

# *40 DAYS WITH JESUS & HIS MERCY*



**DAILY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE**

**LENT 2019**

*40 DAYS WITH JESUS  
& HIS MERCY*

*Daily Devotional Guide*

Week of March 10  
The Mercy of His Forgiveness

Week of March 17  
The Mercy of His Presence

Week of March 24  
The Mercy of His Patience

Week of March 31  
The Mercy of His Welcome

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The Mercy of His Giving

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The Mercy of His Death

Week of April 21  
The Mercy of His Resurrection

*40 DAYS WITH JESUS & HIS MERCY*  
*Growing in Knowing Jesus and His Mercy*

Jesus is the most compelling person ever to walk upon the earth. Two billion people call themselves His followers, and call Him their Lord and Savior. More books are written about Jesus than any other person. More prayers are prayed in His name than any other name. More works of charity are done motivated by His mercy than any by other motive.

How can we know Jesus, who walked upon this earth two thousand years ago? We can know about Jesus through many books, but how can we know Jesus? We can get to know Jesus in the same way that we get to know other people. How did I get to know my wife, Amy? We were introduced and talked briefly. At another time, we talked more. We hung around with mutual friends. I saw how she acted toward others and toward me. Each time we were together, I got to know her a little better. After years of marriage, I am still getting to know her!

We get to know another person as we listen to their thoughts and as we observe their behavior. The more we hear what they say in conversation with us and the more we see them in action, the more we know them. It is the same way with Jesus. The more we listen to and converse with Him, and the more we see His mercy in action, the more we get to know Him.

Over the 40 days of Lent, we will see the merciful acts of Jesus. We will see that His mercy is for people then and for people today, including you!

Derek Lecakes  
Bishop, President  
The Atlantic District, LC-MS  
Lent, 2019

## *OUR PLAN*

Each Sunday's message in Lent will set forth the theme for the coming week, a certain dynamic about the mercy of Jesus. Through the Word and Sacrament, **EACH Sunday IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIENCE THE MERCY OF JESUS.**

Our daily plan for the next 40 days, is to give you the opportunity to **READ** of the mercy of Jesus and to "see" it through His Word, and His living Word shows Him in action.

As you read about the mercy of Jesus, it is vital to **RECEIVE** his mercy for yourself. It is most important to remember that Jesus' mercy is for you.

Jesus' mercy works in our hearts so that we **RESPOND TO OTHERS** who need His mercy also. Our world and church is in need of Christians who are reflecting the mercy of Jesus in their daily interactions.

**WEEKLY SMALL GROUP STUDIES** will also be part of this opportunity to get to know the mercy of Jesus better. Jesus promises, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst." We will examine, discuss and wrestle with others the contemporary application of mercy of Jesus

After 40 days of personal devotions, Sunday worship services, and weekly small group gatherings, each of us will grow in getting to know the mercy Jesus. We will also grow in extending His mercy to others in word and deed.

# Week One

*The Mercy of His Forgiveness*

**SUNDAY, MARCH 10**

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**1ST SUNDAY IN LENT**

## **The Temptation of Jesus**

### **TODAY'S GOSPEL READING: LUKE 4:1-13**

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."

And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'"

And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."

And Jesus answered him, "It is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'"

And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

# MONDAY, MARCH 11

## DAY 1

### Mercy for a Woman Caught in Adultery

**READ:** John 8:1-11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”

And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”

**RECEIVE:** How easy it is to see the sin in others. The woman was caught red handed. There was no doubt about her sin. Imagine the woman standing there with the hatred and vehemence around her. As she looks in the eyes of her accusers seeing only anger accusations, mercy comes from an unexpected place.

Jesus speaks. Jesus points out the obvious. “Let him who is without sin...”

Who can say that they are without sin? No one can say as much. No one that was in that crowd and not us. So the crowd leaves.

But Jesus turns the table. Instead of focusing on the sin, Jesus offers forgiveness. The one who is without sin say, “neither do I condemn you.” That is mercy in spite of our sin Jesus in love reaches out to us with no condemnation.

**RESPOND:** It is so easy to point out the sin we see in others. It is so hard to humble ourselves admit our own sin.

Jesus is so different than us. He looks at us. He sees our hearts and offers us mercy.

How do Jesus’ actions make you feel about your life? What sins do you offer God? What does it mean to you that Jesus looks at your heart and says, I do not condemn you? How does this freedom that we experience in his mercy, make you want to live your life.

*Dear Lord, I know that there is sin within me. Thank you for your words of mercy and grace. That just as the woman caught in adultery was not condemned by you, so too am I able to stand forgiven in your sight. Help me to live in that mercy and share that mercy with all those I come in contact with. Amen.*

Written by Pastor Derek Lecakes, Atlantic District President/Bishop

# TUESDAY, MARCH 12

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## DAY 2

### Forgiveness Through the Lord's Supper

**READ:** Matthew 26:26-29

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." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

**RECEIVE:** This is my body ... blood ... for the forgiveness of sins. Such simple words Jesus speaks. These simple words offer us life and salvation. The very real forgiveness of sins come to us comes to us through these simple words.

Jesus sits there that night on the eve of his death and resurrection. He sits there with his most trusted followers and friends. As the meal progresses, he pauses so that the disciples might now how important this event really is.

The forgiveness of sins is offered to us in the Lord's supper. Like the disciples, we are offered this intimate relationship with our Savior. It is at the Lord's table that we are offered Bread, body, wine, and blood that work in us the forgiveness of sins.

**RESPOND:** No work, no action on our part. The Lord comes to us in his body and blood, in with and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion. As you leave the table how do you respond to what the Lord has done in you? How does it feel to be set free of your sins. How does being forgiven make you a want to live your life? How does this forgiveness that is freely given help you view the world around you?

*Dear Jesus, I do not deserve your love and forgiveness and yet you offer it to me freely. Thank you for dying and rising for me that I might know the love that you have given me. Thank you for forgiving my sins and setting me free to live a life filled with your grace and mercy. May I see others as you see me, forgiven in your sight. May this forgiveness cause me to offer forgiveness to those around me. Amen.*

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Written by Pastor Derek Lecakes, Atlantic District President/Bishop

# WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13

## DAY 3

### Paralytic Man Forgiven & Healed

**READ:** Mark 2:1-12

And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay.

And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “My son, your sins are forgiven.”

Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic—“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.”

And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”

**RECEIVE:** “You are an evil person!” “You are getting what you deserve.” “If God cared about you, you would not be in such a mess.” “There is no hope for sinners like you!”

Each day, the paralytic heard these recriminations from others and from his own heart. But this day, four friends brought this broken man to Jesus. And Jesus spoke those tender words of mercy, “My son, your sins are forgiven.” Jesus brought healing to His soul and body.

That mercy of Jesus is for you too. No matter what others say or what your heart shouts to you, Jesus says to you, “My child, your sins are forgiven!” And he backs up those words with his death on the cross and his resurrection. Receive His cross-won mercy.

**RESPOND:** Four friends brought the paralytic man to receive the mercy of Jesus. Certainly you have a friend or family member who needs the mercy of Jesus. How can you help that person receive a taste of the mercy of Jesus? By forgiving them? By praying for them? By pointing them to Jesus? By an act of mercy? “Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” (Matthew 5:7)

*Dear Lord, I confess my sinful thoughts, words and deeds. Thank you for your perfect forgiveness won through the death and resurrection of your Son. Help me to receive His forgiveness daily, and help me to bring His merciful forgiveness to others. In Jesus's name,  
Amen.*

Pastor Victor Nelson | Resurrection, Cairo

# THURSDAY, MARCH 14

## DAY 4

### Publically Known Sinner Forgiven

**READ:** Luke 7:36-50

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."

"A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?"

And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

**RECEIVE:** The woman came uninvited. Jesus could have ignored this woman, scolded the woman, rejected the woman. Instead, he poured His mercy upon her. She loves much because she was forgiven much. He forgives her and sends her forth in peace!

You too have been forgiven more than you could possibly know. You were forgiven because Jesus paid a price higher than we can possibly understand! Faith receives that mercy and peace.

**RESPOND:** What kind of person would do this: barge into a dinner party, absorb a cutting remark from the host, cry a river of tears, kiss the dusty feet of a teacher, dry His feet with her hair??? What kind of person would do these things? - Only a person responding to incredible mercy. How will you respond to God's incredible mercy in giving His only Son for you? A tepid response won't do!

