

DAILY LENTEN DEVOTIONS:

COMFORT FROM THE PSALMS



BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

COMFORT FROM THE PSALMS 2025

Introduction

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 for comfort.

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. This is of great comfort for sinners! In fact, Psalm 23 famously says, "His rod and staff, they COMFORT me...", but the Hebrew word translated here as "comfort" happens to be the same word that's translated elsewhere as "repent." Our Lord wants us comforted by this wonderful gift of repentance. 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. And there in the nail-scarred hands of Jesus, we find comfort, peace, and joy!

We have written daily Lenten devotions for the congregation to utilize in their homes this season, that the Lord's comfort would fill your home. 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. In addition, this year we've recorded an audio version that you can download each day and even have it emailed to you every morning. See the website to sign up! We pray that this resource is helpful to you in your Lenten observation and Easter preparations.

Pastor Clemmer

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5

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.*

Psalms 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 such a morbid and depressing way to begin the service, 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 my sins, speak Your Words of Life into my suffering, and sustain me by Your grace as I walk through this valley of the shadow of death. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 6

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.

David turns to the Lord and asks for salvation because of the steadfast love of the Lord. The Lord is gracious and merciful. He has made the sure promise of salvation. He made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He rescued Israel from Egypt. He gave them the Promised Land. The Lord has steadfastly loved His people. Therefore, David has a sure hope because of God's steadfast love. That steadfast love is manifested fully in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and rose from the dead 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, MARCH 7

Pastor Schumacher

*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.*

Psalms 6:6-7

In his anguish, David has pleaded that the Lord would turn toward him and deliver his life (v. 4). He continues his lament with the vivid description of his condition. His sadness and grief are overwhelming. He has cried a river of tears; his eyes must have been thoroughly bloodshot from crying. He is exhausted physically. He can find no comfort day after day.

So many of God's people have gone through terrible situations that lasted so long. For example, Israel's enslavement in Egypt lasted at least 80 years. Times of trial and despair can be ongoing. There can seem to be no hope.

David in the midst of his tears has not given up hope. He has not stopped pleading with the Lord. That is the point of the psalm. Even though the Lord's favor seems distant, David still knows that God will listen to his plea for mercy. God is still the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is still the God who has promised the coming Christ to David and to all His people. When you are weary and your bed is wet with tears, continue to look to the Lord, who with His steadfast love given in Jesus Christ is with you and is still your loving God.

O Lord, there are times when our suffering seems to have no end. Yet, You promise to be our Lord and to give us deliverance. Be with us and sustain us according to Your mercy. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 8

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!

"*He hears me?*" 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 me mindful that You hear my prayers,
and give me the faith to pray "Thy will be done,"
knowing You work all things toward my good. Amen.***

SUNDAY, MARCH 9

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.

Earthly health, wealth, family, and honor are indeed blessings from God. However, if we remain separated from God by sin, these mean nothing. God is a gracious God who always wants to forgive sins and have us reconciled to Himself.

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, MARCH 10

Pastor Clemmer

*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

When we do wrong, our conscience convicts us. Christian or not, the Law is written on our hearts and convicts us with guilt and shame when we sin against God and neighbor. That's what David is expressing in this Psalm: "*My bones wasted away...your hand was heavy upon me...my strength was dried up.*" The Law crushes us in our guilt over sin. Our natural tendency is to attempt to self-justify our sin and to "cover our iniquity," as the Psalm says. Iniquity-covering sounds like this: "*What I did was OK because... He deserved it because... It was OK that I did this because....*" When we do evil, we try to get off the hook via iniquity-covering, but it never satisfies. Try as you may to cover it up, you still know deep down you were in the wrong.

The Lord loves you too much to leave you in such despair! He has given you the gift of Confession and Absolution—the Church's formal name for what the Psalm is describing: "*I confess my transgressions to the Lord, and He forgives me.*" No contingencies from God to me; no "I'll forgive you Ifs" or "I forgive you BUTs"—just full blown forgiveness for sinners.

What a gift: The law convicts, our guilt crushes, we confess, He forgives, and He'll keep on forgiving!

