

Sunday, April 5, 2020 (Palm / Passion Sunday)
Service of the Word for individuals and families

Welcome – Sharing & Caring – By Pastor Michael

Dear Friend(s), I put this service together in the mindset that an individual or a family could take some time on Sunday morning and experience a sense of worship in the home. There are some language changes to reflect the reality of being in a time of separation from our church and normal worship style, yet I believe this service speaks true to the nature of our worship, and provides everyone an opportunity to feel the stirrings of the Holy Spirit in their lives. May this service be a blessing to you in these challenging times.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God, who is present, who gives life, who calls into existence the things that do not exist. **Amen.**

If you were to keep watch over sins, O Lord, who could stand? Yet with you is forgiveness, and so we confess.

Gracious God,

have mercy on us. We confess that we have turned away from you, knowingly and unknowingly. We have wandered from your resurrection life. We have strayed from your love for all people. Turn us back to you, O God. Give us new hearts and right spirits, that we may find what is pleasing to you and dwell in your house forever. Amen.

Receive good news: God turns to you in love. “I will put my spirit in you, and you shall live,” says our God. All your sin is forgiven in the name of † Jesus Christ, who is the free and abounding gift of God’s grace for you. **Amen.**

Prayer of the Day

O God of mercy and might, in the mystery of the passion of your Son you offer your infinite life to the world. Gather us around the cross of Christ, and preserve us until the resurrection, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Scripture Reading – Psalm 31 (Note the Lectionary reading for Passion Sunday is only verses 9-16, but I feel the entirety of the Psalm is very appropriate for our current time and situation)

Psalm 31 is a personal lament, a cry for deliverance from enemies and affliction. It is well suited as the psalm set for Palm/Passion Sunday each year.

¹In you, O Lord, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me.

²Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.

³You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name’s sake lead me and guide me,

⁴take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge.

⁵**Into your hand I commit my spirit;** you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.

⁶You hate those who pay regard to worthless idols, but I trust in the Lord.

⁷I will exult and rejoice in your steadfast love, because you have seen my affliction; you have taken heed of my adversities,

⁸and have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy; you have set my feet in a broad place.

⁹*Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.*

- ¹⁰For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away.
- ¹¹I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors, an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me.
- ¹²I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel.
- ¹³For I hear the whispering of many— terror all around!—as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.
- ¹⁴But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my God.’
- ¹⁵My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.
- ¹⁶Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.
- ¹⁷Do not let me be put to shame, O Lord, for I call on you; let the wicked be put to shame; let them go dumbfounded to Sheol.
- ¹⁸Let the lying lips be stilled that speak insolently against the righteous with pride and contempt.
- ¹⁹O how abundant is your goodness that you have laid up for those who fear you, and accomplished for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of everyone!
- ²⁰In the shelter of your presence you hide them from human plots; you hold them safe under your shelter from contentious tongues.
- ²¹Blessed be the Lord, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was beset as a city under siege.
- ²²I had said in my alarm, ‘I am driven far from your sight.’ But you heard my supplications when I cried out to you for help.
- ²³Love the Lord, all you his saints. The Lord preserves the faithful, but abundantly repays the one who acts haughtily.
- ²⁴Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord.

Pastor’s Exegetical Thoughts and Message

Psalm 31 is sometimes known as the psalm for “Prayer and Praise for Deliverance from Enemies.”

The psalm offers an image of one who is pleading with God for deliverance from troubling times and situations; sharing a recitation of woes and a graphic account of fear over the scheming of one’s enemies, yet culminating in powerful words of praise and the firm conviction that God will preserve the faithful one who “waits for the Lord.” The poetry and style of the psalm is entirely relatable and moving, and it is general enough in tone that people with a variety of laments might easily make this prayer their own.

(Verses 1-8) Psalm 31 begins with words of prayer for rescue and deliverance. Within the first two verses are multiple imperatives that speak to a cry for help - "do not let," "deliver," "Incline," "rescue," "Be a rock of refuge...a strong fortress." Following immediately on the heels of these urgent requests (vs.3-6), the psalmist expresses a deep trust in God as one who can indeed save and protect. Certainly, Christians will be familiar with the words of trust expressed by the psalmist that Jesus later quotes from the cross: "Into your hand I commit my spirit." Understanding such words in the context of the psalm, one quickly realizes this is not a statement of giving oneself up to death, but rather trusting oneself to God in all things. The strength of the psalmists (and Jesus’) trust is based on previous experience with God’s deliverance – as the psalmist reflects in verses 7-8 “You have seen,” “You have taken,” “You have not delivered me to my enemies,” “You have taken heed,” all of these things happened in the past. God has already proven to be faithful, and so the psalmist confidently puts his life in the hand of One who has proven to be a rock, a fortress, and a trusted guide.

