

Holy Week Planning Guide 2025



THE WAY OF NO RETURN

Pastor Mark Anderson



GOD'S WORD IS LIFE

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INTRODUCTION

The cross stands before us, and the empty tomb beyond it. Nothing will ever be the same. The road is narrow now. The hosannas will fade like the last notes of a half-remembered song, and in their place comes a malevolent, oppressive evil. Holy Week is upon us, and there is no turning back.

Step forward, but step carefully. The path is marked not by triumph but by the deep, naked footprints of One who walks ahead of us, carrying the weight of a world that does not want saving yet cannot save itself. This is not the triumphal path of presidential motorcades, kings with banners, or heroes with swords. It is the slow descent of the Son of Man, bound for the decisive battle where victory will look like defeat, where the greatest act of power will be abject suffering and surrender.

The cross rises in the distance, stark and immovable, defying every scheme, every resolution, every last gasp of human striving. No wit nor will can alter its course. The old Adam writhes, grasping for another way, but there is none. Holy Week is no season for self-betterment, no stage for sentimental sorrow. It is the great unmaking, the unraveling of all illusions, where our finest garments are unmasked as tattered rags, and our wisdom collapses into the foolishness of a cross. Here, we are not called to contribute, to grasp, or even to comprehend. We come only to hear, to receive, to be repented.

And so, we go, not to do, but to be undone. We go to baptism, where all things end so that all things may begin. He goes to the cross for us because only the dead can be raised.

Pastor Mark Anderson



Planning Guide

PALM SUNDAY

Theme: The Politics Of Power And The Kingdom Of The Cross

Gospel: Luke 19:28-40

Hymns:

1. LBW 108 – "All Glory, Laud, and Honor"
2. LSB 617 – "O Lord, We Praise Thee"
3. ReClaim 145 – "Come to Calvary's Holy Mountain"
4. ELW 343 – "My Song Is Love Unknown"
5. LBW 111 – "Ah, Holy Jesus, How Hast Thou Offended"

KEY FOCUS:

Jesus does not enter this final week in earthly triumph but in humility, mounted on a donkey, riding toward His death. The tension between expectation and fulfillment? The people wanted a political king; Christ came to reign from the cross.

COMMENTARY

Palm Sunday starts with fanfare, the energy you'd expect for a king. The people shout, "**Hosanna!**" They lay down cloaks, thereby demonstrating their submission. They wave palm branches like banners. It looks like a revolution. But by the end of the week, their cries will shift from "**Save us!**" to "**Crucify Him!**"

Jesus doesn't play the game they expect. He doesn't ride in on a warhorse. He doesn't march to the palace. He doesn't raise an army. He doesn't even defend Himself when they put Him on trial. And that's the problem for them and us. We keep expecting God's kingdom to work like the kingdoms of this world.

The Politics of Betrayal: The System Always Wins

Jesus sits at the table with His disciples and tells them what's coming. "**One of you will betray me.**" (Luke 22:21), but the betrayal is bigger than just Judas. The whole world is stacked against Him.

- The religious leaders need Him gone because He threatens the law that they uphold.
- The Roman authorities don't care about justice—they want to keep the peace.

- The crowd is easily manipulated, switching from worship to rage in a matter of days.

Pilate is the picture of 'realpolitik.' He knows Jesus is innocent. He even says: **"I find no guilt in this man"** (Luke 23:4), but the crowd is getting restless. And if there's one thing a politician can't afford, it's instability. Pilate does what politicians always do when power is on the line. He plays it safe. He releases Barabbas, a man guilty of insurrection and murder, and hands Jesus over to be crucified. Barabbas, the man of violence, walks free. Jesus, the man of peace, is condemned.

Jesus' inauguration into power didn't happen at a grand ceremony. There were no triumphant speeches or inaugural balls, just a brutal public reckoning. He was introduced to the people not as the promised deliverer or restorer but as a problem to be dealt with. His approval ratings had tanked overnight. He wouldn't overthrow the unjust oppressor. He wouldn't make Israel great again. So, they did what we always do when the latest messiah doesn't fit our definitions of salvation: they got rid of Him.

History repeats itself. We still want Barabbas in every election cycle, every revolution, and every movement. We still think salvation comes through force, through power, through the right leaders in the right offices. But politics cannot fix the human heart. Luther saw this clearly:

"The world desires a kingdom of power, but God's kingdom is one of faith. Earthly rulers can make laws, but they cannot change the heart." (*LW 26:289*). And the heart is where God's work of faith is done.

The Cross: A Throne Unlike Any Other

The rulers sneer at Jesus. The soldiers mock Him. The sign above His head reads: **"This is the King of the Jews."** (Luke 23:38)

This isn't what kings look like. Kings wear crowns of gold, not thorns. Kings are flanked by soldiers, not thieves. Kings rule from palaces, not from crosses. He is reigning not from a place of conquest but from a place of surrender. His throne is the cross. His victory is His death. And the world cannot comprehend it. As Paul would later put it:

"The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:18)

The cross exposes the failure of human power. No government, no party, no ideology can bring salvation. They can build roads, pass laws, and even enforce a certain kind of morality but they cannot deal with sin. They do not want to. They cannot raise the dead.

The Two Thieves

On either side of Jesus, two criminals hang. One of them mocks Him: **"Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"** (Luke 23:39) That's the world's voice. The demand for salvation schemes that operate on our terms. Prove yourself. Show us your power.

But the other thief sees something else. He knows he has nothing to offer. No bargaining chip. No reason to be saved. He simply says, **"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."** (Luke 23:42)

And Jesus replies:

"Today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43)

That's the scandal of the Gospel. The kingdom of God doesn't come through conquest. Nor is it bestowed on account of merit. It doesn't arrive on the wings of political victory. It comes through mercy and forgiveness. Luther puts it this way:

"Christ does not come with force but with love, not to condemn but to save. The cross is His throne, suffering His triumph." (*LW* 22:20).

Palm Sunday and the Politics of the Cross

Are we any different from the crowds in Jerusalem? We still want a God who fixes problems on our terms. We want Him to make our nation stronger. We want Him to align with our political views. We want Him to bless our side of the argument.

Jesus is not here to take sides. He takes sinners. He doesn't come to bolster our agendas, religious or political. He comes to shut them down, to put all our striving, all our righteousness, under the judgment of the cross. And then, he dies. And with Him dies all potential for salvation through human pretension. Because, in the end, the kingdom of God isn't seized or built. It's handed over. It comes by sheer mercy.

Greek Word Studies

1. ὡσαννά (hōsanna) – "Hosanna"

The term "Hosanna" is a transliteration of the Hebrew phrase (Hoshiana), which means "Save, please" or "Save us, we pray." The crowd's exclamation of "Hosanna" acknowledges Him as the anticipated Messiah and Savior. This acclamation is recorded in the Gospel of John: "So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!'" (John 12:13).

2. **βᾱῖα (baia) – "Palm Branches"**

The Greek word "βᾱῖα" refers to palm branches, which were symbols of victory and triumph in ancient cultures. In the Gospel account, the crowd uses palm branches to honor Jesus as He enters Jerusalem: "So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him..." (John 12:13). This act signifies the recognition of Jesus as the victorious King and Messiah. The palm branches thus become a symbol of the victory that Jesus would achieve through His Passion and Resurrection.

3. **ὄνος (onos) – "Donkey"**

The term "ὄνος" refers to a donkey, the animal upon which Jesus rode into Jerusalem. This act fulfilled the prophecy from Zechariah 9:9, which is cited in the Gospel: "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" (John 12:15). The choice of a donkey, rather than a horse, symbolizes Jesus' humility and the counter-intuitive nature of His kingship, contrasting with the common expectation of a militant Messiah.

4. **δόξα (doxa) – "Glory"**

The word "δόξα" means "glory" and is used to describe the honor and praise given to Jesus during His entry into Jerusalem. The crowd's acclamation, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," reflects the recognition of Jesus' divine glory and messianic role. This event is a foretaste of the ultimate glorification of Jesus through His death and resurrection, where His true glory is fully revealed.

5. **βασιλεύς (basileus) – "King"**

The term "βασιλεύς" means "king." In the Palm Sunday narrative, the crowd refers to Jesus as the "King of Israel" (John 12:13), acknowledging His royal authority. This proclamation recognizes Jesus as the promised descendant of David who would establish God's eternal kingdom. However, Jesus' kingship is not of this world; it is a spiritual reign characterized by humility, service, and sacrificial love.

6. **μαθητής (mathētēs) – "Disciple"**

The word "μαθητής" refers to a disciple, but a disciple is not primarily someone who takes up a task or follows a set of instructions. Rather, a disciple is one who Christ's Word seizes, is made new by His declaration, and is drawn into the reality of His cross. On Palm Sunday, the disciples do not orchestrate Jesus' entry into Jerusalem; they are caught up in the unfolding drama of His mission. They fetch the donkey not as an act of merit but because the Word has laid claim on them.

SERMON

Luke 19:28-40

Dear friends in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Palm Sunday is a strange day. It feels like a celebration, but it's a parade marching straight into suffering and death. The people cheer, but they don't understand what they're cheering for. They cry out, "Hosanna!"—"Save us!"—but they have no idea what that salvation will cost.

They expect a king who will fix their problems, restore their nation, and throw off the Roman oppressors. They want strength. They want victory. They want glory. And standing before them is Jesus—riding on a borrowed donkey, heading toward suffering, rejection, and death.

Here is the great collision: Our expectations versus God's reality. We want a king on our terms. A king who will reward our goodness, clean up our messes, and smooth out the rough edges of life. But Jesus is not that kind of king. He is not here to affirm us, improve us, or give us a spiritual to-do list. He is here to die for us.