*O Lord Jesus, thank you for your free forgiveness that came at such a high price. Help me to receive your mercy and to respond in a way proportionate to your mercy. In your name,  
Amen.*

# FRIDAY, MARCH 15

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## DAY 5

### Forgiveness From the Cross

**READ:** Luke 23:33-34

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. And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments.

**RECEIVE:** From His holy cross, our Divine Redeemer Jesus Christ speaks forgiveness to those who crucified Him. From the cross, our Lord forgives us. His innocent suffering and death purchased forgiveness for us. His forgiving words free us from our sin, both when we know we are sinning and when we do not. The forgiveness that the crucified and risen Christ offers to us through His Word and Sacraments does not depend on our knowing our sin but on His gracious and merciful heart. That forgiveness liberates us freely to forgive others by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**RESPOND:** The power of forgiveness does not depend on the person being forgiven but on the one doing the forgiving. Stop waiting for people to apologize to you so that they may be worthy of your forgiveness; bear your cross as Christ did and make the first merciful move toward reconciliation by forgiving them. In that way, you can direct them and others to the One who continues to be the first to forgive.

*Holy Spirit, give us faith through Your Holy Word to hear Your forgiving words spoken to us so that we may forgive freely all who sin against us, just as we have been forgiven through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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*Rev. Dr. Dien Ashley Taylor, Redeemer, Bronx*

# SATURDAY, MARCH 16

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## DAY 6

### Mercy and Restoration for Peter

**READ:** John 21:15-17

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.

**RECEIVE:** The fast having been ended by the resurrection feast, the risen Christ Jesus directs Simon to a restorative task for the life of God’s people. The thrice-denying Simon is given three directives grounded in the merciful love that Christ has for him. In grateful response to this love, Simon loves our Lord as he is given opportunity to feed His lambs, tend His sheep, and feed His sheep. Christ’s death on the cross and victorious resurrection secure forgiveness that is brought to us not only through words of restoration offered to repentant sinners but also through the Holy Eucharist that empowers us to go to restore the world to God’s redemptive purpose.

**RESPOND:** “Feed” is the directive our Lord gives to Simon. Our Lord feeds us at every Eucharist so that we, as His forgiven and restored people, may feed the world. That feeding happens in love and mercy as we feed others what we have been fed. Restored to Christ’s fold, what are you feeding others? How will you repent from feeding into the lies that separate people and, instead, feed people words of community restoration and wholeness in Christ?

*Feed Your children, Lord, and let Your mercy drive the restoration You have called us to bring to the world. As we are loved by You, show us that true love for others restores broken relationships through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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*Rev. Dr. Dien Ashley Taylor, Redeemer, Bronx*

# Week Two

*The Mercy of His Presence*



## SUNDAY, MARCH 17

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### 2ND SUNDAY IN LENT

#### Weeping Over Jerusalem

**TODAY'S GOSPEL READING: LUKE 13:31-35**

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."

And he said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.' O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

## MONDAY, MARCH 18

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### DAY 7

#### The Mercy of Immanuel

**READ:** Matthew 1:21-23

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel"(which means, God with us).

**RECEIVE:** It is a rather overwhelming concept to consider that the infinite God would chose to be with us (Immanuel), living in His creation. Even more overwhelming, the God who created the light and is the Light of the World has chosen to live in the darkness of Mary's womb for nine months. Jesus understands to the fullest possible extent what it means to be human. When God does anything, He does it all the way and He does it for a reason.

Mary is to "call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." He hasn't come to

punish. He hasn't come in terror or condemnation. He has humbled Himself to the lowest possible point (a fetus), becoming fully like us but without sin, in order to save us from those very sins. God is with us in mercy, mercy shown to you in your sin, and shown to all His broken creation.

**RESPOND:** At times we are tempted to think that we are alone and no one understands what we are going through. But we are wrong! Jesus knows and Jesus understands you and your struggles. How can you reassure the person who feels alone that God is with them? Are you willing to be with them in the same love and mercy that motivated God to be with you?

*O Immanuel, God with Us, come into my heart, into my soul, into my life. Use me to extend your Word and Your grace into the lives of those around me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

Pastor Mark Mueller | Bethlehem, Delmar

## TUESDAY, MARCH 19

### DAY 8

### Mercy from Presence of the Christ Child

**READ:** Luke 2:22-35

And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

**RECEIVE:** Righteous. Devout. We assume old, though the text never says that. Simeon was waiting – waiting for the consolation of Israel. The Greek word there can also be translated comfort. Isaiah had foretold this work in chapter 40 verse 1: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God." These words are the begin-

ning of a beloved Advent hymn.

Two parents not in their hometown and just having given birth in a barn. An old man who is living in a country that is under foreign, non-God-fearing rule. Also there, a widow, Anna, who has been

alone for a long time. They are all people who needed and received comfort. Comforted from being in the very presence of God. Comforted from knowing they have seen the fulfillment of God's promises to them. Comforted from seeing God's salvation in their very midst.

**RESPOND:** All of us have things in our lives that make us anxious, concerned, and worried. What worries you? Consider how God is in your midst – in His Word, in His Sacraments. How does this comfort you? How can you share His comfort with others?

*O Immanuel, God with Us, I am anxious and worried about many things. As Your presence comforted Joseph, Mary, Simeon, and Anna, comfort me with the promise that You are with me always. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

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Rev. Mark Mueller | Bethlehem, Delmar

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

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### DAY 9

### Mercy Through our Lord's Baptism

**READ:** Luke 3:21-22

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

**RECEIVE:** There's an old saying: "baptism by fire", which means that the best way to go forward in life is through direct experience. Jesus Christ is God with us. He personally enters our sin soaked world by being baptized into our fallen human condition. Jesus is baptized directly into our sin and death to save us from sin and death. When he is baptized the heavens open and the Holy Spirit descends upon him while God the Father declares him beloved. When we are baptized, the Holy Spirit descends upon us and God the Father declares us beloved children of heaven on earth. Heaven is open to all who receive and believe that we are beloved by God.

**RESPOND:** Our baptism into the life and death of Jesus Christ raises us to walk daily with God in faith and perseverance. The best way to go forward in life is through the direct experience of being empowered by the Holy Spirit to serve others in peace, joy and love. Find ways to actualize wellbeing in others through the serenity of Jesus. Look for opportunities to increase the happiness Jesus inspires. And even when the going gets tough, persist in loving others in the authenticity of Jesus.

*Thank you God our Father for opening heaven to us through your beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Send your Holy Spirit to open our hearts to you and to others. Direct us to experience your presence in our lives that our thoughts, words, and actions be filled with the peace, joy, and love of Jesus, God with us. Amen.*

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Rev. Dr. Joshua Holmann | Concordia College, New York

# THURSDAY, MARCH 21

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## DAY 10

### A Merciful Presence at Wedding

**READ:** John 2:1-12

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.”

And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it.

When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.”

This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.

**RECEIVE:** At a wedding party in Cana, Jesus showed his power to make things better by changing water into wine. When it seemed like the party was over, Jesus made water become wine for everyone to enjoy. When it seems like we are running low on happiness, Jesus appears and changes our sadness into the gladness of his forgiveness, life, and salvation. The outpouring mercy of Jesus brings people together. His mercy at the wedding feast of Cana enabled all of the guests to drink fully from the cup of his blessings. Jesus mercy still brings Christians together from all over the world as together we share the communion of his abiding presence. Jesus invites everyone to drink from the wellspring of his mercy that changes our ordinary into his extraordinary everlasting life.

**RESPOND:** Just as the servants listened to and followed Jesus, we also are called to respond to our Savior’s instructions. Listen to Jesus. His Word encourages us to believe that he is full of grace and truth. Bring to Jesus our regular routines and watch him transform the mundane into momentous movements of mercy. Where do we feel empty? Bring that emptiness to Jesus in order that he would fill us with his mercy and peace. In Jesus the best is yet to come as he promises life without end to all who receive him.

*Loving Father, you sent your Son, Jesus, to pour out his life for the salvation of the world so that all who believe in him would not perish but have eternal life. Fill us with the mercy of Jesus and make our hearts wellsprings of compassion for the welfare of all, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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Rev. Dr. Joshua Hollmann | Concordia College, New York

# FRIDAY, MARCH 22

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## DAY 11

### His Presence Among Two or Three

**READ:** Matthew 18:18-20

“Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

**RECEIVE:** Loneliness is a state which is not spoken of much. Despite people racing from demands to responsibilities and despite a society which is deeply concerned about relationships, individuals are often by themselves.

