

Third Sunday in Lent

Isaiah 42:14-21

The Old Testament prophets often contrasted those who were led astray against those who consciously defied God—often those who were in leadership positions who should have known better. Who would want to hear God’s proclamation that those “who trust in idols, who say to molten images, ‘You are our gods’...” will be “utterly put to shame.”? God’s own people were frequently guilty of these sins of rebellion and idolatry. And, we also are guilty of the same sins, though our “idols” are apt to be financial, peer driven, or self-centered rather than “molten.”

The wonder in this, and other prophetic dissertations in the Old Testament, is that though God chastises His people, they still remain His people and they remain His first love. It is the same for us. It is a hard concept to understand in our American culture of cheap love. To many in our society, to love means that you never disapprove and never chastise. We don’t understand how a relationship can be both loving and severe.

A professor friend of mine had an experience that I thought demonstrated the idea very well. It seems that he and his son were far out in the woods on a hunting trip. As they were getting ready to go home, they were tossing their gear into the trunk of the car. The son, in a moment of dunderheadedness, tossed the car keys into the trunk and slammed it shut. Of course, the car doors were still locked as well. My prof said, “My son was still my son. I still loved him very much. Our *relationship* hadn’t changed, but our *fellowship* suffered for a few minutes.”



Why is it that even when our dunder-headedness leads us to modern idolatry and rebellion, our relationship with God remains even though our fellowship with Him may become very painful and full of trouble? All of us who are His children know the answer—it is Jesus!

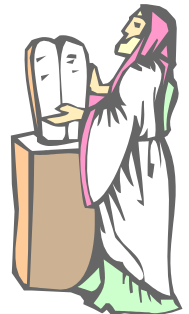
In this time of Lent, as we ponder what we would be without Jesus, let us REJOICE in His free gift of eternal life in His kingdom.

Is your week too short for Bible study? Don't let it be!
A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Third Sunday in Lent

Isaiah 42:14-21

1. Who is the blind and deaf “servant” referred to in vs. 18-20? (See also the Concordia Self-study notes on Isaiah 41:8-9)
2. The law of these verses also speaks to us. In what ways are we blind and deaf in our relationships with God and in our response to His laws?
3. Where do we read the Gospel in these verses? (Note especially vs. 16)
4. Why is this Old Testament prophecy a good partner text for today’s Gospel lesson in John 9?
5. What is “great and glorious” about the law of God (vs. 21)?
6. Are there times in your life when God appears to be silent (vs. 14)? Is God still working (and speaking) in times of silence? When and how has God broken His silence in your life?



Third Sunday In Lent

Text: Exodus 20:1-17



In 19:6 God said His people would be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” In a non-religious context the word for priest meant that you were one of the king’s closest representatives, available to his command at all times. The word for holy might be translated “different.” God is different from anything else we experience; His goodness and mercy are unique in the universe. So, what did God do to help His people understand how to be His priests and His holy nation?

The ten commandments were not a way to be saved, but a way of life. Jesus summarized them in Matthew 22:36-40 when He was asked which of the commandments was the greatest. He replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” and He added “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” What an awesome statement! What commandment could be broken if one lives by these two statements from Jesus?

By living according to God’s guidelines His people were to bring His reality to the people around them. The nations would hear that there was only one God, and by the actions of His people they would find a better way to live. God’s people, however, came to a point where they used the commandments as tools for salvation. They came to believe that if only they could obey every word perfectly, then God would have to let them into heaven. They even added hundreds of laws in order to further define the commandments. They forgot that the King’s representatives were to live by His words and take His message to the world.

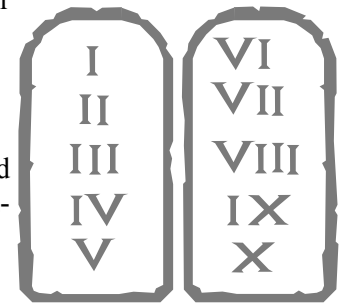
Sometimes we forget that God’s laws are meant to make our lives better and happier. We tend to be like the Old Testament Jews and use the commandments to condemn “sinners” while we proclaim that we are saved by grace through faith. In Christ we truly are “a royal priesthood” and “a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9). May we faithfully live as His people, guided by the ten commandments.

