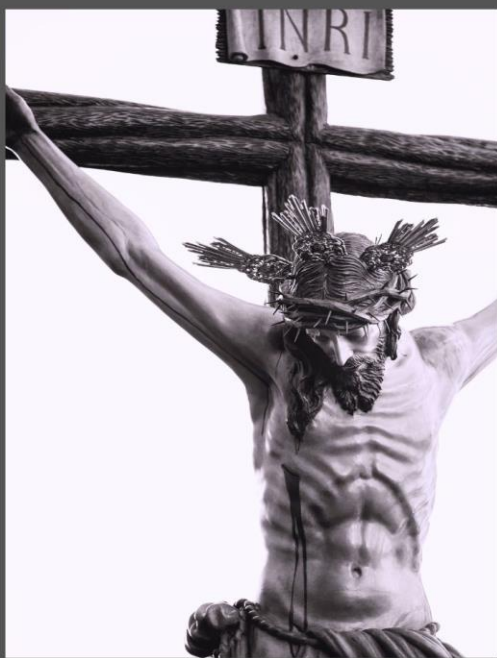


DAILY LENTEN
DEVOTIONS:
THE GIFT OF
REPENTANCE



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PENITENTIAL PSALMS 2024

Introduction: The Lord's Gift of Repentance in the Penitential Psalms

For much of the history of Christianity, some of the Psalms have been characterized as “Penitential Psalms.” That is, some of the Psalms have the clear theme of repentance—a theme which also happens to be emphasized during the season of Lent. But what is repentance? In both the original Greek and Hebrew, *repentance* is from the same word for *turning*. Thus, in the gift of repentance, the Lord turns us away from the death of sin to Him for life and forgiveness. However, if you think you have no sickness, then why would you need the medicine? Likewise, if you think you have no sin, then why would you need a Savior (Mk 2:17)? In His working of repentance, our Lord convicts us of our bondage to sin that we would despair of ourselves and flee to Jesus for refuge.

Our sin is not merely what we do (*outer*), but our sin infects all that we are (*inner*). From sinful trees come sinful fruit. In repentance, then, the Lord is cutting down our sinful tree self by the preaching of His Law, showing how our sin runs all the way down. Then, through His Gospel, He gives the gift of Life and freedom from sin. Rinse and repeat. That's the Christian's daily baptismal life of repentance: the gift of the Lord turning us to Himself.

Your pastors have written daily Lenten devotions for the congregation to utilize in their homes this season. These devotions will slowly work through each of the seven penitential Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143), giving opportunity to inwardly digest a few verses each day over the course of the season. Each day's devotion is quite brief, including the Psalm, a devotional thought, and a prayer, allowing you easily to read the devotion in less than 5 minutes. We pray that this resource is helpful to you in your Lenten observation and Easter preparations.

Pastor Clemmer

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14

Pastor Clemmer

*O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger,
nor discipline me in your wrath.*

*Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing;
heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled.*

Psalm 6:1-2

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” These words are spoken as ashes are smeared on our heads as a vivid and morbid reminder of our mortality. It’s quite the contrast from the fluffy clichés of Valentine’s Day cards and candies, isn’t it? Our Lenten journey begins with this harsh look at where our bones are headed: back to the dust. Because of our sinfulness, not just our sinful actions but our sinfulness that runs deep into our bones, we will one day face death, unless Jesus returns first.

As we consider our mortality and reflect on the bitter reality of death, we cannot but fear the anger and wrath of God that we deserve. We are helpless in our unstoppable downward spiral toward death. There is nowhere to turn but to the grace of God—and that’s right where He wants us—fully left to the grace of Jesus. Our Ash Wednesday smudges were given in the shape of a cross, for the death we will inevitably face has been overcome by the cross of Jesus. We do not deserve Him, we cannot earn Him, and He is given before we even asked. We cry, “Be gracious to me,” and He always is.

*Gracious Lord, forgive our sins, speak Your Words of Life into our suffering, and sustain us by Your grace as we walk through this valley of the shadow of death.
Amen.*

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15

Pastor Schumacher

My soul also is greatly troubled.

But you, O LORD—how long?

Turn, O LORD, deliver my life;

save me for the sake of your steadfast love.

For in death there is no remembrance of you;

in Sheol who will give you praise?

Psalm 6:3-5

Looking at himself, at his adversaries, at the prospect of death—wherever David looks, he sees no earthly hope. He is in despair. However, he does find hope. His hope is from the One who gives hope to the hopeless. It is in the Lord. He turns to the Lord asks for salvation because of the steadfast love of the Lord. He has a sure hope then because of God’s steadfast love. That steadfast love is manifested fully in Jesus Christ, who has died and risen for us. When we look at ourselves or our outward circumstances, we have no sure hope. When we turn to the Lord, knowing His steadfast love in Christ Jesus, there is hope and peace and sure salvation.

Turn, O LORD, “deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love”, the steadfast love that is mine in Jesus Christ. Amen.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16

Pastor Bartens

*I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.
My eye wastes away because of grief
it grows weak because of all my foes.*

Psalm 6:6-7

The writer of the book of Hebrews tells us clearly that God chastens those whom He loves (Hebrews 12:6). Furthermore, he goes on to state that such chastening, though it be painful for the moment, yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness for those who have been trained by it.

The words of Psalm 6 given above provide words for us to pray when we are thus chastened by God. These words do not minimize the reality of the chastening nor its severity. To the contrary, they confess that God's discipline leads to weariness, moaning, and weakness.

Nevertheless, we know that God disciplines us as a Father does his children. For us, his discipline flows not from wrath but from love. And if this be so, then his discipline must bear fruit for us. So we pray these words not from despair, but knowing that he will work out His discipline for our good.

*O Lord, grant that we may receive discipline from you in childlike fear, always trusting your fatherly goodness.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 17

Pastor Clemmer

*Depart from me, all you workers of evil,
for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping.*

*The Lord has heard my plea;
the Lord accepts my prayer.*

*All my enemies shall be ashamed and greatly troubled;
they shall turn back and be put to shame in a
moment.*

Psalm 6:8-10

Life will certainly have trials. There's no way around it. When those trials come, your enemy the Devil will bring his accusations: "God is ignoring you, doesn't love you, or is powerless to help you. You deserve this, so God has left you to suffer alone." This Psalm pushes back against the Devil's lies. The Lord has heard your plea!

You?! Yes! He has commanded you to pray and promises to hear you. You have a God who listens to you; He's even taught you to pray "Our Father." So, God Himself hears you as He hears His only Son—with the loving ears of a Father. He hears the cries of our weeping—like a mom recognizing her fallen child's cry—and comes running.

To be sure, He may not end your trial in the way you prefer or on your timeline, but you can be certain that He hears you, loves you, and is working through this trial for your good. He's with you, so your enemy the Devil is put to shame and can only depart from you.

