

The First will be Last, and the Last First

Devotions for Lent 2019



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The theme for our devotions this Lent is Jesus serving sinners. We see this theme throughout the Gospels. Jesus continually puts Himself last and sinners first. Jesus humbles Himself that you would

be first. He takes your sins and gives you His righteousness. We will trace this theme through the earthly life of Jesus from the four Gospels. May these devotions bless you as you prepare yourself in Christ this Lenten season.

In Jesus Christ,
Pastor Michael Boyer

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March 6

Jesus said, *“But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”* Mark 10.31 (the entire section is Mark 10.17-31)

This theme runs through all four Gospels, Jesus should be first but makes Himself last. He empties Himself for us sinners. He lays aside His divine powers for the sake of saving us. We deserve no saving. We are as worthy as the evil angels who fell away from God. God made no promise to save or help them. God should make no promise to help us either.

Yet, in the Garden of Eden the Son promised He would overcome the might of the devil. He would save sinners through His death upon the tree. He would come and be last. He would put sinners before Himself.

That was not the way it should have been. The Son is God. He should be first, not last. But to save you He makes Himself last. Salvation comes not by you keeping the law or giving things away. Salvation comes not even by your own works, no matter how good they may seem. Your salvation is a gift given by Jesus to you.

Only through His emptying Himself are you saved. Only by Jesus taking your sins upon Himself are you forgiven. Only with God is your salvation possible. Consider well what Jesus has done for you. He became your sin, your death, suffered your hell and all this to give you His righteousness and eternal life.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son emptied Himself for me and became last of all, grant that I rejoice in the suffering He endured for me and give me the benefits of His death. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 7

Gabriel said, “*And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.*” Luke 1.31 (the entire section is Luke 1.26-38)

This is how God chooses to come among His people? Why not something more powerful? Why not something more impressive? Couldn't God come among His people in pillar of fire or cloud as in the past? Couldn't He just smite His enemies with fire and brimstone? Why not destroy the disobedient with plagues? Couldn't He come among His own shining like lightning showing forth His full divinity? Why would God come as a baby?

In the incarnation you are taught that Jesus will take up your road and your lot. He comes not to work among His people as an outsider, but to be one of us. He comes to take the fragility of our very nature on Himself. Jesus comes in weakness, not power. He comes in humility, not to be served.

Jesus puts Himself last in birth and throughout His life. He puts you first. He is born for you. He needed no body for His own sake, but takes one to offer it upon the tree for you. He becomes your servant, doing exactly what you need. He does not serve Himself in power, but serves you in humility.

We should marvel at the incarnation. Why would God love us so much as to be born for us? Why would He love us so much to give Himself for us? Why? There is nothing in us but sin and evil. But still the Son loves you to become last for you.

Prayer: Father, as Your Son is conceived in the womb of Mary I see that He willingly puts Himself last for me, grant me joy as I consider how Jesus saves me through His incarnation and passion. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 8

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. Luke 2.7 (the entire section is Luke 2.1-7)

Amazing that God would be born in a world that would have no room for Him. Still more amazing is that He was born to common parents and placed in a manger. But those details pale in comparison to the fact that God was born in flesh. That is the true wonder here. How could Mary wrap up God in swaddling cloths? How could the ever present God be placed in a manger?

The incarnation is a mystery. How can we begin to fathom how God could limit Himself to be born in flesh? Yet, this is how Scripture speaks, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1.14a).” And, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law (Galatians 4.4).” And again, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son (John 3.16a).”

In the incarnation God makes Himself last. He masks His divine powers. He does not look nor act like God, He looks and acts like a baby. He becomes weak and frail for you. He enters your world in human flesh for you. He experiences pain and loss for you. He suffers and dies for you.

It was love that caused the incarnation, God’s love for you. It was love that caused the crucifixion also. These events cause us to marvel that God would love a sinner like me so much. There is nothing lovely in me or anything I have done, yet He loves me. He gives up all to give me everything.

Prayer: Father, Your Son’s incarnation shows me the depths of His love toward me, I have nothing to offer in return but to simply receive the gift of salvation given by Jesus and return thanks to you. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 9

The angel said, “*And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.*” Luke 2.12 (the entire text is Luke 2.8-20)

What makes the angels so happy? What makes this angel rejoice to appear to the shepherds in the Bethlehem countryside? We see no angels rejoicing when Joshua destroys Jericho. We see no angels rejoicing when Gideon defeats the Midianites. Where were the angel

choirs when Josiah opened again the temple? In all those times God acted, but the angels did not appear to men.

But this is different. God has not acted like this before. Everything else in all human history leads up to this. This is what the angels were waiting for when the Son spoke to Abraham, when God destroyed Jericho, and when Josiah opened the temple again. They were eagerly expecting God to act in this singular way.

Angels are quick to speak of the most important things that Jesus does. They are there spreading the news to the shepherds when Jesus is born. They are quick to spread news of the resurrection of Jesus to the women at the tomb. They love to speak of how God has humbled Himself.

The humiliation of God is the object of their worship. They do not worship the perfection of God nor the majesty of God's Name. Rather, they worship the humiliation of the Son at the hands of sinners. They celebrate the incarnation for the Son will offer that same flesh to save sinners. They rejoice when the flesh of Jesus is raised up as proof that His sacrifice was accepted before the Father. They rejoice that God serves sinners.

Shouldn't our attitude be the same? Should we sinners not rejoice that God serves us? We should marvel and find comfort that God becomes last for us. He elevates us, sinners, to the highest position in all creation. He covers us with His holy blood; born of Mary and shed upon the tree. Rejoice and be glad in the service Jesus gives you!

Prayer: Father in heaven, remind us of the joy the angels have in the work of Jesus, grant me the same joy knowing all that Jesus has done for me as He secures my salvation. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 10

And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. Luke 2.21

Jesus is circumcised and named after eight days. He should not have to shed His blood, but He does. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant for Jewish males. Jesus is the one who made the covenant and now He is a part of the covenant. This covenant binds

Him to the sacrifice He would make on the tree. The shedding of His blood has only begun.

Jesus is named. He will save His people from their sins, that's what the name Jesus means. He puts Himself last for His people. And who are those people? All those whom He has created. He has come to save all sinners.

The creator, who made all things in seven days, is circumcised on the eighth day. He has entered His creation in flesh to redeem sinners. He comes to lay down His life on the sixth day and rest in the tomb on the seventh. He comes to be raised up on the eighth day.

All this He does for you. He puts Himself last and you first. He is circumcised and named for you. He dies for you and is raised for you. He does this for you because you couldn't save yourself. He is last, the least of all. He becomes sin that your sins would be forgiven. He sheds His blood so that you would live eternally. He saves you from your sin.

Prayer: Father in heaven, I praise You that Your Son was circumcised and named for me, He has shed His blood to save me from my sins, grant me the benefits of His death. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 11

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Matthew 2.13 (the entire text is Matthew 2.13-23)

Pathetic isn't it? The Christ is so weak and powerless that Joseph must protect Him. Shouldn't it be the other way around? Shouldn't the Christ protect Joseph? Why can't Jesus, who is God, take care of Himself? What sort of Messiah is this Jesus going to be?

Yes, this shows the weakness of the Christ. He is humble and dependent on a sinner like Joseph. The life of the Christ is as fragile as your life. It seems that the Christ has no power to save Himself or the other children in Bethlehem. He has no ability to stop the weeping in Ramah.

How deeply the Christ is humbled through His birth! He lays aside His divine powers. He becomes weak and frail. It seems like He is

tossed about by the powers of this world. But all this He does for you. He is humbled for you. He takes up your life and your sin. He is weak for you.

