

Sermon for March 1st, 2026
SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

READINGS

Genesis 32:22-32

22 The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. **23** He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. **24** And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. **25** When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. **26** Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." **27** And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." **28** Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." **29** Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. **30** So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." **31** The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. **32** Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.

Psalm 121

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From where does my help come?
2 My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.
3 He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
4 Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
5 The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade on your right hand.
6 The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
7 The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
8 The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore.

Romans 5:1-5

1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. **2** Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. **3** Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, **4** and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, **5** and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Matthew 15:21-28

21 And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. **22** And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.” **23** But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.” **24** He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” **25** But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” **26** And he answered, “It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” **27** She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.” **28** Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

Our meditation this Second Sunday in Lent is on our Psalm.¹

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Today's reading is one of the fifteen Songs of Ascent in the book of Psalms. These were written so that people traveling to Jerusalem on pilgrimage could sing them together and meditate on the message while making their arduous journey. They are called songs of *ascent* because the road to Jerusalem was uphill the entire way. Now, our spiritual forebears did not have radios for music, nor did they have podcasts to listen to. The only thing that could occupy their ears and their minds was making conversation, singing songs, or listening to the sounds of the wilderness around them. These were the only things that could keep boredom or fear away.

If you are making such a journey, you do not want to be left without conversation or thought in your mind. Our bodies are well made by our Creator, such that even when a man is out of shape he can hike for an entire day if he really needs to. But our *minds* make things difficult because they are easily discouraged, from the moment we take our first step on the journey. People fail in their thoughts long before they would ever fail physically. So this sort of Psalm focused their minds, motivated them, and encouraged them throughout their journey.

A Message to Stay Strong

With our reading for today, we can see the clear message upon which they were to meditate: God is with us, God is on our side, and God will protect us. At first, this sounds like something we all hear all the time – there is no shortage of reminders for us that God loves us and provides us with everything we need. But for the song of ascents, it is *more* than that. He connects this with creation and the nature of the Lord Himself.

The God who spoke light into existence, who separated waters from dry land, cares about you. He who named every star in the sky says that *you* are important to Him. The Psalmist looks up to the hills of Jerusalem, to the majesty of the armies of Judah guarding its walls, and he knows that it is unlikely that he would ever get an audience with the king in his palace, but that does not matter. He looks up to the hills and thinks of the true God, the King over the entire universe, and thinks to himself “The Lord always makes time for me and helps me.” My friend, do you know that He does the same for you?

And the love of God which looks over him (and us!) is more than mere affection. God does not

¹ Note to all Lay Leaders, Deacons and Chaplains. On account of a number of our Catacomb Synod congregations doing Wednesday night services (and me providing audio messages for them), the Lenten sermons will be focused on the Psalms and shorter than usual. If that does not suit your congregation, I recommend utilizing the previous year's Lenten homilies.

get tired and nor does He have to sleep. Could He sleep if He wants to? Sure. But He abstains from sleep to watch over the pilgrims. As they ascend the hills to the city to present themselves before our Lord and engage in devotion, even when it gets too dark and they have to camp near the road, God is watching over them. And He does the same for you.

We might be tempted to think this is ridiculous. The majesty of our Lord is incomparable. He is big and we are small, He is strong and we are weak, He is smart and we are fools. Why would the sovereign King of the entire universe take the time to watch over a few pilgrims going to Jerusalem? What inspires Him to be concerned with creatures so far below Him?

I'll tell you why He does this. Because He is the *Keeper of Israel*, and the *Keeper of you*, my friends. If you belong to Israel, the body of saints here on earth who hold to the true faith, then you are *His*. The vast majority of humanity hates the Creator and hates everything about Him, they want nothing to do with Him. To love the Lord and believe in His promises makes you exactly the kind of person that He wants running the earth some day. God sees those who are *His*, and He ensures that they are protected from all evil; we cannot count the sheer masses of disasters in our lives that God has prevented. If anything bad happens to us, we know for certain that God had a good reason for permitting it – even if we should be martyred for our faith, we stand confident to confess with St. Paul that “for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”²

Conclusion

So the pilgrims, walking up to Jerusalem for the festivals and gatherings, were comforted and encouraged as they sang this song. They traveled hill and dale to go up to the capitol city, risking attacks from bandits, low supplies, illnesses, bad weather, injuries to get there. They went through boredom, anxiety, fear, and interpersonal conflict every time. But what kept them going was knowing that God was *for them*. They made it through knowing that He was the One protecting them, helping them, and ensuring their success in every step of their journey.

Now these days we have a hard time noticing that the same benefits are offered to us daily, to *all* Baptized believers in Christ. God watches over *all* the saints, not just those going on some journey. But with everyone driving or riding in a vehicle, and nobody going without the stimulation of cell phones, radios and televisions, it gets difficult to see where we are blessed. I suspect the devil is hard at work making sure these distractions only get worse, because he wants us to forget that we too are pilgrims. We may not be walking up a road to go make sacrifices at a temple, but we *are* on our way to that holy city – the heavenly Jerusalem, wherein we shall rejoice with our Lord forever who kept our path straight. So then, let us return to this Psalm (and all other songs of ascent) as we continue in our devotions, that even when we are afraid we may not forget that our Lord watches over us.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Third Wednesday in Lent, March 4th

The Seven Sayings of Jesus on the Cross.

Behold your son: behold your mother. John 19:26-27

John 19:23-27

23 When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, **24** so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says,

"They divided my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots."

So the soldiers did these things, **25** but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. **26** When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" **27** Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Savior did not possess many things. By the time He was crucified, all He possessed was an undergarment and a seamless tunic. Even this tunic was taken from Him, leaving Him drenched in blood, wearing only a loincloth and a crown of thorns. He had no jewels nor rings nor necklace on His body, no money on hand, nor the deed to any piece of property. Though He is Lord of all creation and so everything belongs to Him, according to His humanity He had absolutely *nothing*.

