

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT
MARCH 14, 2021

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



PRELUDE Drawn to the Cross, Which Thou Hast Blessed Setting: Anne Krentz Organ

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN #560 Drawn to the Cross, Which Thou Hast Blessed

- 1 Drawn to the cross, which Thou hast blessed
With healing gifts for souls distressed,
To find in Thee my life, my rest,
Christ crucified, I come.
- 2 Thou knowest all my griefs and fears,
Thy grace abused, my misspent years;
Yet now to Thee with contrite tears,
Christ crucified, I come.
- 3 Wash me and take away each stain;
Let nothing of my sin remain.
For cleansing, though it be through pain,
Christ crucified, I come.
- 4 And then for work to do for Thee,
Which shall so sweet a service be
That angels well might envy me,
Christ crucified, I come.

INVOCATION

In the name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful,
Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Jesus said: If any man would come after me,
Let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Christ was wounded for our transgressions;
He was bruised for our iniquities.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. Therefore, let us be reconciled to God and to one another.

(silence for reflection and self-examination)

Gracious God,

have mercy on us. In your compassion forgive us our sins, known and unknown, things done and left undone. Uphold us by your Spirit so that we may live and serve you in newness of life, to the honor and glory of your holy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life.

Amen.

KYRIE

O God, Father in heaven, have mercy upon us.

**Your heart, O God, is grieved we know
By every evil, every woe;
Upon your cross-forsaken Son
Our death is laid, and peace is won.**

O Son of God, Redeemer of the world, have mercy upon us.

**Your arms extend, O Christ, to save
From sting of death and grasp of grave;
Your scars before the Father move
His heart to mercy at such love.**

O God, Holy Spirit, have mercy upon us.

**O lavish giver, come to aid
The feeble child your grace has made.
Now make us grow and help us pray;
Bring joy and comfort; come to stay.**

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray. Almighty God, our heavenly Father,

Your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



FIRST LESSON Numbers 21:4-9

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned,

for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 107:1-9

Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever!
Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
whom he has redeemed from trouble
and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.

Some wandered in desert wastes,
finding no way to a city to dwell in;
hungry and thirsty,
their soul fainted within them.
Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.
He led them by a straight way
till they reached a city to dwell in.
Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wondrous works to the children of men!
For he satisfies the longing soul,
and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

SECOND LESSON Ephesians 2:1-10

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

GOSPEL VERSE #198 from One and All Rejoice O Come, Let Us Fix Our Eyes on Jesus

O come, let us fix our eyes on Je - sus, the
found-er and per - fect - er of our faith, who
for the joy that was set be - fore Him en - dured the
cross, de - spis - ing the shame, and is seat - ed at the
right hand of the throne of God.

GOSPEL John 3:14-21

The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the 3rd chapter.

Glory to You, O Lord.

[Jesus said:] "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ

SERMON

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ:

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up."

Jesus' words here refer to the event from Israel's past described in today's Old Testament reading. This was the time when God had become tired of his people's complaining and decided to send poisonous snakes among them. God's actions, you recall, achieved their desired effect. The people soon repented of their sin and asked God to have mercy.

To show his mercy, God then provided for the healing of those who got bit. He did this by having Moses make a bronze serpent and lift it up on a pole. Thereafter, anyone who got bit by a snake could look at that bronze serpent and live.

Jesus brings up this occasion from the past in order to help explain his own ministry. He too, like the serpent, would be lifted up in the sight of the people. And this lifting up would also be an act of mercy on the part of God, for anyone who looked to Jesus in faith would live.

As we find out later, the lifting up of Jesus took place when he was nailed to a cross and publicly executed. On that cross he would hang – seemingly in shame, but actually in glory – for all the world to see.

The life that he would give is an eternal life – one beyond the grave, as shown by his own resurrection. Jesus makes this gift of eternal life clear already in today's reading.

One of the things we notice about the particular words of Jesus in this text is that he says he "must" be lifted up. He must. His death had to happen.

We know that these words indicate the purpose behind Jesus' death. His death would serve the purpose of paying the price for our sin. If Jesus did not die in this way, there could be no atonement.

Jesus, by the way, spoke about this lifting up two other times in his ministry. He mentioned it in both John 8 (v. 28) and in John 12 (v. 33). In that last mention, John adds that Jesus said this "to show by what kind of death he was going to die."

These words of Jesus offer an essential understanding of his ministry. They point to his service to the world on the cross.

