

February 25 – March 3, 2018

By Virginia Paulson
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Sunday, February 25, 2018

Text: John 15:13

“No one has greater love than this to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

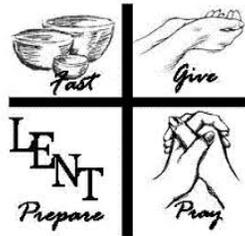
There is a story of an African American woman in the pre-civil rights times in the south. She was a servant of a woman who died. Another woman from the area expressed her sympathy. “I’m sorry to hear of Lucy’s death, you must miss her greatly, you were such good friends.”

“Yes Ma’am, that is so. We laughed together and we talked, but you see we haven’t never shed any tears and folks got to cry together before they is friends.”

Jesus, our friend, our God, has cried with us and for us. He wept over Jerusalem, he wept at the tomb of Lazarus, for Mary and Martha and for all who gathered with Him. And He weeps for us and with us when we are hurt and when we are lost and afraid.

He knows us and loves us. He became one of us to be our companion and our support. He came to build a relationship with us. That’s what makes the gospel such good news.

Let us pray: *Loving God, we give you thanks for choosing us to be your friends. Amen*



Monday, February 26, 2018

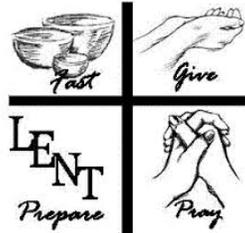
The cross was a scandal to most of the ancient world. But what about us? What does the cross mean to people in this world? We have seen crosses burned, we have seen them taken out of public buildings. We have noticed them on the roadsides as a memorial to someone who has lost their life in that spot. Or is it a piece of jewelry that has a special meaning?

When we look at the cross of Calvary we see pain, suffering and death, but if we look beyond that to the resurrection we see a symbol of life.

*“Upon the cross of Jesus, my eye at times can see
the very dying form of one who suffered there for me.
And from my contrite heart, with tears, two wonders I confess:
the wonders of redeeming love and my unworthiness.” (ELW #338)*

That is what the cross should remind us of, the suffering Christ endured for us and how unworthy we are. May that vision of Christ on the cross remind us that Christ paid for our sins, not with silver and gold, but with his precious blood.

Let us pray: *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son to die for us and whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. Amen*



Tuesday, February 27, 2018

Text: Matthew 26:26-28 (paraphrased)

Take and eat, this is my body broken for you, this cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for you.

I love bread. A cup of coffee and a slice of good bread and of course butter is a treat. A vendor at the Farmer's Market sells a variety of bread – white, cracked wheat, and one she calls “healthy bread”. A gentleman shopper ahead of me asked her, “What makes your bread healthy?”

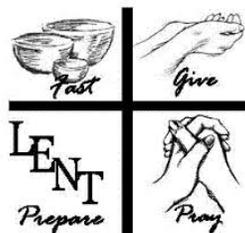
She said, “I use spelt flour, flax seed and canola oil.”

When Jesus identified himself as the bread of life it has taken on a greater significance. It is the word that goes into it accompanied by our faith. It is the word that makes it healthy bread. Our Lutheran tradition is very clear in the teaching that when we eat this bread we experience the presence of Christ.

Jesus invites his disciples to come and eat, to share in His life and tell them of what is to come. He spoke of His death but reminded them that He would always be with them.

For all these years the church has been re-enacting the Lord's Supper as a symbol of Christ giving his life for the world, so that we can hear Jesus' promise that He is the bread of life.

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, we are dependent on the word and sacrament. We have been given the gift of salvation through the body and blood of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen*



Wednesday, February 28, 2018

Text: Matthew 14:28-32

“Lord, save me!” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” (vs. 31)

God does not always calm the storm, but he calms the child in the middle of the storm. He knows where we are emotionally and mentally. He understands our need to ask why. Why me? Why now?

He gives us what we need to meet the demands of what is happening at the moment, not for what might happen tomorrow because that is another day’s grace.

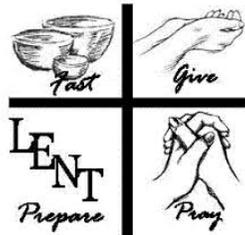
“Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, Morning by morning new mercies I see”
(from the hymn “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”).

