

# Why Lutheran?



**HOLY TRINITY**  
LUTHERAN CHURCH

2021 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

40 DAYS OF PREPARATION

# 2021 Lenten Devotional

## 40 DAYS OF PREPARATION

**Dear Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Friends,**

We are now entering the season of Lent. Over these 40 days, we are invited to renew our commitment to our faith. Lent is the season of purging ourselves from what is superfluous, and focusing on what is essential. Just like Jesus fasted in the wilderness for 40 days, we focus on our spiritual life with renewed intentionality.

**Daily Devotional:** In the pages to follow, you will find 40 devotionals written by 40 Holy Trinity friends, largely reflecting on the question, "Why Lutheran?" We encourage you to take up the practice of this daily devotional.

**Small Groups:** At the end of this devotional booklet, you will also find five discussion guides for small groups. If you want to jump into a small group, or would like more information, please visit our website at [holyltrinityonline.org](http://holyltrinityonline.org).

**Worship Regularly:** Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, as we remember that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. On this page, you will find temporary tattoos to mark yourself with the cross of ashes this year. Please join us as we begin this holy season with a special Ash Wednesday service on February 17, 6pm, on Facebook and YouTube, followed by a Zoom service at 7 pm where we will share in Holy Communion.

As our days lengthen and the hope of spring arrives, we prepare for new life by focusing on our faith. God has seen us through. And God will guide us forward.

**Blessings, Pastors Alicia and Ben**

***"Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." - Romans 12: 15-18***

My husband and I are from two very different religions. We decided when we were married that we would find a church that we both enjoyed and wanted to raise a family in. It took many years, but we finally stumbled upon Holy Trinity Lutheran Church. After doing much research on the ELCA values and viewpoints, we decided this would be our church home. Fast forward 9 years and we are still very happy with our decision.

I love and enjoy history and I love the history of the rebellion of Martin Luther to speak for what he thought was right... Something I had previously struggled with in my religious life. I am happy to have found the Lutheran church for myself and my family. My children are having a much happier religious/faith experience and church is "fun" for them which is very important to me.

Dear God, please let us find peace and understanding, let us see others' viewpoints and learn from one another. Let us be open to new ways, thoughts and ideas.

***"By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things." - Galatians 5:22-23***

Why am I comfortable giving so much of my life to service in the Lutheran Church? I listed the nine fruits of the spirits above. Each of them speak to me in multiple ways in where I work at HTLC! I have grown to be confident, feel supported, feel wanted, and feel loved at HTLC! My faith has become stronger each day through each of these nine fruits of the Spirit. However, it is easy to overlook each of these. I have learned it is ok to be open about your faith. For example, reading my daily devotion is a routine I have learned to incorporate into my daily routine. This is something I am not sure I would have added into my daily life if I have not learned to have the patience, faithfulness, and self-control or the role models I have at work (HTLC Pastor's). Church is my safe place and I feel the love, joy, peace, generosity, and kindness each day I am there. These are the many ways of why I give so much of my life service to HTLC! I feel each of the nine fruits of the Spirit all around me, even during these unnormal times. The goodness of God is with me at HTLC just like the fruit of the Spirits are each and every day.

Dear God, I pray for you to continue to fill us with the fruits of the Spirit and the goodness of God in all our days ahead. Amen.



*Jackie Mackenthun*  
Day 1, February 17



*Jamie Bisek*  
Day 2, February 18



*Barb Gullickson*  
Day 3, February 19

***"I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly---- I came so everyone would have life, and have it fully." - John 10:10***

I grew up in a Methodist family that was led by a special father who was a leader in our church and also a guidance counselor for our high school in Ada, Minnesota. This verse was always his favorite and was his inspiration for life while he also coached many young people in their sports and lead us on our way in life. Becoming a Lutheran after marrying Bob has also been a blessing. To practice a faith through being part of Holy Trinity which accepts and welcomes all, brings much joy to me. This past year has been challenging while we are home most of the time. The news of each day makes me look for what brings joy to others and myself as we all try to live it to it's fullest extent. The online worship we share with others makes us reflect on how Christ led and taught us in all of life's experiences. "We are the children of a loving God for whom nothing is impossible." A quote by Marianne Williamson in her book Everyday Grace. What a wonderful message!

Pray with me. Dear lord, may we have hope, find forgiveness, and may love be our guiding principle for where love is, there God is. Thanks be to God.



*Jim Thorp*  
Day 4, February 20

***"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." - Ephesians 2:8***

I grew up on a farm just south of the small towns of Grove City and Atwater. We had a country Lutheran church just south of the farm but we had to go into town to the Norwegian Lutheran church and definitely not the Swedish Lutheran down the street or the German Lutheran just north of town. (Ironically, in later years, the town churches shared a pastor.) My father was Norwegian and Lutheran so when I was born, I was too, and have embraced my Lutheran faith ever since.

Easter is why we are Lutherans. Our belief that Jesus died for us, and that we are to live a life of FAITH and are then, saved by GRACE, not by works, is the foundation of being Lutheran. However, James 2:14 states, "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." I have strived to live this life whether through my family, teaching, ambulance volunteering, church work, or now through the Gideons, I have tried to help whoever and whenever. Salvation is a gift we don't earn, our life is a reflection of our appreciation for such a glorious gift that we celebrate during Easter and throughout the year.

Dear God, Thank you for the gift of grace. Amen.

***"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." - Galatians 3:28***

I grew up in the Lutheran church in the Missouri Synod. I loved the traditional hymns, the opportunities to be in bell choir, the youth activities, the coffee (with lots of creamer) and donuts. Most churches have those components though. What I love about being Lutheran is that it's by grace that we are saved, not because of things we do on Earth. But something was missing while I was growing up: female leaders, diversity, and openness to others. When we moved to the New Prague area, Craig and I found HTLC. I loved that women were allowed to be pastors and members of the council (not so in the Missouri Synod). I stayed at HTLC because of their resolutions and social statements of inclusion for LBGTOIA and anti-racism (not so in other synods). Now, more than ever, I am so proud to be a member of HTLC and the ELCA. It is a place where ALL truly are welcome.

Almighty God, we thank you for blessing us with a world of diversity. Help us to see things like You do. Speak to our hearts so that we remember no one is better than another because of appearance or any other earthly attribute. Empower us to respect the diversity of mankind and embrace that we are all one with You. Amen.