However, there is also a part of us that hears these words of Jesus, especially that word "must," and understands it differently. We hear these words as a direction instead. We hear Jesus telling us that we must lift up his cross.

Perhaps nowhere is this impulse of ours actualized more than in the singing of that great hymn Lift High the Cross. We love this hymn – and not just because of its noble melody (although that certainly does help) – and not just because of its emotional use at funerals and during Holy Week – but also because it enlists us in God's service. We're given a task in this hymn – to lift high the cross. We feel good about being useful, and about being on God's team.

Our hymnal, like many others, places this hymn in the category of a mission hymn. The text of the hymn certainly justifies this choice. One stanza is all about baptism. Another includes reference to people of every race and language. Another echoes Jesus' promise: "when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself." In the original version of the hymn there are eleven verses – others of which also point to mission themes. Singing this hymn makes us think of texts such as Hebrews 13:15 – "Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name."

To lead us in our mission task, the hymn also employs the Biblical language of battle. Christ is our Captain. The baptismal stanza calls us newborn soldiers. The sign of his cross is triumphant. His hosts combine in conquering ranks.

This military language is certainly appropriate when calling us to such a critical task. We recall how St. Paul calls us to fight the good fight of faith and put on the full armor of God. We remember that the Book of Revelation calls us to participate in the great battle between good and evil, and that Jesus himself sometimes mentions the sword.

But of course, such language needs to be understood properly. Ours is a spiritual battle not an earthly one. We battle for souls, not soil. And we don't attempt to control others but fight to control ourselves.

As followers of Christ, we are, certainly, to lift high the cross. But we should also understand how that action has sometimes been abused. The great Emperor Constantine may have indeed seen that vision of the cross before his battle and rightfully understood it as a sign to embrace the Christian faith. But ever since, others have used the cross as an excuse to seek personal triumph at the expense of others. We must therefore understand the complexity of the cross's use by Christians such as the Crusaders and all those who fought under the symbol of the Iron Cross. We must understand how the cross has lent credence to forces of imperialism and overly ambitious nationalism.

Writing about this great hymn in a sermon on this text, contemporary author Andreas Wagner says: "I still love this hymn and I love to sing it, don't get me wrong. But I always wonder what the original cross bearer might think about the victorious, militant language it uses. The one who carried THE CROSS and with it the weight of all human sin, the one who suffered under the violent hands of soldiers and was tortured and crucified... what does he make of this 19th century hymn from the height of the proud British Empire? Would he like it? Would he endorse it? Or would he throw it out of God's Temple just like what he did to the money exchangers in the gospel passage we heard last week? I love this hymn, and I must confess, I am a little bit afraid of Jesus' answer. I think, at the very least we need to better understand what kind of Christian soldiers he would want us to be."

Yes, of course. We need to be the right kind of soldiers.

A little over two months ago, among the hundreds of so-called patriots who rioted inside and outside the United States Capitol were some who carried a cross or wore it on their clothing. Those were the wrong kind of soldiers of the cross. Theirs was a misplaced understanding of the cross's meaning and God's desires.

What other kinds of abuses of the cross might there be among us who claim to be Christians?

When we lift high the cross, we must lift it up with the right intentions and message. Our lifting up must be done with a right understanding of the theology of the cross.

The theology of the cross lifts up the sacrifice of Jesus for the sake of the world. As such, it teaches that God will accomplish things in ways that appear to be weak. And it teaches that humble acts of mercy are greater than boastful claims of victory. The theology of the cross teaches that the last shall be first and the first last. The theology of the cross teaches that life will come from death, where there is faith.

We do not lift up the cross as a talisman. We do not lift up the cross as a symbol of our power. We lift it up as a sign of God's mercy. We lift it up as a source of healing. As Jesus said in John 6 (v. 40): "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

We lift up the cross because it reminds us that "God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ." We lift it up because "by grace we have been saved through faith. And this is not our own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

We lift up the cross because there Christ paid for the sins of the world. As such, we lift up the cross as a sign of the reconciliation between God and man (move hand up to down), and one man with another (move hand side to side – completing the sign of the cross).

We lift it high to keep ourselves humble. We lift up Jesus and trust him to rule the world through his kingdom of love and grace, forgiveness and mercy.

Jesus speaks to this worldly focus of his when he says: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

God's salvation comes as people look to him in repentance and faith. God will reward such faith... in his good time. Certainly, in the life to come.

These are the messages about the cross that should be carried high in procession as we gather in the church. And these are the messages that should lead us out as we go forth into the world as Christ's witnesses. These are messages that the Lord invites us to rally behind, becoming an army of servants for the sake of the world.

