredictability. He performed miracles, like filling them with bread and fish, but then disappeared before they could anoint Him King?!

This story illustrates the problem that many people today have. They believe the American motto, “In God We Trust” (which is as strong a statement as a secular nation can say, but that’s another discussion), but they don’t know Who He is or how to come close to God. In Jesus’ day, the Jews had the Scriptures and the wonderful history they passed down from generation to generation. This particular group of Jews definitely knew the Scriptures, but they didn’t understand what (or Who) it was pointing to.

People today study the Bible. They see God’s Creation around them and know in their hearts that Someone made it. They search in many churches and countless religions to truly know God, but fail, just as did the Jews of Jesus’ time. The Jews then (and now) studied, memorized, and lived the Law given to Moses on Mount Sinai. And that, too is good and beneficial for life. But solely focusing on following God’s Law is comparable to feeding the stomach with manna, or bread, merely sustaining their physical life but doing nothing for the soul.

Their question, at the beginning of this devotion, shows their deep desire to come to God by their own deeds alone. But to them, as to the world today, Jesus offers a much more grand and enduring feast. He explains how Moses didn’t give them manna in the desert; God did. Moses didn’t give them the Law; that came from the Father. And the greatest “work” they could do is to believe the One sent to them by the Father, Who is not there to merely feed their stomachs, but to teach them **“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”**

Prayer: Come, Lord Jesus. Be our guest, and let these gifts to us be blessed, Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, July 26, 2021

Read John 6:35-40

### God's Will

For faithful Christian people, it can become a near obsession to try and determine God's will. Of course, we usually mean that God must have a specific narrow path for every decision and relationship, and it is our task to seek to perfectly determine what exactly this might be. We think that God's will includes precise answers who I will marry, what occupation I should have, etc.

This is an exhausting exercise in futility because what we really want is the ability to see into the future. I think that's why God's will fascinates us – it is a mixture of wanting to be faithful, but also wanting to know what's ahead. God's expressed will in the Scriptures is specific, but also leaves a lot of freedom.

Jesus says, **“this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”** There. That's God's will for you. Now, sure, as one who believes in Jesus, your decisions and relationships and occupation should be guided and directed by Christ and His Word, but it's not your job to fixate on what God's unspoken will might or might not be. Focus on Christ and His Word and live faithfully trusting in Him.

More than anything, take comfort in the fact that the essence of God's will is to save you. Forgive you. Raise you up on the Last Day. The essence of God's will is grace and it is accomplished in Jesus for you.

Prayer – Dear Father in heaven, help me to rejoice in Your will to save me. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, July 27, 2021

Read John 6:41-51

### What Did I Do to Deserve This?

How did I come close to God? Where does my faith come from? Or in the words of a song, "What did I do to deserve this?". Alas for my pride and self-satisfaction, I did nothing to deserve anything good. I was an enemy of God - and I find I still act like an enemy of God. I find I still sin, I still do wrong. So there is no room for pride or the self-satisfaction that comes from doing something right. God came looking for me! God cares about me!

Jesus says, "**No man can come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.**" It's not just that Jesus died for me. Yes, He did, but that would do me no good alone. I would still resist and refuse that blessing. Yet while I was resisting, He came looking for me. God pulled me out of my failure, my selfish sin, and faced me with the Truth of Jesus. God gave me the faith that accepted both my helplessness and His successful rescue of me.

Eternal life is a gift from God - had I tried to earn it, had I trusted even just my choice of God (as above, 'What did I do ...') I would not be accepting a gift but trying to insult God by purchasing it. But I don't! He came to me, changed me, and made me His. Now I trust Him - and live forever.

Prayer: Lord it is tempting to accept credit myself for what you did. Please guard my thought and dreams. Keep me in Your hands, not in mine. Amen

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, July 28, 2021

Read John 6:52-59

### Unless

“Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” Jesus’ words sound pretty bizarre. They sounded strange to the first crowd that heard them. They sound strange to us.

We might think they are more easily explained if they are about communion, but Jesus had not yet given that meal. So, while these words might relate to the Lord’s Supper, they must also mean something more. They are a graphic depiction of faith. To have life on Jesus is not by snacking on a few of His teachings or gorging ourselves on a specific action of Jesus. Faith is to swallow the whole thing – to trust in Jesus.

We are always tempted to nibble around the edges or spit out the bits we don’t like. In our sinful flesh, we always seem to want to sample the parts of Christ and the Christian faith that we prefer.

To the contrary, Jesus gives us Himself. Completely. To give us life and to shape our lives. Completely. This is what it is to feast on the Son of Man. We do this always by faith, and in particular, in His Supper where He gives Himself.

The result of feasting on Jesus? “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.” What a beautiful promise!

Prayer – Dear Jesus, prevent me from being satisfied with nibbling at the edges, and feast on You that You abide in me, and I in you. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*



Thursday, July 29, 2021

Read John 6:60-71

Words of Eternal Life

*“Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”*

John 6:68-69

An Amazing Confession, Assertion, Profession of the Truth. Where does this confession come from? The Holy Spirit teaches Jesus is the Holy One of God in the Word of the Scriptures, the Word of God, Christ Jesus, the *Logos*, the Eternal Son, and the Holy of One of God. Notably, Peter and the twelve’s hearts were hardened when they did not understand about the loaves (Mark 6:52). This hardening was after Jesus miraculously feeds over 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish. After Jesus walks on the sea saying, **“It is I [egō eimi—I Am], do not be afraid”** (v. 20; Matt. 14:27; Mark 6:50; ), and that He, Jesus, is the Bread of Life (v. 35)?

Looking in the psalms, we see a connection to the Holy One of God. David sings, **“For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption”** (Psalm 16:10; see Acts 2:13; 13:35), speaking of Jesus Resurrection from the dead. Yet, before we see the crucified and risen Jesus from the dead with the eleven Apostles, Peter and the twelve professed Jesus as having **“ the words of eternal life”** as **“the Holy One of God.”** Yahweh God is the Holy One of Israel seen and revealed throughout Scripture in the Old Testament, especially through the Prophet Isaiah. We also might recall Nathanael’s confession earlier in John’s account. Philip brings him to Jesus, **“Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”** (1:49). Amazing!

One might wonder why Judas Iscariot confessed Jesus as the Holy One of God with the twelve. Judas stayed with Jesus and the twelve up to his betrayal. He did not leave with the other disciples for the words of Jesus, saying He **“is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread [Jesus] will live forever”** (v. 58). This **“hard saying”** cause many to depart from Jesus, **“who can listen to it?”** (v.60). Jesus answered them, **“Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.” He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him.”** (vv. 70-71). Jesus is the Holy One of God for you and me. In Him, we are forgiven and have eternal life given by the Spirit and granted by the Father. With the whole Church [catholic], we confess together the creeds and the words of Peter in the Holy Spirit singing:

Prayer-

**Alleluia. Lord, to whom shall we go?  
You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia.**

Amen.

(Lutheran Service Book, 156, 173)

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch*

Friday, July 30, 2021

Read John 7:1-9

### Waiting for the Right Time

**"My time has not yet fully come."** As Jesus's brothers urge Him to capitalize of the attention that the feeding of the 5,000 has brought Him, Jesus remains humble and true to the Father's plan. His family figured that if Jesus made a big appearance at the Feast of Booths where many of His followers would be, that they would once again try to crown Him king and perhaps succeed this time. What they had in mind was the worldly power and glory that Jesus could have with a grand public entrance into Jerusalem. Jesus' response reveals the irony in their plan. They did not yet believe in Jesus because they clearly did not understand His mission. Jesus would go up to the festival with a grand entrance and do His works in the public eye and He would be crowned king. But this was not yet Jesus's time. He would not go up to *this* festival (that is, not publicly) but only a short few months later, Jesus would go up to another festival, Passover. There He would have His triumphal entry but His public works would be a shameful death and His kingly crown would be a crown of thorns. He would gain for Himself followers and a Kingdom, but in a way that His brethren could not understand until after the resurrection.

We ourselves are much like Jesus's brethren in this passage, we want God to show Himself in mighty ways. We want God to miraculously heal our sick, we want Jesus to come back soon for judgment and salvation, we want the whole world to see the works of our God. These are not bad things at all, in fact God will surely do all these things. Still, just as in our passage for today, Jesus does not act according to our schedule. Neither does His plan look exactly the way that we want and expect it to. Sometimes we even feel our faith waver when Jesus does not seem to do what He has said He will. Nevertheless, we are better informed than Jesus family was. We have experienced the power of His resurrection, and we trust that He will do all things in a way far better than we could imagine and at precisely the right time.

Prayer: Dear Lord, give us patience and understanding so that as we eagerly await the fulfillment of Your promises for us, we can remain strong in faith, knowing that You will surely do all things in their right time. Lead us and keep us in true faith that trusts in Your abundant mercy. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Saturday, July 31, 2021

Read John 7:10-24

### Peace is with You

Some of the time, knowing God through knowing Jesus makes us comfortable. OK, a lot of the time: “Peace be with you”, “Silent Night, Holy Night”, “Go in peace; your sins are forgiven”. After all, Jesus is “the Prince of Peace”. But some of the time, knowing God this well makes us uncomfortable.

In John 7, as Jesus arrives in Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths, the people are muttering about Him. They aren’t talking openly about Him; just muttering, quietly. They’re afraid of being heard saying something supportive of Jesus and thereby becoming the target of those wanting to kill Him.

The Jews were uncomfortable about Jesus, too. He was “rocking the boat” by pointing out how they focused only on appearing to do the Father’s will, rather than actually allowing God to change their hearts. They knew the Scriptures – enough to be able to pick and choose select rules with which to accuse Jesus. That way they wouldn’t have to listen to the Truth He was saying. The truth was that they were happy with the status quo – they were in charge of their religious life and didn’t really want a Messiah to save them.

When Jesus, though, through His Spirit, enters your heart and changes your life, your balance of peace and comfort changes dramatically. You used to be at peace with the world (like the Jews in the story). You used to see eye to eye with those telling you to pursue your own dreams, do your own thing, “You earned it.” But now, knowing Jesus’ love for you, you suddenly feel how uncomfortable you had been with God. And that “Peace that passes all understanding” has changed you. You see that God is love, and wants you to be with Him for all eternity.

Now though, your comfort level with the world isn’t the same. You’re not part of it in the same way you had been. Your role has changed – now you’re in the world as a witness to the light that changed you. As Jesus healed the paralytic, who then told the story of his healing to the world, you shine God’s love to the darkness all around.

Prayer: Precious Savior, thank You for making Peace with and in me. Please continue to fill me with Your light. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, August 2, 2021

Read John 7:25-31

### Many Views

John makes it clear that nothing was clear to the crowds as to who Jesus was. The authorities wanted to kill him. The crowds couldn't understand why they didn't. There was a belief that no one would know where the Christ, the Messiah would come from. So that seemed a strike against Jesus of Nazareth. Still, it sure seemed like He might be the Christ, the Messiah. After all, "will (the Messiah) do more signs than this man has done?" Confusion was rampant.

Confusion is still rampant. Some see Jesus as a guru to gain advice from. Some see Jesus as the ultimate affirmer of whatever you want to do. Some see Jesus as a judgmental bigot. Some see Jesus as a figment of imagination. Some see Jesus as an interesting historical figure, and nothing more. In the end, many seem to see what they want in Jesus.

John tells us the reason for the confusion then (and the confusion now). "His hour had not yet come." To know who Jesus is, we have to look to the hour of His glory – His crucifixion. There we see His mercy for sinners and yet the high cost and seriousness of sin. He welcomes all, but also welcomes us to turn from our sin and find hope in Him alone. He is the Messiah. He is the Son of God, who reveals the heart of God the Father. To know Jesus we don't look to an abundance of signs, but to the sign – the cross.

Prayer – Dear Jesus, teach me again and again who You are (God's Son and my Savior) through the glorious sign of the cross. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, August 3, 2021

Read John 7:32-36

### Clinging to My Efforts

Jesus is a great teacher - just not ONLY a great teacher. He teaches successfully because He has done successfully. This world is a rough, evil place. I need rescue, I need continual help, I need direction in life and Jesus does it all. But when I try to check out Jesus, when I try to limit Him, to make myself the judge, trying to make my investigations the determination of His quality - I always will fail to find Him and thus reject Him.

I need help - but when I interfere with that help adding my efforts, those efforts get between me and the help. In fact, the problem in the first place comes from my efforts to do it myself. I need help, not a small inject of betterness.

How tempting it is! To try to make his successes subject to my decisions. I want to be at the center, to not need to depend on another. My selfishness has made me an enemy to God, so my selfishness blocks out my acceptance of God's help. Holding on to my self prevents my holding on to God! Trying to limit God to my understanding, to my ideas of how He can (or must!) act, means that I have already refused God.

Cleanse me, God! Take away from me that dreadful desire to make myself the instrument of God, to place my desires for power between us. I know Jesus as I have lived in Him - Let me rest in that joy and completeness, knowing that I don't know everything and that that's all right.

Prayer: Thank you Lord! It would be so easy to let my desires creep back in. Thank you, God, for Your protection. In the name of Your dear Son, Jesus. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, August 4, 2021

Read John 7:37-39

### Refreshment from the Drought



Before you head west these days, it is a good idea to check the Drought Monitor. The Western United States is in the midst of a years-long drought. Across California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico, not only are the states dealing with drought, but most areas are in Level 4 Exceptional Drought. I'm not exactly sure what that means, but it is worse than Severe or Extreme Drought. It's bad.

Above is a picture of the previous location of the Lake Mead marina. In the distance, you can just barely see where Lake Mead (the largest reservoir in the United States). Heat and drought have combined to massively shrink the main water source for the Southwest US.

We may not be in a drought at the moment in Missouri, but we know spiritual dryness (even drought) that afflicts us because of our sin and the circumstances that surround us. King David expressed this as being "in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Psalm 63:1).

Our Lord Jesus proclaims, that He is the relief. **"If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"** (John 7:37-38). The One who thirsted from the cross gives to us lasting refreshment for our parched souls by His Spirit. The Spirit brings forth rivers of living water through the cool water of Christ's Word to quench our spiritual drought day by day.

Prayer – Dear Holy Spirit, in my times of Spiritual dryness, refresh me in the cool water of life found in Jesus. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Thursday, August 5, 2021  
Read John 7:40-44

### Division Over Jesus

*“So there was a division among the people over him. Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him” (vv. 43-44)*

Should we be surprised about division over who Jesus is? The world has much to say about Jesus. The baptized elect, chosen, adopted, and redeemed of God have much to believe, teach, and confess.

*Concerning the Person of Christ, “We believe, teach, and confess that, although the Son of God is a separate, distinct, and complete divine person in and of himself and thus was truly, essentially, and fully God with the Father and the Holy Spirit from eternity, nonetheless at the same time, when the fullness of time had come [Gal. 4:4], he assumed human nature into the unity of his person, not in such a way that there were two persons or two Christ’s, but that Christ Jesus was in one person at the same time true and eternal God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and a true human being, born of the most blessed Virgin Mary, as it is written in Romans 9[:5], “from them [the patriarchs], according to the flesh, comes the Christ, who is over all, God blessed forever” (Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord VII I 6).*

So, what does this say about Jesus? Is he the Prophet? Is he the Christ? Is he the offspring of David? Is he from Bethlehem? Answer: yes, yes, yes, yes! Jesus is Yahweh God in the flesh, the only Savior for all mankind from the power of sin, death, and Satan; the only mediator between God and man, Christ is our righteousness. Jesus is given for you and me to believe he is the Christ and have life in his name. Isn’t it obvious? Only through true living faith can one see Christ Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus gives true living water, and his precious blood is poured out for our sins.

The world is blind to righteousness by faith alone. Through faith alone, we see Jesus, the Prophet, the Christ, and promised offspring of David. Jesus is the crucified and risen holy one of God for all to believe. Our human feeble hearts and faith fail us; therefore, Christ’s righteousness and faith never fail for us. We should not listen to the desires of the flesh and lies of Satan, **“Did God really say . . .?”** What does the Holy Scripture say? As it is written, the Word of God says, **“Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”** (vv. 38-39)

Prayer - Yahweh God. Thank You for giving Your living water through Christ Jesus. Guard and protects us from all divisions, especially on the person and work of Christ our Lord, who is over all; God blessed forever. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch*

Friday, August 6, 2021

Read John 7:45-52

### Nicodemus and the Pharisees

Nicodemus is a fascinating person in the Gospel of John. His most memorable appearance is in chapter 3 where he comes to Jesus by night because he is afraid that being seen with Jesus would lower his status, then he makes a fool of himself when he talks to Jesus, completely unable to understand what Jesus is trying to tell him. In this passage though, it is clear that Nicodemus' conversation with Jesus has had an impact on him. To set the scene, we have the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together waiting for their servants to retrieve Jesus for them so they can somehow silence him. When the servants come back and have no Jesus but only the report that Jesus' words are unlike anything they've ever heard, the hard-hearted Pharisees lash out. In essence, they are saying that the servants are idiots. The religious elite (the theologians and church administrators of the day) were not buying into Jesus, so anyone who did was a fool.

Ironically, just after the group asks rhetorically whether any of the Pharisees have believed in Jesus and said that the crowd who follows Jesus does not know the law, Nicodemus speaks up. Nicodemus was himself a Pharisee and as it turns out he had believed in Jesus (Nicodemus even helped to prepare Jesus' body in chapter 19). Moreover, Nicodemus speaks up to challenge the Pharisees' knowledge of the law. He submits to his peers that they ought to at least hear Jesus and see what He does. This is exactly how Nicodemus came to faith. Perhaps Nicodemus thinks that if the Pharisees actually knew Jesus, they would realize what he had realized. Alas, the Pharisees show themselves uninterested in keeping the law. Instead, they break it by plotting to murder an innocent man. The Pharisees are more interested in geography than morality. They who are supposed to safeguard the observance of the law and watch for the coming of the Messiah are they who turn the law on its head and reject the Messiah. Nicodemus' words did nothing but embitter the others to more and more hatred against. We should watch that we who are heirs of the message of the Gospel and the commandments of Christ are not like the Pharisees, who think they know best and wind up crucifying the Lord of life, but are like Nicodemus, whose encounter with Jesus was genuinely life-changing and who did his best to share that Gospel with others even if he could fail or lose his livelihood.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we thank you for the witness of those who urge us to listen to what You have done and said so that we would have faith. Send us Your Spirit to lead others to You and not to discourage their faith. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*



Saturday, August 7, 2021

Read John 7:53-8:11

### *Adultery*

The scribes and Pharisees had caught a woman in the act of adultery. She was guilty, no question about it. Knowing the legalism of those who condemned her, she doubtless expected the worst. The penalty for adultery was for the guilty man to be stoned to death, along with the woman. There's no mention of the man in this account, so she may have felt betrayed, abandoned, and unfairly charged, while the man went away free. That's all conjecture, but she surely felt ashamed. She was brought to the Temple, of all places! The religious leaders dragged her there before everyone she knew. She had no defense; she'd committed the crime and now everyone saw her for what she was: an adulteress.

