

**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**

This week's writer: Mark Tranvik '92 Th.D.
Professor of Reformation History and Theology

Monday March 22, 2021

Psalm 118:1-2; 19-29

¹ O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!

² Let Israel say,
"His steadfast love endures forever."

¹⁹ Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

²⁰ This is the gate of the Lord;
the righteous shall enter through it.

²¹ I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.

²² The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.

²³ This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴ This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

²⁵ Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!
O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

²⁶ Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
We bless you from the house of the Lord.

²⁷ The Lord is God, and he has given us light.
Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.

²⁸ You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God, I will extol you.

²⁹ O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

Reflection:

It is remarkably easy to get trapped by the shadows of the past and the future. With regard to the past, we have anger about something that was done to us or we have guilt over something we did to someone else. With regard to the future, we tend to let our fears dominate our horizons. We get stuck in a "what if" way of thinking where we imagine dark scenarios about our health, our loved ones, or our nation.

Verse 24 reminds us of the importance of the present time: "This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." Christ is alive and in our midst, reminding us that anger, guilt, or worry does not define us. Moreover, he declares to us that we are his beloved children—right now— and therefore freed from the captivity of the past or future.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we rejoice in this day. May your Word of forgiveness and love shape our hearts and minds as we move and breathe and live. 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
 Parents as they contemplate how to safely educate children

Tuesday March 23, 2021

Mark 11:1–11

¹ When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ² and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. ³ If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately." "

⁴ They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵ some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" ⁶ They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it.

⁷ Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

¹¹ Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Reflection:

"Those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!' (Mark 11:9). Notice how this verse describes the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It says that some are ahead of him while others are following behind. In other words, Jesus is in the midst of them.

I find it easy to forget that Jesus is not only behind or ahead of us. He is not simply a figure from 2,000 years ago or a savior who will meet us in the moment of death and bring us to new life. Our verse reminds us that Jesus is here now in our midst. He comes to us today with a Word of forgiveness and freedom. He meets us whenever and wherever we meet a neighbor—in our homes, workplaces, schools, and community.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your presence in our

midst. May we and those we meet be enclosed in your gracious Word of love. 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 24, 2021

Isaiah 50:4–9a

⁴ The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher,
that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.
Morning by morning he wakens—

wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.

⁵ The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious,
I did not turn backward.

⁶ I gave my back to those who struck me,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.

⁷ The Lord God helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;

⁸ he who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together.
Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me.

⁹ It is the Lord God who helps me;
who will declare me guilty?

Reflection:

I am a teacher and it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that my job is to tell people things they do not know. But I find my best days in the classroom are the ones where I not only teach but when I am being taught. This happens when students wrestle with an idea and this sparks new insights for the entire class, including me. Those are the times when real learning is taking place.

In our reading from Isaiah, the prophet speaks in verse 4 of God's servants as ones who "listen as those who are taught." In other words, these words underline that we don't have all the answers— sometimes we simply need to be good listeners to be taught. That is good advice for hearing the Word of God in the Bible. And it also applies to our relationships and the importance of real listening rather than constantly doling out our opinions and supposed good advice.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, during this season of Lent we are humbled by the love you show to us, the unlovable. Open our hearts that we may genuinely listen to you and your Word of life. 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 25, 2021

Psalm 31:9–16

⁹ Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress;
my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.
¹⁰ For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away.
¹¹ I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors,
an object of dread to my acquaintances;
those who see me in the street flee from me.
¹² I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;
I have become like a broken vessel.
¹³ For I hear the whispering of many— terror all around!—
as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.
¹⁴ But I trust in you, O Lord;
I say, "You are my God."
¹⁵ My times are in your hand;
deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.
¹⁶ Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your steadfast love..

Reflection:

We all struggle with loneliness. This has been evident during the pandemic, especially for many of our senior citizens. They often go days without meaningful human contact. The sense of isolation grows and they begin to feel life is without meaning or purpose. It has been heartening to see the way many families and congregations have found ways to reach out to those who are alone with meals, "safe" visits, and words of comfort.

Our reading from Psalm 31 foreshadows the loneliness of Jesus on the cross. He is scorned and rejected. The disciples abandon him. The religious and civil authorities condemn him. The soldiers taunt and torture him. Let's not forget that we are there, too. We cast him aside and leave him utterly alone. Our sin ultimately kills him. But loneliness and death do not get the final word. God's steadfast love does. Jesus is raised from the dead. In God's crazy logic, the empty tomb is not a lonely place but a scene of triumph.

Prayer:

Merciful Lord, you know how we struggle with loneliness. Fill us with the power of the crucified and risen Christ that we might comfort others who feel forgotten and alone. Amen.

Some additional prayers during this time:

Hospitals, nursing homes, other health care facilities

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Friday March 26, 2021

Philippians 2:5–11

⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Reflection:

Martin Luther loved to compare our relationship with Christ to a marriage. He suggested that we picture Jesus as the bridegroom who falls in love with an unfaithful bride (us!). We know that when two people get married they share debts and assets as well as sorrows and joys.

So picture the scene of this absurd wedding: Christ takes us, a most unlovely and implausible spouse, and in the marriage of faith shares with us his love, forgiveness, and complete acceptance. He actually gives us these gifts! And we in turn give to him our fear, resentments, and guilt. All that we give him sends him to the cross, where he dies our death. Luther called this the "happy exchange." Others have labeled it the "sweet swap." We almost lack the right words to describe this deep and wondrous and costly love that holds this couple together. Perhaps it is better to just take a knee and bow, as Paul suggests in verse 10 of our text.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you have taken us, the loveless ones, to be your very own. May that love create in us minds and hearts to serve you and your world. 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 27, 2021

“Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery” (ELW 334, Verses 6)

6. Living Water of salvation,
be the fountain of each soul;
springing up in new creation,
flow in us and make us whole.

Reflection:

As I write this devotional, I am in Minnesota, and winter is fast approaching. But today the sun shone brightly and the temperatures stretched into the 50s. A neighbor of mine told me it would

be a good idea to water the evergreens that line my backyard. I thought this was strange advice, but she said the trees would draw on that soaking throughout our long winter.

In a similar way our watery baptism sustains us throughout life. Each day we are reminded by the Holy Spirit of our baptismal dying and rising. Christ's love sustains us as we move about our daily callings in our families, workplaces, and communities. It is a stream that runs deep with clear and cool water, "flowing in us and making us whole," as our hymn says so well.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you have forgiven us and adopted us into your family in our baptism. May this living water sustain us as we walk with you on your way to the cross. 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 28, 2020

“Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery” (ELW 334, Verses 7)

7. Give us eyes to see you clearly;
make us children of your light.
Give us hearts to live more clearly
as your gospel shining bright.

Reflection:

The great reformer John Calvin said we can have a hazy understanding of God if we only look at the world around us. The beauty of a sunset or the sight of snow-capped mountains at least suggest that God exists. But there is a lot that goes wrong in the world as well. There is cancer and hurricanes and wildfires. So Calvin maintains our vision of God based on the created world alone is blurry and out of focus.

However, says Calvin, our vision becomes clear when we read and listen to the scriptures. He likened it to an old man with failing eyesight who puts on spectacles for the first time. Now he is truly able to see! It is the same with us. When we open our Bibles and move to its center—the story of Jesus crucified and risen—we see that God not only exists but that our Creator is also good and can be trusted. The Holy Spirit blesses us with eyes to see God clearly—a Redeemer whose love extends even to the unlovable—us!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, it is easy to be confused and depressed by things that go wrong in our lives and in the world around us. As we walk toward the cross with you, keep our eyes on you and your love for us and our world. Amen.