Typically when someone is on their deathbed, the matter of a last will and testament is eventually discussed. Who inherits the property of the deceased? Who gets what? What are the instructions given to the family to carry out this will? These have been ubiquitous questions for every family since the Fall in Eden when death was imposed on us. People die, someone gets their stuff, and somewhere along the line their dying wishes must be honored. This is crucial, especially with men being breadwinners, so that their families can continue surviving after they are gone.

Having been stripped of His last earthly possession, Jesus has absolutely nothing that He could give to people as an inheritance. I speak in earthly terms, because Him being on the Cross in the first place secures for us an *eternal* inheritance; His precious Blood being shed there wins for us the new heavens and new earth. But seeing this crucifixion on the ground level as it happened, it is clear to see that He would not be giving a standard inheritance for anyone. As we said, He had no title deeds to property on His person, no jewelry, and no money.

But He did have a will, and He spoke it in this passage. He had nothing to His Name, but He *did* have an Apostle who believed in that Name, one left after the others had fled. The Apostle in question, who refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," is St. John. He was the only one of the Twelve who stayed by His side even as the nails were driven into His hands and feet. He was all Jesus had in that moment, and Jesus knew that He had to say something for His mother's sake.

This is Christ's last command before His death upon the Cross. When He says to Mary, "Woman, behold your son," He is telling her to see St. John as the effective replacement for the son she was about to lose. When He says to St. John, "Behold, your mother," He is commanding St. John to respect this adoption and *treat* her as his mother. This means that the Fourth Commandment applied to

those two from that moment on. St. John must honor, obey, and provide for Mary. This ensures her survival and provisions.

You might be wondering to yourself, why were Christ's brothers not tasked with caring for Mary? Where is St. James, Joseph, Simon, St. Jude? Where are His sisters?¹ Mary was probably a widow by this point, but we have plenty of instances where the siblings of Christ are following her around and caring for her. What gives? Ah, but here my friends we find more tragedy. It appears that the earthly family of Jesus had abandoned Him too, with the lone exception of His mother and one aunt. They were not with her, they were certainly not following Him, and no mention is made of them. St. John says *he* was the one to take her in and care for her after the Crucifixion, meaning that these siblings were absent. We do not have all of the details in that moment, but Mary could sympathize with being abandoned to some degree; Jesus, full of compassion for His mother, refused to die on that Cross without first ensuring that she was not left totally alone.

With this last command, Christ shows us how entirely unselfish He is. Even when bleeding on that cross and enduring unimaginable pain, He still cared more for others than for Himself. He requested forgiveness for the men who crucified Him, reassured a thief that he would be with Him in Paradise, and made arrangements for His mother to be cared for. To be compassionate is one thing; to be compassionate to everyone around while suffering a slow execution, that is the surest sign that it was no ordinary man on that cross. Christ's limitless love and care for others shows us that He is truly the Son of God.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

1 Matthew 13:55-56, Mark 6:3

Sermon for March 8th, 2026
THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

READINGS

Exodus 8:16-24

16 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt.’” **17** And they did so. Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats in all the land of Egypt. **18** The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast. **19** Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

20 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and present yourself to Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. **21** Or else, if you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people, and into your houses. And the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand. **22** But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth. **23** Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen.’”” **24** And the LORD did so. There came great swarms of flies into the house of Pharaoh and into his servants' houses. Throughout all the land of Egypt the land was ruined by the swarms of flies.

Psalm 4

- 1** Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!
You have given me relief when I was in distress.
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!
- 2** O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame?
How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? *Selah*
- 3** But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself;
the LORD hears when I call to him.
- 4** Be angry, and do not sin;
ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. *Selah*
- 5** Offer right sacrifices,
and put your trust in the LORD.
- 6** There are many who say, “Who will show us some good?
Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!”
- 7** You have put more joy in my heart
than they have when their grain and wine abound.
- 8** In peace I will both lie down and sleep;
for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

Ephesians 5:1-14

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. **2** And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. **4** Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. **5** For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. **6** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. **7** Therefore do not become partners with them; **8** for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light **9** (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), **10** and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. **11** Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. **12** For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. **13** But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, **14** for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

Luke 11:14-28

14 Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. **15** But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons,” **16** while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. **17** But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. **18** And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. **19** And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. **20** But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. **21** When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; **22** but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. **23** Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

24 “When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ **25** And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. **26** Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first.”

27 As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!” **28** But he said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

Our text for meditation this Third Sunday in Lent is on our Psalm.¹

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Introduction

Is it OK to yell at God? I know that sounds like a stupid question, nobody thinks you can just...*yell* at Him...can you? Our instincts say no, of course not. Heaven forbid we should raise our voices at the King of Kings...right? We could never do such a thing like that, even though Job and David and Moses and Asaph and Jeremiah and so many others appear to have done it. You know, those men who all yelled at God and begged to know what He was doing in their lives who were rewarded and blessed by God.

Oh wait.

My friends I have a hard truth to tell you. It is not a bitter truth, but one that many people have a hard time accepting because they have confused politeness with piety. You see, there are times when God wants you to yell at Him. Whenever we are aware of our stresses, pressures, and tragedies, we are to go straight to God about it and not mince words. Of course we are not permitted to be *angry* with God, nor can we *accuse* Him of doing something bad; God is perfect in every way, and neither wills nor does evil. But He wants us expressing our heartaches and frustrations *to* Him, showing Him exactly how we feel. And if that means shouting your pain in His direction, then this what God wants you to do my friends.

Calling on God

In our Psalm, King David understands that calling out to God is his only option. And he does not make some small, sheepish request to our Lord. Rather, he *explodes* at God. He does not stutter, mince words, or mumble. We can almost hear him yelling the first verse.

Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!
You have given me relief when I was in distress.
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!

Or to put it another way, “God, answer me! You did that before, do it again, I need you!” That sounds *almost* blasphemous, doesn't it? Who does David think he is, launching what sounds like demands at our Lord? But in all reality, David is doing the *right* thing here.

We do not know the exact problem he was facing, but from the second verse we see that it involved men slandering him. But whatever it was, David was aware that it was catastrophic, and he could not take it lying down. He did not ignore what was happening, especially as ignoring the problem would not stop the shaming or the lies being spread about him. He did not try to fix it himself, because he knew that he *couldn't* undo that damage, at least not instantly. And he did not sit there and suffer; that would have been absolutely pointless. So instead he calls upon the Lord, pouring his very soul into his complaint.