The scribes and Pharisees treated her as a non-person. She was an egregious sinner, unquestionably guilty – she'd been caught in the act! In Deuteronomy and Leviticus God had told the Jews to cleanse the community of sinners like her. But she still had some value: maybe, just maybe, they could use her to catch Jesus. They knew He was a sucker for ones like her and that something He'd say or do might win Him the death penalty. It didn't matter that they were shaming her before the congregation in God's Temple. She didn't matter.

How did Jesus see this woman? He, too, had absolutely no doubt that she was a sinner, worthy of death. But these self-righteous men before Him were acting exactly like the faithless Jews that the Old Testament prophets had so often spoken against. How many times had those prophets compared Israel's unfaithfulness to that of an adulterous wife? They were compared to a prostitute, who gave herself away to anyone, for no charge. And Who was the offended, faithful husband?

Jesus. This woman was unfaithful to her husband – she'd broken her vows of marriage. Jesus rebuked her and told her to “**sin no more**”. But the scribes and Pharisees, representing His bride – Israel – were committing adultery against Him. They were being faithless to God, wrapping themselves in the sleazy clothing of self-righteousness and putting judgement before mercy.

Until Judgement Day, Jesus' mission is to take away the sins of the world. He gives every mercy to scribes and Pharisees, adulterers and sinners, you and me. He wants all to repent and turn to Him and join Him at the wedding feast.

Prayer: Merciful Lord, bring me to repentance and forgive me when I'm unfaithful to You. Because of Your faithfulness, Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, August 9, 2021

Read John 8:12

### The Light of the World

(Jesus said) **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”**

Never? How in the world can this be possible? We know immediately that Jesus is not talking about physical darkness, but about a darkness that clings to creation on account of sin. How can we possibly never walk in darkness?

Author Bo Giertz wrote that, “God is light, John says. Paul says He lives in light. This light was the life of man. But we live in darkness. Each of us has something inside of us that loves “the darkness rather than the light (John 3:19).” Now the true light which enlightens everyone, has come into the world with Christ, John says in 3:19. Whoever follows this light, the light of life, will never walk in darkness. But if he doesn’t follow the light, he will remain in darkness and die in sin. Everything Christ has to tell us about the light – life, joy, and peace – has this darkness surrounding it. It isn’t something everyone has simply because there is a God, but it’s something that saves us from darkness, from death, and for evil.”

That is the key! We do not walk in darkness because we have The Light! The darkness of sin in our hearts is not yet eradicated, but we have the Light of the World by faith. We have the light of life. So just as the darkness has not overcome Christ, The Light (John 1:5), the darkness does not overcome us because we have The Light! He is our Light who puts an end to the darkness of sin and death. The Light (Jesus!) changes everything for us!

Prayer – Almighty God, you have poured the true Light of Your Son into our hearts. Let this Light shine forth in our lives. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, August 10, 2021

Read John 8:13-20

### How Do I Know About Jesus?

How do I know about Jesus? After all, He doesn't walk around anymore on the streets. So how do I know that He is real? Where do I get the confidence, I do have, the trust that has never abandoned me?

He has been with us and left a record with us. His disciples, His chosen few, witness to Him, to His existence, to His teachings, and to His presence then and now in the world. In that way, He is Himself a witness to me. The record He left tells about Him and works His power to convince me and continue to work in me. He is Himself then a witness to the salvation He worked in His death/resurrection and has brought into my life.

But His witness is not alone. His very existence is a witness from God the Father. Jesus does not represent Himself. When He appeared to be alone in the world, He was not, for He is also divine, God Himself as the internal Son of the Father. He represented then another, whose is also a witness to Him and His truth. Jesus' acts are a sign that God is approving of Jesus and His teachings. Thus, there is a second witness to the truth, that Jesus is real and my savior.

But then, there is another fact. I know He is real because He lives with me. He guides me, teaches me, disciplines me, and loves me through it all. While another may not see Him directly in me, yet there He is!

Prayer: Thank you Father for bearing witness to the truth. Thank you for sending Jesus, for teaching me, and giving me faith to trust Him. I know He is real. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, August 11, 2021

Read John 8:21-24

### Unless You Believe that I AM

Unless is an ominous word. It leaves no wiggle room. There are no other paths. This is it. Unless also carries with it a sense of impending danger. If the one path isn't followed, things will not go well. In this case, "you will die in your sins."

The point that Jesus is making is pretty simple, but with incredible, eternal consequences. To carry the weight of our sins forever is a burden that we must endure...unless we believe that Jesus is I AM. That Jesus is truly God, come from the Father. Unless we believe that Jesus is I AM who spoke to Moses from the burning bush (Exodus 3), and proclaimed that He would deliver the people of Israel.

As our I AM, Jesus is the only path for deliverance for us from the bondage of our sins. Their incredible weight would crush and condemn us if we carry them into death, but since Jesus carried them into death by trusting in Him we are relieved of the burden. He has carried the weight that we could not.

Unless can be an ominous word because it reminds us of the horrible result of every other path – that we would die in our sins. But here it is a beautiful freeing word that leads us to Christ the key – the One who has unlocked eternity for us. For believing in Him, believe that He is I AM, we have deliverance, life, and hope.

Prayer – Dear Jesus, the Great I AM, help me by Your Spirit to ever cling to You, and so be eternally freed from sin and death. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Thursday, August 12, 2021

Read John 8:25-30

### Who Are You, Jesus?

*“So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.” John 8:28*

*I AM!* Did you catch that? Again, Jesus says he is Yahweh, true God and one with the Father who sent him. With proclamations like these, one might say to Jesus, “Who are you?” or better, in true faith, “You are the Christ, Yahweh my God!” who spoke to Moses, the patriarchs, and prophets. We are struck in awe, marveling in wonder of such heavenly and beautiful divine things and power at Jesus’ compassion, mercy, and grace among his people, and in the midst of us. The Pharisees and the Jews listen to Jesus proclaim he is *I AM*—Yahweh God sent by the Father, the eternal and only begotten Son of God. The Son of Man prophesied to come into the world, and some believe, and others still do not understand and ask, “Who are you?” in unbelief.

Saint Augustine wrote, “We have spoken to you on the preceding passage, suggesting how the Father may be understood as True, and the Son as the Truth. But when the Lord Jesus said, ‘He that sent me is true,’ the Jews understood not that He spake to them of the Father. And He said to them, as you have just heard in the reading, ‘When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then ye shall know that I am, and [that] I do nothing of myself; but as the Father hath taught me, I speak these things.’ What means this? For it looks as if all He said was, that they would know who He was after His passion. Without doubt, therefore, He saw that some there, whom He Himself knew, whom with the rest if His saints He Himself in His foreknowledge had chosen before the foundation of the world, would believe after His passion.

Jesus, the eternal Son of God and Son of Man, is lifted up for you and me. He is *hupsoō-lifted, raised up, elevated* above the earth, and nailed to a tree and crucified for our sins. Earlier in John’s Gospel account, we heard Jesus say to Nicodemus, “**And as Moses [hupsoō] lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that** [all and everyone who] **believes in him** [will] **have eternal life**” (3:14-15). In Christ Jesus alone, you are forgiven and have eternal life.

Prayer – Yahweh God. You are *I AM*. Beautiful in majesty, glory, strength, power, might, and wisdom seen and given in Christ Jesus crucified and risen for us, for faith and life everlasting, the forgiveness of sins, and freedom from the power of sin, death, and all evil. O give thanks unto Yahweh, for He is good and His steadfast love endures forever. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch*

Friday, August 13, 2021

Read John 8:31-38

### The Truth Will Set You Free

In this exchange between Jesus and His Jewish followers, we see Jesus talking about sin as slavery. The Jews were confused by His words. They had never heard sin talked about this way. The idea that sin is slavery was foreign to them, and although we've heard this and other passages that talk about the slavery of sin, this may not be what comes to our mind when we think of sin. Our evil inclinations can make us think that sin is secretly a good thing that God has told us not to do. Like a child who wants a cookie even though mom has said it'll ruin our dinner, we are always drawn toward sins that on the surface are sweet. Jesus speaks also to us when He says, "**you do what you have heard from your father.**"

Just like Adam and Eve in the garden, we are easily deceived into thinking that God has forbidden the sweetest fruit from us. The serpent told Eve that eating the fruit would give her wisdom. He tells us that sin will give us some reward or get us ahead in life. And just as in the garden, his lie is so tempting because it is a distortion of the truth. The fruit did give wisdom. Sin can feel good or get us some worldly reward. But that is a far cry from the whole truth. The fruit that gave wisdom also brought pain and suffering and death into the world. The sin that may feel good for a moment will actually take away our freedom. Sin enslaves us.

But Jesus offers us an alternative to the lie of sin and its slavery. He offers the whole truth for His disciples. He offers His very self when He says, "**I am the Truth.**" He says, "**If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free.**" The only solution to the lie of sin and its slavery is the Truth of Jesus who gives us freedom. He, who has conquered the devil and his lies, has freed us from sin and its slavery and given us all the benefits of His freedom. We are no longer compelled to seek worldly reward by doing the work of our former father, the devil, but freed to be children of our true Father who gives us true and eternal blessings through His Son.

Prayer: Jesus Christ, the Way and Truth and Life, free us from the slavery of sin. Draw us nearer each today to You who are the Truth that in knowing You we may no longer act like slaves of the devil but as children of Your Father and ours. Amen

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Saturday, August 14, 2021

Read John 8:39-47

### *Your Father*

Jesus told the Jews who were questioning Him, **“You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.”** That’s one of those readings you hear at church that just sounds so wrong when the reading ends with, “This is the Gospel of the Lord.” If the reading is Jesus telling you that your father is the devil, that’s not good news (remember, “Gospel” means “Good News”). That’s the opposite of good news.

But these Jews were claiming salvation by ancestry – **“Abraham is our father,”** they’d said. They were God’s favorites and therefore had salvation assured. God had promised Abraham he’d have countless descendants and that the world would be blessed through them. They thought, “Well here we are – God’s gift to the world!”

They’d forgotten what John the Baptist said to them earlier, **“do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.”** Maybe they forgot because John had started by calling them a brood of vipers, maybe they truly believed that because their ancestor was offered salvation that it automatically flowed to them. Either way, Jesus was offering them Truth.

He made two points: first, if God was their father, they wouldn’t be trying to kill Him. That’s devilish, not godly. Second, He, Jesus, has come from the Father, is telling them the truth in love, but they do not believe Him because they are not of God.

You and I have heard the truth in Jesus words. We are God’s children because we know and love Jesus. Our father is not the devil, but sometimes we do his work “on the side”. Sometimes we twist the truth and lie and deceive. It hurts to think of it this way, but when we choose sin, we’re deceiving ourselves just like those Jews were. Just as being sons of Abraham didn’t save them; just as being white, black, brown, or any other race doesn’t make us special in God’s eyes; these are just lies the devil tries to feed us. The Truth is that God is Love, has sent His Son to us, and freely gives His salvation to all through faith in Jesus.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You are full of light, life, love, and truth. I know this because Your Son showed me through His life. He died to give me this truth, and His Spirit lives within me. Abba (Father), Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, August 16, 2021

Read John 8:48-59

### Eternal Claims

Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees has reached its conclusion with the religious leaders taking up stones to silence Jesus once and for all. The accusations sent back and forth in our reading are strong – "You are a demon." "You are liars." This is not mere name calling. These things are serious.

Why do the Pharisees think Jesus has a demon? Jesus claims to be THE son of God, and (by the end of this reading) reiterates that He is "I am," which is a reference to Yahweh, the name God uses in the Old Testament to identify Himself. They were convinced that this was impossible, and so any claim to be God would be an act of the devil.

Why does Jesus call the Pharisees liars? Anything that opposes the truth is a lie. As the true Son of God, those who stand against Him and claim that He has a demon are liars. Obviously, this is of eternal significance to hold to such a falsehood.

Perhaps we don't always speak in such stark terms, but when it comes to Jesus, these extremes are accurate. Those who trust in Christ belong to the eternal truth that gives life. Those who stand against Christ are endorsing a lie. This is why when Jesus is rightly understood, He receives such a strong reaction. There is no middle ground. Those who oppose Christ are separated from God. Those who trust in Him? **"If anyone keeps (Christ's) word, he will never see death."**

Prayer – Lord Jesus, the Great I AM, help me to humbly trust in You, keep your word, and share in Your life. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*



Tuesday, August 17, 2021

Read John 9:1-7

### I See!

God shows His love to me and others when He comes to us and changes us. We didn't even know that we were blind; we didn't know we needed help. How could I? I was blind to my own disability. I thought I was intelligent, wise, and could handle life - but I was mistaken. I couldn't see the problems of others well, - after all, I couldn't see myself!

God let me be blind to myself so that I would appreciate what He has done for me! He took something we all consider ordinary, words in voice or text. Ordinary experiences (such as the blind man's mud) which sent us to the Scriptures, the well of eternal life Jesus promises and give us. There He washed away my blindness. Now I can see!

Now I see my Savior there with me. Cured of my blindness I can see what I am really without Him. I see that I was fooling myself, living in deceit, and running from God - even as I was sure that I knew Him and His will. He had to come to me! I couldn't see Him, I couldn't even truly seek Him, as my selfish desire refused to see more than my wants.

But even while I gloried in my ignorance, Jesus was seeking me. He came to me, He taught me, He acted on me - and I received His actions. His light, the true light shone on me. Now I see, Now I am His, and Glad of it! Praise the Lord.

Prayer: Thank You Lord, that You sought me out, that You made me see You. I am content. I live in You, and I need no more. Thank You. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, August 18, 2021

Read John 9:8-12

### A Witness

While everyone else argued about Jesus, the once blind man was a wonderful witness of Christ. I'll come back to what that means in a moment.

First, I want to talk about witnessing. We falsely tend to think that witnessing of Christ means knowing the answer to every question or argument of a skeptic. We are afraid to say too much because we might not be right. In the process, we often convince ourselves to say nothing. A witness is someone who tells what they have seen and heard. Not all Christians are evangelists (who travel far and wide preaching the Gospel), but all Christians can be witnesses after the pattern of 1 John 1:3, **“that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us.”** We want others to know what Christ has done, so they can share in His life.

The previously blind man was a wonderful witness. He didn't get into the arguments swirling around him. He simply said what he knew. He spoke about what Christ had done for him. **“The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘God to Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight.”** The man testified to what he knew to be true.

We need not use eloquent words to be witnesses of Christ. We simply share what we know: He lived perfectly, where I do not. He died for my sin, to take mine and yours away. He rose from death, so I will too. And all those who believe in Him.

We could say more, but to simply say this is to be a witness.

Prayer – Dear Jesus, lead me by Your Spirit to be a witness of what you've done for me. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Thursday, August 19, 2021

Read John 9:12-23

Jesus the Prophet, the Christ, from God

*So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet." John 9:17*

Here is another questioning and confession of Jesus as the Prophet which Moses spoke about, **"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen"** (Deuteronomy 18:15; see John 4:19; 6:14; 7:40). The Jewish religious leaders are continually divided over Jesus and seek to kill him, yet His time has not yet come to be glorified. Jesus continues teaching the Kingdom of God among His people, to the lost sheep of Israel; healing the lame, blind, and doing the works of His Father proclaiming He is the true bread of life from heaven and light of the world, the Son of God and Son of Man, the Messiah, true God, the I AM.

By the time the man born blind had received his sight from Jesus, we know many were questioning and confessing Jesus to be the Christ (see John 1:21; 4:25-26; 7:26, 41, etc.) such as the Samaritan women and the people of Jerusalem at the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles). Division among the Jews arose over Jesus. And the Pharisees had placed together a rule of excommunication from the Jewish congregation for anyone who confessed Jesus as the Messiah. The blind man's parents knew this well and told the Pharisees to ask their son, who is of age, again, who opened his eyes? **"His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue."** (v. 22).

Jesus healed the blind man on the Sabbath just like the sick man healed by the pool called Bethesda was healed on the Sabbath. And the Jews were persecuting and seeking to kill Jesus because of this. It's funny, yet deeply sad, how the Pharisees are spiritually blind to Jesus continually and refuse the gift of seeing the true Messiah from God and the one who will save His people from their sins. This gift comes from God alone by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone; To all those who are repented and believe the Gospel Truth in Jesus the Christ crucified and risen for our sins, and the sins of the world, overcoming the power of sin, death, and Satan forever. You are forgiven by the blood of Christ given and shed for you!

Prayer – Thank You, Lord Jesus, for giving us life and peace, the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life in Your Name. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch*

Friday, August 20, 2021

Read John 9:24-34

"We know that this man is a sinner!"

This exchange between the Pharisees and the man born blind reveals just how desperate and sad their rejection of Jesus was. After failing to get the answers they wanted out of his parents, the Pharisees try to interrogate the no longer blind man once again. They call him in and quite ironically tell him "**Give glory to God.**" Now, this was just their way of saying "be honest," but they had no idea just how much the blind man would give glory to God. The Pharisees began with the assertion that they knew Jesus was a sinner, telling the blind man that they were only interested in hearing things that supported their idea of Jesus. The man born blind (and apparently pretty snarky) says something along the lines of "I'm no expert in sinners, but I used to be blind and now I can see." The Pharisees ask again for the man to repeat the story of his healing, but he refuses, knowing that they only want to try and discredit him. He suggests that perhaps the Pharisees also want to become disciples of Jesus. Clearly, this sets them off. They accuse the man of being a disciple of Jesus (which the man does not deny, though he does not really know Jesus until after this scene) and say that they do not know where Jesus has come from. As is so often the case, the Pharisees have no idea just how true their words are. If they knew where Jesus came from, they would not call Him a sinner, they too would be His disciples. The man born blind goes on to prove to them that unless Jesus was from God, He surely could not have made the blind to see. In a rage, the Pharisees accuse the man of being an utter sinner (much the same as their assessment of Jesus) and throw him out of the synagogue.

While we don't learn much about Jesus in this exchange, we see in the man born blind an excellent example of how Jesus' work emboldens us to speak the truth. This man who was once a blind beggar, dependent on the goodwill of others for his livelihood, is now boldly speaking the truth to the religious leaders. Even though it is clear what the Pharisees want him to say in order to maintain his place in the synagogue, the man is fearless in proclaiming what Jesus has done for him. The man's encounter with Jesus was so life-changing that he cannot deny Jesus' actions even if the whole world were standing against him. It is precisely the same way with us. No matter who stands against us or whatever they tell us they know about Jesus, we have no choice but to share the truth that we have experienced ourselves: Jesus Christ has healed us. Though we were born blind, He has made us see. Though we were born in sin, Jesus has washed us clean. The world may *know* that Jesus is not all He has claimed to be, but we know what He has done for us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for the example of the man born blind who boldly proclaimed what You had done for him. Lead us also to boldly proclaim Your mighty works in our lives so that others may also become Your disciples. In Your holy and precious name we pray, Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Saturday, August 21, 2021

Read John 9:35-41

### *Cast out of the Temple*

The man had been born blind. All his life, he could not see God's Creation around him. He could only smell, hear, taste, and touch that world. And the people around him considered him a terrible sinner – either he or his parents had to have sinned horribly to leave him so pathetically cursed. So, many avoided him. Others pitied him and probably gave him just enough to live on. Until Jesus came to him.

