



Crucify Him!

This booklet distributed by

Redeemer Lutheran Church

66325 M 152

Dowagiac (Sister Lakes), MI 49047

www.redeemerlc.org

DAILY DEVOTIONS
FOR THE LENTEN SEASON
2012

THE EMPTY TOMB

EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 8

Luke 24:1-3 Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

Fact or fiction? Many theories concerning the death and the resurrection of Jesus have been advanced throughout the centuries. What is fact, and what is fiction?

When we are dealing with matters that have implications for our eternal lives we had better be confident that our faith is resting on more than theory. We want to rest our faith and the hope of our salvation on the rock of fact. So let's look at the undeniable fact of the resurrection: Jesus' grave was empty.



The women who followed and ministered to Jesus during His ministry had observed the crucifixion of Jesus. They had seen Joseph and Nicodemus take the body of Jesus down from the cross, followed them to the tomb where they had placed the lifeless body of Jesus in the grave, and watched as they rolled a large stone over the entrance. Now on Sunday morning when they returned after the Sabbath day to finish the preparations of Jesus burial, the body of Jesus was gone! The tomb was empty.

The empty tomb was the first fact of the resurrection of Jesus, but there would be many more. Death could not contain the Lord of Life! Look on His *deserted grave!*

Morning breaks upon the tomb; Jesus scatters all its gloom.

Day of triumph thro' the skies; see the glorious Savior rise.

Christian, dry your flowing tears, chase your unbelieving fears;

Look on His deserted grave, doubt no more His pow'r to save.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 203:1, 3)

These devotions were selected from the online collection found at xrl.us/devotions

To receive daily devotionals like these free by e-mail, sign up at www.redeemercfc.org/devotional.html

Artwork in this booklet is courtesy of FCIT etc.usf.edu/clipart

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE MORNING

HOLY SATURDAY, APRIL 7 SEASON OF LENT, DAY 40

Matthew 27:62-66 On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.

It is Holy Saturday, Easter Eve. It is for us a Saturday unlike any other, for we anticipate the joy of the morrow. For Jesus' disciples that first Holy Saturday was no doubt, a day of sorrow and fear. For Pontius Pilate the Roman Governor, it was another day of humoring the humorless Jewish Leaders. They had threatened Pilate and had their way with Jesus, but it wasn't enough. They wanted more. For the Chief Priests and Pharisees, Holy Saturday was a day to close the book on Jesus of Nazareth, a day to tie up loose ends. They came to Pilate with a request. They were thinking ahead, call it potential damage control.

Jesus said He would rise from the dead. They didn't believe it could happen, but they wanted to prevent any further misunderstanding. They'd see to it that someone was waiting for Him should He rise or be carried off by his disciples. Pilate, could we have a guard, please? Guard a dead man's tomb!

The guards were going to make sure Jesus stayed in the grave where they had put Him – yet they hadn't really put Him in the grave. They didn't take His life from Him. He gave it up. He willingly went the way of death. He wasn't suicidal. He was committed to your redemption.

Holy Saturday can be a quiet day, but we can't help but look forward to the morning light breaking on the tomb, the empty tomb. We can't help but think of the guards ... that became like dead men ... and the dead man who rose and became for us Life and Salvation.

ASHES OF REPENTANCE

ASH WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22 SEASON OF LENT, DAY 1

Genesis 3:8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

It didn't take long for Adam and Eve to discover that hiding from God didn't obscure what they had done nor did their hiding take away their sin. All of Adam's children tend to do the same thing as Adam. Instead of laying their sins before God in repentance, they seek to hide them away, pretending God can't see them.

But this silly game of hide and seek doesn't really hide our sins from God, and it certainly doesn't take them away. Thankfully, God has sought us out by the Gospel and washed our sins away with the blood of His Son (Colossians 1:13-14).

Sins will never become pretty things which we are proud of. But through Christ we become willing to display them to the world. We don't display our sins to brag about how great they are, but to show great and merciful our Savior is. The Apostle Paul considered himself to be the worst of sinners, and didn't shy away from saying so. He also knew that in the forgiveness he received, the grace of God was displayed.

"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal" (1 Timothy 1:15-16).



Today is Ash Wednesday. It isn't unusual to see people wearing ashes in the shape of a cross on their forehead. This is how we should bear our sins in this world. Openly, and with the purpose of drawing attention to the cross, where ours and all sins were paid for.

LENT: TIME TO THINK AGAIN

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 2

Mark 1:14-15 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said, "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

The Greek word which is translated *repent* in Mark 1:15 is made up of two Greek words put together, roughly *after + think*. Or as we'd say in English, "Think again."

The people to whom Jesus preached were encouraged to consider their sins and to "think again," and so are we.

Yesterday the Lenten season began. Lent is the time in the church year when we consider our Savior's suffering and all of the events that brought Him to the cross.

When we really get to the heart of the matter we see that the true cause of our Savior's suffering and death was not the scribes and Pharisees. It wasn't the soldier who scourged Him or the soldier who drove the nails. Jesus' suffering and death was made necessary by our sins.

The events that brought Jesus to the cross were the events of your life and mine, events that are thoroughly laced with the dark deeds sin. The death of God the Son was necessary because of the evil that we have done, and the good we have failed to do.

Because of this, a seriousness and a sadness seem to descend on the season of Lent. But listen again to what Jesus preached "Repent and believe the good news!"

Sure, Jesus directs us to look inside ourselves to see our sin, but then He calls us to look back to Him and see our Savior. Think God wants us to be sad during Lent? Think again.

It is during Lent that we are brought to see the dark depths of our sin, but it is also in Lent that the unfathomable depth of God's love for us is revealed and forgiveness shines on us with greatest intensity.

THE JUST FOR THE UNJUST

GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 6

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 39

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 bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.

It must have appeared that He was getting what He deserved. Anyone not familiar with the facts of the case against Jesus of Nazareth probably assumed that He was being punished for his wrongs. Those coming upon the cross on Calvary that day needed only look to the mock accusation written against Him: The King of the Jews. No doubt some assumed him disturbed, ego-maniacal to have supposedly claimed such a thing. It is easiest to assume that He got what he deserved. Innocent men don't get executed with robbers, do they?

The Prophet Isaiah corrects all misconceptions about what we see on Calvary. We may think Him struck down by God and afflicted because of His own wrongdoings, but if we think thus we are in error. He bears our griefs and carries our sorrows. He is wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities. The punishment to bring peace to us fell on Him. He got what we deserved.

I understand that it was a practice in those days to make a sign explaining the charges against the condemned as he was led to execution. What would *your* sign have said? This human being is condemned for: cursing, lies, adultery, hurtful words, idolatry, hatred, stealing, covetousness ... You fill in the blank. I need a bigger sign.

Wait. Now look closer. The accusation that belongs to you has been nailed to His Cross. For it is written (Colossians 2:13-14): "And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." He suffers for you, the Just for the unjust, to bring you to God.