This is the Christ who has come not to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. But the time to give His life is not yet. You are shown the depths of humility the Christ would go for you. He becomes a helpless child for you. He lays down His life for you.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son took on flesh and became helpless for my sake, grant me to rejoice in the humility of Jesus that I would rejoice in the salvation accomplished through His death. In His Name. Amen.

March 12

John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Matthew 3.14 (the entire text is Matthew 3.13-17)

John is a little confused. Jesus has come to him for Baptism. Why? John knew that Jesus was the Christ. The Christ has no sin, no need for repentance. John was Baptizing people for repentance in preparation for the coming of the Christ. John was the one preparing the way in the desert. But Jesus does not need to be made aware of the Christ- He is the Christ!

Jesus reminds John this Baptism is necessary, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3.15)." But Jesus is righteous; there is nothing lacking in Him. For Himself, Jesus does not need to be Baptized.

But Jesus is humbling Himself. He is Baptized for you. Here He begins His public ministry and He publically begins taking up your load of sin. He carries your burdens and fulfills your righteousness. This is not done in some big show, but through the humility of this Baptism.

This Jesus may not look like what we would expect God to look like nor does He act like what we might expect God to act. Jesus does not do this for Himself, but for you. As with everything Jesus does He works for you, putting Himself last and you first.

Jesus is Baptized by John in the Jordan for you. He stands in those waters for you. He stands under the approval of the Father as your

advocate. He will stand under the wrath of the Father for you on the tree. He gives you His righteousness.

Prayer: Father, Your Son has taken up my load of sin and paid the full price for it, He has put Himself last serving me, I think You for all that Jesus has done for me. In His Name. Amen.

March 13

And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him. Mark 1.13 (the entire text is Mark 1.12-13)

Can God be tempted? Could God fall from perfection? God can't, but His creation can. Adam and Eve fell from perfection. The devil and his followers fell. All creation was plunged into sin. The devil had destroyed what God had made and corrupted the world through the temptation of Adam and Eve.

The devil believes he has the advantage here also. God can't be tempted, but God in flesh can. Here is the chance for the devil to corrupt God. The devil understands how weak Jesus is; He is clothed in flesh! The devil understands how hungry men can be and how easy it was to deceive Adam and Eve. Shouldn't Jesus be easy prey?

But Jesus, although so weak, never gives in to temptation. The devil does his best, but comes away the loser. Jesus does not sin, but remains perfect for you. This temptation is not some show, but the devil really did his worst.

This shows you how weak Jesus was. He was able to be tempted. Yet, it also shows you how much He loves you; He remained holy for you. He did not desire to give up His righteousness to the devil, but desired to give His life upon the tree for you. Nothing can sway Jesus from the cross, He travels there for you to die in weakness.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son was tempted in every way and yet did not sin, I sin continually, cover me with the blood of Jesus and grant me forgiveness. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 14

And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. Matthew 4.23 (the entire text is Matthew 4.23-25)

Is this what God should be about? Doesn't God have more important things to do than walk around teaching and healing people? Is this what a king or great leader would do? No! The great people have no time for the weak and sick. But God does. Jesus takes time for the poor and weak.

This shows the character of Jesus and what He has come to do. Jesus has come to seek and save sinners. He has come to seek and save all people. It also shows you how important Jesus views teaching. What did He do here? Help and teach. He desired that sinners learn about God's kingdom and experience God's mercy.

Jesus puts Himself last. He teaches others; He works for others. So what is Jesus doing now? Still, He teaches you. He has given you His Word to show you all He has done and so teaches you. He works in your life to do good that you would know the mercy and love of God.

It should amaze us that God would desire to teach sinners like us. It should make us marvel that God would desire to work in our lives for our good. Still Jesus comes to you with the benefits of His death to grant you eternal life.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Jesus shows His character as He teaches and heals, grant me to rejoice in all that Jesus has done for me that I would continually learn more about His love for me. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 15

And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. Mark 1.21 (the entire text is Mark 1.21-29)

Why should Jesus have to spend time with sinners? Why should He bother to teach them? Doesn't He have better things to do? Yes, the people marvel at His teaching because it seems that He has authority. He has authority to drive out demons. But why would Jesus do all this?

Jesus does this this to show the people what's important. It is important to learn about God. Jesus takes time to teach the people because Jesus values learning about God. He wants these people to know God more and more. He wants them to understand their sin and know how much God loves them. The Father has sent His Son into this world to teach sinners. The Son lovingly spends time with sinners that they would learn about the character of God.

Isn't this what Jesus does in the Divine Service today? When Christians come together to worship, Jesus still desires to teach us. Through the Word, read and preached, Jesus teaches. As we see sinners Baptized and as we receive the Supper, Jesus still teaches. We are shown how much God loves us.

Jesus humbles Himself to come among sinners to teach, heal, and save. Jesus does this out of love. He desires that you would come closer to Him and know more about Him. He wants to drive the wicked one far from you. He wants to save you from your sins. All this He does through His divine authority for your sake.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son desires to come to me and teach me that I would know Your love and mercy, grant me joy in hearing the Word and receiving the Sacraments, drive far away from me the evil one and save me from my sins. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 16

And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." Matthew 8.2 (the entire text is Matthew 8.1-4)

This is not what anyone would want. No one would want a leper coming near. Lepers were unclean and could spread their disease to the clean. Jesus does the unthinkable- He touches this leper. The crowd must have been shocked; how could Jesus do this!

For anyone else touching the unclean made one unclean. But not so with Jesus. Jesus touches the unclean leper and makes him clean. This is what Jesus has come to do- make sinners clean. This goes beyond the sickness of leprosy to the uncleanness of sin.

As the leper can't do anything about his disease so the sinner can't do anything about their sin. There is no way to make up our sin before God or excuse it. We can ignore our sin but God still knows.

He is righteous and just to punish sin. Jesus comes to make you clean.

Jesus takes the uncleanness of your sin from you. He shoulders your load of sin and dies upon the tree. He makes satisfaction for your sins in your place. He dies suffering your punishment. He touches you with forgiveness. He gives you His righteousness. As He touched the leper and made him clean so He touches you and makes you clean.

You are clean! Should you not rejoice as the leper must have? Your sins are paid for and washed away! Jesus has entered your life and does all for you. He willed to make you clean.

Prayer: Father in heaven, I give you thanks that Jesus has humbled Himself to take my sins away from me, He grants me forgiveness freely, I praise You. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 17

“Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Mark 2.7 (the entire text is Mark 2.1-12)

Why would God bother with sin? Doesn't God have more important things to do? Shouldn't God, who is holy, punish sin and just move on? What would make God take note of us sinners and deal with us kindly? Why should Jesus care about this paralytic?

Jesus shouldn't care. If we think like humans that's what we would come up with. Why would God care about us? Do we care about our neighbor? Are we quick to point out our neighbor's sin? Are we quick to help and support him in every physical need? If sinners won't do this for other sinners why should God?

Jesus forgives this paralytic to teach you why He has come. He has come not to stand and be adored, but to serve. He has come to seek and save the lost. He has come not to act like we might assume God should act, but to act like the lowest servant of sinners. He makes time for this paralytic and forgives him.

Jesus makes time for you also. He takes time for you as He journeys on to Jerusalem. He rejects all temptation so that He would be your perfect sacrifice. He takes the time to die in your place on the tree. Jesus takes the time to come to you and speak you clean.

He brings His saving death to you through your Baptism into Him. He teaches you that He loves you.

As proof Jesus heals the paralytic. As proof He heals you from your sin. As proof He will raise your sinful body up on the last day and grant you eternal life.