*Do you get together with friends to study God’s Word?
A message from your District Education Committee*

Third Sunday In Lent

Text: Exodus 20:1-17

1. Review Exodus 19. What was the setting for this revelation? Who was God speaking to? What was this a special time in Israel’s history?
2. How does God identify Himself in vs. 2? Why would this identification be important to Moses and Israel?
3. Read the ten commandments in Luther’s Small Catechism (LW pp. 300-301). What differences do you note from words of Exodus 20?
4. The sin of idolatry (vs. 3-4) is listed first. How does disobedience of this commandment affect the other commandments?
5. Exodus 20:18 states “they trembled with fear.” Why do the ten commandments cause a response of fear?
6. Read John 1:17. What was God’s answer to our disobedience? Do we still need to be fearful?



Third Sunday in Lent

Exodus 3:1-8a, 10-15

In answer to Moses' question of Who was sending him, God replied that He was simply "I am." The phrase "I Myself" that sometimes began Jesus' teaching can also be translated "I, I am." In this phrase Jesus identified Himself with the God of Abraham. As He once said, "Before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58). The title *Angel of the Lord* in the Old Testament is almost always a reference to the pre-incarnate Christ.

This was the eternal, beyond comprehension, glorious God that said to Moses that He would send the shepherding ex-prince to rescue the Hebrews enslaved in Egypt. But Moses wasn't too sure about the assignment. Although in today's passage Moses voices only two objections to God about his mission, there are more in later verses, culminating in the suggestion that God go find someone else. God was not pleased.

Lest you think that all people would have objected to such a task coming without warning, let's look for a moment at Mary the mother of Jesus. She was much younger than Moses, an unmarried girl of perhaps 15 (marrying age in those days), engaged to a carpenter; all in all a typical teenager of Nazareth. Her only question for Gabriel concerned how she could be pregnant since she was still a virgin. Her next words were "Behold the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38)



One of these two servants appointed by God was more comfortable when he was in control of his life, without sudden interruptions by God. The other was comfortable as a servant of the Lord, ready to obey God in whatever circumstance might come. Most of us are more like Moses than Mary. Even St. Paul said that he had to "learn" to be content in his life with God, indicating that he didn't begin as an obedient servant of the Lord. Which leader do you identify with? Is it Moses, Mary, or perhaps Paul?

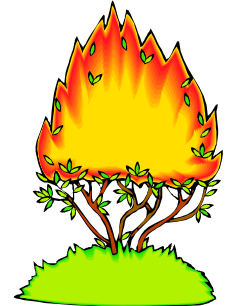


Third Sunday in Lent

Exodus 3:1-8a, 10-15

1. Review Exodus chapter 2. What circumstances had brought Moses to Midian?

2. Identify "the angel of the Lord" (vs. 2)? See also 3:4 and Genesis 16:7. What is special about this revelation of God?



3. What is the first excuse that Moses offers to God's call (vs. 11)? What is God's response?

4. What is Moses' second objection (vs. 3)? What is God's response?

5. What is the significance of the name "I AM"? How does Jesus reveal Himself as the "I Am" God? (John 8:58 and other John descriptions of Jesus)

6. God is aware of Israel's "misery" in captivity. What misery in our world or in your personal life is God aware of? What can we learn from God's response to Israel's situation?

We learn to know Jesus through God's word. Do you make time for it?

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

Third Sunday in Lent

Isaiah 42:14-21

Early in chapter 42 God announces the coming of the Messiah and proclaims a time of rejoicing over His coming victory.

In today's reading, it appears at first that the "blind" are those who will see the Messiah and know His gift of salvation. Then God's tone changes and we see the "blind" as God's people whom He loves, but who are blind and deaf to His call. They have ears that work, but they do not hear. They are not blind, but fail to see what is before them.

All of the "blind" are loved by God; all are part of His chosen nation. Some are blind but will see when the Messiah comes. Some will continue to close their ears and eyes to the truth and the light that the Messiah will bring.

Some of the images that Isaiah presents can apply to our own Christian lives. We are not blind to the Messiah. We have not closed our ears and eyes to our salvation in Christ. We know that He has saved us by His suffering and death. However, we can still fall victim to the temptation of closing our ears and eyes to God's call.

God called His nation of Israel not only to be faithful to Him, but to be a light in the world, revealing His love to everyone. They failed to see that. Even as Christians, it is easy for us to not see that God calls us to spread the news of His love and salvation.

Jesus calls us to care for those around us in His name—and in doing so let them know that He is the Lord of our lives and wants to be their Lord and Savior, too. It is perhaps the most effective way to spread His Gospel. Yet, we often fail to hear God's call to give of ourselves and our time in serving the people of our communities who need our response to their daily needs *and* need to know our Lord.

