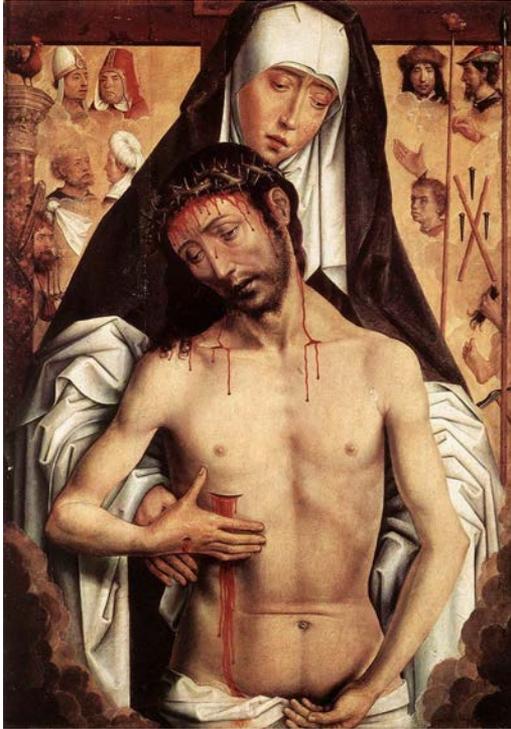


2017 Lenten Devotional:

Christ's Redemption Throughout the Old Testament



“Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He revealed to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” ~ Luke 24:27

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Lenten Devotional

The babe whose arrival we eagerly anticipated throughout the Advent season is now on his long march to Jerusalem, and to the cross. During the penitential season of Lent we meditate upon this, our Savior and the atonement for our sins He won by His suffering and death. As His birth fulfilled many prophecies, so too does His death. This devotional focuses on some of the many instances of foreshadowing within the Old Testament that point to Christ's nature as the Lamb of God who comes to take away the sins of the world. As we meditate upon His holy Passion, let us see with continued awe what those disciples on the road to Emmaus were blessed to see: that the Passion of our Lord sits upon a throne at the center of Scriptures, and that all of Scripture bows before Him and points us to Him as well. May the blessings of God purchased by our Man of Sorrows be yours now, and for eternity.

O Jesus, only Son of the Father, splendor and figure of the Father's glory, call to mind the humble commendation of your soul as with body torn, heart broken, and bowels of mercy opened to redeem us, you gave up your spirit. In memory of your precious death, O my Savior, comfort me and help me resist the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil that, being dead to the world, I may live to you in the world and, at the hour of death, be welcomed as a pilgrim returning home. Amen (Prayer on the Passion by St. Brigid of Sweden)

The collects for each day are drawn from *Lutheran Service Book, Liturgy and Agenda*, and other LCMS resources. For this reason, many will be familiar to you and many may be unfamiliar. By drawing from our deep well of resources, we hope to match the prayers to the texts as closely as possible. It is also our prayer that this exposure to material both familiar and unfamiliar may increase your appreciation for the vast treasures of the Church.

Cover art: *The Virgin Showing the Man of Sorrows*, Hans Memling, 1475

March 1

Isaiah 58:1-12

As Lent begins, you may find yourself receiving a cross-shaped smudge of ashes upon your forehead as a sign of repentance and mourning. A sign to whom? To God? This is what the people of our text thought. “Surely if we are devout, our God will save us,” they supposed. But God wouldn’t have it. Rituals don’t merit His favor, and God will not be manipulated by them. He knows the heart. Perhaps, then, the ashes are there for others to see and consider what they mean. But what good do ashes on your forehead do for your neighbor in need? Can those ashes clothe him or speak a kind word? What good is it to follow God outwardly while denying love to your neighbor? Unless your heart is repentant, those ashes are false piety simply proclaiming to the world, “Look how humble and repentant I am.” So contemplate the reason for the ashes. They are put on your forehead to remind you that you have neglected the righteousness and compassion your God demands, and your sin has earned you death. This Lent, rather than focus on and point to your piety, consider what Christ has done for you, the atonement He made to reconcile you to the Father and to your neighbor. Jesus didn’t simply obey the Father’s will by His outward actions. His heart, full of love—love for you—led Him who knew no sin to take the punishment for all your sin upon Himself. He counted it joy to suffer for you, and He gives you His righteousness.

Aaron Yaeger, Sem IV

Hymn: *O Dearest Jesus, What Law Hast Thou Broken* (LSB 439:6)

There was no spot in me by sin untainted;
Sick with sin’s poison, all my heart had fainted;
My heavy guilt to hell had well-nigh brought me,
Such woe it wrought me.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, You despise nothing You have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and contrite hearts that lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness we may receive from You full pardon and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Ash Wednesday)

March 2

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Moses says to the people: "Here's life. There's death. Choose life". Love the Lord, walk in his ways, keep his commandments, and the milk and honey will keep on flowing. The choice seems obvious enough, right? Remember though, what a long walk on an empty stomach did to the people of Israel. "Would that we had died in Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full," said the people to Moses. All it took was a little hunger for Israel to choose the bread of death in Egypt over the bread of life given from God.

You see, the choice between life and death is not so easy after all. The way of life is a hard road to walk. There's hunger and thirst and suffering and temptations of body and soul all along the way. Many times the temptations are so great that death seems to be the only choice we have. That's why the Lenten season begins with a reminder that Jesus was brought into the wilderness to make the choice which we cannot make. In the wilderness Jesus was hungry, tired, suffering, tempted, and faced with a choice of life or death. Jesus rejected Satan's offers of death and instead he chose life. Jesus chose life in the desert so that He could give His life on the cross and destroy death for you forever. The death of Jesus feeds the hungry, delivers the tempted, and strengthens the suffering to continue on loving the Lord, walking in His ways, and keeping His commands. Because Jesus has died for you, death is no longer even an option. In Jesus the choice *is* obvious. Jesus has chosen life for you.

Thomas Cowell, Sem IV

Hymn: *O Lord throughout These Forty Days* (LSB 418:3)

Though parched and hungry, yet You prayed
And fixed your mind above;
So teach us to deny ourselves,
Since we have known God's love.

Prayer: Merciful Lord, we beseech You to cast the bright beams of Your light upon Your Church, that, being instructed by the doctrine of the blessed Apostles, it may so walk in the light of Your truth that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Collect 11)

March 3

Psalm 51:1-10

Psalm 51 is recognizable as the text used in the offertory of Divine Service setting three. Because of this many can recite these few verses from memory with very little prodding. My youngest son gets to hear it every night as I put him to bed. "Create in me a clean heart" is a great part of the Psalm but it remains just that: a part. What we don't see in the liturgy is the huge confession of the psalmist before he turns to God and asks Him to create a heart which is clean.

How many of you have sinned? Everyone should be raising their hands. When we talk about sin we are always referencing God's commandments. In those commandments we learn that we sin against God and we sin against our neighbor. Through Psalm 51, the psalmist shows that every sin is against God. Our sins against our neighbor are in fact direct sins against God and before God. While this might bring to mind images of a judgmental God, we learn from the psalmist that this isn't true. For him, the fact that his sins were always before God and against God only was a huge comfort. You see, when you sin, the one person you want that sin to be before is God because it is God alone who can forgive sins. It's God alone who creates within us a clean heart. When we sing this very familiar Psalm we are confessing to God that we have sinned, and that our sins are before Him. Yet He does not look upon them. Instead, He creates a clean heart within us and looks upon us not in judgment but in love.

David Weirauch, Sem IV

Hymn: *Lord, to You I Make Confession* (LSB 608:4)

Lord, on You I cast my burden--
Sink it in the deepest sea!
Let me know Your gracious pardon,
Cleanse me from iniquity.
Let Your Spirit leave me never;
Make me only Yours forever.

Prayer: We beseech You, O Lord God, to turn Your face from our sins, and to blot out all our transgressions; and as the publican, who stood afar off, was heard in his humility, so hear us not for our own merits, but for the merits of Him who, being co-equal with You, His Father, yet for our sakes took upon Him the form of a servant, our Lord Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen. (Psalm 51)

“There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours.” Our God has indeed worked many great things, none greater than the work of redeeming us through His son Jesus. Though God did many great things for His people prior to Christ, they were all a foreshadowing and preparation to the sending of his Son Jesus in human flesh to redeem and pay for our trespasses by the shedding of his blood. Jesus in human flesh would have prayed through all of the Psalms often, including this one. Though these words were recorded by David, we can see now how they became reality in Jesus’ Passion. “Preserve my life, for I am godly; save your servant, who trusts in you—you are my God.” How true these words were when Jesus willingly submitted to His death according to the Father’s will. He trusted in God the Father, asking for deliverance.

“In the day of my trouble I call upon you, for you answer me.” Though Jesus would die, yet He trusted in the Father’s mercy. “For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.” The Father did respond in steadfast love then by raising Jesus’ body and soul from the tomb. For us who are now in Christ, we share in this same hope of steadfast love, of forgiveness, and of a resurrection, just as Jesus did. These words apply to us as much now as they did to Him then. Living with trust and confidence in God’s work for our salvation, we live our lives praying this: “Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.”

Paul Gaschler, Sem II

Hymn: *Grant Peace, We Pray, in Mercy Lord* (LSB 778)

Grant peace, we pray, in mercy Lord;
 Peace in our time, O send us!
 For there is none on earth but You,
 None other to defend us.
 You only, Lord, can fight for us. Amen.

Prayer: O Lord Almighty, You alone are God, and besides You there is none other. Heaven is Your throne and the earth Your footstool. But seated high You look upon the poor and lowly. Remember that we are dust and without You can do nothing, and be Yourself the help of our countenance. Remove our sins from us, and save us from the hand of our enemies, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Psalm 86)

March 5

Genesis 4:1-26

Like Cain, jealousy and envy rage in the hearts of even the best of us. We see this everywhere. We see it in ourselves. Even at family gatherings, seething beneath the surface, there often writhes this serpent of envy. His venom is all the more deadly because he is often hidden. He tells us that he is not as bad as other sins. He “crouches at the door, seeking to master us.” Cain’s offering of a faithless sacrifice, as opposed to Abel, planted the seeds of this wickedness in his heart. Cain is drawn away by his evil desires, and surrendering to the devil’s enticements, nurtures the dragon, giving birth to sin. Cain murders his brother.