Jesus was alone on the Calvary cross. Though there were “two or three gathered in His Name”, most were onlookers who either did not care or wanted Him dead and gone. His solitary death was God’s chosen way for the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus, through His sacrifice, would repair the broken relationship we have with God. Jesus’ loneliness on the cross would mean that we can live with Him and the community of believers eternally.

**RESPOND:** It is not hard to find people who are lonely. They are in the hospital, confined to a convalescent facility or homebound. It could be a young girl eating lunch alone in the school cafeteria or a boy playing for hours on his computer day after day.

Do you know someone who is lonely? Find an opportunity to speak with them. Show your concern by asking how they are doing and allow them to talk. Trust that, through your efforts, God will fill their heart with His comfort and compassion.

*Dear Lord God, Your suffering Son sacrificed His life to overcome my sin. I am alone in my sinful state, yet the love and mercy of God lifts and sustains me. Jesus does this gracious work without any merit or worthiness on my part. You are present in my life. I will never be alone. Grant me a thankful heart and the compassion to reach out to others in their despair with your loving spirit. In the Name of Jesus, Amen*

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Rev. David Wackenhuth | Vice President, Atlantic District - LCMS

# SATURDAY, MARCH 23

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## DAY 12

### Jesus is With Us Always

**READ:** Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.

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 observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

**RECEIVE:** We learn from Scripture that God is omnipresent. In other words, He is not limited by time nor space. God chooses to be with His people and offers His loving and guiding presence.

At the foot of the cross, Mary, John and others gathered. It was a time of great pain and suffering for our Savior. Jesus was in their midst even during their moments of grief and sorrow. However, Jesus was dying for their sins and ours. Weeks later, He was present with them and sent them forth to spread His saving Word. Christians gather regularly to worship our Lord and Savior. Believers unite to receive His grace in Word and Sacraments. We pray and have fellowship with one another. Jesus is present with us now and at all times.

**RESPOND:** God is ALWAYS present with you. Are you ALWAYS present with Him? Believe Jesus when He says, “I am with you ALWAYS”. He is with you when you feel lousy, when you are short of money and when you seek wisdom and guidance. Knowing God is present with you ALWAYS, be confident as you share your gifts with others.

How about sharing the gift of your voice by calling someone who could use a personal contact? Why not share your gift of compassion by inviting someone to lunch who needs to talk about their concerns? Perhaps, simply share a smile with a stranger. Just as your Loving Lord is ALWAYS present with you, trust that He is with you as you share your gifts with others. Let them know Jesus is ALWAYS with them.

*Heavenly Father, You promise to be with your people in times of joy as well as trial. Thank you for Your presence. May Your comfort and peace be with all of your people. May our faith in You grow as we receive Your grace and share Your love throughout the world. In the loving presence of Jesus, Amen.*

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Rev. David Wackenhuth | Vice President, Atlantic District - LCMS

# Week Three

*The Mercy of His Patience*

**SUNDAY, MARCH 24**

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**THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT**

**Patience for Repentant Fruit**

**TODAY'S GOSPEL READING: LUKE 13:1-9**

There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

# MONDAY, MARCH 25

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## DAY 13

### Merciful Patience with Martha

**READ:** Luke 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me."

But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

**RECEIVE:** There are always two choices that we can make when confronted with stress and anxious situations. One is to worry and be filled with anxiety. The other is to go into the presence of God in prayer and ask Him to speak to our troubled hearts. Martha chose to worry and lash out in anger. Mary chose to draw near to Jesus and to be content that His presence would be enough. Perhaps Mary had anxiety about how all the serving would get done. Yet being in the presence of God, in the person of Christ, was enough to still her heart and help her to focus on "the good portion." The feet that she prostrated herself before were the feet that would walk the Via Dolorosa (Latin for "Way of Grief") that led to Calvary and they were the same feet that would emerge from an empty tomb and ascend to the right hand of God the Father. Mary was wise to choose being in Jesus' presence over worry and anxiety.

**RESPOND:** What are you anxious about today? Have you come near to God in prayer through Jesus and have you laid your burdens at Jesus' feet. God answers all prayers with either "yes," "no" or "wait and grow". We cannot guarantee that God will eliminate all our cares. However, being in His presence gives us extra peace and joy as we await his good and gracious will to be done.

*God of the Way of Grief, thank you for walking that path of suffering for our sins and the sins of the whole world. Help us to draw near to you with all anxiety and worry and draw strength from your presence. In the power of your resurrection, give us faith and that peace that passes all understanding. In your name we pray. Amen.*

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Rev. Dr. Robert Hartwell | Village, Bronxville

# TUESDAY, MARCH 26

## DAY 14

### Merciful Patience with James & John

**READ:** Mark 10:35-45

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?”

And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”

And they said to him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

**RECEIVE:** Jesus teaches the disciples an important lesson. He describes how the world often operates (rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them) and an important distinction for followers of Jesus (But it shall not be so among you.) It reminds me of a parent who may catch a small child acting in a way that is crude or offensive. “We do not act that way,” a caring mom may say. Although the child may feel scolded, in the future he will not make that same mistake and the words of that mother may linger in his memory for decades to come. In fact, he may even pass this wisdom to his own children one day. A truth of scripture is that the ways of Jesus are often not the ways of the world. Most especially we see this in His passion to save the lost, and not by their feeble efforts, but by His life, death and resurrection and through the grace and mercy of God.

**RESPOND:** Are there any areas of your life that seem to be tracking the ways of the world rather than the ways of Jesus and His kingdom? If some part of your life is worldlier than you wish, ask God to give you His mercy and forgiveness and the power of the Holy Spirit to try again. In this area, may your prayer and desire be to follow the way of the crucified and risen Christ and to follow His example in all you do and say.

*Glorious Lord of Life, grant me the faithful heart and will to follow the Son of God in a life of faith and devotion. When I am tempted to follow the ways of the world, gift me the grace and mercy of the Son of God to convict me of this error and to find, through the power of the Spirit, the power to start again and to follow His ways. Thank you for your mercy and patient care for all who are lost in the ways of the world and the careful rebuke and direction to follow your way. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

# WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

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## DAY 15

### Merciful Patience with Philip

**READ:** John 14:8-11

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

**RECEIVE:** Philip was one of the men who had the privilege of hearing Jesus’ words, seeing Him perform miracles, but, Philip needed more help to grow his faith. Jesus tested Philip when the 5000 approached by asking him, “Where are we to buy bread so that these people may eat? Jesus was ready, but Philip wanted proof that Jesus was really connected to the Father. Once more, Jesus explained how the Father and He were in each other – one Being. Reaching out with words of merciful patience offering him the option of believing Jesus or the miracles, so that Philip and others would know Him and be saved.

**RESPOND:** Jesus is no longer with us to win the hearts of unbelievers with His miracles. Those visible manifestations of His almighty power as the Son of God have been replaced with the gift of the scriptures inspired by the Holy Spirit. Our challenge is to learn from the scriptures the Good News so that we can share the gospel, so that like Philip, every person will come to know Him.

*Heavenly Father, please help us to engage others who have not yet heard and believed the Good News so that they may join us as those to whom Jesus offers His words of merciful patience. We ask this in the confidence of the holy promises we have received as your children. Amen.*

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*Mr. Ralph C. Schultz | President Emeritus, Concordia College, New York*

# THURSDAY, MARCH 28

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## DAY 16

### Merciful Patience with Peter

**READ:** Luke 22:31-34

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.”

Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.”

**RECEIVE:** When a football team prepares for a game, they focus on the star of the opposing team. They will look for his weakness as the key to beating his entire team. Satan uses a similar tactic in his battle with God. Throughout scripture we read about special people who were Satan’s favorite targets. In this episode, Satan wanted to ruin Simon’s leadership, but Jesus prayed for him and protected his faith. Peter, the powerful leader of the disciples, the confident speaker, the “rock” who declared his readiness to suffer prison and death with Christ didn’t know how vulnerable he was.

**RESPOND:** Satan still wants to destroy those who are believing leaders in the Church because it remains his diabolical strategy for causing some to fall away. Believers must be aware of how Satan targets personal weakness with temptations. Our merciful, patient Defender is Jesus who prayed for Peter’s faith. We need to ask Him to pray for us so that we will be prepared to help others to strengthen their faith.

