THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT MARCH 10, 2024

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

PRELUDE

The Gospel Shows the Father's Grace Setting: Paul Manz

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN (Stand)

The Gospel Shows the Father's Grace

- The Gospel shows the Father's grace, Who sent His Son to save our race, Proclaims how Jesus lived and died That we might thus be justified.
- 2 It sets the Lamb before our eyes, Who made the_atoning sacrifice, And calls the souls with guilt oppressed To come and find eternal rest.
- 3 It brings the Savior's righteousness To robe our souls in royal dress; From all our guilt it brings release And gives the troubled conscience peace.
- 4 It is the pow'r of God to save From sin and Satan and the grave; It works the faith which firmly clings To all the treasures which it brings.
- 5 It bears to all the tidings glad
 And bids their hearts no more be sad;
 The weary, burdened souls it cheers
 And banishes their guilty fears.
- 6 May we in faith its message learn Nor thanklessly its blessings spurn; May we in faith its truth confess And praise the Lord, our righteousness.

In the name of the Father and of the \(\mathbb{Y} \) Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Beloved in the Lord! Let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins unto God our Father, beseeching Him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness.

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.

(We kneel and reflect on our need before God)

O almighty God, merciful Father,

I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto You all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended You and justly deserved Your temporal and eternal punishment. But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them, and I pray You of Your boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor, sinful being.

Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the \mathbb{H} Son and of the Holy Spirit.

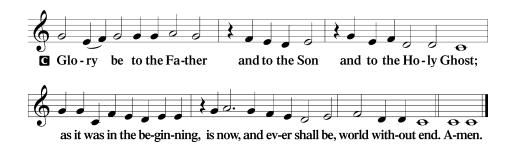
Amen.

INTROIT (Stand)

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

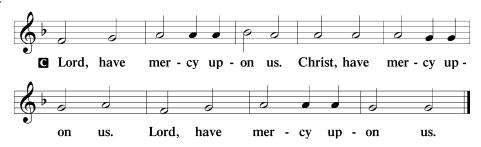
Jesus said: If any man would come `after me, Let him deny himself and take up his cross and `follow me.

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



Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

KYRIE



Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christ, have mercy upon us.
Lord, have mercy upon us.

HYMN OF PRAISE (omitted during Lent)

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.

HHH

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

FIRST LESSON (Be seated)

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.

8:00 PSALM 107:1-9 (Sung Responsively)

10:30 ANTHEM Jubilation Choir My Song Is Love Unknown LSB 430

Setting: Donald Busarow

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.

10:30 CHILDREN'S SERMON

GOSPEL VERSE (Stand)

from One and All Rejoice

O come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated 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 Christian friends:

The Gospel lesson just read records the concluding words of Jesus' conversation with a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Jewish leader who came to Jesus in private in order to ask about the miracles he was performing.

The conversation takes place towards the beginning of Jesus' ministry, so Jesus is careful about what he reveals to Nicodemus. But he does drop a strong hint about his purpose and plans using a story that Nicodemus would have known very well—the story of Moses and the bronze serpent. We read this story as our Old Testament reading today.

The connections between that Old Testament text and the message in our Gospel lesson are very important, and we'll consider them toward the end of the sermon. But first I'd like us to think about the Old Testament reading on its own. As we do so, I'll point out a lesson, two questions and a reminder.

The lesson is that God doesn't like complaining. This seems rather obvious when God sends poisonous snakes to bite the complaining Israelites.

However, the lesson is actually a lot more complex. And that's because there are many other scriptural texts in which God clearly puts up with complaining.

In one of these, God listens to chapters' worth of complaints from Job and never punishes him at all. God eventually quiets Job's complaints by overwhelming him with facts, but he doesn't punish him.

And while some might think that Job is an exceptional case since Job had suffered so much already, other scriptural complaints without these extreme circumstances turn out the same way. Examples of these include the many psalms which contain expressions of obvious complaint. These psalms, some of which are even labelled "complaint psalms," include statements which question God and accuse him of things such as ignoring injustice and not adequately providing.

In these psalms, we see that God does not rebuke the complaints. Rather, the complaints stand in scripture as acceptable outpourings of human emotion.

Yes, in most of these the writer ends up expressing faith in God as a final thought. But the complaints are not taken back.

