

March 14, 2021

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

God Comes to Us

Perhaps you are a parent whose favorite time of day is tucking your sleepy child in at bedtime. The day's adventures and interactions are gathered together at dusk, a patchwork of memories. No matter how much this child has challenged you, you are absolutely undone by your love for her at day's end. Perhaps at these times your heart grows several times its size in gratitude for the life before you, for the privilege of being a parent.

Thomas Merton's later writings were influenced by his friendship with a Buddhist monk and an eastern understanding of God. Merton came to appreciate the Buddhist perfection in the art of meditation, the achievement of full mindfulness in the present moment, the discipline of body, mind, and spirit in order to achieve a oneness with God. One may echo Merton's deep respect for the aspirations of a life achieving spiritual oneness with God through discipline and practice.

As compelling as these religious practices may be to our spiritual sensibilities, the words of today's gospel text set Christians apart from world religions that strive to achieve closeness to God. For the truth upon which we stand is that *God comes to us*. No spiritual discipline, no moral purity, no heartfelt pleading can bring us closer to our Lord. God is not to us as a master training a servant in obedience, nor as a judge weighing degrees of righteousness. The God of the New Testament is like a mother rushing to the side of her child, like a father hovering over his child in gratitude and forgiveness. This is our God. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16).

First St. John Lutheran Church

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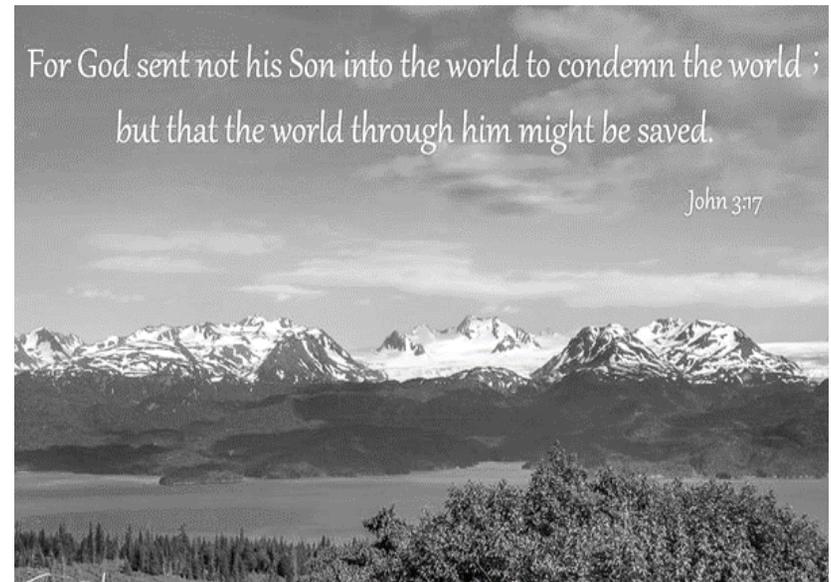
www.firststjohn.com

Rev. Jerald K. Rayl

Annette Slater - Music Director

Dr. Anthony Pattin - Organist

Toni Wilbarger - Secretary



Called through faith; Gathered in worship; Serving the community

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Fourth Sunday in Lent

Welcome to First St. John Lutheran Church! Please review some of our guidelines below.

Masks must be worn. We have some available to take if you don't have one. Some are cloth masks and can be taken home to wash and reuse. There are also disposable masks.

Please do not congregate in the Narthex (entrance area) either as you arrive or leave.

To minimize direct contact, we will use the outside aisles only for entry and exit. The center aisle will be used for communion, special needs, or emergency exit.

Ushers will fill the pews from the front to the back of the church and dismiss from the back to the front. Please follow their directions. We are sorry everyone cannot have their usual seat.

NOTE: We can speak the congregational responses behind our masks. Dr. Tony and Annette Slater will provide music. The service will be recorded and published to the website. We are now live streaming the service on our church website, www.firststjohn.com

Elders will wear gloves. You can get a bulletin at the check-in table when you walk in. Please do not leave your bulletin in the pew when you exit; take it home or put it in the recycling bin at the front door.