*Loving Lord, keep us mindful that you hear our prayers,
and give us the faith to pray "Thy will be done," knowing
You work all things toward our good. Amen.*

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18

Pastor Schumacher

*Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.*

*Blessed is the man against whom
the LORD counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

Psalm 32:1-2

In this the second of the traditional seven penitential psalms, David gets to the one blessing that is absolutely necessary, and that is the forgiveness of sins. Sin separates us from our Lord and Creator. Left in sin, there is alienation from God, and the horror of eternal separation from God.

Because of the work of Christ Jesus on the cross for us sinners, there is now forgiveness of sins. He paid our price for all sins on the cross. In Him we now have forgiveness of sins. And “where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation (Small Catechism, Sacrament of the Altar).” We are indeed blessed because of the forgiveness of sins won for us by Jesus.

Gracious Heavenly Father, we praise you for the blessing of forgiveness of sins through Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19

Pastor Bartens

*For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.*

*For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.*

*I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity*

*I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.*

Psalm 32:3-5

The world in which you and I live finds those last words abominable. Those words mean that sin is real, that we are not good, that there are such things as right and wrong, and that God is the one who determines them.

But we say those words weekly. "I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord!" Why? Consider the alternative. King David tried it for a time. He tried keeping silent, ignoring his sin, sweeping it under the rug. "Out of sight, out of mind" he thought.

But try as he might, he could not hide his sins from God. And God, in love, laid his hand heavy upon David, not letting his conscience rest until he confessed his sin. And when he confessed his sin, God, who is faithful and just, forgave the iniquity of his sin. So also for us. We confess our sins, not as a form of self-flagellation, but in faith that God desires nothing more than to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Heavenly Father, grant us true love and trust in you, that we would confess our sins to you, confident in your forgiveness. Hear us for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20

Pastor Clemmer

*Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you
at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.*

*You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance..*

Psalm 32:6-7

The picture is of a deadly “rush of great waters” that renders helpless everything in its path, destroying every person and object it impacts. In Psalm 32, that deadly water bomb is the impact of our sin upon us when we insist on holding onto it, justifying it, or denying it. As any home improvement guru will tell you, water always finds a way to cause damage—and the longer it sticks around, the worse it gets. Like persistent water damage, our sin erodes our joy and our life the longer we hold onto it. But for those who confess their sin to the Lord, who acknowledge their brokenness and their helplessness for self-improvement or self-preservation, the Lord snatches him from the waters of sin and holds him high in safety. The waters “shall not reach him” for He is a hiding place that preserves him. May our Lord always have us confessing our sin to Him, that He would rescue us from the deadly waters of thinking we can make it on our own!

Merciful Lord, grant us the gift of repentance, that we would daily acknowledge our sin and be turned to You for forgiveness and life. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21

Pastor Schumacher

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;

I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

*Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
which must be curbed with bit and bridle,
or it will not stay near you.*

Psalm 32:8-9

The Lord speaks to David and to us. He instructs us in the way that we should go. “The way”—Jesus calls Himself “The Way, The Truth, and The Life.” To be with Jesus is the goal of life, and to be with Jesus is the Way right now. Life is Jesus and He is both the goal of life, the way to the goal, and our Lord who is with us right now. He is The Way. In the early Church, to be a Christian was to belong to the Way (Acts 9:2).

Our Lord does not want you to wander through life aimlessly. He is the Way, and He instructs us so that we know the Way. His eye is upon us and He gives us everlasting joy and peace in Himself.

Gracious Lord Jesus, You are the Way. Teach us to rightly remain in you and keep us on the path to everlasting life in You. Amen.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22

Pastor Bartens

*Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one
who trusts in the LORD.*

*Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!*

Psalm 32:10-11

The sorrows of the wicked are not the kind of sorrows we see with our eyes. As far as our eyes see, the wicked flourish and it is the righteous who are plagued by sorrow.

If we react according to our sinful flesh, then we cry out with jealousy, desiring the easy life, the luxuries, and the accolades which the wicked seem to be surrounded by.

But if we react according to the Spirit of Christ who dwells in us by faith, then we are not envious of the wicked and their luxuries, but we pity them. Though they may seem to flourish, their flourishing is shallow and temporary, only as permanent as a breath.

And as for us, who trust in the Lord, though we be poor in the eyes of the world, yet we are surrounded by riches that the world cannot see. We are surrounded by the steadfast love of the Lord which has no end. His love sustains us in our earthly sorrow and delivers us into the joy of the eternal kingdom of heaven for the sake of Christ who died for our sins.

*O Lord, grant us the eyes of faith, that we might trust in
You and Your steadfast love in the midst of the
uncertainties of this world, through Jesus Christ our
Lord. Amen.*

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23

Pastor Clemmer

*O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger,
nor discipline me in your wrath!
For your arrows have sunk into me,
and your hand has come down on me.*

Psalm 38:1-2

There are two ways for you to stand before God. Either you are one who denies the depth of his problem and says, “I can do this alone—I’m not as wrecked as those people over there!” Or you are one who cries out before God for mercy, for you know how bad you are and how broken and enslaved to sin you are. This Psalm is the painfully sincere prayer of the latter—the one who has been made to feel the depth of his sin and the sting of his shame. Like an arrow into the heart, the law is a gift that convicts the repentant man of his stubborn idolatry of self and smashes him into a pile of helplessness (“Your hand presses down on me”). The law is the doctor’s true report of the reality of the disease. The one who denies his disease also rejects the medicine that would save him. Likewise, the unrepentant, hardened sinner thinks he needs no Savior and foolishly denies his condition, stumbling toward death and hell.

Knowing the pain of sin and the wrath he deserves, the repentant sinner confesses that reality to God—the only one who can save him—crying out for mercy and forgiveness. And He gives it, every time.

*Lord of gifts, continually grant me the gift of hearing
Your law, that it may sink into my heart and turn me to
You for Your merciful Gospel of forgiveness and life.
Amen.*

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24

Pastor Schumacher

*There is no soundness in my flesh
because of your indignation;
there is no health in my bones
because of my sin.*

*For my iniquities have gone over my head;
like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.*

*My wounds stink and fester
because of my foolishness,.*

Psalm 38:3-5

God is absolutely Good; He is absolutely Loving; He is absolutely Merciful. His desire is for our everlasting salvation where we will have perfect health and well-being in His eternal kingdom. So that this would happen, the Lord can bring about a physical punishment such as Saul's (Paul's) and here He afflicts David so that David too would repent. Likewise, there are times when God allows a physical ailment in our lives so that we would see that we might know our sins and repent of them.

The Lord is gracious and merciful and He always desires that we repent of our sin and turn to Him for His forgiveness and His salvation. He only desires good for us and the true good is that we be His forever.

