Home Service for March 17, 2024

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

### *God has written the law of love on your heart. Gaze deeply and find God within.*

Call to Worship:

Opening Prayer:

Lord, we know Easter is coming soon and while we anxiously wait to celebrate your triumphant victory over sin and death, there are still difficult days between now and then. And try as we might, we cannot comprehend love and mercy so great as this. There is nothing perfect about us, yet you beckon us with hands that soon will be scarred by betrayal, greed, selfishness, pettiness, pride, and apathy. You see us and our imperfections with compassionate and patient eyes as we struggle to rid our lives of all the worldly things that distort, distract, and entangle us. As the cross looms ahead, our eyes and our focus are on you and you alone for our redemption and salvation. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Compassionate Lord, forgive us when we falter on this Lenten pathway; when the road ahead seems too uncertain and we are afraid. We admit that following Jesus is not an easy task. Jesus requires us to be willing to make the ultimate commitment of our whole lives and we hesitate and hold back. Draw us back to you, Lord. Give us confidence and courage to face the future with hope. Let us place our trust in you that the message of peace and mercy you have given to us through Jesus Christ may be offered to others through our own witness to your healing mercy. In Jesus’ Name, we pray. AMEN.

Words of Assurance:

*Even though the future is clouded; God is with us, guiding, healing, comforting, restoring. Rejoice! In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven and healed. AMEN.*

Read Psalm 51:1-12

Have mercy on me, O God,
    according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
    blot out my transgressions.
**2**Wash away all my iniquity
    and cleanse me from my sin.

**3**For I know my transgressions,
    and my sin is always before me.
**4**Against you, you only, have I sinned
    and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
    and justified when you judge.
**5**Surely I was sinful at birth,
    sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
**6**Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
    you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

**7**Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
    wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
**8**Let me hear joy and gladness;
    let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
**9**Hide your face from my sins
    and blot out all my iniquity.

**10**Create in me a pure heart, O God,
    and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
**11**Do not cast me from your presence
    or take your Holy Spirit from me.
**12**Restore to me the joy of your salvation
    and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Prayers of the People:

*You know us too well, Lord. You know that we would like the ways of discipleship to be easy; to have the paths laid out in a neat line with the future clearly visible at all times. But part of our journey is obscured by our own greed and fear. You do not block the way to hope and peace. Our own fears provide the barriers; and far too often those barriers take the forms of alienation and prejudice. Write your words on our hearts, Merciful God. Plant your transforming love in our spirits. Give us courage. As we have gathered this day to bring before you name of those we care about along with our concerns, our joys and our sorrows, give us hearts of peace and confidence in your all-sustaining presence. Help us to set our feet on this pathway toward the cross and beyond. 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 Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 31:31-34

“The days are coming,” declares the Lord,
    “when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
    and with the people of Judah.
**32**It will not be like the covenant
    I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
    to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
    though I was a husband to[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah+31%3A31-34+&version=NIV&interface=print#fen-NIV-19724a)] them,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah+31%3A31-34+&version=NIV&interface=print#fen-NIV-19724b)]”
declares the Lord.
**33**“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel
    after that time,” declares the Lord.
“I will put my law in their minds
    and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God,
    and they will be my people.
**34**No longer will they teach their neighbor,
    or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’
because they will all know me,
    from the least of them to the greatest,”
declares the Lord.
“For I will forgive their wickedness
    and will remember their sins no more.”

Read the Epistle Lesson: Hebrews 5:5-10

In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him,

“You are my Son;
    today I have become your Father.”[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+5%3A5-10&version=NIV&interface=print#fen-NIV-30036a)]

**6**And he says in another place,

“You are a priest forever,
    in the order of Melchizedek.”[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+5%3A5-10&version=NIV&interface=print#fen-NIV-30037b)]

**7**During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. **8**Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered **9**and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him **10**and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Read the Gospel Lesson: John 12:20-33

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. **21**They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” **22**Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

**23**Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. **24**Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. **25**Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **26**Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

**27**“Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. **28**Father, glorify your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” **29**The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

**30**Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. **31**Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. **32**And I, when I am lifted up[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+12%3A20-33&version=NIV&interface=print#fen-NIV-26613a)] from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” **33**He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

Message

Who is Jesus Christ? Everyone believes he existed. Unless you are completely uneducated, you at least know that there was such a man named Jesus. Secular history books, those unconnected with the Bible, talk about a Jewish teacher named Jesus who lived in the early first century who really upset a lot of people. He existed. But after that, opinions go in different directions about who he was. Was he really the Son of God? Was there more significance to his death than what meets the eye? Did he really rise from the dead?

