

**United Proclamation of the Gospel  
&  
St. John's Windish Lutheran Church  
Scripture and Prayers during Coronavirus Pandemic**

**Readings, Reflections, Prayers shared by Luther Seminary  
Awesome Mystery  
Lenten Devotional 2021**

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**Monday March 15, 2021**

**Jeremiah 31:31–34**

<sup>31</sup> The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. <sup>32</sup> It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. <sup>33</sup> But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup> No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

**Reflection:**

God makes four covenants in the Old Testament with human beings: with Noah (Genesis 9); with Abraham (Genesis 12, 15, 17); with Israel at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19–20); and with David (2 Samuel 7). But here in Jeremiah 31, God speaks of making a “new covenant” with Israel—but not the older covenants such as at Mt. Sinai, which the Israelites broke. This new covenant will be written on hearts instead of on stone tablets. Stone tablets gather dust and moss. Hearts are living organs, and what is written on the heart gives life to the whole body. And this time God will do it all—“I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.”

We Christians believe that this new covenant—the new relationship established by God with all of humanity—is sealed at a Passover supper we will remember and celebrate in a few short weeks: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:25).

**Prayer:**

Gracious God, the new covenant in Jesus' blood frees us from bondage to sin and death. Write your name on our hearts, so that we may know you and love you more and more as we walk in the way of the cross. Amen.

**Additional prayers:**      Calm to children who are fearful from all they hear and see around them  
   Patience in times of school closures  
   Guidance for school administrators as they make decisions

**Tuesday March 16, 2021**

**Psalm 51:1–17**

<sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

<sup>2</sup> Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

<sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

<sup>4</sup> Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.

<sup>6</sup> You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

<sup>7</sup> Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

<sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

<sup>9</sup> Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

<sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

<sup>11</sup> Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.

<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

<sup>13</sup> Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

<sup>14</sup> Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

<sup>15</sup> O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

<sup>16</sup> For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.

<sup>17</sup> The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise..

**Reflection:**

This psalm is traditionally attributed to David, when the prophet Nathan confronts his sinful behavior (2 Samuel 12). “Have mercy on me, O God!” cries David, “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.”

Such a prayer is countercultural in today’s world. We rarely hear a public figure confess sin and ask for forgiveness. Instead, non-apologies go something like this: “Mistakes were made.” “I

should have known better.” As if sin is simply a temporary lapse in judgment, a quirk to be passed over quickly.

David knows better. Unconfessed sin is heavy, too heavy to bear. So David makes no excuses for his behavior, but relies on God’s abundant mercy to take his broken heart (verse 17) and create a new heart within him (verse 10).

In this, at least, David is a model for us. During this Lenten season, may we be quick to confess the sin that weighs us down so that we might walk in the way of the cross with unburdened hearts..

**Prayer:**

Create in us clean hearts, O God. Give us grace to confess our sins to you and to one another, so that we may again rejoice in your salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Some Additional prayers during this time:**

Workers who are anxious about the safety of their workplaces  
Uncertainty in how work will be accomplished in the days ahead  
Calm and guidance amid financial uncertainties

**Wednesday March 17, 2021**

**Hebrews 5:5–10**

<sup>5</sup>So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; <sup>6</sup> as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." <sup>7</sup> In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. <sup>8</sup> Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; <sup>9</sup> and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, <sup>10</sup> having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

**Reflection:**

Driving home from a doctor’s appointment, my 12-year-old daughter Sarah was understandably disgruntled with the news that she might require yet one more surgery.

“Why is this happening to me?” she said from the back seat.

“I don’t know, sweetie; I wish I did, but that’s a good thing to pray about,” I replied.

“Well, it’s an argument prayer,” she said.

“Yes, it’s an argument prayer,” I answered, “And that’s an important kind of prayer. The Bible is full of argument prayers.”

The author of Hebrews writes that Jesus “offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death.” As a good Jew,

Jesus was not afraid to wrestle with and question God (in the book of Psalms you'll find plenty of "argument prayers").

Following the example of the psalmists, then, and of Jesus himself, we should be bold to approach God honestly with all of our questions—our fear, our anger, and our "argument prayers," knowing that God will hear us.

**Prayer:**

Jesus, our high priest, often the world around us is not what it should be, and we don't understand what you are doing about it. Teach us to pray with honesty and boldness, trusting that you hear us and will answer us. Amen.

**Some additional prayers during this time:**

Government institutions and municipal agencies:  
Prayers for Times of Public Health Concern: COVID-19/Coronavirus  
Guidance when making decisions for our communities

**Thursday March 18, 2021**

**John 12:20-33**

<sup>20</sup> Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup> They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." <sup>22</sup> Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup> Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. <sup>27</sup> "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—"Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." <sup>29</sup> The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." <sup>30</sup> Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. <sup>31</sup> Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup> And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." <sup>33</sup> He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

**Reflection:**

A week into the COVID-19 shutdown last year, my family planted some tomato seeds inside for our garden. The seeds were some that "Doc" Runge, an old friend, gave me many years ago, descended from originals received from a German immigrant after World War II—"German tomatoes" he called them.