Heavenly Father, grant that we would rightly know our sins and repent of them. Forgive us our sins and grant us life in Your name. Amen.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 25

Pastor Bartens

*I am utterly bowed down and prostrate;
all the day I go about mourning.*

*For my sides are filled with burning
and there is no soundness in my flesh.*

I am feeble and crushed;

I groan because of the tumult of my heart.

Psalm 38:6-8

The Penitential Psalms help us to confess and recognize the reality of our sins. Left to ourselves, we would be quick to make light of our sins. “They are not so bad,” we say. “They are not as bad as the sins of others.”

Only through the Word of God do we see the enormity of sin’s effect. If our sins were to be placed upon our bodies like physical weights, we would be bowed down, prostrate, crushed with our faces pressed deep into the dirt.

And by considering our sins in this way, we are also aided in our consideration of the passion of Christ. For it was our sins that were heaped upon him, that caused his grief and sighing. Our sins caused him to be feeble and crushed and caused his flesh to suffer even death.

But by that death, he lifts the burden off of us and grants us soundness of flesh and peace of conscience. He stills the tumult in our heart and grants us his peace.

Lord Jesus Christ, you suffered death in your flesh to save us from eternal torment. Make our hearts grateful and grant us your peace. Amen.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26

Pastor Clemmer

*O Lord, all my longing is before you;
my sighing is not hidden from you.
My heart throbs; my strength fails me,
and the light of my eyes—it also has gone from me.
My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague,
and my nearest kin stand far off.*

Psalm 38:9-11

Do you like to surround yourself with cruel people who speak evil and complain about their life? Do you like to associate with evil people who try to tempt you to inflict evil upon yourself and others? Probably not! Sin brings isolation. It cuts us off from unity with God, yes, but it also cuts us off from others. The guilt and shame of our sin can, at times, lead to loneliness and depression. The devil loves this, for in our loneliness, we become more susceptible to his lies, such as, “If you do this, more people will like you,” or “No one likes you; your life is not worth living.”

These verses confess the loneliness of sin and shame that we sometimes feel. We pray for the Lord to preserve us from such self-inflicted isolation! The Lord’s law is a gift, warning us of the evil deception of sin that would drive others from us—may we always hear it! And when we fail, may the Lord who eats with tax collectors and sinners, not leave us alone or forsake us, but be with us in our dark times, giving us the Light of forgiveness and even the joy of His presence with us.

Jesus, as you ate with sinners and tax collectors, do not forsake me in my sin, but forgive me and strengthen me in my struggle against sin. Amen.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27

Pastor Schumacher

*Those who seek my life lay their snares;
those who seek my hurt speak of ruin
and meditate treachery all day long.
But I am like a deaf man; I do not hear,
like a mute man who does not open his mouth.
I have become like a man who does not hear,
and in whose mouth are no rebukes.*

Psalm 38:12-14

The world is a deceiver. The world supplies us with plenty of excuses for sin. Our sinful self wants to listen to these excuses so that we can self-justify. However, we have no excuses. God's Law condemns us. David now knows he has no excuse. Likewise, the Law condemns us. When we consider God's commandments, we have no excuse. As Paul says, in Romans 3:19, "Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God."

We are accountable to God. We cannot open our mouth to justify. We only open our mouths to confess our sins and to cry to the Lord for His mercy through His Son Jesus Christ. And we are sure that He hears our cry for forgiveness as He is gracious and merciful. In Him there is forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

*Merciful Father, we have no righteousness of our own.
We have no defense for our sins. We plead for your
forgiveness because of Your Son, my Lord, Jesus Christ..
Amen.*

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28

Pastor Bartens

*But for you, O LORD, do I wait;
it is you, O Lord my God who will answer.
For I said, "Only let them not rejoice over me,
who boast against me when my foot slips!"*

Psalm 38:15-16

Time, it seems, moves most slowly while we are waiting. Waiting for the return of a phone call. Waiting for the package to arrive. Waiting for the guests to ring the doorbell.

It moves even slower when we are waiting in pain and anguish. Waiting for the pain to alleviate. Waiting for the medicine to kick in. Waiting for the paramedics to arrive.

So it often seems to us that time moves slowly when waiting for the Lord. Waiting for Him to answer our prayers. Waiting for Him to come again and restore us and bring us to everlasting life.

But this waiting, though it seems burdensome, is good. God's slowness is a sign of his patience and mercy. And his slowness is by no means an indication that he will not act. For as David cries out, "The Lord, my God will answer."

In times of distress and anguish, let your cry ring out to Him and wait patiently for Him. It is He and He alone who will answer and bring you relief when and how He sees fit in the way that He knows is best for you.

Merciful Father, grant us patience to wait upon you in all our troubles and deliver us according to you gracious will, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

THURSDAY , FEBRUARY 29

Pastor Clemmer

*For I am ready to fall,
and my pain is ever before me.*

*I confess my iniquity;
I am sorry for my sin.*

*But my foes are vigorous, they are mighty,
and many are those who hate me wrongfully.*

Psalm 38:17-19

If God is all-powerful and if He loves you, then why does He allow such suffering to come to you? Why does he not end the persecution of His children? After all, if we were in His shoes, we would step in and demolish the persecutors!

This is the often-repeated question of the Christian in the midst of suffering, even driving some to unbelief. On the one hand, the fact that the Psalmist made this prayer is evidence that believers have been suffering since the beginning—and while you may feel alone, you are not alone in your suffering. To suffer at the hand of persecutors is to join the long list of the Lord's persecuted people: many of the Old Testament prophets, most of the apostles, St. Stephen, and even Jesus Himself.

The Lord never promised to end suffering in this life for His children, but He did end the suffering. He even used suffering at the hand of persecutors as the means by which He would end our suffering eternally. He works through suffering to end eternal suffering. Thus, the Lord brings good (yes, good!) out of the midst of terrible evil. Your trials are by no means evidence that He does not love you, but instead, your trials are evidence that you need a Savior to rescue you from this world's evil. And He does—but in His way and in His time.

Lord of might, rescue me from my enemies and work through their wicked plans to bring me good, as You have promised. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 1

Pastor Schumacher

*Those who render me evil for good
accuse me because I follow after good.*

Do not forsake me, O LORD!

O my God, be not far from me!

Make haste to help me,

O Lord, my salvation!

Psalm 38:20-22

We praise God for the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to Himself that we have through Jesus Christ. When we have faith in God through Jesus Christ, we are reconciled to the Father, and we are a new creation. However, the world will hate us because the world hates the Lord. There are those who despise the Lord and will even call what is good in being a Christian as evil because we oppose the world's sinful ways.