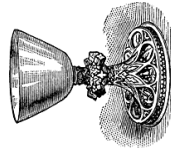
BODY AND BLOOD GIVEN FOR YOU

MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 5 SEASON OF LENT, DAY 38

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

It's first hand information, inspired by the Spirit and reliable. The Apostle Paul received from the Lord this word and he passes it on to the Corinthians and to us. Thus, we are not left to wonder at the nature of the Lord's Supper. For the Lord Himself tells us what we receive and its blessing.

First, Jesus took the unleavened bread – and so do we. Jesus gave bread to his disciples and so to we receive bread from the hand of the pastor. Yet, according to Jesus' own words we receive more than simple bread. We also, according to His promise, receive His Body in the Sacrament. We don't need to wonder about this, for if the Son of God says it is so, it is so.



Then, Jesus took the cup – filled with grape wine – and so do we. We believe, according to His Word, that we also receive His own blood in the Sacrament. For if the Son of God says it is so, it is so.

So we take the bread and drink of the cup and we are led to remember how He gave his body and shed his blood to redeem us to God. Thus we are also strengthened in our faith in Him and in His Sacrifice. We rightly think of Him when we partake – and rejoice! Even more, our reception is a confession, for we express our confidence in His sacrifice and by His grace will do so until He comes again.

REPENTANCE: A TURNING NOT A DUCKING

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24 SEASON OF LENT, DAY 3

Matthew 9:12-13 When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

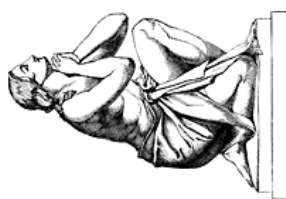
I've got two daughters, ages three and one. The older one is forever doing something to upset the younger. But big sister has learned that if Mom or Dad hears little sister crying, it's time to start apologizing. Down the hall I'll walk to the sound of "Sorry-sorry-sorry-sorry," being directed at our youngest. Is this repentance? I don't think so. Repentance is being sorry for what you did, not being sorry you got caught.

True repentance is a turning away from sin not a ducking away from its consequences. True repentance is a change of heart. True repentance is proved by it's fruits. That's what John the Baptist told the Pharisees. "Saying you're sorry doesn't prove anything, let's see you show your repentant heart by the way you act."

Jesus never needed to repent, because He never sinned. Because He didn't have sins to turn away from, Jesus was able to turn His back to accept the punishment for our sins. He turned His back to accept the flesh tearing scourge. He turned His back to accept the cross. And when the crown of thorns came to His head, Jesus didn't try to duck it. He took it, along with all the other pain and punishment.

Why? Jesus wanted to save the sinners that He had called to repentance, and their saving could only be accomplished by His suffering in their place.

May God give us eagerness to turn our backs on sin, because of our Savior who turned His back and accepted "the punishment that brought us peace." Truly, "by His wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).



Luke 18:10-14 Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get. But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

1 Timothy 2:8 I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting ...

As a child I was taught to pray with my hands folded and my head bowed. But some pray with their hands held up. Perhaps this "open-palmed" prayer stance is meant to remind us that we have nothing to offer God, but He has much to give us.

Paul desires prayer done with "holy" hands. Of course, our sin dirtied hands can only be cleansed in the blood of Jesus. But as long as we clutch our grubby sins through impenitence our hands will remain dirtied by sin's black residue.

The Pharisee in Jesus' parable was doing just this and didn't even know it. He stood up proudly claiming that his hands were clean before God. Though they were filthy with sin. Sadly, his hands remained dirty when he left God's temple.

The tax collector also held up dirty hands before God. But he knew his hands were dirty. There is no self-righteous pride in his prayer, only an admission of guilt and an asking for mercy.

Jesus says this man went home with clean hands. For when the Christian lifts up his sin dirtied hands in repentance, he finds that God has washed them clean.

Philippians 2:8-11 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In just two days we will reach the end of our work week, Friday. This Friday, however, is like no other Friday during the year. It is Good Friday. Good Friday? The world looks at us through the corner of an eye and says, you Christians call it a "good" Friday when your Lord is treated roughly, beaten and put to death?

The Apostle Paul reminds us this morning why we call it Good Friday. Jesus was no victim. He was a willing participant. He humbled Himself. He submitted to this terrible death while burdened by our sin to free us from sin and death.

It is because of His perfect obedience that the Father has exalted Him and separated Him from all others. Every knee shall bow to Him. Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and God will be glorified.

Let us remember this, for the Jesus we see on Good Friday does not outwardly look like a man to be honored or exalted. Yet, this bleeding, dying man is Christ, the King. He rules and will rule. Now He rules – not by force or compulsion – but by love in the hearts of men through His Gospel. Then He will rule – coming in glory on the clouds of heaven.

Who is this that comes from Edom, All His raiment stained with blood,
To the captive speaking freedom, Bringing and bestowing good,
Glorious in the garb He wears, Glorious in the spoil he bears?
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 209:1)

BOAST IN THE CROSS

TUESDAY (HOLY WEEK), APRIL 3 SEASON OF LENT, DAY 36

Galatians 6:14 But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

It is Holy Week and we do well to remember the holy and complete work of the Savior Jesus. No matter how busy our preparations for Easter, it is fitting that our thoughts first turn toward the cross of Jesus.

In the first century the cross was a symbol of death, a reminder of one of the cruelest forms of execution ever developed by men. There is little doubt that the symbol of the cross had a depth for early Christians that eludes us in an age of lit and gleaming golden crosses. Still, the cross is for us a source of both sorrow and joy. It causes sorrow in that it reminds us that Christ's death was made necessary by our sins. It also causes joy for through the cross we have been reconciled to God.

The Lenten season now begins to draw to its close. Some who have "given up" things for Lent may begin to talk about their sacrifices. In some cases, no doubt, these well meant gestures will become a source of pride.

Instead of directing us to *our* "sacrifices" the Apostle Paul directs us to the cross and sets the tone for Holy Week. God forbid that I should take pride or boast in anything, except the cross of Jesus Christ my Lord. The words of the hymn also echo Paul's words as a personal heartfelt prayer:

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 175:2)

A LENTEN PORTRAIT BY THE NUMBERS: ONE BITTER HOUR

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27 SEASON OF LENT, DAY 5

Matthew 26:40 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with Him, and He began to be sorrowful and troubled.

When I was young an activity I enjoyed doing was painting pictures by numbers (for example, yellow for picture parts marked with a one, blue for two, green for three, etc.). When you got done filling in all the parts, you ended up with an attractive picture. An ocean scene with ships sailing across the sea. A country scene with a red barn, tall silo, and green pasture with cows grazing. In coming devotions we will paint a picture by numbers using brush-strokes of Scripture and the numbers 1-6 as they occur in scenes of the Passion. We won't use bright colors (no pretty blues or cheery tints of yellow). The colors will be dark shades of gray. A little violet. Lots of red. When we're finished we'll have a beautiful portrait of our suffering Savior, who gave up His life on the cross to redeem us.