***Lord, I bow my head humbly and ask for your strength and guidance. You are my rock in a very tumultuous year. I ask for your understanding and peace to see me through this trying and difficult time.***

My Lutheran faith and traditions holds strong. My children have been brought up with the scriptures that have sustained my family and I for generations. With this solid foundation my hope is a never ending following of your truth. The walls of the church are my haven I seek shelter in. The patience, love and understanding from those who gather are my comfort. The words that are preached fulfill my soul and recharge my faith. The sound of gospel hymns is a memory that brings me back to my past - my childhood. It has filled my heart with joy to the present. I know it will brighten all of my tomorrows. It Colors my world.

Lord, grant me your patience and understanding giving me the serenity I seek. I ask for you to light my path helping me to see... how you want me to grow. In Jesus Name I pray, Amen.



*Melissa Horejsi*  
Day 5, February 21



*Donna Galvin*  
Day 6, February 22





*Mary Busch*  
Day 7, February 23

***"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." - maJohn 14:27***

My Aunt Ruby passed away in 2011. Her daughter was kind enough to share some of her jewelry with the cousins as a memorial. I saw a small silver watch. I had a few other small watches I had collected, so I chose the watch. It had a little charm on the side. It wasn't until I returned home and looked closer at the charm, that I realized it was a Luther Rose, and on the back it said in bold type I AM A LUTHERAN. At the time Holy Trinity was experiencing a hurtful congregational split and it was painful for my family. I considered this watch a sign that we had made a faithful decision to continue worshipping at Holy Trinity because of the love, joy and peace the seal of the Luther Rose represents.

Thank you Lord, for the great history and shared grace of our families as we share our faith. Amen.



*Gary Eagen*  
Day 8, February 24

***"I can do all things through Christ who strengthen me." - Philippians 4:13***

Years ago I had an occasion that really tested my faith in Christ. At the time I was the Master of our Masonic Lodge. As the head person it was my responsibility to give the Eulogy of some one who had passed. It is probably the most emotional experience one may have in her/his life. It being my first Eulogy made it all the more stress full. My heart was pumping extremely fast until I was standing in front of the lectern and then the Spirit entered my body with a calming effect. From that day forward I knew that there is a God walking along side me.

My mother married a Catholic so that was my introduction to religion. My dad didn't practice his faith very well, thus, at twelve my mother felt it best we switch back to Lutheranism. What I like best about Lutheranism is talking directly to God not through an inter mediator.

God loves me, He wants the best for me, He will guide me. (Dr. Schuller)

***"I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well." - Pslam 139:14***

Sister Mary R. was a formidable woman at my school. Her silent stare at an offending action could halt such action from across the room. She had strong opinions, and a knack for helping people to see things her way, which usually led to the good of others. I now see her for what she was, a leader. (Before that she was just the nun who telepathically KNEW I was hiding a novel inside my Bible.)

In 2020, the ELCA celebrated 50 years of ordaining women. Within this denomination, women are allowed, INVITED, to hold positions of authority and to help make policy decisions. Sister Mary R. would have thrived in this environment.

Bruce K. was a little boy growing up in the middle of cornfields. He was always being beaten up or taunted because he preferred styling his sister's hair to playing trucks with the other boys. He was like this from a young age, made this way. The ELCA openly welcomes anyone from the LGBTQ+ community. Bruce would have thrived in this environment. I am proud to be a member of the ELCA church because when they say "All are Welcome," they mean it. ALL are welcome.

Thank you, God, for leading me to a denomination (and church) that encourages us all to be who YOU made us to be, fearfully and wonderfully made.

***"Learn to do right; seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow." - Isaiah 1:17***

I was raised as a Missouri and Wisconsin synod Lutheran. When my Catholic-raised husband and I were married, we found the ELCA Lutheran church to be the perfect fit for us. We learned all are welcomed to the communion table. It is this position of inclusivity that is important to us. In the ELCA social statements, it says the ELCA has a calling to confront racism and to advocate for justice and fairness for all people. We are called to serve and love our neighbors. The little pantries, in our church parking lot, are a great way to begin. We can check out a book about racial justice in one party and bring food and household items for the other two pantries. In these times of uncertainty, helping our neighbors and examining our own thoughts can give us a sense of purpose.

Dear Lord, Give us your eyes of concern and your heart of compassion for others.  
In Jesus name we pray, Amen.



*Rose Fife*

Day 9, February 25



*Linnea Hautman*

Day 10, February 26



***"Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'" - Matthew 25:34-40***

*Mark Walser*  
Day 11, February 27

This years Lenten question is "Why Lutheran?". The simple answer for me is, because my wife is Lutheran and grew up in the ELCA Lutheran Church. There were many items along the way the led me to follow her to the Lutheran Church. One of these was how welcoming the parishioners were at Holy Trinity. The more time we spent being a part of church, it was not only Holy Trinity that was welcoming, but the ELCA Lutheran Church also. The church wanted to be welcoming to all people. It did not matter their faith background, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or age. It was also a place that all were welcome to worship, discover their faith or continue their faith journey. Reading the Matthews scripture tells me that we need to welcome all into the church. Welcoming all that are in need of a place to worship is like welcoming God to come and worship. It does not matter who that person is, it's the fact of welcoming that person and treating them as if they themselves were God.

Dear God, I pray that the church continues to be a place that is welcoming to all. We want to ensure that all of Gods children have a place to worship. Whether they are continuing their faith journey or just starting to find their way, all need a place to worship and feel welcome.



***"On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will" - Acts 15:11***

My bible verse comes from a time when the disciples and some elders from Judea were debating whether it was necessary for Gentiles to be circumcised in order to be saved. Peter spoke and reiterated God's promise of salvation through grace alone, not by deeds or acts.

I am a 5th generation Lutheran. My great-great grandparents immigrated from Germany in the mid-1800's and eventually settled in Havana Township in rural Steele County (known today as Claremont, MN). Original baptismal and confirmation certificates of my great-grandmother adorn my wall, although I can't read much of what they say as they are written in German. Interestingly, what started as German-speaking, Evangelisch Lutherilchen St. Johannes-Gemeinde in 1865 became English speaking St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church sometime in the mid-1900's. An English newspaper clipping and a German booklet highlight the 50th Anniversary of the church in 1915 as well as the 100th Anniversary booklet (in English) titled "A Century of Grace" from 1965. As an infant, I was baptized at St. John's Lutheran Church in Owatonna and every time I visited my grandparents overnight, my grandmother proudly marched to the 2nd row on Sunday mornings. I grew up going to St. John's Lutheran Church in Waseca and was confirmed and married at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Faribault. So, why Lutheran? For over 150 years, it's all my blood has known. It wasn't until I was an adult and continued attending Lutheran Churches that I knew it was where I was meant to be. Thousands of sermons have rang through my ears... A sermon of grace given to a woman having an abortion (Grace Lutheran Church in Waseca), sermons of grace towards same-sex couples (Faith Lutheran Church in Wabasha) and sermons of grace while living in the grey space of not having all of the answers (HTLC). The best part of being a Lutheran is the ability to share God's love and grace freely to EVERYONE, no matter who they love, where they come from or what they've done in the past. For me, it's who I am.