***Lord of mercy, always hear my confession when my guilt crushes,
and set me free with Your forgiving Word. Amen.***

TUESDAY, MARCH 11

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 them from the waters of sin and holds them high in safety. The waters “shall not reach them” for He is a hiding place that preserves them. 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 me the gift of repentance, that I
would daily acknowledge my sin and be turned to You
for forgiveness and life. Amen.***

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12

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. God has provided His Word which clearly shows how lost we are because of sin, and the true Way, who is Christ Jesus our Lord. As we walk the path of life, we have Jesus, our Lord and Shepherd of our souls. 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, MARCH 13

Pastor Schumacher

*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!*

Psalms 32:10-11

These verses conclude a great psalm. The Psalm begins with, “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” There is no greater blessing than having sins forgiven and receiving life and eternal salvation because of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is the great contrast of the wicked and those who trust in the LORD. The term wicked refers to sinners who do not repent of their sins. All of us were among the wicked because of sin. Now, as forgiven sinners, we have life and salvation.

The steadfast love of God in Christ Jesus surrounds us, envelopes us, and abides with us. As forgiven sinners, we anticipate the eternal joy of being with all the saints before the Lamb, our Lord Jesus. This joy is seen in Revelation 7, “...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!...’ These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

***Gracious Heavenly Father, we praise and thank You
for reconciling us to Yourself, giving us forgiveness of
sins, life, and salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.***

FRIDAY, MARCH 14

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.*

Psalms 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, MARCH 15

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 Paul's blindness and here He afflicts David so that David too would repent. Likewise, there are times when God might allow a physical ailment in our lives so that we would see that we might know our need for the Lord and our need for His forgiveness of sins and salvation.

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 are 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, MARCH 16

Pastor Schumacher

*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

David has confessed that his iniquities are very great, and that they are a burden too heavy for him. In verses 6-8, he expands on the crushing nature of his sin. His health is broken; he is crushed under the guilt of his sin. He is acutely aware that sin has separated him from his Creator and loving Lord. He has chosen sin over his God, and he now suffers from his sin.

Your sin separates you from your Creator and loving Lord. When you take seriously how you have offended your Creator and Lord, then sin is a terrible and tortuous burden. Sin is deadly, leading to eternal death.

However, there is One who gladly bore the burden of your sin all the way to the cross. Isaiah 53:4-5, “*Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.*” Jesus carried your sin. You have forgiveness of sins and perfect peace in Him.

Lord Jesus Christ, You carried our sins to the cross and died for them. You give us life and salvation. Grant that we who sin so greatly would look to You for pardon and peace. In Your name we pray. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 17

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, MARCH 18

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.*

Psalms 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 mouths 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. Praise God. 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, MARCH 19

Pastor Schumacher

*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!"*

Psalms 38:15-16

"Is it worth waiting for?" A long line for a free hot dog? No, not worth it! Waiting for a heart transplant? Yes, definitely worth it! The wait might be nerve-racking as one is in misery waiting for the transplant, but the wait is worth it when one receives the new heart.

David is waiting for the Lord. He is waiting for the Lord to deliver him. He has confessed his sin. He knows that God will deliver him from his sin. He also has earthly foes and he waits for the Lord's deliverance from them. His situation is desperate, yet he knows whom to trust: The Lord! He knows that the Lord is his God and that He will deliver him. The wait might be long and tiresome, but David's confidence is in his saving God.

We might have to wait on the Lord for relief from earthly distress. Sometimes, the relief might not be in the way that we desired it. However, the Lord will never abandon us. He promises to be with us, now and eternally. He has given us a new heart! He has changed our hearts of stone to new and living hearts that trust in Him. *"But for you, O LORD, do I wait!"*

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

THURSDAY , MARCH 20

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 eternally. He even used suffering at the hand of persecutors as the means by which He would end our suffering forever. 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 21

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 to follow their sinful path. You can feel like an outsider at work, at school, or even in your own family. They do not see the stain of sin, and the hopelessness of life apart from Christ. We are blessed to know the Savior, to know His cross and forgiveness; and to know that He claims us as His in our baptism. From God's Word we know not to fear. Your Lord will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). Jesus promises to be with you to end of the age (Matthew 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 22

Pastor Clemmer

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

Mercy is the act of withholding the punishment that is deserved. So, “showing mercy” is really doing *nothing*—it’s the *absence* of punishment. When a spider scurries across the living room and you scoop it onto a magazine and toss it outside instead of smashing it into rubble—that’s what mercy looks like.