The Results of Calling

After the first two verses, we see a change happen. David reminds himself and us (as he turns his attention to us!) that God has “set apart the godly for Himself,” and what does that mean? It means that whoever belongs to God can in harmony with David say “The Lord hears when I call to Him.” So for anyone who does what David does, he exhorts us to then lay down, be silent, and think about all of it. Here, my friend, you are to ponder what sort of God you have, what sort of request you just made, remind yourself that He wanted you to call out to Him this way. Then get up and do your best for Him once more.

So King David yells at God, makes his complaint, lies down and meditates on it, and then gets up and does his best to serve God from a willing heart. Because of this, God answers his prayer. Soon after, over all the people who sneer at him saying “who will show us some good?” David's prayers are

answered and he is full of unspeakable joy. He boasts that his joy in the Lord is greater than the mockers, scoffers and slanderers who attacked him. He has a greater joy than they have when they have all their needs met, or even when they are feasting. While he does not say exactly how this situation was solved, he expresses to us that God answered his prayers and thus can answer our prayers as well.

Conclusion

So why did our Lord answer David's complaint? What made the difference between his and all the unanswered prayers out there? Rest assured, it is not about volume as though God were hard of hearing. Rather, it is that the *heartfelt* prayers of the saints are heard from on high. David's prayer was bold, and God wants people who have a bold faith in Him. The very first of the Ten Commandments, "You shall have no other gods before Me," includes in it a command to expect good to come from God. As Luther explains in the Large Catechism, to even have a god in the first place means having that someone "from which we are to expect all good and to which we are to take refuge in all distress."² We are not simply to *hope* for good from God, but to *expect* good from Him. We must believe that He is gracious toward us and earnestly seeks to bless us with everything we need and tons of the things that we want. David had this bold faith that God is looking for in men, the kind He looks for in *us*.

Though we must all fear God, and though we must be careful to avoid ever accusing Him of wrongdoing, God appreciates prayers that are heartfelt – whether they are from quiet words spoken between tears or from loud shouts bemoaning our circumstances. We have this confidence to approach the Throne of God with boldness³ on account of our faith in Christ. We need not shrink away from prayer, even honest prayer, because believers are covered in the righteousness of the One who died for all of our sins. So let us then, like David, go to our Lord for every need, meditate on His goodness and graciousness, and then live our lives every day for Him.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

² <https://bookofconcord.org/large-catechism/ten-commandments/>

³ Hebrews 4:16

The Seven Sayings of Jesus on the Cross.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Matthew 27:46

Matthew 27:45-47

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. **46** And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” **47** And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, “This man is calling Elijah.”

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Before we discuss what Christ *said*, we must acknowledge the fact that some of the bystanders watching Him die did not hear Him correctly. The reason they thought He was calling out for Elijah was a linguistic issue. St. Matthew reflects this in his writing. “Eli” is a Hebrew phrase, which means “my God,” but St. Mark renders the first part “Eloi,”¹ which is the same phrase but in Aramaic. Yet more of them heard “Elijah” - in Greek, where Elijah's name is rendered “Elias” sounds quite a bit like “Eloi” if spoken under one's breath. For the rest of the pronunciation, both Hebrew and Aramaic share a lot of words (linguistically they are like Spanish and Italian, with a lot of mutual intelligibility to them), so “lema” or “lama” both mean “why.” And for the last part, “sabachthani,” it is from a root Aramaic word – but sounds a lot like the Hebrew rendering *azavthani*, which means the same thing: “you have abandoned me.”

What is going on here, is Christ mixing Hebrew and Aramaic? Are the Gospel writers contradicting each other? Neither my friend. Both Sts. Matthew and Mark are writing *phonetically*. Some people heard what Jesus muttered out as the Hebrew words, others could have sworn He was speaking Aramaic, and then some of them thought He called out Elijah's name in Greek. But none of them heard Him quite clearly because He was *dying*. Drenched in blood, much of it running over His mouth, He sputtered this phrase through labored breathing and few could make it out accurately.

Such was the suffering of Christ at this point, that His pain made speaking clearly difficult. Thus few of the people who heard Him could understand what He was truly doing here (and even fewer cared), when what He intended was to quote Psalm 22 and telling the whole world that it was a prophecy about the Crucifixion He was going through. “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me” is the very first line from David's Psalm, and the rest of it points to the Crucifixion with astonishing accuracy.

David writes in a prophetic style about everything that would happen to Jesus one thousand years later. “All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; “He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”² And just so, the people around Jesus mocked Him while He was hanging from the Cross. David writes “they have pierced my hands and feet,” and “they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots” - and indeed, both of these things happened to our Savior.³ When He quotes the twenty second Psalm, He is telling everyone around Him exactly what has been spoken concerning Him. Sadly, none of them were listening. How forlorn He must have felt, to squeeze these words from His strained vocal cords, trying to reassure His weeping mother and sorrowful follower St. John that all was going to plan! How lonely

1 Mark 15:34

2 Psalm 22:7-8

3 Psalm 22:16-18

it must have been to remind the people who had Him crucified of this prophecy, only for them to start arguing about whether He was calling Elijah!

Had they understood what Jesus was saying, their countenance would have changed. If, instead of asking about Elijah they remembered what the *rest* of Psalm 22 says, they would not have mocked Him any further. David predicts the Resurrection when he writes,

“From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will perform before those who fear him.
The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD!
May your hearts live forever!⁴

So despite being pierced in hands and feet and suffering immensely, not only will the afflicted one in the Psalm eat and be satisfied, but men shall seek Him. David does not only prophesy the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, he also adds that Christ shall establish a kingdom for Himself and that every knee shall bow:

All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
even the one who could not keep himself alive.
Posterity shall serve him;
it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;
they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn,
that he has done it.⁵

In other words, Jesus was not *just* proclaiming His sorrow at the anguish and loneliness He was experiencing. By referring back to David's prophecy, He predicts His Resurrection, and lets whoever has an ear to hear that He will still be the King of all. In a word, He proclaims victory over sin, death and the devil, showing that God's Word has been unbroken no matter what the scoffers were saying. Though in the moment it was extremely painful and exhausting, He knew that it was *worth it* to die for you and me, for by saving us He received the people yet unborn, *us* who worship and trust in His Name.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

4 Psalm 22:25-26

5 Psalm 22:29-31

Sermon for March 15th, 2026
FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

READINGS

Isaiah 49:8-13

8 This is what the LORD says:

“In the time of my favor I will answer you,
and in the day of salvation I will help you;
I will keep you and will make you
to be a covenant for the people,
to restore the land
and to reassign its desolate inheritances,
9 to say to the captives, ‘Come out,’
and to those in darkness, ‘Be free!’