The number we color in today is *one* (for the "one bitter hour" Jesus spent in the Garden of Gethsemane). The color: Gray. Our text presents the account of Jesus in Gethsemane where He goes with His disciples late on Maundy Thursday night. The Garden, located to the east of Jerusalem, on the lower slope of Mount Olivet, is dark with shadows of the night. The natural green of the olive tree leaves has faded to charcoal gray. But the murky darkness of Gethsemane is nothing compared to the blackness sweeping over Jesus' soul. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow," He says, "even to the point of death." Walking deeper into the Garden's pitch-darkness His turmoil of soul intensifies. Feelings of gloom roll over Him like the wave upon waves of the ocean. He pours out His soul to His Father in prayer, asking that the cup of suffering be taken from Him, if possible.

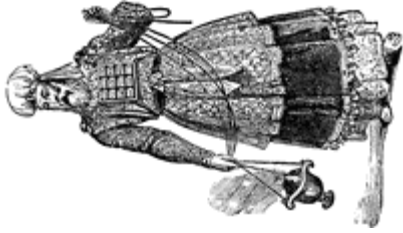
How can it be that the holy soul of God's sinless Son is tormented by dark feelings of dread? He feels the guilt of the world, yours and mine, and every sinner. He feels the stroke of divine Justice that will be inflicted on Him in a few hours in the darkness of Good Friday – for us.

A LENTEN PORTRAIT BY THE NUMBERS: TWO WICKED PRIESTS

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 6

John 18:13-14 And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year. Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.



Today we color in number two on our portrait of the suffering Savior (for the two wicked priests, Annas and Caiaphas). The color we dip our brush into is black. Black for the moral depravity of the human heart, as illustrated by the dastardly actions of these two men. From beginning to end the proceedings over which they preside are a travesty of justice. Neither has any intention of granting Jesus a fair hearing to discover whether the charges against Him are true. They determine in advance what the verdict will be: "He is guilty of blasphemy and deserves to die!" Is there a blacker example of the innate wickedness of man than this? "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). How the evil conduct of these two men must have cut deeply into the Savior's holy soul! But do you not suppose, dear friend, that He is similarly grieved by the sins of which we are guilty? Each of our missteps against God's law may be painted with the same dark brush stroke as the acts of treachery committed long ago by Annas and Caiaphas. Our sins too are the cause for His anguish and bloody death. "Yea, all the wrath, the woe, Thou dost inherit, This I do merit."

How thankful we may be that Jesus patiently endured the deception, chicanery, and subterfuge committed against Him in the courtrooms of these two priests so our black sins might be atoned for! How blessed we are to have a Savior who kept His peace when men bore false witness against Him and who went forward uncomplainingly to the cross. Thanks to Jesus we have been purified and cleansed. When the Day of clouds and blackness arrives (for unbelievers), we who have anchored our hope in Christ shall stand before Him dressed in white.

THE FACE OF GOD WITHHELD

MONDAY (HOLY WEEK), APRIL 2

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 35

Exodus 33:18-20 And he said, "Please, show me Your glory." Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." But He said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live."

When God withheld His face from Moses, Moses was serving as a preview of Christ. On Mount Calvary, the Father would withhold His face from Jesus too, though for a very different reason.

God withheld His face from Moses because a vision of that magnitude would have killed Moses. On Mount Calvary, the Father withheld His face from Jesus, along with the rest of His presence, so Jesus could suffer the full punishment our sins required. Hell is the punishment for sin, so Jesus had to experience Hell if He was going to set us free from sin.

God the Father stopped all His goodness from shining on His Son as He hung on the cross. That was hell. Instead of the brilliant glory that Moses experienced, the noonday sun grew dark for three hours on Good Friday. And there in the darkness the Son experienced unspeakable torment.

God told Moses, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Exodus 33:19).

When you first read this it might sound like God is saying, "Hmm, I'll have compassion on that guy, but not on that guy over there." As if God randomly distributes His grace and love. But that's not what God is saying at all.

God is describing how our salvation was accomplished. God *chose* to have mercy and compassion on sinners who didn't deserve it. To do this, God had to *choose* to withhold his mercy and compassion from His suffering Son. Jesus experienced suffering which surpasses our understanding so that we could experience peace which surpasses all understanding.

MEMENTOS OF HIS PASSION: A CROSS

SATURDAY, MARCH 31

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 34



John 19:17-18 Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). Here they crucified him, and with him two others -- one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

A cross didn't need fine craftsmanship or rare wood. It wasn't a piece of furniture or a decoration. A cross was a tool used to kill. It could take three days for man to die on a cross. His limbs becoming full of gangrene and infection, body slowly dehydrating, life ebbing away until it was gone. Because of the way it was used, a cross was also a symbol of severe pain, humiliation and death.

To many onlookers, the cross of Jesus was also a symbol of guilt. Rome didn't just hand out death sentences. This man must have earned His horrible death. But Jesus' cross was different than the others raised on Mt. Calvary. He did not earn His cross, sinners did. It doesn't matter how much any one individual contributed to buying His cross, we all had a part in its purchase.

It is fitting that Jesus' cross was placed in the middle. Of all the crosses that ever were, His takes center stage. His cross held the Son of God. His cross was not merely used to bring death, but to conquer it. All crosses display the consequences of sin, but only the cross of Christ displays our Savior from sin.

The cross of Christ is a precious memento because it preaches a two part sermon of sin and grace. First it reminds us that OUR SINS got Jesus crucified. But then the cross comforts us by showing that OUR SINS were taken away through Christ crucified.

A cross was a tool of death, but Jesus used it to bring us life. A cross was a symbol of sin's consequences, but Jesus made it a symbol of sin's solution. A cross was made with the simplest of carpentry, but Jesus' cross spans the immeasurable gap between sinners and their loving God.

A LENTEN PORTRAIT BY THE NUMBERS: THREE SHAMEFUL DENIALS

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 29

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 7

Luke 22:60b-62 Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Today we color in the number three in our portrait (for Peter's three denials). The color we add to our portrait is violet (symbolic of Christian repentance).

Peter the bold and impetuous. What a marvelous confession of Jesus he had once made. When many would-be disciples deserted the Lord (after He made clear: "I'm not a bread-king"), He asked if the Twelve would leave, too. Peter responded: "Lord, to whom should we go? You have the words of eternal life! You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:68-69). But not tonight in Caiaphas' chilly courtyard. Here Peter asserts three times: "Jesus means nothing to me! I don't even know Him!" Poor Peter. How could he take such a tumble? He had ignored Jesus' admonition to "watch and pray." He believed he was strong enough to fend off temptation on his own. He overestimated his strength and underestimated Satan's.

Thank God there's more to the story. No sooner had denial number three rolled off his lips than a crowing rooster is heard. The Savior turns and looks at Peter. It's a look of sadness mingled with love, a call to repentance. Jesus' look has its desired effect. Peter is overcome with grief and runs outside and weeps repentant tears.

During Lent we see violet-colored paraments hanging in our churches. May they be reminders to us of this story and the importance of looking to Jesus for strength to overcome temptation and our need to "watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation." May our comfort be that when in weakness we take a spiritual "tumble," our Lord's forgiveness is always available, full and free.