The truth is, we don't want a suffering king. We don't want a God who bears a cross. We want one who hands out blessings. We would rather have a God who gives us what we ask for than a God who gives us what we need.

The crowds shouting "Hosanna!" will shout "Crucify him!" just days later, and if we're honest, we know why. Jesus doesn't come to affirm our religious efforts. He comes to put an end to them. He doesn't come to reward our righteousness. He comes to expose the truth: we have none.

That's why Palm Sunday feels so upside down. It exposes the deep sickness of the human heart. We want to be in control. We want to be strong. But Jesus marches toward the cross, because we are not strong, but weak. Because we are not righteous but sinners. Because we call death life and life death.

Jesus knows all of this, and still, he rides on. He does not turn back. He does not hesitate.

The road to the cross is not an accident. It is not a tragedy. It is the mission. The Son of God rides into Jerusalem to be betrayed, to be mocked, to be beaten, to be nailed to a Roman cross. And he does it for you.

For the ones who shout "Hosanna!" but don't understand what they are asking.
For the ones who will cry "Crucify him!" when they realize he is not the king they wanted.
For the ones who love their sin more than their Savior.

For the ones who run from him, deny him, fail him.
For us.

Jesus does not come to be served but to serve. To give his life as a ransom for many. To be crushed under the weight of our sin so that we might be set free. He dies the death we deserve so that when he rises, we will rise with him.

Palm Sunday is not just about a parade in Jerusalem. It is about the unstoppable movement of the kingdom of God. The cross does not stop it. The tomb cannot hold it. The resurrection launches a victory procession that has never ended. And by baptism, you have been joined to it.

You are not left behind in the dust of your sin. You have been carried into Christ's death, buried with him, and raised with him. His victory is now yours.

So today, we cry out "Hosanna!" not in blind expectation but in the full knowledge of what it means. We do not follow a king who gives us what we want. We give thanks for the King who has given us everything—his life, his righteousness, his victory.

And when he returns, we will cry "Hosanna!" again. But this time, the procession will have no end. No more sin. No more suffering. No more death.

Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!

And may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.





MAUNDY THURSDAY

Theme: Given for You

Gospel: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Hymn Suggestions:

1. LBW 197 – "O Living Bread from Heaven"
2. ELW 359 – "Where Charity and Love Prevail"
3. LSB 617 – "O Lord, We Praise Thee"
4. ReClaim 145 – "Come to Calvary's Holy Mountain"

Key Focus:

The Lord's Supper is the feast where Christ gives all—Himself, body and blood—for the forgiveness of sins. We come empty, bringing nothing but need, and receive everything: His mercy without measure, drowning every failure, sweeping us into His death and resurrection. The new commandment—to love one another—is not a task laid upon weary shoulders, but a gift already accomplished, freeing us to love not by compulsion, but by grace.

And see how He serves? Not only with a towel and basin, but with a cross and grave. He stoops lower still, descending into suffering, into death itself, into the very depths of all that would tear us from Him. And there, in that lowest place, He does His greatest work not as a lesson to imitate, but as the act that remakes us.

Our filth, our failure, our sin—it is finished. And in Him, we are forgiven and made clean.

COMMENTARY

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

The Hour Has Come

"Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father" (*John 13:1*). The whole story turns on this hour. It is the hour of glory, the hour of suffering, the hour of the cross. Every sign, every miracle, every word has led to this. And how does he begin? Not with thunder. Not with fire. But with a towel.

Luther reminds us: "Christ is not only a gift and present, but an example and pattern, setting before us the very path and way which we should walk." (*Luther's Works, vol. 24, p. 112, Sermon on John 13:15, 1523*)

The King Kneels

They had seen him command storms, cast out demons, raise the dead. But now? Now, he bends low. **"He laid aside his garments and girded himself with a towel"** (*John 13:4*). He does not seize a king's throne; he takes a servant's basin. The holy Son of God kneels before sinful men. The hands that shaped the heavens scrub dirt from calloused feet. The One who holds the universe together holds the heels of his disciples.

Luther again: "We should picture Christ to ourselves in this way: he washes the feet of his disciples and dries them. This is a wonderful example of ineffable humility and love." (*Luther's Works*, vol. 22, p. 131, *Sermon on John 13:5*, 1521)

And Peter, always the one to speak, recoils: **"Lord, do you wash my feet?"** (*John 13:6*) He cannot stand the thought. This is backward. This is wrong. But Jesus presses on: **"If I do not wash you, you have no part in me."** (*John 13:8*)

But Peter misses the mark. Peter still wants things his way. He wants a Lord who fits his idea of lordship, who doesn't stoop, who doesn't serve. This is about grace. Here at this basin, the kingdom of God is breaking in.

The Water That Cleanses

The washing is not optional. **"He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over"** (*John 13:10*). It is not Peter's work, nor yours, nor mine. We are cleansed by Him, by His word, by His mercy.

Luther speaks of this washing: "Christ alone must cleanse us daily, and for that reason he is seated at the right hand of God, that he might ever cleanse us." (*Luther's Works*, vol. 35, p. 68, *Sermon on John 13*, 1533)

This is baptism lived out. Washed once, yet daily needing cleansing. As we walk through the dust of this world, the promise of Jesus repents us and makes us clean.

The Shape of the Cross

And then comes the command: **"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet"** (*John 13:14*). This is not a new law, but the shape of the cross in daily life, the shape of vocation. To follow Jesus is to kneel, to serve, to suffer the burdens of the actual life we live. Not as a way to earn but to reflect what has already been given. Yes, this is what we "ought" to do, but we do not.

Luther makes it plain: "God does not need our works, but our neighbor does. Therefore, we are to serve our neighbor, just as Christ has served us." (*Luther's Works*, vol. 31, p. 367, *Heidelberg Disputation*, 1518)

He calls us to love, but not the love of the world. Not the love of power, self-interest, or gain. **"If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."** (*John 13:17*) But we don't. Not naturally. We still grasp. We still climb. We still seek glory. So, Jesus must give something new.

The New Commandment: A Judgment and a Promise

Judas walks into the night. Peter will soon deny Him. The disciples will scatter. And yet, Christ still kneels. Christ still serves. Christ still loves. The cross is not a transaction; it is a total and complete undoing of the old world, the world built on power, striving, and self-righteousness. The new world, the new creation, is born not from strength but from weakness, not from law but from mercy, not from us but from Him. Judas leaves. The betrayer is gone. And then, in the shadow of what is to come, Jesus speaks: "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and in him God is glorified" (*John 13:31*). Here is the great reversal: Glory is found in suffering. Majesty is revealed in a cross.

And then the words that have shaped the Church—and condemn it: **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."** (*John 13:34*)

What is new about this? The world has always spoken of love. But this love is different. **"As I have loved you."** The measure of this love is not human effort, not sentiment, but His love—cross-shaped, self-giving, relentless. And that is the problem.

Who among us loves like this? Who has laid down everything for another? Who has loved without self-interest, without calculation, without limit? The commandment exposes us. His love stands as a judgment on ours. We do not love as he loves. We will not.

Luther captures it: "Christ says, 'I am not speaking of the love that the world has, which loves only when it sees some good in another. I am speaking of the love that is unknown to the world: the love that does not look to its own advantage but is willing to lay down its life for others.'" (*Luther's Works*, vol. 24, p. 230, *Sermon on John 13:34*, 1523)

And here is where the theology of the cross leaves us. Not with resolve but with repentance. Not with determination but with desperation. If love is what justifies, then we are lost. If we must love as he loves, then we are condemned.

But his love is not just a command. It is also a gift. This impossible love must be given. It must come from Him.

And that is exactly what He does. The One who commands love becomes love for us. The One who demands righteousness gives righteousness as a gift. What he asks of us; he fulfills for us. As Luther observed;

“This is the way divine love works: it does not find but creates that which is pleasing to it.” (*Heidelberg Disputation, Thesis 28*)

So, faith alone remains. Faith that he loved us first. Faith that his love and mercy is what saves. Faith trusts that though we fail to love, we are already loved fully, eternally, completely in Him.

By This They Will Know

How will the world see? Not by our buildings, not by our arguments, not by our might, but by this: **"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."** (*John 13:35*)

But what does that mean? The Church has spent centuries trying to make itself visible through power, through success, through moral superiority, and good works. We build institutions, enforce doctrines, stumble around in apologetics, rally movements, all to prove that we are the genuine disciples, the good lovers. We turn love into a program, a strategy, and a goal to be achieved. And in doing so, we miss the point entirely.

The love Christ speaks of is not something we can produce. It is not an ethic to be enacted or a virtue to be cultivated. It is his love, not ours, that marks the Church. And that love comes in only one form: the cross. The Church is not known by its successes, its influence, or its programs but by its death and resurrection.

Luther puts it plainly: "Wherever Christ's love is, there is a living sacrifice. The Christian lives not for himself, but for his neighbor. This is how faith works: it kills the old man and makes all things new." (*Luther's Works, vol. 27, p. 66, Commentary on John 13, 1528*)

And that's the scandal. Our love does not make us disciples but being loved. Being put to death and raised in Christ. We do not justify ourselves by our acts of charity or by our witness to the world. We are justified by faith alone. And that is how the world will know. Not by what we build. Not by what we prove. But by the love that comes to us and through us by faith alone. The love that has already been accomplished for us and is proclaimed in the forgiveness of sins.