There is a small wooden church just to the right of the main door when you come in. It has a slot for your offering.

Restrooms are in the church basement. Go to the Narthex (lobby) and take the left set of steps down. The ladies room is at one end of the hallway, and the men's room is at the other. Return to the Narthex using the opposite set of stairs. Please, one person only in the restroom area.

Diaper Changing: A diaper changing table is available in the ladies restroom in the basement of the church.

Flowers: If you would like to sign up for flowers for a Sunday, please call the church office during the week to check on availability.

PARTICIPANTS IN TODAY'S SERVICE

ELDERS

Jeff Ladd, Dave Wilbarger

SOLOIST

Annette Slater

SOUND BOARD

Andy Hodges

FIRST READING: Numbers 21:4-9

Throughout the Hebrew scriptures, the time of Israel's wandering in the desert is seen as a period of testing. Though God delivers the people from slavery and provides for all their needs on the journey, they whine and grumble. They fail to see the gift of salvation in the exodus. Yet God's anger is not the final word. God continues to lead the people toward the land promised to their ancestors.

From Mount Hor the Israelites set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way.⁵ The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food."⁶ Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died.⁷ The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people.⁸ And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live."⁹ So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Reader: Word of God. Word of Life.

C: Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

The LORD delivered them from their distress. (Ps. 107:19)

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.

**²Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
those he redeemed from trouble**

³and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

**¹⁷Some were sick through their sinful ways,
and because of their iniquities endured affliction;**

¹⁸they loathed any kind of food,
and they drew near to the gates of death.

**¹⁹Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress;**

²⁰he sent out his word and healed them,
and delivered them from destruction.

**²¹Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.**

²²And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices,
and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.

SECOND READING: Ephesians 2:1-10

God raised us up to new life while we yet belonged to powers of evil. If such was our past, we now live with Christ and will spend eternity discovering the breadth of God's goodness.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

P: Blessed are you, O God, creator of heaven and earth. You rescued your covenant people, led them on all their journeys, and taught them by the prophets. You so loved the world that you gave your only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

C: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

P: Pour out your Holy Spirit in this meal, and make us one in this community of faith and with your people throughout the world. Glory and praise to you, O God, Author of life, Word made flesh, Power of the Most High, now and forever.

C: Amen.

The Lord's Prayer (prayed by all)

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;

And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Invitation To Communion

P: Jesus draws the whole world to himself. Come to this meal and be fed.

C Thanks be to God.

Gospel Response

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to you, O Christ.

(Please be seated)

SERMON

Sermon Hymn "Our Father, We Have Wandered"

Pastor Rayl

No. 606

(sung by Annette)

(Please stand)

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried;

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;

He ascended into heaven,

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer *(Each petition concludes with this response)*

P: Hear us, Lord.

C: Your mercy is great.

The Offering *(As you exit, please place your offering in the wooden church in the Narthex if you have not already done so.)*

Musical Offertory

Dr. Pattin

Offering Prayer

P: Faithful God, you walk beside us in desert places, and you meet us in our hunger with bread from heaven. Accompany us in this meal, that we may pass over from death to life with Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C: Amen.

You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ --by grace you have been saved--⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God--⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Reader: Word of God. Word of Life.

C: Thanks be to God.

(Please stand)

Lenten Verse "Return to the Lord Your God" (sung by Annette)

Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful,

Slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,

And abounding in steadfast love. (Repeat)

Gospel Acclamation

P: The Gospel according to St. John Chapter 3.

C: Glory to you, O Lord.

GOSPEL: John 3:14-21

To explain the salvation of God to the religious leader Nicodemus, Jesus refers to the scripture passage quoted in today's first reading. Just as those who looked upon the bronze serpent were healed, so people will be saved when they behold Christ lifted up on the cross.

[Jesus said:] ¹⁴"Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."