When we plead to God for mercy, we’re not only asking Him to withhold the punishment we deserve, but we’re also recognizing that our sin actually deserves punishment. That is, we wouldn’t need mercy if we were innocent. So, our plea for mercy is a confession of our guilt and the punishment we deserve.

But in showing mercy, in withholding punishment from us, our debt doesn’t magically evaporate. It still must be paid—the punishment must be suffered by someone. If not you and me, then who? And who could suffer such punishment at the hand of God and not be eternally destroyed?

Only God Himself. In mercy, God withholds the punishment we deserve; in mercy, God becomes man in the person of Jesus; in mercy, Jesus suffers the punishment we deserve. Why? Certainly not because we deserve it—that wouldn’t be mercy! Mercy must be undeserved. He shows us mercy simply because He loves us. On the cross, mercy is shown to you and me. Unmerited forgiveness. What joy to receive such mercy, and what joy to show such mercy to those God puts before us!

Lord Jesus, thank You for the mercy shown to me by Your death for me. Grant me the kindness to be merciful as I have been shown mercy. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 23

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, I have sinned against You alone in my 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 24

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. We are not born spiritually neutral. We cannot fulfill the commandments perfectly; we cannot make ourselves acceptable to God. All are born sinners. This is clearly taught in Romans 5 and throughout the Scriptures. This means that we cannot look to our works or anything in ourselves to save us. We were born into sin and we actually sin in thought, word, and deed.

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 (Romans 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 25

Pastor Clemmer

*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***

Let me hear joy—let my bones rejoice! Who doesn't want to have joy? But what is it exactly? We might tend to associate joy with a feeling of pleasure, happiness, and contentment. But joy transcends mere feelings and emotions. It's no accident that the psalmist says "let me *hear* joy" and not "let me *feel* joy." While we might perhaps conflate joy with the happy feelings, joy is the state of being washed clean of all sin and shame, and having that cleansing pronounced to you. In that way, you can be full of joy—rejoicing down to the bones—even when your physical bones are broken and when all the causes of sadness gang up on you.

That's because you have been washed by the blood of Jesus. Your sin has been removed from you, your shame has been covered with His holiness, and when God looks at you, He sees the spick-and-span pureness of Jesus Himself. Having been cleaned, the joy of that washing is spoken to you every day—"let me *hear* joy!" The Lord has spoken you forgiven and clean, washed and pure. He washed you by His death, and He had that eternal washing delivered to you in the washing of your baptism. He continues washing you every time you hear His Word, and He'll have you hear joy anew every day until He calls you to Himself eternally.

Lord Jesus, You have washed me clean and pure in Your blood. Cause me to hear and know of that joy every day as I serve You and my neighbor in this life. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26

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.*

Psalms 51:10-12

Humans are physical beings. That means we use our senses to measure things and determine goodness or badness. Are those bananas 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 27

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.*

Psalms 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 has saved us from sin, death, and hell by dying for us on the cross. We were lost as sinners, and entirely without hope. It was as if we were in the ocean about to drown, and we were plucked from the waters and placed onto a safe and warm boat. Jesus died for us. He rose for us. He made us His own by baptism. He feeds us with Word and Sacrament. It is all gift. 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 28

Pastor Schumacher

*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.*

Psalms 51:16-17

God searches the heart; externals will not fool Him. David had tried to fool the people and even worse, he had tried to fool God. He had made it seem as if Uriah died in battle, and David hurriedly married his widow who was already pregnant with David's child. No one knew the sins, or so David thought. However, God knew David's sins.

Confronted with his sins, David repented. He knew that an outward action such as a sacrifice is not what God wanted. God desired that David turn from his sins, and seek the Lord's forgiveness. David's heart was broken; he was contrite. In verse 4, David said, "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."