Our world sorely needs those who are committed to serving. And it sorely needs those who will do so with faith. It needs those who will both fight injustice and promote righteousness. And it needs those who will shine Christ's light on our troubles.

As Jesus reminds us, people tend to love the darkness rather than the light. That is because they fear the light and the exposure it brings. But where the forgiveness of God is known and proclaimed, there the light will be welcomed and allowed to do the great work that it will always do.

Jesus was lifted up on the cross to bring healing to our world. Remembering this, let us lift up his cross in ways that reflect his healing mission.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY #837 Lift High the Cross

Refrain

**Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim
Till all the world adore His sacred name.**

- 1 Come, Christians, follow where our Captain trod,
Our king victorious, Christ, the Son of God. *Refrain***
- 2 Led on their way by this triumphant sign,
The hosts of God in conqu'ring ranks combine. *Refrain***
- 3 All newborn soldiers of the Crucified
Bear on their brows the seal of Him who died. *Refrain***
- 4 O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree,
As Thou hast promised, draw us all to Thee. *Refrain***
- 5 Let ev'ry race and ev'ry language tell
Of Him who saves our lives from death and hell. *Refrain***
- 6 So shall our song of triumph ever be:
Praise to the Crucified for victory! *Refrain***

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

OFFERING Lift High the Cross Setting: Paul D. Weber

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

In peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That God would draw us into His light, exposing where we have thought, spoken and acted against Him and our neighbor; and that in repentance we might turn to His Son for forgiveness and new life, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the Church, that the God who loved the world by giving His only Son would bless her and the work of those called to preach and teach the Gospel; and that His Spirit would create and sustain faith in all who hear, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For us and all Christians, that God, who made us alive in Christ, would cause His Spirit to be at work within us, that we would walk in the good works He has prepared for us to do, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For this good land and all who lead in her, especially Joseph, our President and Ralph, our Governor, that God would lead us to pray for and uphold them as befits the people of God, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all who suffer in body, mind or soul [*especially _____*]; that they would be hid in the shelter of Christ; and that God would uphold them in His peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all who commune, that our Lord would nourish our hungry souls from His heavenly bounty, and that we would rise up renewed and restored for service in among God's people and in the world, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

We rejoice in the ministry of God's holy angels, and look forward to that day when we shall feast with them and all the saints, in His glorious kingdom come. All these things, and whatever else You know that we need, grant us, Father, for the sake of Him who died and rose again and now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

BENEDICTION

The Lord bless us and keep us.

The Lord make His face shine on us
and be gracious to us.

The Lord look upon us with favor and ✠ give us peace.

SENDING HYMN #555 sts. 1–2, 5–6, 8–10 Salvation unto Us Has Come

- | | |
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| <p>1 Salvation unto us has come
By God's free grace and favor;
Good works cannot avert our doom,
They help and save us never.
Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone,
Who did for all the world atone;
He is our one Redeemer.</p> <p>2 What God did in His Law demand
And none to Him could render
Caused wrath and woe on ev'ry hand
For man, the vile offender.
Our flesh has not those pure desires
The spirit of the Law requires,
And lost is our condition.</p> <p>5 Yet as the Law must be fulfilled
Or we must die despairing,
Christ came and has God's anger stilled,
Our human nature sharing.
He has for us the Law obeyed
And thus the Father's vengeance stayed
Which over us impended.</p> | <p>6 Since Christ has full atonement made
And brought to us salvation,
Each Christian therefore may be glad
And build on this foundation.
Your grace alone, dear Lord, I plead,
Your death is now my life indeed,
For You have paid my ransom.</p> <p>8 The Law reveals the guilt of sin
And makes us conscience-stricken;
But then the Gospel enters in
The sinful soul to quicken.
Come to the cross, trust Christ, and live;
The Law no peace can ever give,
No comfort and no blessing.</p> <p>9 Faith clings to Jesus' cross alone
And rests in Him unceasing;
And by its fruits true faith is known,
With love and hope increasing.
For faith alone can justify;
Works serve our neighbor and supply
The proof that faith is living.</p> <p>10 All blessing, honor, thanks, and praise
To Father, Son, and Spirit,
The God who saved us by His grace;
All glory to His merit.
O triune God in heav'n above,
You have revealed Your saving love;
Your blessed name we hallow.</p> |
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ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE Salvation unto Us Has Come Setting: Dennis Zimmer

Acknowledgments

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