*Dear Jesus, please help us in our combat with Satan. He seeks to target us as one whose faith fails his testing. We pray for your merciful patience so that even though we do not deserve your grace You might bless our efforts to strengthen others. In your Holy Name. Amen.*

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*Mr. Ralph C. Schultz | President Emeritus, Concordia College, New York*

# FRIDAY, MARCH 29

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## DAY 17

### Patience with His Father's Timing

**READ:** John 7:30, 13:1

So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come.

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

**RECEIVE:** “Are we there yet?” whines a voice from the back seat. “How long before dinner?” calls a voice from the living room.

The response? “Patience ... patience”.

Patience ... the ability to accept or tolerate delay, trouble or suffering ... without getting angry or upset.

An old adage speaks of “having the patience of Job”. How about learning of Jesus and the patience He demonstrated in His life. Patience with His family, His disciples, and even His crucifiers.

The readings relate: “His hour had not yet come” and “that His hour had come”.

Jesus knew what was to come. He endured it all with great patience.

**RESPOND:** I have not been in a situation as Jesus was. But I have driven on the thruway; I have been in the grocery store; I have interacted with relatives.

Looking back on the definition of patience, can I accept and tolerate? The better question might be, will I accept or tolerate. As always, we have the choice.

*Precious Jesus, You are our model. You have shown us by Your life how You want us to be and live. Heavenly Father, give us the wisdom we need. Holy Spirit, give us the power. Give us the patience to live in this world. Amen.*

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Deacon Pearl Albrechtsen | Trinity, Schenectady

# SATURDAY, MARCH 30

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## DAY 18

### Merciful Patience with Paul

**READ:** 1 Timothy 1:12-16

I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

**RECEIVE:** How much patience did the Lord have with Saul/Paul? Just when the persecutions by Saul began is not clear, but we know they happened. But, that was then and this is now.

That phrase can be a part of our story. Some of us were born into the church; some were evangelized; for some it was a miracle. We all have a story of our faith walk. But that was then ...

Let's not make a comparison but look only, with thanks and praise, to the patience the Lord had with us through our journey.

This Lenten season, let us look back to where we were and give praise to God because we once were lost, but now we're found.

**RESPOND:** God had patience with Saul/Paul. As Saul, Paul though all was well and he was doing the right thing.

The right 'thing' for us is clearly written in the Bible. Believe in Jesus and believe Jesus. Trust in Him. Follow Him. Tell others by your words and your life. Our conversion begins now.

*God of mercy and God of grace, Help me to live the life You have planned for me as You planned the life of Saul/Paul. Thank you for Your generous patience with me and let me be patient with others. Let me be Your light to them. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

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*Deacon Pearl Albrechtsen | Trinity, Schenectady*

# Week Four

*The Mercy of His Welcome*

**SUNDAY, MARCH 31**

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**4TH SUNDAY IN LENT**

## **The Prodigal Son**

### **TODAY'S GOSPEL READING: LUKE 15:1-3, 11-32**

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

So he told them this parable:

And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them.

Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squan-

dered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'"

And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

"Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

# MONDAY, APRIL 1

## DAY 19

### Merciful Welcome to Andrew & Peter

**READ:** John 1:35-42

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.

One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter).

**RECEIVE:** Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist, who preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of our sins. For him to be a disciple of John, he agreed and submitted to the baptism and forgiveness of sins. The preaching of John convicted Andrew’s soul of sin just as Moses’ commandments showed Andrew that he failed.

Repentance is not an easy quality and sinners naturally resist the knowledge of our own sins. Repentance is not borne out of one’s humility or wisdom. True repentance includes grief because of our sin, helplessness that we cannot repay God the debt we owe Him and faith that God paid the price for us by allowing His only begotten Son to take on our sin.

When you recognize these things in yourself, give thanks to God, for it was He that planted them in your heart. If you lack these things, then hear the Word of God. Hear it as it convicts you of sin. Hear it expose your hopelessness. Hear it show you your Savior.

**RESPOND:** When you hunger and thirst for righteousness, you will be filled, as Christ promised in the Beatitudes. Realize that of yourself you are empty, and then you will cling to the one who fills you.

When you hunger and thirst for righteousness, you will naturally lead others to Christ. That is what Andrew did. He brought Simon Peter to the Lord.

When you meet and know the Lord, you will realize how wonderful and amazing it is.

*Father of the universe, we come before your footstool of grace and mercy and surrender our sinful and wretched self to you. We pray that you will always convict us when we go astray and even when we lead others astray by our self-righteous religious pride. Convict us O God, and let us remember that your Son has taught us to ‘suffer the little children to come unto me, for to such belong the kingdom of God.’ May we lead your children to Christ and may they acknowledge their sins as David did. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.*

Rev. Francis Rigobert | Holy Trinity, Yonkers

# TUESDAY, APRIL 2

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## DAY 20

### Merciful Welcome to Matthew

**READ:** Matthew 9:9

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.

**RECEIVE:** Matthew was a tax collector, an apostle, disciple and an evangelist. He was one of the gospel writers. Matthew helps us to follow Christ. He was a sinner before becoming a saint. Repentance is being called by Christ as a sinner to come and follow him and receive his mercy and belong to him alone. That, in turn, is what it is to be a saint, a holy one, that is, one of Christ’s set-apart people.

A tax collector being called by Christ to follow Him, something that was frowned upon. Yet, Jesus said, “Follow me.” Jesus is saying this to all sinners. Like Saint Matthew, you don’t get to be a saint until you become acknowledge you are a sinner. The Pharisees were better at hiding their sins; sins of pride, of self-righteousness, sins of lack of mercy toward others. But those sins are not hidden from God. He sees. He knows. The truth is, each and every one of us on earth is a sinner and we all need to repent, to acknowledge our sins before God, to turn in contrition and confess our need for God’s mercy and forgiveness. Jesus does not come to call the righteous, but sinners. And that’s you and me.

Matthew rose and followed Jesus, in faith. He sat at his Master’s feet and learned from Him. He followed Jesus around in His ministry and witnessed all that He was doing, preaching and teaching and healing. He heard the authority in Jesus’ words, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” He heard the wisdom in His teaching, as Jesus unfolded the true meaning of the law. He heard the authority in Jesus’ commands: “Rise and walk.” “Storm, be still.” Matthew heard Jesus’ parables and began to understand the secrets of the kingdom.

**RESPOND:** Just like it did for St. Matthew, the call of Christ leads us into a life of service. For Matthew, it was the unique service of ministry as an apostle and evangelist. What are the areas of service God has for you? Where has God planted you? Start there. Are you a husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter? Each of those situations has its own set of responsibilities. Are you an employer, an employee, a leader, a servant? Well, be the best you can be. Are you a citizen of this community, this state, this country? You have civic responsibilities to carry out. Are you a church member? How can you better serve in our

church, supporting your congregation financially, generously, speaking well of your church out in the community, inviting your friends and relatives and neighbors to join you at church? These are all areas of service you already have, just to begin with. And God will help you to fulfill your various vocations, as you live a life of service, following Jesus, the Servant par excellence.

Following Jesus, in repentance, in faith, in service, will lead you into everlasting life.

*Lord God, we need you more than ever. May we seek your face for guidance so we can repentant of our sins and strengthen our faith so that when we fall into temptation, we can stand firm to acknowledge our sins and receive your cleansing. In Jesus name. Amen.*

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Rev. Francis Rigobert | Holy Trinity, Yonkers

# WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3

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## DAY 21

### Merciful Welcome to Sinners

**READ:** Luke 15:1-2

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

**RECEIVE:** They’re not like me. It’s not exactly what the Pharisees are saying, but it’s basically the same. They don’t look like me. They don’t act like me. They don’t believe like me.

What the Pharisee’s failed to see is what we sometimes fail to see. We are like them. We are all the same, sinners. Equal in our need for God’s undeserved mercy. Some might be more open about it than others, but at the end of the day, aren’t we all alike? In need of God’s mercy in Jesus Christ? Desiring a Savior who comes to me personally in order to show that God has drawn near to me, even me, a sinner.

