

Lutheran Church of the Master
580 Kuhn Road, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188
Curt Gerald, Interim Pastor
March 20/21, 2010
Fifth Sunday in Lent
“Called to Extravagant Worship of Jesus”

The Lenten preparation is almost at an end. Something new is about to happen! Mary's act of anointing Jesus is extravagant, but when we know that grace has come to us, it is time for lavishness. Our old values get rearranged when we realize how deeply we are loved.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Creator God, you prepare a new way in the wilderness, and your grace waters our desert. Open our hearts to be transformed by the new thing you are doing, that our lives may proclaim the extravagance of your love given to all through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, whom with you and the Holy Spirit we worship and praise, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

FIRST READING *Isaiah 43:16–21*

¹⁶ Thus says the LORD,
who makes a way in the sea,
a path in the mighty waters,
¹⁷ who brings out chariot and horse,
army and warrior;
they lie down, they cannot rise,
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
¹⁸ Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
¹⁹ I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.
²⁰ The wild animals will honor me,
the jackals and the ostriches;
for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,
²¹ the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.

PSALM *Psalm 126*

When the LORD restored the for- | tunes of Zion,*
then were we like | those who dream.

²**Then was our mouth | filled with laughter,***

and our tongue with | shouts of joy.

³Then they said a- | mong the nations,*

"The LORD has done great | things for them."

⁴The LORD has done great | things for us,*

and we are | glad indeed. R

⁵Restore our for- | tunes, O LORD,*

like the watercourses | of the Negev.

⁶Those who | sowed with tears*

will reap with | songs of joy.

⁷Those who go out weeping, carry- | ing the seed,*

will come again with joy, shoulder- | ing their sheaves. **R**

SECOND READING *Philippians 3:4b–14*

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If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

⁷ Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

GOSPEL *John 12:1–8*

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ² There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³ Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor? ⁶ (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷ Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

Several years ago a new book store opened in the Glen Center ... it is about a block away from our townhome in Glenview ... it is built around the original landing tower of the Glenview Naval Air Base ... and found this book, *THE CROSS, AN ANTHOLOGY* ... and as I fanned through its pages I found this quotation on a page following the Preface ... the only thing on that page ... a quotation from Martin Luther:

"THE CROSS ALONE IS OUR THEOLOGY."

As the last sermon in this Lenten Series on *THE GOOD NEWS*, this is the point that must be made: *GOOD NEWS ALWAYS STARTS IN THE CROSS.*

If you are a first time worshipper with us this morning ... if you are fortunate enough to know nothing about denominational divisions in the church ... if you have even the slightest knowledge of Scripture (perhaps you know that there is an Old Testament and that there is a New Testament ... and that somewhere it talks about Jesus) ... if you are wondering what is unique about this bunch of folks called Lutheran compared to other Christian folks ... I would say this:

What unites us with the entire Church is what we call our Trinitarian base: we believe in one God who has been made known as the Creator ("Father"), Redeemer ("Son"), and Sanctifier ("Holy Spirit") ... which means we believe that there is a God who created us in the first place ... set out to save us when sin entered the picture ... and remains among us to help us live our lives right now.

We'll share that faith when we proclaim the Creed in a few minutes.

But what is rather unique about us is that we are rooted in what we call A THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS. Back in the 1500s, the Church was rooted in A THEOLOGY OF GLORY which emphasized that human effort guarantees divine forgiveness ... included in it is any understanding that we can buy, merit, earn, deserve, or accomplish works righteousness. Historically speaking, in the early 1500s the Roman Catholic Church had put salvation on sale ... buying a sheet of paper called an indulgence was like using green stamps to buy a vacuum cleaner ... if you had enough money, you could be like Schindler buying up your family's salvation ... and God would be an accountant whose main concern was money ... not love.

Works righteousness has contemporary more protestant forms too. It is anything that says "do this to get that." It is anything that says "you have to ... in order to be saved." It might be the booklet "The ABCs of salvation" ... it could be the "You have to speak in tongues" tradition ... it could be the "You have to be the emphasis on Adult Baptism as the only way" ... the common thread in all these is that the center of attention is ... YOU / ME!

For us Lutherans, "(t)rue theology is a 'theology of the cross,' resting on the faith that the source of the most realistic vision of life is the death of God" ... rooted in an understanding of law and Gospel, we understand that "law reveals sins" and that "Gospel discloses salvation."