Jesus explained to His disciples that, no, he wasn't blind because of his or his parents' sin. He was blind **"that the works of God might be displayed in him."** And what a display! Jesus immediately displayed God's compassion by restoring the man's eyesight. He could see! And what vision he now had! He explained first to his neighbors, then twice to the Jewish leaders that Jesus had given him his sight, and that only a man **"from God"** could possibly do such a thing.

But the blind Jewish leaders, not wanting to hear this testimony, called the man a sinner and cast him out of the Temple. He was no longer welcome in God's House – "excommunicated" and thrown away. Immediately Jesus (who would later compare Himself to the Temple) searched out the man, revealed Himself to him as the Son of Man, and the man worshiped Him.

What a contrast: from being declared a hopeless sinner and being thrown out of Temple, he's instead invited into the Holy of Holies! And with perfect eyesight, he beholds God before him. And through this story, you and I, with our eyes opened by faith, can witness **"the works of God ... displayed in him."**

The connection to Jesus performing this miracle on the Sabbath is interesting. Adam and Eve had been cast out of the Garden of Eden (where they'd had fellowship with God) because they'd opened their eyes to the knowledge of good and evil. And their deed has clouded man's sight of God ever since. The Jews in this story were acutely suffering from it. You and I can't (yet) claim perfect vision either. But Jesus spent the Sabbath after His crucifixion in hell defeating death and the devil to open a new Sabbath to us.

In this life, we still suffer from "partial blindness". We still sin, we can't visibly walk and talk with God, and we suffer the ravages of sin throughout our world. But, like Jesus restored this man both physically and spiritually and restored to him face-to-face worship with God, He has begun this for us and will one day perfectly restore us to health to walk with Him forever.

Prayer: Gracious Father, You magnificently displayed Your works in Your care for this formerly blind man. Improve our vision of you through Your Son, that we may walk with You in Paradise. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, August 23, 2021

Read John 10:1-6

### He Goes Before Them

When my daughters were little (say 2 or 3), they both were a little unsure about new things, including playgrounds. No matter how excited they were before arriving at the park. Joy often turned to abject fear when standing at the top of a slide. We could stand at the bottom and try to coax them down, but often times the only thing that worked was to ride down the slide with the girls on our laps. This was followed by mom and dad would go down first – to show them it was safe. Then, finally, they would come down because mom or dad went before them.

Over the next few days, we will look at a few different aspects of what it means that Jesus is our Good Shepherd. Today we consider that “he goes before them.” He doesn’t drive His sheep like cattle. He goes first. He clears the path of enemies and leads the way to green pastures. This is what Jesus does for us, His sheep. He goes before us – even into death! In so doing, He has cleared the path of our enemies of sin and Satan. He leads us by the voice of His Word to follow Him to the green pastures of peace with God and eternal life in His kingdom. We have nothing to fear for our shepherd goes before us.

Prayer – Dear Good Shepherd, help me to follow You, knowing that You always go before me. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, August 24, 2021

Read John 10:7-10

### I am the Door

I like this Door - I have a place to be safe and the door is the entrance! Jesus is my entrance to salvation. Here I see my Savior, Here I am guarded from those others who seek to do me harm. But as I appreciate what He has done for me, I mourn for those who have passed by the Door. They have blinded themselves, unwilling to accept that using a door means one's position is changed.

How the devil tricks people. How he tries to convince them all doors are the same, that they can always choose another door, so why cut off the future. Ha! The future is behind that door, only by going through the door can one arrive at the real future. Looking at oneself, seeking to keep control by avoiding the door, leaves one sterile with a hopeless future, never gaining true life, always losing, and eventually left to die apart from God in an eternal loneliness.

So, take the Door. Trust the One who lives, who cares for you, who spent it all, dying in your place to be your Door into Life! Jesus is the Door to God's people. As you trust in Him, He brings you with Him into the fellowship of God and of God's people. As He is with you, as you rest in Him you can (and will) avoid thoughts and attempts at other (but false) doors. That change makes your life overflowing. You are His!

Prayer: Thank you Jesus for being a Door. Please keep on giving life to me, showering me with love, strength, and patience. Amen

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, August 25, 2021

Read John 10:11-18

### A True Shepherd

Sometimes it can be hard to tell the difference between a fake and the real thing. In artwork, you may need a trained eye. A gemologist can quickly spot the difference between a genuine diamond and a replica. But when it comes to a shepherd, anyone can spot the difference – you just have to wait for things to get tough.

Jesus points to Himself as **“the good shepherd...who lays down His life for the sheep.”** The hired hand (to which He is comparing the Pharisees and other false shepherds) might look a lot like the shepherd from day to day. But when the wolf comes, everything becomes clear. The hired hand protects his own hide and runs. It makes sense since **“he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”** On the other hand, the good shepherd lays down his life. There is no question regarding His care for the sheep. He is the real deal, and it is obvious when the wolf comes.

There are plenty of days when we sheep deal with threats from Satan, the wolf. In the midst of physical trials, He claws away at our confidence by insisting that the pain tells us that Christ is no better than a hired hand. When things don't go our way, the wolf tries to convince us that Christ has abandoned us, and all is lost. But we know better, our Good Shepherd has laid down His life for us. We have no reason to doubt His care. He has put His love on display, not when things were easy, but by letting the wolf attack Him, instead of us. In giving Himself for us, we have no reason to doubt that He is the real thing.

Prayer – Dear Jesus, my Good Shepherd, in every trial help me remember Your care by turning my eyes to Your cross. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*



Thursday, August 26, 2021

Read John 10:19-21

### Listen to Jesus's Words

Another division among the Jews over Jesus' words? Jesus clearly said He has authority from the Father to lay down His life for His sheep and that He is the *Beautiful—Good Shepherd* of His sheep. Again, after these sayings of Jesus, **“There was again a division among the Jews because of these words”** (v.19). We have seen division over the words of Jesus a couple of times prior in John's gospel account.

On the last day of the Feast of Booths, Jesus shouted out, **“If anyone thirsts, let him, come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scriptures has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’”** (7:37-39). Hearing Jesus' words, some people said He was the Prophet to come, which Yahweh promised and spoke through Moses to come, and “listen” to. Others confess Jesus as the Christ, and some question if the Christ comes from Galilee (perhaps they did not know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem), saying the Christ is the offspring of David to come from Bethlehem. Another time, Jesus opens the eyes of a man born blind, and the Pharisees said, **“ This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.’ But others said, ‘How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?’ And there was a division among them”** (9:16). There was division over these sayings of Jesus.

Here in our text today, Jesus, the *Beautiful Shepherd*, is accused of having a demon. **“Many of them said, “He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?”** (v. 20). They were not listening and could not hear the Shepherds' voice and thus would not come and follow him, as Jesus said, **“I know my own and they know me . . . they will listen to my voice”** (vv. 14, 18). Looking at the last verse in our text, others who heard or witnessed Jesus open the eyes of the man born blind **“said, These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”** (v. 21).

The devil has many luring tricks and temptations aimed at our hearts and minds. It is perhaps easy to listen, hear, and follow our sinful desires and the schemes of the devil and worldly rubbish. Yet, through faith, we listen and respond to Christ alone, believing and trusting the words and promises of our *Beautiful Shepherd*, Jesus, who cares for us eternally, now, and forever, who laid down His life and took it up again for us. Jesus was lifted up for our redemption from sin and eternal death by His death, which fully paid for our sins. In Baptism, we are united with Christ in His death and resurrection.

Prayer – Beautiful Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Thank You for calling, leading, and keeping us forever in Your Word and Truth. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch*

Friday, August 27, 2021

Read John 10:22-30

### My Sheep Hear My Voice

Once again, we see Jesus approached by the Jews with a question and once again, we see Him answer in a way that they do not expect nor like (you'd think they would just stop asking). This time, the Jews are very straightforward and ask Jesus plainly whether or not He is the Christ. Jesus answers that the works He has done should give them all the answer they need. But they aren't satisfied with the answer and Jesus tells them why, because they "**are not among my sheep.**" This is Jesus' explanation for the reason that although they kept a close eye on all that He said and did, those who were opposed to Jesus were never able to accept His claims that He was the Son of God.

But as in so many places in the Gospels, Jesus gives more answer than the question deserves. He says that we who do accept Him accept Him because we are His sheep. We hear His voice and we follow Him. Unlike the Jews who heard His voice and rejected Him, we hear Him and know Him as our shepherd who gives to us eternal life. When we see Jesus' works and hear His voice, we are comforted because we recognize who He is and what He does for us. He gives us life, He protects us so that we never perish. We know that He is greater than all, that if we are in His hands, there is *no one* who can harm us. This is almost a sad passage because those Jews that heard Jesus did not understand Him or receive what He was offering, rather than rejoice in the eternal life available to them, they picked up rocks to stone Him. And so often our hearts would reject our Shepherd and stone Him rather than follow Him. Nevertheless, our sin is never so great that we are snatched from His loving and forgiving hands.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we thank You that You have called us as Your sheep and made us hear Your voice. Lead us on paths of eternal life and comfort us in the knowledge that if we are with You, there is no one who can take us away. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Saturday, August 28, 2021

Read John 10:31-42

### *Half Right*

In today's "love-filled" political climate, politicians enjoy comparing their opponents to the worst people of the last century, the Nazis. This week however, we may choose another group as that ultimate embodiment of evil: the Taliban. I contend, though, that the Jews from today's reading are similar in one way to the Taliban: they're both "half right".

The Taliban, who are radical Muslims, adamantly insist "there is only one God"! Christians vehemently agree with this. Where we say they miss the mark, though, is in their refusal to believe that Jesus is God and Man. Using human reason, they consider us who believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be infidels. They do not believe these three Persons can be considered God without making them three Gods. So, we say (because the Bible says) they don't truly know God because they don't know Jesus. Being half right doesn't get them very far.

The Jews arguing with Jesus were completely correct in saying that Jesus was a Man. But, despite all the evidence before them, as well as God's Word that they studied daily, they could not accept that the Man before them could also be God. The Man who made the blind see, the deaf hear, and the mute sing for joy (according to their thinking) could only be a man, not God. Again, being only half right doesn't mark you as one of God's sheep.

But Jesus' reply caught me by surprise. He quotes Psalm 82, where it says "**you are gods**". There, God was speaking to the faithful, especially the leaders, and was saying that the faithful are "gods" as they do the things of God. They are God's hands and feet when they "**Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.**" Using Scripture, how could they stone Jesus, when He was only doing the things of God?

This week we've seen heart-wrenching scenes from Afghanistan of many people doing the miraculous works of God, while others fight them tooth and nail. We, too, in our neighborhoods and church, do God's work as we care for one another, pray for those experiencing hell firsthand in places like Afghanistan (especially our servicemen and women), and as we pray for the "gods" – the leaders of our country – that they may do God's work in this difficult time.

Prayer: Good Shepherd, pour out Your love for the world through me, through all members of Your Church, and through the governments and forces of the world that Your will be done. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, August 30, 2021

Read John 11:1-4

### More than Meets the Eye

Every day I'm reminded a little bit more that I'm limited. You've undoubtedly had the same lesson taught to you through your experiences. I recall that when one of the girls was little (I can't recall which one), she fell and hurt herself. The scraped knee led to a waterfall of tears. Mom wasn't around so I attempted to kiss her wound to make it better. The response? "That didn't really help...at all!" Followed by more crying. We can't always take away the pain of others. At a certain point, we can't do what we used to be able to do (aging joints remind people of this all the time). And there are some things we could never do. We are limited.

Our limited nature also means that we can't see everything. Like in our story today. Through this week, we will read the familiar story of the raising of Lazarus. From our vantage point, that's how we see this story. That's not what the disciples saw (or what Mary or Martha saw – as we will be reminded). They saw the death of Lazarus. Yet even in his death, there was more than met the eye.

Why did Lazarus die? Well, the disciples would have said because he was ill. From a universal, theological perspective, we would say that Lazarus died because of sin. Jesus tells us, **"This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."** Which was true? All of these. The illness did lead to death (but only temporarily). Sin is always the root cause of death – whether the medical cause is a disease, heart problems, or an accident. Yet, Lazarus' death would be brief for Christ would raise Lazarus and foreshadow His own resurrection (and ours!).

When tragedy, difficulty, or illness strikes, we don't get to see all the reasons. We are limited, but we take comfort in our Lord who is not limited by illness, sin, or even death. Trusting in Him, we are strengthened for all of the things that our limited minds cannot understand, and sharing in His resurrection promise, we are given hope that assurance that we will share in His glory.

Prayer – Dear Jesus, give me faith to trust in Your unlimited grace and wisdom, even when I cannot see all that You intend. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, August 31, 2021

Read John 11:5-16

### Trust in Unhappy Times

The Bible tells us that because Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, He waited for Lazarus to die! (John 11:5-6). This is very scary and very reassuring. Very scary because it implies that God does good things to me by allowing what seem to be bad things to happen to me. That means that the bad things in life that I ask God to keep away from me might still come to me. But reassuring because I know that God has something good planned to come out of those times/events I want to avoid.

How often I tell my LORD that I know what He should do! I am sure that only what I see as good could be part of God's will. And yet when I pray "Thy will be done," I am including the realization that I don't know what is best. Yes, Jesus is my model here (as well as my Strength and Savior) - He prayed to avoid the evil that had to happen to Him. Yet there too, God knew that what had to happen was for the best. Please God help me to understand. Help me to depend on You while trusting that all will indeed work out for good.

Notice though, that God has never promised me that I would actually see the good He has in mind. That good will and does come, as it did for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. It comes, but not always in my eyesight and understanding. So that too is part of my plea for God to help - to build my faith to trust Him even through those unhappy events.

Prayer: Thank you so much for Your promise, and picture, of how all things will work out for good. Build my faith, use my faith to keep me going when I see no solution or answer, to make my faith part of my life. I thank you for Your promise. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, September 1, 2021

Read John 11:17-27

### The Resurrection and the Life

**“Do you believe this?”** Jesus’s question is a challenging one. He is not asking for a generic statement of faith, but a very specific one. This is not merely trusting in Jesus, but trusting in who Jesus is. Who is He? **“I am the resurrection and life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”**

So much is in this declaration of who Jesus is. If He is the resurrection and the life, He has power over death. The One who has power over death is able also to overcome sin. Not only this, but He is also “I AM.” He is God. Martha’s answer makes this clear, **“Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God.”**

Christ invites us in this story to a fuller faith and confession in who He is. He not only declares that He is the resurrection and the life, but He will also display His power over death in raising Lazarus. This not only looks ahead to His own resurrection but displays His power to give life to all who trust in Him. We share in the promise of life everlasting. We share in the assurance that we will be raised as well on the last day.

Prayer – Dear Jesus, I believe that You are the resurrection and the life. Strengthen me in the promise of resurrection today and in times when death draws near. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Thursday, September 2, 2021  
Read John 11:28-37

### Jesus Indignant Over Death

“When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved—[*embrimaomai*—indignant (to snort with anger)] in his spirit and greatly troubled—[*tarassō*—agitated/disturbed].”

John 11:33

Jesus has met Martha about Lazarus’s death near the village of Bethany in Judea in order that **“the Son of God [will] be glorified”** (v. 4). There is no doubt, Jesus beloved his friends, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. Martha had just confessed the credited trust and faith (belief) given her, that Jesus is **“the Christ, the Son of God”** (v. 27) come into the world.

Martha tells Mary that Jesus, theirs, and our Master Teacher, was calling for her. Now Mary says to Jesus, falling to his feet, **“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died”** (v.32). Perhaps, we may think this way when Jesus seems to be away from us. We know and have seen that Jesus heals the lame, blind, and raises the dead. And, we are about to see Jesus raise Lazarus from the tomb. Mary and Martha, and the Jews with them, do not know Lazarus will be raised at that moment; sorrow is thick among their hearts. Jesus weeps. Some comment how Jesus loved Lazarus. Others question Jesus. **“Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”** (v.37).

Yahweh Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Resurrection and Life for us, is our only hope from sin, death, and all evil. He is ours through faith, and Jesus is God with us and in us through Baptismal regeneration. In our Baptism, we were (spiritually) buried with Christ and raised from the dead with Christ. And because Jesus lives, we too shall live; At the Resurrection of the body on the Last Day, we too shall be (physically) raised from the tomb and transformed imperishable, body and soul, to be with Yahweh God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit forever in the new heaven and new earth. We have this promise now and forever on account of Christ Jesus alone.

We all may have, and will, experience death like Mary, Martha, and Jesus over a beloved friend or family with indignation and weeping. Nowhere do we see deep sorrow and grieving over death condemned. Death is bad. And the good news is that Jesus overcame death, hell, and Satan for us. The victory over death has been won by Christ’s glorious death and victorious resurrection for us. So in Jesus, we have resurrection reality; we can rejoice and sing Halleluiah, He has risen. Jesus Christ, our King, is Lord over all now and forever.

Prayer - Father, You give us life everlasting; comfort, joy, and peace in sorrow and suffering. We believe in “the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting” in the name of Jesus, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch*

Friday, September 3, 2021

Read John 11:38-44

### Jesus Raises Lazarus

There are so many moving stories in the Gospels and especially the Gospel of John, but this may be a personal favorite of mine. We should remind ourselves of the scene. Jesus and the disciples got a message that Lazarus was sick and that they should come see him before he died so that Jesus could heal him. The disciples thought that sounded good but Jesus delayed long enough that Lazarus died. And when Jesus finally did go to see Lazarus, the disciples thought that it was no use and furthermore that they were going to be killed for being so close to Jerusalem with Jesus who had quite a reputation at this point.

When Jesus gets to the funeral, he sees a big crowd consoling Mary and Martha and when He talks to Martha, she confesses some faith in Him and in the resurrection of all the dead at the last day. Yet she and many others are upset that Jesus did not come sooner. They knew He could heal people, but raising the dead is a step up, and raising a man who had been in the tomb for four days and had begun to rot was only possible for God Himself.

When Jesus makes it to the tomb, He is not bold or brash although He knows precisely what is about to happen. He famously weeps and is deeply moved at the death of His beloved friend. Still, in His grief, He did not delay in doing the work that His Father sent Him to do. Jesus calls Lazarus out of the grave, and Lazarus comes out and his grave clothes are taken off of him.