Dear Lord, Thank you for your life-giving grace. Help us to show grace to others and make this world a peaceful place. Amen.



*Karen Taylor*

Day 12, February 28



*Val Drommerhausen*  
Day 13, March 1

***"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." - Ephesians 2: 8-9***

I have been a Lutheran all of my life. My parents took me to church and Sunday school from the time I was little. We belonged to a very conservative sect, the Church of the Lutheran Confession. When I was a teenager, I had doubts about many literal interpretations of the Bible. I accepted science. I wanted to discuss geology with my pastor, but the only answer he gave was that the scientists were not correct. I just could not wrap my head around creation in seven 24 hour days. Women could not vote in that sect of the Lutheran Church. Women could not be ordained as pastors. My search for a less literal translation of the Bible and desire for equal rights for women led me to the ELCA. Here I found a church that was more welcoming and was much more inclusive of women. When the ELCA took a stand on LGBTQ rights, I was proud to be a member. As a Lutheran I believe that we are all loved and forgiven unconditionally, and saved for one reason— because Jesus died for us. How could we exclude individuals if all of us had God's grace? The gospel for us is everything. All of us commit many sins, but Jesus accepts us and grants us forgiveness. As I look on this season of Lent, I know that God will be with me in all places and times. That gives me great comfort.

Dear God, Thank you for the unconditional love that you have bestowed on us. Thank you for your forgiveness and for the nurturing relationships that we find at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church. Help us to be tolerant of those who disagree with us, and help all mankind to love and care for one another. Amen.

***"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" - Psalms 133:1***



*Toby Thietje*  
Day 14, March 2

I grew up Lutheran in Minnesota. I have also lived in California for 3 years, Florida for five years, and traveled all over the U.S. and overseas to Germany and Japan. Whether I was living on the East Coast or West Coast, I tried to find a church that I could call "home" while I was there. None of them were Lutheran churches. I went to a non-denominational church in CA, Catholic church in FL, and many other churches during my time traveling. I've been to my friend's Mega churches in Nebraska, small churches in South Dakota, and yet, still, something felt like it was missing. It wasn't until I came back to Minnesota and the Lutheran church that I felt like I was "home" again. A church that welcomes everyone and turns away no one. I am grateful for HTLC and so glad I can call it "home".

Dear Lord, Thank you for loving everyone, no matter what. Amen.

***El restaura a los de corazón quebrantado y cubre con vendas sus heridas.  
He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds. - Psalm 147:3***

As a child growing up in the Roman Catholic Church of Nicaragua, I loved my church. I loved the old saints, crafted by my ancestors, worn and discolored by the centuries, that looked down upon me. I loved to watch the grandmas and great-grandmas of my town, kneeling with rosary beads draped from their hands, praying faithfully day after day. I loved the processions during Holy Week where the streets were crowded with people following the cross.

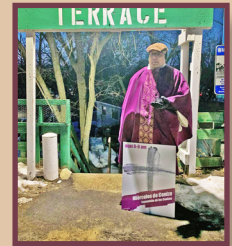
After my time in a Franciscan order and studying to be a priest, the church that I loved broke my heart from the corruption and unfaithfulness I witnessed by superiors. But we have a God who heals the brokenhearted, who brought me to the Lutheran Church. And I once again loved my church. I loved and continue to love the accompaniment of immigrants by a church of founded by immigrants. I loved and continue to love Lutheran theology that is biblically rooted on the cross. I loved and continue to love the Gospel message of God's grace, where God's love is for ALL.

Restoring God, bring healing to all those who have had a broken heart because they have experienced pain in their church. Bind their wounds. Bring peace. Amen.

***"In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." - Matthew 7:12***

Lutherans value being Christ to their neighbors. Ministries of compassion have always been central to the Lutheran experience. Lutheran churches such as HTLC are known for their participation in ministries (food drives, meals, transportation, clothing, housing, etc.) To people in need within and outside our community. Compassion warms the heart and ties us together in love.

Lord, take our selfish hearts and transform them. Use our understanding of what would please us, and direct it outward, that we may be thoughtful of others and lighten their burdens. In Jesus name, Amen.



*Jorge Luis  
Espinoza Perez*  
Day 15, March 3



*Jim Pittberner*  
Day 16, March 4



*Arlene Hilding*  
Day 17, March 5

***The next day he (John) saw Jesus coming toward him and said "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!". John 1:36 and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" - John 1: 29***

Since the Reformation, Lutheran hymn writers have interpreted Scripture in their texts. Therefore, many of our hymns are reflections which include reference to Jesus as the "Lamb of God". The strong connection between hymns we sing and Scripture is one of the reasons Lutheranism is satisfying and appropriate for me and other musicians as an expression of Christian faith.

In the Old Testament the Hebrew practice of animal sacrifice was an important Temple ritual acknowledging before God the need for forgiveness of sin. Early Christians identified Jesus, the Messiah, as the ultimate sacrifice. Since Jesus, though human, was pure and sinless, He redeemed all humanity once and for all. Through the centuries, generations of Christians treasured this belief. Today we still sing the traditional Latin Agnus Dei "Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us..." As a central part of the Communion liturgy. The ELW, our current hymnal, contains a contemporary interpretation by Twila Paris at #336. Verse 1 reads, "Your only Son, no sin to hide, but you have sent him from your side to walk upon this guilty sod and to become the Lamb of God. O Lamb of God, sweet Lamb of God, I love the holy Lamb of God. Oh, wash me in your precious blood, my Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God." Lutherans are blessed with much music, old and new, that teaches us lessons from the Bible. Thanks be to God.

Most merciful and all-wise God, thank you for sending Jesus into our world to redeem us from our sins. Thank you for all poets and musicians who help us to believe and share this good news. In Jesus name, Amen.