**RESPOND:** When we read this story, we see that Jesus receives sinners. People who are cast out from society. People who may not be in the “in crowd”. We like to put ourselves among those people on Sunday morning as we say, “Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.” But more often than we like to admit, we might also be the ones standing off in the distance, judging, holding mercy off of those who need it most.

Our response to Jesus’ amazing mercy for us as sinners isn’t to act as though we’re perfect. Our response should be seeing ourselves, our weakness, our need for hope and forgiveness, peace and comfort in everyone we meet...and being merciful.

*Heavenly Father, you could have stood far off, judging me for who I am and what I have done. But you didn’t. You sent Jesus to meet me in my need. Help me by your Holy Spirit, to do the same. To meet people where they are with the mercy of Jesus. In his name I pray. Amen.*

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*Rev. Matthew Schultz | Immanuel, Niskayuna*

# THURSDAY, APRIL 4

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## DAY 22

### Merciful Welcome to the Children

**READ:** Mark 10:13-16

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

**RECEIVE:** Welcoming the vulnerable. That’s what this story is all about. Because that’s who children were in Jesus’ time. The most vulnerable.

It’s hard to imagine in our culture today where children are doted upon, held up as our future, the best of us. But in Jesus’ world, they were nothing...really. They weren’t meant to be seen or heard. They had no use. Children were of no value...or so society said.

But Jesus wasn’t about following societies norms. He was showing the world a new kingdom, a new world, a new order of things where everyone was equally valued, equally loved by their King.

**RESPOND:** When Jesus took the children in his arms and pointed to them as the key to understanding his kingdom, he was truly flipping things on their head. He was making the vulnerable, the unseen and the unheard, the most important. The first shall be last right?

Jesus mercy goes to the broken and the down trodden. He lifts up the broken hearted and makes the least to be greatest. That’s the great reversal of God’s kingdom.

In a world that is obsessed with power, position, and politics, we can stand out as from a different nation, a different kingdom. We are called to do what Jesus did and let the least of these be the greatest. We can turn the world on its head with an other-worldly mercy that reaches down instead of up, out instead of in, and embraces the least of these.

*Gracious Father, help me reach out to those who are vulnerable around me, showing your mercy to even the least of these. Amen.*

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*Rev. Matthew Schultz | Immanuel, Niskayuna*

# FRIDAY, APRIL 5

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## DAY 23

### Merciful Welcome to the Crowd

**READ:** Luke 9:10-11

On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida.

When the crowds learned it, they followed him, and he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing.

**RECEIVE:** It is important to note that this passage is sandwiched between the apostles' first mission trip and the Feeding of the Five Thousand. The Twelve had returned from visiting village after village, driving out demons, curing diseases, preaching about God's kingdom and healing the sick. They did as Jesus told them, all by His power and authority; but there is something in Jesus' response to them that makes one wonder if their "performance report" indicated a combination of premature satisfaction and exhaustion. What does Jesus do? He shows them that there are more people in need of His preaching and healing, and that there are no limitations to what He can and will do for His followers. We are all in need of his merciful welcome.

**RESPOND:** It is our job as modern-day apostles to share this message with the world, preaching about God's mercy in Jesus and caring for those in need. We may not be able to cure diseases, heal the sick or drive out demons; but, we can show others Christ's love in our words and actions. If we trust in His power and authority, there is no exhaustion; and, until all people know Christ in their hearts, there is still important work to do.

*Dear Heavenly Father, By the grace of Your Son and the healing power of His Body and Blood, You have welcomed me into Your eternal crowd. By the grace of Your Holy Spirit, help me to follow You and trust that there are no limitations on what You can and will do for me ... and empower me to share Your Love and Good News with all who are in need. In Jesus Holy and Precious Name, Amen.*

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*Michael Schultz | Principal, The Chapel School in Bronxville*

# SATURDAY, APRIL 6

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## DAY 24

### Merciful Welcome to Zacchaeus

**READ:** Luke 19:1-10

He entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

**RECEIVE:** The merciful welcome of Zacchaeus reminds us that Jesus came into the world to save all people from sin. He does not cast judgment on the marginalized (like Zacchaeus), and neither should we. Zacchaeus struggled to see Jesus because of his stature, which could refer to his height or his position among the sons and daughters of Abraham as a hated tax collector. But Jesus saw Zacchaeus as both lost and penitent; and, He modeled for us a welcoming, loving, sharing and forgiving heart. God wants us to welcome others and share His love with all people, just as Jesus did.

**RESPOND:** The modern-day relevance of the story of Zacchaeus can be revealing and startling. Jesus is both divine perfection and human perfection, qualified and authorized to judge; and yet, He shows mercy and love to all people. To do anything less ourselves, as bearers of Jesus’ name and members of His crowd, is failure. We need to urgently seek His energy, and do whatever we can to make all people aware that they belong to God, and they are free to experience His love and mercy through Jesus.

*Dear Heavenly Father, I have been given Your Spirit and Mercy, although these are things that I clearly do not deserve. Help me to share them with all people, that Your Love might shine through me and make all people feel welcome. Forgive me when I miss opportunities and remind me to work for You and not against You, that all people might know that they are Your sons and daughters, free to experience Your Grace and Mercy through Jesus. In Jesus Holy and Precious Name, Amen.*

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Michael Schultz | Principal The Chapel School in Bronxville

# Week Five

*The Mercy of His Giving*



**SUNDAY, APRIL 7**

**5TH SUNDAY IN LENT**

## **The Giving of Himself**

**TODAY'S GOSPEL READING:** Luke 20:9-20

And he began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "Surely not!"

But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone"? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people. So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.

# MONDAY, APRIL 8

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## DAY 25

### The Giving of Sight

**READ:** Mark 10:46-52

And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside.

And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart. Get up; he is calling you.” And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And the blind man said to him, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.” And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

**RECEIVE:** Often, the idea of professing our faith can be challenging, perhaps even terrifying! The odd looks and assumed thoughts of those around us can tempt us to believe that we should remain silent. Even worse, when others make the profession in a public way, we may be quick to think poorly of their witness, especially if it makes us uncomfortable.

Yet, our Lord recognizes the witness of Bartimaeus as both an example and a witness of true faith. In the midst of rebuke, His desire for necessary healing reveals the faith in Jesus that is vital for our earthly lives. By the power of the Spirit, we are made able to rebuke the fear & sinfulness of our hearts and be the living witnesses of Jesus’ healing in our lives, sharing the miraculous in that which others think mundane.

**RESPOND:** There are many opportunities to witness and to support the witness of our sisters & brothers in the faith. Where are you able to do this? Do you find opportunity in your workplace? Amongst your family and friends? How might you do this in a loving and caring way? Remember that God is working through you... **YOUR WITNESS MATTERS!**

*Almighty and faithful God, help us to remain faithful in the midst of fear and embolden us to share the truth of Your goodness whenever and wherever we are able, so that others may hear of Your goodness and receive Your merciful healing. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord...*

*Amen.*

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*Rev. Matthew Ryan Gonzalez | Trinity, Bronx*

# TUESDAY, APRIL 9

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## DAY 26

### The Giving of Bread

**READ:** Luke 9:12-17

Now the day began to wear away, and the twelve came and said to him, “Send the crowd away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions, for we are here in a desolate place.” But he said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” And they did so, and had them all sit down. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

**RECEIVE:** When Jesus comes to reveal the nature of God for us, He does so in amazing ways. We often focus on the extravagance of the miracles that Jesus performs, but we might miss the revelation of God’s character. Certainly, the multiplication of the meal is incredible, but the beauty of who God reveals Himself to be is evermore awesome.

He knows what we need and He shows Himself to be the provider, the One who nourishes our temporal bodies and our souls, which are marked eternal in the death and resurrection that we prepare to remember and celebrate again. As we look to the Cross, we see that Jesus came to provide in every way possible, even in our most basic needs. Jesus, through whom all is created, continues to care with the same perfect love of the Creator, One God cherishing His people.

**RESPOND:** What a gift to know the incredible works of God for His people! Where do you witness these in your life? How has God revealed Himself? It may not be in ways that are obviously miraculous, but they can certainly be equal to a miraculous happening for you. Don’t miss the “simple miracles” that happen every day!