As Christians we sometimes hear and see God's love at the same time that we are seemingly deaf and blind to His call to serve. We are, after all, sinners, but God will never give up on us and our timidity. Daily He calls us; forgives us; loves us; lifts us up; and enables us to serve in His name. All this He does because His Son Jesus chose to give Himself for us on the cross.

Learn more about "serving" in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee.

Third Sunday in Lent

Isaiah 42:14-21

1. The early verses (14-16) continue Isaiah's celebration of the Messiah/Servant. How will His power be displayed?
2. What "blindness" and "darkness" (vs. 16) will He cure? What promise closes verse 16?
3. What commandment is addressed in vs. 17? How many Gods are there?
4. God's chosen "servant" Israel is addressed in vs. 18-20. How is Israel described? How do we see ourselves in this description?
5. Look at the other texts for today (Ephesians 5:8-14) and John 9:13-17. What do the three texts have in common? Who is our Lenten Light?
6. While our texts speak of spiritual blindness, we also remember those who physical sight is limited? In what ways is The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in mission to the blind? What is your congregation doing to tend to the physical and spiritual needs of the visually impaired?

Third Sunday in Lent

1 Corinthians 1:22-25

The Corinthians lived in a unique time. Christ had been crucified only twenty or thirty years before. There were still many living who had seen Jesus in person, even heard Him speak. Those witnesses and great leaders like Paul and the other apostles told their stories and spread the Gospel truth. Amazingly, many rejected the truth. Others, who had left their old religions and become Christians, either drifted back into the old ways, or intentionally decided to return to them. Some stayed in the Church but let their own selfishness, opinions, and ingrained beliefs influence their behavior and worship. Some just couldn't understand the connection between faith in God and conducting "business as usual" in their personal or professional lives. Come to think of it, maybe their world wasn't so different from our own after all.

While we don't have the joy of knowing anyone who personally sat on the hill and listened to Jesus' sermon on the mount, we do seem to have all of the same problems communicating the gospel both outside of and inside of the church. Perhaps, like the Corinthians, we need Paul's words of encouragement. His words that remind us of both the reality and the priority of our God.

Paul says that many reject Jesus in favor of something that will give them more tangible proofs—like the Jews who hounded Jesus for a "sign" while ignoring the signs that were so obvious. Others seek a man-centered answer for "why?" In the Corinthians' time those were the Greeks who sought answers from within, from man's philosophies, sciences, or the man-created gods of Olympus. In Paul's time and in our own, even Christians become entangled in our own ideas and in our own agendas.

Paul gives us an often-needed reminder. We preach *Christ crucified* because He is the center of all history and the center of all life. Without Him and without His gift nothing else is of ANY value. To center on this Truth, the Truth of God's wisdom and power, reprioritizes all other things. Our egos get under control, our witness becomes more effective, our faith becomes more intense and more constant. He is the core of our being.

Learn more about God's mercy and love in a Bible study this week.
A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Third Sunday in Lent

1 Corinthians 1:22-25

1. Explore the context of this letter to the Corinth congregation (Concordia Self-study Bible or another reference). What cultural influences were at work? What was the influence of the Greeks and Jews on this congregation?
2. According to vs. 23 what is distinct about the message of the Christian church?
3. According to vs. 25 how do "man" and God compare?

For Family Reflection

4. What "wisdom" does the world seem to offer us? What is wise about believing in Jesus?
5. What sources of power does the world suggest? What is powerful about believing in Jesus?
6. How could you explain the wisdom and power of the cross (vs. 18) to your friends and neighbors who do not believe in Jesus? Why is the Lenten season a good time for sharing Jesus?

Third Sunday of Lent

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Did you ever notice that there is no excuse for sin? According to today's passage, we are never tempted beyond what we can endure. In our visits with one another many of us have referred to Paul's words concerning temptation (vs.13). We are usually referring to relationship problems, work frustrations, or even illness—a situation that gives us great concern or frustration. However, God's promise extends beyond the most difficult problems we face and into daily life.

The world in which we live objects to many things about us. We believe in an all-powerful God who has authority over His world. We believe that Jesus is the only path to God. We even believe that all people sin and fall short of the glory of God. The world rejects these and other truths that we accept. In fact, most of the world rejects the idea that there is any such thing as an absolute truth. This puts us in constant conflict every day. The world pushes us to accept its version of morality, truth, religion, God, etc., etc. Temptation is not something reserved for special occasions—its pressure is upon us continually.