David was no longer hiding from God. He had repented and turned to God for forgiveness of sins and life. Because of His steadfast love and mercy, the Lord forgave David's sins. He too will forgive those who are repentant and turn to Christ for forgiveness and life.

***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. Amen.***

SATURDAY, MARCH 29

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.*

Psalms 51:18-19

God Himself instituted the sacrifices of the Old Testament to be the means by which He delivered His mercy and forgiveness to Old Testament 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 Psalm 51:16, we heard how God “will *NOT* delight in sacrifice”? And why in verse 19 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 30

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. The promise of Jesus is sure: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28),”

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 31

Pastor Schumacher

*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

The psalmist now pours out his distress to the Lord. His life is utterly shattered. He is in deep, deep distress and agony. From an earthly perspective, his life is now hopeless. There is nothing to cheer him. He can only regard this earthly life as one full of tragedy and tears. He is drained; he feels like there is nothing left in him.

However, there is something left in him. He still has faith in the Lord. If he had forsaken the Lord and concluded there is no God, then there would be no psalm. In the midst of his gloom and sadness, the psalmist is still praying to the Lord.

At times, there can be horrible tragedy in our lives. Loved ones can die suddenly. A visit to the doctor might reveal an incurable disease. A loved one might turn against us. There are times when we feel like our hearts have withered away. Yet, the Lord is still the Lord. He is still gracious and merciful, and abounding in steadfast love. In the midst of tragedy, Jesus is still Jesus. On the cross, Jesus felt utterly forsaken. His strength was ebbing away. He felt the full weight of our punishment for sin. Yet, He still knew He was on the cross for your sake, for your sin. This Jesus still loves you; He is with you always.

***Gracious Lord, in times of heartache and despair,
grant that we remember that You will never leave us or
forsake us. Your promises in Christ Jesus are sure.
Amen.***

TUESDAY, APRIL 1

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;*

Psalms 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, APRIL 2

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 (Psalm 124:8)."

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

THURSDAY, APRIL 3

Pastor Clemmer

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.

Psalms 102:9-11

What a depressing few verses! When the evening shadows start getting long and dim, we know the day is almost over. My life flies by that quickly! Grass looks lush for such a short time—it has its prime, then we hit August and the whole yard withers. We get the message: Life is very short.

To make it worse, it seems like the suffering and loss we experience in this life are sent by the very hand of God Himself. After all, we know He can reverse death and fix all things, so when He allows my suffering, He might as well be causing it.

My life is racing toward death, and God doesn't seem to be hitting the brakes.

Yes, that's terrible news. But is it really surprising news? We might ignore that problem or distract ourselves, but we know this is true. We can't change it—but how will we face it? How can we find joy in the face of it?

Comfort for this depressing news is NOT found in ignoring the reality or trying to find a way to prevent or avoid it. The treadmill and diet trends have their place, but we know we're withered grass in the end.

This is why Jesus died. The comfort for this depressing mess is that Jesus only had to die because our fate was inevitable. Sure, he could stretch things a few more months with miracle cures, but the body will eventually fail. Jesus died to reverse this depressing downward spiral. While we may wither like grass for a blip, Jesus will raise us up again. Death is not the end because Jesus died and lives. We live again, too. That is our joy in the face of any depressing news.

Jesus, be my life in the face of death! Amen.

FRIDAY, APRIL 4

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 world. 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, and 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 no 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 me faith to confess You eternally,
and work through me to pass along that confession to
the Church of tomorrow. Amen.***

SATURDAY, APRIL 5

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.*

Psalms 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. Even greater: Isaiah 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, APRIL 6

Pastor Schumacher

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

Psalms 102:16-17

Mount Zion was the location for the Temple in Jerusalem. When Solomon dedicated the Temple, the Lord's glory filled the Temple. The people of Israel were sure that the Lord was present and that He was their gracious God, giving them forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

In the Divine Service, heaven meets the earth, especially in the giving of Christ's Body and Blood to us. Hebrews 12:22-24 says, "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

In eternity, redeemed sinners will gather before Jesus, receiving eternal life from Him, and praising Him forever. So also in the Divine Service: Redeemed Sinners gather before Jesus, receiving eternal life from Him, and praising Him. Destitute sinners receive the wealth of eternal life from Jesus!

