

Devotions – March 19-25, 2017
By Various NGLS Pastors and Lay People

Sunday, March 19, 2017
By Jon Babbitt, LLM
First Lutheran Church, Grand Marais, MI

The Compass

Text: Proverbs 3:5-6 (NRSV)

**Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.**

When I was a little boy, I followed my Grandpa everywhere when he walked in the woods. He had a little brass compass that he pinned on my coat. He loaned it to me every time we went on an adventure in the deep dark forest. I knew I could never be lost as long as I had my Grandpa's compass with me. Boy, was I wrong. You see, getting lost is never fun. It can be very scary to be making your way through the woods only to realize you're lost, that you no longer know where you are. For us hunters, being able to locate your exact position or be in the areas that the big bucks frequent is very important. At times it could even be a matter of life and death. For many, many years, hunters and fishermen have utilized a little pocket compass or one like my Grandpa gave me to orient themselves, but it was often less than ideal because it requires some interpretation and skill to figure out. It can be affected by other metal objects that may come too close. My Grandpa taught me that as long as I had my shiny brass marble compass and paid attention to the sun, the wind and which side of the trees had moss, I would never be lost.

Well, let me tell you, I crossed my own tracks more than once using that little compass but I found my way out sooner or later and it means the world to me, not so much for the navigational function, but because my Grandpa gave it to me.

There is a guidance system available to us believers. It may not necessarily help you find your truck from deep in the forest when you're lost, but it will guide you out of the spiritual darkness of a fallen world. Those of us that know Jesus Christ have been given an internal guidance system. He is known as the Holy Spirit, and his mission is to guide us into truth. It is a gift from God that will help guide you when you are lost, comfort you when you are lonely, inspire you when the going gets tough, convict you when your course is set for destruction, and direct you onto God's path for your life. This guidance system cannot be purchased at any price. God gives it freely to those who give their hearts to his Son. Trust me... believe and trust in him and you'll always find your truck.

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, we thank you for your guidance in life. Help us to follow the path you have set before us, and the peace in our hearts only you can give. May you be the direction we follow on our life's journey home. In your most precious name we pray, Amen.*



Monday, March 20, 2017
By Brian Price
Trinity Lutheran Church, Ishpeming

Healed by his Wounds

Text: Isaiah 53:5

But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.

Isaiah 53:5 is a reminder of God's sacrifice to all the world. Written in the Old Testament, it speaks initially to the indiscretion of humankind; we are tempted, we have sinned. The verse foreshadows God's greatest sacrifice, when he gave his only Son to die for us, to save humankind. He laid all of our transgressions on Jesus and through him, through his suffering, we all are saved.

To me, Isaiah 53:5 reminds me that though I may wander astray and become lost, I know that my shepherd is there to lead me home. Through his pain, I am healed. We are to look to God to find help, discipline and peace. We can make mistakes, we can live an imperfect life, and we can do so because through his wounds, we are healed. Yet we can only find true healing through repentance and asking forgiveness from our LORD and Savior. When we do this, we know that we are forgiven and that we have been brought home by our shepherd.

Let us pray: *Dear LORD, heavenly Father, we thank you for your sacrifices, your patience and your forgiveness. We know we are blessed to have you to lead us and save us from ungodly lives. Our Shepherd's wounds brought us peace and he brings us home to dwell in the house of the LORD forever. Amen.*



Tuesday, March 21, 2017
By Pastor Micheal Laakko
Bethany Lutheran, Amasa & United Lutheran, Crystal Falls

Thirsty on the Cross

Text: John 19:28b
"....I am thirsty."

Jesus' final act on earth was intended to win our trust. This is the final plea of a thirsty man. And through his thirst, through a sponge and a jar of cheap wine, he leaves a final appeal. "You can trust me."

Jesus, lips cracked and mouth of cotton. Throat so dry he couldn't swallow, and voice so hoarse he could scarcely speak. He is thirsty. To find the last time moisture touched his lips you need to rewind a dozen hours to the meal in the upper room. Since tasting that cup of wine, Jesus has

been beaten, spat upon, bruised, and cut. He has been a cross-carrier and sin-bearer, and no liquid has soothed his throat. He is thirsty. So why did Jesus endure all of these feelings? Because he knew that we would feel them too. He knew you would be weary, disturbed, and angry. He knew you'd be sleepy, grief-stricken, and hungry. He knew you'd face pain. If not the pain of the body, the pain of the soul...pain too sharp for any drug. He knew you'd face thirst. If not a thirst for water, at least a thirst for truth, and the truth we glean from the image of a thirsty Christ who understands us. And because he understands, we can come to him. "But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." – John 4:14

Let us pray: *Dear Lord as we journey to the cross, help us to draw from you each day the water of life. Amen*



Wednesday, March 22, 2017
By Pastor Kenneth Lahners
Trinity Lutheran Church, Ishpeming, MI

Our Sinful Lord

Text: Galatians 3:13

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.”

Are you comfortable with the fact that as a Christian you follow a condemned and cursed man? And a man condemned and cursed, not just by unjust leaders, but by God himself? Paul quotes from Deuteronomy and (while he doesn't include the specific words that anyone hanged on a tree is cursed "by God") this is *God's* law that curses and condemns the wrongdoer.