As Christians we are supposed to know the answers to these questions. This is the fifth Sunday of the Lenten season, and if there’s any doubt in your heart about who Jesus is, any confusion, then it is my prayer this morning that the words we hear this morning will help you understand more clearly who Jesus really is.

Our Epistle for today, talks about the identity of Jesus Christ. To help us remember the content of this section, think of it this way - “the two S’s.”

S #1 is from verse 7: “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.” There’s our first S: submission. Who is Jesus? He was the Son of God, and he submitted to the will of his Heavenly Father. This verse describes Jesus praying to God with loud cries and tears. The picture here is the Garden of Gethsemane. Shortly before he was arrested, Jesus looked into the future and he could see what lay ahead of him – he could see all the suffering and death. It was a terrible thing. But all of it was optional.

Why do you think God keeps you from seeing your future? Perhaps it’s because if we knew that something bad was going to happen, we would lose our minds worrying and stressing over it. What if God let you see into your future, and you found out that you were going to die a slow and gruesome death tomorrow morning? Wouldn’t that be a terrible thing, to know?

That’s what Jesus went through right before he suffered and died for our sins. He could see what lay ahead of him. And it wasn’t just the physical suffering that made him recoil. It was the spiritual suffering – he was about to have all the sins of the world placed upon him. He was about to have God the Heavenly Father punish him for the sins of all mankind. Jesus could see this in his future, and it was a terrible thing.

He could have bypassed the suffering, if he wanted to, for all of it was optional. After all, he was the Son of God. At any moment he could have said, “No, I won’t lower myself to that level. I won’t do that for the human race.” But he knew that this was the only way to save people, you and me, from total destruction. And so he submitted to the Heavenly Father, as it says, “Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered.” He submitted to the betrayal, to the arrest, to the all-night trials, to the beatings, and finally, to the crucifixion. When you ask yourself, “Who is Jesus Christ? Why did he suffer on a cross?” Think of the word “submission.” Of all the words that describe Jesus Christ, perhaps one of the best is the word “submission.” This is how he took our sins away.

There is another “s” in this section that I would like to focus on. Verse 9: “And, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” The Greek word for “made perfect” actually means “to complete” or “to finish.” Once Jesus completed his suffering, what happened? He became the source of eternal salvation. There’s our other “s” - source.

What would life be like if you had no clean water to drink? I don’t think you and I can really relate to that. What if there had been some sort of disaster in this part of the country, and all the drinking water had been contaminated? Spiritually, this is the situation of the world. A terrible disaster has taken place in our world, and that disaster is called the fall into sin. As a result, everything good, everything spiritual, has been contaminated.

But something big happened when Jesus submitted to all of his suffering. After he completed everything and rose from the dead, he became the source, of salvation, for all who obey him. In him, you find relief from your guilt, a sense of purpose, an understanding of who God really is. In him you find the strength and motivation to change your life for the better; he changes it for you. He is the source of all these things, “the source of eternal salvation.” “Source” is the second “s” to think about as you ponder in your mind who Jesus Christ really is.

When you realize to what extent he submitted to the Heavenly Father, when you realize that he is the source of eternal salvation; that changes everything. It changed the lives of 11 men, his disciples, from doubting cowards to courageous witnesses. It changed the lives of millions of people that have learned about Jesus over the years. May his life and death and resurrection, all these things that happened for you, may they change you as well.

At the same time it is important that we know who we are. So ask yourself, who are you? Someone answered this way: I am (1) a child of the Creator, (2) the temple of the Holy Spirit, (3) the image of God (4) a redeemed disciple of Christ, (5) a working member of his kingdom, (6) a member of the fellowship of saints, and (7) a candidate for Eternal life. If we think about it in that way, we are very special people not because of our doing but because of the work of God through Jesus in our lives.

We are special and our First lesson from Jeremiah speaks about that unique nature. The Lord said that He would make a covenant with his people. He said He would be their God and they would be His people. God established a covenant with us during the time of Jeremiah. He continued that covenant through the time of Jesus. Jesus came to continue that covenant that God began with the people of Israel. Jesus came so that we might know who we are. We are God’s children. Children bought and paid for by the blood of the lamb of Jesus. So even today God continues the covenant with us.

Remember who you are. You are a child of God called by the Holy Spirit into a covenant with God. So as Christians may we always remember who Jesus is and what he has done for us and at the same time let us not forget who we are, God’s children, bought and paid for by the blood of the lamb. Jesus Christ. Amen.

Benediction:

*Fix your eyes on the Lord. Place your hand in His Hand, trusting in his guiding and comfort. Go into this world, that needs so much the words of healing love, and bring the good news of God’s absolute love and presence to all people. Go in peace. AMEN.*