Prayer: Father, Your Son entered my sinful state and died in my stead, grant me joy knowing all that Jesus has done for me, make me a blessing to those around me. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 18

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. Matthew 9.9 (the entire text is Matthew 9.9-13)

Jesus calls the worst; He calls Matthew. Tax collectors were expected to be thieves. They could and did steal from the people and this theft was legalized by the Roman government. Matthew knew that he didn't deserve to be a follower of Jesus. Matthew knew that he was sinful.

That's why it's amazing that Jesus called Matthew to come and follow. So simple, just get up and follow Jesus and Matthew did. But Jesus did the work. It was Jesus who humbled Himself to come to Matthew. It was Jesus who called to Matthew. It was Jesus who led Matthew. Jesus did it.

Jesus humbles Himself to call you. He calls a sinner like you to follow Him. He comes to you to wash you clean through Baptism. He humbles Himself to give you His death upon the tree and grant you forgiveness. Jesus does the work, you receive. Jesus leads you and guides you, you just follow.

Jesus humbles Himself to allow you to follow Him. He comes to you and dwells with you as He ate with Matthew. Jesus builds a relationship with you. He invites you to hear His Word and speak back to Him. He invites you to work in His kingdom. He invites you to receive Him who died for you.

As Matthew, realize your need. It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. Realize how sinful you are and how much you need Jesus. Then know that Jesus does all for you.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son invites me to follow Him, grant me to realize my sin and know my need for Jesus to save me even as I rejoice in your goodness and mercy. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 19

And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons. Mark 3.14-15 (the entire text is Mark 3.13-19)

Not very impressive, is it? Jesus sends out twelve. Just twelve? And these twelve weren't exactly the crème of the crop. They were just regular guys. Fishermen and tax collectors; not the wealthy or intellectual. And the reason Jesus sends them out is odd too. They are to teach and drive out demons.

They had been taught by Jesus. He had been instructing them. Jesus had been teaching them through sermons and parables about the kingdom of heaven. They had seen and heard and now they were to go out and tell. What would the crowds have thought to see these regular guys walking around town teaching people about Jesus?

But they were also to drive out demons. Teaching sinners about Jesus pushes back the devil's kingdom and so does driving out demons. The work of the apostles was meant to bring sinners to faith and teaching them the faith. There was a war going on between Christ and the evil one.

The disciples were to go out into the battlefield and teach. Their weapon was simply the law, that men are sinners, and the Gospel, that Christ has come to save sinners. This is what Christ has given you. As you are taught Christ through the Divine Service you are to go out and give Christ. You know the hope you have in Jesus. You know the importance of His death for you. You know that you could never save yourself from your sins, but that Jesus has done it for you.

You are sent out into this world through your vocation. Whatever you do on a daily basis is where you bring Christ. To school or work or home you bring Christ and teach Him. To anyone you come in contact with you bring Christ and teach Him. You push back the devil's kingdom as you do this. Thus, learn Christ and give Him.

Prayer: Father, You sent Your Son to teach us of Your love, grant me joy in learning all You have done for me that I would also teach those around me of Your works. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 20

And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." Matthew 13.57-58 (the entire text is Matthew 13.54-58)

Jesus was too familiar to these people. They thought they knew Him too well. There was no way that Jesus could have such teachings to give them, they wouldn't listen. The people of Nazareth are offended by Jesus.

It happens all the time. As Jesus humbles Himself to come to sinners and they are offended at the way He comes. The people in Nazareth just heard His teaching and rejected Him. Many others hear Jesus' teaching and reject. It isn't what they want to hear. Who wants to hear about their inability to save themselves under the holy law of God? Who wants to hear that Jesus is the only way of salvation?

As Jesus comes to sinners through simple water, who wants to hear that? Wouldn't it be better if Baptism was a sign or our commitment to God or our love of God? Many reject Christ by denying His gift. He promises to come and save sinners through simple water combined with Word, yet it isn't what many want.

As Jesus comes to sinners through simple bread and wine, many reject. How can God be present in such things? Wouldn't Jesus have meant that this is only a representation of Him? Many deny the words of Christ because they sound unreasonable.

Do not take offense at Jesus. Trust Him. He comes to you as He promises through water, Word, bread and wine. He binds Himself to these things for your comfort. You know the ways He promises to be among you. You know that receiving these gifts your sins are forgiven for He says so. Hear, receive and believe! Jesus is God and what He promises happens. Trust Him and do not take offense.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son is present in Word and Sacrament for my salvation, I thank You that Jesus comes to me and

grants me the fullness of forgiveness that I would not die but live eternally with Him. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 21

Herod said, "John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?" And he sought to see him. (the entire text is Luke 9.7-9)

Isn't that the way the powerful run things? This was especially true in Jesus' day. Disagree with Herod, then Herod had the authority to end life. Could this be John the Baptist raised from the dead? Would Herod have to kill John a second time? Herod is interested in this Jesus.

But that is not the way Jesus does things. Jesus has power over life and death. He is the creator of all life. He could withdraw life from anyone at any time. He has complete power and supreme control. But Jesus doesn't use that power. He doesn't just kill those who hate Him. Jesus humbles Himself for sinners.

Jesus heals sinners. He teaches sinners. He keeps Himself holy for sinners. He gives up His life for sinners. Would any earthly king think like this? Would Herod give his life for John? Jesus is different in that He puts Himself last. He serves others.

Jesus serves you through His death upon the tree. He dies that you would live. Through Baptism you receive this life. The death that Jesus died is applied to you and you are forgiven. Herod should be seeking Jesus to receive this great gift.

Jesus gives. He gives Himself. He gives you forgiveness and life. He gives you chances to serve Him and walk in His ways. So seek Jesus in the water of Baptism, the bread and wine in the Supper, and in the Word. Jesus is there for you.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son is different than the rulers of this world, He gives Himself for sinners, grant me to be covered by His blood and forgiven. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 22

Jesus said, "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat." (the entire text is Mark 8.1-10)

Who has the higher position, the one who serves or the one who eats? Who has the higher position, the one who teaches or the one who is taught? Jesus had been teaching for three days and during that time the crowds that followed ate whatever food they brought. They had nothing left.

Jesus has compassion on them. He could have, uncaringly, sent them away. He could have told them this problem was too big for Him or not His problem in the first place. But Jesus has compassion on them. He loves these people. Thus, He feeds these people.

He served them with bread and fish and they all ate and were satisfied. Jesus reminds the people what He had been teaching them, that He came to serve. He desires to put Himself last. He desires to teach them of His love for them. He desires to die in their place and cover their sin.

Jesus desires this for you. He desires to cover you with His blood. He desires to wash you clean through Baptism and cover you with His righteousness. He desires to feed you with the true manna from heaven; His own body and blood in the Supper. He desires to teach you through His Word. He desires to serve you.

He serves you through Word and Sacrament. He serves you better than the crowd of four thousand that were fed with fish and bread. He serves you with His death and grants you forgiveness the of your sins. The Father counts you righteous and innocent through the sacrifice of Jesus. So be served by Jesus.

Prayer: Father, Your Son serves me through His death upon the tree, grant me to receive the benefits of His death through Word and Sacrament that I would rejoice before you eternally. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 23

Jesus said, *“But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”* (the entire text is Matthew 19.16-30)

The rich man asks the question, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life (Matthew 19.16)?” And Jesus gives this man law and more law and more law. This man must do and do more and do even more. That is the way the law is, it always demands more. It

is never satisfied with your good deeds, but demands more. Asking questions of the law will always leave us sorrowful (Matthew 19.22).

The disciples begin to understand when they ask, “Who then can be saved (Matthew 19.25)?” With man this is impossible. Under the requirements of the law no sinner has any hope of saving himself. The law accuses sinners of each and every sin. Jesus gives His disciples Gospel when He tells them, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible (Matthew 19.26).” Only through God do sinners have hope.

