

Home Service for March 14, 2021

Welcome and Announcements

You might notice a few changes. You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

Give thanks to the Lord, whose steadfast love endures forever. Let the faithful give thanks to the Lord.

Call to Worship:

God is good. All the time. And all the time, God is good. Let all God's people cry out in joy: God's steadfast love endures forever. Come! Let us worship the Lord of our salvation.

Opening Prayer:

Gracious God, so often we have missed your presence because we are looking for you clothed in a particular way. Let this time of worship be an encounter with you that will enable us to behold you in all the people we meet and all the situations we greet. You are from everlasting to everlasting, so we are confident that you are here; help us to be aware of your holy presence. O Lord, enrich this act of worship with the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Gracious God, we are tired of our own grumbling. Though we run around like errant children, we long to return to your warm embrace. Though we act as if the odds are stacked against us, we yearn to rest in the knowledge that your steadfast love endures forever. Though we crouch in the shadows, we long to feel the warmth of your love shining upon us each day. Lead us from death into life that we might live as children of light, and serve one another as heirs of your son, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Words of Assurance

God sent not his Son into the world to condemn it, but that through him we might have eternal life. The one who comes from above saves us from our destructive ways, and leads us into life.

Read Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

² Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story—
those he redeemed from the hand of the foe,

³ those he gathered from the lands,
from east and west, from north and south.^[a]

¹⁷ Some became fools through their rebellious ways
and suffered affliction because of their iniquities.

¹⁸ They loathed all food
and drew near the gates of death.

¹⁹ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress.

²⁰ He sent out his word and healed them;
he rescued them from the grave.

²¹ Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love
and his wonderful deeds for mankind.

²² Let them sacrifice thank offerings
and tell of his works with songs of joy.

Prayers of the People:

Almighty God, we so often try relying on ourselves instead of you in times of trouble. But you are the source of our strength. Embrace those who suffer from illnesses of mind, body or spirit with your strength and healing presence. Comfort and encourage those who grieve. Help resolve the conflicts in our lives — with family, coworkers, neighbors. Our deepest longing is to follow you, and yet we fail to live as you command. Help us not to hide from conflict, but allow it to shape us so that we might truly become more faithful disciples. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us

not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is The kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Lesson: Numbers 21:4-9

⁴They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea,^[a] to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; ⁵they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!”

⁶Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. ⁷The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for the people.

⁸The LORD said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” ⁹So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.

Read the Epistle Lesson: Ephesians 2:1-10

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh^[a] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Read the Gospel Lesson: John 3:14-21

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,^[a] ¹⁵that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”^[b]

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

Message

Let us pray: Dear Heavenly Father, as we move through this season of Lent, and closer to our remembrance of your Son's passion, help us to gain a deeper appreciation of his sacrifice for our redemption. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, open our hearts to your word that we might come to true repentance, and embrace with deepened faith the gift of life that you make available to us through the cross which Christ bore for us. This we ask in his holy name. Amen.

We are in the fourth week of Lent, our eyes turn more and more to the old rugged cross, to the place of death, to the cross upon that hill top. We see in our Gospel lesson, a summary for the cross. John is giving us in this lesson, the reason why Jesus died. When we look at the cross of Calvary, we see death, we see pain, we see suffering, but if we can look beyond that, look beyond the physical realities of the cross, what do we see. We should be seeing the love of God.

John says in the most popular of all Bible verses, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world." As we look at the old rugged cross, as we see it coming over the horizon this season of Lent, we can see that the purpose of the cross was love.

God so loved us that He had his only Son killed on a cross so that we might be set free from our bondage to sin. The cross of Calvary is a symbol of pain, of suffering, but at the same time it is a symbol of freedom, because through the cross of Calvary we are set free from the bonds of sin, we are set free from the chains of death, we are set free to be with God for eternity.

God did this because He loves us. He did this because God loves those whom He creates. God did this because He could not bear to see us suffer, to see us separated from Him any longer.

He knew we could not and cannot bridge, that which lies between us and him, so God build that bridge for us. And the material he used in construction that bridge was a tree shaped into a form of a cross. And it was through the cross that God built a means, a way for us to travel to him.

God was the great architect who designed the bridge for our freedom, but He not only designed it, he built it, and he built it out of materials that no one would of thought of, he built it out of a cross and the body and blood of His Son.

He shared it with all who would believe that the work was done for them. Yes, God used the cross of Calvary to build a bridge between Himself and us. As we see the cross coming closer and closer into view, let us look beyond the cross to the see the one who loved us enough to use the cross as the bridge so that we might be granted the freedom from sin and released from the bondage to death.

As the cross comes into focus, we can see the form of one hanging on the cross. We can see the Son of God hanging on the cross, we can see the holes in him hands, the thorns on his head, we can hear his conversations with his Father, and with the people looking at him. We can see a man dying for the rest of humanity; we can see one suffering for the people of the earth. God not only constructed a way for us to come to him, but he used his Son to help him. He doesn't ask us to help him bridge the gap, he doesn't ask us to be punished for our own sinfulness, but He uses His Son for that purpose. As John says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son."

The last gaze at the cross we can take is a look that sees the sacrifice that Jesus offered on our behalf. We can see that he offered himself, he gave of himself, he took the sting of death, the power of death, the pain of death upon himself, so that we won't have to. We know now that because Jesus died and because God raised him on the third day, that we too will be free from the sting and power of death by the victory of the resurrection. Because Jesus offered himself for us, we no longer have to fear death, the sting has been removed.

For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son. The love that God has for us allows us to live in a special way, to live God's way. God loved us enough so that we would change and follow him.

As Christians, we believe and live by the Biblical truth that we are saved by God's Grace alone. It is not our doing that earns salvation, for it is Grace alone that saves us. Both our Epistle lesson and Gospel today are classic biblical texts that affirm

the saving power of God's grace in Jesus Christ. We can find great wisdom, comfort and inspiration in this theological and biblical truth.

As I read our lessons; something jumped out at me larger than life. I'm talking about two verses in particular, which complement each other. In Ephesians 2:10 we read: "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus FOR GOOD WORKS, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life." And in John 3:21 we read: "But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that THEIR DEEDS HAVE BEEN DONE IN GOD."

This is one of the most profound paradoxes of our faith. Yes, Grace saves us! No question about that! However, both of these verses from Ephesians and John teach us that our response to salvation by Grace alone is doing good works! Paul says we have been created in Christ for doing good works and that God has planned such good works before we even do them. In other words, God has planned out our destiny before we even realized it; and our destiny involves doing good works. In our gospel, we learn that doing the truth is seen by others, and as such the deeds bear witness to the activity of God at work in and through us.

Good works do reveal to the world God's saving activity in and through us. That being the case, then we've got a lot of good work ahead of us to do! We do so not because we are saved by works, but because we are saved by grace and will truly want to do something in humble gratitude to express the reality of what God has done for us; because we are designed, we are created for good works by God we will do them. A person or a thing usually does what they are designed to do; otherwise they miss out on life's meaning and purpose.

Only God can create us; only God can save us; only God can give us the ability to do good works our whole life long; which is our response to what Christ has done for us all on the cross. For that, thanks be to God! Amen.

Benediction:

*As God has shared the best with you, now you are challenged to go forth to share your blessings with others. May the peace and love of God go with you always.
AMEN.*