***"May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Jesus Christ, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God."***

***- Romans 15: 5-7***

When I entered my freshman year of college I was ready for a fresh start and a new perspective. I wanted to take ownership of my life and my convictions. With nothing to lose and a heightened sense of wonder and curiosity, I started to test out different friend groups as well as different churches. I grew up in a small, rural ELCA congregation but I was desperate to discover whether my current beliefs and worship practices were merely a result of my upbringing and desire to conform, or whether it was something I believed deep within my core. I explored several churches, read through their statements of belief, and practiced different expressions of worship. At the end of this search I found myself back within an ELCA Lutheran place of worship. I felt a deep sense of belonging, welcome, unity, and honesty within this community of believers. The verse above paints a beautiful picture of what being a Lutheran looks like to me. Welcoming our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ into a loving and unified community of faith that seeks to give all the glory to God.

Heavenly Father, You have created each and every one of us as good and holy to live in accordance with your will. Allow your Spirit to work within us and through us so that we may share your word and love with those around us. When we wander, you remain grounded. When we question and doubt, you remain steadfast and faithful. When we turn from you, you lean in. Wrap us in your unending love and peace today and all days. Amen.



*Casey Fremstad*

Day 18, March 6





*Jay Schoenebeck*  
Day 19, March 7

***"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." - John 3:16***

I am a Lutheran today because of my Mother. She was the faith leader in our family, but both my parents were committed to our faith development. So much so that they made the commitment to send us to a private Lutheran school through 8th grade. It was during these years that I developed a solid foundation in my faith, and to this day, I think of them every time I go to church. What a gift.

John 3:16 has always been endearing to me because of its simplicity. It reminds us that God loves ALL of us. It also very clearly states what His expectations are, that if we believe in Him, we will be granted everlasting life. In today's world, where our beliefs and values are often challenged, this verse reminds me what is truly important. There is no fine print, nothing to read between the lines. It always helps me sort through the "noise" of life and gives me peace.

Let us pray...

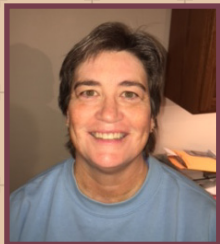
Thank you Jesus for bringing us into a loving relationship with God, and for those mentors in our life who have guided us to you. Thank you for showing us how to love others. May the doors of your Church always be open wide to all who choose to come, no matter who they are, what they do, where they come from, or why they come. May God's peace, grace, and mercy be with us all. Amen.

***"And forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us"***  
***- Matthew 6:12***

As a child I was taught to fear God and his wrath. The green, Lutheran Book of Worship, had the "Brief order for Confession and Forgiveness." The pastor said, "Almighty God, in his mercy, has given his Son to die for us ...." At the time those words didn't mean that much to me. The expectation was to attend church and believe in God. As I matured I questioned my faith in God. My heart and soul struggled with the conflicts.

A few years later attending an ELCA church using the same green, Lutheran Book of Worship, we recited the "Brief order of Confession and Forgiveness." The pastor said, "by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins..." What? Forgiveness of my sins? That was the first time I really heard those words. I felt relief in my heart and soul. I was forgiven for all I had done, all those transgressions! I have always been a Lutheran and believed in God, but now I understand God and Jesus are compassionate and forgiving and not to be feared.

Dear God, Continue to open our hearts and souls to your words of compassion and forgiveness, Amen.



*Sarah Becher*  
Day 20, March 8

***"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— 9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast." - Ephesians 2: 8 - 9***

Two years ago on February 28th, I had surgery to remove half of my pancreas and a few other organs because of pancreatic cancer. I said goodbye to my three children, my husband, and my sister with no fear as nurses took me into the surgery suite. No fear of death. That's why I am a Lutheran. The verses quoted above are my confirmation verse from 47 years ago. This scripture reminds me daily, that God chooses to love me, that I don't need to earn God's love and grace. It also reminds me that the "good" I may choose to do is to be done in response to God's love through Jesus Christ, not done to earn God's love. I have no fear of death because God named me at my baptism as his child, forgiveness is mine, and incredibly the gift of life eternal awaits me. I am a Lutheran because the God of Abraham and Jacob and of Roy and Annette (last two were my parents) destroyed the power of death. The Lutheran faith allows me to live a life focused on loving others - not worried about earning God's love or the power of death. Thanks be to God!

Dear God, Thank you for the gifts of faith, grace and eternal life. Help me to love others as you love me. Amen.

***"My people will live in peaceful dwellings places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest."***  
***- Isaiah 32:18***

When I lost my home, I quickly realized you can lose so many other core things as well. And above all other things that it is, homelessness is a robber. It takes your pride, your sense of belonging somewhere and sometimes your Faith.

I was one of the lucky ones. A family member offered me shelter. But the real healing had to begin with rebuilding my sorely tested Faith.

As Lutherans we are called to serve those that don't have a place to belong. It is one of our greatest strengths. We have to live that intentionally every day. For the people we love and that person you may never see again after you pass them on any street on your path home.

Lord, Please keep us ever mindful of our ability to serve with Joy and without judgment those who are still searching for an undisturbed place of rest and Peace. Amen.



*Diane Goulson*  
Day 21, March 9



*Ann Gengel*  
Day 22, March 10



*Chris Hauck*  
Day 23, March 11

***"Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." - Romans 15:7***

Personal Reflection: This is such a simple, yet very powerful statement. "Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you". Christ has welcomed us without condition and out of pure love even though none of us are perfect and without sin. In the context of the rest of Romans chapter 15, we are to build up each other (our neighbors) not for our own good, but for their good. The strength of our community relies on support from each other. I was born and baptized a Lutheran, but I remain a Lutheran today because I believe that my faith and our church (HTLC) embodies this sentiment very well. I'm reminded of this at every communion when I hear the words "All are welcome".

Prayer: Dear Lord, please help us to accept each other as we are, as you have accepted each of us. Lead us first to listen and understand, rather than react immediately with disagreement or disdain, and to love each other as you have loved each of us. Amen.



*Ben Hilding*  
Day 24, March 12

***"The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost." - 1 Timothy 1:15***

Why Lutheran? I like to say that I didn't choose the Lutheran church; the Lutheran church chose me. My family has deeply Lutheran roots. It's a part of my identity- it always has been. In my teen years, I started to branch out from my home church to see the ways God was working through other churches as well. My eyes were opened, as was my heart. But in college, I took a class with a Professor named Darrell Jodock titled, "Luther and his Legacy."