But what does that mean? The Gospel is what God has done for sinners. It is that Jesus has come. God enters our world in flesh. Jesus takes on humanity that He would save sinners. He comes to seek and save the last. He comes to put Himself last and be the servant of sinners.

Jesus stoops down in the mire of our sin. He takes the punishment meant for you. He becomes the worst offender before the Father. He feels the entire burden and punishment of the law in your place. Only with God is this possible. Only God could be the sufficient sacrifice for our sins; only God.

Jesus, who should be first, becomes last. He serves the worst, sinners, who should be last. He puts you first and Himself last. He takes your punishment and gives you His righteousness. For this you need do nothing, only receive from Jesus.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son put Himself last for me because I could never save myself, grant me to trust in His sacrifice for the forgiveness of my sins for I give thanks that Jesus put Himself last for me. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 24

And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only. Mark 9.8 (the entire text is Mark 9.2-8)

Isn't this something that Jesus would want everyone to see? Imagine how the crowds would have felt seeing Jesus transfigured. Imagine the other disciples, wouldn't they have been in awe? If Jesus is about making people “feel” God shouldn't this transfiguration be witnessed by as many as possible?

But only three see this. Just Peter, James, and John. No crowd is awed. No one gets to feel closer to God. But the three disciples are taught an important lesson; Jesus is not about feelings nor does He show off. The lesson the disciples learn is that Jesus does not do what they think He should. He does not make the crowd feel closer to God. He does not shine like lightning before the masses. He does not permit them to build structures to stay in that moment.

Jesus would rather teach the crowds. He would rather tell them of the kingdom. Jesus would rather die than receive earthly glory. He would rather save sinners than make them feel good. Peter, James, and John learn that they need Jesus only.

Isn't that what you need? Jesus only. You don't need to be entertained at church. You don't need to feel better during worship. You don't even need to feel closer to God during worship. What you need is Jesus- Jesus only. Jesus promises to come to you through the Word. He desires to teach you of Himself. He promises to come to you through Baptism and the Supper. Isn't this enough- Jesus only? So then come and receive Jesus only in the Divine Service. Come seeking Jesus and you will not be disappointed.

Prayer: Father in heaven, grant me to understand that I need Jesus only for my salvation, so give me Jesus through the Divine Service and allow me to rejoice that Your Son serves me. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 25

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"
Luke 10.29 (the entire text is Luke 10.25-37)

Again questions of the law are put to Jesus. What do I need to do to inherit eternal life? Who do I have to be nice to? The lawyer does not understand the law. The law never tells sinners, "Good job!" The law never says that there is an end to what we must do. The law always demands more and more. The law always accuses.

Isn't that what the parable is about? Jesus tells the parable about the good Samaritan to show this lawyer that he has failed under the law. How many people has this lawyer rescued on the roadside? How many has he helped? A few? Hundreds? The law would say,

“Do more!” It is never enough for there is no end to the law and its demands.

But Jesus offers this lawyer a way out. Jesus tells the lawyer to stop asking questions of the law and realize the truth; that lawyer is lying there dead on the roadside. It is the lawyer who can't do anything before God. It is the lawyer whose deeds are not good enough to inherit life. It is the lawyer who needs help.

Jesus is the good Samaritan. It is Jesus who desires to serve this lawyer. Jesus desires to pick him up amid his sin. Jesus desires to bring him to where there is help; that's the church. There the lawyer would be served by Jesus through Word and Sacrament. Jesus desires that you understand that you need to be served also. The law demands more than you can ever do. Jesus dies in your place to fulfill the demands of the law. He pays your price.

Be served by Jesus. Cry out for mercy. Let Jesus cover you with the robe of righteousness. Let Jesus serve you through the Gospel. Let Jesus wash you through Baptism and feed you through the Supper. Let Jesus do it all.

Prayer: Father, Jesus accomplishes my salvation for me and grants it to me freely, grant me to simply receive from Him and rejoice in Your mercy. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 26

“But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’”
Luke 16.29 (the entire text is Luke 16.19-30)

Moses and the prophets should be enough. The Word of God should have been enough for this rich man, but it was not. This rich man focused his life on money, not God. The rich man knows the truth: his brothers have lived apart from God. God's Word would not be enough for them either! Someone must go back from the dead to warn them!

Is God's Word enough for you? Do you need more? Do you, like the rich man, put things before God? Every sin is a rejection of God's Word. Every sin places something else before God and His

will. You are as guilty as this rich man sitting in hell. You are a sinner.

Repent. Repent of your sins. Repent of the times you have placed something before God. Go to the Scriptures. Study the Scriptures. Make God's Word important in your life.

Trust the one who has risen from the dead. Jesus has died for your sins and was raised as proof that His sacrifice avails for you. He has come back from the dead with great news. Through His death you are saved; you are forgiven! You need not fear death or hell because Jesus has conquered and gives you the victory. He has humbled Himself that you would be exalted eternally.

Prayer: Father, Your Son has paid the full price for my sins upon the tree, I rejoice in Your love and mercy, grant that I study and honor Your Word rightly that my faith would grow in my Savior Jesus. In His Name. Amen.

March 27

And lifting up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Luke 17.13 (the entire text is Luke 17.11-19)

These lepers have no hope. Their disease is not able to be cured by any earthly means. They can't live with their families or be around their friends. They can't worship at the temple either. They have no hope.

Isn't that where we should be too? We should have no earthly hope. The law shows us that we are unable to save ourselves. We are not holy enough. There is nothing we are able to do to please God or make up our sins before Him. In earthly means we have no hope.

These lepers cry out to Jesus. "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." But what can Jesus do? They hope He can save them; cure them. They are not disappointed. Jesus has mercy on them and heals them all.

These lepers show you what to do. Cry out to Jesus for mercy. Jesus has mercy on you. He loves you. He covers you with His death and grants you full forgiveness. Jesus does all the work. He saves you.

These lepers keep teaching you. Nine leave and one returns to give thanks. So you return and give thanks. Come into the presence of God in the Divine Service and give thanks. Do this not once or twice, but weekly. Come, receive Jesus and give thanks.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son has had mercy on me, He has died to forgive me all my sins, grant that I give thanks continually. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 28

Jesus said, *“And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”* Luke 13.30

Jesus answers an important question, “Lord, will those who are saved be few (Luke 13.23)?” Everyone wants to know how many will be in heaven. A lot or a few? If there are a lot in heaven it must be easy to get in and I won’t have a problem. But if there are only a few, well that’s another story.

Jesus answers by saying that many will be standing at the door knocking, begging to get into heaven. But the door won’t be opened. These ones will remind the Lord how they were near Him and His Word, “We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets (Luke 13.26).” Isn’t that good enough? They were around the Word of God a little. Shouldn’t the door be opened to them?

But it isn’t. The door remains closed tight. And the master will say, “I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil (Luke 13.27)!” Others will enter into the kingdom but these will be left. Jesus explains by saying, “And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”

What does Jesus mean? That if you just put yourself last you will get into heaven? If you really humble yourself and exalt others, if you really love your neighbor, then you will get eternal life? But that’s law. You can’t get to heaven by what you do.

Jesus highlights what He does here. He is the one who is first, and He puts Himself last. He is God and should not take on flesh. He should not offer His flesh on the tree. He should not die for sinners. He is made last of all through His death. Why? For you. Because you could never save yourself.

So know your sin and repent. Realize that you would forever be on the outside of heaven. Realize that you are last of all, the chief of sinners. And know that Jesus has died for you. He has put Himself last that you would be forgiven and be first. Know for certain that you will be in heaven.