The Towel, the Water, and the Cross

Jesus kneels, and we recoil. He washes, and we resist. He loves, and we betray. But he kneels anyway. He washes anyway. He loves anyway. And soon, these holy hands that have scrubbed dust

from sinful feet will be pierced. Soon, the blood that pumps through this serving heart will be poured out for selfish humanity. This is his glory. This is his love. This is for you.

Greek Word Studies

1. **δίακονος (diakonos) – "Servant"**

The word diakonos originally referred to a table waiter, someone who served others in a lowly and practical way. In the New Testament, this term is transformed into a powerful image of Christ's ministry and the Christian life. Jesus explicitly identifies Himself as a diakonos when He declares, "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). This servant-hearted nature of Christ is seen vividly in John 13, where He kneels to wash the feet of His disciples. In that act, He demonstrates that true greatness in His kingdom is not found in power, status, or authority but in humility and self-giving love.

The ultimate expression of Jesus' servanthood is found in the cross. His service is not limited to acts of kindness but is fulfilled in His suffering and death for sinners. He carries out the Father's will as the perfect diakonos, bearing the burden of sin and redeeming the unworthy. For the believer, this word challenges all notions of self-exaltation, calling us to reflect Christ's humility: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus... he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:5-7).

2. **ἀγάπη (agapē) – "Love"**

The Greek language has multiple words for love, but agapē is uniquely associated with divine, self-giving love. This love is not dependent on emotions or circumstances; it is a commitment, an act of the will, and ultimately the nature of God Himself: "God is love (agapē), and whoever abides in love abides in God" (1 John 4:16).

This agapē is also at the heart of justification. Unlike human love, which seeks reciprocation, God's agapē is freely given apart from our merit: "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). The believer does not love to earn salvation but loves in response to the love already received in Christ. This love is not sentimental or transactional—it is sacrificial.

3. **κοινωνία (koinōnia) – "Fellowship"**

The word koinōnia means more than casual friendship or shared interests—it signifies deep, participatory communion. In the New Testament, it is used to describe the believer's shared life in Christ. Paul writes, "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship (koinōnia) of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:9).

Nowhere is this koinōnia more profound than in the Lord's Supper: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation (koinōnia) in the blood of Christ? The bread that we

break, is it not a participation (koinōnia) in the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16). The meal of Holy Communion is not merely symbolic; it is an actual participation in Christ’s forgiveness and presence. As believers receive His body and blood, they are united with Him and each other in the one body of faith. Christian koinōnia is not based on human effort but is a gift of God, created and sustained by His Spirit through Word and Sacrament.

4. **καθαρίζω (katharizō) – "Cleanse"**

The verb *katharizō* means to make clean or pure, often used in relation to physical washing, ceremonial purification, and spiritual cleansing. Jesus uses this word when He tells Peter, “If I do not wash (*katharizō*) you, you have no share with me” (John 13:8). While Peter initially resists, Jesus’ washing points beyond mere hygiene to the greater cleansing that He provides through His death and resurrection. This cleansing is given in baptism, where sinners are washed and made new: “Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins” (Acts 22:16). Through Christ, we are no longer unclean but fully purified in the eyes of God.

5. **προδίδωμι (prodidōmi) – "Betray"**

The verb *prodidōmi* means to hand over or betray, and it is most notably used in reference to Judas Iscariot. Jesus foretells His betrayal at the Last Supper: “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray (*prodidōmi*) me” (John 13:21). The weight of this word is staggering—Judas, who had walked with Christ, seen His miracles, and heard His teaching, would ultimately turn Him over to His enemies. Yet even this act of treachery does not thwart God’s plan. Paul captures this paradox in Romans 8:32: “He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up (*prodidōmi*) for us all—how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?” Judas’ betrayal is wicked, yet through it, God brings about the greatest act of redemption.

6. **ἐντολή (entolē) – "Commandment"**

The word *entolē* refers to a command or ordinance, and in John 13:34, Jesus gives a new commandment: “Love one another, just as I have loved you.” Unlike the Law, which demands and condemns, this *entolē* is not a burden but a promise—Christ’s love transforms the believer so that love becomes the natural outflow of faith. The difference between Christ’s *entolē* and the old commandments is that He fulfills the Law *for us*. Love is no longer a tool to gain righteousness; instead, it is the fruit of being made new in Christ. “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). The Gospel creates what it commands.

SERMON

JESUS LOVES THE BAD LOVERS

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

It is Maundy Thursday. The air is heavy, thick with something unsaid, like a storm about to break. The meal is ready, the table set, the candles flickering with quiet promise. But there is a shadow in the room, a reckoning waiting in the wings.

Jesus stands. He takes off his outer garment, wraps a towel around his waist, and kneels—low, lower still before feet caked with the dust of the road. The dust clings like sin, like shame, like all the things we cannot wash away. He touches them, one by one, these feet that have followed him. These feet that will soon flee from him.

He washes Peter's feet, though they will soon carry him to a courtyard where he will curse and swear, "I do not know him."

He washes Judas's feet, though they will soon slip out into the night, moving fast toward thirty pieces of silver.

He washes them all, every last one of them—though by morning, not one will remain at his side.

He washes the bad lovers.

And that is what we are. Bad lovers. That is what sin is—bad, idolatrous love. Loving the wrong things, in the wrong way, for the wrong reasons. Loving power, safety, control, status, self. Loving ourselves more than God. Claiming to love God, but only when he gives us what we want. Sin is love twisted in on itself. Sin is love undone.

And here is the sharp edge of the law: Jesus does not merely expose our failure to love—he reveals that we cannot and will not love as he loves. The command to love as he has loved us is not an encouragement, not a gentle invitation—it is a hammer. We can admire it, theologize about it, and even try to imitate it, but when it truly confronts us, we are undone. This commandment does not inspire. It kills.

Jesus knows this. He has always known this. And still, he kneels.

"If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."

Peter recoils. He does not want a Lord who kneels. He does not want a King with a towel. He wants a Messiah who wields power, not one who stoops in service. But love does not grasp. Love gives.

And here, we must be clear: love does not save us. Jesus did not come merely to model love as if our problem were that we just needed better instructions. We do not need a teacher. We need a Savior.

So, Jesus does not just wash feet. He washes sin. Not with water from a basin but with blood from a cross. Not with a towel, but with nail-pierced hands.

The bad lovers betray, abandon, deny. But the Good Lover does not stop. The Good Lover loves to the end. The world does not work this way, of course. We love what is lovely, what is useful, and what is deserving. We love transactionally. Jesus loves efficaciously. His love is not contingent. It is not rationed out for the worthy. It is not merely an example but a verdict.

And that is what offends us. We act as if Jesus said, “Love one another,” as if that were manageable, and we could legislate it into existence. We turn it into books, lectures, laws, and programs. We make it about fairness, about justice, about duty.

But that is not what he said. He said, “Love one another as I have loved you.”

That ruins all our games. It does not motivate us; it exposes us. It strips us bare, leaving us with nothing to offer in return. We do not love as he has loved us. We cannot. That is why he does not command love as a condition for salvation. He loves us first. He loves the bad lovers. He loves the unlovely, the caked-in-dirt sinners.

So, he kneels. He washes. He forgives. He feeds. He dies. Without condition. Without transaction. Without waiting for us to deserve it.

So, we eat and drink tonight—not to prove our love, but because Christ is here, doing what he promised. The Supper is not our love for Jesus. It is Jesus’ love for us. Tonight, the bad lovers come to the table. We, who run, who deny, who betray, who fail. And the Good Lover meets us here and says:

Take, eat. This is my body, given for you. This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins. This is not a metaphor. This is not a lesson. This is not a moral encouragement. This is Jesus doing what he said he would do. The world does not work this way. But the Kingdom of God does. And it does just as the Good Lord promised—for you.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.





GOOD FRIDAY

Theme: The Cross Alone

Gospel: John 18:1–19:42

Hymn Suggestions:

1. LBW 111 – "Ah, Holy Jesus, How Hast Thou Offended"
2. ELW 351 – "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded"
3. LSB 450 – "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded"
4. ReClaim 153 – "Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted"
5. ReClaim 145 – "Come to Calvary's Holy Mountain"

KEY FOCUS:

Christ takes the cup—bitter, full, and final. He does not merely taste; He drains it to the dregs. There is not a drop left for us, and there is not a trace of wrath remaining. He swallows the world's sin—ours too—down into Himself, and with His last breath, He does not whisper, but shouts: **"It is finished!"** Not half-done, not awaiting our contribution, not an open-ended task—finished!

At that moment, the old-world crumbles. The world of debts and ledgers, of striving and failing, of always falling short—gasps its last breath with Him. Every demand of the Law, every record of wrongs, every desperate attempt to make ourselves worthy, buried in His tomb.

And when He rises, a new world rises with Him. Not a world we construct by our efforts, not an achievement unlocked by our devotion, but a world given—a creation remade, whole, and free. No call to try harder, no burdensome ladder to climb. Only life—poured out, given, already ours. Already done.

COMMENTARY

John 18:1–19:42

The Garden: Where It Began and Ends

It started in a garden, and it will end in one, too. Adam and Eve hid behind trees, ashamed of their nakedness. This Second Adam stands fully revealed. He does not flinch when they come with torches and swords. **"Whom do you seek?"** (*John 18:4*) This question hangs in the air, not just for the soldiers, but for all of us. A Messiah who flexes his muscle? A Christ who will clean up your life, make you better, stronger, more respectable, better at the law?

They fall to the ground when he speaks. The great **"I AM"** (*John 18:6*) has spoken, and in that moment, every knee buckles. But this is not his hour of glory—not yet. He will not stand above them; he will bow beneath them. They take him away, but he is not taken. He walks the road willingly, like a lamb led to the slaughter.