Never do we feel the hand of God more closely upon us than when we remember the past. We see how many times we have suffered and gave little thought to it while it was happening. We see often God was with us even when we didn’t realize it.

Even if there were no books or sermons, the trials that we have gone through in our lives would show us the goodness of God’s mercy far beyond our imagination.

God promises us that he will provide the strength and power that we need, not for our own glory, but that we have experienced the glory of Christ.

In the words of Paul: *We know that all things work together for good, for those who love God. Amen.*



Thursday, March 1, 2018

Text: Mark 2:13-22

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have come to call not the righteous but sinners. (vs. 17)

Often in life we have to walk with uncertain steps, not knowing where we are going. We walk with a heaviness in our heart, down dark paths, unsure of what is around the corner. That is the situation that I found myself in when I got the call that my son was in an accident, and that he was paralyzed and would never walk again.

He came to live with me and I was overwhelmed with the nursing care he needed. Nursing is not a skill of mine and it was not something I wanted to do. Why would God put me in this situation?

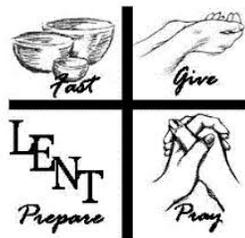
On one of my son's bad days, he said, "Why didn't God just let me die?"

Someone who is physically crippled can be strong enough to care for themselves, but those who are spiritually crippled become paralyzed by their problems instead of asking God for help in their difficulties.

We were both complaining about the condition we were in. Why do we lash out at God when we are angry? Both of us were spiritually paralyzed.

This scripture teaches us that our greatest need is not physical healing, but forgiveness for our sin.

Let us pray: *Dear God, when we acknowledge our weakness, your power is magnified. Amen.*



Friday, March 2, 2018

Text: Book of Jonah

Salvation is a pure gift of grace and Jonah's story reminds us that we do not own that grace. It is not up to us to determine who receives it. If we don't believe that God can save others, what makes us think that we can be saved?

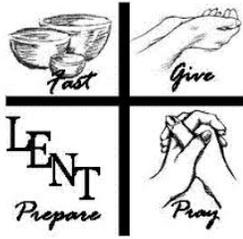
We don't cast our fishing net of God's love as wide and as deep as He does. He takes in whatever fish come into that net. Those who commit crimes, those who abuse others, those who suffer from addiction.

That's why we have to remember how Jesus began his ministry. The words he said were, "The time has come, the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news." God is justice and mercy for all people.

There are times that we should speak on behalf of God, but we, like Jonah, are fighting our own struggles and we remain silent.

We learn from Jonah that God is a God of surprises. We will not receive what we deserve, but we will enjoy the grace and mercy of God.

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, we give thanks that you are a God of second chances. Amen.*



Saturday, March 3, 2018

Text: Ephesians 2:11-22

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God (vs. 19).

The temple at Jerusalem had walls separating male and female, Jews and Gentiles. Trespassers could receive punishment. But Jesus tears down such dividing walls of racism, social class and culture. In the reign of God, aliens do not exist.

Paul is telling the Gentiles, remember when there was a wall separating you from God? Remember you were not circumcised, you were considered heathens, you were foreigners, you clearly were not people of God.

What does God's word have to say to us about the walls we have set up? Sometimes those people aren't from a different country. They just come from a different part of town, or they attend a different church or no church at all. Maybe there are walls between the young and the old. The ones with grey hair and the ones with piercings, tattoos and hair coloring.

Maybe they are on welfare, they are too liberal, too conservative. Maybe they want to preserve every tree in the forest and save the wetlands. Or they might be loggers or a mining company wanting to build roads.

Maybe they have different sexual orientations. These walls take on many forms. That's why we have so many religious denominations and so many protest groups.

Christ came to preach to the insiders and the outsiders. He treated us as equals. His church is a place where we can all come and share and be together, because we are all one in Christ.

Let us pray: *Gracious God, help us to tear down the walls that divide us. Amen.*