It is often lonely to be a Christian. Others want you follow their sinful path. You can feel like an outsider at work, at school, or even in your own family. But do not fear: Your Lord will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). Jesus promises to be with you to end of the age (Matt. 28:20). Even in times of isolation from other Christians, know that you are not alone; you are His and a member of His holy and eternal people.

Do not forsake me, O LORD! O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation! Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 2

Pastor Bartens

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.*

*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!*

Psalm 51:1-2

“The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” These are words which God spoke to Moses on Sinai, words which give David hope in the face of the guilt of adultery and murder.

Steadfast love and abundant mercy.

If David had known God only as a strict and righteous judge who only returns to man according to his deeds, then he would have certainly despaired.

But David knows the God of abundant mercy and steadfast love. And so do you. Your God does not desire the death of the sinner but that the sinner turn from his ways and live.

Your God is the God of mercy and love, the God who sends his Son to die for you, who washes you from iniquity and cleanses you from sin with the water that bears his Word.

We implore you, heavenly Father, not to look upon our sins, but according to Your steadfast love and mercy to grant us forgiveness and cleansing for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 3

Pastor Clemmer

*For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment.*

Psalm 51:3-4

David had committed adultery with Bathsheba. He then tried to cover it up by murdering her husband Uriah. So, if David sinned against anyone, it would seem to have been Uriah, against Bathsheba, against Israel (for whom he was to serve as an honorable king), and against himself (giving himself into lust). Yet David confesses that His sin is finally against God. All the sin we commit, in our heart, in our family, against our neighbor, it is all sin against the Lord who created us and created our neighbor.

The Greek word for “confess” means to “say the same.” Thus, when we confess our sin, we are simply saying back to God the same thing He has said of us. He has called us sinners—in word and deed, against God and neighbor—and we simply agree. We do not self-justify or attempt to blame others, but we lay our guilt before God. That’s what it means to “know our sin”—to agree with what God has said about us. Then, knowing the terrible greatness of our sin against God, we are given to know the awesome greatness of our Savior toward us.

Merciful Lord, we have sinned against You alone in all our sins of thought, word, and deed. Make me to know my sin rightly, that I may turn fully to You as my Savior. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 4

Pastor Schumacher

*For Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

*Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.*

Psalm 51:5-6

In Psalm 51:5 there is the clear exposition of original sin. Ever since Adam, all are born sinful. There is nothing good in anyone that can save them. All are born sinners. This is clearly taught in Romans 5 and throughout the Scriptures. This means that you cannot look to your works or anything in yourself to save yourselves. You were born into sin and you actually sin.

As Christians we recognize the truth of our own depravity so that we would not be deceived to trust anything in ourselves to save us. We have salvation that is freely given in Jesus Christ. “At the right time, Christ died for the ungodly (Rom. 5:8).” The realization that Jesus does all the work of salvation and the Holy Spirit is the one who brings us to faith means that salvation is entirely a gift, a wonderful gift. God loves sinners and God saves sinners such as us.

*Gracious Lord, no merit of my own I claim, but wholly
lean on Jesus' name. For Your gracious salvation, I am
eternally thankful. Amen.*

TUESDAY, MARCH 5

Pastor Bartens

*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.*

Psalm 51:7-9

Perhaps you remember the three uses of the Law from confirmation class. The second use, the mirror, shows us our sin. But it does much more than that. The Law actually brings death to our sinful flesh. For our sinful flesh cannot stand in the presence of a Holy God and his holy Law.

Through His Law, God breaks our bones, David says. His Law crushes us. And this is a good thing. For if the Gospel is to make us alive again and resurrect us to eternal life in Christ, then we must first die.

God's Law kills us so that His Holy Gospel might restore us to life for the sake of Christ, who also died for us, that we might live with him forever. Those corrupted bones that God breaks, he puts back together and restores to perfect life. And those bones rejoice in Him for eternity, perfectly white, all iniquities blotted out.

Merciful Father, grant that the old Adam in us may die daily through our Baptism, that we may be raised and restored to live in righteousness and purity before you forever. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6

Pastor Clemmer

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.*

*Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.*

*Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.*

Psalm 51:10-12

Humans are physical beings. That means we use our senses to measure things and determine goodness or badness. Are those banana's good? Well, how do they look?

It comes very naturally for us to judge whether something is good or bad based on what we can see and measure. We look to the outside of things for evidence of goodness or badness and assign value based upon what we can see. But that doesn't work with sinners.

When it comes to sinners, you can dress up the outside all you like—controlling outer behavior, coercing external habits, even enticing good works with rewards—but a dressed up outside does not get to the real problem. The sinner can look good but be dead. Because the sinner's problem is not on the outside—it's an inside problem!

We need a new heart. "Create in me a clean heart, O God." Our heart is the real problem. You can glue beautiful fruit onto a dead apple tree, but you still haven't made a good, living tree—and that glued on fruit is already beginning to rot, as it no longer is being fed with life! Jesus is after our hearts. Only having made our hearts anew by His Gospel can good, living, sincere fruit grow. There we find the joy of salvation.

Lord of Joy, by the preaching of your Gospel, create in me a new heart, and grant to me the joy of salvation and truly good works to serve my neighbor. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 7

Pastor Schumacher

*Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.*

*Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.*

*O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.*

Psalm 51:13-15

In the midst of flood waters, the rescuer plunges himself into the water and saves the drowning person. The rescued cannot but help to thank his rescuer and praise him. Having been close to death and now being entirely safe leads to thanksgiving and praise of the rescuer.

Our rescuer is Jesus Christ, and He had saved us from sin, death, and hell by dying for us on the cross. We are His entirely by grace through faith in Him, who saved us. We now live in Christ. We cannot but help to repeat the words of David: “My tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.”

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 8

Pastor Bartens

*For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.*

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God,
you will not despise.*

Psalm 51:16-17

Why does God delight in a broken and contrite heart? Is it because he delights in our pain and agony? Of course not. God's ultimate delight is that our hearts rejoice in him for eternity.

So why the broken and contrite heart? It is because the broken and contrite heart is the sort of heart that sees its sin rightly. And it is also the heart that sees its savior rightly.

It knows that its sin is too great to cover with works. It knows that burnt offerings of bulls and goats cannot atone for what it has done.

But it also knows that there is a sacrifice much greater than burnt offerings of animals. It knows that God is merciful for the sake of His Son, the one who was given as the ultimate sacrifice, whose blood covers all our sins.

And so it offers itself in trust as a sacrifice to God, confessing its sins, trusting that God will not despise it, but for the sake of Christ, he will create it anew and give His Holy Spirit in place of the broken spirit.