This is a scene I would have loved to have seen: the reunion between Lazarus and all of his friends and family. And it is a scene we will all see. Just as our sin and sickness bring us to the grave and binds us, so also Jesus who mourned over our death will raise us from the dead and free us from the grave to be rejoined to our loved ones. Even when Jesus delays to act for His own reasons, we can be sure that in the end, He will heal us completely and fully just as He did to Lazarus. This moving scene is only a foretaste of what we can expect on so much grander a scale when Jesus returns at last.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, cleanse us of our sin and free us from the grave. Give us faith and patience to wait for the day when You will raise us all from the dead. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*



Saturday, September 4, 2021

Read John 11:45-57

### *Voters Meeting*

In yesterday's reading, Jesus had just raised Lazarus from the dead. He'd wept openly, and grievously, as He witnessed the anguish of death. Crowds had come from nearby Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside to publicly mourn the life of their friend; that life now snuffed out and gone. Even though He (more than anyone) truly knew that Lazarus was only sleeping, Jesus already felt the weight of sin and death around Him.

Like our own world today, where everything that happens seems to be seen through completely different glasses by different people, this ultimate miracle had a polarizing effect. While **"Many of the Jews ... believed in Him"** as a result of witnessing God's power manifested in the defeat of death itself, others took quite a different meaning from the spectacle. Word reached the Jewish leaders, who called a "Voters Meeting" to decide what to do. **"The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council"** (the Sanhedrin, made up of 70 elders from the community, along with the chief priests and scribes who functioned to make pronouncements on religious and civil issues).

I've never really enjoyed voters meetings. While necessary and important, they aren't what the Church is about. You conduct business there; you discuss budgets, building repairs, and other administration. Very little Gospel at a voters meeting. And this meeting was full of Law and condemnation. The outcome was decided before they even said anything: **"From that day on they made plans to put Him to death."**

But shining out from their condemnation and hate, the Gospel was loudly proclaimed from the strangest source: Caiaphas, the high priest himself! The man who would soon lead shouts of "crucify Him; crucify Him!" now proposed a brilliant compromise. **"It is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish."** Everyone would come out winners – Israel wouldn't be destroyed by the Romans, Jesus would be gone, and "their" Temple and positions would remain – Caiaphas was pleased with himself! This would benefit not only the nation, it would **"gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad."**

Thank God He used Caiaphas' prophecy for good! That one Man did die that all Israel would not perish and that you and I, too, can be gathered to God.

Prayer: Holy Father, You sent Your Son into our world to truly experience life and death. Thank you for making Him the Resurrection and the Life for me. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Tuesday, September 7, 2021

Read John 12:9-11

### Needed Assurance

I know that Jesus is my Savior. I trust in Him even when the world hates me and attacks me. It would be so easy to conclude that “if only they could see the miracles, then they would believe, then they would abandon their harsh opposition.”

But Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. What better proof could they ask for? Proof that death has been conquered in Jesus! As the result, they planned harder to kill Jesus and decided to include Lazarus because he was convincing many to follow Jesus. A heart that rejects God, is sure to reject all reason and logic.

But I appreciate what Jesus did. He showed me an authentic proof that my death is not final. And the very comment that they were plotting to kill Lazarus as well, is proof that the death/resurrection of Lazarus was not a fake but the real thing. There is also the comment that many believed Jesus because they saw Lazarus. So there is proof that Jesus not only forgives sins, but also has conquered death.

Besides reminding us of these proofs, (and I need them when times are tough, when Covid or other problems threaten my life) I need that reassurance that even when evil is torturing me, when I feel like I have failed my Lord, yet He took time to give me and those who trust him reassurance. Thank you, Lord.

Prayer: O LORD, You are so overwhelming that it is hard for me to see that evil doesn't care about the truth. Help me to trust You not only for salvation but also for guidance and presence in ending days. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, September 8, 2021

Read John 12:12-19

### Resurrection Faith

In today's reading, we come to a familiar portion of Scripture, one that we celebrate every year: Palm Sunday. We probably all have fond memories of singing some of the great Palm Sunday hymns like "All Glory, Laud and Honor" and "Hosanna, Loud Hosanna". We often celebrate with a processional, or by having palm branches in church.

But John's account is interesting. One thing that he chooses to emphasize is that the people were eager to see Jesus because they had heard he raised Lazarus from the dead. That was something people found amazing—it gave them hope that perhaps this Jesus truly was the Messiah. Clearly, the power over death was something only one who was from God could have.

But we know the rest of the story. The raising of Lazarus, in the end, was just a foreshadowing of what was to come. At the end of Holy Week, Jesus would rise from the dead himself, showing that he has power over death for all eternity! We have been given these assurances from the Gospel accounts—we believe because those who have gone before us have continued to pass down the Gospel truth that Jesus has overcome both sin and the grave—and that he has done it not just for himself, but for all who believe. May we be as eager and hopeful as those on Palm Sunday, who wanted to see Jesus more than anything else.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I believe that just as you raised Lazarus from death, and just as you were raised from death, I will also be raised from death when you return on the Last Day. Keep me steadfast in faith and grant me grace all the days of my life. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Alex Smith*

Thursday, September 9, 2021

Read John 12:20-26

### The Hour Has Come

Marvelous! Yesterday, we had seen one of the psalms being fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the *Hosannas* to the *Blessed One who comes in the name of Yahweh* (Ps. 118:25, 26): And Zechariah's prophecy; *O daughter Zion rejoicing The Righteous King coming sitting on a donkey* (Zech. 9:9). In today's text, the Holy Spirit reveals *some Greeks "wish to see Jesus,"* and Jesus answers, **"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit"** (vv. 23-24). What does this mean? *The hour* has come? Is Jesus talking about going to the Father, his glorious atoning death on the cross for our sins, his victorious resurrection from the dead for our declaration of righteousness from sin, and for our eternal life and sanctification? Absolutely.

Paul Kretzmann commented, "Like a grain sown into the ground and decomposed, so is the death of the Savior. But His resurrection is like the blade which springs Up from the seemingly dead seed; and this blade brings forth an abundance of fruit. The head that was laid into the grave in deep sorrow has now been crowned with glory, and the glory of the exalted Son of Man will convert many Gentiles, Isa 11:1."

Jesus spoke of this *hour* to come: At the wedding in Cana (2:4), the Feast of Booths/Tabernacles (7:30), when He was sought to be arrested at the Temple (8:20). Looking ahead to *the hour* come, **"before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father"** (13:1). And Jesus prays before his betrayal and arrest, **"Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent"** (17:1-3).

Here and now till the Last Day, God's eternal election is for all in Jesus Christ, his sanctified children. **"Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life"** (v. 25). God "will protect them in their great weakness against the devil, the world, and the flesh. He will rule and lead them in His ways [Deuteronomy 8:6], raise them again when they stumble [Proverbs 4:11-12], comfort them under the cross and in temptation [2 Corinthians 1:3-5], and preserve them for life eternal [John 12:25]" (*Formula, SD, ARTICLE XI:20*).

Prayer – Lord Jesus. You are glorified so that we may live forever in You as promised, You are always where we are, Your servants. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch*

Friday, September 10, 2021

Read John 12:27-33

### The Son of Man Must Be Lifted Up

As a beginning student of New Testament Greek, I was told that the Gospel of John was relatively easy to read in Greek. The only issue is that it's so hard to read in English. John records many of the cryptic things that Jesus said which clearly did not make much sense to their first hearers and can only make sense to us now because we have the benefit of knowing the whole story and some helpful notes from John himself.

After the Father's voice comes from heaven, declaring His intent to glorify His name again, the people are confused. Yet, Jesus adds to their confusion by saying that the judgment of the world is at hand, the ruler of the world is being cast out, He would be lifted up from the earth, and He would draw all people to Himself. Luckily, John cuts through the fog to tell us what he probably didn't know when he heard these words of Jesus: Jesus said all these things referring to the same central event in the world's history, His death and resurrection. His impending suffering is on His mind at the beginning of our reading today when His soul is shaken to the core with the weight of the horror of all the sins of the world being placed upon Him. He considers asking the Father to remove this unbearable doom, but resolves to place the divine will above His human will and to fulfill the purpose that He came into the world for: to glorify the Father's name. And God is glorified nowhere more than at the cross in Jesus' suffering for the sake of the world.

The Father does not save Him in that hour, but He glorifies the Father by saving all the world. This is the judgment of the world: all of the sin and evil committed in all the past, present, and future punished in one man. And though it seems that the ruler of the world has won at the cross, it is actually his greatest defeat as all of the power of Satan to accuse God's people of sin is emptied. Evil, sin, death, and Satan, the forces that seemed to control the world are all cast out at the death of Jesus. In being lifted up from the earth on the cross, a gruesome sight that should repel any person, we have all of humanity drawn together in our sin, and, all the more, we are drawn to the Crucified Jesus to receive life and forgiveness and to worship Him as the true ruler of the world.

Prayer: Crucified and Risen Savior, we glorify You because You first glorified Yourself by humbling Yourself to the point of death on a cross for the sins of us and all the world. Draw us to You so that the ruler of the world and his works may be cast out from among us and you would rule in our hearts as Lord. Amen

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Saturday, September 11, 2021

Read John 12:34-36

### The Light in the Darkness of 9/11

Twenty years ago today was a dark day in world history. Nearly 3,000 people were killed in the attack, some forced to choose between death by fire or by jumping out the window. Everything stopped that day – airlines, business, even normal conversation. If you're like me, you knew how the Bible speaks of the end times, but until 9/11, it seemed a long time off. It made you ask yourself, "Are we living in the last days now – when people indiscriminately kill men, women, and children of all faiths, beliefs, and lifestyles?" Next, the dark, endless war began, in which literally trillions of dollars were consumed. Millions have perished, and property destroyed. People have spent their lives in this battle, some losing it; others "only" being maimed.

This was the darkness Jesus was confronted with when He came into our world. His life, teaching, preaching, and miracles all served to shine the light into that darkness, but many refused to see it while it shone directly in their faces. In our reading, the crowd before Jesus demonstrated by their confused questions they still didn't know Him: "**How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?**"

Jesus' words to them speak strongly to us today, too. "**The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.**" The people He spoke to would only have Jesus with them a few more days. Then, after rising from the dead, He'd only walk with them another 40 days.

We, too, live in precious times. We have freedom to worship, speak, and sing to God. We can read His Word in most human languages anywhere in the world. With hindsight, we know that Jesus is the promised Messiah, that He lived and died for us, and that He rose from the dead, sending His Spirit to draw us to Him. But these are the "end times". We're surrounded by darkness, and it's fighting to overcome us.

In John 1, though, we see a glimpse ahead: "**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**" Even in the devastation of 9/11; or today in the growing darkness of Afghanistan – the Light shines. 20 years of Christians in our military in Afghanistan shone the Light there. Jesus will send them His Spirit as He continues sending it to us.

Prayer: Bless us, Father, in these dark times. Shine the Light of the World into our lives, to those serving in the military and as first responders, and to those in Afghanistan. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, September 13, 2021

Read John 12:36-43

### Priorities

People are constantly seeking to set their priorities in order. Many people (I would say all of us) can our priorities out of whack. We say that certain things are most important to us, but our habits, energy and attention seem to be consumed by things that we do not say are our highest priorities. Sometimes our priorities are thrown out of order by urgency. Whatever demands immediate attention can take all of our attention. Sometimes our priorities are thrown out of order by laziness. We say that faith is the highest priority, but sleeping in or watching a movie can be placed first because what we want in the moment is often not what we say we want most of all.

But sometimes we find ourselves like some of the religious authorities who believed in Jesus, but they wouldn't say so publicly. Why? They didn't want to **"be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God."** What a sad statement, but a sentiment with which we all struggle at times. Desiring to be accepted by others, we will hide or soften our confession of faith.

Nevertheless, our Lord willingly gave up the perfect joy of heaven to take on our humanity, carry our sin, suffering even for our times of denial. He gave up all glory to give us His glory. Such is the love of your Savior for you and me.

Prayer – Lord, turn our hearts to seek first Your glory. Keep us from hiding our trust in You. Make us willing to lose esteem in the eyes of the world rather than deny our trust in You. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, September 14, 2021

Read John 12:44-55

### His Words

I have heard the Words of my Lord Jesus Christ. I know that He is my Savior. My trust is in Him, not in my own efforts - even in my choices - but in Him. He speaks truth, He is truth itself, the ultimate reality.

But what about my friends? What shall I say to them? How can I convince them? Oh, wait. Jesus says "MY WORDS." His Words, not my Words. Indeed, there is nothing I can say or do to bring my friends (or my enemies for that matter) to trust in Jesus. But I do have His Words. He will convince them, or they will condemn themselves.

I could find it easy to condemn those unbelievers, those who reject the Lord, preferring to trust themselves. I could find it easy to try to put guilt on them, to make them ashamed or afraid using my words and attitudes. But Jesus keeps reminding me that He brought me into Himself, not through my actions. He wants those others to come also, but He reassures me that He can do it better than I can. Especially since I can't!

Are they condemned? Yes, they hear God Himself speaking to them - and they reject Him. Jesus is God and He tells us to trust Him. Those who trust Him are his children, and those who trust Him are not condemned. The same Word that saves but its very saving nature, shows the true nature of those rejecting it and Jesus its speaker.

Prayer: Thank You Lord for my salvation, thank You for not making me do it myself. And I ask for my friends, those who don't know You, please, bring Your Word to them one more time, building trust in them too. In Your Name, Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*



Wednesday, September 15, 2021

Read John 13:1-11

### Jesus Knows

The account of Jesus washing his disciples' feet is a fairly well-known Bible story. We often read it on Maundy Thursday, since that is when it occurred so many years ago. It is only found in John's Gospel. And John reminds us of a couple things that Jesus "knew" that can help us understand this foot-washing and make it even more significant for understanding Jesus' love for us.

In verse 1, we are told that Jesus knew that his hour had come. This means that Jesus knows he is in his passion. We are reminded here (and throughout John's Passion account) that Jesus knew what he was doing and willingly laid down his life. And in v. 3, we are reminded that Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going back to God. All this emphasis on Jesus's knowledge and power reminds us that Jesus is God himself! No doubts here that Jesus didn't know what was coming, or what would be accomplished by his death. Jesus knew—and he did it anyway. And that's good news for you and for me.

Jesus is God, in the flesh. And that's what makes his service even more remarkable. While on earth, he could have assumed all the glory of the entire universe. However, he instead stuck with the role of a suffering servant, someone who washes the dirty feet of men who have walked many miles on dusty roads. Today, Jesus continues to wash away our sin, just as he washed those feet, through the gifts of his Word and Sacraments.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, Wash our heads, our hands, our feet. Wash us clean from our sin. Keep us strong in faith and hope in your power and love. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Alex Smith*

Thursday, September 16, 2021

Read John 13:12-20

### Servant/Slave

We saw how Jesus washes the feet of his disciples as a slave would and did. A strange reaction came from Peter. Would not we all try to stop Jesus from washing us clean as a slave washes our feet, like Peter? Then we would beg for washing after Jesus says, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me" (John 13:8). We would desire our whole body to be washed, right? Are you uncomfortable thinking or saying the word "slave" and "servant" aloud or in public?

Jesus teaches we are to be subject to one another as slaves. What? We often do not think of slavery as good, yet Jesus speaks of being a servant, a slave to one another, as he has served us. To be clear, bad oppressive slavery has destroyed lives and the lives of all nations throughout the ages to today. This badness comes from sin, devil, and death. So, we talk about spiritual slavery to righteousness, a righteousness from without us, which comes from God alone. Righteousness through faith is imputed to us by the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus.

Jesus says, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant (*doulos*—slave) is not greater than his master (*kurios*—supreme authority/Lord/Master), nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him"** (v. 16). Jesus at *The Feast of Booths/Tabernacles* said that his teaching is the Father's; **"My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me"** (John 7:16) and is accused of having a demon. Gladly, many hear Jesus's words as the Father's words, and sadly, others refuse and resist the Truth of God in Christ and The Holy Spirit.

Beautifully, Jesus says, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me"** (v. 20). Jesus is speaking of the Father who sent him into the world. You may hear these Words of God ringing in your ears, **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"** (John 3:16), and **"The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand"** (John 3:35; see 5:20).

We see Jesus; **"though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross"** (Philippians 2:6-8). For you and me.

Prayer – Yahweh God. You are above all and rule the heavens and earth. Grant responsive faith in Jesus, the Blessed, our Master and Savior who calls us friends, to be his servants to others. To walk in life's renewal. For the sake of Christ Jesus crucified and risen for us. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch*

Friday, September 17, 2021

Read John 13:21-30

### Judas the Betrayer

The account of Judas being identified as the betrayer of Jesus is truly heart wrenching. Jesus is still troubled at the weight of sin which He is to bear for all of mankind. And He is troubled even more recalling that one of His closest disciples would be the one to betray Him. Jesus identifies the betrayer to John (and Peter) by a piece of bread. By accepting the bread, Judas also accepts Satan into his heart and resolves to carry out the dreadful plan that he has conceived. Yet, Jesus shows Judas that no one is truly handing Jesus over. He tells Judas to do what he is going to do quickly. Judas's plan may be his own and that of Satan, but it would be all too easily thwarted if it were not ultimately the will of Jesus as well to be handed over and crucified. Even in this sad moment as He is being betrayed by such a close follower, Jesus retains His willpower and remains resolved to suffer willingly for the sins of the whole world. The other disciples who did not hear what Jesus said to John were still clueless to what Jesus had told them on so many occasions: that He would be betrayed and killed.

What is most troubling to me about this passage is the very end where John simply says, "And it was night." On a literal level, we know it was night. The Passover was an evening meal and a very long one. But in another sense, it must have been an exceptionally dark night because of the weight of the betrayal and the depth of the suffering Jesus was about to undergo. The Light of the World was about to be snuffed out by His own follower's absolutely frivolous evil. And yet, but for the grace of God, we ourselves would betray the Lord for a modest sum. Our hearts are no less black and our night no less deep than Judas. The difference is that where Satan entered his heart, the Holy Spirit has entered into our hearts so that we seek to serve the Lord rather than betray Him. And when we do betray Him by acting against His will, He points us back to the betrayal which stands at the head of all the things He suffered on our behalf so that we would be forgiven all our sins and betrayals.

Prayer: Jesus, we have betrayed You with our sins. Have mercy on us and shine Your light upon our hearts so that we would not betray or deny You but walk in Your blessed ways forever. Amen

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Saturday, September 18, 2021

Read John 13:31-35

### Love One Another

It was Maundy Thursday; the night before Jesus would go to the cross, but He still had a lot to say. This chapter and the next four contain His final, precious words before being arrested. Today's reading contains words that have fundamentally altered the world in which we live: **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."**

Christians down through the ages have taken these words to heart. Already in the Bible, the early believers sold everything they owned to care for each other. In the early Roman church (even before it was legalized), people were attracted to the Church because of the love Christians demonstrated. In the second century, a Greek Christian named Aristides presented a letter to the Roman Emperor, defending and describing the Christian community. This letter was recorded, distributed around the empire, and testifies today to the effect of Jesus' command (read it [here](#)).