A LENTEN PORTRAIT BY THE NUMBERS: FOUR HEARTLESS SOLDIERS

THURSDAY, MARCH 1

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 8

John 19:23-24a When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining ... "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it."

Today we color the number four into our portrait (for the soldiers gambling under the cross). Our colors, more shades of gray and some red.

The Jewish dignitaries have manipulated Pilate into handing down the death sentence. Jesus is driven out to the crucifixion site. We behold Him hanging there, blood flowing from His wounds into pools on the ground. Huddled nearby are four soldiers, gambling for His tunic. They want to heap more scorn on Jesus.

But how different is the heart of Jesus! Even now He is filled with thoughts of love. He bears with patience the mockery and shame. He would bring to completion the work of redemption, of rescuing us from the dominion of darkness and bringing us into His kingdom of light.

One Sunday morning after returning from church a little boy asked his dad: "How does Jesus love us?" "Son," his father responded, "Jesus loves us with an unconditional love." The lad posed another question: "Daddy, what is unconditional love?" His father answered: "Do you remember those two boys who used to live next door and the cute puppy they got last Christmas?" "Yes." "Remember how they used to tease it and throw sticks at it?" "Yes." "Remember how the puppy would always greet them with a wagging tail and try to lick their faces?" "Yes." "Well, that puppy had unconditional love for those boys. They didn't deserve it because they were mean to him. But he loved them anyway. Jesus' love for you is like that. Men threw rocks at Him, hit Him with sticks, even killed Him. He loved them anyway."

May the Savior's love for you be your daily joy. May it inspire us to serve Him better, and reflect His love in tangible ways to others.

MEMENTOS OF HIS PASSION: A SIGN ABOVE HIS HEAD

FRIDAY, MARCH 30

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 33

INRU

John 19:19 Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Maybe you've seen the letters "I-N-R-I" used in church decorations.

Those letters stand for the Latin, "Jesus Nazaretum Rex Iudeorum," or, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." This was the superscription that Pontius Pilate gave to Jesus.

A criminal condemned to die by crucifixion was forced to carry his own cross to the place of execution. Normally, he'd be accompanied by a procession of soldiers. At the head of the procession marched a herald, who carried the criminals "title" – a sign, proclaiming the crime for which he was being executed. The sign might say *thief* or *murderer* or *revolutionary*. When they reached the place of execution, the sign would be hung on his cross. That way, the passing public could learn a lesson about what happens to such people. Today, we learn a lesson from the title hung on Jesus' cross.

To the unbelieving Jews the sign was a mistake. This man had only claimed to be a king. He had even claimed to be the Son of God! To the unbelieving Jews, Jesus' title might as well have read *blasphemer*.

To Pilate, the sign was a joke. Pilate hadn't wanted to crucify this man. He was obviously innocent. But Pilate had been bullied into doing it anyway. To Pilate, Jesus' title might as well have read *innocent man*.

To Christians, the sign hung above Jesus means what it says: *This Man is a King*. Sometimes a king sits on a throne, pronouncing judgments in service to his citizens. Sometimes a king stands on the battlefield, face dirty and bloodied, cutting down the enemies of His people.

Jesus' throne was a cross instead of a jeweled chair. His hand held a nail instead of a shimmering sword. But the sign got it right. He is our King, and more. He is our God, our Savior and our Eternal King.

MEMENTOS OF HIS PASSION: A CROWN OF THORNS

THURSDAY, MARCH 29

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 32



Matthew 27:29 And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

In Eden the ground produced food eagerly. As a result of Adam's sin, God cursed the ground, causing thorns to grow in it (Genesis 3:17-19). As he tended the soil the thorns must have continually reminded Adam of his sin and his need for the Savior whom God had promised. In the same way, the thorns of Jesus' crown remind us of our sin and our need for Him.

The crown being placed on Jesus' head reminds us that our sins were also placed on Him. As He accepted the crown of thorns, Jesus also willingly accepted our sin when it was laid on Him. John informs us that Pilate brought Jesus out to the mob wearing the crown of thorns (John 19:5). But then the crown disappears from the Bible's record for good.

Artists often portray Jesus crucified with the crown of thorns still on His brow. Perhaps the cruelty of the soldiers made sure Christ carried the crown all the way to the cross.

One thing we know for certain. Our sins were carried all the way to the cross. And it is there that they disappear from the record books of God. The missing crown of thorns reminds us that our sins have also gone missing. They were lost deep in the wounds of Jesus our Savior.

When we meet Jesus in the flesh, we too will wear a crown. The Apostle Paul looked forward to this crown when he wrote: "... There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8).

Oh, what a precious memento. Jesus wore the crown of thorns, so we could wear the crown of life.

A LENTEN PORTRAIT BY THE NUMBERS: FIVE WOUNDS

FRIDAY, MARCH 2

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 9

John 19:17-18a Carrying His own cross, He went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). Here they crucified Him.

Today we color the number five into our portrait (for the five wounds inflicted on Jesus on Calvary). We dip our paint brush into red.

Even before He was executed, Jesus endured much: The cruel flogging, brutal beating, the thorny crown driven into His scalp. Now He volunteers to drink the bitter dregs at the bottom of the cup of agony given to Him by His Father. He allows the soldiers to lead Him to Golgotha, stretch Him out on a cross, pound iron spikes through His extremities, lift up the cross from the ground, and jar it home.

The blood you see flowing from the hands and feet of the Man of Sorrows – and from His wounded side pierced by a soldier's spear after His death – is the all-sufficient price that needed to be paid for our redemption. The holy God has so much against us on account of our sin that nothing less than the bitter suffering and dying of His own perfect Son can pay our debt, still His wrath, and make us acceptable in His sight. Without the shedding of the blood of Jesus there would be no forgiveness for anyone. We could enjoy no loving relationship with our heavenly Father now. No crown of glory would be awaiting us in the life of the world to come.

But thanks be to God that ...

Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed His blood for me;
Died that I might live on high, Lived that I might never die.

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

Because of Jesus' blood shed on Calvary, our scarlet transgressions have become as white as snow. Our crimson sins have become like wool.

A LENTEN PORTRAIT BY THE NUMBERS: SIX TORTUROUS HOURS

SATURDAY, MARCH 3

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 10

Mark 15:33-34 At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" – which means, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"



Today we color in the last number, six (for the six hours Jesus suffered on Calvary). We dip our paint brush into liberal amounts of black.

The time when Pilate's soldiers carried out the crucifixion order was 9:00 am. At noon an eerie darkness settles over the earth. God causes the sun He created to stop shining. This supernatural midday darkness continues till 3:00 pm. What message is God conveying? It's a "visual aid" to the world that His Son is enduring the dark horrors of hell. His Son is enduring the punishment guilty sinners justly deserve.

