



March 29—April 4

Lenten Devotions
 inspired by Handel's
 oratorio
Messiah

April 4

Easter

Revelation 19:6, 16;

Revelation 11:15

Hallelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. The Kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever. King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

Hallelujah! He is risen!

So long ago, the Lord promised that the tempter, the evil foe, the serpent would not be able to contain himself, would bite the heel of the Messiah and find his head crushed.

Brothers and sisters, it has happened. Our Lord Jesus was bruised, but He is healed, He is risen. Hallelujah! The Word of the Lord is proved true.

The word of the tempter is proved false. The tempter had sold us a bill of goods. He told us that the Lord's omnipotence meant He would rule over us roughly, that God's will overpowers ours, that He keeps good things from us, like the knowledge of good and evil.

It was a lie. Would the Lord who gave His own Son not graciously give us all things? Is this how He overpowers us, by submitting to corrupt political rulers, to the punishment of death?

No, we see how the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth, He reigns as the Lamb who was slain. Our God is Love and His omnipotence is His ability to do what no other king can do, what the tempter most certainly cannot do: love the worst of His enemies and embrace them for eternity.

Rising again, our Lord embraces this world and seals it for the promise of this chorus, that the kingdom of this world will become His Kingdom, not by the force of arms, not by piles of money, not by backroom deals, but by the strength of a Love that gave up everything. Love really does conquer all, thanks be to God, Love shall indeed reign for ever and ever. Hallelujah! He is risen!

By Rev. Daniel Guagenti

Prayer

*Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just.
 Amen.*



Inkwell Greetings

March 29

Psalm 2:1-2

Why do the nations so furiously rage together, why do the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed.

I picture here a smoke-filled back room, assorted old guys in robes and crowns huddled together and speaking in hushed voices in order to conspire against God.

Think of a political leader or sports figure who has gotten into trouble of one sort or another, I know—hard to do, right? It seems unbelievable, but somehow these celebrities think they will not get caught having affairs, taking bribes or driving drunk.

It is not like that for regular folks like you or me, though, is it? Think again. It is truly a small world, and all too often we learn the hard way that even if we are in Vegas, what we do does not stay in Vegas.

So what makes us think that we can hide anything from God? He sees into hearts and minds. He is everywhere. God knows the secret sins we say, do or even think all by ourselves in the dark of night. Yet, somehow we still think we can hide from God.

I plan to tell you something a bit unexpected. Now, you probably expect me to say that we just need to stop this sinful behavior. You might not expect me to tell you that it is very good that we cannot hide anything from God. If we could hide a sin from God, then He would not be able to forgive it. Then we would be sunk. But He can and does reveal the sin in the deepest recesses of our minds and very depths of our souls. He removes the sin, takes it on Himself and pays for it with His life. He wipes out all our sins—the ones we know, the ones we do not know and the ones we try in vain to hide. He removes our sin and forgets it ever happened.

Rev. Matthew Brackman

Prayer

Thank you, O Lord, for revealing our sin and removing it from us. Continue to reveal your Word to us so that we may live each day without fear and openly walk in your light. Amen.

April 3

LB 448

O sorrow dread
Our God is dead
Upon the cross
extended. There
His love enlivened us
As His life was ended.

This hymn features one of the most arresting lines in all of hymnody: “Our God is dead.” There is no attempt to explain away the significance of this statement, say, by telling us that it was only God the Son dying upon the cross and not God the Father or God the Holy Spirit or each person of the Holy Trinity.

No, following Martin Luther (who liked to say that God himself died upon the cross), we sing that it was God who suffered and died in the flesh of Jesus. It was God Himself who suffered and died there, just as it was God Himself who would lie buried in a tomb and God Himself who took flesh and would lie asleep in a manger.

We sing this hymn on Holy Saturday—or Good Friday, as in some congregations—to make sure we do not forget what we have seen at the entrance to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday or what we have seen in the Garden of Gethsemane on Holy Thursday or what we have seen at Calvary on Good Friday: God Himself in the flesh has died to forgive the sins of the world.

Yet, in the midst of our darkest woe, as we reflect upon the Lord who gave His life because of our sins and who was placed in a tomb to rot, we gather in the humble, quiet, and confident joy of what happens tomorrow, when the Son of God overcomes death, hell, and the grave forever, and brings life and immortality to light through His resurrection.

In the midst of sickness and death, misfortune and loss, hurt and grief, this is your joy, now and forever: that the God who died upon the cross will not stay dead long.

By Rev. Richard J. Serina, Jr.

Prayer

Son of God, enliven us now with the hope of your resurrection and ours. Amen.

April 2

Good Friday

LSB 454

Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle; Sing the ending of the fray. Now above the cross, the trophy, Sound the loud triumphant lay; Tell how Christ, the world's redeemer, As a victim won the day.

Today we celebrate Good Friday. We celebrate the death of Jesus Christ. The Christian Church has been celebrating this day and this event for centuries. I remember those celebrations from my own youth. They confused me, and perhaps they have confused you. I felt I was supposed to be sad; after all, the church was draped in black, the candles were extinguished, and Jesus was dead. But we called it Good Friday, and we sang hymns about it, hymns I found peaceful and comforting. I didn't know whether to celebrate or to grieve.

Today we celebrate Good Friday. In the words of a very old hymn, "Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle; sing the ending of the fray! Now above the cross, the trophy, sound the loud triumphant lay; tell how Christ, the world's redeemer, as a victim won the day!" Death is victory? Death is victory! We celebrate the emasculation of the devil and death and sin. We celebrate our forgiveness by God and our freedom from condemnation and curse. We celebrate that "It is finished!" We rejoice in our deliverance, in our salvation, in our victory, our glorious and triumphant victory in the struggle for human existence and meaning. These things Christ has gotten for us in suffering and dying and has safely stashed them beyond the doors of death and the gates of the grave, where the things of the world and the things of hell cannot touch them or take them away any more.