I learned how Martin Luther tried to simplify things, and helped get the faith into a language people could understand. I learned how my faith isn't just for me, but how I'm called to serve the neighbor. I learned how there's space for questions and doubt, yet it doesn't have to contradict belief. I learned that the grace I received from God wasn't contingent on my own ability to earn it. I even learned that marriage was a cool gift from God (a pretty timely topic as Alicia and I were getting engaged at the time!) While the Lutheran church chose me, it was during this class where I decided to choose it for myself as well.

I give thanks to you, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have protected me through the night from all harm and danger. I ask that you would also protect me today from sin and all evil, so that my life and actions may please you. Amen.

***"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not a result of works, so that no one may boast. " - Ephesians 2: 8-9***

This verse has always resonated with me, as there has always been something so comforting to know that we are "enough" just by having faith in God. While we may fail, and sin, and not always do the things we think we should be doing, God still loves us and accepts us anyway. There is peace in knowing that we are worthy of his love and of heaven, just by accepting Jesus into our hearts and God into our lives.

Like many of us, I was born, baptized, raised and confirmed Lutheran. For so many years of my life, I didn't give a lot of thought to why I was Lutheran. I just was. My whole family was. Growing up in a heavily Scandinavian community, most people in my community were as well. I didn't give a lot of thought about what it meant to be Lutheran or even that there were other things to be. I went to a Lutheran college (Go Gusties). When I got married, my assumption was always that I would get married in a Lutheran church. I planned that my children would be baptized and grow up Lutheran as well.

As I've gotten older and had more exposure to all manners and practices of faith, what has kept me in the Lutheran church has been this concept of being saved by grace, through faith. That God accepts and loves us all, no matter where we come from, who we love, where we live, or how we act. Lutherans believe and accept that love from God is unconditional – it doesn't require that you are the best Christian who always does the right things. It just requires faith.

Dear God,

Thank you for the gift of your grace and unconditional love, even when, or especially when, we don't feel that we deserve it or have earned it. We pray that we continue to grow in our faith in you and in your son Jesus Christ. Amen.



*Michelle Newman*

Day 25, March 13



*Jesse Hemann*  
Day 26, March 14

***"I can endure all these things through the power of the one who gives me strength"***  
**- Philippians 4:13**

When I reflect on my faith, I think about my journey of faith and life but also my underlying beliefs. I grew up Catholic, and my wife a Lutheran. Fast forward to today, I've been a Lutheran for almost 20 years now (happily J). Regardless of the denomination for which we have celebrated our Christian faith (we've visited many Catholic and Lutheran churches over the years), I've come to appreciate the commonalities such as we believe in the same God, recite the Apostles' Creed, celebrate communion, and sing many of the same hymns. Regardless what church you belong to or where you are in the world (whether Lutheran, Catholic, or any other denomination), we can all take comfort in that we always have our faith, which we can take with us anywhere we go. Equally important, through the ups and the downs of life, our faith can give us strength and comfort.

Gracious Lord, thank you for always being there for us. You are there with us to celebrate the good times; the best of times. But more importantly, you're there to lift us when we're down, forgive us when we sin, and pick us up when we fall. In your name we pray. Amen.

***"Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood..."***  
**-1 Peter 2:5-9**



*Alicia Hilding*  
Day 27, March 15

I love that you and I are both priests. We each have holy callings. This, what is typically called, "the priesthood of all believers," is one of many things I value about the Lutheran Church. It is the understanding that each of us have equal access to God and God can work equally through us. None of us have a higher position with God.

While I believe this, I have also experienced this. There have been moments in my life when I have experienced the power of God through the presence of another- some family members, neighbors, some pastors, and still others. The grace, the love, and the forgiveness I have felt, often at low points of my life, I know is only possible because of God's presence through them. I am grateful that God is not limited in who God can work through. We are all a royal priesthood together, the body of Christ. Not because of anything we've done, but because of what God, the High Priest, has done for us.

God, holy and human, help us to know we can come to you at all times and help us to experience you through those around us. Amen.



***"Keep your roots deep in Him, build your lives on Him, and become ever stronger in your faith, as you were taught." - Colossians 2:7***

I have been a Christian and a Lutheran all my life, as were my ancestors in Norway, for hundreds of years. My grandparents came to America in the late 1800's. They were strong in their Christian and Lutheran faith, and passed this faith on to their children, and their children's children. My family honors them every December 23rd (Vetla Julaften) as we share our faith with friends and neighbors and a meal together, on Little Christmas Eve. Sometimes we forget the influence our ancestors had on our lives and how important it was. I am reminded of the hymn Faith of Our Fathers. We may not suffer as they did, but we have the pandemic, riots, and so much division among people today. This is the time to rely on our faith and our church to help us through. It is what our ancestors did.

Our Father, we thank you that we can trust you will always be with us as you were for generations past. Amen.

***"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and it is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." - Ephesians 2: 8***

I have been a lifelong Lutheran...Baptized and confirmed in the Lutheran faith. It was always an important part in my childhood family's life which I continued with my own family. During my second year of confirmation, my pastor gave this definition of God's grace. It is God's redeeming action concerning everyone. This has provided a strong guidance in my life. I try to remember that God loves and forgives everyone no matter what we do, have done, or will do. His Grace is a gift to us. We only have to receive it through our faith. In turn, I try to give that same grace to others. The Lutheran church is one of inclusion for all through God's Grace.

Dear God,

Help us to remember your grace is a gift to everyone. Help us to have your unconditional love for others. We thank you for this gift. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



*Karen Hoylo*  
Day 28, March 16



*Sunde Schoenecker*  
Day 29, March 17



*Jen Sayler*  
Day 30, March 18

***"For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" - Matthew 5:46-48***

So many churches use religion to exclude rather than include, and judge rather than love. When I attended Confirmation of our Godson we were banned from Communion in a Lutheran Church. That made me feel very upset; I thought "what right do they have to say who is worthy to come to the table and who is not?" The more this stirred in me, the more angry I got because it was the exact opposite of what Jesus did. I am Lutheran, particularly ELCA, because "All are Welcome." I dug up an email I sent Pastors Ben and Alicia shortly after we returned to HTLC; I'll share it here. "Dear Pastors Alicia and Ben, From the first time we came to Holy Trinity with you leading, I heard these words come out of your mouths prior to Communion. "All are welcome to the table." I listen for those words every time and smile. Please keep saying them loud and clear for all to hear. There might one day just be someone who really needs to hear them in our midst. In fact, I think we all long to hear we are loved and worthy at the Lord's table."

Dear Heavenly Father, We thank you showing us an example for how to truly love and welcome our neighbor. It is easy to welcome our friends, and people who are like us and like-minded to us, but help us to radically welcome and love others beyond our comfort zone. In your name we pray. Amen.