The Psalmist describes the hellish woe Jesus experienced amid the darkness like this: "My God, My God, why have You abandoned Me? Why are You so far away from helping Me, so far away from the words of My groaning? I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax. It has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like pieces of broken pottery. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You lay Me down in the dust of death. A mob has encircled Me. They have pierced My hands and feet" (Psalm 22). The Father – for sinners' sake – treats His Son as if He were a worthless worm. He ignores Jesus' cries for help and lets them die away unanswered. He utterly forsakes Him. This is hell!

We can't comprehend the depths of agony Jesus endured for us when deserted by His Father during those hours. But this much we do understand: Because the Savior was forsaken by God as our Substitute, the heavenly Father's way of looking at us has been drastically changed. He has become for us a God of mercy and loving Father instead of a God of wrath and stern judge. Through faith in the Crucified we have become His beloved children whom He will never abandon.

MEMENTOS OF HIS PASSION: THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 28

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 31



Matthew 26:14-15 Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver.

It was the price of a slave, roughly half a year's wages. If we were to ask Judas, "What would it take for you to give up Jesus?" he would have to answer, "Thirty pieces of silver."

If only Judas had been the last to give up Jesus for the things of this world. Sadly, there have been many betrayals like his since then. How many Christians have been drawn away from their Savior by the things of this world? How many have had the privilege to know the Savior, but instead, for a price, have sold Him out?

What about you and me? Have we started the selling-out process by compromising on "little things"? Have we started the selling-out process by not considering time in God's Word the most valuable part of our day?

Judas' thirty pieces of silver serve as a painful reminder of our failures as Christians, our sins. These coins are also a warning of what happens when sin is downplayed, and love for created things exceeds love for one's Creator.

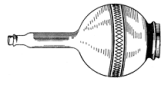
Thankfully, the thirty pieces of silver leads us to another question, "What would Jesus give to save sinners?" The answer is, *everything*. God the Son gave up His heavenly throne and came down to earth. God the Son became a mortal man, and experienced a life of poverty and pain. Through it all He remained sinless. But Jesus was not content to pay part of the price. He would not rest until He had paid the full price for our redemption. He not only gave is lifetime, but His very life.

The thirty pieces of silver remind us of sin and betrayal. But, these thirty pieces of silver also remind us of the infinitely higher price that Jesus paid when He bought us the ticket to heaven.

MEMENTOS OF HIS PASSION: AN ALABASTER FLASK

TUESDAY, MARCH 27

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 30



Matthew 26:10-13 Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

About a week before His crucifixion, Jesus sat at a dinner prepared in His honor. Mary (Lazarus and Martha's sister) approached Jesus with a container of perfume. The perfume would come out much too slowly if she used the little dispensing hole at the top, so she broke the neck of the flask. Her plan was to use it all. It was worth a whole year's wages, but nothing was too great for her Master. She started at the Master's head, and since there was enough, she anointed His feet as well.

Jesus called her action a beautiful thing and indeed it was. She humbly honored her Savior. She willingly gave of what she had been given. She poured out her thank offering to God, on God's own Son.

We do well to take this container away in our minds and hold onto it as a precious reminder of our Savior's suffering. It was broken. It was poured out. Its aroma filled the house. The alabaster flask reminds us of what was to come for Jesus.

In a week His body would be broken. In a week His blood would be poured out. And the aroma of His sinless and perfect sacrifice would rise up to the Father and fill His House. And the payment for all sin would be made in full.

A beautiful thing Jesus has done, for you and for me. A humble and loving act. Through His suffering, we have been set free from sin, death, and Satan. Free to live for Him. All thanks and glory be to Jesus.

THE GARDEN

MONDAY, MARCH 5

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 11

Luke 22:40-45 When He came to the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. When He rose up from prayer, and had come to His disciples, He found them sleeping from sorrow.



As we read the Scriptures, our mind's eye looks into the Garden of Gethsemane. We see a picture of Jesus in fervent, agonizing prayer. We also see His disciples sleeping a short distance away.

What a striking contrast! While Jesus was consciously battling the sorrow in His soul caused by the world's sins, His disciples had let sorrow take them into a state of unconsciousness after their Master had specifically warned them to "watch and pray". On this night, Satan was doing His best to tempt both Jesus and His disciples. Satan desired to lead Jesus away from His Father's will, but Jesus would not give in to this temptation.

The disciples were fighting the war against temptation and losing, but Jesus was fighting the war against temptation and winning! Not only was He winning, He was winning this battle in the disciples' place. Jesus was actively fulfilling the requirements of God's perfect law that they were failing to keep.

By faith, we are also Jesus' disciples. However, we too fall prey to temptation because of our sinful flesh. When we fall, God does not see our sins – rather He looks over at the life of Jesus and credits His righteous actions to us. Praise Jesus that He never once fell into temptation, but always kept the law of God perfectly in our place.

JESUS AND BARABBAS

TUESDAY, MARCH 6

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 12

John 18:37-40 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all. But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" Then they all cried again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.

Can you see it? Can you see the two men offered by Pilate standing before the mob? Maybe by outward appearances they wouldn't look that much different from each other. If anything, Jesus would have appeared to be in worse shape given the things He had been through leading up to this point. However, the lives of these two men couldn't have been more different.

Standing before the mob was Jesus, the King of Truth. Jesus had only ever spoken and done truth. In Him there was no sin. On the other side stood Barabbas, a robber, an insurrectionist and a murderer. When Pilate offered to release one of these men to the crowd, the choice should have been easy. Jesus was no criminal. Jesus had no place being on trial before Pilate with His life hanging in the balance. Jesus was the one who needed to be released from His unjust captivity. However, the crowd chose Barabbas. And so, the innocent man was condemned to die in place of the guilty criminal.

As sinners, we all stand like Barabbas before God. We are all robbers, insurrectionists and murderers. And yet, God chose to punish and kill Jesus in our place so that we might go free. He did not hand His Son over to die because of hatred, as the mob did; He handed His Son over to die because of His great love for us.

We are truly loved.

THE WILL OF GOD IS ALWAYS BEST

MONDAY, MARCH 26

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 29

Luke 1:38, 22:41-42 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her ... He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

Is it too early to be thinking about Christmas? Yesterday was March 25th, nine months before our celebration of Christmas, and the day on which Christians remember Gabriel's visit to Mary and the announcement that she would be the mother of the Savior.

It was an amazing announcement. The angel told her that she would give birth to the Son of the Most High. He would be great and would be King forever and ever. But just as stunning as the announcement was Mary's reaction to it. She answered, "May it be to me as you have said." She didn't argue or suggest that God could not accomplish what He said. Rather she bowed in humble faith before God's will for her life. What moved her to such faith? Was it not the gospel of Christ that was laid out so clearly before her? Here was the good news that the Messiah was coming who would save His people from their sins. She was not going to stand in the way of that.

The Child was born, as you know, and as He grew older He also grew closer to Calvary. Finally, one evening He was in a garden with His disciples and He prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." The phrase was similar to His mother's some 30 years before. Jesus too had received word of the Father's will for His life. Like Mary, He also bowed in humble faith, willing that things should happen as God had said. And like Mary had seen, He also saw the glory of the gospel's salvation before His very eyes, giving Him the strength to continue in the face of such agony.