I had little hope that those now 15-year-old seeds would germinate, but miraculously almost all of them did. Those "German tomato" plants produced abundantly from July until October— long after the nursery-bought ones had died—so many that we gave away the extra. And, yes, we saved some seeds.

Jesus says that unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone, “but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Those old tomato seeds, useless until we put them in soil, once broken open, produced abundantly.

In this Lenten season, perhaps we should ask, “What in us (pride, grudges, envy, hate) needs to die and be broken open so that God can bring forth abundant life for the sake of the world?”.

**Prayer:**

Jesus, it is hard to follow your call sometimes, especially when it means letting go of things that we have held onto for too long. Give us grace to die to ourselves daily so that we might live for you and for your coming kingdom. Amen..

**Some additional prayers during this time:**

Hospitals, nursing homes, other health care facilities  
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

**Friday March 19, 2021**

**John 12:20-33**

<sup>20</sup> Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup> They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." <sup>22</sup> Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup> Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. <sup>27</sup> "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—"Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." <sup>29</sup> The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." <sup>30</sup> Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. <sup>31</sup> Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup> And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." <sup>33</sup> He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

**Reflection:**

“Now is the judgment of this world,” says Jesus, “now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

The judgment of God may sound frightening, but it holds the good news that all that works against God will be driven out. Jesus’ talk of being “lifted up from the earth” echoes his earlier assertion (John 3:14) that the Son of Man must be lifted up like Moses lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness, so that the snake-bitten Israelites could look at it and be healed (Numbers 21).

We are not bitten by snakes (hopefully), but we are sin-bitten, death-bitten, grief-bitten. In the strange economy of God, healing now comes not through a bronze serpent on a pole, but a man nailed to a cross, pouring out his life in love for the world. May we, like the Greeks at the beginning of this gospel reading, seek to know this Jesus.

**Prayer:**

When we are frightened, O God, when our hearts are heavy, raise our eyes to see the healing that you have accomplished through Jesus' death and resurrection. Vanquish the ruler of this world and draw all people to yourself. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

**Some additional prayers during this time:**

Houses of worship and their ministries at this time  
For all who travel  
For all who grieve the loss of loved ones

**Saturday March 20, 2021****"Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery" (ELW 334, Verses 5)**

5. In our call to be a blessing,  
may we be a blessing true;  
may we live and die confessing  
Christ as Lord of all we do.

**Reflection:**

"In our call to be a blessing," says the hymn. "May we be a blessing true." The lyrics recall the story of Abraham, when he is called to leave his homeland to travel to a new land, sight unseen. There, God promises him, he will become the father of a great nation, he will inherit the land, and he will be blessed.

The hashtag "#Blessed," used on social media, too often signifies material prosperity or so-called "humble bragging." But Abraham and his descendants are blessed not for their own sake, but in order to be a blessing to the whole world. "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed," says God to Abraham (Genesis 12:3).

We the church, along with our Jewish brothers and sisters, take Abraham's story as our own. We are also blessed, but not for our own sake, and certainly not to draw attention to ourselves. We are blessed in order to be a blessing. May God give us grace, then, to be a conduit of God's blessing to the world around us.

**Prayer:**

God of Abraham and Sarah, we thank you for all the blessings you have given us. Help us to be blessings to those around us, friend and stranger, in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

**Some additional prayers**

The World Health Organization  
Medical researchers and scientists  
All the animals that are used in medical research to benefit our lives

**Sunday March 21, 2020**

## **“Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery” (ELW 334, Verses 5)**

5. In our call to be a blessing,  
may we be a blessing true;  
may we live and die confessing  
Christ as Lord of all we do.

### **Reflection:**

More than 40 years ago, Gudina Tumsa, the leader of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (a graduate of Luther Seminary), was faced with a choice. At risk of being killed as a prominent critic of the brutal Marxist regime in Ethiopia at the time, the leader of the Lutheran World Federation arranged for him to escape to Tanzania. But Gudina refused: "Here is my church. How can I, as a church leader, leave my flock at this moment of trial?" He then quoted 2 Corinthians 5:15: "Christ died for all, so that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." One month later, Gudina Tumsa was abducted, killed, and buried in an unmarked grave.

Now, it is unlikely that many of us will ever be faced with such a choice. Nevertheless, we are called to follow Jesus in the way of the cross; and we do so, trusting that, "Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:8). Or, as our song says, "May we live and die confessing / Christ as Lord of all we do."

### **Prayer**

God, we thank you for the witness of the saints, including Gudina Tumsa. Grant us grace to live as your servants, knowing that whatever befalls us, in life and in death, we are yours. Amen.