The Lenten season is a time of repentance. We all tend to underestimate sin. For this reason we watch, remembering that the devil is a serpent and a lion seeking to devour us. When Abel was murdered, his blood cried out to the Lord pleading for vengeance, which was promptly executed against the unrepentant Cain who was cast out to wander the lonely earth. As we journey through Lent this year, let us also consider our sins, repent, and come to the Lord for forgiveness. His blood also cries out. As Hebrews tells us, it is His blood which “speaks better things than the blood of Abel.” It is the blood of Christ which cleanses us from all sin. As beggars let us partake of the Lord’s *true body and blood*, the only medicine that is able to destroy sin, death, and the devil.

Justin Woodside, Sem I

Hymn: *Glory Be to Jesus* (LSB 433:4)

Abel’s blood for vengeance
Pleaded to the skies;
But the blood of Jesus
For our pardon cries.

Prayer: O almighty, everlasting God, who, through Your only Son, our blessed Lord, has commanded us to love our enemies, to do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them that persecute us: we earnestly beseech You that by Your gracious visitation they may be led to true repentance, and may have the same love, and be of one accord, and of one mind and heart with us and with Your whole Church; through the same, Your dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (For our Enemies)

March 6

Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18

There it is. No way around it. The LORD reveals in this passage of Scripture to Moses and to us how God's people must be in order to dwell with their holy God: they must be holy. What does this mean? What does the LORD mean when He says, "You shall be holy"? We don't have to take a very long look at ourselves in the mirror in order to see that we are anything but holy because of our sin. Our own holiness is as filth before this holy God, and we cannot come into the presence of a holy God. We have failed to keep the Law of God which He has revealed to us in His Word today. We have failed to love others more than ourselves. For all that we have done to transgress the Law of our Holy God, we deserve nothing but God's temporal and eternal punishment. Thanks be to God that this not the end of the story. God sent His holy and perfect Son to redeem you, a lost and condemned person, not with gold or silver but by his innocent suffering and death. Christ has clothed you with His perfect holiness in your baptism and now through faith in Christ, you dwell in the presence of this holy God for all eternity, for you are holy as He is holy!

Zachary Voss, Sem IV

Hymn: *Christ, the Life of All the Living* (LSB 420:6)

Thou hast suffered great affliction
And hast borne it patiently,
Even death by crucifixion,
Fully to atone for me;
Thou didst choose to be tormented
That my doom should be prevented.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

Prayer: O God, whose strength is made perfect in weakness, mortify and kill all vices in us, and so strengthen us by Your grace that by the innocency of our lives and the constancy of our faith, even unto death, we may glorify Your holy name; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.
(For Innocency of Life)

March 7

Isaiah 55:6-11

How easy it is to seek the Lord in our own thoughts and ways rather than His! Without thinking about it, we often assume that we know a better way to find peace for our souls. "Oh, if I just get ahead on all my work for this week, then I can relax." "If I can just be a better husband, wife, dad, mom, son, or daughter, then everything will be okay." "I know that if I study hard enough, I'll be at peace." Just like that, we no longer think we need God. Isaiah reminds us, however, to "seek the Lord while he may be found." Where is the Lord? "He is near... that he may have compassion on [us]!" When we assume we know a better way, the Lord declares that "[His] thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways [His] ways." We hear this, realize our own sinfulness, and rejoice in a God who "abundantly pardons" us despite our selfish thinking.

How does God abundantly pardon us? Just as the rain waters the earth and brings forth life, so God's word proceeds from His mouth and accomplishes His purpose. What is this word and purpose? The word which God sends forth is His incarnate word, Jesus Christ. His purpose is to redeem the lost and unrighteous. Christ died with your thoughts and ways of self-justification. He rose again, redeeming you by the only perfect way. God has sent forth this Christ into your heart so that His thoughts might be on your lips. Although you have failed to seek the Lord at times, he sought you. His word did not return void, but has redeemed you.

Sawyer Meyers, Sem I

Hymn: *O Christ, You Walked the Road* (LSB 424:4)

When lures of easy gain
With promise brightly shine,
Lord, help us seek Your kingdom first;
Our wills with Yours align.

Prayer: Merciful Father, give us grace that we may never presume to sin; but if at any time we offend Your divine majesty, may we truly repent and lament our offense, and by a lively faith obtain remission of all our sins, solely through the merits of Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

(For Penitence)

March 8

Jonah 3:1-10

The call of Jonah should sound familiar to the ears of a Christian. It's the call for repentance, which is wrought through God's Word clamoring within the hearts of man. This is not just any Word, but the Word of God's Commandments. This is God's law. This is what a holy God desires. This is what a holy God *requires*. It drops like a hammer on the hearts of men and crushes the spirit. The heart of man is brought to despair when its self-righteous adorations plummet into the dust. Yet all is not lost. Jonah's words resonated through hearts of the people of Nineveh and they believed God. They believed God at His word and they repented. They repented of their ways because faced with God's wrath, all was lost. We are lost when confronted with our own sin. Like the people of Nineveh we lament of our sins. But God is merciful. He is compassionate. He desires that all men be saved. This is why He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life through Him. We repent when we hear God's righteous judgement. We stand condemned in our sin. But God relents from His judgement for the sake of the One who took that judgement upon Himself. He sees our faith in Him, which He produced in us through His Word. He is our salvation. He is Jesus, the only name under heaven by which men can be saved. Look, therefore, at the cross of Christ this Lenten season and know He paid for all your sins. You are forgiven for His sake.

Jonah Domenichelli, Sem II

Hymn: *Jesus Sinners Doth Receive* (LSB 609:5)

Oh, how blest it is to know:
Were as scarlet my transgression,
It shall be as white as snow
By Thy blood and bitter passion;
For these words I now believe:
Jesus sinners doth receive.

Prayer: O God, as the prophet Jonah spent three days in the belly of the great fish, so Your Son Jesus spent three days in the heart of the earth. Grant us repentance to embrace our death in Him through Holy Baptism and to proclaim His victory over sin and death to all the world; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Easter Vigil, Jonah 3:1-10)

God's glory is difficult to picture. We might think of images of rays of light, or of an exalted throne upon clouds. If God's glory appeared to us, would we flee or rejoice? God revealed in His great power is terrifying to sinners. When in the heavenly temple of God, Isaiah confessed that he was a man of unclean lips from a people of unclean lips. He was not worthy to stand before God. Yet, God made him pure before him. He touched his lips with a coal; his guilt was taken away and his sin atoned for. For David, God's great glory is known in his mercy as much as it is in his power. God exalted His name and His Word in the forgiveness of sins declared at His temple. God's goodness extends through the whole earth. By God's faithfulness He holds all things together and commands the forces of nature. By God's faithfulness the broken in spirit are bound up, the contrite are forgiven. This promise of our merciful God will go out into all nations, and even the kings of the earth will hear and thank God for His goodness. For it is not power and authority, or even material wealth that are evil in themselves. It is the heart that says to God, "I have no need for Your favor or goodness," that is turned far from Him. The Lord's work endures forever, and He will fulfill His purpose for you. He will continually grant you His grace and favor in His holy Word. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever. He will not forsake you in your days of trouble, but will glory in showing His love.

Kevin Belter, Sem IV

Hymn: *In the Cross of Christ I Glory* (LSB 427:1)

In the cross of Christ I glory,
Tow'ring o'er the wrecks of time.
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.

Prayer: Multiply Thy strength, O Lord, in the souls of Thy humble servants, that while we ever worship Thee in Thy holy temple, we may, together with Thy holy angels, rejoice in beholding Thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, One God, world without end. Amen. (Psalm 138)

Ezekiel preached to Israelites in exile. Under the reign of Nebuchadnezzar the people of Jerusalem were uprooted from the city of the king to be transplanted in the land of their enemies. We see here in this passage from Ezekiel that as God's people spent a season in physical exile from their home they also subjected themselves to spiritual exile from the Lord. In their distress and anxiety over being away from Jerusalem, the people of Israel began blaming God, the fount and source of all their blessings and the hope of their salvation, for the injustices done to them. This led to the prophet Ezekiel's reprimand of the Israelites, "Is it not your ways that are not just?" Implementing this rhetorical method the Lord, through the prophet, spoke to his people as a mother would speak to her child, "Is it my fault that you are being punished for your unclean room?" The question put to the house of Israel ought to stir up in them remorse for their unjust ways, and increase awareness that God is the source of all good things. The Lord does not seek to stir up feelings of guilt only in order that his people may live in fear of their end. God's accusation of Israel through the lips of his prophet has in mind the turning from unrighteous ways. God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked. The way in which God wants all people to go is the very one which he gave at Sinai. Israel failed, as do we, to remain faithful to the way given at Sinai, yet God remained faithful by sending His Son to die by the Law. This payment of our debt through Jesus' blood is now the way to which we turn.

Matthias Wollberg, Sem II

Hymn: *Sing, My Tongue, the Glorious Battle* (LSB 454:3)

Thus, with thirty years accomplished,
 He went forth from Nazareth,
 Destined, dedicated, willing,
 Did His work and met His death;
 Like a lamb He humbly yielded
 On the cross His dying breath.