“They will feed beside the roads
and find pasture on every barren hill.

10 They will neither hunger nor thirst,
nor will the desert heat or the sun beat down on them.
He who has compassion on them will guide them
and lead them beside springs of water.

11 I will turn all my mountains into roads,
and my highways will be raised up.

12 See, they will come from afar—
some from the north, some from the west,
some from the region of Aswan.”

13 Shout for joy, you heavens;
rejoice, you earth;
burst into song, you mountains!

For the LORD comforts his people
and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.

Psalm 132:10-18

[Collect verses in **bold**]

10 For the sake of your servant David,
do not turn away the face of your anointed one.

11 The LORD swore to David a sure oath
from which he will not turn back:
“One of the sons of your body
I will set on your throne.

12 If your sons keep my covenant
and my testimonies that I shall teach them,
their sons also forever
shall sit on your throne.”

13 For the LORD has chosen Zion;
he has desired it for his dwelling place:
14 “This is my resting place forever;
here I will dwell, for I have desired it.
**15 I will abundantly bless her provisions;
I will satisfy her poor with bread.**
**16 Her priests I will clothe with salvation,
and her saints will shout for joy.**
17 There I will make a horn to sprout for David;
I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.
18 His enemies I will clothe with shame,
but on him his crown will shine.”

Acts 2:41-47

41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. **42** And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. **43** And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. **44** And all who believed were together and had all things in common. **45** And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. **46** And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, **47** praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

John 6:1-15

1 After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. **2** And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. **3** Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. **4** Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. **5** Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” **6** He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. **7** Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.” **8** One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, **9** “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?” **10** Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. **11** Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. **12** And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.” **13** So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. **14** When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”
15 Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Our meditation this Fourth Sunday in Lent is on our Psalm reading.¹

¹ Note to all Lay Leaders, Deacons and Chaplains. On account of a number of our Catacomb Synod congregations doing Wednesday night services (and me providing audio messages for them), the Lenten sermons will be focused on the Psalms and shorter than usual. If that does not suit your congregation, I recommend utilizing the previous year's Lenten homilies of the Lenten devotional homily from this past Wednesday.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Psalm 132 is one of the Songs of Ascent, a Psalm that pilgrims would sing while traveling to Jerusalem as they were preparing to present themselves to the Lord, celebrate the Passover, or offer up sacrifices at the Temple. If we wish to grasp its fullness of meaning and its beauty, our reading for today must be approached with the perspective we have as Christians with their full Bibles. If we read it in isolation, all by itself, then we have a promise to David regarding a dynasty and a promise about Jerusalem being a nice place to live – and that's it. Such a reading would suggest to us that David received some good promises, felt good about them, and then wrote about it in celebration so others could read it on their journey to his capitol city. That would make this reading something of... well, lesser value to us compared to other parts of Scripture.

But when we look at how things played out with a bit of *hindsight*, we have a greater appreciation for what God actually said to King David, and how it reveals His merciful, patient, and faithful character. It shows us His faithfulness despite the sins of men, how His Word endures throughout all generations, leading to our salvation in Christ Jesus. When we see it with the *long* term perspective, it becomes invaluable to us.

The Psalm's First Message

King David prays, beseeching our Lord to shine His Face upon the Anointed One. Previously, the king received a promise from God that said,

When your days are fulfilled to walk with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from him who was before you, but I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever.”²

David understands this single offspring to be the true Anointed One, the Christ, who will be the Savior promised of old. And so, in the eleventh verse of our Psalm reading, he refers back to that oath from God: “The LORD swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: ‘One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne.’” *That* son of David we know to be Jesus, and this promise was never broken. Christ indeed according to His humanity hails from the line of David, and He is the promised One to sit upon the Throne forever.

But as for the rest of David's descendants, they are not given an unconditional oath from our Lord. Instead, our Heavenly Father gives them a *conditional* promise. “*IF* your sons keep My covenant,” He says, *THEN* “their sons also forever shall sit on your throne.” Do you see the disconnect there my friends? There can only be one son of David on the throne at a time, and the “forever” seat is reserved for Jesus. The others then are saddled with this Psalm predicting that ultimately there will be a disconnect because of disobedience. And indeed, this happened – but God was faithful to His oath.

The Kings of Judah (and the rest of us)³

God was faithful to the promise of the Messiah arriving through the Davidic lineage, despite the absolute scandal of that family's history. He kept His Word even when David disobeyed the Law,

² 1 Chronicles 17:11-14

³ For those curious, here is a handy chart regarding the kings of Israel and Judah:

<https://www.providenceacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Chart-of-the-Kings-of-Israel-and-Judah.pdf>

committed adultery and murder. God was faithful to that promise even when Solomon began building temples to false gods for his foreign wives. He was faithful when Rehoboam and his son Abijam did evil after the kingdom split in two. He was faithful to prosper Asa and Jehoshaphat who followed His ways. He kept His promise about the future Messiah even when Jehoram and Ahaziah and Athaliah all reigned and did evil in His sight. He did not betray His Word even when Joash and Amaziah turned away from following Him. He blessed Uzziah and Jotham and kept them going even though He knew that Ahaz would be wicked after them. He blessed Hezekiah's reign and preserved his family even though Manasseh and Amon who came after him bathed the land in blood and idols. Though Josiah the next king died in battle, God blessed his soul and granted him a continued lineage despite the next four kings – Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin and Zedekiah – were all failures whose evil led to Babylon taking Judah into Exile.