*Holy Spirit, guide our hearts to see where the Father continues to care for us, His creation, so that we may recognize the remarkable gifts that are His compassion and love. Through the grace of our Savior, Jesus... Amen.*

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*Rev. Matthew Ryan Gonzalez | Trinity, Bronx*

# WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10

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## DAY 27

### The Giving of Life

**READ:** Luke 7:11-17

Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited his people!” And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

**RECEIVE:** Jesus touched the casket. That touch changed everything. To on-lookers who were religious ritualists, it made Jesus impure. To the dead son occupying the casket it restored him to life. To a mother decimated by grief, it restored her hope for the future. To the coffin carriers, it shut them up, in stunned awe. To those in the surrounding areas who heard the narrative, it sent waves of praise to God “through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.”

**RESPOND:** Walking to the pulpit, on his way to deliver the eulogy, President George W Bush (43) gently touched the flag-draped casket of his deceased dad, President George H W Bush (41). This gesture was touching, but was nothing like life-giving power we in the touch of Jesus. Reflect on the ways Jesus touches our lives: like when Jesus’ word “Do not weep, Arise!” enters our ears and hearts; like when Jesus’ presence in, with, and under bread and wine enters our mouths and strengthens our faith in the Holy Meal. When Jesus’ encouragement surrounds us “in, with, and under” the body of Christ, the fellowship, the church, our Christian friends. Now consider ways we can extend that circles “through the whole of [insert your village or neighborhood] and all the surrounding country.”

*O God of grace and glory, your touch of mercy changes everything. Your saving touch opens the everlasting door, leading us from death to life. Because of this hope you have given us, we praise your name and we work to love everyone, especially our neighbors who need your touch, in Jesus, Amen.*

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*Rev. Dr. John Arthur Nunes | President, Concordia College, New York*

# THURSDAY, APRIL 11

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## DAY 28

### The Giving of Peace

**READ:** John 14:25-27

“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

**RECEIVE:** He, the Holy Spirit, (not an it or a thing, but a person of the Trinity)—he, the Holy Spirit “will teach us all things.” In his Commentary on this passage, Martin Luther suggests that part of the on-going work of the Holy Spirit is “to emphasize” the Word of God in ways that “make it clearer from day to day, so that we will know Jesus increasingly better” (LW 24: 175). The Holy Spirit guides us in ways that enlighten us, opening our eyes to God’s plan for all people, liberating us from sin and death. The truth of God is unchangingly transcendent, but our apprehension and understanding of that truth grows during our faith-journey. We come to realize the new things that God is doing in our world; but only to the extent that we remain connected, not to the world, but to the vine, Jesus. And we remain connected to Jesus Christ only to the extent that we do not block the work of Spirit who “will teach us all things.”

**RESPOND:** More from Martin Luther: “We can boldly rely on this: we who have Christ are holy before God and have the Holy Spirit with us in opposition to any self-styled holiness” (LW 24:177). How might we define “self-styled holiness” in North American churches in 2019? Consider asking a friend who’s outside of the faith, “How do forms of ‘self-styled holiness’ keep you from connecting with a church? What aspects of Christianity might youth and young adults consider inauthentic faith? Should we ask them what it would take for them to give the church a(another) chance? Consider the ways in which the Holy Spirit has changed your thinking about what God’s Word says and what’s more in the category of “tradition”?”

*Holy Spirit, speak to our spirits and strengthen us. We desire to hear you and to believe the promises that come from Jesus. Despite all the challenges that we face, we need not let our hearts be troubled nor should we be afraid. We are children of a loving God who leads us through the Lenten seasons of this life into life forever with Jesus. Amen.*

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*Rev. Dr. John Arthur Nunes | President, Concordia College, New York*

# FRIDAY, APRIL 12

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## DAY 29

### The Giving of Hope

**READ:** John 14:1-6

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.”

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

**RECEIVE:** Hope is a view of the future, based on the past, that affects our present. Having washed His disciples feet, predicted His betrayal, given the new commandment and foretold Peter’s denial, our Lord who was preparing for His suffering and death on the cross and His resurrection for us offers words of hope as He Himself is the Way, the Truth, and the Life who brings us to our Father. Freeing us from the anxiety stemmed from our own failures and doubts, Jesus direct us to a future where we shall always be with Him with complete access to our gracious Heavenly Father.

**RESPOND:** It easier said than done to believe in God. But thanks be to God it is not by our own reason or strength that we believe in Christ since the Holy Spirit calls us to believe. Do you let your past prevent you from seeing Jesus as the Way? Does your present blind you to Jesus the Truth? Does your view of the future prevent you from experiencing Jesus the Life? Our hope in Christ can calm troubled hearts. That hope is a gift we can receive and share.

*Heavenly Father, we thank you for Your Son Jesus, who gives us hope to meet the days ahead without troubled hearts. Direct us always to Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life, so that we may share this hope with others. Amen.*

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*Deaconess Raquel A. Rojas | Redeemer, Bronx*

# SATURDAY, APRIL 13

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## DAY 30

### The Giving of the Holy Spirit

**READ:** John 20:19-23

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.”

**RECEIVE:** Having died on the cross and having risen from the dead to free us from fear and death, Jesus appears to His disciples on the evening of His resurrection through the locked doors of their fear. When He comes, He brings them the Holy Spirit so that not only they may receive the forgiveness of sins but that they may share that forgiveness with other people. The nail-pierced hands and feet of the crucified and risen Christ show us the forgiveness He has purchased for us freely on the cross. His Holy Spirit, given through the Word and Sacraments, allows that forgiveness to be both received and shared by us each and every day.

**RESPOND:** We often reject the Holy Spirit that is given to us. When we do, we forfeit forgiveness that God has for us and we hijack the forgiveness God has for others intended to be given through us. Will we avail ourselves to our Lord’s Word and Sacraments so that the Holy Spirit’s gift of forgiveness can be both received and shared by us? Would not that make for a truly “Holy Week” and a truly “Happy Easter?”

*Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for sending us Your Spirit. Let the forgiveness of sin that He brings us transform our hearts and motivate us to bring forgiveness to those around us so that peace may be experienced by all. Amen*

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Deaconess Raquel A. Rojas | Redeemer, Bronx

# Week Six

*The Mercy of His Death*

**SUNDAY, APRIL 14**

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**PALM SUNDAY/ PASSION SUNDAY**

**The Passion**

**TODAY'S GOSPEL READING: LUKE 22:1 – 23:56**

*Please use your Bible for today's reading.*

# MONDAY, APRIL 15

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## DAY 31

### Mercy for His Sheep

**READ:** John 10:11-18

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

**RECEIVE:** There is so much in this passage to unpack! First off, we are assured that Jesus knows each of us, intimately. He just doesn't know my name or that I work there or attend church here. No, he knows that I prefer the back row, even though I am not afraid of the spotlight. He knows that when I watch a movie, I'm looking for the next one I get to watch with this excellent character actor whose name I don't remember. He knows that I cried the other night. He also knows why, even if I'm not so sure.

Next, Jesus promises that we have the same relationship with him, as he has with his Father. Wow! That pretty awesome! Intimate – honest-real – deep- constant.

Then he makes sure we know that we are not the only ones he cares for in such a way. Your friends, family, co-workers, that stranger you met three years ago and you still wonder ‘whatever happened to him’ or that person you can't avoid who thinks totally the opposite of you on everything . . . these are the people God desires to claim as his own. In fact, he says, “I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice.”

And finally, he offers an answer to the question that some might be asking, “Can I believe him? Can this be true?” Well, here is someone whose authority is absolute! He controls life and death itself. Christ's ultimate show of mercy to us all is to lay down his life for his sheep.

**RESPOND:** God taught me long ago that people are more important than anything else. He is sharing here how important people are to him. As forgiven children of God, how can we help others understand the importance of their place in God's family?

Here are simply prayers I say throughout my day. When a student comes to ask a question (especially one whose first language is not English) I say, “Lord, help me understand what she is saying so I can respond appropriately.” Or, when he (you know the one) comes knocking on my door-again-I pray, “Lord, give me the strength to love him the way he needs to be loved.” What is the Lord laying in front of you, so you can help others feel the love of Christ? How can you be available for the people you encounter every day?

*Lord, you know me inside and out, and you still love me! Give me the desire to know others, so that I may learn to love them and they may learn to know you. Amen.*

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Ms. Katherine Witto | Martin Luther High School, Queens

# TUESDAY, APRIL 16

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## DAY 32

### Mercy for His Mother

**READ:** John 19:26-27

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

**RECEIVE:** Mary was no stranger to loneliness. In whom could she confide after the angel told her she would be the mother of the Messiah? What words could she use to explain to her friends and family the strange events surrounding her son’s birth and early life? How heavy was her heart when Jesus left to begin his ministry?