What about you? What moves you to pray, "May it be to me as you have said ... Not my will, but yours be done"? Is it not the fact that the gospel is before your eyes too? You too can see His gracious plan for you – to take you to heaven where you will live with Him forever.

ATONEMENT:

FROM ETERNITY TO ETERNITY

SATURDAY, MARCH 24

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 28

Revelation 13:8 The Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

I sometimes ask grade school children if they know the longest word in the English language. They are quick to offer the old stand-bys. I then suggest the word "smiles" – and point to the fact that there is a mile between the first "s" and the last one.

But there's no trick involved in showing that while the English word *atonement* may date from 1525 or so, the fact it describes has been in existence far, far longer. Indeed, the atonement predates all human language. It predates time. In eternity God planned our salvation in such detail that Peter would later state by inspiration of the Spirit that it was by God's set purpose and foreknowledge that Jesus was arrested and bound over to Pilate for crucifixion (Acts 2:23).

The sacrifice by which Christ reconciled us to God through the remission of sins was no desperate last-minute remedy. God's plan was so firmly in place before the creation of the world that it was as good as accomplished in the mind of our Maker. Thus our Savior is described as the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world (Revelation 13:8).

While the atonement of Christ was conceived in eternity, it was carried out in time. It is an historical fact, a once-for-all-time event, one that needs to be proclaimed to sinners until the end of time. And that will not be the end of it either. For when we are given a glimpse of heaven's halls through the vision accorded the Apostle John, we hear the eternal choirs singing of the atonement.



"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (Revelation 5:12).

"HIS BLOOD BE ON US"

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 7

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 13

Matthew 27:22-25 Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said to him, "Let Him be crucified!" Then the governor said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!"

When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it." And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children."

Have you ever been at a sporting event where the crowd is enthusiastically chanting? It's fun to cheer and chant for our team, but it can be a little bothersome when the crowd is cheering and chanting against our team. Maybe the most bothersome cheers and chants of all time came on the day that Jesus was to be crucified, as the crowd chanted "Crucify Him" and "His blood be on us and on our children."

What a terrible picture. The Savior of the world stands beaten and alone before a crowd of His own people who actually wanted to be held responsible for His execution. Some have said that this is why such terrible things have plagued the Jewish people throughout their history, such as the Holocaust. We have to say that God has not specifically told us this. One thing that God has told us specifically is that He "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." This includes you and me, this includes the Jewish people, and this even includes those who chanted such terrible things that day.

The people called for Jesus' blood to come on them out of contempt for Him. God wished for Jesus' blood to come upon them out of love for them. Our prayer is that many of those who chanted against Jesus later realized who He was and repented of their unbelieving attitude and their unbelieving words. Our prayer is that Jesus' blood may be on us and our children; not as a curse through unbelief, but as a blessing through faith, so that we may be washed of our sins and made clean in God's sight.

“FATHER, FORGIVE THEM”

THURSDAY, MARCH 8

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 14

Luke 23:33-34 And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him ... Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

And now we see Jesus nailed to the cross. We see a few of His faithful gathered there, but for the most part, we see a different kind of crowd. We see the cruel and indifferent Romans, we see the vengeful Jewish leaders, and we see the people passing by, mocking Him. Even the criminals on the crosses with Him join in on the taunting.

In Psalm 22, through the prophecy of the Psalmist, we hear how this all appeared to our suffering Savior. He says "the congregation of the wicked" is surrounding him. He says it is like being encircled by bulls, dogs, lions and wild oxen while He hangs helpless. He has been reduced to less than a man. He says He is a worm.

How does Jesus respond to all of this? He prays that His Father would forgive them. They truly had no idea what they were doing. Of course, coming from Jesus, this was more than a mere sentiment. Jesus was actually taking their place on the cross and accomplishing their forgiveness and salvation. He was doing this for His enemies. He was praying this and doing this for those who were crucifying Him.

As we look at this scene, we see those who are crucifying Jesus; let us add more people to the scene. How about you and me? How about all people who have ever lived? We have all crucified Jesus because we have all committed sin. Jesus needed to die on the cross because of the sins we've committed.

Do we really know how bad our sin looks in the eyes of God? There are no little sins and big sins; there are only sins that nail Jesus to the cross. Every sin is fatal. We must confess that many times when we sin, we don't know what we are doing. However, Jesus does. And that is why He went to the cross. That is why He goes to the Father for each of us who has crucified Him and says, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." Because of what He has done, we are forgiven.

ATONEMENT:

THE CROSS IS THE CRUX OF THE MATTER

FRIDAY, MARCH 23

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 27

Romans 5:10 ... When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son.

The English word *atonement* impresses upon us needy sinners the fact that by His sacrifice Jesus secured for us both the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God. Without Christ's death in our place, sin would not be atoned for and we could never hope to be at one with God.

The cross is absolutely central to our salvation. It is not by accident that it quickly came to be accepted as the symbol of Christianity. So central is the cross to the Gospel of Christ and to the Christian faith that the word itself has come to carry that significance. When something is at the heart of a matter it is referred to as the *crux* of the issue. When something is absolutely essential it is *crucial*.

The death of Jesus was not the death of a martyr but of a Savior – THE Savior. His death saves us human beings from our sins. Christ took our place and died our death – after a living a life in which He, though Himself sinless, willingly and consistently identified with sinners. It is no accident that our Lord hung between two thieves when He breathed His last.

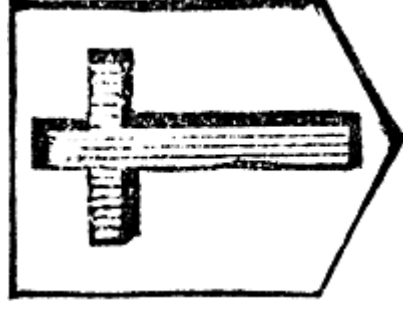
Jesus, may our hearts be burning With more fervent love for Thee!

May our eyes be ever turning To Thy cross of agony

Till in glory, parted never From the blessed Savior's side,

Graven in our hearts forever Dwell the cross, the Crucified!

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 145:3)



ATONEMENT:

BIG WORD WITH A BIG MEANING

THURSDAY, MARCH 22

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 26

Romans 3:25 God presented him [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement.

In English we use the word "atonement" to describe both the sacrifice Christ made to reconcile us sinners to the holy God and the state of being reconciled to God (at one!) as a result of the death of Christ in our stead. Perhaps this is one reason why we have come to speak of the "vicarious atonement" when we emphasize the fact that Jesus sacrificed Himself in our place.

Usually when a word ends up being understood in more than one way, this is a result of usage. That is, over the years people use words in different ways and these usages become commonly understood and therefore a part of the language. The English word atonement has a different and very interesting origin. Here's the rest of the story ...