Heavenly Father, wash my sin white and cleanse my heart, that being washed in the blood of the Lamb, I may obtain the joys of heaven. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 9

Pastor Clemmer

*Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
build up the walls of Jerusalem;
then will you delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.*

Psalm 51:18-19

God Himself instituted the sacrifices of the Old Testament to be the means by which He would deliver His mercy and forgiveness to sinners—much in the same way that He instituted the Lord’s Supper and Holy Baptism to do the same in the New Testament. The sacrifices were His idea and a great thing, bringing certainty of God’s mercy to His people.

So, how come in Ps. 51:16, we heard how God “will NOT delight in sacrifice”? And why now do we hear how He “WILL delight in right sacrifices”? Which is it?

The point is that the sacrifices were indeed commanded by God, but if they are simply outward gestures and not coming from a sincere heart of repentance, then they are worthless and rejected. Once again, the Lord is not interested in the superficial works of the outer man—He does not care for the fruit that’s been glued to a dying tree. The Lord is after the heart. With His Word of Law, He cuts to the heart and gives the gift of repentance, turning the sinner to God. Only then, from a sincere heart of repentance, does the sinner bring right and delightful sacrifices before God; and only from a sincere heart of love can the sinner love his neighbor outwardly.

Heavenly Father, create in me a sincere heart that my life of self-sacrifice and love toward the neighbor may be delightful to You. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 10

Pastor Schumacher

Hear my prayer, O LORD;

let my cry come to you!

Do not hide your face from me

in the day of my distress!

Incline your ear to me;

answer me speedily in the day when I call!

Psalm 102:1-2

The Psalms are such a blessing as they speak the prayers of the faithful. Some are psalms of praise and thanksgiving. However, there are times in life when there does not seem to be any hope and there is only weariness about going on. For the weary, Psalm 102 is very apt. The title is “A Prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the LORD.”

All hope seems to be lost. The burden of life seems too hard to bear, yet the psalmist hopes in the Lord. He still knows that his life has value and that there is a God who hears. From his despair, his weariness, his distress, he calls to the Lord. Though life seems unbearable, the psalmist knows he can call on the Lord. In the midst of your burdens and when life seems overwhelming, you too can call on the Lord, and He will hear and answer you.

Dear Lord Jesus, You said, “Come unto me, you weary, and I will give you rest.” We are so often weary and burdened. You invite us to rest in You. In You then we rest our souls. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 11

Pastor Bartens

*For my days pass away like smoke,
and my bones burn like a furnace.
My heart is struck down like grass and has withered;
I forget to eat my bread.*

Psalm 102:3-4

Consider the last time you were afflicted with an illness and fever. The days of the sickness are wasted, passing by without significance, passing by like smoke that vanishes. Your insides burn like a furnace even in the midst of chills. Mealtimes come and go and not a bite is eaten.

Yet all the while, the fever is doing its work. The fever is not the enemy. It's the cure. Though it makes you miserable, it is at work defeating the real illness which, left unchecked, would bring about death.

Our Lord's work to bring about our repentance also brings about a spiritual anguish that the psalmist expresses with physical words. God's law brings about the knowledge of sin and makes us conscience stricken. But this work is not our enemy. It is done out of love. It is killing the Old Adam in us and preparing us for the Gospel.

And once the Gospel enters in, as when the fever breaks, we are renewed and filled with life. The Law, having done its work gives way to the Gospel and its life. We rejoice in the days God has given us, our heart is full of joy and gratitude and we feast on the Christ, the true bread of heaven.

Lord God, grant us strength and patience, that we might endure our earthly trials and receive the eternal crown of life. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 12

Pastor Clemmer

*Because of my loud groaning
my bones cling to my flesh.*

*I am like a desert owl of the wilderness,
like an owl of the waste places;*

Psalm 102:5-6

In the ancient heresy of Gnosticism, it was taught that the physical stuff (bones and flesh) was bad, but the spiritual stuff (soul) was good. They would sometimes practice asceticism (a religion of extreme self-denial), ignoring the body's evil physical needs in an attempt to escape them. If the physical stuff is bad, then why not ignore it and focus exclusively on the spiritual stuff? The ideas of Gnosticism are still alive and well today, especially among those who say that their body is not the "real them" and that their "true self" is on the inside. Thus, the inside self (the true and good part) might not align with the outer self (the bad and irrelevant part), so a person might try to mangle the outer self to try to conform it to the inner self.

In contrast to such Gnostic division, the Lord created the physical realm (including our bodies) and the spiritual realm (including our souls) both as good, and He redeemed our bodies along with our souls by His death on the cross. Thus, Christians hold the body (alive or dead) in high regard, treating it reverently and as an eternal gift from the Lord—even helping our neighbor in his body.

In this Psalm, the physical bodily pain of starvation is vividly described as bone clinging to flesh. Sin has impacted our bodies with sickness and hunger. But in our bodily suffering, we are given to cry out to the Lord who took on a body, knows our physical pain, and has redeemed our bodies. We do not suffer alone, but as those with a Lord who has a body like ours.

Lord, preserve me in both body and soul, giving me food for both. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13

Pastor Schumacher

I lie awake;

I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop.

All the day my enemies taunt me;

those who deride me use my name for a curse.

Psalms 102:7-8

Sleepless nights: Troubles have piled up; in your mind you cannot see any resolution to your difficulties; your mind is filled with worry and anxiety. The one relief that you might have to your weariness in life is at least to sleep. And yet that too you cannot have! You toss and turn. You are so tired; yet the mind races. And to add to your worries, you know that in a few short hours you will face another painful day.

The faithful are not immune to a torrent of life's problems. Here the psalmist is describing his plight. This too is part of his prayer. In his despair, he turns to the Lord. Rather than turning away from God and cursing God for allowing these unending burdens and persecutions to happen, the psalmist prays. He knows even in weariness that the Lord does hear and that He can indeed deliver him.

At times when you are weary and yet cannot sleep, turn to the Lord. Know that He who heard the prayers of the despairing psalmist hears your prayers as well. "Our Help is in the Name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth (Ps. 124:8)."

Heavenly Father, grant that we know that in the hour of our despair that You are with us. We are always Your baptized children. In You then we trust. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 14

Pastor Bartens

*For I eat ashes like bread
and mingle tears with my drink,
because of your indignation and anger;
for you have taken me up and thrown me down
My days are like an evening shadow;
I wither away like grass.*

Psalm 102:9-11

Ashes and tears are a sign of sorrow for the torment that the Psalmist has gone through. But more than that, they are the outward gestures of repentance.

The Psalmist is saying, “Lord, you took me up and threw me down. You were right in doing this, for I sinned. And now, O Lord, I recognize my sin. I confess it to you, not only with my words but with my actions. I not only sit in sackcloth and ashes but I eat those ashes as though they were bread. I do not weep only a little, but my tears fill the cup from which I drink.”