***"Listen to me! You can pray for anything and if you believe, you have it; it's yours!" - Mark 11:24***

When we moved to New Prague, we hadn't been attending any church. Our two grade school children had been baptized, and attended ecumenical VBS every year, but they were largely unchurched. When a playmate told our daughter she was going to hell since she hadn't made her First Communion (!), we started church shopping! We began looking for a church more as a way to meet people than because it was Lutheran. We began attending HTLC at the invitation of Pastor Chuck. Having been raised Catholic, I felt comfortable with the liturgy and was thrilled with the music. Joining Growth Groups was a wonderful way to meet and bond with other couples. We formed friendships that have lasted to this day. Luther's teaching on salvation through grace alone became very meaningful to me. It freed me from the tyranny of trying to earn my way to heaven. As to why I stay: liturgy, music, and the people.

Heavenly Father, please open the doors of our church so we once again experience the joys of full communion. Lord, I do believe, help my unbelief.



*Audrey Austin*  
Day 31, March 19

***"Speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord." - Ephesians 5:19***

Why Lutheran? This truly makes me think of how I grew up. I remember singing and harmonizing with my Dad in the truck on the way to the feed-mill the old Lutheran hymns. I was fortunate to grow up in a family where Mom and Dad met in Church Choir and incorporated music in each of us. My parents each played piano and their parents were also involved in music with my grandmother serving as the church organist in her youth. There was always a piano to play whenever we visited our grandparents' homes. Mom would bring me to piano lessons every week starting in 2nd grade even though I would sit at the piano and cry because I did not want to practice or go to lessons. Luckily Mom never gave up on us and kept us going until we got over a hump where we all enjoyed it and could appreciate all our parents did for us. I even remember 'playing church' at the farm and giving the cats that died a full Lutheran service with my hymnal. They got 3 hymns, a sermon, and a blessing. You can imagine how busy I was with cat funerals!!

I have played piano/organ in many faiths and churches. Something I always come away with is the fact that the Lutheran's sure can sing! When I grew up in church the organ led the music and you could even hear four part harmony. In other faiths a soloist leads the music and instrumental is an accompaniment to the hymns being sung. I'm grateful to grow up Lutheran where music is an important part of our heritage. I love the fact that I can 'sing and make music from my heart to the Lord'!!

Dear Lord. Please continue to bless us with your love and mercy and keep us singing your praises as we worship your name. Amen.



*Rita Sapp*  
Day 32, March 20



*Stephanie Galvin*

Day 33, March 21

***"And that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." - 2 Timothy 3:15***

I was born into a family that have been practicing Lutherans for generations. Two of the individuals in my life who helped in solidifying my faith were my Grandma and Great-Grandma. As a little girl some of my fondest memories that come to mind include both of these nurturing individuals. The love that both gave to me created a bond that sustained my being and filled my soul. I recall always looking forward to my sleepovers at my Great-Grandma's home, and this is where the Lord's teachings began to shape the person I would become. These sleepovers were not only filled with games and special treats, but we would sit together and my great-grandma would read the Bible to me, and share the meaning and lessons that each story had. Each night ended with us holding hands and reciting the Lord's Prayer. The challenges and triumphs that my family and I have endured have always brought us closer to the Lord and strengthened our faith. On December 7, 2020, my grandma passed away due to complications of COVID-19. The outpouring of love and support my family and I received during and after her passing was incredible. God's hands were at work through all of those within the HTLC community, many offered prayers, words of comfort, and love. Pastor Diane came to my grandma's window at the nursing home and sang to her some of her favorite hymns, which I know brought her and all of us comfort. Pastor's Ben and Alicia's comforting words and prayers were felt those last few days. I called Pastor Alicia as I saw my Grandma rapidly declining, I held the phone up to her ear, and Alicia said a final prayer for her. As we hung up the phone, I held my grandma's hand and she took her last breath. Why Lutheran? I am Lutheran because that is what I have been taught and the faith I have been brought up in by those I love and respect the most. I continue to be Lutheran because I believe God has put the Lutheran Church within my path, in particular HTLC. This community has continued to show me time and time again their love, patience, understanding, and has helped to continue strengthen my faith.

Lord, I ask that you continue to give us strength and hope and we navigate these uncharted waters. Give comfort to those who are grieving, offer compassion to those who are hurting. May our actions be a reflection of Christ's love in us. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

***"And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." - 1st Corinthians 2:4-5***

We as a nation have just come through a time in our history where the words of men have tested our resolve. The resolve of our faith in humanity and the resolve of our faith in our nation's leadership. As Lutherans, we put our faith in the words of the Gospel. If we had an opportunity, we would put a copy of Luther's Small Catechism in the hands of every leader and ask that those words guide them in every decision they make. That won't happen. But for now, we bow our heads and ask God to guide us and our nation forward. That is what we do as Lutherans. We put our faith in the Bible. We put our faith in the words of God because they are always there, they are always true and they can always be trusted. Dear Heavenly Father,

Dear Heavenly Father, wherever our nation takes us going forward, we know you will stand beside us and guide us. Help us remain compassionate, understanding and guide our hearts and hands as we search the Bible for words of wisdom and strength. Amen.

***"For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life" - John 3:16***

Being raised with parents of Evangelical and Adventist backgrounds. Sunday School was a mixed bag when very young. This was a verse learned everywhere with varied interpretations as how to prove you believed so you could claim that everlasting life. Everything changed after attending Bible school one summer (about 5 yrs old). The guest leader had me questioning my parents, Uncle Win says it is sinful to play cards, to dance, to wear makeup, etc. These were all activities that our family did regularly. My parents bought a home soon after and we moved to another area of the community. We had many friends here who offered to give rides to Sunday School at the Lutheran Church in town. The same verse was still being used, however, there were no restrictions to the activities to prove belief in God. God took on a more loving and acceptable attitude, one that gave permission to live a GOOD life with a moral compass that would honor family, community & God, everyone including self, and gave confidence that Love was surrounding ME(the person) as I strove to share my gifts and talents & set a good example for those younger. WHY LUTHERAN? A loving group whose primary goal is to accept all & judge not while praising our Lord.

Heavenly Father, Let us feel and know your love even though we may stumble in our walk through life. Amen.



*Jon Bergquist*  
Day 34, March 22



*Andre Johnson*  
Day 35, March 23





*Angela Schoenbauer*  
Day 36, March 24

***"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."***  
**- 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7**

When I joined the staff here at Holy Trinity, I immediately felt welcomed and accepted. Even though I was personally raised Catholic, I never felt as though my views were being questioned or like I didn't belong within the Lutheran setting. That is one of the beautiful things about Lutheranism; everyone is grounded in their love for God.