[Hospitals](#), [orphanages](#), and sanitariums, if not invented by Christians, have filled the world with Christian-run examples (click the links to read more). Christians founded many (most?) of the schools and universities around the world. Braille was invented by a Christian. Christians led the fight to end slavery. In Nazi Germany, some Christians (sadly not all) risked their own lives and resources to protect those targeted by the Holocaust. The Red Cross, the idea of "Social Work", prison reform, care for lepers, public libraries – these and countless other concepts were the result of individual Christians responding to Jesus' words that night (see this [amazing list](#)).

All the people involved deserve a pat on the back for what they've done, but most would wonder what you're doing. They'd appreciate your kindness but would be the first to point to the key words in that passage: **"just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."** All these wonderful things that Christians do for our neighbors are simply our weak, poor, small imitations of the love Jesus has shown us. By these actions we're trying to say, "no matter how sinful, weak, poor, old, young, diseased, or otherwise damaged you are, God loves you so much that He sent His Son, that you may not perish in your sin but have eternal life."

Prayer: Loving Father, empower me, strengthen me, and move me by Your Spirit to commit acts of love to those around me. If I'm not able to, make me an "example" for Christians helping me to lead others to say, "Behold, how they love one another!" In Jesus' Name, Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, September 20, 2021

Read John 13:36-38

### Misplaced Trust

“I will lay down my life for you.” Those are beautiful sounding words. They just happen to be coming out of the wrong person’s mouth. In a moment of boastful arrogance, Peter proclaims that he will lay down his life for Jesus. Peter’s words are certainly well-intentioned, but his trust is misplaced. Instead of trusting in Jesus, Peter is trusting in himself to do something for Jesus.

We are constantly tempted to misplace our trust. Like Peter, we often will place too much confidence in ourselves and our ability to do something for Jesus. But the bedrock of our hope and trust is rightly directed towards the One who can truly say, “I will lay down my life for you.” When those words are in the mouth of Jesus, they become words of life and hope.

With our trust grounded in Christ’s sacrificial love, we are prepared to give of ourselves. We lay down our lives, not to prove ourselves or in boastful arrogance, but in service to others and in response to the One who has laid down His life first for us.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, let me trust in You, and not in myself. Then in joyful thanks, lead me to lay down my life for others. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, September 21, 2021

Read John 14:1-7

### Trusting

How I need that reminder! How I worry and fret - about things far outside my power and so obviously within God's power. My health, my wealth (well really, just my support - can I get food, can I feed my family?), my country, my community... and on and on. At the same time, I know that God is in control. I know that He cares for me and about me. So, then I worry that I don't trust God enough, because I worry a lot.

I am so glad that Jesus simply tells me to trust Him - "believe (or trust) in Me." Who or what am I really trusting? When He reminds me, I stop, and wait, and say, "I'm sorry God. When I am trusting You, I have no time left to worry about other things." Thank you for being You, for being the One who takes care of me.

After all, He has "prepared a place for me"! If then He is ready for me in the future, He must care for me now! God doesn't waste preparing a place for someone who isn't coming (and He knows all). And the things of this life that so concern me, seem so small, so immaterial now, as I contemplate a long future with Him.

So, my heart, be not troubled. Don't worry and fret. Don't anticipate trouble. Rather place yourself in His hands, be confident. He never drops what He Has. Trust, and let God be God.

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for reminding me that all these things of this world are truly temporary, and that eternity is safely in Your hands. Oh, and as well, all the things of this time are also controlled by You. Build my trust in You. Thank you.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, September 22, 2021

Read John 14:8-11

### Jesus, the Way to the Father

In our reading for today, we see Jesus dealing with a request from Philip, one of his disciples. Philip asks him, “Show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” It seems like Philip was looking for some kind of divine revelation of the Father, the God of Philip’s ancestors, of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. But by asking Jesus this question, Philip reveals that he’s missing out on who Jesus is—who the one he is following truly is.

And so Jesus gives him a better answer than simply “showing the Father,” whatever it was that Philip had in mind with that request. Instead, Jesus tries to make Philip and his other disciples realize who he is. “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father...I am in the Father and the Father is in me.” Here Jesus is making an audacious, bold, and clear claim of his divinity—he is part of the Godhead. The Trinity is a hard concept to think about, and we can’t understand it fully with our feeble minds. But Jesus is telling Philip that he is God here.

Why is this significant? Because like Philip, we can’t always fathom the Father. We know him as the creator, as the author of life and sustainer of all things. But we can often start to wonder how he regards us, how he thinks of us, especially when we remember that we’re lowly human sinners. But that is the comfort of Jesus’ words: he is God in the flesh, the Son of the Father, and the Father speaks through him by his words and deeds. How do we interact with God? In the person of the Son, our savior, Jesus Christ. We receive forgiveness by his authority, and we encounter our Lord himself in his body and blood as we receive forgiveness in our own mouths. Thanks be to Jesus, who shows us the Father’s love in his own sacrifice and resurrection.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we praise and thank you for your incarnation. Thank you for showing us the way to the Father in your words and deeds, and by submitting to your Father’s will in your life, death, and resurrection. Be with us always. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Alex Smith*

Thursday, September 23, 2021

Read John 14:12-14

### In My Name

Jesus says to those whose faith is credited to them will do works that he does. And whatever is asked in his name, he will do, **“that the Father may be glorified in the Son”** (v. 13). A couple of questions that immediately arise could be – Really? And – Do I believe this? Of course, Jesus promises! Do we doubt this? Do I understand this by human reason, strength, works, and will? Indeed not, but by credited faith alone given from God.

We remember that Jesus’s name means – YHWH is salvation, **“for he will save his people from their sins”** (Matthew 1:21). Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the *“only name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (see Acts 4:12 *“italics mine”*). JESUS – Yahweh God in the flesh crucified and risen for us is the material principle, cause, and authority of justification by grace through faith for sinners.

The disciples are still learning that Jesus is God dwelling in the flesh, that the Son is one with the Father. Here in John’s account, Jesus promises, **“If you ask me anything in my name [onoma – a name, authority, cause], I will do it”** (v. 14). And he certainly will do for us according to his Word, promise, and will. The Word of God is Truth. And the Law of God is perfect and good. Without Christ, we are condemned and can do nothing before God. The proclaimed and written Word of God in Scripture reveals God’s will for us to believe in the name of Jesus Christ. God gives us life abundantly through created faith by means of Word and Sacrament for the sake of Christ.

Philip Melanchthon skillfully wrote, “So we conclude that we are justified before God, are reconciled to God and reborn through faith. In repentance this faith lays hold of the promise of grace and truly enlivens the terrified mind. It is convinced that for Christ’s sake God is reconciled and favorable toward us” (Apology, Article V:265).

Prayer - Yahweh God. You hear our prayer for the sake of Christ’s name in all our worries, troubles, doubts, and fears. Your Word teaches Jesus is the only Way, Truth, and Life, and to trust in his name alone for salvation from slavery to sin, death, and Satan. You give us eternal life and forgiveness of sins in Christ alone. Thank You for all Your gifts and benefits through Jesus Christ, our Master, and King. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch*



Friday, September 24, 2021

Read John 14:15-17

### The Promise of the Spirit

In this short section, Jesus makes a huge promise to His disciples: the Holy Spirit. He calls the Holy Spirit the "Helper" and "the Spirit of Truth." But the Spirit is not promised to everyone. In fact, the world at large will not receive the Spirit at all. It wouldn't even recognize the Spirit if it did. The world received Jesus, but it did not see Him nor know Him. It did not love Jesus and it did not keep His commandments. It broke Jesus' commandments in one fell swoop, hating both God and neighbor by crucifying the Lord.

We ourselves participate in the world's failure when we participate in its sin and grieve the Spirit. Yet, we should not think that when Jesus says "**If you love me, you will keep my commandments**" that He is setting up a condition for us to live up to before we receive the Helper. We know that if we sin and grieve the Spirit, it is only because we have the Spirit of Jesus in the first place. And the Spirit is called the Helper because He helps us to love Jesus and to keep His commandments. We don't need a certain standard of devotion and moral purity for the Spirit to come to us. The Spirit of Truth is the very One who leads us into all truth, that is, leads us closer and closer to the One who is the Truth, Jesus Himself. It is only by the mighty power of the Spirit that we are enabled to love Christ and to keep His commandments. God the Spirit Himself dwells with us and is in us. How is it possible that such sinners as us could ever do what Jesus demands of us? With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible. And by the great gift of the Spirit who is ever near to us, we are empowered to live in the Truth of Jesus and all of His teachings.

Prayer: Spirit of Truth, you have come into our hearts to bring us Your truth. Lead us ever nearer to Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life so that we may love Him and keep His commandments to the glory of His holy name. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Saturday, September 24, 2021

Read [John 14:18-24](#)

*“Comfort, Comfort, My People”*

My older son is autistic. I’ve come to learn from him that things go better if you ease him into change. You have to prepare him to help his mind be comfortable in order to accept that which is going to change so as to not have a panic attack. I’ve also learned that most of the symptoms of autism are not unique reactions to life, but just magnified “normal” reactions. What I mean in this case is that you and I, too, need to be prepared for change (just not as much as the autistic person).

In this section of John’s Gospel, Jesus is preparing His disciples for an enormous change. He’s been explaining more and more to them that He’s about to leave them. He will **“be killed”**, **“go to His Father”**, **“be lifted up”**, **“be glorified”**. And they really need more preparation to accept this change – to even begin to grasp the enormity of it.

You and I don’t have the same problem as the disciples, though. We haven’t been living, eating, sleeping, and travelling with Him for two years, getting to see and know Him as a man. Their perspective is that first and foremost, Jesus appears to be a human being (that says and does things that continually disrupt that simple view). For us, we know Jesus through His Word and Sacraments (and the occasional miracle He shows us). We look at Jesus, knowing that all those things they’re just beginning to understand, are perfectly explained in the Resurrection and through His given Word.

Still, we might feel like Jesus has risen and gone to heaven and left us behind, especially when change surrounds us (COVID, aging, friends dying, etc.). But we are prepared: we too are filled with comfort, peace, and power by Jesus’ Words to His disciples: **“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”** **“Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.”** He is with us: He’s in our hearts and fills us with the Triune God. We do “see” Him: in the good works that we and other Christians do, Jesus reveals Himself today.

Prayer: Caring Father, thank You for preparing me for my life today and for eternity through Your Word, Jesus. In His Name, Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, September 27, 2021

Read John 14:25-31

### Not As the World Gives

When a peace treaty is reached between long warring nations, there is often a celebration. Balloons are released. Music is played. Cheering trumpets the end of the conflict. But with any military ceasefire, there is always a nagging and sometimes unspoken question regarding the newly established peace, “how long with this last?”

Our experience in this world, and even a passing knowledge of history, tells us that peace will not last. In many ways, the story of the world is a movement from one war or conflict to another with intermissions of peace.

Here is the beauty in what Jesus promises to His disciples in our reading, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world give do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” In the words of Paul, this peace, the peace of Christ, “passes all understanding” (Phil 4:6). In Christ, peace is made between God and man, “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph 2:14). Certainly, this means an eternal peace and a final day when all conflict (which is based in sin) will come to an end.

Yet it also means you have peace now. Peace with God is yours now. The certainty of His love for you in Christ is yours. This is yours by the Holy Spirit who is with you. Such certainty calms our hearts even as conflict surrounds us. And unlike the always shaky peace that is found in the kingdoms of this world, “Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end” (Isaiah 9:7).

Prayer – Lord Jesus, You have made peace by Your cross, and You give me peace by Your Spirit. Calm my heart today. Let me not be trouble or afraid, for I have You. Even better, You hold me. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, September 28, 2021

Read John 15:1-8

### Abide with Me

Lord Jesus, Your Word has spoken to and through me. I am Yours. But, Lord, I live in this sinful world; My own flesh, my body, my desires, my impulses all pull me away from You. "Abide in Me," You say! But I couldn't come to You by myself, I couldn't even trust You of my own accord. Now, even as I am saved, one of Your children, yet I find myself at a loss. Help me. Guide me, show me, or even better, take over so that I do indeed abide with You.

Then I remember, You said Your Word made me clean. You did it, with a Word. And I have that Word - not just a single sound, not just a single idea but the Word. Your Bible is Your Word. You directed the authors, You directed John as He put them all together for Your People. And You use that Word on me!

It makes sense now. As I want to abide in You, as that desire to be with You grows and thrives in my heart and life, so I turn to those Words You have given - Words to be read, to be memorized, to be used in my life. Those Words who carry Your Power, You who are Yourself the Word of God, Your Words bring faith, bring trust, bring faithfulness as Your power speaks to and through into my heart and life. Amen, Let me abide in You, forever!

Prayer: Lord, use Your Words, use Your Bible in my life. Act through me as I live in You. Let me see Your actions as I abide in them. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, September 29, 2021

Read John 15:9-11

### Abiding in Love

In these verses, Jesus draws a link between the love that his Father has for him and the love he has for those who abide in him and in his love. But what does this abiding in love look like? While we might initially answer with something about sharing the Gospel or forgiving one another, Jesus offers a different answer: keeping his commandments. Yes, Jesus says that the way to abide in him is to obey God's law!

This might at first strike us as strange since we don't often think of the law as something like love. Love is more associated with the Gospel, right? But this is a false association we make. God's law is good, and is perhaps best understood as his will for creation. God gave us the law in the commandments, and Jesus articulated the law in his own words. And so Jesus is saying that if we want to abide in him, we should follow the commandments and thus live in harmony with God's will for creation.

It can be hard to abide in the commandments and in love. Our sinful nature certainly works against us. But we have the promise from Jesus himself that he will continue to love us and take joy in us, so that we may also know the joy of abiding in that love, living in the ways he has taught us to live.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to abide in you and to keep your commandments. Forgive me when I fail and give me joy as I follow your word. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Alex Smith*

Thursday, September 30, 2021

Read John 15:12-17

### **Chosen and Appointed Friends of Jesus**

Life in this world has turmoil, confusion, boredom, heartache, and busyness during our everyday routine, even in our “free time.” Who can love one another in all this? It is impossible to love our neighbor apart from Christ, who first loved us. Especially when sinful, self-inward focus and horrible thoughts storm our corrupted miserable hearts and minds in this broken and redeemed body and world. Are their hope and assurance, comfort, and abundant joy and godliness among the madness for the redeemed in Christ? Indeed the fruit of the Spirit is bestowed to the redeemed in Christ in the world, and Jesus commands fruitful love that remains in Him, yet we cannot love and remain or listen attentively to Him without Him and love God or one another.

The text in John’s account today is marvelous and True. We who believe have been chosen and placed in a position of justification through faith alone in Christ Jesus and sanctification through faith alone in Christ to bear fruit in His name to love as He loved us and bear fruit in His name. What does the Scripture say? Jesus says, **“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide [menō—stay, abide, remain], so that whatever you ask the Father in My Name, He may give it to you”** (v. 16).

Concerning God’s command to love and good works, “The Holy Scripture itself uses the words like “necessity,” necessary,” and “necessarily” and “should” and “must” to describe what we are bound to do according to God’s order, command, and will, as in Romans 15[:5, 6, 9]; 1 Corinthians 9[:9]; Acts 5[:29]; John 15[:12]; 1 John 4[:11]” (*Formula of Concord*, SD IV:14).

Jesus, our Lord, and Master also calls us friends and not slaves, for all that Jesus has heard from the Father, He has made known to us. Certainly, we are called Jesus’s friends by Jesus Himself, and at the same time, we also remain joyful slaves of righteousness bound to God in Christ alone (see Romans 6). Through faith and Baptism into Christ, we are bound to YHWH God and called His friends. This is eternal life here and now as we look forward to the Last Day Resurrection of the living and the dead on account of Christ Jesus alone. No other name than Jesus, the crucified and risen One for us, can give us God’s abundant life, love, and forgiveness of every sin and remain in Him bearing His fruit!

Prayer – Yahweh God. We give thanks to You, for Your steadfast love endures forever. Your love and righteousness on account of Messiah Jesus brought us life eternal, bearing fruit that remains in His name alone by grace alone through faith alone. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch*

Friday, October 1 ,2021

Read John 15:18-25

### The Hatred of the World

This section of John's Gospel is, well, not. If you're anything like me, you don't hear Jesus say that the world will hate us and say, "Wow, that's good news!" And yet, in another sense, it is good news. The world doesn't hate us for no reason, but it hates us because we belong to Christ. If the world did not hate us, we would not belong to Christ. Yet, the world's hatred is not just some generally uncomfortable feeling that we don't belong here (although if we take our Christian identity seriously, that feeling will be hard to escape sometimes), Jesus showed us just what the world's hatred looks like: rejection, loss of family and friends, poverty, persecution, even suffering and death. All these things our Lord suffered because the world hated Him. Although He told them the truth and did many great miracles, they hated Him for no reason. So also, even though we speak words of truth and life to the world and even though we follow in Jesus' example of showing mercy and kindness to the least, the world will nevertheless hate us and persecute us like it did our Master.

But we do not suffer alone, for the Spirit is with us in our sufferings. Jesus has sent His Spirit upon us in our baptism, and the Spirit is working within us each day both in our success and in our suffering. The Spirit helps us even to rejoice in our suffering, knowing that we suffer for the sake of Him who suffered all things for us so that, as Paul says, "if we are united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His." It is better to be united with Christ than anything else, even if we are united in His suffering. For though the world hates us, Christ's love outshines that hatred and answers our suffering with life eternal.

Prayer: Christ our Master, You have suffered all things for us. Give us patience in our sufferings and help us to know Your presence so that we can rejoice in our sufferings and look forward to joining You in resurrection. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Saturday, October 2, 2021

Read [John 15:26-27](#)

### *“Spirit”*

In yesterday’s devotion, Case did a marvelous job in attempting to find the “Good News” in Jesus’ message: “the world will hate you and persecute you”. I only get two verses today, but fortunately, they begin with the word “But”. However, after hearing the doom and gloom Jesus had been describing to His disciples (after repeatedly telling them He was going to die and go to the Father), today’s Gospel may not sound sufficient. **“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.”**

He’s sending them a “Helper”, the “Spirit”, a “witness bearer”. The disciples knew Jesus to be the strong, right hand of God on earth. His miracles were earth-shaking and life-changing. We’re learning in Sunday morning’s adult Bible class on Ecclesiastes about “spirit”. That word means something like “air, breath, or wind”. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon uses that to point to the “meaningless” of something, like “life is just a puff of air”, “a fleeting breeze”, “something you can’t even grasp”. And that describes who Jesus is going to send to take His place when He goes to the Father?!

Try this experiment (and I hate to say, it’s more effective if you wear your COVID mask): sit still and quietly in a chair. Breathe in and out, slowly. Don’t otherwise move. Do you feel your chest filling with air? Growing full? Breathe out. Even with your eyes closed, that breath has the power to fog your glasses! And, because you breathe air, every cell in your body enjoys oxygen and life!