Prayer: O Lord, let Thy mercy speedily come before us, for there is neither comforting hope, nor trust in merit, nor helpful assistance to support us; but the guilt and trouble of our life, the consciousness of our sins, or the vengeance on our offences rebukes us in our unrest. Deliver us for the glory of Thy Name, and purge away our sins for Thy Name's sake, that when Thou hast done both for Thyself, and hast looked on Thy people with Thy wonted loving-kindness, we may give Thee glory for our deliverance, and obtain propitiation through Thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, One God, world without end. Amen. (Psalm 79)

March 11

Deuteronomy 26:16-19

Much of Deuteronomy lists the moral, ceremonial, and civil stipulations for Israel. The people of Israel's obedience would *never* affect the covenant made with the Lord. Their covenant, however, does echo the will of God to the world, and their relationship to the world. The Lord declares that they will be "a holy people to the Lord." Instead of desiring wickedness, foolishness, and idolatry, the people of Israel "walk in his ways." Amongst a mad world, they are to observe all the laws of their God while serving and forgiving their neighbor. Christ's redemption made on the cross makes way for a new people. The cross declares all believers in Jesus, not only the Israelites, to be a treasured possession and a holy people. Christians, like the Israelites of old, now "walk in his way" and follow the commands of God. Christ was obedient to the will of His Father unto the cross. Where ours falters, His obedience was perfect. The great exchange took place. Our wickedness, foolishness, and idolatry was traded in for the forgiveness and goodness of Christ. The promise of the absolute absolution from the cross declares us "a holy people to the Lord." We are to be obedient to the Word of God while serving and forgiving our neighbor. Our obedience *never* affects the redemption won on the cross, but echoes God's will to the world. Because of the redemptive work of Christ alone, we now walk in His ways.

Adam Barkley, Sem IV

Hymn: *O Christ, You Walked the Road* (LSB 424:5)

O Christ, You walked the road
Our wand'ring feet must go.
Stay with us through temptation's hour
To fight our ancient foe.

Prayer: Almighty God, who has given Your only Son to be unto us both a sacrifice for sin and also an ensample of godly life, give us grace that we may always most thankfully receive that His inestimable benefit, and also daily endeavor ourselves to follow the blessed steps of His most holy life; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (For Likeness to Christ)

March 12

Genesis 16:1-12

“My Way” is a song that Frank Sinatra made popular in 1969. In the song, Sinatra sings from the perspective of a man who has lived his life and is preparing to die. He boasts that regardless of what has happened in his life he did everything his way, through the good times and the bad times everything was done my way. This is the perfect song to explain the actions of Abram and Sarai in Genesis 16. God tells them that they will have a son together and that this will be the start of making Abram into a great nation. Abram and Sarai try to fulfill God’s promise their way. Sarai gives Hagar her servant to Abram and together they have a son Ishmael. They have done it their way. They tried to fulfill God’s promise their way. But when it comes to God promises there is no my way, your way, their way. There is only God’s way. God in his mercy does not relinquish his promises from Abram and Sarai and later they do have a son together Isaac, and the promise is fulfilled God’s way.

How often when we are confronted with the promises of God, do we think to ourselves, “No, I will do it my way? I will come to God on my own terms, on my own time.” Yet even when we come to God our way, His promises still hold true to us in His way. The salvation that Jesus brings is still offered to us as a gift without our works and without our sinful ways. Thank God that salvation is given to us His way.

Alexander Garber, Sem IV

Hymn: *Our Father, Who from Heaven Above* (LSB 766:4)

Your gracious will on earth be done
As it is done before Your throne,
That patiently we may obey
Throughout our lives all that You say.
Curb flesh and blood and ev’ry ill
That sets itself against Your will.

Prayer: O almighty and everlasting God, vouchsafe, we beseech Thee, to direct, sanctify, and govern both our hearts and bodies in the ways of Thy laws and in the works of Thy commandments, that through Thy most mighty protection, both here and ever, we may be preserved in body and in soul; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (For Divine Guidance and Help)

The people of Israel and Judea were captives in the foreign land of Babylon. They had sinned against God and had rejected His covenant with them. Although God's people had rejected His covenant, He remained faithful to them. He was with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. He was also with the prophet Daniel while he interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dreams, and again in the lion's den.

In this text, Daniel prays on behalf of the captive Jews. He recognizes that the people of Israel and Judah have broken their covenant with God. The Lord had been faithful to them, but they had been unfaithful to Him. In his prayer, Daniel draws distinctions between the actions of God and His people. These distinctions are still true today. We have sinned, done what is wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled. In turn, the Lord God offers mercy and forgiveness. We have turned aside from His commandments and ordinances, and yet God keeps His covenant to us and steadfastly loves us. To us belongs only open shame, but to Him belongs righteousness and loving kindness.

Daniel knows that God will not keep His people in exile forever. Daniel trusted in the coming Messiah to save His people from their sins. As we are in the season of Lent, we remember the passion and death of that same Messiah, Jesus. The One who is righteous receives suffering while we who are sinful and wicked receive mercy and forgiveness. The One who keeps His covenant is unjustly killed. He is stricken, smitten, and afflicted while we who have broken His covenant receive life and salvation through His death.

Timothy Kern, Sem I

Hymn: *O Perfect Life of Love* (LSB 452:2)

No work is left undone
Of all the Father willed;
His toil, His sorrows, one by one,
The Scriptures have fulfilled.

Prayer: O Lord, favorably receive the prayers of Your Church, that, being delivered from all adversity and error, it may serve You in safety and freedom; and grant us Your peace in our time; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (For the Church)

March 14

Isaiah 1:2-4, 16-20

In the first words of Isaiah's vision, the Lord calls on the heavens and the earth to hear what He has to say about His children. "They are rebellious children, more stupid than a donkey!" For, unlike His children, a donkey at least knows how to return to the master's crib. They think they know everything, yet do not have the sense to admit they are laden with iniquity, nor do they seek the Lord's shelter or provisions. God's Word of judgment strips the mask off to reveal who they truly are: estranged children who have disowned their own Father. We too are those corrupt sons, who have disowned God and despised His Holy One, the Christ. We, along with the children of Israel, stand before God with bloodstained hands of sin, and our filthy works. The stain of our scarlet sins must be washed away.

God summons Israel and all his children to the court of divine justice to render his verdict. His blessed reasoning concludes that He must justify and forgive His rebellious children. But in order to forgive blood guilt, God requires a payment of blood. He sends His Holy One, His only Son the spotless Lamb of God, who did no evil thing. God's wrath against our bloody guilt was placed on Him, and He died on the cross to render us clean. The blood of the pure, innocent Lamb of God has washed you clean and removed your sin. Though your sins deserve punishment and death, they are washed away, as if they did not exist. You are made holy by the Holy One of Israel, forgiven, and washed clean. Your crimson sins are white as snow.

Carl Wendorff, Sem II

Hymn: *Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed* (LSB 437:1)

Alas! And did my Savior bleed,
And did my sov'reign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?

Prayer: Lord God, Heavenly Father, who through Your Son, true God and our Redeemer, did say, "If a man keep My saying, he shall never taste death," we beseech You, bestow upon us Your Holy Spirit, that we may give due honor to Your Son, keep His Word, trust in it, comfort ourselves therewith in the hour of departure, and through death enter into everlasting life; for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Judica Gospel)

March 15

Jeremiah 18:1-11

You are created in God's image. Your worth, beauty, humor, all that you are, is grounded in this reality. However, our sin has broken this image and we act in ways which we were not created for. We cannot hide our imperfections from God. He sees and knows everything. Nevertheless, even though we have caused cracks and breaks in our relationship with the Father, He has not discarded us. Even though we filled God's perfect Vessel with all our sins, to the point that the shards of that broken Vessel filled a tomb for three days, God has not abandoned us.

This Lenten season remember, as God's creation, you are in His hands. He is the one who has created, redeemed, and called you by name. No matter how many pieces your life may seem to be in, remember Jeremiah's words, "He reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.... Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand." Through the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ, God has made you a new creation, formed by His loving hands, on account of Christ's pierced hands.

Kelly Krieg, Sem IV

Hymn: *Upon the Cross Extended* (LSB 453:6)

Your cords of love, my Savior,
Bind me to You forever,
I am no longer mine.
To You I gladly tender
All that my life can render
And all I have to You resign.

Prayer: Almighty God, who has given us Your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon Him, grant that we, being regenerate, and made Your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by Your Holy Spirit; through the same, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (For Spiritual Renewal)

March 16

Jeremiah 17:5-10

If you have not discovered by now that the world is full of sinners, you've spent your whole life in a fantasy world. You don't need the nightly news to know that people are terrible to other people. Man cannot be trusted, because out of the heart of man comes only evil things. That is why the Lord here says, "Cursed is the man who trusts in man." Even the best ruler is still a sinner. Even the person who loves you the most sins against you again and again. So do not put your trust in any man. It will yield nothing but problems.

Trust in the Lord. Unlike man He is perfect and sinless. Unlike man He has the power to save you. For He took on human flesh to redeem humanity. Throughout Lent we hear of the suffering of Christ for sinful man. He loved us while we were still His enemies, and so He endured the sufferings and temptations of this world. Then at the last He went to Jerusalem to be condemned at the hands of sinful men and die upon the cross in the bitterest of agony. His death delivered you from sin, death, and the devil. This is why the man who trusts in the Lord is truly blessed and blessed forever.

Phillip Fischaber, Sem IV

Hymn: *Praise the Almighty* (LSB 797:2)

Trust not in rulers; they are but mortal;
Earthborn they are and soon decay.
Vain are their counsels at life's last portal,
When the dark grave engulfs its prey.
Since mortals can no help afford,
Place all your trust in Christ, our Lord.
Alleluia, alleluia!

Prayer: O God, from whom call all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works, give to us, your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey Your commandments and also that we, being defended from the fear of our enemies, may live in peace and quietness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Peace)

Brothers betray a brother: their own flesh and blood. These brothers weren't members of just any family, they were sons of Jacob--Israel himself! They knew that God had chosen their family to fulfill his plan for salvation. If anyone should have been abounding in joyous thanks and praise, it should have been them! Instead, bitterness, frustration, and jealousy had led them to betray their dear brother for a few pieces of silver. This should give us a glimpse at what Jesus experienced, as the world hated him. Joseph was innocent. Jesus was innocent. Joseph was betrayed with silver. Jesus was betrayed with silver. Joseph's brothers abandoned him. Jesus' people abandoned him. On Palm Sunday, the Jewish people welcomed Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah. Less than a week later, their adoring praise had turned to hatred, as they demanded his blood. We might look to our own sinful thoughts, words, and deeds, as we marvel at the heartlessness of Joseph's brothers, or the impatience and disbelief of the crowds who demanded Jesus' execution. Are we so different? Of what sin was Joseph guilty that he deserved to be thrown into a well and sold into slavery? Likewise, without any cause or guilt on his part, Christ was rejected, abandoned and plotted against. Because of Christ's redemptive work, we need not fear the betrayal and abandonment we often experience in this broken world. Neither must we fear the guilt of our own sin. Because of Christ's redemptive work, we have the hope of a sure and certain future in eternity with Him. When we read the story of Joseph, let us remember the redemption we have in Christ, who gave himself up to betrayal for our sake.

