

First Sunday in Lent

... Baptized we live

A mighty fortress is our God,
A sword and shield victorious;
He breaks the cruel oppressor's rod, And wins salvation glorious.
The old satanic foe Has sworn to work us woe.
With craft and dreadful might He arms himself to fight.
On earth he has no equal. LBW #229, verse 1

And Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan!" - Matthew 4:10a

In the early Church, as in all the world in those days, evil was seen as a very real presence, rather than an abstract concept. And so, when a person was baptized as a Christian, an exorcism - a formal rite for casting out evil - preceded that baptism! The devil was cast out, and the Holy Spirit was brought in by water and the Word. Some of this rite of exorcism was restored in the order of baptism with the questions: Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God? Do you renounce the powers of this world that rebel against God? Do you renounce the ways of sin that draw you from God? Most people don't even know what "renounce" means! (It means *give up, forsake, reject.*) For Martin Luther, his baptism was a source of spiritual strength that he returned to daily. When he was depressed and beset, he would again renounce the devil and re-claim the power of his baptism. In his Small Catechism, Luther recommends that we remind ourselves daily of our baptism. When we wash our faces each morning, he says, make the sign of the cross, and remember that we are God's baptized children. So when the day gets difficult, splash some water on your face, make the sign of the cross, and remember that God has claimed you and marked you as his child forever!

Prayer: Lord God, our strength, the battle of good and evil rages within and around us, and our ancient foe tempts us with his deceits and empty promises. Keep us steadfast in your Word and, when we fall, raise us again and restore us through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen. (Prayer of the Day for the First Sunday in Lent – LBW #25)



First Sunday In Lent

Monday

... among God's faithful people

We were baptized in Christ Jesus,
We were baptized in his death,
That as Christ was raised victorious,
We might live a brand new life.
For if we have been united
In a dreadful death like his,
We will all be reunited, for he lives!
WOV #698, verse 1

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into his death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. Romans 6:3-4

Baptism is a Sacrament - literally "a sacred or holy thing." For Lutherans, that means that it incorporates some very specific things:
- it has been commanded by Christ (Matthew 28:19-20)
- it involves an "earthly element" (water)
- it carries a promise (forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life!)
But that's not all! Baptism also connects us with the Body of Christ - the Church. It brings us into the family of God's faithful people - truly a "forever family" of all believers who are, who ever have been, and who ever will be; in all times and in all places. This Church is not limited by time or space or pandemic because God transcends all time and all space. Talk about a support system!!

Prayer: Almighty God, whose people are knit together in one holy Church, the Body of Christ our Lord: Grant us grace to follow your blessed saints in lives of faith and commitment, and to know the inexpressible joys you have prepared for those who love you; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(Prayer of the Day for All Saints – LBW #136)



Tuesday

... Hear God's Word

O Word of God incarnate,
O Wisdom from on high,
O Truth unchanged, unchanging,
O Light of our dark sky:
We praise you for the radiance
That from the hallowed page,
A lamp unto our footsteps
Shines on from age to age. LBW #231, verse 1



In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
John 1:1-5

God's Word became flesh in Jesus, and the Bible bears witness to Jesus. Martin Luther dedicated a huge part of his writing and teaching to bring the Word of God to God's people. He not only translated the Bible into German, but also advocated strongly for public education (for boys and girls!) so that people could read God's Word for themselves. The Lutheran Confessions state that God's Word is how God's kingdom comes to us, how we are converted to faith in Christ, and through which we receive forgiveness of sins and new life. With such great treasure between its covers, we should be digging into it daily and deeply. In his explanation of the commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy" Luther says, "We are to fear and love God, so that we do not despise God's Word or preaching, but instead keep that Word holy and gladly hear and learn it." So whether we gather in person for worship and Bible study or attend on Zoom or TV, this is an important part of our life as God's people!

Prayer: Blessed Lord, you speak to us through the Holy Scriptures. Grant that we may hear, read, respect, learn, and make them our own in such a way that the enduring benefit and comfort of the Word will help us grasp and hold the blessed hope of everlasting life, given us through our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (*Grace to Receive the Word* – LBW #201)

Wednesday

... Share in the Lord's Supper

Come, let us eat, for now the feast is spread.
Our Lord's body let us take together.
Come, let us drink for now the wine is poured.
Jesus' blood poured let us drink together.
In his presence now we meet and rest.
In the presence of our Lord we gather.
Rise, then, to spread abroad God's mighty Word.
Jesus risen will bring in the Kingdom. LBW #214



For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was handed over, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my that is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. *1 Corinthians 11:23-26*

It's all about God! Notice the word in the title for today: share in the Lord's Supper! Not "a" supper or even "the" supper — it's the Lord's Supper! Our Lord is the host and all gather around the table at Christ's invitation! We are invited, not because of the social standing our presence will confer on the gathering, but because we and all who come stand in desperate need of God's forgiveness, love and grace which are given in this Sacrament. We come as sinners, but we also come as God's beloved daughters and sons to whom he freely offers forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation. It has been difficult to receive Holy Communion regularly these days, but call your pastor and ask about what options might be available.