What I love most about the Lutheran church is that focus on love. As depicted in this Bible verse, love is simply about being kind and accepting. The Lutheran church at its core promotes love, and it is willing to adapt to a changing world in order to do so.

The longer I spend at Holy Trinity, the more I love about it. I am still growing and continuing to explore what religion means to me, but I have no doubt that I have a forever home within Holy Trinity and the Lutheran church.

Dear Lord, please help me to grow and understand you on a deeper level. Please guide me to always promote love just as you did. Amen.



*Liz Nelson*  
Day 37, March 25

***"This is my commandment, That you Love one another, as I have Loved you."*** - John 15:12

Legacy was the major contribution to why I am a Lutheran. In my family, both my Grandmother and Great-grandparents were immigrants and homesteaded land in a farming community located in West Central Minnesota. In 1870, they were instrumental in establishing and building a Lutheran Church in their community. I believe these early settlers lived out their faith based on the commandment from John 15:12. In the Community, a well known practice of showing kindness, love and friendship to their neighbors was faith in action. It was in that same Country Lutheran Church where my family were members and where I was baptized, taught and confirmed. I am grateful and privileged to have been a recipient of the legacy of faith in a County Lutheran Church. I believe the same Legacy is just as relative today as it was so many years ago. Together, let's be reminded of Jesus' commandment and continue to pass on God's Love to families, neighbors, community and beyond.

Heavenly Father, Thank you for Loving us. We ask for your guiding hand to enable the Spirit of your Love to flow through us to others each day. Amen.

***"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." - Romans 12:12***

This verse is my absolute favorite and has helped me through a lot of my personal tribulations. It reminds me to BREATHE and remember it's in God's hands no matter how I react.

Why Lutheran? I grew up with very kindhearted parents and they were extremely involved with our church. Growing up they told us it didn't matter what religion you chose as long as we believe in something. That gave us the choice once we left home to find the religion that spoke to us, even if it wasn't the Catholic Church.

It took us awhile to choose the right church. I attended services at Sacred Heart Catholic Church while in college in Grand Forks, ND. Once Joel and I married we attended Wooddale in Eden Prairie. Finally after moving to New Prague in 2014 we visited several churches of all religions and then we discovered Holy Trinity Lutheran Church. Melissa Horejsi was the first person I met at HTLC and she immediately invited me to sit at a table full of Holy Trinity regulars for dinner. It was scary and uplifting to sit with a group of strangers who genuinely wanted to learn about who I was. Researching the churches beliefs and meeting the great people is why we knew this is where we wanted to be! I'm so thankful for the day we walked into HTLC's doors and I'm thankful for our wonderful Pastors Ben and Alicia Hilding.

Father, Give me the strength to be patient and faithful in all things. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

***"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" -Psalm 133:1***

Family. That is the most important thing to me. Throughout many generations, we have all been Lutheran. I am Lutheran because our faith has been passed down through my family. My great great grandpa was even a Lutheran Pastor. Religion has been such a huge part of my life since I was born. It was why I got up early every Sunday morning, when I was younger. I just thought about the dough-nuts, lemonade, and fruit loops my parents would sneak into church so we would be quiet during the sermon. But now as a senior about to graduate and take on the world as an adult, I can see why being a Lutheran is so important. No matter who you are, you are welcomed into church by the grace of God. I believe that my ancestors stayed with the Lutheran church because as a congregation... we make a family.

Dear God, please keep us safe, especially during this time of unknown. And thank you for making us all a family. Amen.



*Gina Fadden*  
Day 38, March 26



*Bethany Jacobson*  
Day 39, March 27



*Timothy Price*  
Day 40, March 28

***"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." - Isaiah 41:10***

For many years my Lenten promises were based on personal wants and needs. I'd often hear, "So, what are you giving up for Lent?" And I'd think, man, it'd sure be nice to lose a few pounds, so I would give up sugar or swear off of thick-crust pizza with extra cheese for the forty-day duration. But over the years and as I grow closer to Christ, Lent has come to mean so much more to me than merely denying myself of something. It has also become the cornerstone of my life, and I try to live it 24/7/365. Why? Because bettering ourselves in order to get closer to God or to better serve others shouldn't be something we do for only a few days out of the year. Lent can be a springboard, so to speak, to launch ourselves into a better understanding of why we do it, regardless of what we're giving up or what we are taking on during this period in the name of Christ. I'll also admit, it took me quite some time to see it.

Due to a dysfunctional upbringing and struggles with drug addiction and alcohol, fear and selfishness have always been strong components in my life. (That's why Isaiah 41:10 is now my "go-to" verse.) So when I started stepping out of trying to merely satisfy my personal wants and needs and began thinking of others, I really started to feel God's presence in my heart. It also does quite the number on fear too, because the more I get out of my own head to help other people, the more I feel a true paradox taking place. It seems the more I help, the less fear I have and the closer to Christ it brings me, all year long. Something that pizza and sugar are incapable of doing whether I'm senselessly indulging in them or trying to put them down for a few days in the name of something much-much bigger. I feel this is a season where I am truly growing, and no matter where we begin, it leads us to a better understanding of many, many things. It also gives us a better ability to truly trust in God and His ability to uphold us with His righteous right hand.

Dear Lord, Please open my eyes to your will and your way. Remove my fear and ego and in its place fill me with love, hope, faith, endurance and diligence and may it all glorify your great name. Amen.

# Small Group Discussion Guides

## Session 1: *Ecclesia Semper Reformanda*

**Week of February 21-27**

**Introductions:** Greet one another, and share one habit in your life that has changed over the past year.

### **Opening Prayer**

**Bible Reading:** 2 Corinthians 5:17 "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

**Read Today's Lesson:** During the 16th century, Martin Luther challenged the teachings, practices and structures of the Roman Catholic Church. It's important to remember that Luther didn't intend to start a new church. He wanted to reform the existing church. In Latin, "*ecclesia semper reformanda*" means, "the church must always be reforming". It refers to the conviction that the church must continue to change, adapt, and re-examine itself in order to meet the needs of a particular time and place.

### **Discussion Questions**

- 1) If you happen to know them off hand, what's something Martin Luther wanted to reform in the church?
- 2) How has the church been reforming over the past year?
- 3) What do you imagine to be the reforming in the church that will be needed as we go forward?
  - a. What's one aspect of church life that you really miss?
  - b. What's something you realize you didn't miss so much?