During this Lenten Journey the law reminds us again and again that we fall short ... we miss the mark ... we go the other direction ... we don't get it ... we aren't perfect ... just like a computer, we have a virus ... all of those concepts are included in the Greek word hamartia ... SIN.

But during this Lenten Journey the Gospel ... thanks be to God the Gospel ... discloses what God has done about it ... it doesn't tell us what we can or must do about it ... but the Gospel tells us that GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT GOD SENT THE ONLY SON SO THAT EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES ON HIM MIGHT NOT PERISH BUT HAVE LIFE EVERLASTING ... and God did all of that back there from about the year 3BC through 30AD in the life of Jesus ... in the death of Jesus ... and in the resurrection of Jesus.

If there are "ABCs of salvation," the ABC's are these: A: God Created; B: God saved; C: God is still here.

And for that purpose, six days before the Passover when THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST was to be played out for the first time in human history ... when it was the real thing and not actors' portrayals ... back in the days when men were crucified probably on a daily basis and the highway to and from Rome were strewn with crosses with corpses hanging on them ...

Back in those days, Jesus is back at Mary and Martha and Lazarus' home ... once again Martha is scurrying around the place serving the meal and once again Mary is at Jesus' feet ... and Lazarus (whom Jesus had raised from the dead) is enjoying this meal too ... and here Mary is the one who anoints Jesus' feet with costly oil and wipes his feet dry with her hair.

Remember: the Hebrew word for the anointed one is "Messiah" ... and the Greek word for Messiah is "Christ" ... several times in Scripture we get pictures of Jesus being anointed for his mission ... from the angels and shepherds in Bethlehem to the Wise Ones' gold and frankincense in the house through the waters of his baptism 30 years later through the transfiguration event and now

through Mary's most expensive gift ... Jesus is anointed for what is about to happen ... and it will all be centered on a cross upon which Jesus will be impaled, lifted up, given up for dead, taken down and buried ... and for all intents and purposes on that day, it looks like it was all over ... the disciples' must have thought it had been a good ride in the wrong direction ... it would be worse than George McGovern's ball room following the defeat by a landslide that the nation had just handed him.

But God's power was only hidden in that cave for a couple days ... and for the rest of human history, that cross would serve as a sign and symbol of what God can do ... not what men and women can do.

Now that cross stands empty and no longer necessary ... you and I ("the sinners") no longer need to face the consequences of our sins because Jesus already has ... the cross has become our "get out of jail free" card ... the judge has become the convict in order that the defendant might go free ...

As you open your hymnals to Hymn #482, Isaac Watts' "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" ... an unknown author attached another verse not included in LBW:

"To Christ, Who won for sinners grace
By bitter grief and anguish sore,
Be praise from all the ransomed race
Forever and forevermore."

The Gospel ALWAYS starts in the cross ... when as death drew near Jesus said (whether in a shout or a whimper) TETELESTAI what he said was: IT (FORGIVENESS) IS FINISHED ... it is completed ... no more sacrificial lambs ... no more works righteousness ... no more ABCS ... no more paying off God ... now

God has paid the price in full ... salvation isn't for sale ... salvation is free ... given away by a God of Love ... now Go ... let people know what they have received ... and it starts with you.

Did you know that God loves you so much that God picked up the tab for your salvation?

Mike Benshish told me about an article he saw in a recent edition of the Fox Valley police blotter in the *Daily Herald*
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Elgin

• Joseph Tomasino, the 41-year-old Elgin man charged last summer with disorderly conduct for spreading the Gospel too loudly on the streets of Elgin, has been vindicated in court. Kane County Judge Joseph Grady dropped the case against him this month, authorities said. Tomasino, who continued to preach to pedestrians and motorists at three main intersections while the case was pending, said his ministry has flourished since his arrest and now involves Bible study as well as donating clothes and meals to the homeless. He continues to speak to the public on the streets daily. "I'm going to continue until Jesus returns because a lot of people need hope," he said.

I'm not sure that Mr. Tomasino has researched the best way of communicating the Gospel ... standing at an intersection isn't my idea of a good setting ... but I think he understands what being extravagant in the proclamation of the Gospel is all about.

What if every worshiper in every Christian congregation this weekend left worship saying "I'm going to continue until Jesus returns because a lot of people need hope?"

Well ... that is the mission of the Church isn't it?