But there is also the disciple whom Jesus loved. He had a front row seat to most of Jesus’ miracles, parables and conversations. The last three years had been the most exhilarating experience he had ever known. And now, it was coming to an abrupt end. What would he do now? Where would he turn to pick up the pieces and start over?

Jesus, even as he was preparing to give his life for the whole world, took time to share this intimate moment with his mother and his friend. He always sees the individual through the sea of the many.

Neither of you will be alone when I am gone. Each of you will remind the other of me: what I’ve said and done. You will be comforted and you will be lonely no longer.

One of the beautiful things about this scene is that neither questioned or suggested a better option. They simply obeyed, a true sign of their understanding of who Jesus is and how he can change their lives.

**RESPOND:** Jesus is still at work, helping us to reach the individuals who need to know how he can change their lives.

Have you thought lately, “Maybe I should call Joan,” but haven’t done it yet? I would encourage you to call her. Maybe you have thought, “I bet Dan would appreciate an invitation to the game!” Then, invited him!

Are you lonely? Have you ignored invitations, concluding “That won’t help” or “They wouldn’t understand”? Even if that invitation is simply a nagging feeling that “I should probably get back to church one of these days”, trust that the Lord has not left you alone.

*Lord, you promise that one day there will be no tears, but now there is loneliness. That you for coming to us through your Word and Sacraments so we are not alone. Help us to know your presence in our lives and to bring that joy and comfort to those who need it most. Amen.*

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Ms. Katherine Witto | Martin Luther High School, Queens

# WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17

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## DAY 33

### Mercy to a Thief

**READ:** Luke 23:39-43

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

**RECEIVE:** As God’s divine drama reaches its darkest hours, Jesus hangs on a cross next to two deserving thieves. God’s love and mercy spans the history of the disobedience of man from the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden to a different tree, the man-made tree of the Cross. Darkness and desperation has reached a pinnacle. An outcast, shunned, tried and sentenced thief desperately calls on Jesus to do something for him. His fellow thief rebukes him essentially saying, “we are getting what we deserve! That’s not the case for Jesus.”

In that statement, the thief has acknowledged his own brokenness and knows what he deserves. He makes a small request of the unjustly suffering servant-king next to him. He asks for a crumb of remembrance. Simply, “when you are in your kingdom, please remember me.”

Jesus response resounds with the consistency of grace that God has displayed from the beginning of humanity, “today you will be with me in paradise.” The darkness of evil and death will not derail God’s love for the world in Jesus Christ. In the face of the most seemingly powerful force on earth, death, Jesus points to hope, joy and peace with Him for eternity as God’s kingdom reigns and will have no end. This good news is for all of humanity, even those tried and sentenced to die!

**RESPOND:** Perhaps the darkness is such in our lives that we desperately call out “Jesus, do something for me.” Or we find ourselves asking “God, how can you still love me?” or maybe a little bit of both. Regardless of our own misgivings the mercy of God abounds and Jesus promises us in Water and Word, in Bread and Wine “today you will be with me in paradise!” Paradise of being forgiven of our sins and living in the promising presence of God now and forevermore, not because of our strength and power, but because of God’s incredible love for the world revealed in Jesus Christ.

A way to respond out of our great need for mercy, time and again, is by boldly, yet simply praying, “Jesus, remember me in your kingdom!”

*Lord, God, Your mercy is great and Your love for humanity has been obvious since our beginnings. We praise you for revealing your love to us in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Open our hearts and minds that we may recognize our deep need for your grace and in receiving we may boldly respond to your love with merciful acts toward you, the world and each other. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.*

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Rev. Justin K. Vetrano | The Life, Old Westbury

# MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 18

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## DAY 34

### Mercy in the Lord's Supper

**READ:** Luke 22:14-21

And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table."

**RECEIVE:** Knowing that He is going to be arrested, tormented and crucified, Jesus gathers with His disciples at the ritual of the Passover to remember the promise God made to the Hebrew people in setting them free from slavery in Egypt. Jesus fulfills God's promise to all of humanity with a new sacrificial covenant. Nothing else will ever need to die as a sacrifice to God, for God will make our broken relationship right with him, once and for all in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The disciples at the time, most likely couldn't grasp what Jesus was talking about, however they simply did as Jesus told them to do, "Take and eat, this is my body. Take and drink, this is my blood." The disciples must have been perplexed wondering what it is that Jesus is doing and why is He saying what He is saying? With all their wonder, faith drew them to do as Jesus asked, they ate and in eating they received what God promised; forgiveness, life and salvation.

**RESPOND:** We too have so many questions for God? Especially in times of grief, despair, shame, sorrow or suffering we ask "where are you, God?" We hear responses like, "God is everywhere" or "Jesus is always with you," yet, just like the disciples, we struggle with uncertainties and often we cry out to God, "please help my unbelief."

Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus, that faith does not depend on our feelings, successes or even our strong beliefs. Faith is God's gift of His presence in our lives revealed to us through the power of the Holy Spirit. So much of our relationship with God is shrouded in divine mysteries. We live by faith trusting that we have been made God's children through the water of our baptism and Christ invites us to receive all God has to offer. Jesus says to us "take and eat, take and drink" for in the bread and wine, when combined with the promise-filled Word of God we are truly receiving the very body and blood of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. In all of our uncertainties in life we can hold onto the promise of God that tells us that in water and word and bread and wine, this is where Jesus is found, granting us forgiveness of our sins, life and salvation!

We may not fully understand or comprehend it all, however, through faith, we believe that we receive God's mercy in the communion meal. Why do we believe this? Simply stated, because Jesus told us so.

As we enter the holiest of days of the church year, let us humbly remember all that Christ has done

for us and may we come to the table with true joy in our hearts, that reminds us that “nothing in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Take and eat for “this is Christ’s body and blood given for you!” Amen!

*Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, that I may come to You and receive the gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation that You grant to me in receiving of Christ’s body and blood in the communion meal. I praise and thank You for giving me that which I do not deserve and pray that you would use this Holy Meal to grow up in me works of hope, peace, joy and love so that the world may see them and bring glory to Your Holy name.*

Amen.

Rev. Justin K. Vetrano | *The Life, Old Westbury*

# GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 19

## DAY 35

### Mercy for Us All

**READ:** Mark 15:33-39

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. 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?”

And some of the bystanders hearing it said, “Behold, he is calling Elijah.” And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.” And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. 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!”

**RECEIVE:** How often do we feel forsaken by God? Our life gets hard and we think, “Oh, God doesn’t care about me.” Maybe you’ve been praying about the same thing for years and years and years, and it seems like God has not answered it at all. Yet another option - perhaps you feel as though you’ve forsaken Him, and if you were to walk into a church the whole building would fall down in shock as God judged you harshly.

The cross demonstrates that the reality is in fact the exact opposite! God cares so much for you that he abandoned His own Son to die the most horrible, painful death. That same thing you’ve been praying about for years, God has heard and continues to hear, because of the loud cry Jesus uttered in your place. The church building won’t fall down, because the temple curtain has already fallen, showing that you have unrestricted access to His mercy and love.

Christ was forsaken so that you will never be forsaken. His blood has paid your price and removed the sin that separates you from your loving, heavenly Father. Call out to Him, and in mercy He will hear you, as He has promised.

**RESPOND:** Is there an area of your life that you feel God has abandoned you? What is it that causes you to feel this way? How will you hold on to His promise to “never leave you or forsake you?” (Hebrews 13:5) How can we communicate this same promise to our friends and family who feel abandoned?

*Gracious Father, I thank you for your Son Jesus, whom you abandoned to the Cross so that You would never have to abandon me. Give me faith to receive your promises and trust in Jesus' power and mercy in my life. In His name I pray, Amen.*

DCE Ryan Howard | St. James, Long Island

# HOLY SATURDAY, APRIL 20

## DAY 36

### Mercy Fulfilled

**READ:** John 19:30

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

**RECEIVE:** This is it. This is what everything in the Bible has been leading up to.

Jesus has been here since before the beginning. He was with the Father and the Holy Spirit at the Creation of the world. He was there when Adam and Eve fell into sin. He was around for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was with the people of Israel through their redemption from slavery, and through their disobedience, exile to Babylon, and restoration back to their home.