Prayer: Father, Your Son came and put Himself last for me, He has exalted me with forgiveness and eternal life, for all this I praise You. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 29

Jesus said, *“And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’”* Luke 15.6 (the entire text is Luke 15.1-7)

What shepherd would leave the 99 sheep in the open fields and look for the one? Aren't the 99 more valuable than the one? What shepherd would have a great celebration over that one sheep? Sheep don't know, they don't understand. Why celebrate?

Jesus has come to seek and save the lost. The shepherd is Jesus. Jesus seeks the lost and when one comes home there is much rejoicing. But Jesus does not just go looking in the forest and pasture for the sheep. Jesus seeks the sheep at the cross.

Isn't that what heaven rejoices over; the cross and death of Jesus? There sinners are bought back from certain death. There Jesus takes the sins of sinners and pays the full price. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. At the tree sinners are found.

Jesus comes to you and finds you amid your sin. He comes to you through Baptism to wash you clean of your sins. He comes to you through the Word and the Supper to feed and nourish you. Is there not much rejoicing as sinners are Baptized and receive the Word? Is there not much rejoicing in heaven as you are in the Divine Service receiving Jesus?

If heaven rejoices when sinners receive Jesus shouldn't we also? Rejoice as you receive Jesus in the Divine Service. Rejoice when other confess their sins and receive Jesus; after all, heaven is rejoicing too.

Prayer: Father, Your Son has sought me out amid my sin, as my sins were placed on Jesus through Baptism I have been found and saved, grant me to rejoice in the salvation you accomplished for me. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 30

Jesus said, *“Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?”*
Luke 15.8 (the entire text is Luke 15.8-10)

This woman is determined. She has lost ten percent of all she owns! It must be found. This is a larger percent than the shepherd lost (Luke 15.1-7). He lost one percent of the sheep, she has lost ten percent of her wealth. It must be found.

Jesus is that woman. You were lost to Him. But unlike a coin that can't move you chose to leave His loving care. You are sinful and each sin places you out of His grace and mercy. You walked the other way in sin. But Jesus is determined to seek you out.

Can you not see His determination? Nothing will stop Him. John will not prevent Him from being baptized to fulfill your righteousness. The devil will not tempt Him away from His mission. The disciples will not distract Him with their own dreams of glory. Pilate and Herod will not dissuade Him from claiming His innocence. Jesus is determined to travel to Jerusalem and die for your sins.

You are more valuable to God than a coin. How much more does heaven rejoice over you than this woman rejoices finding her coin. The shepherd rejoiced in finding the sheep so this woman rejoices. Do you understand? Heaven rejoices over you and the salvation Jesus won for you.

God has great joy when you repent. God rejoices when you receive Jesus. God rejoices in this way because He loves you. More than a sheep or a coin, you are a child of God. You are covered by the blood of God and redeemed.

Prayer: Father in heaven, I know that heaven has rejoice in the salvation Jesus has won for me, grant me to have that same joy in all that Jesus has done for me. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 31

Jesus said, *“It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost and is found.”* Luke 15.32 (the entire section is Luke 15.11-32)

The three parables of the lost, which Jesus tells, culminate in these verses. As a sheep, coin, and now son are lost and the value is heightened. Far worse than losing a sheep or coin, this father loses a son. But do you see what happened? The son came to himself, that is, he understood his sin against the father. He repented and came home. He came relying on the mercy of the father.

But before the son could make that big apology speech, the father ran to him. He was hugged, given a ring and sandals, and forgiven. This father forgives and then rejoices for the son, who was dead, is now alive.

It would be great if the parable would end there, but it continues to the older brother. He will not forgive or rejoice. He gets upset because he thinks he is owed something from the father. He relies on his work for the father and so he is on the outside of the party.

The Pharisees and scribes did not like that Jesus was eating with sinners. They did not like that Jesus was doing miracles among them and forgiving sinners. They were not rejoicing.

When you confess your sins and receive Jesus, heaven rejoices. Should you not do the same when a brother or sister comes to faith? Should you not rejoice when your brothers and sisters are in worship receiving Jesus? Should you not encourage them to be with you in the great banquet? The Father stands ready to forgive through His Son.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son has died in my place and grants me forgiveness, I know that You rejoice as I am forgiven, grant me to rejoice when others receive Jesus and use me to reach others. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

April 1

Jesus said, *“So the last will be first, and the first last.”* Matthew 20.16 (the entire section is Matthew 20.1-16)

It’s not fair. They had been working and working all day. They worked through the heat of the sun. They worked among the bugs

for the master of the vineyard. They could have been at home relaxing. They could have been working somewhere else. But they worked.

When the cry rang out for workers some answered the cry immediately. They worked all day. Others began at the third hour or the sixth or ninth hour. Some even arrived to work at the eleventh hour. It wouldn't be fair to give those who worked less the same as those who worked more; would it?

But when the workers were paid they all received the same. It was what they agreed upon with the master, but some grumbled. How could they receive the same as those who hardly worked? It wasn't fair!

It's not fair. You should receive hell for your sins, that's fair. You should not receive any mercy or grace from God, that would be fair. You should not even know your loving creator, that would be fair. But it is not fair. God steps into your sins. The divine God becomes human for you. That's not fair.

Jesus becomes last for you. He gives you not a denarius, but all. He gives you His life upon the tree, He gives you the fullness of forgiveness, He gives you eternal life. None of that is fair. He becomes last that you would be first.

Would we dare grumble about what God has done for us? He has done what He wills and has crucified His Son in your place. There is nothing left that you need to do, but receive Jesus.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son put Himself last for me, through His death I am put first and given every heavenly blessing, I rejoice in all that Your Son has done for me. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

April 2

Jesus said, "*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many.*" Mark 10.52 (the entire section is Mark 10.46-52)

James and John want to be exalted. They want the power and fame and prestige that Jesus will win for them. James and John assume that Jesus will be an earthly king with earthly princes; they want to be those princes. Don't they deserve such for following Jesus?

Why would they want such power? Because that is the way the Gentiles do things. The kings of the Gentiles lord it over the people. To be at the right or left hand of such kings is what the Gentiles want. But Jesus says this is not the way it should be among the disciples (Mark 10.43). Jesus has a different way.

The difference begins with Jesus. His glory is not found in the might of armies or the splendor of palaces or the amount of territory conquered. His glory is found through the suffering of the cross. Jesus' glory is found not as people serve Him, but as He becomes the slave of all. His glory is found as He gives His life as a ransom for many.

So be served by Jesus. That's why Jesus came. James and John did not want to be served in this way. But you realize the truth. Your sins can only be overcome by Jesus on the tree. He is your slave carrying the burden of your sins. There is the glory of God and the love of God; at the tree. So receive Jesus and be served by Him. Be not like James and John seeking to lord it over others, but serve because you have been served.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son serves me through His death, grant that I receive Jesus and serve my neighbor in joy. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

April 3

And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" Mark 11.9 (the entire section is Mark 11.1-11)

Isn't this glorious? All the people flocking to Jerusalem for the Passover and proclaiming Jesus the king. Imagine the electric excitement in the crowd! They just knew that Jesus would ride into the city as a triumphant king. He would overthrow the Roman occupation and establish their kingdom. He would do it!

But Jesus doesn't. The people are excited. Jesus does ride into Jerusalem. It is Passover. But after Jesus arrives in the city, He looks around the temple and then leaves. No new kingdom is won. No occupiers are thrown out. Somewhat anticlimactic.

Jesus has not come to do what the crowd wants, but what they need. He has not come to be served and made an earthly king. He

has come to serve and be slave of all. He rides out of Jerusalem because Palm Sunday is not the day of victory. Palm Sunday should signal to the people that that day is very, very close.

Soon enough Jesus will enter into His glory, glory as of the only Son of the Father. He will do the will of the Father and lay down His life on the tree. This is what the people needed; the very Son of God to die in their place. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! Blessed is Jesus who dies for the sins of sinners, desiring no honor for Himself, but in love saving you.