(Verses 9-18) The words of vs. 9-13 echo the anguish of the suffering servant spoken of in the book of Isaiah (Isa 50:4-9a), and can just as easily be imagined coming from the lips of Jesus as he faced the ordeals of

the last week of his earthly life. The strong sense of grief, sorrow, and misery; of being scorned, broken, and the central object of mean-spirited and vile plots is palpable. Yet these detailed and vivid descriptions of the psalmist's plight and concerns are sharply contrasted with the simplicity and brevity of the psalmist's statement of trust, "I trust in you, O Lord, I say, "You are my God"". Verse 15-16 continue to develop the nature of the psalmist's trust with the affirmation, 'My times are in your hand,' an acknowledgement that the psalmist's life rests with God. Following this affirmation, the psalmist prays for deliverance and a sense of God's presence, "Let your face shine upon your servant," appealing to God's hesed, (Hebrew - Cheset) his longsuffering care (mercy, grace, charity) for his people. The words of verses 17-18 reflect the psalmist desire for justice and personal peace rather than the violence of revenge, asking for those who abuse him to be the ones who are shamed or silenced or sent dumbfounded (literally - stilled or silenced) to Sheol (the grave).

(Verses 19-24) The psalmist concludes with words of praise and trust that are no longer addressed to God, but rather spoken out as if to a congregation of people. The psalmist now takes on the role of a teacher, reflecting on the miraculous things that the Lord has done for the righteous (providing shelter, safety, and steadfast love), and offering words of instruction and encouragement for the faithful: "Love the LORD, be strong, and let your heart take courage."

In the end, the overall theology of psalm 31 implies that God is responsive to those who call upon the Lord, and that it is in God's very nature to deliver and save God's people when they are afflicted by illness or enemies, and to hear them when they cry.

It is no wonder then that this psalm comes up in connection with the passion of Jesus (Luke 22:14 to 23:56) for Jesus is setup as the archetypal pray-er of such a psalm as Psalm 31; indeed, Jesus is the model of all those who bear such opposition and anguish and yet hold to that deep trust and faith in God - who is himself always faithful to his people.

A letter / prayer inspired by Psalm 31

Dear God,

You have been my rock and foundation as far back as I can remember. I cannot count the number of times that I have come to You in trouble and distress looking for guidance, deliverance, and hope. And now here I am, coming before You once again, acknowledging that I am struggling because, like so many of Your people, I find myself surrounded by concerns and trouble.

Lord, I am not where I want to be. And while I do recognize how insignificant my concern will appear compared to those who are sick with the coronavirus, or having to stand on the front lines of the fight against it, nevertheless my heart is sorrowful because of the losses I feel in my own life, and the losses felt by many of my brothers and sister in Christ; losses of jobs and incomes, losses of social activities and rites of passage, losses of the freedom to travel or to embrace family far away, losses of the most basic sense of security, consistency, or normalcy in a life turned upside-down by a raging pandemic.

Father, as You know, this coming Sunday was supposed to be different. It was going to be a time of joyful processional, carrying our palm branches around our sanctuary and celebrating the royal entrance of Your Son into Jerusalem. This coming holiest week of the entire year was going to be an opportunity to gather around the table and share a holy meal on Maundy Thursday and be reminded of Your commandment to love one another as You have loved us. On Good Friday we would have gathered in solemnity and, with dimming candlelight and mournful music, heard once again that powerful message of Jesus being handed over to death; crucified for our sake, for the sin of the world. Come Saturday we would have joyfully welcomed the children and families of our community for the traditional annual Easter egg hunt. And of course, on Easter Sunday, You know full well that all the stops on the organ would have been pulled, and with great celebration we would have shouted our alleluias to the glory of Your Son's resurrection, the power of Your unending love, and the gift of Eternal life.

But as You know Father, things will be different this year. Instead of the joyful planning and anticipation of these glorious faith occasions, I find myself confronted with the reality that over the next few weeks, death and sickness will wreak havoc on our nation, even as we do our best to "flatten the curve" by sheltering in place. Though the main enemy I/we face is an indifferent virus – an unfortunate reality of the natural world – invisible and highly contagious; there are other enemies that surround me/us. There are the enemies of

selfishness and greed that cause people to ruthlessly stockpile goods, heedless of others needs, or to use the pandemic as an opportunity to gouge pricing on necessary supplies. There are the enemies of apathy, ignorance, and malice that cause people not to heed warnings or take seriously the dangers of contagion, or that drive others to willfully spread disinformation simply for the sake of chaos. And of course there is the most familiar enemy of all – fear – an enemy that often leads to panic, bad decisions, and violence.

Lord, hear my cry and deliver me and Your people from enemies both without and within – protect us from Covid-19 and from the many temptations and destructive behaviors caused by fear and anxiety, apathy or indifference, selfishness or greed. In the midst of days such as these help me to remember how You have always been faithful to me and to Your people in times of trouble and despair. Fill my thoughts with memories that convey Your goodness – thoughts of those whose faith continues to be an inspiration to me in these challenging times, thoughts of the many blessed saints that I have had the privilege to know over the years, thoughts of those many coincidental moments in my life which I only later realized were Your clever and anonymous way of showing off.

