

March
8-13

Lenten
Devotions
Inspired by
Handel's
Oratorio
Messiah



Editor

Rev. A. Daniel Guagenti
Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Shelbyville, KY

Contributors

Rev. Matthew Brackman
Peace Lutheran Church, Texas City, TX

Rev. Eric Brown
Zion Lutheran Church, Lahoma, OK

Rev. Richard Gizynski
Ebenezer Lutheran Church, Chicago, IL

Rev. David Grassley
Redeemer Lutheran Church, Fort Worth, TX

Rev. Andy Guagenti
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Bardstown, KY

Rev. A. Daniel Guagenti
Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Shelbyville, KY

Rev. Christopher Jackson
St Johns Lutheran Church, Lexington, KY

Rev. William Sabol
Trinity Lutheran Church, Jasper, MN

Rev. Michael Salemink
St. James Lutheran Church, Lafayette, IN

Rev. Richard J. Serina, Jr.
Trinity Lutheran Church, Albany, TX

Rev. Charles St Onge
Memorial Lutheran Church, Houston, TX

Rev. Christopher Truelsen
St. Johns Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lanesville, IN

Art

Expressive calligraphy by Timothy R. Botts,
used with permission.
Please visit www.timbotts.com.

March 8

Isaiah 53:6

All we like sheep
have gone astray,
we have turned
every one to his
own way; and the
Lord hath laid on
Him the iniquity
of us all.

What is the significance of the word “all”? What does it mean that Jesus bore the sins of “all” people? It was during my first year at seminary that the blessing of this small word was illuminated. Seminary students are required to perform field work—assisting at a local congregation and volunteering at nursing homes and hospitals. In these settings, our task was primarily the proclamation of the Gospel, through preaching, teaching and visiting.

While my classmates and I were nervous about our first times preaching and teaching, we were comfortable serving at the congregations, because the members with whom we interacted were Christians. But when it came time for us to volunteer at the nursing homes, the anxiety level increased. What did we say to a person who may not be a Christian?

In response to that question, the field work professor reminded us of this Isaiah passage and asked, “What does it mean that Jesus died for *everyone’s* sin? Doesn’t that mean that by His death *everyone* is forgiven? Is it wrong to tell an unbeliever that Jesus has forgiven them their sin? No!”

For the first time I realized that the Gospel proclamation does not change with regard to the hearer. Jesus did not simply die for *some* people, He died for *all* people. Sadly, many reject this truth and lose out on the benefit, but it is not because Jesus’ death does not cover them. This truth we can continue to proclaim to them in the hope that the Holy Spirit will move them to receive it in faith.

Personally, this truth becomes a great comfort. When we stumble and fall into sin, remembering that Jesus took upon Himself *all* iniquity calms our hearts, for even we are included in the “all”.

Rev. William Sabol

Prayer

O my Savior,
help afford By
Your Spirit
and Your
Word! When
my wayward
heart would
stray, Keep me
in the narrow
way; Grace in
time of need
supply While I
live and when I
die.
Amen.
(LSB 611:5)

March 13

LSB 571

God would not
have the sinner
die; His Son with
saving grace is
nigh; His Spirit
in the Word
declares How we
in Christ are
heaven’s heirs.

As a married man, I appreciate what my wife does for our household. Bachelor men are known for living with only the bare necessities: a cooking pot, one set of bed and bath linens, a refrigerator, and a widescreen television with sports channels. All the other extras, like dust ruffles, shams, doilies, pizza stones, etc. are excluded. I appreciate such niceties that my wife contributes. Unfortunately, however, we Lutherans have the tendency towards bachelor-esque minimalism in our spiritual lives.

Sola Gratia (Grace Alone). *Sola Fide* (Faith Alone). *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone). *Sola Christe* (Christ alone). These are the four Reformation “*solas*,” the principles that guided the Lutheran Reformation. Such formulations are useful. Unfortunately, they can also have a limiting effect. For example, how often do we hear Lutherans speaking of the Father’s and Spirit’s roles in our salvation? In your own spiritual life, how big a role does your baptism play, or do you focus solely on faith and Scripture?