Out of the twenty one kings of the Davidic dynasty, only seven were truly faithful to God. As He says in our Psalm reading, each one of these monarchs – except Athaliah, who was a foreigner – was under the same conditional promise. “If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies that I shall teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on your throne.” Over time their failures racked up, and so after Zedekiah no son of David sat on the throne until Christ arrived. God saw this single family, one burdened with an abysmal track record of sinfulness and abuse of power, said “I shall keep My promise to David.” Our Heavenly Father saw Manasseh offer up sacrifices to the false god baal, but kept His Word concerning Christ. He witnessed Zedekiah throwing the prophets in mud pits and still maintained His oath to David.

This same patience is shown to us our entire lives. The Davidic dynasty failed to maintain the conditional agreement God gave them, yet He still brought Christ through their line just as He promised. So too do we fail God *every day*, yet His Word to us stays strong. If no matter how badly one of those fallen kings sinned we still call Jesus the son of David, then how much more so will our Lord forgive those who love Him, trust in Him, and seek to please Him with their lives? May I remind you that God says He is no respecter of persons, He shows no partiality.⁴ If your faith is in Christ, then you are *just* as important to God and *just* as beloved by Him as David or Hezekiah or Josiah.

Conclusion: an Enduring Jerusalem

And if God sees you with the same love, patience, mercy, and steadfast faithfulness, then you are among His universal priesthood.⁵ And what does He promise to that priesthood in this Psalm? Being clothed with salvation, shouting for joy, being with God who dwells in the new Jerusalem forever. An eternal happiness which shall never be undone, for we shall behold Christ wearing His many crowns, and He shall be elevated far above all. Whenever you doubt yourself, and whenever your sins are brought to the forefront of your mind, remember these promises bestowed on every believer; for the very same God who was faithful to His promise given to David shall be faithful to *you* no matter how heavily your sins try to weigh you down.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

4 Acts 10:34

5 1 Peter 2:9

The Seven Sayings of Jesus on the Cross.

I thirst. John 19:28

John 19:28-29

28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” **29** A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

When Christ spoke these two simple words, “I thirst,” He was near death. Typically, a crucifixion lasted a long time, even a few days before the victim perished. The strain on the rib cage from having one's body weight pulling downward from their arms slowly made it harder and harder for them to breathe. If someone's feet were nailed down, they would have to push through the pain to straighten their legs and take in fresh air. As the body became weaker, the moment of asphyxiation got closer. Sometimes, to speed up the process, the arms would be positioned directly above the victim's body, going straight up, which results in death in as little as ten minutes. Jesus was crucified in the standard Roman fashion with His arms stretched out to the sides, but the execution only took a few hours.

The reason for His death going more quickly is very simple: He was tortured first. Jesus was flogged and beaten within an inch of His life before He was nailed to the Cross. This was not a normal flogging either, but accomplished with something called a Roman *flagrum*, a kind of whip with shards of rock, broken glass, and metal attached. The purpose of a flagrum is to savagely rend flesh from the person being flogged. In other words, Jesus had already suffered significant blood loss, that blood loss was ongoing, and several of His bones were likely visible from skin and muscle tissue having been ripped off.

When Christ says “I thirst,” at that point it was extremely difficult to say anything. To speak, He had to press His body up from the legs to get air, and in doing so He was scraping His heavily injured back against the crossbar. Needless to say, being *thirsty* was the least of His troubles in the moment. He did not say “I thirst” *just* on account of not having had anything to drink, but because there were two other things He wanted to proclaim in the act of drinking the wine.

First, let us recognize that He was in the midst of taking in the wrath of God. In the garden of Gethsemane, He prayed “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”¹ To drink wine from God is to receive His wrath, as the prophets say.² By beckoning for some of the wine by the cross, Christ proclaims to the Father and to all who have eyes to see that He was almost done receiving our Heavenly Father's wrath against sin. With His dying breath close at hand, the Divine plan of salvation was nearly complete and mankind was almost redeemed.

Second, let us not forget what He said at the Last Supper. After giving the Words of Institution, our Savior said “I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.”³ From the end of the Last Supper to the moment He said “I thirst,” He did not drink so much as a drop of wine – but *here* He does it, which tells us the Kingdom is being inaugurated as He dies. Everyone in the world from that moment on will be able to receive

1 Matthew 26:39

2 Isaiah 51:17, 51:22, Jeremiah 25:15-16

3 Matthew 26:26-29

salvation, becoming a child of God by faith in Jesus. Though it is not quite time for His Return and judgment of mankind, the “already but not yet” Kingdom is established in that moment.

St. John says that this act, the final time anything went into His mouth before the Resurrection, was to fulfill Scripture – from taking the cup of wrath to inaugurating the Kingdom by His Blood. This is how faithful our Savior is, leaving no prophecy nor word of the Scriptures unfulfilled. Even though His head was spinning, even though He was in immense pain, He *still* went out of His way to proclaim victory over sin and the devil, to show us that He fulfilled it all, and that our souls are safe with Him. He knew that coming up for air was going to hurt, and even more so the act of swallowing the wine, yet He did so anyway to more completely show us that He is the true Savior. Let us therefore look to Him as the One who keeps His promises, and hold tightly to the testimony of our salvation in His Passion.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Sermon for March 22nd, 2026

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

READINGS

Genesis 22:1-14

1 After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” **2** He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” **3** So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. **4** On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. **5** Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” **6** And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. **7** And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” **8** Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.

9 When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. **10** Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. **11** But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” **12** He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” **13** And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. **14** So Abraham called the name of that place, “The LORD will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”

Psalm 43

- 1** Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause
against an ungodly people,
from the deceitful and unjust man
deliver me!
- 2** For you are the God in whom I take refuge;
why have you rejected me?
Why do I go about mourning
because of the oppression of the enemy?
- 3** Send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling!
- 4** Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God my exceeding joy,
and I will praise you with the lyre,
O God, my God.
- 5** Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my salvation and my God.