God became angry with the Israelites because they had no excuse for their sin. They knew Him as their Savior from Egypt, their Protector at the Red Sea, and their Provider in the wilderness. Yet, when faced with temptation, the Israelites dove into sin with gusto. They didn't have to—they chose to.

We can resist temptation, but we do not. Or can we? We are, on the one hand, able to resist temptation, but on the other hand we are not capable of choosing to resist temptation all of the time. We cannot be perfect because we are by nature sinful rebels against God. Each of us is a strange personality that wants to choose to obey but also wants to rebel. That is why Jesus is so precious to us. Moses, all of the Old Testament people, Jesus' apostles, and we, would be lost without Jesus.

It is our rebellion and its resultant sin for which Jesus chose to die. He chose to suffer for Moses and his people, for the apostles who followed Christ, for us, and for all believers of all time who keep choosing to sin in spite of their desire to choose to obey.

Learn more about serving God in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Third Sunday of Lent

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

1. Paul gives the Corinthians (and us) a quick review of Israelite history. Make a list of the incidents that are cited. What do we learn from their history?
2. How and where in their journey did the Israelites see signs of Christ? Where in our journey do we see signs of Christ?
3. Is all temptation sinful? (See Matt. 4:1-11) When does the temptation become sin?

For Family Reflection

4. What temptations did you face today? Did you "give in" to any temptation? How do we "escape" (vs.13) temptation?
5. Do we sometimes get too confident (vs.12) of ourselves and our ability to face trials and temptations? How do we stay focused and strong?
6. "God is _____." (vs. 13) As we continue our Lenten journey, where do we see God's faithfulness to us?

Third Sunday in Lent

John 4:5-30

In the time of Jesus' ministry, if a Jewish man passed his wife on the street, he would ignore her. Jewish men thanked God daily that they had not been born a Gentile, dog, or woman. Yet, Jesus singles out this woman and speaks to her. Not only was she a woman, but a Samaritan. Jews would walk days out of their way just to avoid stepping on Samaritan soil. In addition, she was living with a man who was not her husband. Yet, Jesus came to her, showed her compassion, reasoned with her, and even sent her to witness to others about Him. Some claim that God is not concerned about women, but Jesus shows us God's true character—one of caring, concern and respect for a woman's ability to understand His words. His love is the same for everyone.

What else is Jesus telling His disciples and us? He is the answer for everyone: men and women, Jews and non-Jews, even pagans and atheists. It doesn't matter where you have been, what you have done, or whom you were born. He is the answer for every problem, sin, frustration, and fear.

Jesus answered the woman's needs, and also her questions. He is not offended by the questions of His children. He chastised the Pharisees' questions because they were asked with the intent of proving that He could not be whom He claimed to be. But, He is always ready to talk with us when we ask the many "Why?" questions that are a natural part of our lives. How? Often through our study of His Word and through prayer. We can come to Him with every doubt and question because He already knows what they are. The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming...He will declare all things to us." Jesus' answer to her is also for us, "I who speak to you am He." Wow!

Is Bible study a part of your day?

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Third Sunday in Lent

John 4:5-30

1. What social and cultural blunders did Jesus make in interacting with the woman at the well?
2. What's the difference between physical thirst and spiritual thirst? What the difference between the effect of physical water and "living" water? Where do we get physical water? Where do we get "living" water?
3. What did the woman already know about the Messiah (vs. 19-20, 25)? What else did she discover about Him in their dialog?

For Family Reflection

4. What effects did the woman's experience and message have on her community (vs. 39)? What effect is Jesus' message having on your family, your church, and your community?
5. The woman's moral failures (vs. 17-18) did not keep her from Jesus. What's the good news for us in that example? What's the good news for others that we meet in Jesus' name?
6. Does the Lenten season make you spiritually thirsty? Where's the Water?

Third Sunday in Lent

John 2:13-25

The massive Jerusalem Temple begun by Herod the Great in 20 B.C. had shaky beginnings. Herod, ruling under Rome's authority, sent for permission from Caesar Augustus to build the structure, but encouraged the messenger to "take the long way around" to Rome. While awaiting a reply, Herod began construction. After some months, the message arrived from Rome that if it wasn't yet started, the structure should not be built, but if it was already underway, it was alright to proceed. The temple was not completed until A.D. 64, more than thirty years after Jesus' crucifixion and only about six years before its virtual destruction.