Prayer: Father, Your Son entered Jerusalem to die on the cross for my sins, grant that I rejoice in all that Jesus has done and gladly receive Him who loves me. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

April 4

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. Matthew 21.12 (the entire section is Matthew 21.12-17)

Does this sound like a loving Jesus? Loving yes; tolerant no. Jesus cannot tolerate the sin of the people exchanging money. It was a big business and the poor were taken advantage of. Jesus drives them out. Their focus was wrong. The money changers should have been seeking to worship not rob the people.

To those who do not know their sin Jesus gives law as He gave the money changers. To those who know their sin Jesus gives Gospel. How else can we describe what goes on next? “And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them (Matthew 21.14).” In the same spot where He drove out the money changers, Jesus heals the blind and lame. He forgave their sins for they knew their sins. The children even cried out in excitement (Matthew 21.15).

So know the law. Know God’s righteousness demands. You have not upheld your end of the covenant. God has upheld His end perfectly, but you have sinned. You are worse than the money changers. Jesus should drive you away, but He does not.

Jesus treats you like the blind and lame. He comes to you to save you. That’s exactly what His death upon the cross means for you-

your salvation. He was struck down that you would be saved! He forgives you as your sins are put on Him and He pays the price for them. Shout as the children, “Hosanna to the Son of the David!”

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son has paid the full price for my sins, I am forgiven, grant me to know my sin and therefore know how much Jesus has done for me. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

April 5

And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions. Matthew 22.46 (the entire section is Matthew 22.41-44)

They had asked Jesus questions. The Pharisees, Sadducees, and teachers of the law knew that they were smarter and wiser than Jesus. They knew that they could trap Him with their logic puzzles and impossible quizzes. “Do we pay taxes to Caesar (Matthew 22.17)?” “By what authority do you do these things (Matthew 21.23)?” “Whose wife will this imaginary woman be in the resurrection (Matthew 22.24-25)?” “What is the greatest commandment (Matthew 22.36)?” Jesus answers them all and now silences the objectors.

Jesus had just asked them whose son is the Christ? These wise men responded, “The Son of David.” But then Jesus asked them how, in Psalm 110, David could call this one his Lord. How can David’s son be greater than David?

You know how David’s son can be greater than David. David’s son is the Christ- the Son of God. The Pharisees were too busy trying to trap Jesus, that they couldn’t see who Jesus was. They overlooked the miracles, they did not hear the sermons, and the parables went over their heads. Look and hear who Jesus is!

He is the very Son of God. He is God! He has taken on flesh and dwelt among sinners. He has not come to be tested with logic puzzles, but to give Himself on the tree. This he does for sinners.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son came to give Himself on the tree for me, grant me to simply believe all that He said, taught, and did. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

April 6

Jesus said, *“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”* Matthew 25.34 (the entire section is Matthew 25.31-46)

The kingdom had been prepared. At the end of time the King will welcome those on His right into the kingdom. This kingdom had been prepared for them since the beginning of time. A little mind boggling? How could this kingdom be prepared for these ones thousands of years before they were born?

God knew everything. It was known by God that Adam and Eve would fall into sin in the garden. God knew that He would promise to save them from their sins. God knew that He would come, be born of Mary, and die for the sins of sinners. God knew it.

But God didn't just know this; He came. He lived the perfect life. He died upon the cross. God saved them. He made good on His promise. What He prepared before time was given, in time, to sinners. That eternal kingdom was promised, won, and given by Jesus.

The kingdom is yours, but not yet. God has promised to save you. Jesus has died for you and redeemed you from your sins. You have been baptized into Christ and your sins are covered by His blood. You have it all, but not yet. You are not in heaven yet. Your sins still cling to you. So what can you do while you wait? Do good to your neighbor.

Prayer: Father, Your Son has promised to redeem me and He has, grant me to trust all that He has done for me that I would love my neighbor as myself. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

April 7

A woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. Matthew 26.7 (the entire section is Matthew 26.6-13)

It is a rare thing that someone serves Jesus. This nameless woman comes up to Jesus and pours perfume on Him. But she is scolded for it. The disciples don't consider this serving Jesus, but wasting the perfume. However, that was not the intent of the woman. Her

intent is to serve Jesus as best as she can. She offers Him this perfume as a gift.

Jesus reminds the disciples why this is done, “to prepare me for burial (Matthew 26.12).” Is Jesus just being morbid? No, Jesus speaks the truth. This should serve to remind the disciples of what Jesus is about to do for them. He is about to die on the tree to save them from their sins. What should their reaction be to this? The same as the woman; joyful service.

What should your reaction be to Jesus? Should you grumble as the disciples or desire to serve as this woman? Yes, there is time to serve the poor, but there is also time to give thanks to God for all He has done for you.

Through the beautiful service Jesus gives you, you may serve others. You may joyful watch as your brothers and sisters serve. They may not serve as you would want, but be joyful and give thanks as you see their service. Be served by Jesus and serve in joy.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son has served me through His death on the cross, grant me joy as I serve my neighbor and watch him serve others too. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

April 8

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take eat; this is my body.” Matthew 26.26 (the entire section is Matthew 26.17-35)

Jesus keeps on giving. He keeps on serving the disciples. In the middle of the Passover meal Jesus serves them. They had just been talking about who would betray Jesus. Jesus knows and so He gives them Himself.

Because of their sin Jesus gives them Himself. They will soon fall asleep in the garden. They will run away from Jesus. Some will betray. Some will deny. They are sinful; they need Jesus.

So Jesus serves them. He gives those sinful disciples Himself. It’s what they need. Jesus forgives them their sins. He fulfills the Passover by being the Passover lamb. He is sacrificed for their sins.

But not just for their sins, for yours too. Jesus is your Passover lamb. He takes the burden of your sins and dies in your place. He

grants you forgiveness through Word, Baptism, and Supper. He gives you what He gave those disciples- Himself.

Isn't that enough? You have the fullness of Jesus. You have all your sins forgiven. There is nothing you lack before God. Rejoice and be glad in the service that Jesus gives you.

Prayer: Father, Your Son has served me amid my need, He has forgiven me my sins through His death, grant me to live a new life in service to others. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

April 9

And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." Mark 14.36 (the entire section is Mark 14.32-42)

Not all things are possible for God. Jesus knows that. The Father will not change His will. The Father willed that the Son give His life for sinners. This will was eternal. Before time even began the Father knew all things. He knew that Adam and Eve would sin in the garden. He knew that He would send His Son. He knew that Jesus would die.

It is not possible for Jesus to avoid this cross. So He prays. Jesus prays because He knows what's coming. Beyond the betrayal, the beatings and floggings, the crown and purple robe, nail and spear-beyond all that- are your sins. Your sins separate you from God. They must be punished by God for God is holy. Jesus knows that those sins will be placed on Him.

Jesus will be forsaken by the Father. This was the Father's will. Jesus will suffer the punishment and guilt for all your sins. This too was the Father's will. Jesus will give you His holiness and take your sins. The Father's will would be done.

See what kind of love the Father has for you! He sends His Son to die in your place that you would be forgiven and live with Him eternally. And so you are forgiven! You are declared forgiven from the cross as Jesus dies. This forgiveness comes to you through Baptism and the Supper that you would not doubt the will of the Father, but know His love for you.

Prayer: Father I thank You that You willed Your Son to go to the cross and die for my sins, I thank You that You bring me the forgiveness Jesus won freely, grant me joy as I see how much you love me. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

April 10

Jesus said, *“When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”* Luke 22.53 (the entire section is Luke 22.47-53)

The light shone in the darkness and it looks like the darkness will overcome the light. A faintly burning wick it seems will soon be snuffed out. This seems to be the hour of darkness, the hour when the Son of Man would be defeated and destroyed.