You fill your tires with air and are confident in driving down the road at high speed, enjoying the corners, trusting in the air that you ride on. A gust of wind doesn’t do anything until you see it blow down the shed you were building in your back yard (don’t ask!). When I flew a plane supersonic and then pulled the engines out of afterburner, the air that we were forcing our way through was solid enough to throw us forward in our shoulder straps like we’d slammed on the brakes!

No, this “Spirit” that Jesus was sending was the same “breath” of air that left the Father’s mouth, carrying the Word out to create all the universe. This “Spirit” is what filled Jesus Himself with life, energy, faith, and devotion to the Father’s will. This “Spirit” filled you with faith at your baptism and fills you with Truth as you read the Word.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, come into my heart, my life, my being. Fill me with peace, with joy, and with power to know and do the Father’s will. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*



Monday, October 4, 2021

Read John 16:1-4

### Not As the World Gives

“I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.” Those are ominous words. Keep in mind that Jesus is speaking them to His eleven disciples who are not names Judas Iscariot. They needed to hear the promises of Jesus that stretch across John 14 and 15. They needed to hear that Jesus is the only way to the Father (Jn 14:6). They needed to hear about the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus would send to be with them forever (Jn 14:15). They needed to hear Jesus speak peace to their troubled hearts (Jn 14:27). They needed to be reminded that there is no life apart from Jesus, but connected to Him there is life and salvation and fruit borne for His kingdom (Jn 15:8). They needed to hear that even when things became difficult or when it is hard and intimidating and even dangerous to speak of Jesus, they would have the Spirit, the Helper, to be with them and give them the words to speak (Jn 15:26).

Remember, the eleven disciples who walked with Jesus needed to hear these words. You better believe that we need to hear Jesus’s words constantly. We need to be reminded that life is found only in Jesus. We need to be reminded that Christ has sent the Spirit to be with us and help us and strengthen us to speak even when it is hard. We need the promises of Jesus to keep us from falling away. It is always a temptation, yet our help in Christ is always greater. Remember His words.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, help me cling to Your promises by Your mighty Spirit that I would never fall away. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, October 5, 2021

Read John 16:4-11

### The Comforter

O Lord! I know that you are my Savior and that You live with me. But I look around me and I start to worry. But You have promised me the Comforter. And I need Him.

You promised me that He will convict the world; that He will deploy God's power on my behalf. Thank you. But I still live in the world. I still fail to follow You closely, faithfully. You have promised that my Comforter will reprove the world, and it needs it - but so do I. It's all very well for the world to be set in its place, but I need that reproving myself.

The Comforter will bring out the nature of "sin"; He will show all who come in contact that not trusting You, O Lord Jesus, is wrong. And I find myself too easily thinking that I can do it, that I am independent. Thank You, Lord, for reminding me of my need for You.

The Comforter will bring out the nature of our Salvation, the "righteousness" we have from You; He will show that You, Jesus, are no longer living with us but are the sacrifice that gives us salvation. Again, I need You, not my own efforts.

The Comforter will make clear the "judgment" that sinners and the chief sinner, the devil, face. He brings all this out by His presence and His teaching. I need that reminder also - that this world is not desirable, even as I am tempted by it.

Prayer: Thank You Jesus for the Comforter in my life. Thank You that You have not left me alone, but that I have Your reminder with me. Thank you for the Salvation You give and the direct support as I live in it. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, October 6, 2021

Read John 16:12-15

### The Sent Spirit

In our reading from John for today, we hear Jesus talking about the Holy Trinity, of which he is a member. The Trinity can be a mystery in a lot of ways, and our minds can't really seem to grasp exactly how we have a God who is three in one. It's something we believe without fully understanding. But here Jesus lifts the veil somewhat, and we see him talking about the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

One thing the Spirit will do, Jesus says, is guide the disciples to the truth. It will help them understand and believe the things that are about to happen. Jesus is about to go to the cross, he will be tortured, beaten, rejected, and killed. And Jesus knows the disciples will not understand all of this. They will doubt. But Jesus promises that with the aid of the Spirit, they will be able to understand. The Spirit will declare what the Son has done. The Father has given to the Son all things, and the Son, Jesus, will give all things through the Spirit.

This is as true for us as it was for the disciples. The Holy Spirit is at work among us. The Spirit creates faith through the hearing of God's Word. The Spirit is our comforter, who unites us as the church and gives us unity in our faith. And the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies us in the truth—the truth that Jesus has redeemed the world by his life, death, and resurrection, and that as a result we have forgiveness, life, and salvation. Thanks be to our Triune God!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for sending the Spirit to us. Bless and preserve us in our faith so that we may believe the truth and share it with others. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Alex Smith*

Thursday, October 7, 2021

Read John 16:16-24

### The Gift of Prayer

Have you ever really struggled with something and suffered over it just to have all that pain taken away by a gift? Either big or small, this happens all the time. Maybe you were having a terrible day, but then a little girl smiled at you in line at the grocery store and it made you feel better. Or maybe you injured yourself and can't perform household tasks very efficiently, but then your neighbor prepared dinner for you without being asked and it brightened your day. We all experience flares of sorrow that are squashed and abruptly ended due to some kind of gift.

Well, the disciples in this passage are soon going to experience the worst flare up of sorrow imaginable: Jesus is about to be betrayed, arrested, and killed, leaving them alone and confused. This will be such a blow to the disciples that Jesus compares it to a woman's suffering while in labor. That's pretty extreme. However, the story doesn't end here! Jesus continues by saying that after a woman gives birth, seeing and holding her newborn child, all the suffering and pain seems to disappear because of the overwhelming joy "that a human being has been born into the world." This child is a gift that cuts through all the sorrow and suffering of labor and instead replaces it with joy.

Christ tells the disciples that they have a similar gift. He says, "I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you." Jesus will give His disciples the gift of His resurrection which creates a direct line of passage from them to God the Father. What this means is that even after Jesus ascends, the disciples can still talk with God, and He will listen and answer! This gift is a joy that cuts through all possible forms of sorrow!

But what about now? Jesus no longer walks on the Earth as a man. How do we still have direct access to God? Prayer. Jesus says, "whatever you ask of the Father **in my name**, he will give it to you." Jesus is the mediator who has made a direct line of passage between us and the Father. And now, in the name of Jesus, all prayers are heard and answered by the Creator Himself. So, since God the Father (the Creator, Almighty One, and Ruler of the entire Universe) listens to, cares about, and answers *you*, what Earthly suffering can stand? All suffering, all sorrow, all sin is drowned out by the beautiful gift that through Jesus Christ, God hears us. Knowing this, even in sorrow, how can we do anything *but* rejoice?

Prayer: Almighty Father, King of the universe, let us always rejoice in you. Strengthen us through Your Son, Your Living Word, so we may be full of joy within even the darkest sorrows. "Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to you! (Ps 102)" Through Jesus Christ, Your Son our Lord. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown*

Friday, October 8, 2021

Read John 16:25-33

### Take Heart

As we have read through John's Gospel, perhaps no words are more relieving than how this passage begins. Jesus says that He will soon stop speaking to them in parables and figures of speech. We share in the disciples' relief. Many of Jesus' words aren't immediately obvious to us, and it may take some time and study to digest what He says. But that is not so with the assurance that Jesus gives us here. He tells the disciples first that the Father Himself loves them and will hear them. This is good news. Then He tells them a hard truth: they will abandon Him and be scattered.

When Jesus told them that He would speak plainly, this is not what they wanted to hear. Often, we ourselves don't want to hear the hard truth. We hide from the truth or find ways to put it softly so that we don't have to face the full reality of it. But Jesus who is the Truth was telling His disciples the truth not to alarm them, but to give them peace. He tells us that we will have tribulation in this world. Being a Christian is a troublesome task. But Jesus tells us this hard truth to give us peace. We know what lies ahead of us in this life, but we also know the One who walks with us. Jesus has overcome the world for us. And it is only in this plain truth that we can take heart. We know that Jesus is right in saying we will have trouble, we see it every day of our lives, but He assures us that His love is greater than all the sin and suffering that weighs us down. So, we can take heart in the promise that Jesus has overcome the world and through Him, we will too.

Prayer: Jesus, You have revealed to us the truth plainly in Your words and actions. We know that trouble will come in this world but strengthen us to take heart in You who have overcome the world by Your death and resurrection. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Saturday, October 9, 2021

Read [John 17:1-11](#)

*“Jealous God”*

Jealousy. It’s not actually one of the “Seven Deadly Sins”, but in one sense of the word, it’s very close to one of them: “envy”. “Jealous” isn’t usually a complimentary word. It hints that someone is right up to (and maybe over?) the point of being unhinged over someone or something. You keep an eye on a jealous person because you don’t know what crazy thing they’ll do next. But that’s not the definition that applies to God.

In Exodus 34, Moses told the people a little about God: **“you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God”**. This is the message that today’s reading made me think of. We’ve been listening to and meditating on Jesus’ last words before going to the cross. Now, in this final chapter – His last prayer – before Jesus walks out the door to be arrested, tortured, and crucified, He sounds absolutely jealous.

Jesus was there when the Father breathed the Spirit into simple “dust of the earth”, in order to fill Man with life, light, and holiness. When Adam and Eve tried to become like God, falling for Satan’s deceitful lies, Jesus was promised as the solution. He was born to become “one of us”, living and growing up with people all around Him. His first miracle created wine for a wedding feast, bringing joy to the lives of many. And He’d already demonstrated His jealous streak before, as He took up cords and drove the merchants from the Temple.

This meaning of “jealous” means “zealous vigilance” for something you’re willing to fiercely defend as an inseparable part of your very being. Jesus wasn’t worried about the magnificent, stone, Temple building; He couldn’t stand the idea of anyone coming between His Father and His people. That’s what the Temple was there for, not for money changing! And now, the Hour has come for Him to forever change that. His prayer recorded here wasn’t about sin, or Pharisees, or the injustice He was about to face – it’s about His true love: you. You are so important to Jesus that in His final hours of “peace” before His trial He couldn’t stop talking about you.

The Father gave you to Him, you believe in Him, know the truth of His words, and do His will (by the power of His Spirit). And so, He began the ongoing prayer that He’s saying for you right now:

Prayer: “Holy Father, I have manifested Your name to the people whom You gave me out of the world. Keep them in Your Name, which You have given Me, that they may be one, even as We are one.” And God’s People say: Amen!

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, October 11, 2021

Read John 17:11-19

### Prayer Like Jesus

We are in the middle of Jesus's prayer for His disciples. He will pray specifically for us in tomorrow's reading, but this part of Jesus's prayer certainly has importance for us as well. I am particularly struck by Jesus's request, **"I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one."**

The disciples have been called to be Jesus's witnesses, so it is not an option for them to depart the world. That's what Jesus said back in John 15:27. **"You also will bear witness."** They have work to do, but to testify to the truth of who Jesus is and what He would accomplish soon after this prayer...that would be dangerous. As Jesus put it, **"I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world."**

The safest thing for the disciples would be for God to remove them from the situation. Or He could remove Satan from the situation. But until the last day, God (in His wisdom) will not be executing the final judgment on Satan. Likewise, He will not remove His disciples. Sure, THEY would be safer, but it would be better (including for us!) for them to be Christ's witnesses. So, He prays for their protection as they witness, so that many more may hear and believe and have eternal safety in Christ's kingdom.

We should not just listen to Jesus's prayers but mimic them in our life as His disciples.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, according to my sinful flesh, I would want you just to make me safe, never to face difficulty for testifying to You. Forgive me for often being concerned only with myself. Instead, protect me from the temptations of the evil one. To be tempted and then to follow Satan's lies away from You, Lord Jesus, this is the far greater danger. Help me to be faithful and endure any hardship for my witness in the knowledge that You have redeemed me, and thanks to You, I await a day of eternal refuge and safety in Your everlasting kingdom. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, October 12, 2021

Read John 17:20-265

### He Prays for Me!

Jesus prayed for me directly! He was not just concerned about His local followers, even though they were His apostles. While I am connected to Him through those Apostles and their testimonies in the Bible, yet here I am reminded that Jesus had me, myself, in mind even as He prepared for His death. This is not just an interesting note. Would He then forget about me later? Does not this reassure me that His death and resurrection were for my benefit?

There are, have been, and will be, many who benefit from the forgiveness of sins, from the fellowship that comes from being right with God, from being made to be God's friend. But what is always of first importance to me, first importance because I see my sins, my failures, my guilts, my shames much more clearly than those of others. And here Jesus is praying for me, personally.

There is more than just my knowledge coming here. Jesus promises that as He lives in me (according to His promises), He will be one with me - closer than anyone else could be. He promises to share with me His relationship with God the Father - close to God, a dear friend of God, who receives God's power in His life (that is mine). What a privilege, what a benefit, one that changes my life as I called out of personal concerns into living with Him and seeing His work in me and in my life!

Prayer: Dear God, how I thank You for the gift You give me in being one with Your Son, that is with You yourself. Thank You over and over again. Amen

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*



Wednesday, October 13, 2021

Read John 18:1-11

### Jesus' Willingness

In today's reading, we come to a familiar and dramatic part of the passion narrative. Judas, one of the twelve disciples, betrays Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. There are armed men in the crowd and they arrest Jesus by force. And it is Peter's response here that is perhaps most striking (both literally and figuratively).

In the Gospels, Peter is always a pretty outspoken and well-known disciple. He often acts as kind of a representative for all the disciples. And here when Jesus is about to be arrested, Peter springs into action. He draws a sword and attacks the crowd arresting Jesus, cutting off one of their ears.

One instinct might be to think, "Way to go Peter! Way to stand up against the evil forces trying to hurt Jesus." But this isn't Jesus' reaction. No, Jesus tells Peter to put his sword away. And then he asks Peter, "shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" This question reveals something to us—that even though Jesus is being violently arrested, God is still in control. Everything is happening according to God's plan. It is the Father's will that Jesus drink the cup of wrath. And so Peter's actions are actually working against God's plan at this point—yikes!

Jesus goes willingly to his death on the cross. He will bear the shame of his unjust trial and crucifixion, obedient to his Father's will. But by doing this he will take away our own shame. We will be restored to a right relationship with God by Jesus' death and resurrection. Thanks be to Jesus, who drinks the cup on our behalf.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, we thank you for your willingness to take our shame upon yourself. When we feel the shame of our sin, remind us that you have forgiven it according to your Father's will. Grant us strength to follow you. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Alex Smith*

Thursday, October 14, 2021

Read John 18:12-14

“One man should die for the people”

In this short passage, the disciples witness Jesus being arrested, bound, and brought to the Jewish leaders, Annas and High Priest Caiaphas. For his crimes against Jewish law, Caiaphas issued a warrant for the arrest of Jesus. However, Jesus' disciples were to be left alone because, as Caiaphas says, “it would be expedient that one man should die for the people”. How incredibly ironic these words are! For we see that Jesus does, in fact, die for his people who believe in him, and this death certainly is expedient but maybe not in the way that we expect.

Today, to say that something is “expedient” typically means it to be convenient but also slightly immoral. Well, the word used in the Greek New Testament carries a slightly different meaning. Συμφέρω is commonly translated as “expedient” in Bibles today, but it actually can mean “to be advantageous”. No negative connotations attached. So now we know that the death of Jesus brings nothing but blessings for the people for whom Caiaphas himself said Jesus would die. But what are these blessings? What is the great advantage that comes with Jesus' death? The answer is simple: freedom.

Just before being brought to Annas and Caiaphas, Jesus was “**arrested and bound**”. At that moment, he became more than a prisoner of the Jews and Romans. He became a prisoner of their sins. He became bound by *our* sins and the sin of the whole world. Reflect back on Jesus' words to the Pharisees in John 8:34-36. He says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed”. Jesus took on our bondage to sin, He paid our punishment for this bondage, and through His resurrection He has set us free.

Looking for a scapegoat and an example to demonstrate his power, Caiaphas said that Jesus' death would be expedient for the people. And how right he was. For through His death and resurrection our bonds are broken, and we are set free from the slavery of sin.

Prayer: Lord, you said, “If you abide in my words, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31&32). Help us to abide in your words, live in your truth, and rejoice in your freedom. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown*

Friday, October 15, 2021

Read John 18:15-18

### Peter's Denial

**"Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself."** It was a cold night. Passover takes place in early spring, so the weather in Judea would have been chilly, but that wasn't why Peter felt cold. John had just told the servant girl to let Peter into the courtyard. While he was standing by the fire, Peter's heart grew so cold that when the little slave girl asked if he was a disciple also (she must have already known John was a disciple), Peter denied it. Peter, the boldest of the disciples, was too timid to admit the truth to a bunch of slaves and servants. They had no authority to do anything to him if he were a disciple and they almost certainly wouldn't have cared anyways. Even still, Peter, who at Caesarea Philippi confessed Jesus to be the Christ, denies here that he was even a disciple much less one of the Twelve and the most vocal of them! So when Peter stands by the fire and warms himself, I wonder if he ever felt warmth or if he just felt colder and colder from what he had done.

Have you ever had a moment where you regretted a sin so much that you felt cold or numb? We feel like in our sin we have denied Jesus to such an extent that there can never truly be reconciliation. We can warm ourselves in whatever fires we build to convince ourselves that our sin is "no big deal" or we "didn't really mean it," but as our fires of self-assurance burn out, we realize that we feel no warmer for all our effort. Our only hope is to turn to the one who suffered the cold night of death for our sake, being buried in a cold tomb for three days only to rise again. And just as Jesus forgave Peter his denial, so also, He forgives us all our many sins which make our hearts grow cold. And He promises to give us new hearts of flesh and not of stone which will never sin nor grow cold. And He promises that these hearts will live forever in a perfect city where Christ gives all the light and warmth we could ever need.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for making us Your faithful disciples. Teach us to be like Peter who, though he denied you, received Your forgiveness and turned many hearts toward you. Turn first our cold hearts to the warmth of Your love. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Saturday, October 16, 2021

Read [John 18:19-24](#)

*“The Trial Begins”*

Smack! The first blow smarted, even though Jesus had been expecting it all His life. He'd been bracing for it since before time itself. Before Creation, before the first sin; Jesus knew that He would one day be struck by a sinner who would complain that God wasn't treating His creation well enough. Oh, the irony! Oh, the injustice!

But here Jesus was – standing, bound, before Annas, the High Priest's father-in-law. He had been the High Priest himself about 15 years before and had sons that had followed in his footsteps. Now, his son-in-law, Caiaphas, was the current High Priest, and Annas, the wise old rabbi, was beginning his pre-trial interrogation of the criminal, Jesus. And, if the response to Jesus' first answer (being illegally struck by an officer of the religious court) gave an idea of how things were going to proceed, justice had nothing to do with this court proceeding. But that's why He was here.