Are you comfortable with the fact that this Lord you follow is full of sin, burdened down by it, until it overflowed out of every pore of his body? It is because Jesus was a sinful man that he was on the cross. That is why he died; to receive the penalty and curse of God's law for wrongdoing. The world has never known one as sinful as Jesus.

Yet it was not his own sin that led to his crucifixion, to his being cursed by God. It was our sin, yours and mine and the whole world's. He bore *our* sins and received the curse for it. And in exchange he has given us his righteousness and God's blessing. On the cross, that hideous instrument of execution, we see the depths of God's love for us. For there Jesus truly redeemed us from sin and death, from the curse of God's law, from all that keeps us from God.

Let us Pray: *Heavenly Father, thank you for the redemption won for us at such great cost by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Help us to walk in faith, knowing that through him the curse of the law has been lifted and we stand before you in assurance of your love and forgiveness. Amen*



Thursday, March 23, 2017
By Pastor Chris Johnson
Christ the King Lutheran, Escanaba, MI

Text: Jude, verses 5-7

“Now I desire to remind you, though you are fully informed, that the Lord, who once for all saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterwards destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great day. Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.”

The body of Jude’s letter is a scathing rebuke against the hypocrisy of some false teachers. Jude quotes biblical and extra-biblical sources to prove his point: Those who thought they were saved and safe from God’s righteous judgment, in actuality, are not. These self-righteous “saints” are false teachers who do more harm to the church than anything else. They cause divisions. They create a cultish following within the ranks of the faithful. They may preach an entertaining sermon, but that’s about it. Their words have no substance, nothing of value. The church is “their” church, not God’s. This is why the flock must know their faith – what they believe and why they believe it. The flock must know the Scriptures, must know what the Bible teaches, so that if someone comes along and teaches anything in contradiction to the Word, they can call out those leaders.

I’m reminded of Bo Giertz’s masterpiece of historical fiction: *The Hammer of God*. In one of the stories of the book, a newly ordained pastor is placed into his first church. There’s a problem with this pastor though: He’s not quite sure he believes what he is preaching. His faith was challenged in seminary due to a heavy rationalism influence. One day, this pastor is essentially “born-again,” reawakened from his spiritual stupor. How did that happen? A young girl at the bedside of a dying man preached the gospel better than this pastor could. She knew her Bible and loved Jesus. The pastor knew theology (or what was called “theology” in the seminary he attended), but couldn’t proclaim the Gospel. The “conversion” of this Pastor ushered the church into a spiritual revival. And it all happened because one of the flock knew what she believed and why. A false teacher repented and starting doing what he was supposed to all along: Preach the Word of God, preach the Law and the Gospel to the flock he was called to shepherd.

Let us pray: Gracious God, you know the struggles all people have with faith – pastors, parishioners, young, old, and everyone in-between. Lord, you also know that Your holy people can be easily led astray. Grant to our pastors and church leaders purity of doctrine, a zealous love for You, and a servant’s heart that glorifies You alone. Grant also to all our parishioners an unquenchable desire to know You and know Your Word. With a re-ignited love for You and Your Word, grant that our churches and communities would be revived and set on fire by the Holy Spirit. Amen.



Friday, March 24, 2017
By Pastor John Autio
Mission United Lutheran, Pelkie

Text: John 11:1-45

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’ Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, ‘Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?’ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, ‘Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.’ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go.’ (John 11:38-44)

This is a very long and rich passage and much of course can be said about it. But for this reflection we will look at only the call of Jesus to Lazarus to come out of the tomb and the following command to “unbind him.” Jesus calls Lazarus to come out of the tomb out of death. This scene looks ahead to the resurrection of Jesus while at the same time setting the stage for his death. This is the reason used by the authorities to condemn Jesus to death.

On the theological level John is declaring Jesus to be the source of life. Who can give life? Only God can give life. Jesus gives life so then who is he? Jesus declares that whoever believes in him even though they die, will live and that those who believe also will never die. In Lazarus we see perhaps both of these promises brought to fruition. Lazarus is brought back to life. But we do understand that he will die again, as all flesh must do. What do we understand then about eternal life if this is the case? The raising of Lazarus shows us an important aspect of eternal life, that is it is not limited to the future, it is ours in the here and now. Yes we will die and be resurrected to eternal life but we will also be unbound to life now. A way of understanding the “unbind” command is this: What prevents us from living in love toward one another? What keeps us from living according to God’s commands? Short answer: sin. Who forgives sin? Jesus. What is freedom from sin? The ability to live according to God’s will, in love toward God and one another. We see this unbinding begun in Baptism. We announce forgiveness to the sinner at the font and then spend the rest of our time unbinding them from sin by nurturing them in the faith and Christian life. And at our deaths we are bidden to come out of our resting places and enter into life in the presence of God.



Saturday, March 25, 2017
By Rick Pink
Zion Lutheran Church, Manistique, MI

Text: Matthew 11: 2-6 (NIV)

When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.”

The Lord came to this earth to save us all from our sins. All he asks of us is that we believe in him with our whole heart and follow in his example as best we can. In our human frailty it seems impossible to love each other in the depth, strength and profound faith that God has commanded us to. Just as Jesus reminds John, if our faith is strong and we believe in the depth of our heart, all things are possible through our Lord.

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, help us to remember that you love each one of us deeply. Help us to remember that you are always with us, in both our good times and our bad times. Strengthen us to hold tightly onto our faith and we will certainly weather any storm with your help and guidance. In Jesus name, Amen.*