Craig Rinkus, Sem I

Hymn: *O Dearest Jesus, What Law Hast Thou Broken* (439:4)

What punishment so strange is suffered yonder!
The Shepherd dies for sheep that loved to wander;
The Master pays the debt His servants owe Him,
Who would not know Him.

Prayer: O Lord Jesus Christ, You innocent Lamb of God, who before the Council was falsely accused, spat upon, mocked, buffeted, and sentenced to death as a blasphemer and a deceiver of the people: we beseech You, show us the salvation that is in Your merit, and look upon us in mercy as You did look upon Peter, that, sincerely repenting of our sin, we may obtain by faith the comfort of forgiveness, and at the end be found acceptable in Your sight, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Lent)

March 18

Micah 7:18-20

Note the shift of the second person address to God and the third person address to God. This passage could be pictured as a responsive reading of praise between Christ and His Church! Christ is our great High Priest who speaks to God directly, referring to Him as “You.” We are the congregation who sing the praises of the Lord God referring to Him as “He.” God is He who is not angry forever, who delights in His steadfast love for us. He will have compassion on us, and he will tread our iniquities underfoot, obliterating it like a battalion marching through a field of tomatoes.

Christ responds to this saying, “[Lord,] You will cast all *their* sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob!...” He is the one who accomplishes this for us. He tread our iniquity underfoot not through the tramp of soldiers’ marching feet, but as He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, carrying the cross up Golgotha. He is the one who cast our sins to the depths of the sea just as He was in the belly of the earth for three days. Praise the Lord who sends His Son to annihilate all our sins and hangs a millstone around sin, death, and the devil and sinks them to the bottom of the sea!

Jacob Eichers, Sem IV

Hymn: *Jesus, I Will Ponder Now* (LSB 440:5)

If my sins give me alarm
And my conscience grieve me,
Let Your cross my fear disarm;
Peace of conscience give me.
Help me see forgiveness won
By Your holy passion.
If for me He slays His Son,
God must have compassion!

Prayer: O God, our Protector, behold, and look upon the face of Your Anointed, who has given Himself for the redemption of all, and grant that from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof Your name may be great among the Gentiles, and that in every place, sacrifice and a pure offering may be made unto Your name; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (For the Church)

Jacob flees for his life after deceiving his father into giving him his brother's blessing, and is forced to spend the night in the wilderness. He's tired, he's alone, and has only a rock for a pillow. Jacob doesn't know what the future holds for him. He's desperate. He's all alone. But while he sleeps, Jacob sees the heavens opened up with the angels of God ascending and descending upon a ladder to the heavens. In his darkest hour, after he had lied and schemed to get what wasn't his, God gives Jacob hope. Regardless of Jacob's sin, God promises to never abandon him. He promises Jacob's descendants will be numbered as the dust of the earth, and God fulfills all His promises.

Living in this sinful world today is overwhelming. But just as God revealed Himself to Jacob in a dream, today He reveals Himself in the Scriptures. As the angels descended the ladder from the heavens, so did the Son of God. Jesus came to earth and took our sins upon Himself. He carried our sins to the cross where He endured a loneliness that not even Jacob has dealt with. Suffering the agony we deserve, Jesus cried out "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?!" And then He died. But death could not conquer Him. Jesus rose from the dead, and as the angels ascended to the heavens in Jacob's dream, so has Jesus. Just as God promised to bring Jacob's descendants to the Promised Land, we live with the assurance we will live with Jesus when He returns in His glory to establish a new heaven and earth. Regardless of our sin, God will never abandon us. God is with us.

Kyle McBee, Sem IV

Hymn: *In the Cross of Christ I Glory* (LSB 427:2)

When the woes of life o'ertake me,
Hopes deceive, and fears annoy,
Never shall the cross forsake me;
Lo, it glows with peace and joy.

Prayer: O God, begotten before the morning star, who was before the beginning of every creature, we pray and beseech You that as You, sitting at the right hand of the Father, have put Your enemies under Your feet, so You may make us meet for Your service, doing away with the dominion of sin; who lives and reigns with the same Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen. (Psalm 110)

March 20

2 Kings 5:1-15b

It seems that Naaman would be more of a liability than an asset with his disease. Considering his illness, the king had every right to exile him to a leper community. Naaman could not take credit for anything that he had; it was all a gift and mercy afforded to him. He couldn't even take credit for his military victories because, "the LORD gave victory to Syria." Yet we, like Naaman, have a way of complicating things. Everything we have, so we think, comes from our own hard work and dedication. Naaman wanted to be cured of his leprosy and had his own ideas of how it should be done. After Naaman had arrived at the prophet's door, a lowly servant greeted him and said, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean." Naaman was offended. He expected Elisha to come out himself and wave his hands over him like some witch doctor. The Abana and Pharpar rivers of Damascus were better than all the waters of Israel, he protested, could he not wash there? The cure was foolish. "Wash and be clean." Can anything be so simple? Indeed, it is that simple. It was good for Naaman to be baptized for in it he received faith. Whereas before the remedy seemed trivial and foolish, but after he had received this washing of regeneration he was healed and cleansed of his impurity. The necrotic flesh of Naaman was washed off in the Jordan, and it covered Jesus at *his* baptism. In the same way Jesus has taken upon Himself the death of Naaman and all those who were baptized into His name. You have been washed and made clean, it really is that simple.

Trenton Wollberg, Sem IV

Hymn: *Come to Calvary's Holy Mountain* (LSB 435:1)

Come to Calv'ry's holy mountain,
Sinners ruined by the fall;
Here a pure and healing fountain
Flows for me, for you, for all,
In a full perpetual tide,
Opened when our Savior died.

Prayer: Send, we beseech You, almighty God, Your Holy Spirit into our hearts, that He may rule and direct us according to Your will, comfort us in all our temptations and afflictions, defend us from all error, and lead us into all truth, that we, being steadfast in the faith, may increase in love and in all good works, and in the end obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen. (Whitsunday Gospel)

March 21

Daniel 3:28-30

What a wonderful demonstration of abiding by the First Commandment by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! When the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar threatened them with a fiery death, they refused to worship his golden statue. Without even being sure whether Yahweh would spare them, they put no other gods before the one, true God. But now what about us? Do we keep the First Commandment like Daniel's friends did? Absolutely not! And we're not even threatened with death. Serving the god of social acceptance, we shy away from confessing God when topics like marriage and abortion come up around the office. We bow down to the god of self-indulgence when our out-of-town spring break plans don't involve Sunday morning at the local congregation. For our imperfect service to God, we deserve to be thrown into the furnace of hell.

Fortunately, we have a God who rescues us! He saves us not through just an angel but through His one and only Son. Because of Jesus, God doesn't see our worship of earthly gods. What He does see is the perfect service of His Son that led Him to the cross. Stretched by nails from limb to limb, Jesus endured the suffering that we deserved. Through faith in the saving work of this sacrifice, we are promoted to children of God. As His children, we now perfectly serve and worship none other than our Heavenly Father. Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego!

Daniel Fickenscher, Sem I

Hymn: *Not All the Blood of Beasts* (LSB 431:4)

My soul looks back to see
The burden Thou didst bear
When hanging on the cursed tree;
I know my guilt was there.

Prayer: O God, Your Son protected faithful Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace of the king. Grant us protection in our time of testing that we would boldly confess Your name, reject all false worship, and live and die in confidence, knowing that we are safe in Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Easter Vigil, Daniel 3:1-30)

March 22

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 5-9

God certainly knows what is best for our lives both in this world, and for our lives in eternity. On Earth, it is important that we realize we do not live our lives for ourselves. Rather, we live to God, and we live for the betterment of our neighbor. We have a God who created and sustains us in all our needs of body and soul. So, to worry and focus on ourselves above God and others is a worthless and sinful endeavor. God also knows what is good for us from an eternal perspective. God gave these laws with the expectation that we keep them perfectly and be made righteous enough to enter and live in Heaven. However, God knew that we were not able to keep them. So, he sent us His Son Jesus, that he might live the perfect life, keep all the commandments and statutes of God perfectly, and carry our imperfection to the Cross, that we may receive *his* righteousness and thus enter into eternal life.

On Easter we will celebrate Christ's resurrection, in which he defeats death for us. In doing so, Christ creates for us a new Sabbath rest. This Sabbath rest allows us to care for our souls by handing them to Christ, who cleanses them with his forgiveness and righteousness. So, as we go out and live, let us remember the laws of God that remind us to love Him who first loved us, and to love our neighbor who needs the same love that God has first shown to us.

David Walsh, Sem IV

Hymn: *In God, My Faithful God* (LSB 745:5)

"So be it," then I say
With all my heart each day.
Dear Lord, we all adore You,
We sing for joy before You.
Guide us while here we wander
Until we praise You yonder.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, direct, sanctify, and govern both our hearts and bodies in the ways of Your laws and in the works of Your commandments that through Your mighty protection we may ever be preserved in both body and soul; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (For Divine Guidance)

March 23

Jeremiah 7:23-28

God gave this command to the Israelites in the wilderness, the people He eagerly desired to bring to the Promised Land. Now the Promised Land lies before us and God is speaking. Through the cross of Jesus, God has made us into the new Israel. More than anything, He eagerly desires to lead us to our new home, the place that He has prepared for us that flows with milk and honey. However, just as the Israelites discovered enemies in the way of their new life, we too have a difficult journey ahead of us. Our sin never leaves, the devil never stops accusing, and death lies on the horizon. Yet, Jesus conquers everything in our path. He has taken the punishment for our sin. He has crushed the head of the serpent. He has risen from the dead. We hear the voice of God now in the cross of Jesus, crying out that He is our God, we are His people, and nothing stands in our way. The people of Israel doubted the character of God and refused to follow Him. In the moment of the cross, we see clearly the character of God: sacrifice and love. When we center our lives in the cross of Jesus, we then learn how to properly sacrifice and love. In the cross of Jesus, we walk in all the ways that God commands. In the cross of Jesus, God makes everything well with us and leads us safely on to the Promised Land.