Luther says: "Christ is not man alone, but God and man in one person; he was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. But he humbled himself and did not always use and manifest his divine majesty, but abstained from it until his resurrection, when he ascended into heaven, and was declared Lord over all creatures." (*Luther's Works*, vol. 22, p. 525, *Sermon on Philippians 2:5–11*)

Peter's Sword and the Silence of the Cross

Peter is still playing by the world's rules. He grabs a sword and slices off an ear. Violence, even in the name of righteousness, is still violence. But Jesus? He heals the wound of his enemy. **"Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?"** (*John 18:11*) The cross will not be built by human hands. He will not need Peter's sword.

Pilate asks, **"Are you the King of the Jews?"** (*John 18:33*) He does not understand that kingship here is upside-down. This is a king who reigns from wood and iron, not gold and ivory. Pilate is cynical. Truth? **"What is truth?"** (*John 18:38*) Truth is standing in front of him, bruised and bleeding, but Pilate, blinded by sin, can't see Him.

Luther again: "If you see Christ laid in the manger, believing that he was born for you, and if you hear this word: 'For you is born the Savior,' and accept it as the truth, then you are Christ's, and he is yours. If you do not believe it, then you derive no comfort from the birth of Christ." (*Luther's Works*, vol. 52, p. 18, *Christmas Sermon*, 1522)

Behold, the Man

They strip him down. Mock him. Press thorns into his skull until blood runs into his eyes. And Pilate, still perplexed, presents him: **"Behold, the man!"** (*John 19:5*) But he is not just a man. He is *the* Man—the only true human, the One who carries Adam's failure on his back. He bears our violence, our sin, our desperate attempts to fix ourselves, our self-righteous religion. He takes it all.

The people want him dead. **"Crucify him!"** (*John 19:6*) And we are among them. We do not want a God who comes in weakness. We want power, security, and insurance against the terrible fragility of life. We want a king who will make things right on our terms. And if we cannot find one that suits, we will become a king or queen unto ourselves. But here is God—beaten, ridiculed, mocked. God is found where no one wants to look: in suffering, need, shame, and death.

Luther drives this home: "God receives none but those who are forsaken, restores health to none but those who are sick, gives sight to none but the blind, and life to none but the dead... He has mercy on none but the wretched and gives grace to none but those who are in disgrace." (*Luther's Works*, vol. 31, p. 57, *Heidelberg Disputation*, 1518)

The Throne of Wood and Nails

They hoist him up. This is his throne. The sign above his head says, **"Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews"** (*John 19:19*). It is meant to mock him, but it is truer than anyone knows. This is what kingship looks like in the kingdom of God: merciful self-giving, surrender, sacrifice.

And then he speaks his last words: **"It is finished."** (*John 19:30*) . Not **"It is almost done."** Not **"I have done my part, now you do yours."** No. **"Finished."** Complete. The sin of the world, buried in his flesh. The wrath of God, spent on his Son. The work of salvation, done.

Luther makes this plain: "It must be exclusively Christ's work and no one else's. For he who would make satisfaction for sin by his own suffering and merit or free himself from sin and death, despises Christ and will himself remain in sin and death." (*Luther's Works*, vol. 26, p. 281, *Sermon on Galatians 3:13*, 1531)

The spear is thrust into his side. Out pours blood and water. The church is born from his wounds. The fountain of grace, the river of life, and the washing of baptism all flow from this moment.

The Garden Tomb: The Seed Must Die

They lay the corpse in a tomb. Another garden. Another Adam. The seed must fall into the earth and die (**John 12:24**). For now, it looks like death has won. But the grain is buried, and soon, very soon, life will spring forth. But not yet.

For now, we wait at the foot of the cross. And in the long waiting, in the silence of faith, we see and proclaim this truth: God is most revealed where He seems most hidden. Strength is found in weakness. Life is hidden in death. This is the way of the cross.

Luther says: "The cross alone is our theology." (*Luther's Works*, vol. 31, p. 40, *Heidelberg Disputation*, 1518)

GREEK WORD STUDIES

1. ἐξουσία (exousia) – "Authority, power"

Pilate flexes his political muscle, boasting about the authority he thinks he has over Jesus (*John 19:10*). But Jesus turns the tables: "You have no authority except what has been given

from above." The theology of the cross rips the mask off earthly power—real authority is not in the hands of empires or governors but in the One hanging on the cross. Christ's authority is found in His surrender, His suffering, and His refusal to fight back. The cross is God's paradox—power in weakness, victory in defeat.

2. **βασιλεύς (basileus) – "King"**

A king with no army. A throne that is an execution stake. A crown made of thorns. This is Jesus' coronation—the soldiers mock Him as "King of the Jews," Pilate inscribes it over His head (John 19:19). What they mean as a cynical joke is the truth —Jesus reigns from the cross. The theology of the cross means His kingdom isn't built on might but mercy, not on power but on pardon. The only way to recognize this battered, brutalized King is to see Him crucified for you.

3. **τελέω / τετέλεσται (teleō / tetelestai) – "To finish, complete, fulfill"**

"It is finished." Not a sigh of defeat, but the greatest victory ever proclaimed. Jesus' final words (John 19:30) don't mean His suffering is over—they mean salvation is accomplished. The theology of the cross is all here: Jesus isn't handing you a 'finish this list'; He's proclaiming a word: it IS finished! No more sacrifice needed. No more payments left. The Lamb of God has done it all.

4. **ἀμνός (amnos) – "Lamb"**

John the Baptist saw Him before anyone else: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). At the cross, John tells us, "Not one of His bones will be broken" (John 19:36), pointing back to the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:46). The theology of the cross says Jesus is your Passover. His blood is on the doorpost of your life. Death passes over you because it has already fallen on Him.

5. **σταυρός (stauros) – "Cross"**

A word that meant shame, humiliation, execution. But for Jesus, it's His mission, His victory, His throne. The soldiers get down to business thinking they're killing one more troublemaker. The crowds think they're watching justice being carried out. But the theology of the cross says something else entirely: This is where the world is made right. Not in power, not in glory, not in strength, but in a bleeding, dying Savior who won't come down from the cross. The cross is the place of final victory where the powers of sin, death, and the devil are overthrown.

SERMON

John 18:1–19:42

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The cross is everywhere. It sits atop steeples, hangs in sanctuaries, dangles from chains around necks. The world wears it, displays it, mass-produces it. But symbols are tricky things.

The cross was never meant to be beautiful. It was not jewelry, not an emblem, not a sentimental image. It was a horrifying instrument of execution, a public display of death, a warning to anyone who dared to cross Rome. It was shame. It was agony. It was the end.

On a hill outside the city, far from the centers of power where history is made, they hoisted Him up. Jesus hung there by His wrists, blood running from His wounds and pooling at the dirt beneath His feet. His chest heaved for breath in a cycle of suffocation and agony.

There, under the watchful eye of the ruling elite, the blessed, righteous, innocent Jesus breathed His last, faltering breath. No last-minute save. No victorious rallying of the cowardly disciples. Finally, in the cold grip of death, His corpse was shut in and guarded behind a government-sealed stone.

And yet, here we are—still talking about this cross, this death. Why? Because this death was different. Jesus died on that cross—for you.

This is the scandal of Christianity, the sharp edge of our confession. The cross is not a vague message about love, not an inspirational metaphor, not a general truth about forgiveness. It is an event. It happened. A man was crucified outside the city walls of Jerusalem on a Friday afternoon.

And the offense is not that Jesus died. Many have died unjustly. The offense is that God died for you. The Lord of life gave himself over to death. The Holy One became unholy. The Sinless One became your sin. Paul does not soften it: “For our sake, He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”

God did not wave sin away. He did not spiritualize it or offer techniques for self-improvement. He took it. Bore it. Became it. And in that moment, the judgment fell. The weight of the law, the fury of divine wrath, the condemnation of all the world—it all came crashing down. Not on you. On Him.

No wonder Paul calls this foolishness. No wonder the world mocks. No wonder the cross offends. We do not want this kind of God. A God who comes in weakness, who bleeds, who takes our sin and suffers in our place. A God who does everything for us because we can do nothing—this is offensive.

We would prefer a God who meets us halfway, a God who rewards our efforts, a God who gives us steps to follow so we can feel like we’ve done something. But the cross leaves no room for bargaining. No room for progress. No room for negotiation. The cross is the end of the road. The final judgment. It is the end of your striving. The end of your righteousness. The end of your attempts to justify yourself. The cross leaves you with nothing—except Jesus.

The cross is not a transaction to be admired from a distance. It happens to you. It kills you. It buries you in the very word you are hearing. It strips you of everything—your illusions, your merits, your religious credentials. It exposes you, leaves you naked. The cross does not invite you to decide, participate, or contribute. It happens before you even know what to say.

Luther put it bluntly: “God achieves His purpose by doing everything through an opposite: by law, He slays the flesh, that by the Gospel He may restore it to life.”

This is why we do not proclaim Jesus as a teacher of timeless truths. His words, deeds, and miracles did not inspire faith; they provoked hostility. They got Him killed. The world judged Him and found Him guilty. Even His own disciples abandoned Him. By the end, Jesus had no followers. That’s what the cross does—it clears the room.

And yet, here is the gospel word. You have already died. You have already been crucified. Your sin, your shame, your condemnation—it has all been drowned. Where? In your baptism.

Paul says it without hesitation: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?”

Your baptism was a death sentence imposed and carried out by God’s Word. It was God grabbing hold of you and saying: You are mine. Your sins are mine. Your death is mine. And my life is yours.