For the past two years Jesus had been preaching and teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven, explaining the Father's love for His children. He'd been healing the sick, bringing life back to those who were “only sleeping”. And all that time, many of the hard-hearted, faithless religious leaders (and commoners, too) had been unjustly pursuing Him. They chased Him out of Jerusalem, they followed Him into the country. And now, they had Him right where they wanted Him – bound and on the way to His death.

You and I know this story, but Jesus wants to hear us tell it. Annas had “**questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.**” But rather than argue His legal defense, Jesus replied, “**Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said.**” Jesus didn't defend Himself because He didn't come for justice; He came to die for us. He came to bear on His shoulders the injustice of all time, all people. And, so, in gratitude for this gift, we answer Annas for Jesus. We tell about Jesus' disciples and Jesus' teaching. We tell of Jesus caring for all His followers, including me and you. And so, we baptize and teach the nations, as He taught us. And He is with us always, to the end of the age.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, Your love for Your disciples knows no bounds. Filled with that love and Your Spirit, help us tell Your story to those around us. In Your Name, Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, October 18, 2021

Read John 18:25-27

### Not Today Satan

I've seen the t-shirt several times, but it really stood out in Colorado. On the youth trip to Colorado to take part in a Higher Things youth conference, he wore the shirt every day. The simple message of the shirt? "Not today Satan!"

I can appreciate the sentiment: Maybe yesterday I fell for Satan's lies, but not today. I'm not falling for it. Not again.

But then we do.

Again.

And again.

Like Peter.

Simon Peter started by declaring "Not today Satan!" He swore that he would never abandon Jesus. But then Peter fell...hard. Three times. He didn't just fall for Satan's lies. Simon Peter denied knowing Jesus at all. All his good intentions washed away in an evening, as the rooster crowed.

Yet Jesus picked up Peter's broken promises and declared, "Not today Satan! You will not separate one of my people from me. I will suffer all. I will be abandoned by all. In order to save all. I will never abandon my people. Not today, not ever, Satan! Even as I go to the cross, you may think today is your day. You're wrong. In losing my life, I will save the lives of my people. They may fall like Simon Peter, but I will forgive and restore. I will win for them. And no one and nothing can tear them from me."

Prayer – Lord Jesus, I want so desperately to be faithful and reject every lie and temptation of Satan. Yet I know I do not. Do not let me lose heart. Lead me by Your Spirit, rejoice in Your forgiveness, and live each day in the freedom of knowing I am Yours. By Your forgiveness and the power of the Holy Spirit, may I say "not today Satan" by following You. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, October 26, 2021

Read John 19:16-22

### Bring Me Back

They crucified my LORD! They refused to accept God's Son even when He did good things. They refused to listen to Him and demanded His death, though they were the appointed leaders in God's Assembly. They crucified Him though they knew that was wrong - but it was convenient! They deserve punishment - but wait. That's true but what is also true. I crucified Him. Oh, I was not physically present. I didn't handle a hammer on His arms and feet. But nevertheless, it was my fault.

I love my Lord, but still, I do my thing. Still, I am angry at my neighbor, wishing to get revenge for his mistreating my property! Still, I take advantage of my marriage mate, letting them do more, being lazy. Still, I react selfishly to the needs of others. I anger God and deserve His punishment. That death of Jesus is a death I should have had.

God has called me into being one of His people, one, by His adoption, of His chosen people the Jews. Truly, He is the King of the Jews, my King. And I caused Him to die. My heart goes out to those soldiers, they were obeying orders. They had no clue. But I know better. And I still cause His death.

It is indeed a blessing that Jesus' death has paid for my continual sinning. I am thankful for His salvation and ashamed that I make it necessary. What mixed emotions our Lord has for us.

Prayer: Thank you God for coming to die for me and for letting me be aware of it. Thank you for reminding me that You have paid for it all. Amen

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, October 27, 2021

Read John 19:23-24

### The Ugly Truth

When I was a child, this part of the crucifixion story bothered me so much. Jesus is bleeding and gasping for breath, and the soldiers are playing games and stealing His clothes!

There is something about it that reminds me of a scene in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. As the Ghost of Christmas Future is showing Scrooge shadows of the future, a group of unseemly characters discusses stealing various items from "a dead man" (whom we know to be Scrooge) to sell them to a pawnbroker. His bed curtains and blankets are one thing, but even Scrooge's clothing is stolen from his body, and yet all in the scene laugh ignoring the life taken and justifying their behavior because Scrooge was stingy in life. The scene is presented as evidence that no one cared about Scrooge, and he got what he deserved (unless he would change).

But such things can't be said of Jesus as these soldiers treat Him with such contempt that they gamble for His clothes while He grasps for breath just above them. They don't even wait for Him to die. Now, sure, His friends deserted Him out of fear, but as we watch this scene, we certainly look on our Lord in love. We care! Beyond this, Jesus does not deserve any of this! We do. Yet Jesus is the one treated with utter contempt as He carries our sins.

This whole scene is shameful. Embarrassing. Ugly. Such is our sin. I lose sight of this reality sometimes. I think of sins as indiscretions or mistakes. Our sins can be those things, but they are also unseemly. Shameful. Ugly. How remarkable that our perfect Lord took on such ugliness to make us beautiful in His sight!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, let me never lose sight of the ugliness of my sin. Don't let me minimize it or dress it up. Let me see its wretchedness. Let me see my wretchedness, that in repentant faith, I may also see anew the wonder of Your sacrifice. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Thursday, October 28, 2021

Read John 19:24-27

“Behold your son”

Jesus has just undergone one of the most gruesome punishments imaginable. Here Jesus, our Lord, the very Son of God hangs upon the cross bleeding, beaten, and naked. The cruelty of this scene cannot be properly expressed. This was the King of the Universe, and His Creation had betrayed Him. Now instead of Creation being naked and ashamed like Adam and Eve, the tables had finally turned, and the Creator was naked and shameful to His believers.

But even after being insulted, humiliated, and beaten to the point of near death, Jesus does something completely unexpected. He demonstrates love. Catching sight of His mother who is undoubtedly crying over the suffering of her son, He comforts her. He seeks to make sure that she is taken care of and comfortable after He has died. Even amidst His unimaginable pain, He thinks first of someone else.

This scene communicates two important concepts. First, God’s family extends beyond biology. When Jesus told Mary “Behold your son” and then to John “behold your mother,” He didn’t magically change the biological make-up of the two to make them physically mother and son. Rather, through the words of Jesus and the faith of Mary and John, they were both made members of the same family: God’s family. Through faith in Jesus, we are adopted into God’s family - God’s Kingdom! Therefore, we are **brothers and sisters in Christ!**

Second, being part of God’s Kingdom, we are called to help our fellow members of the family of God. After Jesus claimed Mary and John to be family under His name, John took Mary in “to his own home” and took care of her. He didn’t simply confess “we’re family in Christ” and then leave her alone until the following Sunday when they’d be family again. He lived the confession! He took Mary in and treated her like family! This is the same calling we are given today. Like Cain, we often find ourselves asking the question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” and Jesus answers with a resounding “Yes!”

Brothers and sisters, we are united under our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and through Him we are given an unbreakable bond that lasts forever. So, let’s work together to withstand all the valleys of this world saying, “I am my brother’s keeper!” for we hold fast to the one who always keeps us: Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You unite us and induct us into Your heavenly family. Help us to live the confession that we are all Your Kingdom by expressing love to one another in the way that you first loved us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown*



Friday, October 29, 2021

Read John 19:28-29

### I Thirst

There is a traditional Good Friday service called the Tre Ore, or Three Hours, service where there are seven short sermons given centered on the seven last words of Christ. It's a beautiful service for anyone who has had the chance to attend, but I imagine it's a dreadful day for the preacher unlucky enough to draw this final word of Jesus. What do we make of this passage in John? It almost seems like an afterthought because John says that Jesus knew that all was finished. Then there is the scene with the sour wine before Jesus says, "It is finished" and dies.

So, what is the point of this story? Well, John says that this was "to fulfill the Scriptures." The Scripture in question is Psalm 69:21. Psalm 69 begins with a cry to God for help from enemies. These enemies abuse the speaker who demands that God not ignore him, for all his friends have deserted him. Yet in this lament, the psalmist turns to praise. He is certain of the Lord's redemption, no matter how dire the circumstances. This is the attitude of Jesus as He is at the point of death. He asks for spoiled homemade wine to moisten His mouth so He can speak His last words, His words of victory in the face of certain defeat. Jesus laments His pain and sorrow, but He never thinks that His Father will, in the end, abandon Him.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we are surrounded by our enemies and abandoned by those who would help us. Be our help in times of trouble and teach us to trust always in your sure salvation, no matter how dire the circumstances. Lead us to walk in the confidence of Christ's victory accomplished at the cross. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Saturday, October 30, 2021

Read John 19:30

*"It is finished"*

**"When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."** With those words came Jesus' death. We've seen and thought a lot about death in the past year and a half. Around 700,000 COVID deaths in our country alone. Suicides have increased, loneliness and depression is everywhere, and drug and alcohol abuse are up – leading to more loss of life. In our own congregation, how many deaths have we anguished over?

During the funeral services and memorials we've had at Hope, we remember and honor that person. We tell warm stories of their lives and deeds. We recall their families and loved ones, their life of faith, their accomplishments – or the accomplishments they would have had if they'd only lived a full life. But most of all, we're pointed back to those three words, **"It is finished"**. That message that Jesus proclaimed from the cross doesn't mean what the rest of the world thinks: it isn't "the end"; rather, it is "complete", "whole", "done".

Just as God rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Creation not because He was tired, but rather because Creation was complete; Jesus said, **"It is finished"** because His purpose was now accomplished – complete. Before He was born, the angel told His parents that He was to be called "Jesus" because **"He would save His people from their sins"**. Now, as He breathed His last, He paid the full price for all our sins. Our sins are finished! Eternal death is finished! The eternal divide between God and Man is no more!

The other Gospels tell us that, immediately prior to Jesus breathing His last, He'd loudly said, **"My God; My God! Why have You forsaken Me?"** The rest of His disciples were gone, He'd just given His own mother to John – Jesus was totally alone. None of us were there to do what He alone did; none of us could have done that – no one could – only Jesus! And that's how we can look at death and say, "you may have won this round, but my Lord and Savior Jesus has crushed you!"

Prayer: Beautiful Savior, Lord of the nations, Son of God and Son of Man! Glory and honor, Praise, adoration – Now and forevermore be Thine! Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, November 1, 2021

Read John 19:31-37

### Life-Giving Liquids

In our reading for today, we see a good example of “overkill.” Literally. The soldiers crucifying Jesus and the two thieves are told to expedite the process of their deaths since the Sabbath was approaching. So they go to each cross and kill the person on it. For the two thieves this meant breaking their legs so that they would suffocate. But when they get to Jesus, the soldiers see he is already dead.

But just to be sure, they pierce Jesus’ side with a spear. St. John reminds us in verses 36-37 that all of this fulfills Scriptural prophecy. It shows just how clearly the Old Testament points to Jesus. John wants us to realize that something significant is going on here.

From Jesus’ side pour water and blood—two life-giving liquids. But not just physical life—eternal life as well! I once saw a painting by the artist Edward Riojas that showed Jesus on the cross, and the blood from his side was going into a communion chalice. The water from Jesus’ side was going into a baptismal font. This image reminds us that on the cross, as Jesus poured out his life through blood and water, these two ordinary things, water and blood, give us life in baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

When we were baptized, and each time we eat and drink the Lord’s Supper, we are truly receiving forgiveness, life, and salvation. The same forgiveness, life, and salvation that was won for us by Jesus on the cross. I’m reminded of the hymn “Glory be to Jesus”, verse 1, which we often sing during Lent:

Glory be to Jesus,  
Who in bitter pains  
Poured for me the lifeblood  
From His sacred veins!

Prayer: Dearest Jesus, you poured out blood and water on the cross, taking away our sin. Yet you also come near to us in baptism and your supper, offering forgiveness in abundance. Strengthen my faith as I receive your sacramental gifts. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Alex Smith*

Tuesday, November 2, 2021

Read John 19:38-42

### Help Me to Act

It was a sad day. Jesus had died. There was no question, no hoping, it was obvious and if it wasn't the soldiers made sure of it. The light seemed to go out of the world. His open followers could do nothing; their poverty and social insignificance gave them no options. But ... but even this terrible event, cause hearts to cease their dilly-dallying. People who had hidden their faith came forth. Important people who had a responsibility to God to openly recognize and support God's Christ, they finally stepped up and did what they could. True it was only to care for His dead body (He did really die) but they did for him in death what they failed to do while He was alive. It is good to recognize their eventual stepping up, let their past failures fall among all the other things they and we have needed forgiveness.

And who am I to condemn or even criticize them? Haven't I been silent when speech is needed? Haven't I been willing to go along, to make peace even at the cost of letting opportunities to do good pass by? I look at Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus and see where I too can do better.

Give Lord the insight to see where I can do good, where my stepping up will be what others need. It is not that I don't love You or that I don't want to do good. It is my fears, and even laziness that cripples my actions. Lord give me the strength to do good - wherever it is needed.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for the actions of Joseph and Nicodemus. Help me to act similarly when you are present in others among us. Thank you for the promise that you will! Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, November 3, 2021

Read John 20:1-2

### God—Always in Control

Jesus has been crucified. Jesus has died. Jesus has been buried. Now we begin a new chapter of John's Gospel, the one the entire book has been leading up to. But in the first couple verses, which tell us what happened first on that Easter morning, there isn't an immediate recognition that Jesus has risen from the dead!

Mary Magdalene, when she sees the stone rolled away, does not at first realize what has happened. It will take Jesus actually appearing and speaking to her before she understands. We even might be tempted to criticize Mary—after all, Jesus had raised other people from the dead, and he had foretold his resurrection as well—why didn't she just believe? But we humans don't often understand the ways of God except in hindsight. We're not always that different from Mary.

In our own lives, we might struggle to see how God could possibly be at work. A situation seems so hopeless, or so terrible, that we just don't think God is doing anything. But that early Easter morning reminds us that God works even when he seems silent. Even as the grave was shut, the Father had a plan to raise his Son from the dead to prove that he alone has power over death. God is always in control.

As we contemplate how bewildering that Easter morning must have been for Mary, we know that our Lord speaks to us, just as he later did to Mary. And it is through his words that he will comfort us. That he will forgive us. That he will assure us of the salvation that he brings to us. That he is always in control. Thanks be to Jesus, who by his rising from the dead has brought us into eternal life.

Prayer: Dearest Jesus, though we often fail to see you at work, remind us through your church and word that you will never leave us or forsake us. Give us strength to endure our suffering with faith, and keep our eyes fixed on you. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Alex Smith*

Thursday, November 3, 2021

Read John 20:3-10

### Robbing the Grave

After Mary Magdalene informs Peter and John that Jesus' body is gone, the two disciples rush to witness the scene themselves only to find that what she told them is true. The body of Jesus was missing. Ideas probably came pouring into the disciples' heads. Maybe like Mary they asked, "Was his body stolen?" or "Did one of us take it?" However, upon closer examination, John recognized a small but important detail: the linen cloths and face cloth were still there. Surely if someone had taken Jesus' body from the tomb, they would have also taken the expensive and valuable cloths with them! This means that Jesus' body wasn't taken! He got up, removed His linens, gently folded His face cloth, and walked out of the tomb all on His own!

John saw this evidence and knew the truth. He saw the linens in the tomb and believed that Jesus had risen out of the grave. Thieves did not rob the grave of Jesus' body. Rather, Jesus robbed the grave of death. And now He continues to rob the grave of our deaths as well. Through faith in Christ, we do not stay dead, but rather get up, fold our cloths, and walk out of the tomb and into eternal life with Jesus.

Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed, alleluia! And so shall we!

Prayer: Almighty Father in Heaven, You raised Your Son, Jesus Christ, from out of the grave. Do the same with me also so that I may join You in everlasting life. Through Jesus Christ, Your only Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown*

Friday, November 5, 2021

Read John 20:11-16

## Mary

Imagine the scene. It's early in the morning just after the Sabbath. The sun has not even broken the horizon yet, and there's nearly no light. Mary Magdalene arrives at the tomb, finds it empty, and goes to tell the disciples. They look for themselves but end up going back to their homes because they were still confused. Mary is left all alone, weeping for the loss of her Lord and the loss of even His body. But through her tears, she looks again into the tomb because she could hardly believe what she had already seen and had to see it again. Mary doesn't see an empty tomb but two angels in white who ask her why she's weeping. She hardly flinches at their presence because she is so overcome by grief that even angels won't comfort her. They ask why she is weeping, and she answers so frankly, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." She doesn't understand the irony. She feels someone standing behind her and she turns around to see another figure that she can't recognize in the dim light of the early dawn. He asks just the same question, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She answers again that she is overcome by grief and wants nothing more than to grieve properly for her friend, the prophet. Jesus cuts through her hysterical sorrow by gently speaking her name: "Mary." Now His voice is unmistakable. The Teacher is alive!

Mary is such a beautiful example of how the most faithful disciples of Jesus are still victims of the grief of this world. We dwell in the depths of the darkness of death. All we see is failure and the absence of God. Insult is added to injury, and we are left like Mary without even the ability to mourn rightly. Even when we see angels asking why we weep or even God Himself before us, we are so easily blinded to the reality of the blessing that stands before us. But God's mercy is abundantly great, and He calls us by name. We are powerless to see who He is unless He calls us, but when we do hear the voice of our Shepherd, everything changes. Death turns to life and mourning turns to joy. We fall at the feet of the One who has defeated the ancient, powerful foe, Death itself, and yet still knows us personally and calls us by name.

Prayer: Risen Lord, we thank You that You love us enough to die for us, rise for us, and in the midst of our darkness, call us by name. Help us to recognize Your life and salvation through our gloom and hasten the day when all mourning and death is defeated once and for all. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Saturday, November 6, 2021

Read John 20:17-18

*“I have seen the Lord!”*

It’s ironic – but perhaps the closest thing we have today to this scene in John’s Gospel is called “Black Friday”. You know, just like Mary Magdalene and the disciples that Easter morning, Black Friday is when people go out “early in the morning, before the first light” on the day after Thanksgiving. Back in the old days, people would set up tents and bring sleeping bags. They’d cook a late dinner on camp stoves, just for the chance to buy a computer for \$75, or a big screen TV for \$150.

But actually, the time of day is really the only thing that makes Black Friday similar to the first Easter. Here, in a few weeks, people will go out early, knowing exactly what they’re going to get. They expect to get the Super-Keurig Coffee-Blaster down at Best Mart for only \$19.99! They will have shopped all the ads and have the trip planned out to get to each store right at opening time to “get the stuff before it’s gone!”

But Mary and “the other Mary” had no plan, no hope. They went to the tomb simply to do what the Law said to do. Jesus hadn’t been properly buried in the rush to entomb Him before the Sabbath, and now they were coming to finish that job. They likely wept as they walked in the dark, emptied by the calamitous events of the past days. They expected to find nothing at the tomb except a large stone, blocking their way – nothing, that is, except death. Jesus was dead.