“God Love the World So That He Gave” provides a wider view. In verse three, it reminds us that salvation is a work of Christ, indeed, but also a work of the Father and the Spirit. In verse six’s Trinitarian acclamation, we see that not only in the Holy Trinity the source but also the goal of our salvation. All this is grounded in a piety that looks not only to Scripture, but also in the Word spoken to us in Holy Baptism (verse 4).

Many people give something up for Lent. I encourage you to add something. Specifically, I encourage you toward a more robust understanding of salvation by more fully appreciating its Trinitarian source and end as well as its mediation through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

By Rev. Christopher Jackson

Prayer

Father, Son,
and Holy
Spirit, all
praise be to you
now and
eternally for
effecting our
salvation and
declaring us
saved in
Baptism’s holy
waters.
Amen.

March 12
Lamentations 1:12
Behold, and see
if there be any
sorrow like unto
His sorrow.

Here we have the personification of Jerusalem as she laments her afflictions. Her enemies have broken down her walls, burned her Temple and killed or taken captive her people. No one will help. No one can help, because the Lord brought this upon her for turning away from Him.

So why does Handel use the personification of Jerusalem to talk about Jesus? The answer is really kind of neat. Jesus is the true personification of Jerusalem. He is the true Holy City. He is the true Temple. He is Jerusalem, even all Israel, condensed into one person. His life is the life of Israel, from coming out of Egypt to being put to death for transgressions and even to being restored to life.

He is truly the one who has faced sorrows like no other, because He suffered afflictions He did not earn. He suffered the afflictions earned by Jerusalem, by Israel, by you and me. He vicariously lived and died for us. The perfect life we are called to live, He lived. The death we earned because of our failures, He died. No one else can claim such sorrow. His affliction is that of the world, from the first sinner to the last. No one who believes in Him will ever face it. We will not be separated from or rejected by our Father, because our Savior has faced that sorrow in our place. He returns from sorrow, affliction and death with life for Jerusalem, for Israel, for you and me.

We have many times of sorrow and types of sorrow in our lives. These times can draw us closer to our Lord because He too suffered. He is with us in our sorrows and lifts us out of them. He rose to new life and personifies that new life in you and me.

By Rev. Matthew Brackman

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we cry out to you in our sorrow through Your Son who has faced all affliction in our place. Grant us mercy and restore us for His sake. May His life be personified in us so that even sorrow draws us closer to you. Amen.

March 9
Psalm 22:1
My God, my
God, why have
you forsaken
me? Why are you
so far from saving
me, from the
words of my
groaning?

There is no way to meditate on Psalm 22:1, the verse cried out in anguish by Jesus from the cross, without reflecting on the wrath of God. All of us at one time or another have gotten angry over some perceived slight or injustice. But our anger is always tainted by our sin—it is never really a righteous anger, a godly wrath. But when God looks at the mess we have made of our lives, our relationships, and His gifts to us, at the mess we have made of His perfect creation, God isn't just sad or upset or angry. He is filled with wrath.

Yet God is also love. He wants to see sinful humans saved, not destroyed. He wants us to turn from our sin and live, not perish eternally under His wrath. How can a God of love reconcile His justified anger against us? How can God find a way to love us as He wants, and not kill us as He ought?

The answer happens at the cross, but not just in Jesus' dying or even in His shedding of blood. King Herod could have killed Jesus at age two, satisfying the requirement of a life for a life. Jesus' blood could have been shed by the people of Nazareth, who wanted to throw their hometown prophet off a cliff after His first sermon. No, blood and death were not the only things required to atone for our wrongdoing. Jesus had to absorb into Himself God's wrath, to drink down God's righteous anger against all the the world's injustice and cruelty and unfaithfulness. The wrath of God against every lie ever told, every lust, every act of theft, and murder—Jesus absorbed all of it. Under that weight He cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

And so Jesus, Son of Mary, Son of God, absorbs God's wrath against sin. Now God can love those whom by His own nature He was bound to hate. What else, then, can we cry but "My God, my God, what wondrous love is this?"