In examining this lesson further, another important thing to consider is context. Looking at today's reading, we should recall that the Israelites had already complained four previous times on their journey (Exodus 14:10-12, 15:24-25, 16:2-3; Numbers 11:1-3). And we should remember, too, that their journey was being made because God had delivered them from slavery. These considerations definitely play into God's strong reaction.

After each of the previous complaints, God gave the people what they wanted. He listened to their cries and provided for their needs. And yet, after one of the episodes he also sent fire around the edges of their camp to serve as a warning. Here we get the sense that God's patience with complaining might have a limit.

Certainly God knows that complaining is often the result of fear and anxiety. God understands the power these emotions have over us and shows great mercy and patience as we struggle – hearing our complaints and bearing them with broad shoulders.

But God also knows that our complaining can go too far. One way this happens is when our complaints become hurtful or disrespectful.

As the basketball season comes to its conclusion and many fans yearn with great intensity for their team to win, certain game decisions by the referees will upset them. And some of the things the fans then say and chant at such times can be quite vulgar. I'm always glad when a coach, announcer or school official scolds the fans for such behavior. Thankfully this still happens, from time to time.

But even if the complaining isn't expressed in disrespectful ways, it can also be a sin for another reason. Sometimes our complaining is a claim of authority over God. Such complaints are the ones that come when our heart rebels in resentment, greed, and ungratefulness.

Such was the case with Israel's complaint. The text says that the people "spoke against God." This was taking their complaint to a whole new level; since earlier complaints were directed only against Moses.

As God's chosen leader, Moses deserved respect too. But Moses was a fallible human being and may have been making mistakes. God, on the other hand, doesn't make mistakes. Speaking out against him is thus another matter.

In examining the complaints found in scripture, it seems that God is okay with our complaining if we are also respectfully asking him for help. If we do both, God knows that our heart is still with him.

But if our complaints are only a speaking against God, then we are sinning by putting our own selfish desires above those which God knows to be best. These complaints are in fact a sign that we are losing faith.

Complaining seems to be one of those things which progresses in seriousness the more we do it. And if we're not careful, complaining can become our default way of operating. I'm guessing you can think of some people who operate this way.

Perhaps the key to catching ourselves before our complaining becomes sinful is to understand our need for patience. Notice that the text says that the people in the wilderness became "impatient" on the way.

Impatience is one of those sins which people tend to think is respectable – since we know it's good to be eager and a go-getter. But often what we're really doing in such cases is insisting on our own timing and our own way.

Instead, we are called to wait on the Lord. We are to wait with patience, trusting that God knows best.

Another important thing for us to do is to step back and examine the facts. Sometimes while we are waiting, we get spun up in our frustrations and miss what's really happening. Notice the Israelites said: "For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." How could they complain about not having food when they were also complaining about the food they had? This obviously didn't make sense. But that's what happens when we let our frustrations get the best of us.

These lessons about proper and improper complaining to God are important ones. And our text today challenges us to learn them.

But our text also raises some further questions. One is: does God still deal with sin the way he did here? In other words, does God really do extreme things like send snakes to bite us?

As we've seen in the scriptural complaint stories, God endures a number of sins before he acts in this way to punish his people. He is patient. He is understanding. He is slow to anger. Extreme measures of God's judgment are rare.

That being said, we should not think that God never deals with sin in extreme ways either. Sin always has consequences. And sin that is unchecked can lead to greater sin.

God disciplines us in order to call us to obedience. Not that every bad thing which happens to us is a form of discipline. Sometimes bad things just happen because we live in a fallen world.

In thinking about this, I would say that it's actually very difficult, and maybe even impossible, for us to determine how and when God is disciplining us. But we know that he does it. And we know that he does it because he loves us.

The question of what God allows and how he directs the world is a question that is really beyond us and one upon which we shouldn't dwell. So let's move on to a second question this text presents—one that is a little more manageable.

That question is: why does God, in this text, give his help in such an unusual way? Why does he have Moses make a bronze snake to put on a pole? This seems so different from how God normally acts.

Some folks say that the fake snake was a very logical way for God to communicate his help. For having an image of a troublemaker that can be carried around and controlled is a way of showing that the troublemaker is in fact being controlled. People would see the harmless snake up on a pole and be confident that their trouble with snakes was being dealt with.

As logical as this answer is, it fails to account for another great concern of God – one that could be exacerbated by this solution. God had also taken great pains to impress upon his people not to have idols or images which could be seen as a god. Last Sunday we read the text where this was most clearly spelled out—God's explanation of the first commandment where he says: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them" (Exodus 20:4-5).