### **Closing Prayer**

# Session 2: Justification by Grace Through Faith

Week of February 28-March 6

**Introductions:** Greet one another, and share one time in your life when you found yourself having to justify yourself.

## Opening Prayer

**Bible Reading:** Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast."

**Read Today's Lesson:** "Justification by Grace through Faith" is the heart of the gospel. It begins with the assumption that all of creation is estranged from God. Our relationship with our Creator has been disrupted by sin. We live in a good but broken creation. We are separated from God and from each other. The question is: what can be done about this? If it were left up to human willpower or ability- nothing could be done. But the good news is that the whole situation isn't left up to us, but rather it has been left to God. While we were still unworthy, through Jesus Christ, God has reached out to the broken world, and to us. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are reconciled to God, redeemed by God, saved by God. Our guilt and sin are forgiven.

## Discussion Questions

- 1) Let's imagine salvation as a ladder. A ladder that you had to climb to get to God.
  - a. Think outside the Lutheran church. What are some of the steps on this ladder that you have heard are necessary to get to God.
  - b. How do Lutherans understand the work of God in this ladder metaphor?
- 2) Professor Rolf Jacobson writes, "A Lutheran Christian isn't someone who has the corner on the truth but instead is one who has been cornered by the truth. We have not found God, but have been found by God. And this leads to a very practical orientation toward daily life: humility with regard to the Christian faith." (Rolf Jacobson, "the Power of Lutheran Words", the Lutheran Nov 2012).
  - a. When have you seen the Christian faith in a posture of humility?
  - b. When have you seen the Christian faith in not exemplifying humility?

## Closing Prayer



# Session 3: Law and Gospel

Week of March 7-13

**Introductions:** Welcome each other, and share a time when you've received (or given) a gift with strings attached.

## Opening Prayer

**Bible Reading:** Isaiah 55:11 "so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

**Read Today's Lesson:** Lutherans believe that the Bible is the Word of God. But that Word comes to us in two different forms: both as law and as gospel. The law includes messages that accuse and judge us (commandments). The law also gives limits and boundaries in order to protect human life and promote human flourishing. The gospel includes messages that comfort and save us (promises). You could also think of it this way: the law tells people what they should do; the Gospel tells us what God has already done for us. One common misunderstanding sometimes equates the "law" with the Old Testament and the "gospel" with the New Testament. This is not right. There is a lot of material in the New Testament that accuses and judges people, and there is a lot of material in the Old Testament that comforts, saves and heals. The whole Bible is both law and gospel.

## Discussion Questions

- 1) Let's pretend we are each writing a sermon.
  - a. What is an example of what you would say if you are preaching the "law"?
  - b. What is an example of what you would say if you are preaching the "gospel"?
- 2) Think of your own life
  - a. When is a time when you've experienced a rule or a law as a gift? Something you realize you needed, even if it meant you had to change behaviors?
  - b. When is a time when you've experienced a word of Gospel? (a gift without strings attached)?

## Closing Prayer

# Session 4: Theology of the Cross

Week of March 14-20

**Introductions:** Welcome each other, and share a time when you've experienced suffering.

## **Opening Prayer**

**Bible Reading:** 1 Corinthians 1:22-25 "For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles... For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."

**Read Today's Lesson:** Theology (theos+logos) means the study of God. Lutherans study God by looking to the cross most of all. It is here that God reveals who God is to us. The cross shows just how far God will go to show God's love for this world. God becomes human, suffers and dies in order to reconcile us to God. The God who chose to come down from heaven chooses not to come down from the cross. Therefore, a "theology of the cross" positions God with those who suffer and struggle. The cross reveals something profound about God's love for us and also about God's calling for us to love and serve others. This contrasts with a "theology of glory" which just focuses on the power and majesty of God distanced from earthly challenge.

## **Discussion Questions**

- 1) Christians are called to share the "good news." There's no question- it is good to be optimistic and positive. But have you ever had someone try to look on the bright side of things, but it was actually not helpful?
- 2) A "theology of the cross" locates God, and even intensifies God's presence, precisely in moments of suffering. Can you think about a time when you've felt God's presence when you were experiencing a difficult time?
- 3) Jesus calls us to "take up our crosses, and follow him" (Mark 8:34). This doesn't mean that we should inflict self-harm in order to appease God. But it does invite us to see how God might be calling us to love and serve others, especially the "least of these." What might happen when we do? Where might you see God?

## **Closing Prayer**

# Session 5: Vocation

**Week of March 21-27**

**Introductions:** Greet one another, and share a meaningful Holy Week experience you've had.

## **Opening Prayer**

**Bible Reading:** Colossians 3:17 "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

**Read Today's Lesson:** The term "vocation" literally means "calling." Until Luther's time it was used primarily to refer to those with a special religious calling, like a priest, monk or nun. But Martin Luther condemned any notion that pastors/priests had a closer connection with God, a more righteous life, or a higher calling than others. He translated the Bible into German, so everyone could read it (not just the priests). He made an accessible Small Catechism so that everybody could learn the basics of the Christian faith. A central Lutheran teaching is the "priesthood of all believers", in that every Christian person is called to live out their faith, and that all Christians are equal in the eyes of God. And finally, he taught the concept of vocation, in that we are called to live out our faith in our daily lives, whether we are pastors, farmers, teachers, healthcare workers, parents, etc. Luther said, "God doesn't need our good works, but people do."

## **Discussion Questions**

- 1) The Greek word for church is Ekklesia. Literally this means, "the called out ones." God calls us to different places and to different people to be God's hands and feet in this world.
  - a. God is calling you to serve somebody today. This is someone who is already in your life. Who comes to mind that may need your help? Your care/concern? Your forgiveness? Your love?
  - b. Now think of your work life. Luther once noted that God doesn't want a shoemaker who puts little crosses on shoes. Rather, God just wants a shoemaker who can make good, reliable shoes. How might you serve God through your place of work?

## **Closing Prayer**



**HOLY TRINITY**  
LUTHERAN CHURCH

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
NEW PRAGUE, MN 56071  
PERMIT #51

## *Holy Trinity Lutheran Church*

1300 Main Street East  
New Prague, MN 56071  
P: 952.758.3513 | E: [office@holytrinityonline.org](mailto:office@holytrinityonline.org)

## *Office Hours*

Mon – Thurs 8:30am – 4:30pm  
Friday 8am – 12pm

©2020 Holy Trinity Lutheran Church