Then He was here in the flesh. The tiny baby born on Christmas Day grew up leading a sinless life in a world of sinners. He spread the news that the Kingdom of God was at hand. He called his disciples, he healed the sick, he preached Good News to those who needed it. It was all leading up to this exact moment.

It is finished. Mercy has been fulfilled. The plan of salvation has been realized. The price has been paid for all of our sins - and the gates of heaven opened to us by faith.

And the best part? The story's not over. Mercy will live again - and we will all get to enjoy it for eternity.

**RESPOND:** What are you waiting for?? Salvation is right in front of you - Jesus gave His life for your sins right there on the cross. It's happened, it's done! You don't have to do anything, meet any requirement, or wait for anything! By faith in His blood, you are saved!!

Do you know anyone who is waiting for salvation? Can you think of anyone who needs to hear that the plan has been fulfilled? Is there anyone in your life that doesn't realize that Jesus has finished what He set out to do, and that they don't have to do anything to earn it?

How will you tell them?

*Righteous Father, thank you for saving me through Jesus' blood. Thank you for forgiving all of*

*my sins, and for granting me your righteousness through your mercy and love. Thank you that Jesus accomplished everything that was needed, and for granting me the faith to believe in Him. Your plan of salvation is perfect! In Jesus' name I praise you, Amen!*

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*DCE Ryan Howard | St. James, Long Island*

# Week Seven

## *The Mercy of His Resurrection*

### He Has Risen!

#### **TODAY'S GOSPEL READING: LUKE 24:1-12**

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel.

And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise."

And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

## MONDAY, APRIL 22

### DAY 37

### Mercy for Mary

#### **READ:** John 20:11-18

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"

Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

**RECEIVE:** Loss, grief, despair. These were some of Mary’s emotions as she stood weeping outside the empty tomb. Who cannot identify with those overwhelming feelings? Add to these emotions the confusion about the missing body, and you can understand Mary’s brokenness. Yet, the restorative, life-giving love of Jesus breaks through. He calls Mary by name in a voice that she recognizes, and that changes everything. Now she is empowered to bear witness to what she has seen and heard. “I have seen the Lord!” is her resurrection proclamation. Do you hear Jesus calling you by name? As John records in the 10th chapter of his Gospel, Jesus is our good Shepherd, who knows each of His sheep by name. We experience His mercy anew each day as He calls us to come and follow Him, declaring the joy of His resurrection.

**RESPOND:** Like Mary, we have seen Jesus with eyes of faith. We have been baptized into His name and are now identified as His. Like Mary, we also are called to share the Good News that Jesus lives for us now and through eternity. Blessed are those whose names are written in the Book of Life. Consider how you can reach those who do not recognize our Savior’s voice or realize that He lives for them as well. Pray that God would lead you to be a witness to the transforming power of Jesus’ name which is above all other names.

*Dear risen Lord and Savior, We are grateful that you have called us by name, making us Your sons and Your daughters. Help us to readily share the message of Your mercy and grace with others, so that they*

*too may recognize Your voice and respond to Your call. In the precious name of Jesus, who died that we might live and lives that we might never die. Amen.*

*Mr. Tom Roemke | Our Savior, Colonie*

## TUESDAY, APRIL 23

### DAY 38

### Mercy for Disciples

**READ:** Luke 24:36-49

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them. Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened

their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

**RECEIVE:** “Peace to you!” What fitting words for those frightened disciples. “Peace to you!” How appropriate to any who are paralyzed with fear and drowning in despair. In His mercy, Jesus brings peace to troubled souls. He does not condemn His disciples for their fears and doubts, but provides them with tangible evidence of His resurrection, and then explains how the living Word is revealed in the written Word. Calming them with the peace of His presence, Jesus challenges them to go and share that peace with others after they have received the power from on high. As promised, the Holy Spirit, our Counselor, continues to fill Christ’s followers with His eternal peace.

**RESPOND:** Several times in our worship services we hear these words: “Peace be with you.” That’s the assurance that our sins are forgiven in the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace and our risen Savior. What the world needs now is peace – a peace that passes human understanding and a peace that flows from the presence of Jesus. May we be ambassadors of that peace as empowered by the Holy Spirit.

*Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for driving away fear and filling me with the peace of Your presence. May I faithfully point others to the peace that You bring in the midst of doubts and despair. In the precious name of Jesus. Amen.*

*Mr. Tom Roemke | Our Savior, Colonie*

## WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24

### DAY 39

### Mercy for Thomas

**READ:** John 20:24-29

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

**RECEIVE:** Jesus didn’t have to show Himself to Thomas, but He refused to leave Thomas in His stubborn unbelief. He showed him mercy by appearing to him and giving him what he needed. He wanted Thomas to believe!

Do you find yourself in a similar place? Do you struggle to believe that it's all true? Is it hard for you to believe that God could have mercy on you when what you see in your life suggests the opposite?

Even in your most stubborn refusal to believe things that are not seen, Jesus has mercy for you too. He will never leave you in your stubbornness, for He promises that “a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench” (Isaiah 42:3). The same crucified and risen Jesus who appeared to Thomas comes to you in His Word and lovingly speaks peace and forgiveness. He comes to you in His Body and Blood in the bread and wine, strengthening you in the one true faith—faith in Him alone for salvation. Jesus gives you what you need. He even gives you the gift of the Holy Spirit who creates and sustains faith in you. He will carry you from unbelief to faith, and, one day, from faith to sight. God's mercy for you abounds. You truly are blessed!

**RESPOND:** Do you know someone else who is struggling to believe? Are you frustrated at their stubbornness? Be patient with them. Jesus waited a week—a whole week!—to show Himself to Thomas. Continue to speak words of peace and forgiveness to them. From one often-stubborn person to the next, tell them of the patient, compassionate, and merciful God who refuses to stop showing us mercy. It will be that mercy, God's mercy in Jesus, that will break down their stubbornness, as is the case for us too.

*“Too often, Lord Jesus, I am slow to believe your Word and promises. My faith wavers and I instead live by what I see. Have mercy on me. Forgive me. Come to me in my stubbornness and strengthen my faith once again. I believe; help my unbelief. In Your name, Amen.”*

Rev. Jake Allstaedt | St. John's, Williston Park

## THURSDAY, APRIL 25

### DAY 40

#### Do You Believe This?

**READ:** John 11:25-26

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

**RECEIVE:** Our time spent with Jesus and His mercy during these 40 days of Lent all come down to these two words: for you. Jesus has mercy for you. Everything that He did here on earth—His birth, life, suffering, death, and resurrection—was all for you. He came to forgive your sins and defeat your death. John wrote down the things that Jesus said and did “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

Through baptism, you are intimately, mysteriously, and eternally connected to the One who is the Resurrection and the Life. What happened to Jesus has and will happen to you. You have been crucified with Jesus (Galatians 2:20). His suffering was your suffering. His pain was your pain. His death to sin was your death to sin. Baptized believer, you have already died! You have nothing to fear. Jesus, who was raised from the dead, will also raise you.

He has already accomplished your entire salvation for you. “It is finished,” He declared from the cross. There's nothing left for you to do but to believe it. Seriously, that's it. There's nothing else you can

do. Salvation is already yours, your sins are already forgiven, you have already died, and eternal life is your inheritance. Jesus is really that good. His mercy for you is really that good. Believe it.

**RESPOND:** Let's say you want to watch your favorite baseball team play their biggest rival, but you have another obligation. What do you do? You record the game so you can watch it later. On your way home to watch the game after finishing your obligation, you turn on the radio and accidentally hear the final score. Good news! Your team wins in a comeback story for the books.

Knowing the end of the game completely changes how you would watch the game, doesn't it? Something that you see can change what you know to be true.

Jesus has told us the "end of the game." Jesus has had mercy on you, and you will live. His resurrection is to you a sure pledge of eternal life. What does that blessed assurance mean for you today and every day?

*"O fill us, Lord, with dauntless love. Set heart and will on things above that we conquer through your triumph. Grant grace sufficient for life's day that by our lives we truly say: "Christ has triumphed! He is living" (LSB 465:3)! In Jesus' name. Amen."*

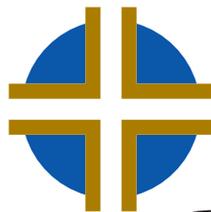
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Rev. Jake Allstaedt | St. John's, Williston Park

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