In all things Father, help me to see and to boldly share with others that constant and eternal truth, that even in the most turbulent and challenging of times, You are always present and You are always faithful. Indeed, You are the light that shines in the darkness, the constant in the midst of chaos, the shelter in the storm, and the rock of my/our salvation. With this truth burning in my heart, I am ready to face whatever the days will bring, to lay at Your cross my burdens and losses, and to celebrate the glory of this holiest season, different as it may be, with the passion befitting one whose full trust is in You.

Your grateful and loving son,
Michael
Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

God of mercy, awaken your church to new proclamations of your faithfulness. By your Spirit, give us bold and joyful words to speak, that we sustain the weary with the message of your redemption. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of mercy, quiet the earth where it trembles and shakes. Protect vulnerable ecosystems, threatened habitats, and endangered species. Prosper the work of scientists, engineers, and researchers who find ways to restore creation to health and wholeness. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of mercy, drive away fear and anger that cause us to turn against one another. Give courage to leaders who seek liberation for the oppressed. Bring peace and hope to those who are in prison and those who face execution. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of mercy, send your saving help to all who suffer abuse, insult, discrimination, or contempt. Heal the wounded. Comfort the dying. Bring peace to those suffering chronic or terminal illness. Tend to all who cry out for relief (*especially*) **Marie Brooks, Kay Good, Art and Elaine Gordon, Marion Kachel, Bonnie Lauer, Jessica Shepherd, Jessica Smith, Claire Sniegowski, Fred Sowa, Bob and Barb Strough, David and Mary Ann Trout, Sara Wagner, Jan Westendorf, Bill and Mike Wilson**, those on our visitation list requesting prayer, **Mary Muhlenberg, Gina Noss, Charlotte O'Neill, Pete Onushko, Janice Roulston, Shirley Shirey, Louise Styer, and Elsie Trout**, our missionaries **Dr. Mark and Linda Jacobson**, missionary **Veronica Gerace**, those in our military service **Shawn and Dusty Lawrey**, all individuals and families throughout the world affected by the Coronavirus pandemic, and those we now name aloud or silently in our hearts (*please add any others that come to mind this morning*). Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of mercy, we pray for all who will prepare and lead worship in this Holy Week. In all things, show us the ways that you call us to die to self, to live for you, and to give of ourselves for the sake of others. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of mercy, when we breathe our last, you raise us to eternal life. With all your witnesses in heaven and on earth, let us boldly confess the name of Jesus Christ, our resurrection and our hope. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

According to your steadfast love, O God, hear these and all our prayers as we commend them to you; through Christ our Lord. **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.

Blessing

Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation. Holy God, speaking, spoken, and inspiring, † bless us, unbind us, and send us in love and in peace. Amen.

Announcements, Odds, and Ends

IF YOU, OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW HAS A PASTORAL CARE NEED please call Pastor Michael at the parsonage (610-875-0015). Please be aware that hospital and nursing home visitation has been severely restricted due to Covid-19 concerns and all area clergy are expected to follow any policies put in place.

IF YOU, OR SOMONE YOU KNOW HAS ANY OTHER KIND OF NEED please call the church office at 610-856-7242. We are operating with a basic staff, and both phone messages and mailbox will be checked daily. As was said in Pastor Michael's most recent sermon, "Please ask for help if you need it! There is no room for pride in a pandemic, but there is an opportunity to experience the love of God through a brother or sister in Christ." Several members of the congregation have already offered to help out others in any way possible, so please, if you need help, ask!!!

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS: Bishop Sam Zeiser, Karen Bauer, Mildred Berg, John Bordonaro, Jonny Brenner, Lon and Nancy Brightbill, Edward Dyer, Trudy Dyer, Stephen Fall, Dave Fittin, Pastor Larry Frank, Clay and Nicole Gessner, Eli Hallock, Benjamin Haney, Dayna Hannon, Robbie Harper, Sandy Hoffman, Steven Mountz, The Owens Family, Hazel Price, Greg Smalley, Stephanie Stronsick-Morlock, Bryan Wagner, and Jeremy Williams.

(Please call the church office if you would like to add anyone to our prayer list.)

Sadly, services and activities at Robeson have been cancelled from March 16 through April. We will reexamine our closure schedule again in the next few weeks. As we seek to protect the congregation and community from the spread of Covid-19, temporarily refraining from worship services and activities on site, and adopting a remote method of ministry (phone, internet, mailings), please continue to support our ongoing ministries by mailing offering envelopes and checks directly to Robeson Lutheran church, 3520 plow road, Mohnton PA 19540, or use the e-giving link on our website. Thank you!