O God, through the humiliation of Your Son You raised up the fallen world. Grant to Your faithful people, rescued from the peril of everlasting death, perpetual gladness and eternal joys; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

MONDAY, APRIL 7

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.

Psalms 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 to 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 me mindful of my bondage to sin and death that I would always cling to You for forgiveness and Life. Amen.

TUESDAY, APRIL 8

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.*

Psalms 102:21-22

Sadly, there is one constant in this fallen world: there is the 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. There will never be true earthly peace and harmony.

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, APRIL 9

Pastor Schumacher

*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.*

Psalms 102:23-24

God did not create Adam and Eve to die. Death came as a result of sin. As Christians, we know the sure promise of the Lord that because of Christ's death for sin and His resurrection, we have the sure hope of eternal life. We also know from God's Word that eternal life is incomparably better than life in this age. However, there still resides in us a hope to continue living our lives here in good health and peace.

It is natural for us to have the hope of living a long life, with good health, near loved ones, and in a peaceful community. We see health, family, friends, and material goods as blessings from the Lord. Even us Christians can be severely jarred when confronted with our lives being shortened because of disease or other condition. It is hard to accept that death might be much nearer than we thought possible.

We all face death. It is the consequence of sin. However, there remains the peace that passes understanding in Christ Jesus. He died for us; He rose for us; He is with us always. He will never forsake us. We might feel weak in the face of death. He is not weak; He is the Lord Almighty, who has conquered death for us. Because He lives, we have the sure hope that we will live also.

Heavenly Father, look with favor upon us Your children, keep us in the faith, and comfort us with the promise to life everlasting through Your Son, Jesus. In His Name, we pray. Amen.

THURSDAY, APRIL 10

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.

Psalms 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 me from the hopelessness and anxiety of thinking You are not in control and that this fleeting world is all there is. Sustain my faith into eternal life. Amen.

FRIDAY, APRIL 11

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.

Psalms 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 at 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 (Hebrews 13:8).” He remains our great High Priest, who has made the once and for our sacrifice for sin on the cross. He is risen and now sits in glory at the right hand of the Father, having obtained our eternal salvation. He is always the same Savior and Lord. Ours is a sure hope because God is sure and His promises in Christ Jesus are 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, APRIL 12

Pastor Clemmer

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

On Ash Wednesday, we sang Luther's somewhat unfamiliar hymn *From Depths of Woe* based on this Psalm. "From depths of woe I cry to Thee, in toil and tribulation. Bend down Thy gracious ear to me, Lord hear my supplication." Isn't this often an honest depiction of our life? Sure, some days everything is rolling smoothly, the skies are clear, and the snow melted before you shoveled...but that's not usually our experience. More commonly, someone in the family is suffering, there are challenges at work, our sins are bringing their consequences, our children wrestle with temptations and are lured by the devil...and on it goes. When it rains, it pours. Our life is less often spent surfing the waves, and more often dragged into the depths of woe.

But whining isn't helpful. The answer to our prayer is not endless complaining about how sad our situation is. Yes, we recognize that our situation is broken, that sin is the primary cause, and that we have been complicit in so many of the sins that have led to this low point. Out of the depths, as the sorrows swallow us up—as the darkness closes in, we gasp for air and cry out to the only true Help. Jesus.

He hears your cry. He's greater than the darkness, He controls the storms, and no sorrow can overcome Him. He reaches into the deep and grabs you. You belong to Him. And yes, that means He might allow suffering for a time—to strengthen your faith, as He promised. He may even allow death to win the battle, as cancer or heart disease closes the eyes. But He's overcome those depths of woe, once and for all. Jesus rose from the dead, so we will rise again, too.

No trial or tribulation can strip you from His love toward you. Know that He is with you and loves you, come what may. He will win you back in the end.

*Lord of life, pull me out of the depths and give me joy
in the face of all things I face this day. Amen.*

SUNDAY, APRIL 13

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 Him, 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 me to fear You alone, that all the other causes of fear in this life would be rendered powerless over me. Amen.