Hebrews 9:11-15

11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) **12** he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. **13** For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, **14** how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

15 Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

John 8:48-59

48 The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” **49** Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. **50** Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. **51** Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” **52** The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’ **53** Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” **54** Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ **55** But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. **56** Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” **57** So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” **58** Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” **59** So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Our meditation for this Fifth Sunday in Lent is on our Psalm.¹

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Humanity's Strength and Frailty

Humanity is incredibly durable. Our skin is heat resistant, so a normal man can walk on hot coals for a bit and not get burned. Our bones are harder than some rocks. When adrenaline courses through our bodies, we get stronger and faster than many other creatures; in 1982, a woman lifted up a car to save her son after the rear of the vehicle fell on him – and she didn't exercise regularly.² I could go on and on, speaking of the impressive feats people have performed or discussing the ingenious way that God designed the human body, but you get the picture. Humans are *tough*.

But at the same time, humanity is incredibly fragile. There are people, and I am sure you know at least one, who have catastrophically sensitive allergies. A man might touch a single peanut, go into shock and end up in the emergency room. My father did not know that he was allergic to purple yams until he was working as a food supply delivery trucker, put down a pallet full of them at a stop, and almost died. The tiniest current of electricity can disrupt the rhythm of a heartbeat and give someone a heart attack. There are so many ways people can find themselves disabled or perishing, for crying out

¹ Note to all Lay Leaders, Deacons and Chaplains. On account of a number of our Catacomb Synod congregations doing Wednesday night services (and me providing audio messages for them), the Lenten sermons will be focused on the Psalms and shorter than usual. If that does not suit your congregation, I recommend utilizing the previous year's Lenten homilies of the Lenten devotional homily from this past Wednesday.

² <https://www.straightdope.com/21343756/supermom-could-a-mother-actually-lift-a-car-to-save-her-child>

loud there are articles being written on the perils of *sitting*.³ For all our toughness, we are quite frail.

Man is a walking contradiction. We reach various heights, only to fall off of them shortly after we make it. We can achieve all sorts of things, but then be felled by the smallest threat. Remove a single big toe from a professional powerlifter, and you will see his career die immediately. To make matters worse, humans *victimize* each other regularly. It is not enough that our position is precarious and our lives easily taken, for we assault each other, brutalizing and murdering whenever some slight anger is inspired or some small gain is to be had. And when someone cannot *physically* harm the man they don't like, they recruit others to hurt him via slander, mockery, dehumanizing language or gossip. When any person or group of people go after you, it is no longer a matter of accidental frailty: now our mortality and the tragedy of our estate come sharply into focus.

The Psalmist's Plea

The anonymous Psalmist is going through just that as he writes the forty-third Psalm. An ungodly group led by a deceitful and unjust man has assailed him; they care nothing about him except that he be harmed. So not only does he have to worry about the normal dangers of living in this world, but *now* he has to deal with these malefactors, this enemy that has him in their sites. We do not know what they were trying to do to the Psalmist, but I suspect that this was an intentional omission. They are ungodly, deceitful, unjust oppressors – a sort of people that has been around since Cain slew his brother Abel. It seems that as he pleads for God to deliver and vindicate him, he realizes that anyone could be going through a similar thing and so he leaves the details out of it.

Do you make the same plea to God, my friend? Surely you have enemies who prowl around, men and women who hate you for no good reason. Maybe they hate what you say. Maybe they hate the color of your skin or they are enraged by someone in your family. Perhaps you are dealing with people who simply like messing with strangers, and they have decided to destroy you for no good reason. Even more likely, it could be that they hate you for being a *Christian*, and being nonbelievers they follow the devil's bidding. Now, we *know* that the devil is a constant enemy to all believers, and as the pied piper of the heathen he does everything in his power to lead them in assailing the Church; whether you like it or not my friend, you have enemies. It is perfectly fine to sympathize with this hymn, and even to *feel* the same desperation as its author. There are indeed times when people make life so hard or dangerous for us that it appears that God has rejected us. Sometimes it goes beyond just being defensive or mad at the enemy, and we find ourselves just sitting down and mourning the tragedy of it all. But praying this Psalm is just as legitimate for you as it is for Asaph or David or the sons of Korah when it was written, for God wants us to reach out to Him when we experience these sorts of trials.

Deliverance

The Psalmist prays for vindication and deliverance from these physical enemies first, and this is sensible. We ought to do the same thing when we are assailed by our enemies. He has a pressing need for it, after all. But then he prays for something else, something he understands that he – and we – will need much more than having our enemy problems alleviated. He prays for God's light, His *Word*, to lead him back. The dangers around him from his enemies have led him away from the joy of salvation, and this is more painful for him than anything an enemy could inflict. Danger is bad, especially with an entire group dedicated to harming him, but it feels *worse* to experience the spiritual dryness and isolation that come as a result of his fears. He asks our Lord to lead him to the sanctuary where he may find the Divine presence.

You see, the Psalmist is aware of humanity's frailty, but he knows that *spiritually* we are in even greater danger. The strongest men can be rendered useless with a single toe breaking. The richest men

3 From Harvard, just one example among many: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/pain/the-dangers-of-sitting>

can be rendered poor by a slight change in the stock market. The healthiest man can be felled by the common cold. But such frailty is nothing compared to how fraught our spirits are in a world that wants to see us hurtling toward hell. A single bad mood can send us into the spiritual darkness, and a brief period of persecution can leave us feeling lost, *doubting* even, as though God was suddenly absent. It is even worse when the enemy persecuting us is ourselves, our own sin dragging us down and leading us to feel like our Lord would never forgive us or take us back.

So he prays to be brought back to God's presence by His light and truth, because these very things show us where we need to go and they refresh our souls. Go to the altar, and you shall find yourself praising Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Go to the sanctuary and be with all the saints, and you shall see that those enemies are smaller than they seemed. "Why are you cast down, O my soul," the Psalmist asks himself. "Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him." Let us see it the same way. Let us trust that if we seek the Lord and go to His Word, then He shall be faithful to restore to us the joy of salvation.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sixth Wednesday in Lent, March 25th

The Seven Sayings of Jesus on the Cross.