Baptism also freed you for eternal life. From that moment on, the only life that finally matters in you is the life of Christ. “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”

And yet, we resist. We want something more. We want to have a say in this salvation business. We want our faith to be impressive, our spirituality to be deep, our lives to progress.

But God has no interest in your spiritual achievements. He is not waiting for your response. He is not dependent on your free will decision. He is not worried that grace will be abused. The question is not whether grace is too much of a risk—the real question is, who are we to begrudge God’s grace?

A Christianity that assumes free will really has no place for the cross. A Christianity that assumes we are neutral that we just need the right information or the right motivation will always turn faith into a decision, grace into a possibility, and Jesus into a helper rather than a Savior.

But the cross does not invite you to choose. It does not wait for your cooperation. It does not leave room for your self-determination. It comes crashing down on you, a real sinner. “It is finished.”

This is the real scandal, the deep offense: God forgives sinners, real sinners. The self-righteous social justice warrior who wields judgment like a club. The self-righteous flag waver who equates political

ideology with the voice of God. The fraud, the pious hypocrite who cheers on the condemnation of others while covering their tracks. The compromiser and the sellout. The one who relativizes evil so that it only sticks to the other guy. The one who plays the game and miserably fails. The closet sensualist who poses as a moral purist. The faker and the taker. The whole sorry morass of human dysfunction. Christ suffered, bled, and died for all of it, not because there is any deserving, but because God refuses to allow our damnable unrighteousness to have the final word. And what is the last word that comes from the highest authority?

If you have fallen away, if you have doubt, if you have objected—then hear this: God has not given up on you. Your baptism holds. The promise stands. Your sin is forgiven. The mercy of God is for you, just as surely as Christ's limp, broken body hung on that cross for you.

This is what it means to be saved by faith alone. Not by a spiritual experience. Not by moral improvement. Not by a deeper commitment. But by this: that Christ was crucified for sinners, for the ungodly. That Christ was crucified for you.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.





HOLY SATURDAY

Theme: Waiting in Hope

Gospel: Matthew 27:57-66

Hymns:

1. LBW 109 – "Go to Dark Gethsemane"
2. ELW 345 – "Jesus, I Will Ponder Now"
3. LSB 448 – "O Darkest Woe"
4. ReClaim 152 – "Jesus, in Your Dying Woes"
5. ReClaim 153 – "Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted"

Key Focus:

Christ rests in the tomb, keeping the Sabbath. The fulfillment of all that was promised from the foundation of the world. The work is done. The sacrifice is complete. And now, even in death, He is Lord, hallowing the grave as a resting place for the redeemed.

The world falls silent, held in the hush between death and life. The crowds have gone, the mockers have scattered, the disciples sit in the weight of unanswered grief. All seems lost. Although hope appears to be sealed behind stone, God's Word remains unshaken. The promise has not unraveled. It holds, stronger than sorrow, firmer than the grave.

For this rest is not the stillness of defeat, but the quiet before dawn. The seventh day is passing, the first day is near. The world as it was, the world of sin and death, is fading. And when the morning comes, it will not be the same world that wakes. It will be new.

The grave will give way. The stone will be rolled back. And the silence of Holy Saturday will break into the song of new creation.

COMMENTARY

The Silence of the Law

Holy Saturday is the day after the great verdict: **"It is finished."** The law has done its worst—condemned, accused, and executed the Son of God. Now, there is nothing left to say. The law's accusations are finally silenced in Christ's death. The old world, with its demands and judgments, is buried with Him.

A World Without God?

If the cross is God's radical act of taking sin and death into Himself, Holy Saturday is the stark reality of what that means: God is dead and buried. For those looking for a theology of glory, this is the scandal of Christianity: a Messiah who does not conquer but lies lifeless in a tomb. The old world and religion believe it has rid itself of God.

The End of Us

Holy Saturday is not just about Christ's death; it is also about our death. The old Adam and Eve, the striving self, the one trying to justify itself before God, is dead and buried with Christ (Romans 6:3-4). This is the terrifying and liberating truth of Holy Saturday: everything now has been taken out of our hands. The old creation is no longer the story of potential. It is a graveyard.

GREEK WORD STUDIES

1. **Τάφος (*Taphos*) – "Tomb" (Matthew 27:60)**

From the Greek *taphos*, meaning grave, burial place, or sepulcher, this word is linked to *thaptō* (to bury). In ancient Greek culture, tombs were final resting places, sealed in memory, marking the end of a story. But here, the tomb is not an end but a beginning. The world buries Christ, believing it has silenced Him, but the grave is merely the stage for the greatest reversal in history.

2. **Κύλιω (*Kuliō*) – "Roll Away" (Matthew 27:60)**

Derived from *kuliō*, meaning to roll, to move by turning, this verb describes both Joseph of Arimathea rolling the stone into place and, later, the angel rolling it away. Human hands try to close the story, but divine hands will undo their efforts. What seems like a final act of control—sealing the grave—will be overturned in an instant. The stone stands as a reminder that human power cannot hold back what God has set in motion.

3. **Σφραγίζω (*Sphragizō*) – "Seal" (Matthew 27:66)**

From *sphragis*, meaning a seal, a mark of ownership or authority, this verb refers to the act of sealing a decree, an agreement, or in this case, a tomb. Seals were signs of power, warnings not to tamper. The chief priests and Pilate believe they have secured their victory, but the irony is striking: they are sealing their own defeat. The world's attempt to control Christ only serves to highlight His unstoppable power.

4. **Φυλάσσω (*Phylassō*) – "Guard" (Matthew 27:65)**

Meaning to watch over, to keep, to stand guard, *phylassō* is often used for military watchmen or shepherds protecting a flock. The guards at the tomb believe they are preventing deception, but they are the ones deceived. They stand against the inevitable, gripping their spears in vain. The true battle was not theirs to fight—it had already been won in the silence of the grave. The theme of victory in the midst of death continues.

5. **Ἀναπαύσις (*Anapausis*) – "Rest" (Matthew 11:28)**

From *ana* (again, up) and *pauō* (to cease, to stop), *anapausis* conveys a deep, completed

rest—not just sleep, but the kind of rest that follows a finished work. Just as God rested after creation, Christ now rests after redeeming creation. His work is not paused but fully accomplished. The world assumes He is defeated, but He is simply waiting for the dawn of the new creation.

6. **Ἐγείρω (*Egeirō*) – "Rise" (Matthew 28:6)**

From *egeirō*, meaning to wake up, to raise, to bring forth, this word is used both for physical resurrection and spiritual awakening. The stone trembles, the grave loses its grip, and when Christ rises, He does not rise alone. This is not a mere return to life but the first act of a new creation. His resurrection is not just for Himself but for all who are in Him—death no longer reigns.

SERMON

Matthew 27:57-66

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The tomb is sealed. The stone is in place. Jesus is dead. The world breathes a sigh of relief. And so do you. Because if He stays in that grave, then you don't have to face Him. If He stays dead, then you can go on pretending that sin is manageable, that death is avoidable, that your life is something you can control.

So you seal the tomb. You post guards over your heart. You try to make it as secure as you can.

But no matter how much you try, the law does its work. It accuses. It demands. It drives you to exhaustion. And finally, it kills. Not just Jesus, you. Because the sinner in you cannot be fixed. The old Adam and Eve in you cannot be improved. He/she must die.

And so, Holy Saturday is not just about Christ in the tomb, it is about you in the tomb. Your striving, your control, your righteousness, it is all buried with Him. This is the end of you.

But this is also where the gospel begins. When Christ rests, the new creation is at hand. What was dead is about to rise. The world's silence is about to be shattered. The grave they tried to seal will become the open door of grace.

And when Christ walks out, so do you. Not the old you, the exhausted, striving, fearful one. That you is finished. The you that emerges is new, washed in His death and alive in His resurrection. That is baptism's promise to you. You belong to Him now, and nothing, not sin, not the law, not even death, can hold you.

For now, the tomb is stone-sealed, the weight of death pressing down in finality. The world has done its worst. The voices of accusation, the whip, the nails, the law's relentless judgment, they have

all spoken their last, and silence reigns. Christ rests, buried beneath the weight of sin, beneath the burden you could never bear.

But not for long.

The stone that seems immovable is already losing its claim. Death itself shudders, its victory slipping like sand through broken fingers. The grave, so certain in its hunger, has bitten off more than it can chew. Because this body, this crucified Christ, does not belong to death. He has gone into the depths, not as death's prisoner, but as death's undoing. He has entered the grave for you, carrying everything that has ever held you captive, your failures, your shame, your fear. And when He rises, He does not rise alone. You have died with Him, you have been raised with Him.

You, who have tried to stitch together your own righteousness and found the fabric too thin. You, who have felt the law's accusations cut deep and wondered if grace could truly be for you. You, who have stood at the edge of hope, afraid to believe it could be real. You are not forgotten. You are not left behind.

For when you were crucified in your baptism, He pulled you from death to life in His arms. Not as a spectator to His triumph, but as one raised with Him—your sin buried, your death undone, your name written in the book of life by the very hands that were pierced for you. The world may think the grave is the end. But for you, the grave is now a doorway. And if that is so, if Christ has already done it all, if the grave is empty and the verdict is in, then there is nothing left to prove, nothing left to fear, nothing left to do but rise and live in the freedom of faith, because you are already His.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.





THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD: EASTER SUNDAY

Theme: Christ Is Risen!

Gospel: John 20:1-18

Hymns:

Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds

- LBW 143
- ELW 367
- LSB 465
- LHS 103
- ReClaim 163

Jesus Christ Is Risen Today

- LBW 151
- ELW 365
- LSB 457
- LHS 85
- ReClaim 161

The Day of Resurrection

- LBW 141
- ELW 361
- LSB 478
- LHS 91
- ReClaim 162

Christ the Lord Is Risen Today; Alleluia!