Keith Kettner, Sem II

Hymn: *We Sing the Praise of Him Who Died* (LSB 429:3)

The cross! It takes our guilt away;
It holds the fainting spirit up;
It cheers with hope the gloomy day
And sweetens ev'ry bitter cup.

Prayer: O Lord, our Savior, we praise and bless You that You were obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, and, having finished all, are become our Mediator and Redeemer; and we beseech You, grant that by Your death we may be crucified unto the world, and henceforth live not unto ourselves, but unto You, who did die for us, and who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Good Friday Epistle [Old Testament])

March 24

Hosea 14:1-9

Many of us have probably experienced a broken or damaged relationship at one time or another. The more serious the relationship, the greater the resulting pain. Problems in marriage, for example, can be devastating and last for years, perhaps even a whole lifetime. God's relationship with His people is described throughout Hosea as a marriage. In our Baptisms, we have been brought into the Church and therefore have been made Christ's Bride. However, like Israel's trust in Assyria to save, we also separate ourselves from Christ whenever we fear, love, and trust in anything other than Him for help, security, comfort, etc. So, God says: "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God..." Confess that you have not trusted in God above all things as He requires, whether by your words, thoughts, or deeds. But most importantly, receive Christ's holy Absolution by which He says: "I will heal your apostasy; I will love you freely, for my anger has turned from you." Upon receiving this forgiveness, we will "blossom like the lily" and "flourish like the grain," all the time knowing that "from him [Christ] comes our fruit" and if we are in Him this fruit will ever abound.

Simeon Cornwell, Sem I

Hymn: *The Church's One Foundation* (LSB 644:1)

The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ, her Lord;
She is His new creation
By water and the Word.
From heav'n He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood he bought her,
And for her life He died.

Prayer: Spare us, O Lord, and mercifully forgive us our sins, and though by our continual transgressions we have merited Your punishments, be gracious unto us, and grant that all those evils which we have deserved, may be turned from us and overruled to our everlasting good; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen. (Litany 5)

March 25

Hosea 6:1-6

Think about the person that is the closest to you. Now imagine that you and that person make a covenant for life, to do whatever you can to be a blessing to each other. How would you feel if all a sudden that person started to completely ignore you every time you spoke to him or her, never giving you any word in response? What if that person started to advocate for everything that you ever stood against? Would you still keep your covenant? And if so, on what terms? There is a reason why we call disloyalty "stabbing in the back." Nothing produces emotional and internal pains as sharp as the sense of being betrayed by a loved one. But, what if that traitor was you?

This is what we do to God every day when we trust ourselves and not in Him. We are the traitors. We deserve damnation. We deserve unending death. We do not deserve the cool rain of God's blessing, but the lake of fire. He does not show mercy unless He first lays us low in the dust. Once we are injured, then we can be healed. This is the strange life of the Christian. You are constantly struck down by the trials of life. In your weakness, He is strongest. For Christ, the Great Physician speaks: "I forgive you all your sins." His powerful, healing Word is medicine for your sin-sickened soul, and His mercy works mightily through His Word. For as He speaks, so it is. Where He forgives, you are healed. Your soul is made whole, and your life is filled to overflowing with His own divine health. It is not that you are healthy in yourself, but you are made healthy in Christ and His Word.

Nicholas Martinez, Sem IV

Hymn: *Jesus, in Your Dying Woes* (LSB 447:5)

May we in our guilt and shame
Still Your love and mercy claim,
Calling humbly on Your name:
Hear us, holy Jesus.

Prayer: Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his evil way and live: we beseech You graciously to turn from us those punishments which we by our sins have deserved, and to grant us grace ever hereafter to serve You in holiness and pureness of living; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Litany 1)

March 26

Genesis 41:53-57

In today's reading, the good times of plenty in the Kingdom of Egypt have ended. Now begins a period of famine in the land. Periodically, this cycle of feast and famine occurred in Egypt. This time it is especially severe on the land. The people of Egypt are in dire straits because they have no bread to eat. They cry aloud to Pharaoh, who has no solution for them. He refers the people to Joseph, his chief administrator, who has been preparing for the coming famine. God works through Joseph to save the people. Joseph, who was betrayed by his brother and sold as a slave, will deliver Egypt. Joseph has built up a supply of grain in the storehouses, places where the famished can find nourishment. The Egyptians can go to the storehouses and find the grain for the bread they need. Even people from other regions come to Egypt to buy grain, meaning that Joseph's preparations bring relief to all those near and far. This will even include his brothers, the Old Testament people of God, who journey down into Egypt hoping to buy grain, unwittingly from their own brother. We see in this text a reflection of Christ and the Church. People cry out for deliverance from sin and the curse of death. Through the betrayal by one of His brothers, Jesus' redemption has been brought to all the lands through His death and Resurrection. Christ has built His church where we can go and receive what we truly need at no cost for us. There we receive Him, in Word and Sacrament and find our salvation.

Brett Witmer, Sem I

Hymn: *O Darkest Woe* (LSB 448:7)
O Jesus Christ,
Who sacrificed
Thy life for lifeless mortals:
Be my life in death and bring
Me to heaven's portals!

Prayer: O almighty and everlasting God, who has blessed the labors of the husbandman, and given unto us the fruits of the earth in their season, grant us grace to use them to Your glory, to the relief of those that are needy, and to our own comfort; through Jesus Christ, who is the Living Bread which comes down from heaven and gives life unto the world, to whom, with You and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen. (Harvest Festival)

March 27

Micah 7:7-9

From the depths of woe, whom do you seek? In these latter days, the devil looks to be moving his troops into positions of worldly power, wielding swords of deceit and evil—as made evident by current events. The darkness that surrounds us, the enemies that encircle us, and the sins we commit are real—a reality of this fallen world we live in. This truth only becomes more real as we consider the sins that we struggle with daily. From the pits wherein we despair over our trespasses, from the fear of God’s real wrath over sin, residing in perpetual hopelessness and helplessness before our enemies, our eyes shift and search for a place to look, a place of comfort and peace.

“But as for me, I will look to the Lord,” this is the direction for those sitting in darkness. Just as did Micah, we look to God who is our salvation. The mighty God that stands over all things is the same God who breaks the darkness, hinders all evil plans of the devil, and the one who shames all enemies of His beloved children. For those who sit in darkness, there is the promise of a Light, a Light that lifts you from the pits, lowly positions, and brokenness, and will raise you in restoration. Here is your comfort, and here your peace can be found, in the fulfillment of Micah’s faithful words—Jesus Christ, the light of the World. Those who believe in him, will never walk in darkness again. Jesus is that light which the darkness cannot overcome, for from his Cross beamed all the light of redemption. From Christ’s sin-atoning sacrifice you will look upon his vindication, which is your righteousness, according to the Lord’s judgement.

René Castillero, Sem IV

Hymn: *Jesus, in Your Dying Woes* (LSB 447:11)

When we seem in vain to pray
And our hope seems far away,
In the darkness be our stay:
Hear us, holy Jesus.

Prayer: Blessed are You, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who led Your people Israel by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Enlighten our darkness by the light of Your Christ; may His Word be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path; for You are merciful, and You love Your whole creation, and we, Your creatures, glorify You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. (Thanksgiving for Light, Evening Prayer)

March 28

Ezekiel 47:7-12

There is a river, and that river sustains all life. This river finds its source in the sanctuary. The sanctuary is where the sacrifices were made, and the only rivers flowing from the sanctuary were rivers of blood. Yet, this blood sustains all sorts of life, produces fruit, and heals. The bloody sacrifice produces a stream of water which nourishes trees that bear fruit and healing leaves. It's about time, actually. That one day, a woman was wandering in the garden, and her husband was not near her. The woman ate fruit which she was not supposed to consume, and the transgression required a bloody payment.

This bloody payment came in the form of a man, the very Lamb of God whose blood sets us free to be people of God. His blood separated at the time of His death, separating into blood and water. The water streams from His pierced side, and that stream of water nourishes us, the trees. These trees, fed by the water of the stream, produce fruit - the fruit of the Spirit. Our leaves produce healing, just as the leaves with which the man and the woman clothed themselves in that blissful garden. These leaves produce healing, but they are only temporary. The eternal coverings find their origin in the sanctuary, of all places. These new coverings are the skin, the by-product of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Nathan Willie, Sem I

Hymn: *The Royal Banners Forward Go* (LSB 455:2)

Where deep for us the spear was dyed,
Life's torrent rushing from His side,
To wash us in the precious flood
Where flowed the water and the blood.

Prayer: O most adorable Savior, our merciful High Priest, we thank You that You atoned for our rebellion against the holy will of God by offering up unto Your heavenly Father Your holy, innocent will; and we beseech You, so govern and direct our wills, by virtue of Your great atoning sacrifice and through the power of Your Holy Spirit, that in childlike obedience we may gladly do the will of Your heavenly Father. Do this, we pray, for Your own sake. Amen. (Collect 7 for Lent)

When is this time of favor? We can answer! The time of favor was then, when the Lord led the people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. The time of favor is now, even today, as the apostle Paul proclaims in 2 Corinthians 6:2. The time of favor will be then as Revelation 7, quoting Isaiah 49:10, paints the scene of the faithful coming from all four corners of the Earth. They sing for joy that “the Lord has comforted His people and [has] compassion on His afflicted.” Why is there this time of favor? Is it because of our holiness? Is it because of Israel’s and Judah’s good behavior? Is it because God owes it to us? We know the answer to all these questions is “no.” No, it is because every good thing that humanity has ever received is because of the Lord’s Servant, who was sent to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, who said to the captives ‘Come out,’ who was deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, and driven out of the synagogue of His own hometown. “The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me,” described this Servant as He was seemingly abandoned by Yahweh Himself in His time of greatest distress. So, when you cry out, “What time of favor!?” in the midst of “afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, [and] hunger,” know that in these tribulations, you bear the marks of that Servant. And it is precisely that Servant’s marks, His stigmata, which are *our* names written on His hands as He is nailed in a perpetual embrace of the world which is filled with suffering.