This was what the devil wanted from the beginning; to get rid of Jesus. Finally, the devil’s plans are being realized. He had convinced Adam and Eve to fall. He had taken many of the angels with him in his rebellion. Now the devil was about to win a great victory over God.

God’s Son would be arrested by men. Tried by sinners and crucified. The devil thought that this was it, he had won. Jesus was humiliated on the tree and laid dead in the cold tomb. Was this not the hour of darkness?

It seemed so, but in truth this was all the Father’s will. He accomplished what He wanted and humiliated His Son. He desired that His Son pay for the sins of all sinners. There was nothing that pleased the Father more. Through the death that Jesus died sinners were ransomed from the devil’s kingdom, death was overthrown, and the devil’s fate was sealed.

The hour of darkness did not snuff out Jesus. That light shone brightly from the cross forgiving sins and saving sinners. All this happened not for the sake of Jesus, but for you.

Prayer: Father in heaven, on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday it seemed that the devil had won, I thank you that Jesus went to the tree and died for my sins, forgive me and strengthen my faith. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

April 11

Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." Matthew 26.64 (the entire section is Matthew 26.57-75)

They had been accusing Jesus of being the Christ. They had accused Jesus of offering to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. They had sought false testimony against Jesus, but could only come up with the truth.

Jesus gives them more truth, "from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." All this truth they do not understand. Jesus will destroy the true Temple, the dwelling place of God, and raise it up on the third day. He would die and rise. He was the Christ, the one anointed with the sins of sinners. He would be anointed with the wrath of the Father. He would suffer and be destroyed for the sake of sinners.

He is the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power. He will soon sit down at the mercy seat of the cross and be raised up with the clouds of heaven. He will humble Himself to die. The high priest did not understand that the sacrifice was there. How could the Christ be the true sacrifice? How could this man, Jesus, be the Christ?

Jesus is accused by the Father of all sin. He is found guilty and punished with the full wrath of the Father against sin. Jesus is the sacrifice and the true High Priest, offering Himself before the Father. He will be crushed on the tree and raised on the third day. This was for sinful Caiaphas and denying Peter. This death of Jesus is for you. Jesus was anointed with your sin and took your place under the Father's wrath. He suffered your punishment. Nothing would deter Him from this. He was seated at the right hand of the Father, punished for your sins, that heaven would be yours.

Prayer: Father, Your Son was rejected and mocked by men, He took up my load of sin on the tree and suffered in my place, grant me joy as I see all that Jesus has done for me. In His Name. Amen.

April 12

But they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" Luke 23.21 (the entire section is Luke 23.6-25)

They want Barabbas released. The murderer should go free that the innocent one would be punished. Luke records this that you would find yourself. Where should you be? You know that the crowds should condemn you; it's obvious. They all knew what Barabbas did and who he killed. His hands were dirty. They knew too what Jesus had done, all He had helped and healed.

Isn't that how it is? The Father knows all your sins. He witnessed them all. God is everywhere and has seen all your sins. What should the Father say? Could He not recount all your deeds? Should He not cry out that you should be cast away into hell forever? Isn't that what you deserve for your sins?

But the Father sends His Son in your place. Jesus stands in your place. He is innocent and the Father knows it. Yet, the Father wills this happy exchange; Jesus' righteousness for your sins. Jesus takes your sins and gives you His righteousness.

Jesus gives you His righteousness through Baptism. As you are washed in that Word filled water you are joined to Jesus, forgiven, and given His righteousness. It isn't fair that the innocent one should die and you, the sinner, should go free. But God is not fair to have mercy on you.

Jesus stands in your place under the law offering Himself. You receive the death that Jesus died. You receive forgiveness. You receive everlasting life. You should cry out in joy for all that God has done for you. You are forgiven and set free.

Prayer: Father, grant me joy as Jesus is crucified in my place and I go free, grant me to share this great news with all those in my life. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

April 13

And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. Luke 23:26

This is not the way it usually is with Jesus. Typically Jesus is the one who does the heavy lifting. It is Jesus who serves others. They come to Him with problems or sickness and He heals. He lifts their burdens from them. But this is different.

Jesus has no strength left. He had been up all night. He had sweat blood in the garden. He was beaten and flogged. He has little strength left. The Romans had done this before to others. They knew it would not look good to have the prisoner die before the condemned could receive their punishment. They can't take the chance that Jesus would die in the city streets.

Here we see that Jesus is truly human. He is concealing and emptying Himself of His divine powers. He really is suffering. He feels the whip and lash like you would. He suffers as one who is dying. This is not some show; Jesus really suffers.

Jesus suffers but not for Himself; He suffers for you. Simon carries the cross, but it is Jesus who carries your sin. Simon could help with the wooden cross, but no one else could carry sin. Just Jesus. Jesus is the sacrifice who is bound with sin. He carries your sin to the tree. He dies for you. He is truly human, able to suffer. He is truly God, the sufficient sacrifice. He is Jesus, the one who dies in your place.

Prayer: Father, I praise You that You sent Your Son to die in my place, only through Jesus are my sins forgiven, grant me to love my neighbor as You have loved me. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

April 14

And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Luke 23.33

Here we find the height of Jesus' humiliation. Crucifixion was reserved for only the worst offenders. Between criminals Jesus is hung. He is just as bad as they. His offenses are as grievous as theirs. The crowd mocks and so does one of those crucified. Jesus is an easy target.

Jesus is an easy target. The Father humbles His Son. This was the plan all along. Jesus would come to be the servant of all sinners. He would suffer and die on the tree. But even worse Jesus would suffer for the sins of sinners. As Jesus is put on the tree the Father places the sins of all sinners on Jesus.

The most beloved Son of the Father is rejected. The Father hates sin and now Jesus, the sin bearer, is hated. He suffers the full punishment from the Father for each sin. Sinners understand the

pain of a whip or a cross to some degree, but how can we begin to comprehend the pain of bearing such sin? How can we understand what Jesus went through on the tree?

Hence, we marvel. It is a wonder that Jesus would do this for us. Surely, we do not deserve Him to stand in our place under the judgment and punishment of the Father, but Jesus does. He takes the punishment meant for you upon the tree. He humbles Himself to serve you.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son has taken the punishment meant for me over my sins, I praise You for Your love and mercy given me, grant me to marvel at all Jesus has done for me at the tree. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

April 15

And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!"
Luke 23.35

They had it right. Jesus was the Christ of God, His Chosen One. But they did not understand what the Christ was to do. "Christ" means "anointed." The crowd assumed that the Christ would be anointed with power and glory. They thought that the Christ would show forth the glory of God in civil power. For Jesus to die on a tree was not something the Christ should do. It was humiliating.

But the Christ came to be anointed with sin. He came to suffer. He came to die. This was the glory of God! God's glory is seen nowhere else as clearly as the cross. All the promises of God find their fulfillment there. God is true. But we also see how much God loves sinners. It is the glory of the Father that His Son would suffer and die.

This glory is better than the transfiguration or the raising of Lazarus. This is true glory, glory as of the only Son full of grace and truth. It is the glory of God to crush the Son on the tree and save you. It is the glory of God to wash you clean through Baptism and nourish you through the Supper. It is the glory of God to grant you suffering that your faith would be strengthened until your last earthly moment.