The outward signs of repentance are not meritorious in the sight of God, but they are not without benefit. Not too long ago, many of you came forward to receive an ashen mark on your foreheads that reminded you that your days are like an evening shadow. “Remember, O man, that thou art dust and unto dust shalt thou return.”

But as you bear in your life the outward marks of contrition and repentance, remember that God looks to and loves a broken and contrite heart. He will not leave it cast down, but will restore it in His grace for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Heavenly Father, by Your word, work in us true repentance, that we might hate our sin and love You above all else. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 15

Pastor Clemmer

*But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever;
you are remembered throughout all generations.
You will arise and have pity on Zion;
it is the time to favor her;
the appointed time has come.*

Psalm 102:12-13

Forever. Our lives in this world are so incredibly short in comparison to that word. Life seems to fly by, and our brief time seems insignificant in the scheme of things. While we pass away like flowers that bloom one day and die the next, the Lord remains on the throne forever. Each generation is brought into the joy of remembering Him, praising Him, and acknowledging His gifts. We have inherited the wisdom of the saints who came before us, who confessed their Lord in the face of lack, suffering, and even death. We rejoice in passing that confession and faith down to our children, that future generations will praise Him in their life on earth, but also be joined with us all together, praising Him in heaven eternally. We draw comfort from His unchanging eternal reign, for we will be with Him in that kingdom, for we belong to Him!

He is the Lord, enthroned forever—but He is with us and works toward us individually in time and space, NOW. “The appointed time has come” to show mercy and favor to us. It’s not a confession of a dead, ancient fact that has not impact on us today, but the Christian’s confession is a joyful proclamation of an ever-present Savior, who daily preserves us, forgives us, and provides for us. Today our Savior; forever our Lord.

Eternal Lord, grant us faith to confess You eternally, and work through us to pass along that confession to the Church of tomorrow. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 16

Pastor Schumacher

*For your servants hold her stones dear
and have pity on her dust.*

*Nations will fear the name of the LORD,
and all the kings of the earth will fear your glory.*

Psalm 102:14-15

Part of the psalmist's weariness comes from being in exile and knowing that the Temple has been destroyed, and all that remains is stones and dust. He knows that Isaiah and other prophets have foretold the return of Judah from exile. His confidence is from the Lord's Word. He knows that God will restore the Temple and that the exile will end.

Yet there is a greater hope than the hope of the earthly restoration of Jerusalem; that is the hope of the New Jerusalem. Famously, Isaiah prophesies of the return from exile; He prophesies of the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ; He also prophesies of the New Heavens and New Earth. He prophesies of eternal life and portrays it as a glorious banquet. In Jesus, you too have the promise of eternal life and the New Jerusalem. In Jesus, all things will be made new.

Gracious Heavenly Father, in Your Son Jesus Christ we have the sure promise of life eternal with You in the New Jerusalem. Grant that we be faithful and be among Your saints in glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 17

Pastor Bartens

*For the LORD builds up Zion;
he appears in his glory;
he regards the prayer of the destitute
and does not despise their prayer.*

Psalm 102:16-17

The mount called Zion in the midst of Jerusalem was the place of the Lord's glory. There the priests ministered in the temple, carrying out the sacrifices by which God administered his grace to his people. There the offering of incense rose up, carrying the prayers of the destitute to the ears of God.

Today in the Divine Service, you heard of a different Zion. You heard of the Zion that the Lord is building up in the Psalm above. This Zion is not on earth, but it is the place of God's eternal glory, his heavenly throne room.

And as you heard in the book of Hebrews this morning, there we have a high priest, not from the line of Aaron. There, we have a priest after the order of Melchizedek. There, our priest is our Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the one who offered himself up in sacrifice that we might be partakers of his grace. And there in the heavenly Zion, he is our mediator, bringing now, the prayers of the destitute to His Father, who hears them and loves to answer them.

*Lord Jesus Christ, hear our prayers and our supplications and graciously intercede for us before your Father's throne. For you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.*

MONDAY, MARCH 18

Pastor Clemmer

*Let this be recorded for a generation to come,
so that a people yet to be created may praise the
LORD:*

*that he looked down from his holy height;
from heaven the LORD looked at the earth,
to hear the groans of the prisoners,
to set free those who were doomed to die.*

Psalm 102:18-20

In the luxury of 21st century America, the land of the free, rarely might we understand our life to be “the groan of a prisoner.” We can go where we want, do what we want, and eat what we want. That’s hardly the plight of a prisoner!

So, in what way are we prisoners? We find ourselves shackled in a life-long march toward the grave, where our apparent freedoms will come to a screeching halt. You might avoid contemplating the reality of death—no one likes to set up their will or plan their funeral, for example. But just because we don’t look at the bars and are free to roam our cell, we are still locked in the prison of sin and death. We are NOT free to avoid eating, drinking, or breathing—so our freedom is not as universal as we think. Each day, we slip closer death and can’t stop it or free ourselves.

To the groans of helpless prisoners, doomed to die, the Lord Jesus came to set us free. But if you don’t think you’re a prisoner, then you don’t think you need rescue. By His death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus broke into our prison, shattered the bars, and set us free. Now, our death has been transformed to the mere door into heaven. We can still see the bars and the shackles, but Jesus has torn off the door forever.

Lord Jesus, keep us mindful of our bondage to sin and death that we would always cling to You for forgiveness and Life. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 19

Pastor Schumacher

*That they may declare in Zion the name of the LORD,
and in Jerusalem his praise,
when peoples gather together,
and kingdoms, to worship the LORD.*

Psalm 102:21-22

Sadly, there is one constant in this fallen world: There is desire that there would be a time of harmony and peace in the world. The formation of the League of Nations and then the more ambitious and more idealistic United Nations were both attempts at world peace. Nevertheless, wars continue and animosities abound between peoples and nations. There is bloodshed in every age.

Jesus promises eternal peace. All those who remain faithful have His forgiveness, life, and eternal salvation. What the psalmist anticipates will come true as we hear in Revelation 7:9-10, “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!””

Gracious Heavenly Father, we praise and thank You that one day You will gather all Your saints from all tribes, peoples, and languages into Your eternal dwelling where we will all praise Your name forever. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

Pastor Bartens

*He has broken my strength in midcourse;
he has shortened my days.*

*“O my God,” I say, “take me not away
in the midst of my days-
you whose years endure
throughout all generations*

Psalm 102:23-24

Have you noticed throughout the course of Psalm 102 that the writer continually recognizes that he is temporal? He knows that in the grand scheme of things in this world, his life is short, a mere fraction in the vast ocean of human history.

Not only is his life short to begin with, but here he expresses a fear that lies within each of us. He fears not only death, but he fears an untimely death, that his life will be cut short and he will not live to the ripe old age he desires.

But where does he turn in the midst of this fear? He turns to the one who endures forever, the one who created time and governs it still for our good. He turns to God. And he trusts that God will lengthen or shorten our days on earth as he sees fit, and always for our good.