It is finished. John 19:30

John 19:29-30

29 A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. **30** When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

St. John recounts the moment he saw our Savior die. The last words he heard Jesus say were "It is finished." The work was complete; in that moment, the wrath of our Heavenly Father against all sin was satisfied. Every sin, from the first offense committed in the Garden of Eden to the final iniquity performed just before Judgment Day, was paid for right after Christ proclaimed "It is finished." My friends, Jesus died for your sins in that very moment.

He did not die for some of your sins. He did not say "It is sort of finished, but they'll have to do penance to pay a little off the top." He did not say "It is not finished, so they ought to spend their whole lives trying to finish it for Me." The most difficult thing about His mission was now entirely complete – and that *thing* is dying for your sins. Not some of them. Not most of them. *All* of them. Whosoever shall receive salvation by faith in Christ receives the forgiveness of *all* of their sins, and the penalty for *all* of their sins has been paid.

In this moment, when He gives up His spirit and dies for us, nothing else matters. You have noticed that not *once* does Christ call for vengeance against those who killed Him (that comes later by His hand). Not once does He tell those around Him how much better He is than everyone else (even though that is true). Also important to note; He does not look at *you* as He says it. Jesus bled and died for your sins, but not *only* your sins. You did not kill Jesus, nor did your sins kill Him, let alone single handedly. He cried "It is finished" - precisely because He went to that Cross willingly with a mission to fulfill. When Christ says "It is finished," it is as though He were to say "I have done it."

Permit me a moment to air a grievance here. When Jesus went to the Cross, it was so that we could look to *Him* instead of our sins. The Church forgets this all the time. In so many different churches today, there is an emphasis on testimony. Some congregation will invite or pay a former criminal to speak to everyone about how wretched a sinner he was before he converted. He spends forty five minutes telling everyone about how he got into doing and selling drugs, how he went to jail, how he slept around with loose women and hit rock bottom before Jesus saved his life. Occasionally a woman with a past as a pornographic actress or a "party girl" will be invited to make the same speech. This is fine theory; sometimes it is good to be reminded that Jesus died for even the worst sorts of people, and there is nothing wrong with someone publicly rejoicing at their salvation.

But these days, the power of testimony has been cheapened, *degraded* by an inverse pride. People act as though being redeemed from their sins makes them unique, like they are the main character in the Atonement. I spoke to someone yesterday about this disturbing new kind of status signaling, and the response was tragic: they said "growing up I wished that I was a worse person. At my church everyone had to give a testimony at some point, and people got more positive attention the more sad and sin-soaked their testimony was. I was made feel bad for being raised in the Church. I was treated like they were special and I wasn't." There is no doubt that there is now a pressure to have a

“good testimony” - and by that I mean one that is salacious or vague-yet-passionate. People responded to the pressure, and so now on social media there is a circus of people who think they are more pious than they really are, putting “servant of the King: father of two: chief of sinners” on their bio, or worse yet – bragging about the sins of their spouses because they didn't have enough sins to brag about on their own. All this ugly, titillating rhetoric turns the Cross into an occasion for sin. Not only does it cheapen the beauty of redemption, but it also sinfully turns us away from attention to Christ Himself who spoke those precious words: “It is finished.”

When the Atonement was finished, something else was finished as well: your sins themselves. They are paid for, done, gone. When Jesus says “it is finished,” this is so much more expansive than we recognize. With these few words, He says “I have done it, it is finished, look to Me instead of to your sins. My Father in Heaven, who is now *your* Heavenly Father, remembers them no more.” My friends, leave your iniquities in the past and rejoice! And should the devil or the worldly mob try to condemn you for them, you can point to the Cross and repeat “It is finished.” When well-meaning believers want you to give your testimony, and when not-so-well-meaning believers want to hear “juicy” gossip laden details of your past, you can tell them it doesn't matter anymore, for Christ nailed those iniquities to the Cross. Of course, there is no need to hide these sins from anyone anymore, but they need not be volunteered to everyone, for we look to Christ who finished the work.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for March 29th, 2026
SIXTH SUNDAY IN LENT
PALM SUNDAY

READINGS

Zechariah 9:9-12

- 9** Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
- 10** I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem;
and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall speak peace to the nations;
his rule shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.
- 11** As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.
- 12** Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;
today I declare that I will restore to you double.

Psalm 118:19-29

- 19** Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the LORD.
- 20** This is the gate of the LORD;
the righteous shall enter through it.
- 21** I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.
- 22** The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.
- 23** This is the LORD's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.
- 24** This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
- 25** Save us, we pray, O LORD!
O LORD, we pray, give us success!
- 26** Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!
We bless you from the house of the LORD.
- 27** The LORD is God,
and he has made his light to shine upon us.
Bind the festal sacrifice with cords,
up to the horns of the altar!
- 28** You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God; I will extol you.
- 29** Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever!

Philippians 2:5-11

5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. **9** Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, **10** so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Matthew 21:1-9

1 Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, **2** saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. **3** If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” **4** This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

5 “Say to the daughter of Zion,
‘Behold, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. **7** They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. **8** Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. **9** And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”

Our meditation for this Fifth Sunday in Lent is on our Psalm reading.¹

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Birthday Party

Once upon a time there was a little boy who had a few friends. His birthday was coming up, but because he was a humble child he did not let his friends know about it. But as they visited his home, his father asked him what he wanted for the big day, and this revealed the little boy's secret. At first, they were a little taken aback: how could their best friend not tell them? He had always been so good to them, and they had always wanted the opportunity to show him some gratitude. He admitted it was true, but asked them to abstain from getting him presents, because he did not want his friends to think of him as greedy. But even though the boy told his friends not to tell anyone, they hatched a plan.

His friends decided to throw him a birthday party, and not just any party – a surprise party! And to make it even more special, they decided to make some invitation cards and pass each one to their classmates at school. They asked their mothers for extra allowance money to buy presents (nothing special, just a ball and a toy car), and helped their mothers bake cake. Within a week, just a day before the party, they were very excited. “He'll never know what hit him,” one giggled to the other, “it'll put the biggest smile on his face.”