God's glory is backward to what men would assume. To the world this glory looks like foolishness and weakness. Yet, God's weakness is stronger than the strength of men. Jesus is the chosen one; chosen to suffer and die. He is the Christ; anointed with your sin.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son suffered in my place, grant me to know Your glory and give thanks to You for Your mercy unto me. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

April 16

And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Luke 23.42 (the entire section is Luke 23.32-43)

Was this criminal speaking to Jesus delusional? What kingdom could a dying Jesus have? The criminal knows that Jesus is not going to suddenly jump off the tree and defeat the Romans, winning a kingdom. This criminal can see Jesus dying. What kingdom do the dead have?

Perhaps we should be surprised that this criminal is not thinking of an earthly kingdom. His time on earth will be shortly over and the criminal knows it. He believes that Jesus is the Christ. The Christ has not come to establish an earthly rule, but a heavenly one. This criminal gets it!

Jesus has come to die for the sins of sinners. The criminal is asking Jesus to die for his sins. This man is asking Jesus to remember him, that is, bring him to heaven. Only Jesus has the power to do that. This man understands that Jesus is the Christ of God, his Redeemer!

Amid death and facing his sins this criminal turns to Jesus. Isn't that what Luke wants you to see? Amid your death, faced with your sins, you turn to Jesus. Jesus is your Savior. He is true man, able to die. He is true God, the sufficient sacrifice. Understand that you are a beggar like that criminal with nothing to offer. Turn to Jesus with nothing but sin and rejoice that Jesus saves you.

Prayer: Father, grant me to turn in faith to see all that Jesus has done for me, I am no better than the criminal hung next to Jesus, forgive me and bring me to paradise. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

April 17

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" Which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
Mark 15:34

Darkness covered the land. The Israelites could hear the wailing of the Egyptians. The angel of death, God, passed through and struck down all the first born of Egypt. God was merciless to save His people. Each plague on Egypt proved that the true God was superior to the invented gods.

Now darkness covers the land again. God again strikes down the first born. Hear the cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" God is merciless to save His people. The firstborn must die. He must suffer all plagues of sin. He must pay the full price.

That price demands the very life of Jesus. Here is the true God laying down His life for sinners. Here is the mercy seat that led the people in the desert. Here is the rock which water poured forth for the thirsty. It is just Jesus dying on the tree.

So cover yourself with Jesus. He takes the darkness of sin from you. He destroys the gloom of death. Cover yourself with His blood. It is poured out for you. Wash yourself clean through Baptism, His Word avails for you. Come to the Divine Service and be served by God; that is receive Jesus.

Live in His light. A city on a hill can't be hidden, nor can your faith. Make it evident that you have been redeemed by God. Love your neighbor as yourself. Serve him who hates you. Love even enemies.

Prayer: Father in heaven, You have removed the darkness of sin from me as Your Son paid my price, grant me to live in the light of Your mercy and receive Jesus. In His Name. Amen.

April 18

Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" Luke 23:46

Is this what the Father wanted? How could He allow His Son to do this? The Father is all powerful, isn't there another way to save humanity? Couldn't He, shouldn't He, rescue His Son?

Jesus had prayed in the garden asking if there was another way. Yet, Jesus said, “Not my will, but Thine be done.” This was exactly what the Father wanted. He wanted His Son to die.

It seems that the Father has abandoned His Son. It seems that the Father hates His Son as He piles up sins upon Jesus. But Jesus still completely trusts. He still places Himself into His Father’s hands. And the Father receives Him.

The Father receives the sacrifice of Jesus. God’s justice is satisfied through all Jesus does. Sins are paid for. Sinners are forgiven. You are saved. The Father approves of all that Jesus does.

Thus, as Jesus dies His soul enters heaven. He was the sinless Son of God. He was the Messiah anointed with sin, still trusting the Father.

As you see how Jesus died, trusting the Father, be encouraged amid your life of sin. Live by faith and not sight. Trust the Father and commit yourself to His will. He is loving, not withholding His Son, but giving Him up to death for you. This is what the Father wanted; He wanted you saved.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son accomplished my salvation on the tree, grant me to trust in You and live in faith knowing that all things are ordered for my good, bring me at last to heaven that I would be with You eternally. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

April 19

And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” Mark 15:39

Sinners are saved at the cross. For this centurion this is reality. He saw all that Jesus endured. He witnessed the silence of Jesus before Pilate. He heard the wild accusations of the Jews. He saw the mockery and beating of Jesus. He was there as Jesus was hung on the cross. He heard the barely audible words that Jesus spoke on the tree. He saw the criminal hanging next to Jesus come to faith. He saw Jesus die.

This centurion came to faith at the foot of the cross seeing what Jesus had done. Isn’t that the same way for you? You came to faith through what Jesus has done at the tree. Through your Baptism into

Jesus you were given faith. You were washed through His blood shed on the tree. You were forgiven by His death.

By the Word of Jesus you received faith. He spoke faith and life into your sinful heart. The humble Words of Scripture are power to overcome sin and overthrow the evil one. It is the power of the cross- of the death that Jesus died.

Through Jesus you are saved. The law is satisfied through Jesus' holy life. The justice of the Father is fulfilled as Jesus laid down His life for you. You may say as that centurion, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" He was and is God's Son, your Savior.

Prayer: Father, Your Son is my Savior from sin, devil and death, I give you thanks for the confession the centurion made, grant me to confess Jesus Christ crucified to my neighbor. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

April 20

And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Matthew 27.59-60

So Jesus rests on the Sabbath. It is the true Sabbath rest! Here is why the triune God rested on the seventh day from creating the world. Here is why the people of Israel were commanded to work six days and rest on the seventh. They were worshiping, honoring, the death of Jesus.

The sad vigil is kept by Joseph and a few women. It is sad because they don't yet understand what has happened. On Friday they should have rejoiced to see the salvation God worked. They should rejoice on Saturday while Christ lays dead, for He died for them. He will overturn death and undo grave. He will be the first fruits of them that sleep. In Christ there is no death, only victory.

Even in the tomb there is only victory for Christ. He has fulfilled the will of the Father. He has saved sinners from eternal death. He has proved that God's promises were true. His soul rests in heaven with the crucified criminal, with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the Old Testament saints. And what could heaven's response to the death of Jesus have been? Surely, no sad vigil.

Heaven rejoiced in the Son. He alone had won the victory. He alone had plundered the devil's kingdom. He had done it! The victory had been won! Heaven rejoiced while earth kept the sad vigil. But soon that victory would break in upon clueless sinners. They would receive the Spirit and understand the reason for the joy in heaven. Jesus had died to save sinners.

Prayer: Father, even as Jesus rested in the tomb my sins were forgiven through His death, I rejoice in all that Jesus has done for me, grant me no sad vigil but great joy in Jesus my Savior. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

April 21

And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Matthew 28.9 (the entire section is Matthew 28.1-10)

He is risen! He is risen indeed! Take hold and worship Him who has overcome your sin and overturned your death. He is true God, the firstborn of the death! Through Him you live. Through Him you live eternally!

Your body may stop, but you will not die. You will live in Christ. He is the Lord of the living not the dead. The wages of sin is death, but He has paid for your sins. You are bought back from death. His victory is your victory!

So take hold of Him and worship. That is, receive Him. Receive Him through Word and Sacrament. He promises to come among us to bring His victory. He promises to join you to Himself through Word, Baptism, and Supper. So receive Jesus.

He died for you and was raised for you. You are given the victory, so receive. You shall live eternally with Him. From this world He will call you to be with Him in heaven. Still the victory will be yours through Jesus. He will, on that last day, raise up your body from the dust. In perfection you will rise. Body and soul you will be with Jesus eternally. The victory will be yours lasting forever.

Take hold and worship. Jesus does all for you. He gives you all things. He, God, was won the victory through His death and grants you to receive. Rejoice and be glad, the victory is His; the victory is yours.

Prayer: Father, grant me to rejoice in the victory that Jesus has won for me on the tree, give me faith to trust that I will be with You eternally. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.