You also, put your trust in the Lord, the one who created time and placed you in it according to his wisdom and good pleasure. He has all things in his hand and will work out the days of your life to bring you to his kingdom, the place where *your* days will have no end.

Almighty Father, through the blood of Christ, dispel in us the fear of death, that we might look with hope to the eternal life that awaits us in heaven. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 21

Pastor Clemmer

*Of old you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.*

*They will perish, but you will remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.*

You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away.

Psalm 102:25-26

The ideology of evolutionism is generally assumed by today's secular culture as the explanation of human origin. According to that ideology, life emerged magically and inexplicably from nothing, and continued to improve over billions of years. The weak species must die off while the strong species must survive and pass along helpful genetic mutations—survival of the fittest. In such an ideology, there is no purpose for life, no standard of good and evil, and no room for mercy. Life is accidentally spinning out of control, and humans will completely cease to exist when their bodies die. It's a hopeless religion of death, that necessitates and celebrates the death of the weak, denies moral absolutes, and is driven by the sole pursuit of self-pleasure. Is it any wonder why anxiety, hopelessness, and suicide are at record highs?

In contrast to the antiscientific accident of evolutionism, the Lord intentionally built the foundations of this earth. Life is not spinning out of control, but He brings life and allows death; He sustains the earth; He remains when all else passes away. Grounded in this eternal Lord, we know our origin, identity, and purpose. Life is not a pointless quest toward self-gratification, but a joyful pursuit of service to God and neighbor. We stand firm when all else is shaken, for we belong to the unshakeable Lord who built the foundations of heaven and earth.

Eternal Father, guard us from the hopelessness and anxiety of thinking You are not in control and that this fleeting world is all there is. Sustain our faith into eternal life. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 22

Pastor Schumacher

But you are the same,

and your years have no end.

The children of your servants shall dwell secure;

their offspring shall be established before you.

Psalm 102:27-28

God is God. He does not change; He cannot change. That does not mean that He is like other things that we consider permanent like a mountain or the oceans. They are unfeeling and uncaring. In fact they are not permanent; they will pass away on the Last Day. There is one constant. Our God will always remain. He will always be “gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (Joel 2:13).”

Our Lord remains gracious and merciful to us. He has given us His Son Jesus, who died for our sins, rose victorious for us, and now sits on the right hand of the Father reigning over His church. We praise and thank the Lord that we are sure also that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” Ours is a sure hope because God is sure and His promises in Jesus are forever sure as well.

Heavenly Father, You change not and Your promise of life and salvation change not. Grant that we remain faithful and confident in Your abiding grace and mercy. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 23

Pastor Bartens

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!

O Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

Psalm 130:1-2

Whether or not he realized it, David's prayer in these verses depends upon the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. It is our Lord Jesus Christ who reconciles us to God so that we can pray. It is through the merits of Christ's death that our Father hears our prayer. It is Christ who stands at the Father's right hand as our intercessor.

Tomorrow, as we begin Holy Week, we will begin to ponder what Jesus has done to answer our cries for mercy. How he endured mockery and shame, nail and thorn, agony and death. We will see him, in our place crying out to his Father, but receiving no response, being forsaken on account of our sin.

And because of all this, we have access to the Father. We may pray to him with boldness. We can say "O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy!" Jesus sacrifice both enables and answers those prayers. There he gives us access to the Father, and there he grants us his mercy.

Lord Jesus, grant that we may ponder your holy passion with faithful hearts, that grieving for our sin, we may see redemption fulfilled in your blood. For you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 24

Pastor Clemmer

*If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?*

*But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.*

Psalm 130:3-4

That seems backward. “You forgive, therefore, you are feared”? Doesn’t it seem like the Lord should be feared if He didn’t forgive? We’d expect, “O Lord, you hold a grudge, you count up our sins and retaliate, therefore you are feared.” That’s the expected way of our world—retribution; eye for an eye. That’s also the way of the law—promising punishment or reward according to one’s actions. That’s even the way we treat one another in our sin—refusing to forgive, holding onto past sins and holding them against others.

But that’s not the way of our Lord. If he kept track of our sins, we would be annihilated. With Him, however, there is no scoreboard or tally sheet of sins. With, there is forgiveness. The retribution and punishment our sins deserve was given to Jesus in our place. “It is finished.” The debt has been paid in full. The forgiveness of this Lord triumphs over all—especially over all that would bring us fear (death, shame, loneliness, condemnation, suffering, etc.). As Luther put it in the catechism, whatever we fear most has become our God. That which we fear controls us. He would have us fear Him alone, that all the other causes of fear would be chased away by Him. We are to fear the true God above all, but we find that this forgiving Lord doesn’t bring paralyzing fear of judgment but the joy of salvation! And that joy sets us free to forgive one another in the same way.

Forgiving Lord, cause us to fear you alone, that all the other causes of fear in this life would be rendered powerless over us. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 25

Pastor Schumacher

*I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.*

Psalm 130:5-6

Sin brings alienation and separation from our Creator and our God. In Jesus there is forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with the Father. In Jesus there is life and salvation. Daily we rejoice that we are baptized into Christ. Weekly we gather as the baptized to receive the Lord's gifts, pray to Him as His people, praise His name, and built up each other as fellow saints. Yearly we gather as His saints at the Great Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord.

Yet there is still something missing. We still want to see Jesus face to face and we want all the saints to be united with Him in glory. We long for Christ's return. Though we are united to Him now, we still live in this sinful world with its pains and heartaches. We long for Christ's return where there will be no more death, disease, dread, or despair. We wait for His return; We wait for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.

We praise and thank You that we are in children, saved by grace through Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. We wait for His coming again so that we along with all the saints will sing Your praises forever. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 26

Pastor Bartens

O Israel, hope in the LORD!

*For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.*

*And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.*

Psalm 130:7-8

Saint Peter reminds his hearers that we were not redeemed with perishable things like gold and silver. If that were the case, our redemption would only last until those precious metals perished, and Christ's atonement would be limited.

But we were instead redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, the pure lamb of God without spot or blemish. Christ is not limited or perishable like gold or silver. He is eternal, he is God, he is not limited. And as with all of us his blood is his life. So if he is eternal and unlimited, then his blood is eternal and unlimited. Since Christ is divine, his blood is divine.

And since his unlimited, eternal, divine blood purchased our redemption, our redemption is likewise eternal, unlimited, and divine. As David puts it above, it is plentiful. Even a drop of the blood of Christ redeems the whole world of all its iniquities.

If the Lord marked iniquity, we certainly could not stand. But Christ's blood redeems us from all of it. It makes us clean so that we may stand glorified in the presence of God.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the purifying blood of Christ. Grant that by his blood we would be freed from Satan's fury to stand in heavenly glory. Through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

Pastor Clemmer

Hear my prayer, O Lord;

give ear to my pleas for mercy!

