

Fifth Sunday in Lent
Sunday, March 17, 2024

Introduction to the day

God promises Jeremiah that a “new covenant” will be made in the future: a covenant that will allow all the people to know God by heart. The church sees this promise fulfilled in Christ, who draws all people to himself when he is lifted up on the cross. Our baptismal covenant draws us to God’s heart through Christ and draws God’s love and truth into our hearts. We join together in worship, sharing in word, song, and meal, and leave strengthened to share God’s love with all the world.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray.

O God, with steadfast love you draw us to yourself, and in mercy you receive our prayers. Strengthen us to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, that through life and death we may live in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 31:31-34

A reading from Jeremiah.

The Judeans in Babylon blamed their exile on their ancestors, who had broken the covenant established at Sinai. Here the prophet looks to a day when God will make a new covenant with the people. There will be no need to teach the law, because God will write it on their hearts.

PSALM: Psalm 51:1-12

Create in me a clean heart, O God. (*Ps. 51:10*)

SECOND READING: Hebrews 5:5-10

A reading from Hebrews.

Using priestly imagery and references to the Old Testament, the author explains how Christ lived in trusting obedience to God, and so God has made Christ the source of our eternal salvation.

GOSPEL: John 12:20-33

The holy gospel according to John.

Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time to celebrate the Passover festival. Here Jesus’ words about seeds planted in the ground turn the disaster of his death into the promise of a harvest in which everyone will be gathered.

GOSPEL MESSAGE

Called Where Jesus Goes

It isn't only the first disciples who become uncomfortable when Jesus talked about his approaching death. We often do as well. Perhaps focusing on the crucifixion seems gruesome. Perhaps it conjures in us the (false) story of a divine parent who cannot forgive without punishing someone, with Jesus standing in as that one. Maybe it feels like a morbid emphasis on sin.

Jesus did not understand himself as the victim of divine punishment. He entered into suffering as a part of his glorification, working with—not against—his Father. He knows that human life has become twisted under the powers of sin and death so that if we grasp onto our “life in this world,” we will miss God’s gracious intention for us. Christ’s judgment of sin is not for our exclusion. Jesus never seeks to shame us, but condemns sin in order to deliver us from its power.

Perhaps, however, we shy away from talk of Christ’s death because we sense, on some level, that if our Lord must go to the cross, then so too must we. Jesus declares, “Whoever serves me must follow me.” Discipleship is a summons to die to ourselves and lose our life on this world’s terms. Paradoxically, this cruciform journey is the road to true fruitfulness and flourishing. It begins in our baptism and is nourished at the Lord’s table. It is sustained by the fellowship of faith, where together we hear the life-giving word of Jesus. It will find completion on the day of resurrection.

Our souls long for this way of salvation. Deep within us all, a voice whispers, “We wish to see Jesus.” God knows this need, so Jesus is lifted up to drive out the powers of sin and death. God’s unending mercy is displayed. For the same reason, we come together so that in hearing the word and sharing the eucharistic meal, and in our prayers, laments, and praises, Jesus may be lifted up to draw us, and all people, to salvation.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Trusting in God’s promise to reconcile all things, let us pray for the church, the well-being of creation, and a world in need.

God of the covenant, through the church you draw us into community. We give thanks for the means of grace around which we gather. Inspire writers, musicians, and artists whose creative gifts adorn our worship. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of all that exists, you lavish the earth with extravagant beauty. Preserve the rich and complex diversity of living things. Support local, national, and international efforts to protect the environment for future generations. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of the nations, you desire peace and plenty for all people. Defend those who challenge oppression and expose corruption. Support advocates for human rights, social justice, and the welfare of children, *such as the Canadian Lutheran World Relief*. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of good will, you restore what is broken. We pray for any experiencing estrangement, conflict, or abuse in families and intimate relationships. Protect and comfort all who are vulnerable, especially those living in institutions. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of every time and place, you are with us. Support ministries of prayer and presence in this congregation. Move us to reach out to any who are homebound, lonely, grieving, in treatment, or ill. We especially pray for: Sandra Gagnon, Karen Weigold, Keith Weckwerth, Karen O'Day, Shirley Glickman, Marilyn Schneider, Denita Wolfgram, Stephanie Yourth, Christopher Yourth, Linda Boland, Peter Howell, Glenda Panke, Mark Bimm, Harold Yourth, Irene Churchill, Debbie Thom, Donna L Hoffman, Walter Hobden, Doug Holly, Gary Churchill and those in long term care facilities and senior residences. In this moment of silence we name out loud or in the quiet of our hearts those who need your healing touch. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of promise, we give thanks for the saints whose faith inspires us, *especially Saint Patrick, missionary to Ireland, whom we commemorate today.* Grant us faith to trust in your everlasting love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Accompany us on our journey, God of grace, and receive the prayers of our hearts, through Jesus Christ, our Savior. **Amen.**

BLESSING

May the road rise to meet you, May the wind be always at your back
May the sun shine warm upon your face, The rains fall soft upon your fields,
And until we meet again
May God hold you in the palm of his hand, And may God hold you in the palm of his hand.

DISMISSAL (ELW p. 146)

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

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