- LBW 128
- ELW 369
- LSB 463
- LHS 86
- ReClaim 161

KEY FOCUS:

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's decisive victory. A triumph in flesh and blood, sinew and bone, breath and life. The empty tomb is not a symbol; it is a great reversal. He who was ruined is redemption; He who was dead now stands alive, never to die again. The world's wisdom would call the cross defeat, but Easter morning proclaims it as the throne of victory.

This is the foundation of our faith, the anchor of our hope. If Christ has not been raised, we are still in our sins. But he has been raised and sin is forgiven, creation is restored, and death has lost its claim.

The absolution is spoken from the cross, "It is finished," now resounds from the mouth of the risen Christ: "Peace be with you." Your sins are forgiven. Your life is made new. The grave is emptied of its power, and in him, sin, death, and the devil stand defeated.

The Easter Word is no call to try harder, no burden placed back upon weary shoulders. It is done. It is given. It is yours. The old is gone; the new has come. And because Christ lives, you shall live also.

COMMENTARY

Still Dark, Still Searching (John 20:1-2)

It was still dark when Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. That detail matters. The sky was dark, yes. But so was her heart. So was the world. Jesus was gone. The world is a graveyard, after all. Hope was buried. And then—the stone was rolled away. Something had happened, something bigger than grief, bigger than fear, bigger than all the things we call "just the way life is."

Mary ran. Her words tumbled out to Peter and John: **"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him!"**

Someone must have taken him. It must be a mistake. It must be something explainable. Because death doesn't just undo itself. It must be undone. And that's exactly what happened to you in baptism.

You were in the dark. You were buried. But then—with a Word from God, the stone rolled away.

Looking In, Stepping In (John 20:3-10)

Peter and John run to the tomb. When they get there, they look in. The grave clothes are there, but Jesus is not. John sees and believes. But what does he believe? Not yet that Jesus is risen, not yet that death has lost its sting. But something has changed. The grave clothes are neatly folded. Jesus wasn't stolen. He left. He walked away, the New Adam, the New Creation. This is your baptism.

“Do you not know?” Paul’s question to the Romans was asked with the force of faith’s certainty. You were baptized into his death; you were baptized into his resurrection. Baptism is not a symbol of your decision. God made a decision. Baptism is your death and your rising in Christ. You went into the water buried, and you came out alive. The tomb is empty, and so will be your grave.

Tears in the Garden (John 20:11-15)

Mary is still searching. The tomb is empty, but she still feels lost. She sees angels, but even angels don’t seem to shock her. Grief does that. It makes us blind to the glory standing right in front of us.

Then she turns and sees a man. He asks her, **“Why are you weeping?”** She thinks he’s the gardener. And in a way, she’s right. Jesus is the Gardener. The One who made Eden, the One who walked in the cool of the day, the One who took the thorns and thistles of sin and turned them into a crown.

But Mary doesn’t see it yet. She just wants Jesus back. **“Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”**

She still thinks she’s the one searching. That’s what we think, too. That we’re the ones looking for Jesus. But he is the one who finds us.

The Voice That Calls Your Name (John 20:16-18)

Then Jesus says one word: **“Mary.”** That’s all it takes. Why? Because Jesus is the Good Shepherd who calls his sheep by name. And when he calls, they know his voice.

Her name snaps her awake. Her grief breaks. Her eyes see. **“Rabboni!”** she cries. Teacher!

This is baptism. For in baptism, Jesus calls your name. The pastor pours the water and says, **“I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”**

But Jesus is the one speaking. He is calling **you**. This is not a **general, impersonal salvation**. This is **for you**. He knows your name. He says it. And when he does, **you belong to him**. From then on, you will learn to hear His voice of promise when it is put in your ear.

Not Holding On, But Going Out

Mary reaches for Jesus, but he tells her not to hold onto him. Not because he is ghostly or distant, but because there is something bigger now. He is ascending to the Father—his Father and our Father, his God and our God. Something has changed. Jesus is not just alive again. This Jesus is now

the Risen Lord. He is making all things new. Mary goes. She, the first witness of the resurrection, carries the gospel in her voice:

"I have seen the Lord!" You don't just belong to Jesus—you carry his name into the world. You speak of what you have seen. You proclaim to the world, to those still weeping in the dark:

"I have seen the Lord!"

The Resurrection Is For You—Now

This story is not just about Mary. This is about you. We live in darkness. We stand outside tombs, weeping. We search for a missing Jesus, thinking he must be somewhere else, someone we need to find.

But the truth is, you don't find Jesus—he finds you. You don't climb your way to God, you don't reason your way into faith, and you certainly don't resurrect yourself. You are dead. Dead in sin, dead in unbelief, dead in all your best religious efforts.

And yet, he calls your name. Not as an invitation, not as an offer, but as an act of sheer divine doing. The Word does what it says. His Word forgives sin, creates faith, raises the dead, makes you alive.

The tomb is empty. Not metaphorically, not spiritually, but really, bodily, eternally empty. You don't get to interpret that, soften it, or explain it away. It simply is.

And this is your baptism. Not your choice. Not your decision. God's doing. You are drowned in Christ's death, raised in his resurrection, handed over to a life that is no longer your own. Sin is forgiven. Death is undone. The absolution of the cross now stands in the flesh of the risen Christ. He bears His wounds.

Baptism is both the cross and the empty tomb given to you—now. You are no longer your own. You belong to the Crucified and Risen One.

And now? You go. Not because you decide to, but because Christ sends you. Like Mary, you are given a word that is not yours to keep. You don't go with advice. You don't go with a religious opinion. You go with a fact, a promise:

"I have seen the Lord."

And to see the Lord, to hear His voice, is to know that sin, death, and evil have been defeated. This is not an invitation to debate but a proclamation that creates what it declares. Forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation—these are not abstract concepts but the greatest realities of living. The Word you

bear does not return empty. It breaks chains, raises the dead, and calls sinners home. You go, not in your own strength, but in the power of the One who speaks resurrection power - and it is so.

KEY GREEK TERMS

1. μνημεῖον (*mnēmeion*) – “tomb” (John 20:1, 2, 11)

Mnēmeion refers to a memorial tomb, grave, or sepulcher—not just a burial place, but a marker of death itself. It shares its root with *mnēma* (remembrance), highlighting how tombs were meant to hold the dead in memory, to be places where death was final. The tomb is where human logic ends. The world expects a tomb to do what tombs do—keep the dead in place. The theology of glory assumes that life cannot come from death, that if God is truly victorious, there would be no cross, no tomb, no suffering. But the theology of the cross tells us that it is precisely in the tomb, in death itself, that God is at work. The tomb is the place where God contradicts the wisdom of the world. The resurrection does not erase the reality of death but bursts forth from within it.

2. ἐκτρέχω (*ektrechō*) – “ran” (John 20:2, 4)

Ektrechō means to run out, to hasten, to move urgently. The resurrection sets the disciples in motion, Mary runs, Peter runs, John runs. It is a verb of pursuit, of racing toward something just beyond comprehension. The running is not triumphal. It is driven by fear, confusion, and hope all tangled together. This is not the confident sprint of the victorious but the desperate movement of those who do not yet understand. The theology of the cross reminds us that we often run toward the resurrection still carrying doubt, still stumbling in the dark. Faith does not mean we comprehend everything; it means we run toward Christ even when we don't.

3. ὀθόνια (*othonia*) – “linen cloths” (John 20:5-7)

Othonia refers to linen wrappings, burial clothes—the physical evidence of Jesus' death. Unlike Lazarus, who had to be unbound from his grave clothes (John 11:44), Jesus leaves his behind, neatly folded. The grave clothes are a sign that death has been left behind, but not in the way the world expects. If someone had stolen the body, they would not have taken the time to unwrap it carefully and fold the face cloth. The theology of the cross reminds us that God's victory is not the removal of suffering but the triumph through it. The linen cloths are left in the tomb because Jesus has passed through death, not avoided it.

4. κλαίω (*klaiō*) – “weeping” (John 20:11, 13, 15)

Klaiō is deep, audible weeping, the cry of grief and despair. This is not silent mourning but gut-wrenching lament, the kind that comes when all seems lost. The world tells us to move past suffering, to find comfort in explanations, to make sense of grief. The theology of glory seeks a quick resolution, a restoration of order. But the theology of the cross allows weeping to remain until Christ speaks. Mary weeps because she has not yet heard the resurrection call her by name. The resurrection does not deny suffering—it transforms it.

5. ῥαββουνί (*rabbouni*) – “Teacher” (John 20:16)

Rabbouni is an elevated, more personal form of “Rabbi”, meaning “My great teacher”. It expresses deep respect, devotion, and relationship. Mary sees Jesus and immediately calls him “Teacher.” This is the only way she has known him, as the one who taught her, who guided her, who gave her understanding. But Jesus’ resurrection is not just a continuation of what was. It is something entirely new. The theology of the cross shows us that Jesus is not simply our teacher, he is our crucified and risen Lord. He does not return to instruct but to redeem, to reign, to send the church to proclaim the forgiveness of sins.

6. ἀναβαίνω (*anabainō*) – “I am ascending” (John 20:17)

Anabainō means to go up, to ascend, to rise. Jesus uses this verb to declare that he is returning to the Father. The resurrection is not the final destination, the ascension is. The theology of glory wants to cling to Christ here, to make him fit into our expectations of how he should be present. But the theology of the cross reminds us that Christ’s work is not complete until he ascends, until he reigns, until he is above all things, until he intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father. His ascension is the guarantee that he is not bound to one place or one time.