In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness!

Enter not into judgment with your servant,

for no one living is righteous before you.

Psalm 143:1-2

Sometimes we might get the idea that we deserve a certain level of care from God. Whether we think we have been good and expect some kind of goodness from him, or in contrast, we might experience trials in life and deduce that this is a consequence of some kind of evil we've done in our past. "I've been righteous—cut me some slack!" Or, "I must have done something to deserve this hardship." Either way, such a view has us looking to God's action toward us as responsive—like a vending machine that pops out a particular candy based on what we put into it.

That is not mercy. Mercy is precisely the opposite of giving what is deserved. Our God withholds the punishment we do deserve (mercy) and gives to us the blessings that we do not deserve (grace). It isn't responsive to us or based upon us—that would put us in control and effectively make us god.

Thanks be to God, His action toward us is tied up in His own righteousness, not ours. He doesn't enter into judgment with us or give us what we deserve—He doesn't answer us according to some righteousness within ourselves. Rather, His love and mercy toward us pours out exclusively because of His righteous and holy nature. He hears our prayer, has mercy upon us on His terms, went to the cross, and will one day call us to Himself—all because of His righteousness and mercy toward undeserving sinners like us.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the ongoing mercy you show toward us. Hear our prayers and rescue us from the illusion of self-righteousness. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 28

Pastor Schumacher

*For the enemy has pursued my soul;
he has crushed my life to the ground;
he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead.
Therefore my spirit faints within me;
my heart within me is appalled.*

Psalm 143:3-4

The Septuagint (Greek version of the OT) has the title that David wrote this Psalm when he fled from Absalom. David's beloved son, Absalom, attempted to overthrow David as king and kill him. What could be more distressing for David than to have his own son attempt to take his throne and kill him. How distressing that would be! How disheartened would David be! In life there can be crushing events and we can be weary and tired of living. What is more burdensome and more wearying is our constant load of sin!

Jesus has come to be our Savior. On this day, Maundy Thursday, Jesus' enemies pursued Him and arrested Him. He would be beaten, spat upon, and then crushed under the weight of the cross. "He was crushed for our iniquities (Is. 53:5)." All this was done in love because Jesus knew that in going to His cross, He would deliver us from the power of death and the devil and win for us an everlasting Kingdom.

Gracious Heavenly Father, when we are crushed under the weight of life's hardships, grant that we know that Christ was crushed even more harshly for our sins, and that we have eternal salvation in Him because of His sacrifice on the cross. We praise and thank You for the victory over sin, death, and hell that Jesus won for us by His suffering, death, and resurrection. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 29

Pastor Bartens

*I remember the days of old;
I meditate on all that you have done;
I ponder the work of your hands.
I stretch out my hands to you;
my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.
Answer me quickly, O Lord!
My spirit fails!
hide not your face from me,
lest I be like those who go down to the pit.
Psalm 143:5-7*

It's not hard to imagine Jesus praying these words from the cross, though we have no record of it. In any case, he fulfills them there. So let us ponder that on this Good Friday.

Suspended from the cross, we see our Lord with outstretched hands. He groans a wearied "I thirst." He cries out to his Father. He gives over his failing spirit as he bows his head in death. He asks his Father, "Why have you hidden your face from me?"

And then, he goes down to the pit, without an answer from above. The Father, in that moment, does not rescue his Son. Instead, he pours out his wrath upon him. And in so doing, he answers our prayer for the same things.

By offering up his Son, he turns to us a gracious face, he spares us from the pit of despair and condemnation. And he grants us the ultimate assurance of this when he raises Christ from the dead on the third day.

Lord God, let us look upon the death of Christ and see there the full assurance of our salvation. Through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 30

Pastor Clemmer

*Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love,
for in you I trust.*

*Make me know the way I should go,
for to you I lift up my soul.*

*Deliver me from my enemies, O Lord!
I have fled to you for refuge.*

Teach me to do your will, for you are my God!

Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground!

Psalm 143:8-10

Happy Easter Eve! On this day, we recall how our Lord rested in tomb having suffered the eternal wrath we deserve. Tomorrow, we celebrate with full throated joy His resurrection from the dead, as we rejoice in the future hope of our own resurrections and our reunion with those who have gone before us in the faith. Until that joyful day, we live each moment trusting in our Lord. He is our refuge—our hiding place from the assaults of the enemies of this life (sin, death, and the devil). We flee to Him and hide behind His unshakable Gospel. In Him, no matter what comes, we will be more than ok—or as the Psalmist says, “on level ground.”

Challenges, bumps, dips, stressful mountains, startling potholes—the sinner’s life is one bump after the next—the opposite of level ground. But trusting in the Lord, beginning each day mindful of His steadfast, unwavering love toward us, and safe within the refuge of the Gospel, the road is leveled. While we still face the bumps, we face them knowing He is with us and working through it all toward our good. With trust in our Lord, our daily road is made level by the knowledge of His presence with us and love toward us. He is allowing our hard times and giving the good times—all for His purposes that we cannot understand or know—and all toward our eternal life with Him (which is His ultimate will for us).

*Resurrected Lord, help me trust in You, for you make
each day level ground for me and my family. Amen.*

SUNDAY, MARCH 31

Pastor Schumacher

For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life!

In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble!

*And in your steadfast love you will cut off my enemies,
and you will destroy all the adversaries of my soul,
for I am your servant.*

Psalm 143:11-12

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! There is unbridled joy in Easter. This is because of Christ's triumph for us. He has paid for our sins on the cross and now He is risen from the dead, guaranteeing our victory over death and our resurrection to eternal life. Our salvation is entirely due to Christ's work for us. There is eternal triumph in Christ and His resurrection. We rejoice at the words of the Apostle Paul:

“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

--1 Corinthians 15:51–58

Gracious Heavenly Father, all praise to You and to Your Son, our Lord, who has won eternal victory for us by His glorious resurrection from the dead. All praise and honor to you and our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit now and eternally. Amen.

HOLY WEEK 2024 AT BETHANY

SUNDAY, MARCH 24
PALM SUNDAY DIVINE SERVICE
8:30 & 11:00 A.M.

THURSDAY, MARCH 28
MAUNDY THURSDAY DIVINE SERVICE
7:00 P.M.

FRIDAY, MARCH 29
GOOD FRIDAY CHIEF DIVINE SERVICE
4:00 P.M.

GOOD FRIDAY TENEBRAE VESPERS
7:00 P.M.

SATURDAY, MARCH 30
THE GREAT VIGIL OF EASTER
7:16 P.M.

SUNDAY, MARCH 31
THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD
8:30 & 11:00 A.M.