But what they found was better than Black Friday – the rock was rolled aside, the tomb was open and – the tomb was empty! After returning to tell the disciples, Mary Magdalene came back again. Peter and John looked in and left, but Mary stayed. Just like she’d stayed at the foot of the cross. Just like she’d stayed with Jesus the last two years, financially and physically supporting His ministry. All this after Jesus had removed from her the seven demons that had filled her until she wished she was dead.

So, expecting only death, and mechanically following Jesus’ example “to fulfill all righteousness and the Law”, Mary’s expectations were blown away and she couldn’t stop “clinging” to her Rabbi when Jesus revealed Himself to her – alive! Jesus had only a short time left and He wanted His disciples to know the Good News! **“Go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”**

Prayer: Risen Lord, I love to “cling” to You, reveling in Your death, life, and love. Strengthen me with this joy, and send me to tell my brothers **“I have seen the Lord!”** Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*



Monday, November 8, 2021

Read John 20:19-23

Then

**“Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.”**

Then.

Before then, there must have been uncertainty. Who was this visitor entering their locked room?

Clearly this was no ordinary person...if it was a person. It could be an angel. Or perhaps, the stories of the women were true, and this really was Jesus. Risen from death.

But an uninvited visitor in a locked room would scare anyone. Until...**“he showed them his hands and his side.”** Then everything changed. He had spoken peace to the disciples, but then He confirmed it.

Then everything changed.

**“Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.”**

You see, the disciples needed to know two things. First, who was this extraordinary visitor? Clearly, the marks showed who He was. Second, the disciples needed to know this extraordinary visitor had come to help them, not to harm them.

So, He showed them his hands and his side. The marks do not just speak to His identity, but His purpose. He is Jesus who came to save. He speaks peace by winning peace for us by His sacrifice. See His hands. See His side.

Then, we too are glad as we see the Lord.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, the marks in your hands and side speak to the peace you have come to bring. Give me joy in knowing Your peace-bringing love for me. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, November 9, 2021

Read John 20:24-29

### Doubting

How easy I find it - to look down on "Doubting Thomas". Here he has just received the best news in the whole world, and he refused it. How easy to conceal my own doubts but attacking another. Thomas wanted to be sure. Don't I want the same thing?

Like Thomas, I constantly find myself challenging God. "Why God do you let X happen to me? If you really loved me You would do Y!" What is that but seeing myself as higher than God! What God does is good and has to be better than my ideas - but it is so hard to let go. And so, I condemn Thomas for what I do!

But God is merciful. God forgives, and sometimes even listens to our desires even while we are offending Him. Jesus offers his body to Thomas to satisfy His "proof". So, I see that God will be merciful to me.

I see myself in Thomas both in his "doubt" but also, praise God, in that fact of God's mercy. God's mercy lies in His forgiveness and continued love and presence in my life, even while I sin, even when I make demands on Him. And so, I am reminded that the solution to "doubt" is trust, that that one Savior who died and rose again, that One person that Thomas finally accepts without reservations. Lord, bless me with more faith, that I don't continue to doubt, even while I cling to Your forgiveness.

Prayer: Thank you God for reminding me again of my sinfulness, of using Thomas to force me to recognize my need to trust You through everything, especially good news. Thank you.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, November 3, 2021

Read John 20:1-2

### God—Always in Control

Jesus has been crucified. Jesus has died. Jesus has been buried. Now we begin a new chapter of John's Gospel, the one the entire book has been leading up to. But in the first couple verses, which tell us what happened first on that Easter morning, there isn't an immediate recognition that Jesus has risen from the dead!

Mary Magdalene, when she sees the stone rolled away, does not at first realize what has happened. It will take Jesus actually appearing and speaking to her before she understands. We even might be tempted to criticize Mary—after all, Jesus had raised other people from the dead, and he had foretold his resurrection as well—why didn't she just believe? But we humans don't often understand the ways of God except in hindsight. We're not always that different from Mary.

In our own lives, we might struggle to see how God could possibly be at work. A situation seems so hopeless, or so terrible, that we just don't think God is doing anything. But that early Easter morning reminds us that God works even when he seems silent. Even as the grave was shut, the Father had a plan to raise his Son from the dead to prove that he alone has power over death. God is always in control.

As we contemplate how bewildering that Easter morning must have been for Mary, we know that our Lord speaks to us, just as he later did to Mary. And it is through his words that he will comfort us. That he will forgive us. That he will assure us of the salvation that he brings to us. That he is always in control. Thanks be to Jesus, who by his rising from the dead has brought us into eternal life.

Prayer: Dearest Jesus, though we often fail to see you at work, remind us through your church and word that you will never leave us or forsake us. Give us strength to endure our suffering with faith, and keep our eyes fixed on you. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Alex Smith*

Thursday, November 3, 2021

Read John 20:3-10

### Robbing the Grave

After Mary Magdalene informs Peter and John that Jesus' body is gone, the two disciples rush to witness the scene themselves only to find that what she told them is true. The body of Jesus was missing. Ideas probably came pouring into the disciples' heads. Maybe like Mary they asked, "Was his body stolen?" or "Did one of us take it?" However, upon closer examination, John recognized a small but important detail: the linen cloths and face cloth were still there. Surely if someone had taken Jesus' body from the tomb, they would have also taken the expensive and valuable cloths with them! This means that Jesus' body wasn't taken! He got up, removed His linens, gently folded His face cloth, and walked out of the tomb all on His own!

John saw this evidence and knew the truth. He saw the linens in the tomb and believed that Jesus had risen out of the grave. Thieves did not rob the grave of Jesus' body. Rather, Jesus robbed the grave of death. And now He continues to rob the grave of our deaths as well. Through faith in Christ, we do not stay dead, but rather get up, fold our cloths, and walk out of the tomb and into eternal life with Jesus.

Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed, alleluia! And so shall we!

Prayer: Almighty Father in Heaven, You raised Your Son, Jesus Christ, from out of the grave. Do the same with me also so that I may join You in everlasting life. Through Jesus Christ, Your only Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown*

Friday, November 12, 2021

Read John 21:15-19

### The Great Reversal

Frequent readers of the Friday daily devotions will remember a few weeks ago when I wrote the devotion on Peter's threefold denial of Jesus. He was warming himself on a cold, cold night around just the same sort of charcoal fire when he was asked by a young servant girl whether he was a disciple of Jesus and he denied it three times, each more desperate and pathetic than the last. But this time, everything is just a little different. It is still dark out, but it is not the thick black of night. No, John tells us that the sun was just beginning to rise. Peter is now not in the courtyard of the high priest surrounded by Roman soldiers, but he's on familiar territory, he's on the sea surrounded by his friends and fellow disciples. So when he sees Jesus, Peter is high-spirited, he is so overjoyed that he jumps from the ship and swims in to see the Lord.

But after breakfast, while he is still warming himself by the fire, Jesus comes to talk to Peter and asks him for a confession of faith. Jesus asks, "Do you love me?" Peter has a complicated history with confession. He confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God! But he denied that the Christ should do the work of suffering and dying for which he was sent and Jesus rebuked him, "get behind me, Satan." Then, Peter denied the Lord again on the night of His arrest. Now, Peter has a chance to set things right. Of course he loves Jesus. But after Jesus asks a third time, Peter feels convicted. Maybe Peter's love isn't good enough, so he simply appeals to Jesus, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you."

Jesus does know that Peter loves him. What Peter doesn't know is how much Jesus loves him. Though Peter rejected Jesus, Jesus accepts Peter back without hesitation, even calling him to feed Jesus' sheep. Jesus explains the whole rest of Peter's life: tending the flock and glorifying God in his death. To summarize, Peter will follow Jesus.

Throughout the Gospels, Peter stands as the mouthpiece of the Twelve disciples. In many ways, he is the mouthpiece of all of Jesus' disciples to the present day. We also find many ways to deny Jesus either explicitly or through our actions. Sometimes we have excuses and sometimes we do it without cause. Sometimes we confess Jesus but get his mission completely wrong. But at the end of the day, we, like Peter, have been called by Christ to love him and he knows our love for him (he is the one, after all, that put it there). So even if we have not all been called to feed Jesus' sheep or given a prophecy of our martyrdom, Jesus' command to Peter is the same command for us: "Follow me."

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we love you. Thank you for those you have given us to care for us. Forgive us our denial and help us to confess you in word and deed. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Saturday, November 6, 2021

Read John 20:17-18

*“I have seen the Lord!”*

It’s ironic – but perhaps the closest thing we have today to this scene in John’s Gospel is called “Black Friday”. You know, just like Mary Magdalene and the disciples that Easter morning, Black Friday is when people go out “early in the morning, before the first light” on the day after Thanksgiving. Back in the old days, people would set up tents and bring sleeping bags. They’d cook a late dinner on camp stoves, just for the chance to buy a computer for \$75, or a big screen TV for \$150.

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But what they found was better than Black Friday – the rock was rolled aside, the tomb was open and – the tomb was empty!? After returning to tell the disciples, Mary Magdalene came back again. Peter and John looked in and left, but Mary stayed. Just like she’d stayed at the foot of the cross. Just like she’d stayed with Jesus the last two years, financially and physically supporting His ministry. All this after Jesus had removed from her the seven demons that had filled her until she wished she was dead.

So, expecting only death, and mechanically following Jesus’ example “to fulfill all righteousness and the Law”, Mary’s expectations were blown away and she couldn’t stop “clinging” to her Rabbi when Jesus revealed Himself to her – alive! Jesus had only a short time left and He wanted His disciples to know the Good News! **“Go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”**

Prayer: Risen Lord, I love to “cling” to You, reveling in Your death, life, and love. Strengthen me with this joy, and send me to tell my brothers **“I have seen the Lord!”** Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*

Monday, November 8, 2021

Read John 20:19-23

Then

**“Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.”**

Then.

Before then, there must have been uncertainty. Who was this visitor entering their locked room?

Clearly this was no ordinary person...if it was a person. It could be an angel. Or perhaps, the stories of the women were true, and this really was Jesus. Risen from death.

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You see, the disciples needed to know two things. First, who was this extraordinary visitor? Clearly, the marks showed who He was. Second, the disciples needed to know this extraordinary visitor had come to help them, not to harm them.

So, He showed them his hands and his side. The marks do not just speak to His identity, but His purpose. He is Jesus who came to save. He speaks peace by winning peace for us by His sacrifice. See His hands. See His side.

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Prayer: Dear Jesus, the marks in your hands and side speak to the peace you have come to bring. Give me joy in knowing Your peace-bringing love for me. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

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Read John 20:24-29

### Doubting

How easy I find it - to look down on "Doubting Thomas". Here he has just received the best news in the whole world, and he refused it. How easy to conceal my own doubts but attacking another. Thomas wanted to be sure. Don't I want the same thing?

Like Thomas, I constantly find myself challenging God. "Why God do you let X happen to me? If you really loved me You would do Y!" What is that but seeing myself as higher than God! What God does is good and has to be better than my ideas - but it is so hard to let go. And so, I condemn Thomas for what I do!

But God is merciful. God forgives, and sometimes even listens to our desires even while we are offending Him. Jesus offers his body to Thomas to satisfy His "proof". So, I see that God will be merciful to me.

I see myself in Thomas both in his "doubt" but also, praise God, in that fact of God's mercy. God's mercy lies in His forgiveness and continued love and presence in my life, even while I sin, even when I make demands on Him. And so, I am reminded that the solution to "doubt" is trust, that that one Savior who died and rose again, that One person that Thomas finally accepts without reservations. Lord, bless me with more faith, that I don't continue to doubt, even while I cling to Your forgiveness.

Prayer: Thank you God for reminding me again of my sinfulness, of using Thomas to force me to recognize my need to trust You through everything, especially good news. Thank you.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*



Wednesday, November 10, 2021

Read John 20:30-31

### That You May Believe

After St. John tells us this story of St. Thomas, he adds a couple of verses about the purpose of his entire Gospel. Verse 30 says this: **“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book.”** And our reaction to that might initially be a groan of disappointment. Or a burning curiosity. We want more! “Come on, St. John, give us the details! Why not write them down? Extra proof never hurt anyone. Did you run out of paper, or just get lazy?”

But then comes the next verse. **“But these things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”** What we’ve been given with the Gospel accounts is the word of those who witnessed the events. Our faith is strengthened by the testimony of the disciples and the other writers of Scripture.

John drives it home—we can trust the Gospel that has been proclaimed to us! We have what is sufficient for saving faith. Because to be saved, we simply cling to Jesus. Jesus comes to us as surely and certainly as he has come to any other believer in history. And he continues to bless us with the gift of forgiveness so that we may have life in his name. It’s not just some story we tell ourselves to feel better.

A life with God in his Church, among fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. And a glorious eternal life when we too will be resurrected from death, when we will behold our savior physically, with our resurrected bodies. Our joy will be complete. May we look ahead with faith strengthened by word and sacrament, even as that glorious day is drawing near. **These things are written, that you may believe, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.** Amen.

Prayer: Lord, strengthen my faith to believe your Word. Instill in me a desire to read and take to heart the accounts which testify to you. Keep me in the one true faith. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Alex Smith*

Thursday, November 11, 2021

Read: John 21:1-14

### Unbreakable Faith

This point in the story shows the third and final time that Jesus appears to His followers in the Gospel account of John. The first two appearances assured His followers that He was risen and that He was Lord. Now all that was left was to make sure that the disciples were ready to tell the world about Him. To do this, Jesus sets up a little test to gauge His disciples' faith.

On a day when the disciples, who are fishermen, are catching no fish, Jesus mysteriously appears unrecognized and tells them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. In doing so, the disciples haul in an incredible number of fish. What a miracle! However, this isn't anything new. In fact, we've heard this before in Luke 5. But there's a small detail in John's Gospel that makes a huge difference as to how we can understand the story: the strength of the net used to pull in the fish.

In Luke 5, we see Jesus using a similar method to call His first disciples. However, in this account, after casting their nets on the other side of the boat, the disciples **"enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking."** At this time before truly knowing Jesus, their faith was weak and their net tore. Peter and those with him did not yet understand that Jesus came for sinners. Their faith needed to grow before they could spread the good news of the Gospel. Therefore, Jesus says to Peter, "follow me and I will teach you how to be a fisher of men".

Well after spending a long time learning from Jesus throughout His ministry, John presents that the time had finally come to see if the disciples' faith was ready for them to be fishers of men. This time, when the disciples cast their nets on the other side of the boat, **"although there were so many [fish], the net was not torn."** This time, they had unbreakable faith, so their net was also unbreakable. In fact, they were so sure of the holiness and power of Jesus that **"none of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord."** And they knew He was there to serve them. They passed the test! The disciples were ready to be fishers of men, Jesus approved.

How comforting it is to know that we follow in the footsteps of Jesus' approved disciples! We have been caught in their unbreakable nets. May we also have unbreakable faith that casts nets that will never be torn!

Prayer: Lord, You trained Your disciples and equipped them with unbreakable faith and nets to cast out into the world. Foster in us the same faith so that our nets may catch even more followers of You. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown*

Friday, November 12, 2021

Read John 21:15-19

### The Great Reversal

Frequent readers of the Friday daily devotions will remember a few weeks ago when I wrote the devotion on Peter's threefold denial of Jesus. He was warming himself on a cold, cold night around just the same sort of charcoal fire when he was asked by a young servant girl whether he was a disciple of Jesus and he denied it three times, each more desperate and pathetic than the last. But this time, everything is just a little different. It is still dark out, but it is not the thick black of night. No, John tells us that the sun was just beginning to rise. Peter is now not in the courtyard of the high priest surrounded by Roman soldiers, but he's on familiar territory, he's on the sea surrounded by his friends and fellow disciples. So when he sees Jesus, Peter is high-spirited, he is so overjoyed that he jumps from the ship and swims in to see the Lord.

But after breakfast, while he is still warming himself by the fire, Jesus comes to talk to Peter and asks him for a confession of faith. Jesus asks, "Do you love me?" Peter has a complicated history with confession. He confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God! But he denied that the Christ should do the work of suffering and dying for which he was sent and Jesus rebuked him, "get behind me, Satan." Then, Peter denied the Lord again on the night of His arrest. Now, Peter has a chance to set things right. Of course he loves Jesus. But after Jesus asks a third time, Peter feels convicted. Maybe Peter's love isn't good enough, so he simply appeals to Jesus, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you."

Jesus does know that Peter loves him. What Peter doesn't know is how much Jesus loves him. Though Peter rejected Jesus, Jesus accepts Peter back without hesitation, even calling him to feed Jesus' sheep. Jesus explains the whole rest of Peter's life: tending the flock and glorifying God in his death. To summarize, Peter will follow Jesus.

Throughout the Gospels, Peter stands as the mouthpiece of the Twelve disciples. In many ways, he is the mouthpiece of all of Jesus' disciples to the present day. We also find many ways to deny Jesus either explicitly or through our actions. Sometimes we have excuses and sometimes we do it without cause. Sometimes we confess Jesus but get his mission completely wrong. But at the end of the day, we, like Peter, have been called by Christ to love him and he knows our love for him (he is the one, after all, that put it there). So even if we have not all been called to feed Jesus' sheep or given a prophecy of our martyrdom, Jesus' command to Peter is the same command for us: "Follow me."

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we love you. Thank you for those you have given us to care for us. Forgive us our denial and help us to confess you in word and deed. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney*

Saturday, November 13, 2021

Read John 21:20-25

*"The Gospel According to John"*

Today's reading concludes our devotions on John's account of the Good News of the Christ. When we hear some of his words, our hearts burn within us:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim...

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk."

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

Jesus wept.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser."

Only in John's Gospel do we hear of: the Woman of Samaria; Jesus' first miracle: turning water into wine; raising Lazarus from the dead; several other miracles.

Strong messages: the Trinity, Jesus as both true God and true Man.

Difficult teachings in the form of a riddle: to be "born again", a dead person being "only sleeping", "My hour has not yet come", "Destroy this temple...", "My kingdom is not of this world"

Favorite phrases: "I Am... (the Way, the Truth and the Life; the Door, the Good Shepherd, the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Resurrection and the Life)"; Jesus beginning teaching with the words, "Amen, Amen..." (translated as, "Truly, truly..."), "The disciple whom Jesus loved" (aka, John).

John didn't write about himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" to lord it over the other disciples. He described himself with those words because that's how Jesus made him feel. I think he'd say the same about any disciple of Christ. He'd be the first to point to you and say, "no, you're the disciple whom Jesus loves!"

John closes his Gospel with these words, "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." This devotion has only offered a few, brief reminders of John's message. But he's right, because "the many other things that Jesus did" are not yet complete. He's still working in you, right now.

Prayer: Jesus, thank You for revealing Yourself to me through John's eyes and pen. Amen and Amen!

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*