Today we celebrate Good Friday. We do not celebrate Easter. That is a different holiday, and its time will come. We will celebrate resurrection, because it is the spoils; but for today, we celebrate the victory itself, a victory that is ours, because Jesus is us.

By Rev. Michael Salemink

Prayer

Heavenly Father, untie my tongue, my mind and heart, and teach me to sing the glorious battle of a victim who won the day for me. Amen.

March 30

Psalms 2:3-4

Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yokes from us. He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn, the Lord shall have them in derision.

The first time I listened to the *Messiah*, the selection based on Ps 2:3 caught my attention. The music was playing on the car radio and I was only half listening. This piece stood out because it was in stark contrast to the selections which had immediately preceded it. The music was upbeat, cheery, fun. It brought to mind pictures of people frolicking in a field, enjoying life. It was a tune with which you wanted to hum along.

It was many years later, as I was practicing the music in a community choir, when I finally really studied the words. Ps 2:3 is not an upbeat verse. It is not a cheery or fun verse. It is a declaration of war. These are the words of the people of the earth casting defiance against the God of creation. "Let us break the bonds [of the LORD] asunder. Let us cast away the yoke [of the trine God] from us." This is tantamount to making a rude gesture at our Savior.

Handel made an astute theological point by setting these words to an upbeat melody. Just as the music draws us in, the world entices God's children away from Him by making their defiance seem upbeat, cheery and fun. The church and God's Word are often portrayed as stodgy, old-fashioned, and a damper on "life." Appearances are deceiving. Jesus, who reigns above all things, has proclaimed the truth. The way of the world is devoid of true life; it is, in fact, the way of death.

Jesus came to give us a full life. He places a yoke upon us, but it is not burdensome, it is light. It is the yoke of freedom and forgiveness. In Him is life, the true life of the world.

By Rev. William Sabol

Prayer

Lord Jesus, think on me nor let me go astray; through darkness and perplexity point out Your chosen way. Amen. (LSB 610:4)

March 31

Psalm 2:9

Thou shalt break
them with a rod
of iron, Thou
shalt dash them
in pieces like a
potter's vessel.

In the 80's a Quebec musician had a hit with a song entitled, "Six Feet Over the Earth," a play on the familiar phrase "six feet under." He sang about corrupt politicians, ministers who fleece their flocks rather than feed them, mafia warlords and all sorts of other undesirables who make life miserable for everyone else. The chorus was one simple sentence: "Good God, promise me that there is a hell." The song was essentially a cry for justice, for some "final reckoning" where evil is judged and destroyed and the good is rewarded.

What was astonishing about the song's success was that it came out of a culture that had largely abandoned a church famous for preaching "good works unto salvation"—Quebecois Roman Catholicism. The people had turned their back on God's judgment, but they still hungered and thirsted for God's justice. Judgment and justice, however, cannot be separated. There can be no justice if wrongs are never called out, and the right is never upheld.

The same is true for God. A God who never judges is a God who cannot be called just. If everything is right, nothing is right. So God assures His creatures that He will judge the nations with a rod of iron, will break them, and dash them to pieces to preserve His justice.

Injustice is always someone else's fault, right? Our Quebecois songwriter could see no fault within himself worthy of final judgment. So it is with us. But if God is to be just, He must also judge the injustice within each of us.

This He does at the cross of Jesus Christ, who takes into Himself those things in us that are evil and worthy of being broken with a rod of iron. He is shattered like a potter's vessel, that we may not find ourselves in the hell we believe only others deserve.

By Rev. Charles St Onge

Prayer

*Most just Lord,
judge us not by
the injustice
that lives in our
own hearts, but
rather by the
righteous life of
Jesus, in whom
we place our
full trust by
your Spirit.
Amen.*

April 1

Maundy Thursday

LSB 617

May God bestow
on us His grace
and favor That we
follow Christ our
Savior And live
together here in love
and union Nor de-
spise this blest
Communion!

"O Lord, We Praise Thee" (LSB 617) is the title of a communion hymn whose text was written by Martin Luther. Every time I hear it, to me it is a festive and stately hymn. It reminds me that the Lord's Supper is a special thing. It is not something we take lightly, but with great care. In spite of that, it is also a joyful occasion. We are receiving forgiveness from the Lord in this sacrament. We are receiving His body and blood.

How often do we carefully ponder what we are receiving? If only we did. But we don't always. We are like the older son in the parable of the prodigal son. The father comes out to his son from the banquet hall, saying, "All that I have is yours." That might remind us of our Lord coming out to us to die upon the cross, giving us all that He had. He did not stay in the heavenly banquet hall but came out to save us from our sinfulness and hardheartedness. He now gives us His body and blood. May we never despise it, but instead hold this sacrament sacred and gladly receive and partake of it, just as we receive God's Word.

The third verse reminds us not only of a restored union with God and one another, it also cautions us: may we never despise this blessed communion, this holy thing, but cherish it. It is indeed Christ's body and blood. It indeed brings with it forgiveness. May you be blessed and satisfied as you humbly consider the sacrament and receive it with joy.

By Rev. Chris Truelsen

Prayer

*O Lord have
mercy! Let not
Thy good Spirit
forsake us;
Grant that
heav'nly
minded
He make us;
Give Thy
Church, Lord,
to see Days of
peace and
unity; O Lord,
have mercy!
Amen.
(LSB 617:3)*