MONDAY, APRIL 14

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.*

Psalms 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 build 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 your 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, APRIL 15

Pastor Clemmer

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

In the year 2025, Israel is a country way across the world. It certainly has its struggles, and it manages to be in the news all the time. Is that the Israel you think of when you read “Israel” in the Bible? When you run across passages talking about “Israel,” do you picture some tiny group of people in the desert across the ocean? It’s a common confusion unfortunately. In our context, Israel is a nation with a flag and lots of political conversation surrounding it. But the Israel of the Bible is a different entity.

When you hear Israel described in the Bible, especially the Old Testament, make a mental substitution. Replace “Israel” with “people who belong to the Lord and have faith in the promised Savior.” Throughout the Scriptures, the Israelites were the Lord’s people who looked for the Messiah (Christ) to save them. Sound familiar? It should! That’s you and me.

The Lord’s Church today is of one fabric with the Israel of the Scriptures. To be an Israelite from the Biblical perspective has nothing to do with chromosomes, borders, or flags—it’s all about faith in the Savior. That’s why the Church of the New Testament is often called the New Israel.

We are one with Israel because we believe in the same Savior as they once did. We belong to the Lord, just as they did and still do.

So we can hear many of the Lord’s promises to Israel as promises to us and our children! O Israel (*O Christian in 2025*), hope in the Lord! He has redeemed you from all your iniquities. Hope not in the fleeting things of this world or the temporary promises of the flesh. Hope in the Lord!

Lord of Israel, I belong to You for You have redeemed me. Let me always hope in You. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16

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, I thank You for the ongoing mercy
You show toward me. Hear my prayers and rescue me
from the illusion of self-righteousness. Amen.***

THURSDAY, APRIL 17

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 Old Testament) 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 even 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 (Isaiah 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, APRIL 18

Pastor Clemmer

*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***

The human face is an intriguing part of our body. Sure, my face is the home of my sniffer, muncher, and lookers, but experience tells us that the face is more than simply that. It's said that the eyes are the windows to the soul, which means that the eyes tend to reveal the inner emotions of a person. We encourage eye-contact, since it's vital for clear communication and expression. Someone who can't look you in the eye is likely concealing something and feeling shame. The face is the distilled location of the full person. Our phones use "facetime" not "full body time" and Zoom is focused on our faces and not our legs (so we can enjoy the luxury of comfy meetings in gym shorts and a tie). To see someone's face is to see the person.

The Psalm talks about God "*hiding His face.*" What does that mean? Things that are hidden are still present, just not seen. They are *there*, but not doing us any good. If God's face seems hidden, we confess our frustration that God is with us and powerful, yet His inaction in this particular situation seems unloving, which frustrates us. For example, if God allows a terminal illness, it seems as though God is hiding His face—that He's present but not helping.

In contrast, God's face shining upon us is His grace and mercy being poured upon us (as we hear in the benediction "*Let His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you...*"). But if His face is hiding, it doesn't seem to be shining upon us. In our times of suffering, we pray with the Psalm, "Hide not Your face from me!" We know He's with us and loves us, but we pray for strength of faith to know He is loving and merciful toward us—that His face is shining toward us, whether or not we feel the shine.

Lord, I know You are with me always, that You love me, and that You will help me however You know is best. Let Your face shine upon me in mercy, and give me the faith to know that Your love toward me is active, especially when I cannot see it. Amen.

SATURDAY, APRIL 19

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 the tomb having suffered the eternal wrath we deserve. Tomorrow, we celebrate with full unthrottled 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, APRIL 20

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. Death no longer has the victory over us. Because He has conquered death for us, we too will rise victorious. 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 2025 AT BETHANY

SUNDAY, APRIL 13

PALM SUNDAY DIVINE SERVICE

8:30 & 11:00 AM

THURSDAY, APRIL 17

MAUNDY THURSDAY DIVINE SERVICE

7:00 PM

FRIDAY, APRIL 18

GOOD FRIDAY CHIEF DIVINE SERVICE

4:00 PM

GOOD FRIDAY TENEBRAE VESPERS

7:00 PM

SATURDAY, APRIL 19

THE GREAT VIGIL OF EASTER

7:38 PM

SUNDAY, APRIL 20

THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD

8:30 & 11:00 AM