Jacob Eichers, Sem IV

Hymn: *Sing Praise to God, the Highest Good* (LSB 819:4)

He never shall forsake His flock,
 His chosen generation,
 He is their refuge and their rock,
 Their peace and their salvation.
 As with a mother’s tender hand,
 He leads His own, His chosen band:
 To God all praise and glory!

Prayer: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Laetare)

March 30

Exodus 32:7-14

Throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites are frequently referred to as God's chosen people. Yet in today's reading God renounces them as he tells Moses that they are "your people." He then lists off the undeniable reasons that they cannot be His people and instead, must be destroyed-- "they have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly...They have made for themselves a golden calf and worshiped it and sacrificed to it." This leaves no room for talking around their sin or making excuse for it. The Israelites faced certain punishment, and there was nothing they could do about it. Yet Moses stood before God and His wrath and made intercession for the people. He made no plea to any righteousness on their part, but reminded God of the promises He had made. Furthermore, Moses called upon God to spare them for the sake of "Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants." And God was satisfied with this plea, for He relented and did not bring about this disaster.

This was of course a foreshadowing of the intercession that would be made by Jesus Christ as He turned God's wrath from all people. For like the Israelites, we too have all gone astray and turned away from God, and await only His wrath. Yet as Jesus died on the cross on Calvary, He bore the fierceness of God's wrath in our place. In doing so, Christ fulfilled the greatest promise of God--the promise of redemption. So now we can stand before God free from the fear of wrath as we point to the redeeming work of the true Servant, Jesus Christ.

Titus Utecht, Sem II

Hymn: *Cross of Jesus, Cross of Sorrow* (LSB 428:2)

Here the King of all the ages,
Throned in light ere worlds could be,
Robed in mortal flesh is dying,
Crucified by sin for me.

Prayer: Spare us, O Lord, and mercifully forgive us our sins, and though by our continual transgressions we have merited Your punishments, be gracious unto us, and grant that all those evils which we have deserved, may be turned from us and overruled to our everlasting good; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen. (Litany 5)

March 31

Psalm 34:15-22

O Heavenly Father, Your eyes are always toward the righteous, to help and deliver them from every attack. You heard the cries of the Israelites in their slavery, the three children in the Babylonian furnace, and David from under the hand of Abimelech; You did deliver them from their earthly griefs. But I am quick to doubt. I so readily see how many You did not deliver in this life: the thief on the cross, the martyrs, the unborn, the fatherless. Forgive me when I turn my eyes from You and fear the world instead. It presses down on me and still I do not fall to my knees in prayer. You have taught me what is good in this life, that I should love my neighbors and pray for those who persecute Your Church. You promised, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely." So by Your Savior, the One whose bones were not broken though his life was expired, deliver me in these days into Your everlasting promise. Protect me from all attacks of the Evil One who would lead me into despair. Grant me faith that I may trust You to redeem the life of Your servant and deliver it from many afflictions. Finally when my last breath comes, speak Your benediction that I may confess You as did the thief: Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.

Christian Schultz, Sem I

Hymn: *Hear Us, Father, When We Pray* (LSB 773:3)

Jesus, advocate on high,
Sacrificed on Calv'ry's altar,
Through Your priestly blood we cry:
Hear our prayer, though they may falter;
Place them on Your Father's throne
As Your own.

Prayer: O God, Ruler of the angels and of all creatures, send forth Thine Angel to encamp round about us, that we, being guarded by His protection, may be delivered from the most evil death of sin; through the same, our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen. (Psalm 34)

April 1

Jeremiah 11:18-20

A plot against Jeremiah's life is instigated by his own family. This shocking revelation leads Jeremiah to some deep reflection on his own mission as prophet to the nations of Judah and Israel. The information comes suddenly, but in many ways it's not surprising. The townspeople of Anathoth, representing the larger community of Judah, have been conspiring to dethrone God with their idol worship and now they seek to silence His messenger. As God's spokesman, Jeremiah has been sent by God Himself. And where God sends, God also promises to protect, "They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you" (Jer. 1:19). Even in the face of grave danger Jeremiah was safe in the arms of his Lord. The rejection of God's Word, and thus His prophet, is exactly what Jesus teaches about in the Parable of Tenants (Mt. 21:33-46). But the rejection of God's Word, His Son, has dire consequences. The idolatry of self-righteousness will lead to destruction. However, through repentant faith in the Lamb of God, He gives us every good gift: forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life.

Ultimately, Jesus is forsaken by His Father so that we may be accepted and brought into God's family. He was perfectly innocent "like a gentle lamb" and was slaughtered for the guilty. By His blood we are set free. Just as the Lord promised Jeremiah, He remains with us through every grave danger and threat. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me." (Ps. 23:4)

Aaron Spratt, Sem IV

Hymn: *We Sing the Praise of Him Who Died* (LSB 429:5)

The balm of life, the cure of woe,
The measure and the pledge of love,
The sinner's refuge here below,
The angels' theme in heav'n above.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, grant us grace so to pass through this holy time of our Lord's Passion that we may obtain the pardon of our sins; through the same Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever, one God, world without end. Amen. (Tuesday in Holy Week)

The season of Lent, with its subdued praise and complete lack of the “A-word” (“*shh*” -- *Alleluia*) parallels the Israelites’ somber forty-year wandering through the desert as they awaited entry into the Promised Land. So, too, does Lent remind us of our own somber wandering through this world until we come into our eternal home. Our life in this world is full of hardship and toil, loss and heartache. And as our forty day journey through Lent draws ever nearer to a close, our gaze is ever more directed toward the focal-point of the season: the crucifixion, the greatest hardship and toil of the Son of God, the greatest loss and heartache of the Father. Jesus Christ gave His own body up on the cross; in tears He sowed His Body into the Earth, in order that New Life might spring forth in His Resurrection and that through Him we may reap His benefits with shouts of joy. Through His Death and Resurrection, the Lord has indeed restored our fortunes; He has indeed done great things among us! He forgives our sins, He cleanses us from all unrighteousness; He feeds us the heavenly manna of His body and blood. And now, like streams of living water, we flow through the dry desert of the world, bringing the Gospel of Christ to the parched earth, so that He might give life to the dead, dry bones and create living, breathing beings, calling all to His holy hill, Zion, our heavenly home.

Kyle Brown, Sem II

Hymn: *Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice* (LSB 556:8)

“Though he will shed My precious blood,
Me of My life bereaving,
All this I suffer for your good;
Be steadfast and believing.
Life will from death the vict’ry win;
My innocence shall bear your sin,
And you are blessed forever.”

Prayer: Comfort Thy people, O Lord, and deliver us from the evil captivity of sin, that what we sow here in tears, we may reap in joy through Thy bounty; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, One God, world without end. Amen. (Psalm 126)

April 3

2 Kings 4:32-37

God sends a man to deal with death. Before Elisha, Elijah was sent to the Widow of Zarephath to pray to God over the corpse of the widow's son (1 Kings 17:17-24). Stretching himself over the child *three times*, Elijah beseeched the Lord, saying, "O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again." And the child arose as though waking from slumber.

God sends a man to deal with death. Elisha was sent to the dead son of the Shunammite woman. He prayed to the Lord and stretched himself over the child *twice*, and the child sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

God sends a man to deal with death. Jesus was sent to Nain and saw a funeral procession of a widow's son (Luke 7:11-17). Out of Jesus' compassion, He simply said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." And with that *one* word, the son arose and started speaking. Jesus, holding the keys to death and life, needed not pray to the Father for life to be restored, but He said the word and the son of the widow was restored to life. But all these sons eventually died again. Fortunately for us, God sends a man to deal with death. The God-man Jesus Christ died and rose again on the third day to deal with death once and for all. Because of Christ's resurrection, our deaths become a slumber and we will one day awake with resurrected bodies as surely as Elijah raised the widow's son, Elisha raised the Shunammite woman's son, and Jesus raised the son of the widow of Nain.

Rees H. Jaccobi, Sem IV

Hymn: *In Peace and Joy I Now Depart* (LSB 938:1)

In peace and joy I now depart
Since God so wills it.
Serene and confident my heart;
Stillness fills it.
For the Lord has promised me
That death is but a slumber.

Prayer: Abide with us, Lord, for it is toward evening and the day is far spent. Abide with us and with Your whole Church. Abide with us at the end of the day, at the end of our life, at the end of the world. Abide with us with Your grace and goodness, with Your holy Word and Sacrament, with Your strength and blessing. Abide with us when the night of affliction and temptation comes upon us, the night of fear and despair, the night when death draws near. Abide with us and with all the faithful, now and forever. (Compline)

April 4

Numbers 21:4-9

The people of Israel were finally freed from slavery in Egypt, yet they constantly wept and grumbled against God and against His servant, Moses. They were unsatisfied with God's provision of manna, the bread from heaven. Longing for the fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic of Egypt, the people turned against God and toward their former bondage. They blamed the living God for bringing them into the wilderness to die. God's wrath was enkindled against the people on account of their ingratitude, and so he sent fiery serpents upon them. Because Israel blamed God for leading them to their deaths, He punished them with death. When the people encountered God's wrath, they repented of their ways and turned to Moses and God for healing. God instructed Moses to craft a bronze serpent and place it on a pole. If anyone were bitten by a serpent, he could look upon the sign and live. The sign of wrath became a sign of mercy. God's act of destruction became a life-giving remedy. The story of Israel's wilderness wandering is the story of the Church. God and His servants are leading the people from a land of bondage to a land of freedom and abundance. The pleasures and enticements of this world cause us to look back to our lives of slavery with a longing that leads to death. But God has provided a way out in the death of His Son. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. The sign of God's wrath has become a sign of mercy. May we ever look to the cross of Christ and live.