An image of a snake on a pole seems like just the kind of image God would want his people to avoid. That's because people pray to these images, keep them in their homes for good luck, and honor them in temples. The images become the focus of people's religious life and are, in effect, their god. Images like this have been worshipped for centuries and are still worshipped today.

The God of Israel didn't tell his people to worship the bronze snake. They were simply to look at it. But didn't God know that his people would be tempted to keep that image and make it an object of worship?

According to a later Scripture, that's exactly what happened. Second Kings 18:4 tells us that King Hezekiah—a good king who wanted to reform the religious life of his people—took that object, which Israel had hung on to and even named, and he destroyed it, because people were worshiping it. As the text says, he "broke in pieces the bronze

serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan)."

So again, the question is: why would God help his people in a way that could be so easily misunderstood? The answer to this question, as with other similar questions from the Old Testament, must be that it points ahead to something extremely important in the New Testament. It must be something that would be used later on as a reminder.

Indeed, that is exactly the case with the bronze serpent on a pole. God would use it, years later, to help people understand what he was doing when he sent Jesus, his Son, to walk among us.

The snake on a pole points ahead to Jesus. Just as the snake was lifted up, so also Jesus was lifted up. Just as the snake brought healing, so also Jesus brought healing. God's people first fell into sin through the temptations which came through a snake, and now they are delivered from sin by one who puts himself in the place of a snake.

The associations are strong. The messages are clear. The image is memorable. Every time we hear the story of the bronze snake on a pole, we have a reminder of Jesus' healing.

And we need reminders of Jesus' healing, because we easily become overwhelmed with life's problems and get frustrated to the point of complaining. In this go, go, go world of ours, we have a very hard time patiently waiting on the Lord.

Because of our impatience and complaining, God, as we noted, sometimes needs to discipline us. But God's main course of action is to heal us. Rather than sending snakes, he sends us witnesses to his truth and instruments of his love. He sends us friends – especially those in his church – to bless us and encourage us.

And God's greatest healing comes as he lifts up before our eyes the image of our Savior, Jesus Christ. In Christ's suffering and death on the cross we are reminded that the price of our sin has been paid. In his rising from the dead, we are reminded that suffering and death will eventually be overcome.

Because of Jesus we are reminded that God is merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. We remember that Jesus told us: "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved."

Yes, "just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man was lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." That is God's promise – one that transcends our complaints and heals us in the ways we most need.

May God then help us to remember this promise in our hearts... for all of our days. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY (Stand)

My Faith Looks Up to Thee

- My faith looks up to Thee, Thou Lamb of Calvary, Savior divine. Now hear me while I pray; Take all my guilt away; O let me from this day Be wholly Thine!
- 2 May Thy rich grace impart Strength to my fainting heart; My zeal inspire! As Thou hast died for me, Oh, may my love to Thee Pure, warm, and changeless be, A living fire!
- 3 While life's dark maze I tread
 And griefs around me spread,
 Be Thou my guide;
 Bid darkness turn to day,
 Wipe sorrow's tears away,
 Nor let me ever stray
 From Thee aside.
- When ends life's transient dream, When death's cold, sullen stream Shall o'er me roll, Blest Savior, then, in love, Fear and distrust remove; O bear me safe above, A ransomed soul!

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

Offerings support the church's mission work – both here and through our many partners. Offerings may be placed in the box at the sanctuary entrance or sent to the church through our website or the mail. **Fellowship Cards** help us welcome new people and track participation. Please fill one out and place it in the offering box following the service.

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH (Kneel)

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

O Lord God, draw us into Your light. Expose those times when we, like your people of old, think, speak and act against You, that in repentance we might look to Your Son lifted up on the cross and be saved from your judgment. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of hosts, You gave Your only Son so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. Bless the work of missionaries as they carry this Gospel to the ends

of the earth, that many may hear of Your love in Christ Jesus and be saved through Him. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Almighty God, You have set Joseph our president, and Glenn our governor, as authorities over us, for our good. Bless and sustain them and all ruling authorities with all that they need, that we might be governed wisely and in accord with Your will. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You had Moses lift up the bronze serpent in the wilderness as an act of healing and of foreshadowing Your own Son's lifting up on the cross. Teach us to hear in the Old Testament the promises and pictures of the coming Christ, that we may further know of your gracious plans through time. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, You are our light and our salvation. Hide in Your shelter all those who are in need of help and healing, especially Geraine, Ann, Sophia, Dolly, Norma, Brooks, Trudy, Mary Ann, June, Peter, Wendy, James, Russell, Rich, Tawni, Marvin, Yi, Val, and all whom we name before you at this time... Keep them from falling into faithless fear, heal them according to your mercy, and uphold them with Your peace in Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