While William Tyndale labored in translating the 1526 English Bible, he recognized that there was no single English word that conveyed the fact that Christ's sacrifice for us brought about both the forgiveness of sins, and, through this, reconciliation with God. There was the word "reconciliation" with its emphasis on peace restored. But in itself this word says nothing about forgiveness. There was also a word for the action of making amends for sin – to *atone*. It was Tyndale's idea to incorporate the concept of reconciliation (at one) and remission of sin (atone) in the single word *atonement*. He especially used it in Leviticus 16 and the Old Testament "Day of Atonement" (lit. day of covering) in which the blood of divinely appointed sacrifices were sprinkled on the Ark of the Covenant. In this way Tyndale cemented the connection between reconciliation and sacrifice in the word *atonement*.

Christ's sacrifice for us brought about both the remission of sin and the reconciliation of man to God. And since the words of man can barely lisp the wonders of God's works on our behalf, at times words will just have to be invented.



DIVIDING HIS GARMENTS

FRIDAY, MARCH 9

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 15

John 19:23-24 Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be," that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: "They divided My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots." Therefore the soldiers did these things.

For the Roman soldiers, it may have been just another day on the job. As soon as they had secured Jesus and the two criminals on their crosses, they quickly turned their attention away from these men and to a fringe benefit of their occupation. They were now able to claim the garments of the men who would soon be dead.

It seems they were not above tearing a single garment into pieces so that each could have a piece of material. On this occasion, they found one of Jesus' garments to be too nice to tear. It was a seamless tunic. They cast lots to see who would come away with it.

This is a striking scene from the passion of our Lord. We see Jesus hanging on the cross, suffering and accomplishing the most important work that this world has ever known. Probably only a few feet away, we see the Roman soldiers, oblivious to this fact. Instead, they were busying themselves with a matter of little importance.

These soldiers were going after the wrong garment. This earthly tunic wouldn't enhance their lives in any meaningful way. However, on the cross Jesus was providing all people with forgiveness of sins. Jesus' shed blood is what allows us to wear white robes of righteousness before God, assuring us of our salvation. This is the garment to have!

As we meditate on the Passion of Jesus, let us be reminded that He is God's Son who has accomplished our salvation. Let us be thankful that we have received a garment from Him. Not a seamless tunic from this world, but a white robe of righteousness that brings us into the next.

TWO CRIMINALS

SATURDAY, MARCH 10

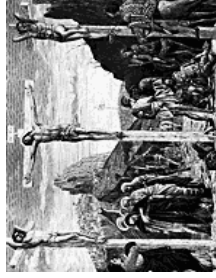
SEASON OF LENT, DAY 16

Luke 23:39-43 Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

It has been said that the picture of Jesus hanging between the two criminals is a picture for Jesus and all the people of the world.

Our Scripture says that at this point one of the criminals blasphemed Jesus in unbelief, but the other criminal rebuked him and displayed faith in Jesus. This man not only saw Jesus as an innocent man who did not deserve to be crucified with the likes of them, he saw Jesus as God, holding the key to everlasting life in a heavenly kingdom. In faith, He asked Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom. Jesus assured this believing man that on that very day he would join Him in Paradise. Jesus died on the cross to win salvation for both of these men, but only by faith would they be able to receive the benefits of Jesus' work. As far as we know, one believed and the other didn't.

In this world, all people are criminals who have sinned and violated the Law of God. We deserve to die an eternal death because of our sins. However, Jesus has taken our sins upon Him and has died in place of all people to bring us forgiveness and eternal life. Unfortunately, those who do not believe in Him will never gain the benefits of His perfect life and innocent death; they remain in condemnation, like the blaspheming criminal. On the other hand, by faith in Jesus, we are given the full benefit of all that He has accomplished for us. Jesus assures all believers that we will join Him in Paradise, just as He assured the believing criminal.



ATONEMENT:

MEANS BY WHICH CHRIST RECONCILED US

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 21

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 25

Exodus 32:30 Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin."

As we noted yesterday, our English Bibles use the word "atonement" to describe the result or effect that flows from the death of Christ in our place. Jesus has reconciled us sinners to God, so that we who were at odds with God are now at one in His Son. So atonement is an English word (not derived from the Greek or Latin) that describes just what it says – AT-ONE-ment – the state of being at one or reconciled.

But that is not the only way the Scriptures use this word *atonement*. After Israel's idolatry in connection with the golden calf, Moses told the people he was going back up Mt. Sinai and try to "make atonement" for their sin. Here the word is used to describe the means by which a reconciliation is brought about. In this case, Moses placed before the LORD His own promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And the heart of God's original promise to the patriarchs was, of course, all wrapped up in the promise of the Savior.

So God did forgive Israel – did so in view of and on the basis of the atonement that would be made by the promised Christ. God forgave the sin of Israel at Mt. Sinai because of the atonement made by Jesus on Mt. Calvary. And when Jesus made atonement for Israel's sin He made atonement, He made satisfaction, for your sins and mine as well.

Thou hast suffered great affliction
And hast borne it patiently,
Even death by crucifixion,
Fully to atone for me;

Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,

Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 151:6)

ATONEMENT:

EFFECT OF CHRIST'S REDEEMING WORK

TUESDAY, MARCH 20

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 24

People the world over have a common desire for "something more" something that money and possessions, power and influence, fame and success, happiness and pleasure, even love and family, cannot give. People everywhere are burdened by a feeling of unrealized possibilities, haunted by a sense of failure. Augustine put his finger on the heart of the matter when he said the human heart is restless until it rests in God.

But if our hearts are to find the ultimate peace that comes only with an inmost connection with God, then something must be done about what we have done. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). There is certainly too little time and space to review here the unsuccessful efforts of human beings to solve this terrible problem on their own. (I don't have the heart for it either.)

Thank God that He intervened and sent His one-and-only Son to set things right between us sinners and our holy Creator. Jesus did what we should have done – did it perfectly and did it in our place. He fulfilled the Law of God that we have so often broken. And then, our Savior offered up His perfect life in our place. He paid the penalty of our violations of the Law.

The great Good News of the Gospel is the glad announcement that Jesus Christ has set sinners everywhere right with God. Our standing with our Maker has been changed once and for all. Reconciliation has been effected! "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). We who were once at odds with God have been made AT ONE with Him.

When sinners lean their hearts wholly on this "AT-ONE-ment" Christ has effected for us (and God must work this also), they have that heart-peace, that peace with God – that can be found nowhere else.

Since Christ has full atonement made and brought to us salvation, Each Christian therefore may be glad and build on this foundation.
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 377:6)

HE LIFTS THE NEEDY

MONDAY, MARCH 12

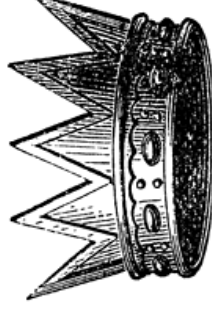
SEASON OF LENT, DAY 17

Psalms 113:5-7 Who is like the LORD our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth? He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap.

There are a lot of people in the world. I think about that sometimes when I see pictures from far away places. When I see the orphans in India or congregations of believers in other nations, I say, "Look at how many people there are whom I will never know! Imagine how many men, women, and children there are in this world whom I am not even aware exist!" All of a sudden, my circle of acquaintances seems very small.