Nathaniel Jensen, Sem II

Hymn: *Jesus, in Your Dying Woes* (LSB 447:15)

May we thirst Your love to know.
Lead us in our sin and woe
Where the healing waters flow:
Hear us, holy Jesus.

Prayer: Almighty and most merciful God, who in Your Fatherly wisdom has chastened us on account of our sins, that we might not continue in impenitence and vain confidence, and thus perish with the ungodly: in the midst of wrath You have remembered mercy, and have graciously delivered us out of our affliction. We give You, therefore, most hearty thanks and praise, that You have turned away from us Your just anger, and shown Yourself favorable toward us, Your unworthy servants. Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. You, Lord, are merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. Glory be to You, O God, forever; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Thanksgiving)

April 5

Psalm 90:13-17

We live in a world of near instant gratification. We want a certain food, the nearby grocery store probably has it. We might even find a microwavable version to speed things up. Between Hulu, Netflix, and hundreds of TV channels, we can find whatever we want whenever we feel like watching it. Even snail mail has put rockets on in order to keep up with the demands of instant gratification. Fast food, instant entertainment, and just plain stuff. If you want something, just look around and you will probably be satisfied. This is not always the case when it comes to satisfaction in our redemption. Yes, Christ has redeemed us. He died and rose again so that we may have new life in Him. But sometimes we don't feel like we have a new life in Him. We still age. We still hunger. We still get sick. And at some point we still die. We still struggle with sin and all its effects even though we are freed from it. We find it hard to be glad and rejoice in something that seems unfulfilled.

Moses and the Israelites were delivered from Egypt but they still had many sins and afflictions to endure on their way to the promised land. No instant gratification, and so our text. So we too are saved, but we still must wait saying, "How Long?" Christ was afflicted to redeem us and yet we still find ourselves afflicted in our own journey to the Promised Land. So we wait. But we wait rejoicing in the fact that God has truly established the work of our hand, for He has established the work of His saving hand in Christ's redeeming work.

Matthew Koterba, Sem IV

Hymn: *The Head That Once Was Crowned with Thorns* (LSB 532:6)

The cross He bore is life and health,
Though shame and death to Him:
His people's hope, His people's wealth,
Their everlasting theme.

Prayer: Keep us, O Lord, from one generation to another, and let not us, who have clung to Thy foundation, be carried away with this present world, but arise to be our Comforter in trouble, and by the bestowal of joy wipe away our sorrows; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, One God, world without end. Amen. (Psalm 90)

April 6

Genesis 17:1-8

For twenty-four years, Abram waited. He heard the LORD first promise long ago, that he would be blessed and his name made great. Now, the LORD appeared to Abram and once again established His covenant, renaming him, and once again promising to make him “the father of a multitude of nations.” During these many years, Abraham was reassured by the LORD that the promise was going to be fulfilled, and received this promise in faith. Yet, the twenty-four years that passed were not free from trouble and temptation. Abram’s wife Sarai tempted him to know Hagar, so that he might bear a son. Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, who was born from Abram’s lack of trust in the promise of God. When the LORD confronted Abram, he fell on his face in repentance, for he had not walked blamelessly. Yet the LORD, abundant in mercy and grace, reiterated his covenant, declaring once more His original promise. The penitential season of Lent provides an opportunity to reflect on how we too struggle to trust in God’s promises, how we fail to walk blamelessly before the LORD, in thought, word, and deed. Yet our repentance does not lead to despair, for we know that God is gracious and merciful. God is faithful, and through the promised nation of Abraham, He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to extend the everlasting covenant to all nations. Christ bore our sins upon the cross, atoning for them, and satisfying God’s wrath. Being clothed in Christ’s righteousness, we are justified. Our faith and hope are in this Christ, this Lenten season, and forevermore.

Jay Weideman, Sem II

Hymn: *A Multitude Comes from the East and the West* (LSB 510:1)

A multitude comes from the east and the west
To sit at the feast of salvation
With Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the blest,
Obeying the Lord’s invitation.
Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!

Prayer: Lord God, gracious Father, who in the fullness of time did send Your Son to become man, to assume our flesh and become our Brother, we thank You for Your truth and fatherly goodness in giving us this Savior, by whose birth we are delivered from sin, death, Satan, and hell; and we beseech You, keep us until the end in true knowledge of our Redeemer, that, with all the holy angels, we may rejoice at His nativity, and behold Him, together with You and the Holy Spirit, in glory and majesty, world without end. Amen. (Christmas Day)

April 7

Jeremiah 20:7-13

“Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts” (Jeremiah 15:16). These were the words from the prophet Jeremiah, when he spoke about the duties of being God’s servant. He was filled with the passion of one who has found righteousness. Jeremiah desired to proclaim God’s word to the people. But now Jeremiah says these words, “O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived.” Jeremiah took in God’s very own Word and it was good. It welled up from within him and was proclaimed by his tongue. And when the prophecy hit the eardrums of the men it was against, the words were not received as music, but as a war march. The men cry aloud to attack Jeremiah and to seize him so that they might have revenge on him. The Word of God is folly to those who do not fear Him. Yet to those who do fear Him it is a terror because we are sinners. We, like Jeremiah, face a world that is hostile to God. In these days, it has become a louder cry and a more fervent action against Him and His word. And we ourselves fight against our Old Adam, our sin-filled selves, to add to our misery. But the Lord is good and, “He has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers.” Christ himself has saved us from the devil, and our Old Adam. Christ has redeemed us from our sin and He is the great conqueror of all who stand against Him. For Jeremiah as for you, Christ has ensured that we will be received into His arms in everlasting life.

Adam McDowell, Sem IV

Hymn: *Ride On, Ride On in Majesty* (LSB 441:3)

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
The angel armies of the sky
Look down with sad and wond’ring eyes
To see the approaching sacrifice.

Prayer: Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and take them to heart that, by the patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

April 8

Ezekiel 37:21-28

A covenant has been struck with the Lord's people. A deal has been made, but it is an unfair deal. God has drawn the short straw, for this covenant is laughably one-sided. It is a covenant of peace which the Lord has struck, and it stands for eternity. In return, His people must do...nothing. The Lord places a burden of responsibility and fulfillment upon Himself alone in this covenant. He will bring peace, He will do it for His people, and He will do it on His own according to His might.

No longer are we, the Lord's people, defiled by our idolatry, by our detestable things, by our transgressions. We have been delivered according to the covenant of peace which the Lord has made with us. His Son, our Lord, fulfilled the Lord's end of the covenant. He defiled Himself, that we would be clean. He became detestable, that we would be beautiful. He took on our transgressions, that we might be cleansed. He died, that we might live. All this He has done for us, His holy nation, purely out of love. Our Prince, our David, our Lord, Jesus Christ, now sits in our midst as a King, a Shepherd, and as the bringer of peace.

Gordon Maxwell, Sem IV

Hymn: *O Darkest Woe* (LSB 448:6)
O Virgin's Son,
What Thou hast won
Is far beyond all telling:
How our God, detested, died,
Hell and devil felling.

Prayer: You good and faithful Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who, of Your infinite love, did lay down Your life for the sheep, we give You praise and glory for this Your unspeakable grace and mercy; and we beseech You, feed us upon the pleasant pastures of Your Word, give us to drink of the waters of salvation, and guide us by Your Holy Spirit, that, as You know us, and do continually minister to our need, even so we also may know You, gladly hear Your voice, and follow You, and by You be delivered from all our foes, until the whole flock shall be gathered in heaven about You, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (Misericordias Gospel)

Lent is a period of anticipation. We know, entering the season, what awaits us at the end on Easter Sunday. In this text from Zechariah we are given the prophecy that the king shall return to his holy city, not in a chariot or surrounded by an army, but, “humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Immediately we are drawn to the image of Christ entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, on a donkey, surrounded by people singing praises to God. Yet this is only the beginning, for not only is the King returning, he has come to conquer.

When Jesus returned to Jerusalem He was determined to conquer as well. However, He was not going to conquer based on our earthly understanding of the word; rather He has come to conquer an enemy that we cannot and that enemy is death. In the weeks leading up to Palm Sunday we awaited this scene. We awaited the return of Christ to Jerusalem because we know what will happen next: Christ will die with the weight of the sins of the world on His back. He will rise again on Easter Sunday, and in turn we will be declared victors because Christ has defeated death. Our King is set to return to Jerusalem to conquer death and because of this we are, “set free from the waterless pit,” for God declares that because of Christ’s victory, “I will restore to you double.”

Alexander Sabol, Sem IV

Hymn: *No Tramp of Soldiers’ Marching Feet* (LSB 444:3)

What fading flow’rs His road adorn;
 The palms how soon laid down!
 No bloom or leaf but only thorn
 The King of glory’s crown.
 The soldiers mock, the rabble cries,
 The streets with tumult ring,
 As Pilate to the mob replies,
 “Behold, behold your King!”

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, You sent Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon Himself our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of His great humility and patience and be made partakers of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Palm Sunday)

April 10

Isaiah 42:1-9

Behold the Servant of God, your Savior, your Messiah. He comes to enlighten and free people from bondage – spiritually, morally, mentally, physically. He comes for you. Through His gifts of Word and Sacrament we are given this Light of the World, the life of Christ Himself. We are brought into the new covenant, poured out and shed for you, in which Jesus Himself is the light that opens our eyes to the reality, and the riches, of God's love and mercy to this fallen world, and to us poor, miserable, failed sinners. In this light of life, we are freed from the prison of sin and death and granted the freedom of being heirs of God's kingdom of light as adopted sons and daughters. Freed, because He himself will serve and the payment of our debts. Freed, because in Holy Baptism this servant takes our place under the law that we might be given His place in the eternal kingdom. Freed, because in this gentle and compassionate Messiah we are no longer slaves to our old sinful nature, but are now able to live as God's servants ourselves. Freed, because we know we are no longer bound to earn our place before God--His beloved Servant Jesus has given it to us of His own grace, kindness, and mercy. And so, dear friends, behold God's Servant, Jesus! He is the beloved and chosen Son of the Father. He is the tender and compassionate Servant who establishes a new covenant to save the nations. He is the dogged Savior who will not falter in the task laid out before Him. Behold this Jesus Christ fulfilling all prophecy on your behalf. Behold the One who frees you from your sins by His righteousness alone. Behold God's Servant, your Savior and Redeemer!