SERMON

John 20:16-18

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mary stood outside the tomb, weeping. Everything had unraveled. The voice that had called her out of the shadows, the hands that had lifted her from the pit, the presence that had made her whole was gone. She had seen it happen. She had watched as the nails pierced him, as the sky turned black, as the weight of judgment crushed him. And now, even this, the quiet dignity of mourning, was stolen from her. His body was gone. The grave was empty. **"They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."**

Suddenly a voice. A voice she had heard before, but grief held her captive, and she did not recognize it. **"Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?"**

Even with the risen Christ standing before her, she could not see him. The weight of sorrow clouded her sight, just as it does ours.

Then he spoke her name. **"Mary."** And everything changed.

He was not gone. He was not stolen. He was alive. He was calling her, personally, directly, by name. At once, she turned, grasping hold of him, clinging to what she thought was lost. **"Rabboni!"** Teacher! Darkness shattered. Death undone.

But Jesus said to her, **"Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"**

This is what happens when the Word speaks. The living Word. The Word made flesh, standing victorious over death, calling her by name. In that moment, faith was created.

Faith does not come from searching, from striving. Faith is not a reward for figuring things out. Faith is given. It is breathed out, spoken into existence, summoned by the voice of the One who has conquered the grave.

And he calls your name, too.

Like Mary, you have known loss. You have stood before graves, where the air is still, and the silence is deafening. You have held questions that have no answers. You have reached for something solid while everything slips through your fingers. And here is Christ, standing in the middle of your sorrow, speaking your name.

That is the power of the gospel. Christ does not wait for you to recognize him. He does not wait for you to put the pieces together, to figure it out, to find your way. He baptizes with a word. He calls first. He speaks life into your doubt. He finds you when you are wandering among the tombstones, lost and confused. And in calling your name, he gives you what you could never grasp for yourself, faith, hope, and a future beyond death.

Mary wanted to hold onto him, to keep him there, to freeze the moment when all was made right. But Jesus moves her forward. "Do not cling to me." This is not a rebuke. It is a promise. There is more to come. He is not simply the teacher who was; he is the risen Lord who was, and is, and will be. The Great I AM. The resurrection is not a return to what was. It is a new creation, the beginning of a kingdom that will never end.

And so, Mary becomes the first preacher of the resurrection. **"I have seen the Lord!"**

She does not go with an argument. She does not go with an explanation, a defense, or a proof. She goes with a proclamation.

And so do you.

He has called you by name in baptism. He has given you faith through his Word. He has forgiven you and made you new. And now, you go. Free from past moments, free from what was, free to bear witness to a living Lord who speaks, who calls, who gives new life.

You go to those still weeping. To those still searching. To those still standing in the dark.

You go with nothing but a promise, the only message that matters:

Christ died, and your sin is forgiven. Christ is risen, and hope is real. He is alive.
And he calls you by name.



Christ was crucified. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

ALLELUIA!



BIBLE STUDY WITH ADULTS

Part 1: Palm Sunday – The King Who Rides to Die

Read: Luke 19:28-40; Philippians 2:5-11

Crowds wave palm branches, shouting *Hosanna!* But they do not understand what they are asking for. They want a king who will march into the city and take power, who will throw off their enemies and make their nation great. But Jesus is not that kind of king. He rides on, under the law, to be subjected to earthly power. He comes not to take a throne, but to take a cross. The cries of *Hosanna!* will soon turn to *Crucify him!* because the world cannot tolerate a king who refuses to play by its rules.

Discussion Questions:

- How does Jesus' entry into Jerusalem contrast with worldly ideas of power?
- Why does the crowd turn on Him so quickly? How do we also try to make Jesus into the kind of king we want?

Key Takeaway:

The world and our hearts always want a different kind of Savior. One who rewards our efforts, who makes our dreams come true. But Christ will not play that game. He comes only to die. And because He dies for you, the self-promotion game is over.

Part 2: Maundy Thursday – A Feast for the Unworthy

Read: John 13:1-17, 31b-35; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Jesus kneels. The King of all creation takes the feet of sinners in His hands and washes them clean. Even the feet of the one who will betray Him. Then He takes bread and wine and gives them His very body and blood—for the forgiveness of sins. This is not a feast for the righteous, but a feast for the condemned. Here, He gives Himself fully. No conditions. No requirements. Only gift.

Discussion Questions:

- What does Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet reveal about how He serves us?

- What does it mean that in the Lord's Supper, Christ gives His body and blood "for you"?

Key Takeaway:

You do not make yourself worthy for this meal. You come empty, and Christ fills you. This is His feast, and He gives everything. Even Himself.

Part 3: Good Friday – The Death of the Old World

Read: John 18:1-19:42; Isaiah 53:1-12

This is where it ends. The weight of the law, the crushing power of sin, the full force of judgment falls on Him. He is stricken, smitten, and afflicted. He is forsaken. And the world believes it has won. But what the world does not see is that this is the moment of victory. Not our victory but His. He takes everything that condemns us and puts it to death. He leaves nothing undone. And when He says, "**It is finished**," He means it.

Discussion Questions:

- Why is it necessary that Christ suffers in our place?
- What does "*It is finished*" mean for our standing before God?

Key Takeaway:

There is nothing left for you to prove. No righteousness to earn, no verdict left to fear. Christ has taken it all. The old world, with all its demands and accusations, dies with Him. We now have peace with God.

Part 4: Holy Saturday – The Silence Before the Dawn

Read: Matthew 27:57-66; Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16

For now, the tomb is occupied. The world falls silent. The law has spoken, and death has done its worst. And Christ rests. The grave holds Him, but only for a time. The stone is heavy, but it will not stay in place. And when He rises, He brings forth a New Creation.

Discussion Questions:

- How does Holy Saturday reflect the moments in our lives when God seems absent?
- What does it mean that Christ kept the Sabbath by resting in the tomb?

Key Takeaway:

The silence of Holy Saturday holds its breath. The old world is on the brink of collapse. The grave is occupied, but not for long.

Part 5: Easter – The End of Death, the Beginning of the New Creation

Read: John 20:1-18; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26

The stone is rolled away. The grave is empty. Death itself has lost. This is Christ's resurrection, and it is also yours. What was buried with Him, your sin, your guilt, your death, stays in the grave. What rises is a New Creation, a new life, a new reality. Although you await the final resurrection, you are already raised with Him in the power of faith.

Discussion Questions:

- How does Christ's resurrection change the way we face sin, suffering, and death?
- What does it mean that we are *already* raised with Christ?
- How does your baptism assure you of this?

Key Takeaway:

The grave is not your future. It is not your final stop. In baptism, you have already died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Closing Reflection

Holy Week is not about your efforts, your worthiness, or your spiritual progress. It is about Christ alone—crucified, buried, and risen for you. The cross has spoken. The grave has lost. Christ is risen!





WITH YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

Welcome to the Real Story

Holy Week wasn't about religion. It was God's full-scale intervention into the wreckage of the world—into your world. This week, we don't just watch Jesus go to the cross; we are brought to the cross with Him. This is where everything falls apart—and where something entirely new begins! It's not about trying harder, being better, or getting your life together. It's about Jesus undoing everything that keeps you captive and raising you to something real. And where does that reality become yours? In Baptism. There, you are united with Christ in His death and resurrection. The benefits of His cross and empty tomb—His victory over sin, death, and the devil—are poured out on you personally, forgiving you, and making you part of His new creation.

Part 1: Palm Sunday – The King Who Comes to Lose

Read: Luke 19:28-40; Philippians 2:5-11

Jesus rolls into town, and the people are hyped. They're expecting Him to take power, to overthrow oppression, to set things right on their terms. But Jesus doesn't come as the King they expect. He comes as the King who dies. And when they realize that they are not having it. Their cheers turn to shouts of **"Crucify Him!"**

Discussion Questions:

- Why do people want Jesus to be a certain kind of King? How do we do the same thing?
- What does Philippians 2 tell us about Jesus' mindset as He enters Jerusalem?
- How does Baptism connect you to Christ? (Romans 6 can help here)

Key Takeaway:

We want Jesus on our terms. But He's not here to fit into our plans. He's here to put an end to our old, dead-end ways and pull us into His life. And in Baptism, He does exactly that. He buries the old you and raises a new you in Him.

Part 2: Maundy Thursday – Love That Gets Its Hands Dirty

Read: John 13:1-17, 31b-35; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Jesus gets up from the table, takes off His robe, and washes the feet of people who will betray, deny, and abandon Him. Then He gives them a meal not of just bread and wine, but Himself. This is not about what they can offer but about what He is giving. No strings attached. And this gift of Himself extends to you in Baptism, where He washes you, not just externally, but completely, making you clean before God.

Discussion Questions:

- What does Jesus washing feet tell us about the kind of love He brings?
- What does it mean that Jesus gives His body and blood *for you*?
- How does Baptism reflect this cleansing and gift of Christ's presence?

Key Takeaway:

Jesus doesn't wait for us to get our act together. He kneels, serves, and gives Himself away in love. In Baptism and the Lord's Supper, He makes that love yours.

Part 3: Good Friday – The Day the World Ended

Read: John 18:1-19:42; Isaiah 53:1-12

This is where everything dies. Jesus doesn't just suffer, He takes the full weight of sin, shame, fear, and judgment. He takes everything that stands between us and God and lets it crush Him. And the last thing He says before He dies? **"It is finished."** And because you have been baptized into His death, that "finished" is for you.

Discussion Questions:

- What does it mean that Jesus took the weight of sin and judgment?
- How does *"It is finished"* change the way we see our relationship with God?
- How does Baptism connect you to Christ's death and make it real for you today?