By Rev. Charles St Onge

Prayer

This is wondrous love, oh my soul, that the Lord of Bliss would bear the dreadful curse for my soul. Amen. (LSB 543)

March 10

Psalm 22:7-8

All they that see Him, laugh Him to scorn; they shoot out their lips, and shake their heads saying; He trusted in God that He would deliver Him, let Him deliver Him, if He delight in Him.

It is easy for non-believers to mock and ridicule our faith, and they will. Regarding this fact, Jesus both promised and warned those who would follow after Him. The more boldly we live our faith, the more outwardly we let Christ shine through us, the more the world will sneer at us. This will be most especially true when they see us facing hard or difficult times, when things seem to be going all wrong.

Cynical doubters will challenge, taunt, and tempt us. They will ask why our God was not there for us. Why didn't He protect us? They will accuse God of not caring for us, asking why He doesn't fix things. Why isn't He doing something? This was David's observation in the psalm. But he knew what we know. God did delight in Him, and He delights in us.

Jesus was challenged the same way, taunted by people when He was on the cross. His delight was not in saving Himself the sufferings of such persecution, but rather to save us from our sins. By His death and resurrection, we are promised life eternal. With this hope, the toils and troubles of this life lose meaning. Further, He promises that He will not allow us to bear more than we can handle as long as our faith and trust is in Him.

When someone thinks you foolish for your faith, smile at them with the knowledge that our Lord holds you in the palm of His hand unto life eternal. And pity them their cynicism which blinds them to the truth that will be revealed to all in His Second Coming.

By Rev. Richard Gizynski

Prayer

Lord, sometimes people think us silly and foolish for our faith. Help us to cling to you and to withstand the temptation to doubt. Thank you for your strength to bear up under all things. Use our confidence in you to break through the doubt and disbelief of others. Amen.

March 11

Psalm 69:20

Thy rebuke hath broken His heart; He is full of heaviness. He looked for some to have pity on Him, but there was no man, neither found He any to comfort Him.

Both King David, the writer of this Psalm, and Job felt the reproach or insults of their friends and their enemies. Job would say, "How long will you torment me and break me in pieces with words? These ten times you have cast reproach upon me; are you not ashamed to wrong me?"

Today the media is full of stories of people offended by Christianity. "Happy Holidays" has pushed aside "Merry Christmas" so as not to offend. The media is not ashamed to present Christians as mean-spirited, gun-toting, stingy radicals. Pastors are portrayed as hypocrites and the faithful are idiots. The charity of the church universal is ignored, as is the charity of individual Christians. We align ourselves with Job, unjustly accused.

In truth, we are not entirely above reproach. In our pride we lift ourselves above others and our pride condemns us. From fear we fail to profess our Lord before others. Out of neglect we are too busy to offer comfort to the broken-hearted. Our sin accuses us daily.

But Jesus was the one truly unjustly accused. As we look at this verse, we can clearly see our Lord. We see Him receiving the insults before the Sanhedrin and the soldiers and the incited mob. We see Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying and weeping and sweating blood. Finally, there will be no comfort as He carries all our sins and our reproach on that cross. The Father will turn His face from our Savior.

By His death, Jesus makes it possible for us to be presented as holy and blameless and above reproach. This declaration will stand for eternity. The media will pass away. The insults will cease. The mocking will end. The day will come when every knee will bow and every tongue confess, "Jesus Christ is Lord."

By Rev. Andy Guagenti

Prayer

But as for me, my prayer is to you, O LORD. At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love answer me in your saving faithfulness. Amen. (Psalm 69:13)