Prayer: Almighty God, you provide the true bread from heaven, your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Grant that we, who have received the Sacrament of his body and blood, may abide in him and he in us, that we may be filled with the power of his endless life, now and forever. Amen.
(After Holy Communion – LBW #209)

Thursday

... Proclaim the Good News of God in Christ

Go, my friends, go to the world,
Proclaim the great love of God;
Messengers to tell the way of life,
Peace and pardon for all.
Be, my friends, a loyal witness:
From the dead Christ arose.
"Lo, I'll be with you forevermore,
Till the end of the world." WOY #753



And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you, and remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20

'Proclaim' is a word that we don't hear much in today's world, other than presidential proclamations. But it is an important word for Christians and it means, literally, "to cry out before" someone. Sometimes we refer to the Pastor's sermon as a "proclamation of God's Word," and so it is. But pastors aren't the only ones called to proclaim. There's Good News to tell people! The Good News is that God loves them! The Good News is that God took upon himself the task of reconciling us all to him, despite the fact that we are sinners and continue to commit sins. This is news that is worth hearing! This is news that is life-giving and life-renewing! And this is the news that every baptized child of God is called to share. The old hymn says it all in a verse that's not in this hymnal:

*I love to tell the story, more wonderful it seems
Than all the golden fancies of all my golden dreams;
"I love to tell the story - it's done so much for me,
and that is just the reason I tell it now to thee."*

Prayer: Lord God of our salvation, it is your will that all people might come to know you through your Son Jesus Christ. Inspire our witness to him, that all may know the power of his forgiveness and the hope of his resurrection. We pray in his name. Amen. (*The Mission of the Church – LBW #192*)

Friday

... Serve all people following the example of our Lord Jesus

We all are called to service, to witness in God's name.
Our ministries are different, our purpose is the same:
To touch the lives of others with God's surprising grace
So ev'ry folk and nation may feel God's warm embrace.
WOV #755

*For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.
Mark 10:45*

Some cynics have described "customer service" as an oxymoron - that is, a contradiction in terms. But we can't afford to let people say that about Christian service, because that's what we're all about! Jesus met people in all the places they were - in grief, in pain, in confusion, in hunger, in need - and reached out to them. He did not simply teach; he wept with people, he taught and healed and touched and fed and calmed people. And he sent his followers to do the same.

Prayer:

Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love,
Show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you.
Neighbors are wealthy and poor, Varied in color and race,
Neighbors are nearby or far away.
These are the ones we will serve,
These are the ones we will love;
All these are neighbors to us and you.
Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love,
Show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you. WOY #765



Sent for Service

Saturday

. . . Strive for justice and peace in all the earth!

Let justice flow like streams of sparkling water pure,
Enabling growth, refreshing life, abundant, cleansing, sure.
Let righteousness roll on as others cares we heed,
An ever-flowing stream of faith
translated into deed. WOV #763

Is this not the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke? Isaiah 58:6

How do God's people interact with others? The obvious answer is "love one another," and that's true, but how can we love those we do not know? But there is something we can do, and that's today's focus: **to strive for justice and peace in all the earth!** Justice is what God expects of his people in their dealings with others, it is, in fact, what God demands of his people! The prophets of the Old Testament called God's people to account because of their injustice toward others. Amos said that God would rather see justice done than any amount of burnt offerings in the temple! Isaiah, in the verses before the one quoted above denounces people for using their fasting as an excuse to oppress others. And Micah proclaims, "*He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*" And doing justice will go a long way toward bringing peace, too! History shows that war is very often sparked by injustice. If nations would deal justly with each other, peace might indeed be possible. But if we cannot influence the policies of nations, we can influence policies and practices in our own lives, homes, neighborhoods and workplaces.

Prayer: Holy and righteous God, you created us in your image. Grant us grace to contend fearlessly against evil and to make no peace with oppression. Help us to use our freedom to bring justice among peoples and nations, to the glory of your name; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Renewers of Society – LBW #142*)