Unfortunately, the little boy's friends were not the only ones making plans. A few bullies heard

¹ Note to all Lay Leaders, Deacons and Chaplains. On account of a number of our Catacomb Synod congregations doing Wednesday night services (and me providing audio messages for them), the Lenten sermons will be focused on the Psalms and shorter than usual. If that does not suit your congregation, I recommend utilizing the previous year's Lenten homilies of the Lenten devotional homily from this past Wednesday.

about this upcoming party in the classroom, and they didn't like the thought of celebrating the little boy. So they decided to play some dirty tricks. One of them spread rumors about the birthday boy saying mean things about the girls in the class. Another told his classmates that he would bully *them* if they did not follow his lead when the party got started. A third bully stole his father's money and bought some supplies at the hardware store.

When the big day arrived, the little boy was greeted by his friends, teacher and classmates singing the “happy birthday” song, and everyone looked like they were excited for the party. “Surprise!” his friends shouted with big smiles. “We couldn't just let you hide your big day. So we have a party in our classroom, come on!” The little boy was happy that his friends and classmates were thinking of him, but being a bit bashful he just muttered a “thank you” and smiled back. And so the whole class, including the bullies, went with the little boy and his friends into the classroom.

When they arrived, one of the bullies asked the teacher to help him with something outside, and she obliged. Now there was the cake on the table, and there were the toys that his friends had bought...but they were broken, and a hammer lay next to them. One of the bullies, holding duct tape, yelled “get him!” and all the classmates except the little boy's friends grabbed him. They put zip ties on his wrists and ankles, duct taped his mouth shut, and began to laugh.

What happened next was almost too unfortunate for words. The girls in the class yelled at him with the accusation that he had said mean things. The other students smeared cake on his face and threw the pieces of the broken toys at him. One of the bullies held the door shut in case the teacher came back, while the other decided to start hitting and kicking the little boy. With great spite in his voice, the bully said “happy birthday,” and then he directed the other students to sing the happy birthday song again – only louder this time so the other classes could not hear what happened next. The door was opened and the little boy's friends were invited to leave before they got started; they were so scared that they ran out the door without even a hint of protest.

What came after was unspeakable my friends. They used the hammer that one bully had bought at the store. The classmates watched on with horror and curiosity as they were instructed to keep singing above the screams. After fifteen grueling, agonizing minutes the teacher returned, only to see no one in the class but the poor little boy lying there in a porridge mess of blood and cake, barely breathing under the pain of several broken bones. Unsurprisingly, none of the children ever got in trouble for the incident.²

Palm Sunday

This story is more or less what Palm Sunday was about, and it is exactly what our Psalm reading today is pointing to. As Christ entered through the gates of Jerusalem, the people sang a great cry of “Hosannah” - which means “save now!” – just as the Psalm says. Everyone rejoiced that day in the Day that the Lord had made, and they gave supplication to Jesus that they would experience success. Meanwhile, the authorities in Jerusalem, the pharisees and the priesthood, they were planning to have Jesus killed after turning all the people against Him. They were the builders who rejected the chief stone. And let us not forget the twenty seventh verse, in all its tragic irony:

*The LORD is God,
and he has made his light to shine upon us.
Bind the festal sacrifice with cords,
up to the horns of the altar!*

My friends, that sacrifice is Jesus. He arrived in Jerusalem as the light shining upon the people, and they responded by sacrificing Him. The Psalmist mixes the triumphant and the tragic to show us, in the clearest way his oracle can express, that what was happening was really the people celebrating as they got ready to torture and murder the Son of God. Even if they could not articulate that this was what

² Lest anyone think a story like this is too unrealistic:
<https://keepyourchildsafe.org/bullying/bullying-cases/extreme-bullying/>

they were doing, in the back of all their minds this was the case. After so many failed fake messiahs in Judea's history, they were ready to celebrate Jesus but only on the condition that He became the hero king that would kill everyone they did not like; in the back of the mind of everyone singing "Hosanna" was an assumption that if He did not do that then they would want His blood shed everywhere.

Someone listening right now might be patting himself on the back. "Oh I would never do such a thing." Yes you would. Today's world is full of people, even self-proclaimed Christians, who would kill Jesus as soon as He met them. Leftists would want Him canceled and killed because He did not support the "lgbtq" lifestyle or embrace marxism and critical theory. Lots of right wingers would want Him dead for not being "based" enough. Organized islam, judaism, and secular humanism would want Him dead for proving their religions wrong simply by existing. Scientific and tech establishments would want Him gone on account of His ethics running counter to their dehumanizing mode of operation, and big businesses would absolutely seek His death for cutting into their coffers. Every government for every country with imperialistic or globalist positions would seek His death simply because He is proclaimed King and they are not. We confess in accordance with Scripture that when Christ returns it shall be for judgment: if He came back for some other reason, He would be nailed onto another Cross in less than a week. We are simply too selfish, too short-sighted, and too idolatrous for it to be otherwise, Lord have mercy.

Tragic irony, the irony of Palm Sunday is that Christ, knowing the shallow praises would turn into shouts of bloodlust, still went forward into the city to do good for them. And with greater irony, He did indeed come to Jerusalem to receive a Kingdom, but an even greater one than the people were expecting. The people of Judah killed Him for not being the king they imagined in their minds, not realizing that He is a far greater King than they could even imagine! He did absolutely everything that the Psalm predicts, He became the chief cornerstone after being the festal sacrifice, He provided salvation and rejoicing and blessing – all things that the people were asking for. But their eyes were blinded by their sin.

Let us reflect on this, for these days everyone is adopting the same mindset as the jews who cried "Hosanna" on that first Palm Sunday. Everybody sees everything in terms of politics, a thirst for violence and prosperity that goes deeper into our souls every day. Why have we become incapable of seeing that Jesus is offering us something so much better than we can even ask for? Great masses of men all over the world have taken their eyes off of the Cross and onto worldly problems, not seeking to honor the Son of God any longer but to demand that He bring them all that they desire – they have joined with the bullies. It is no sin to try to make things better, but we have let our love grow cold as we forget the eternal life He offers. Let us repent, and make our Savior the chief subject of our adoration and desires once more.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.