That's the story of the Temple, but what of Jesus' anger over its use? Does God get angry? Yes, He does, but God does not sin in His anger because it is always with just cause. Why was Jesus angry? Commentator William Barclay says that about ten years after Jesus cleansed the temple, the Romans ordered a census of the number of sacrificial lambs used at Passover. This was probably to estimate the number of Jews in Palestine since Passover attendance was required by Jewish law. Barclay says that the census indicated over 2.5 million people in Jerusalem for the festival. Annas and Caiaphas (The former high priest and his son-in-law, the present high priest) ruled over the dusty, noisy, crowded scene of the business of hawking sacrificial animals that filled the temple courtyard.

Worshippers did not usually travel the many miles to Jerusalem with their sacrifices, choosing to purchase them at the temple. They were often cheated. The animals, which had to be certified by the priests as without blemish, were way overpriced. In addition, the people were required to pay the price with temple coins, so had to exchange their common money—for a fee, of course. Some worshippers had to leave their cloaks as collateral in order to offer their sacrifice to God. Is it any wonder that Jesus drove out the traders? Praise God for the free and perfect sacrifice of Jesus!

We learn to know Jesus through God's word. Do you make time for it?

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Third Sunday in Lent

John 2:13-25

1. What was the significance of the Passover celebration (see Exodus 12)? Why would Jesus and His disciples observe this Old Testament event? When else did a Passover celebration become significant in Jesus' ministry (See Matthew 26:17ff.)?
2. Why did Jesus react so strongly to the temple businesses? Was Jesus justified in His protection of the temple property?
3. What "temple" was Jesus talking about in verse 19? What temple was in the minds of Jesus' audience?
4. Jesus words and actions were also prophetic. What greater events were prophesied? Why weren't the disciples able to understand the details of Jesus' ministry at this time?

For Family Reflection

5. What lessons do we learn about respect for God's house from this story? Why is your church building so special? What behavior is appropriate in the church?
6. Sometimes parents tell children "This will make sense to you later." What made sense to the disciples later (after Jesus' resurrection)? What does it mean to have faith in things we can't yet fully understand?

Third Sunday in Lent

Luke 13:1-9

The Jews of Jesus' time believed that they could save themselves by obeying God's laws. The Pharisees trumpeted the Law as the means of salvation for all Jews. They added hundreds of laws to God's Law to cover all possible situations. They believed that in obeying all of these laws they could be sinless.

Related to this legalism was the belief that if a person suffered a great loss, death, injury, or disease, it was because that person had sinned, angering God who then sent suffering to the sinner.

There were two major problems with this system. First, it was illogical. Jesus taught that all are sinners. No one but Jesus was sinless. The other problem was that the system assumed that sins were of different degrees. Jesus taught that even sinful thoughts separate us from God. Salvation through obedience, classifying sin, and believing that all personal suffering was directly sent by God led to the prideful practice of accusing those suffering of being out of God's favor and not worthy of the attention of the "perfect."

It is true that murder causes more visible suffering than lying, but in God's eye both lead to eternal death.

Jesus said on this occasion that some men killed by a falling tower were no more sinful than anyone else. His words contradicted the legalistic system of salvation. All sin, no matter how insignificant it may seem, causes eternal separation from God; and a suffering person has no more guilt than anyone else in God's eyes.

Jesus' challenge to His questioners concerned whether they could redeem themselves. His warning was the parable of the vineyard keeper, who begged for mercy for the unfruitful fig tree. If the tree could not bear fruit, it would be cut down. If the sinner cannot redeem himself, he will be lost forever.

Jesus' message was simple. If you are not right with God, you will be lost eternally. If you cannot make yourself right with God, you need a Savior. To recognize your Savior, you must understand your sinfulness. Luther said that it is the Holy Spirit who calls us to Jesus; to recognize who He is; to see our need. The faith to believe is a gift He grants to us each day.

Now is the best time to join a Bible study.

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Third Sunday in Lent

Luke 13:1-9

1. What conclusions had some come to about the tragedies that had occurred? Is this response typical?
2. What lesson does Jesus teach from those tragedies? Why is repentance an appropriate response to personal and large-scale tragedies?
3. How do we see the patience of God in the story of the fig tree?

For Family Reflection

4. Can you think of a recent tragedy? What lesson might God be trying to teach you through that tragedy?
5. How has God shown His patience to you? What is your response to His patient grace?
6. Can you think of someone who doesn't seem to be bearing the fruits of faith? How might God use you to "dig the soil" or "fertilize the soil" so that it might be more fruitful for Him?