O Lord, whose steadfast love endures forever, we lift up our voices to you in thanksgiving. You have redeemed us out of trouble and gathered us here that our souls may not faint within us. Satisfy the longing of our hearts with Your Son's goodness and grace, that we may abide in Your eternal peace. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

HHH

THE LITURGY OF HOLY COMMUNION

OFFERTORY LSB 192-198

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.

Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free spirit.

Amen.

PREFACE TO HOLY COMMUNION

The Lord be with you.

And with thy spirit.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up unto the Lord.

Let us give thanks unto the Lord, our God.

It is meet and right so to do.

It is truly good right and salutary...evermore praising You and saying:

SANCTUS

Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth; heav'n and earth are full of Thy glory. Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He, blessed is He, blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna, hosanna in the highest.

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.

THE WORDS OF OUR LORD

Amen.

PAX DOMINI

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

Amen.

- O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us.
- O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us.
- O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, grant us Thy peace. Amen.

DISTRIBUTION (Be seated)

Those wishing to commune at the foot of the steps should come forward first. Those wishing to commune at the altar rail should come forward after these, front rows first, from both sides of the aisle. After receiving, all should return to their seats. A common dismissal will be given at the end.

COMMUNION HYMN

Amazing Grace

- 1 Amazing grace—how sweet the sound— That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now am found, Was blind but now I see!
- 2 The Lord has promised good to me, His Word my hope secures; He will my shield and portion be As long as life endures.
- Through many dangers, toils, and snares
 I have already come;
 His grace has brought me safe thus far,
 His grace will lead me home.
- 4 Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail And mortal life shall cease, Amazing grace shall then prevail In heaven's joy and peace.
- 5 When we've been there ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun, We've no less days to sing God's praise Than when we'd first begun.

Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

SENDING HYMN

Christ, the Life of All the Living

- 1 Christ, the life of all the living, Christ, the death of death, our foe, Who, Thyself for me once giving To the darkest depths of woe: Through Thy suff'rings, death, and merit I eternal life inherit. Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.
- Thou hast borne the smiting only
 That my wounds might all be whole;
 Thou hast suffered, sad and lonely,
 Rest to give my weary soul;
 Yea, the curse of God enduring,
 Blessing unto me securing.
 Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
 Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.
- Thou hast suffered men to bruise Thee,
 That from pain I might be free;
 Falsely did Thy foes accuse Thee:
 Thence I gain security;
 Comfortless Thy soul did languish
 Me to comfort in my anguish.
 Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
 Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

7 Then, for all that wrought my pardon, For Thy sorrows deep and sore, For Thine anguish in the Garden, I will thank Thee evermore, Thank Thee for Thy groaning, sighing, For Thy bleeding and Thy dying, For that last triumphant cry, And shall praise Thee, Lord, on high.

ANNOUNCEMENTS (Be seated)

DISMISSAL

POSTLUDE

Christ, the Life of All the Living Setting: James L Brauer

FELLOWSHIP: Board of Fellowship

Those serving:

8:00 a.m.:

Greeter: Steve Berg

Comm. assist: Judy Koucky Reader: Norm Williams

10:30 a.m.:

Greeter: Charles Fisher Comm. assist: Dan Buuck Reader: Charles Fisher Acolyte: Noah Starck

AV Assistants: Hannes Buuck, Andreas Buuck

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- 702 My Faith Looks Up to Thee Text: Ray Palmer, 1808–87 Tune: Lowell Mason, 1792–1872 Text and tune: Public domain
- 744 Amazing Grace Text (sts. 1–4): John Newton, 1725–1807, alt.; (st. 5): A Collection of Sacred Ballads, 1790, Richmond Tune: Columbian Harmony, 1829, Cincinnati Text and tune: Public domain
- 420 Christ, the Life of All the Living Text: Ernst Christoph Homburg, 1605–81; (sts. 1, 5, 7): tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1827–78, alt.; (st. 3): tr. Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book, 1912, St. Louis Tune: Das grosse Cantional, 1687, Darmstadt Text and tune: Public domain