David Casey-Motley, Sem IV

Hymn: *We Sing the Praise of Him Who Died* (LSB 429)

To Christ, who won for sinners grace
By bitter grief and anguish sore,
Be praise from all the ransomed race
Forever and forevermore.

Prayer: Almighty God, grant that in the midst of our failures and weaknesses we may be restored through the passion and intercession of Your only-begotten Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Monday in Holy Week)

April 11

Isaiah 49:1-7

Before the foundations of the earth were laid, the Lord had called Him according to the divine plan for salvation. By the words of the angel Gabriel God's message was delivered to the Virgin who would bear the Son of God. By the Spirit the Word of God was called into her womb and was made man. From her womb, He was named Jesus, *Yeshua*, "The Lord Saves," for He comes to take away the sins of His people. The Son of God, now the Servant of God was called from her womb to be Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace, Immanuel. He has come to gather His people, to free them from their bondage to sin, death, and the devil. He has come to bring you into his fold.

For Christ, it was not enough to be a servant. He had to be *the* Servant, because this was what He had been called into the flesh to be. He had to be despised, abhorred, detested, abused, and crucified in order to gather you together with His flock. In death he destroyed death according to the faithfulness of the Lord. In His humility He was honored by the Lord. In His state of abandonment He was the Lord's most humble Servant. In His powerless estate, He was the King of Kings before whom all kings and princes bow in ceaseless worship before the heavenly throne. He is himself the Lord who saves us, and who brings us into the assembly of the living by His own death.

Eamonn Ferguson, Sem IV

Hymn: *Glory Be to Jesus* (LSB 433:2)

Grace and life eternal
In that blood I find;
Blest be His compassion,
Infinitely kind!

Prayer: Almighty God, graciously behold this Your family for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed and delivered into the hands of sinful men to suffer death upon the cross; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Good Friday)

May God be gracious to us and bless us, and make His face to shine upon us. While we were still sitting in our own sin, and while we suffered the punishment that we so rightly deserved, God was gracious to us and blessed us. He Himself came and was so gracious to us that He made His face to shine upon us. Actually, this happened a few times. As Jesus was baptized, His face shone with the water that covered Him in our very own filth. As Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, His face shone with the righteousness that would soon become ours, that we could never afford. As Jesus was praying earnestly in the Garden, His face shone with the sweat-like blood that gushed from His pores. As the good, last hour of His life approached, His face shone with the blood that was never supposed to be shed. His power was known among all nations on that day as He willingly carried His torture to the hill where He would return our lives to us by taking our death for Himself. His power far surpassed all nations, and infiltrated the house of the enemy where His power was made known to those who had not believed in Him. The earth had yielded its increase, and God, our God, has blessed us. His face shone with the radiance that cannot be captured by human words or imagination as His body, beaten, bloody, buried, was stolen back from death. His face shines upon us today, today in the darkness of our fallen nature. Let all the peoples praise Him.

Nathan Wille, Sem I

Hymn: *O Love, How Deep* (LSB 544:5)

For us by wickedness betrayed,
For us, in crown of thorns arrayed,
He bore the shameful cross and death;
For us He gave His dying breath.

Prayer: Show the light of Thy Countenance upon us, O Lord, and pour Thy blessing abundantly into our breasts; that our hearts, bedewed with the gladness of Thy light, may know Thy way upon earth, and be glad in the full knowledge of the holy faith among all nations; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, One God, world without end. Amen. (Psalm 67)

The Passover meal is one of unity and fellowship. It honors the integrity of each family by binding them together in this richly meaningful meal. An unblemished lamb is sacrificed for each household. A single unbroken lamb is roasted in its bodily integrity and points to both Christ and the unity of each family and household that eats it. The blood that covered those doorposts and lintels in Egypt protected all those inside. From one lamb, each family had fellowship inside and protection from death outside. God lays the foundation of Israel's rebirth in this meal. He calls His son Israel from the slavery and false gods of Egypt to follow and worship Him in the wilderness. God consecrated the families of Israel, set them apart, and made them holy by this sacrifice, this blood, and this meal. For Israel to return to fellowship with the God who wrestled with and renamed him, he had to be rescued and led away. The meal was to be eaten in haste, fully clothed and packed, ready for a journey.

God gives unity and fellowship in friends, families, and churches. In the Passover God prepared Israel's families to leave their houses never to return. They left their country but still had each other. They left false gods but still carried others. This Israel, renamed and rescued by God, began a journey with Him. Even before the commandments, God first taught through a meal of unity and fellowship of sacrifice and protection. After four hundred years in Egypt, Israel became reacquainted with the One who defended him. As Israel begins this journey, will he come to know who is his defender, the true host of this meal?

Justin Massey, Sem IV

Hymn: *Jesus, Greatest at the Table* (LSB 446:5)

Jesus gave to His disciples
 A commandment that was new:
 "Show My love to one another,
 Do as I have done for you;
 All the world will know you love Me
 As you love each other too."

Prayer: O Lord Jesus Christ, You innocent Lamb of God, who did carry Your cross and upon it the burden of our sin and sorrow, we beseech You, enable us by Your Holy Spirit to comfort ourselves at all times in true faith with Your perfect satisfaction for our sins, to praise and glorify You for Your unspeakable love, and to bear our cross after You with patience and humility, that, having suffered with You, we may also by Your mercy be raised with You to everlasting glory, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Lent)

April 14 (Good Friday)

Genesis 22:1-8

“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!” With these words, John the Baptist confesses the truth of a God who remembers His people, and who is faithful to His promises. To Abraham and his wife Sarah a child was promised in their old age. The Lord remembered this promise and He gave them the child they could not give themselves. Yet, after a time the Lord commanded Abraham to sacrifice this boy, his only begotten son, upon an altar. This boy, provided by God, was to be given back to God as a sacrifice. But God does not desire the sacrifice of this boy. Abraham confesses that “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering,” and provide He does.

Where Abraham’s son is spared from sacrifice, the Lord’s only begotten Son is not. Where Abraham receives from the Lord a lamb to sacrifice in the place of his son, the Lord is not granted this privilege. “Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done,” says the Son, but the Father does not remove the cup from him. The Father *cannot* remove the cup from him, for this Son is the Lamb provided by God himself. God remembers his people and is faithful to his promises, so Christ must die. He is the promised Son we could not provide for ourselves—the greater Isaac, the greater Lamb. Behold then the Lamb of God upon the altar of the cross, slain for the forgiveness of your sins.

Eamonn Ferguson, Sem IV

Hymn: *Lamb of God, Pure and Holy* (LSB 434:3)

Lamb of God, pure and holy,
Who on the cross didst suffer,
Ever patient and lowly,
Thyself to scorn didst offer.
All sins Thou borest for us,
Else had despair reigned o’er us:
Have mercy on us, O Jesus! O Jesus!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, Lamb of the Father’s own choosing, who offered Yourself a bloody sacrifice for our sins on the Place of Skulls, receive our thanks for Your love beyond measure. Let your wounds be the solace of our hearts, and Your merits the ornaments of our souls in life and death, that, with Your perfected saints on high, we may forever sing Your praise. Amen. (Psalm 22)

Job laments your frailty. Oh man, know yourself, you who are no stronger than cedar, no more powerful than a rotting stump. The roots of a tree stretch out to suck up life from the earth, but man puts down no roots, he cannot stretch out to draw life for himself. Man digs a well to draw life from the earth, but the well does not water him after he himself is buried. A man once teemed with life like a freshwater lake, the playing creatures of his earthly joys splashed about along the shoreline, and he laughs and plays and gives thanks to God for His mercy. A strong wind blows, the waters of his lake fail, and the bodies of those happy memories now stink in the hot sun. Job waits for your renewal. Oh thirsty, dying man, when will your renewal come? A rock waits for you in the wasteland of Jerusalem. Strike this rock, oh thirsty man, and springs of living water shall gush forth. Your Redeemer was laid low, whose strength exceeds the cedar and whose stump put forth shoots to draw up life for new vegetation. His leaves conceal you, his tomb covers you, your iniquities lie therein forever sealed. His crimson water fills your failing lake, your rivers run swiftly, and the Lord's baptismal joys are yours. Rejoice you who were buried with Christ by baptism and play in the newness of His life.

Kyle Richardson, Sem II

Hymn: *Upon the Cross Extended* (LSB 453:5)

Your soul in griefs unbounded,
Your head with thorns surrounded,
You died to ransom me.
The cross for me enduring,
The crown for me securing,
You healed my wounds and set me free.

Prayer: O God, creator of heaven and earth, grant that as the crucified body of Your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with Him the coming of the third day, and rise with Him to newness of life, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Holy Saturday)

April 16 (Easter Sunday)

1 Chronicles 16:8-16

Today is a good day to give thanks! After all, we began this morning with the cry, "Alleluia! Christ is risen!" Our praises ring out as we proclaim Christ's wondrous work of our redemption. He who won our forgiveness by His death is now alive forevermore, and because Jesus is risen we too shall arise. Death, the last great enemy, has been defeated. Sin has been forgiven. The eternal victory has been won. Give thanks to the Lord and remember this wondrous work forever. Alleluia! Christ is risen! Sin, death, and the devil are defeated. They can harm you no more.

Sing to the Lord, all the earth!
Tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples!
For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised.
(1 Chronicles 16:23-25a, ESV)

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Phillip Fischaber, Sem IV

Hymn: *Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands* (LSB 458.1)

Christ Jesus lay in death's strong bands
For our offenses given;
But now at God's right hand He stands
And brings us life from heaven.
Therefore let us joyful be
And sing to God right thankfully
Loud songs of Alleluia!
Alleluia!

Prayer: Almighty God the Father, through Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, You have overcome death and opened the gate of everlasting life to us. Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of our Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by Your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(Easter Day 1)