More stunning, however, is the fact that God knows all the people of the earth. He is able to keep track of every individual everywhere at any time. And further still, He has given His only begotten Son into death for every single one.

All those billions of people who are in the world – who never enter our thoughts because we simply do not know – they are all in God's thoughts as Jesus walks the road to Calvary this Lenten season. As for you and me, even though we are but two tiny dots in the speck of humanity's massive sea, our LORD has reached down in Christ to lift us from the ash heap of our sins and raise us to the mansions of heaven.



James 1:12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

SAVED WITH A MIGHTY HAND

TUESDAY, MARCH 13

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 18

Psalms 114:7-8 Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turned the rock into a pool, the hard rock into springs of water.

When Moses led the Children of Israel out of their captivity in Egypt and toward the Promised Land, the mighty hand of God was obvious. It was God who parted the Red Sea so the whole nation could walk through on dry ground. It was God who sent manna and quail, giving them food to eat. It was God who turned the hard rock into a spring of water from which they could drink. The LORD was among them, and His presence was with them to save them.



The Jewish Passover was a celebration of the miraculous escape from Egypt. With the Passover, they were to remember the night they were freed from the tyrant Pharaoh. When Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with His disciples on Maundy Thursday, this event from Israel's history would have been brought to mind.

But the mighty hand of God was not yet finished. For Jesus was on His way to the cross, where He would release not one nation, but an entire world from its captivity -- its captivity to sin, death, and the devil. And the miracles involved in this "exodus" would be no less astounding than those performed in the desert many years before.

The sinless Lamb bears in Himself the sin of the world. Is not that a wonder? Once again, the LORD is among His people to save them. "Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob."

JESUS CHRIST, OUR ATONEMENT

MONDAY, MARCH 19

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 23

Romans 3:24-25 We are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.

In order to set us right with God Jesus Christ, the God-man, became our Substitute. He fulfilled all of the Law's obligations in our place. He endured the full penalty due human guilt.

How can we state this greatest and most comforting of Bible truths in a simple way that child-like faith can hold fast to with simple trust? How can we ever begin to thank our Savior for His unfathomable love? Here is a beginning -- which is all we can ever do this side of eternity:

"I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord.

"He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.

"He did this that I should be His very own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness; even as He is risen from death, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true."

Lord Jesus, Who on the cross cried out "It is finished!", We thank You that You completed the work which Your Father gave You to do: You fulfilled the law of God for us. You bore its curse in our stead. You reconciled all people to God. Grant that we may with our whole heart believe this and that we may never rely upon any work or merit of our own, but always trust in Your finished work on Calvary. In Your saving name we pray. Amen.

THE RULER OF THIS WORLD IS JUDGED

SATURDAY, MARCH 17 SEASON OF LENT, DAY 22

John 16:7-11 "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."

Through the gospel the Holy Spirit tells the world also that the ruler of this world is condemned. And this indeed is joyous news. For he who has tormented us and has had such power over us, to cause us to live in sin, as filthy, dirty pigs is cast out and no longer has any power over us. Learn this word and remember it well for though Satan tries many threats they are absolutely nothing, yet if we forget that he has already been judged, the threats seem real enough and would turn us back from the path that God has set before us.

In the day when you are tormented by temptation and think, "I cannot help it. How can I overcome this temptation? Surely I cannot, it is too strong for me," remember Satan is powerless. Though the temptation may seem strong, it has no power over you in Christ.

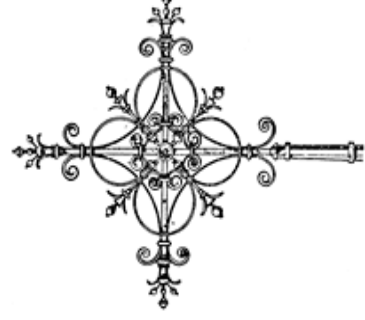
In the day when you give in to temptation and Satan torments you with sin and you think, "How can I be saved? How can I be a Christian when I constantly give in to the desires of my flesh?" remember Satan is judged. He has no power over you to condemn you of any sin, neither has sin any power over you ever again. You are saved by Christ's blood.

In the day when Satan through the world tells you that the way of the world is the way to happiness; in the day when the world ridicules you for your devotion to God; in the day when you suffer humiliation, remember Satan is judged. He has no power over you. It is the world that will suffer humiliation and pain and suffering, not those who trust in God.

PRAISE YE THE LORD

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14 SEASON OF LENT, DAY 19

Psalms 115:1 Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.



It is the cross which sets Christianity apart. Religions without the cross of Jesus must rely on human effort and merit to gain salvation. The Christian looks only to the Savior, trusting that He has lived the righteous life which God requires from all men, and that He has died the punishing death deserved by all men. Only at the cross do we find that all the work which needed to be done to secure heaven for us has been done – by the LORD.

Therefore, not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory! It is not for us to feel proud of our spiritual accomplishments, even if our flesh should at times tempt us to think a little more highly of ourselves when we do such things as pray regularly, make the extra effort to attend church, or strive to live in a godly way.

It is not our love and faithfulness which has done so much, but it is because of God's love and faithfulness at the cross that we are not lost to eternal death. He has done what dumb idols cannot – given Himself for His people.

"Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast save in the death of Christ, my God."

ARE YOU LISTENING, GOD?

THURSDAY, MARCH 15

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 20

Psalms 116:1, 7 I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy ... Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you.

"Are you listening, God?" Perhaps you've uttered that cry in frustration after your prayers have not been answered the way you felt they ought to have been answered. Have you wondered in your mind from time to time if the LORD really hears? Have you been tempted to think that He is not always attentive to the cries of His children?

A parent can pick out the crying of his own child even in a room full of crying children. So your Heavenly Father can recognize the cries of you, His dear child, amidst a world full of prayers ascending to His throne.

The LORD has indeed heard and been good to you. When you are overcome by trouble and sorrow, do not cease to call on the name of the LORD. If the cords of death and the anguish of the grave should be your concern, turn to the Rock of your salvation. In all your need, the LORD saves. For the LORD has delivered your soul from death, your eyes from tears, and your feet from stumbling – through your Savior Jesus Christ.



Jesus raises the daughter of Jairus from the dead.

VICTORY MARCH

FRIDAY, MARCH 16

SEASON OF LENT, DAY 21

Matthew 26:30 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

When Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples on Maundy Thursday, they sang from the hymnal of the Old Testament, the book of Psalms. Psalms 115-118, the second part of the Hallel Psalms, would have been used to conclude the evening's festivities.

What a picture this is: As Christ and His disciples leave that room and walk toward the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, and the cross at Golgotha, they have been left with the words of Psalm 118 ringing in their ears.

"The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies ... Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: 'The LORD's right hand has done mighty things! The LORD's right hand is lifted high; the LORD's right hand has done mighty things!' I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done ... The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Even as the darkness of anguish, arrest, and trial descend, we discover a few rays of Easter sunshine already beginning to gleam. Hallelujah!