Key Takeaway:

Jesus didn't just make salvation possible—He actually did it. There's nothing left for you to earn, prove, or fix. It's over. You are free, forgiven, and Baptism is where He declares it over you forever.

Part 4: Holy Saturday – When God Went Silent

Read: Matthew 27:57-66; Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16

Jesus is in the grave. The world is quiet. It looks like death has won. And yet... this silence is not the end. This is God at rest, waiting for the New Creation to break through. The disciples didn't know what was coming. But we do. In Baptism, we died and were buried with Him in that tomb, only to rise with Him when the silence breaks.

Discussion Questions:

- Have you ever experienced a time when God felt silent? How did you respond?
- What does it mean that even Jesus entered death and waited?
- What does Baptism teach us about dying and rising daily in faith and trusting that God is still at work?

Key Takeaway:

The waiting isn't meaningless. It's the space between the old creation and the new one. And the waiting won't last forever. Baptism tells you that the new world has already started, and you belong to it.

Part 5: Easter – The End of Death, the Beginning of You

Read: John 20:1-18; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26

Jesus is alive. Not as a metaphor, not as a symbol, but as a living, breathing, risen King. The grave couldn't hold Him, and because of that, it can't hold you either. In Baptism, you have already been raised with Him. Death thought it had crushed Him. But he crushed death.

Discussion Questions:

- How does Jesus' resurrection change the way we face sin, suffering, and even death?
- What does it mean that we are *already* raised with Christ?
- How does Baptism give you certainty that this resurrection is truly yours?

Key Takeaway:

You are not waiting to be made new someday. In faith, you already are. The resurrection is for you, given in Baptism, where God made it personal.

Final Reflection

Holy Week is the week where your old life died and your real life began. Jesus has done everything. He took your sin, carried your cross, laid in your grave, and walked out of it with you in His arms. And He made it all yours in Baptism. It's His promise. You are already His!





WITH CHILDREN

The following may be used separately or together as one Holy Week lesson.

JONAH'S & RACHEL'S HOLY WEEK WALK

Palm Sunday – The Lowly King

“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” – Luke 19:38

Jonah and Rachel walked out of church, their palm branches still in hand. The spring air was fresh, and the echoes of the congregation’s singing still lingered in Jonah’s mind.

Rachel twirled her branch. “Hosanna! Save us, Jesus!” she sang, skipping ahead.

Dad chuckled as he caught up. “That’s what the people shouted when Jesus rode into Jerusalem.”

Jonah frowned, deep in thought. “But if Jesus is a king,” he asked, “why didn’t he have a crown and a white horse?”

Dad nodded as if he’d been expecting the question. “That’s a good question, Jonah. Most kings ride big, strong horses and wear golden crowns. But Jesus is different.”

Rachel tilted her head. “Different how?”

Dad took a deep breath. “The people wanted Jesus to be a king who would fight for them, a ruler with power. But Jesus came to save in a different way. Instead of sitting on a throne, he would hang on a cross. Instead of a golden crown, he would wear a crown of thorns.”

Jonah’s eyes widened. “But why would he do that?”

Dad knelt to their level. “Because his kingdom isn’t about winning battles—it’s about forgiving sins. Jesus came not to rule with power, but with love.”

Rachel looked at her palm branch. “So, even though they cheered for him, they didn’t really understand?”

Dad nodded. “That’s right. And sometimes, we don’t fully understand either. But Jesus knew what he was doing. He knew the cross was coming—and he still went.”

Jonah looked at his palm branch, then up at the blue sky. He wasn't sure he understood everything. But somehow, he knew his father was right.

Activity:

Make paper palm branches or use your hands to wave in the air. Walk in a little parade around the room, shouting, **"Hosanna! Jesus saves!"**

Closing Prayer:

Jesus, you are our King, but not like any other king. You come in peace. You come in love. In baptism, you come to us and make us yours forever. Help us welcome your promises with open hearts, today and always. Amen.

Maundy Thursday – Jesus Serves Us

"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." – John 13:15

That night, Jonah and Rachel helped set the table. They folded napkins carefully, just as Mom had shown them.

At dinner, Grandpa took a warm cloth and gently wiped Rachel's hands. "Did you know Jesus washed his disciples' feet before supper?"

Leo scrunched his nose. "Feet?"

Grandpa nodded. "Yes. Even though he was their teacher—God's own Son—he knelt before them like a servant. He wasn't thinking about honor or power. He wanted them to see that true love is humble."

Rachel frowned. "But he's the King. Shouldn't they have washed *his* feet?"

Grandpa smiled. "That's what they thought, too. But Jesus was showing them something greater. His love isn't about being served—it's about serving. And the greatest way he would serve them was still to come."

Jonah's voice was quiet. "The cross."

Mom nodded. "Yes. Just as he stooped to wash their feet, he humbled himself all the way to the cross—to take our sin and wash *us* clean."

Rachel looked down at her hands, freshly wiped. “Like baptism?”

Grandpa’s eyes twinkled. “Exactly. In baptism, Jesus washes us with his love. Not because we deserve it, but because that’s who he is—the one who came to serve and save.”

Jonah sat back in his chair, thinking. Jesus wasn’t just kind—he was the King who humbled himself for them all.

Activity:

Dip your hands in warm water, then gently dry each other’s hands with a towel. Talk about how Jesus washed his disciples’ feet to show love. How can you serve someone today?

Closing Prayer:

Jesus, you wash us clean in baptism and serve us with your love. Help us to love like you—by serving, helping, and caring for others. Amen.

Good Friday – Jesus Gives His Life

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.” – John 15:13

After the Good Friday service, Jonah and Rachel sat under the biggest tree in the yard. The branches stretched wide, their long shadows fading in the afternoon light.

Mom sat down beside them, her voice quiet. “The cross looked something like this,” she said, pointing up at the tree. “Jesus stretched out his arms, not to fight, but to love the whole world.”

Jonah traced a stick on the ground, shaping a cross in the dirt. “But why did he have to die?”

Mom sighed, looking at the darkening sky. “Because love sometimes means giving everything. Jesus took all our sin, all our sadness, and carried it to the cross. He gave his life so we could be forgiven.”

Rachel picked up the stick and held it tightly. “It doesn’t feel scary anymore,” she murmured. “It feels... like love.”

Dad sat down beside them. “That’s because it *is* love. And in baptism, his love covers us completely. We belong to him forever.”

Jonah looked up at the tree again. The branches stretched wide, like arms open for a hug. He wasn’t sure he understood everything, but he knew one thing for certain—Jesus had given everything for *him*.

Activity:

Provide paper and crayons so kids can draw their own cross and decorate it with symbols of Jesus' love (hearts, a sunrise, an empty tomb). Have them sit quietly for a moment and think about the cross.

Ask:

What do you think about when you see the cross?
How does it make you feel to know that Jesus loves you this much?

Closing Prayer:

Jesus, you gave everything for us. In baptism, you join us to your love forever. Even when we don't understand, help us trust you. Thank you for never letting go. Amen.

Holy Saturday – Waiting in Hope**“Be still, and know that I am God.” – Psalm 46:10**

The house was quiet. No big celebrations. Just waiting.

Jonah sat on the couch, staring out the window at the gray sky. Rachel sat beside him, twisting a strand of hair between her fingers.

“Mom,” Jonah asked, “what was Jesus *doing* today? I mean... after he died?”

Mom sat down next to him, folding her hands. “That’s a good question. To everyone watching, it looked like nothing was happening. Jesus’ body was in the tomb. The disciples were hiding, afraid. But just because they couldn’t see anything didn’t mean nothing was happening.”

Rachel tilted her head. “So *was* something happening?”

Grandpa nodded. “Yes. Jesus was finishing what he came to do. He had already taken all our sins to the cross, and now, even in death, he was still working. But the world wouldn’t see it until Sunday morning.”

Jonah frowned, thinking. “So it’s kind of like... a seed? When it’s in the dirt, you can’t see it growing, but something is happening underground?”

Grandpa smiled. “That’s exactly right. And that’s what baptism is like too. When you were baptized, Jesus planted his life in you. Even when you can’t see it, even when it feels like nothing is happening, he is there with you.”

Rachel looked back at the gray sky. “So today isn’t just about waiting—it’s about trusting that something *is* happening.”

Mom nodded. “Yes. Because when Sunday comes, everything changes.”

Jonah pressed his hands against the window and whispered, “I’ll wait too.”

Activity:

Hold a small seed in your hand (or draw one). Think about how it looks quiet, but inside, something amazing is happening. Jesus was buried, but something new was coming!

Closing Prayer:

Jesus, sometimes we wait, and it feels like nothing is happening. But in baptism, you have planted faith and love in us. You are always near. Help us trust you, even in the quiet times. Amen.

Easter Sunday – Jesus is Alive!

“He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.” – Matthew 28:6

Jonah and Rachel burst out of the church doors, their ears still ringing with the last notes of the final hymn. The sun was bright, the air fresh, and the bells high above in the steeple echoed like silver trumpets, proclaiming to the world what the grave could not hold.

“Jesus is alive!” Rachel shouted, spinning with her arms wide.

Jonah laughed, running ahead. “This is the best story ever!”

Mom and Dad followed, smiling. “Yes! He is risen!”

“He is risen indeed!” Grandpa said, his eyes twinkling.

Rachel grabbed Jonah’s hand, still breathless from singing. “And it’s not just a story—it’s *true!*”

Grandpa nodded. “Yes. And do you know what else? Your baptism means you are alive with Jesus too!

Jonah looked up at the bright sky, the whole world bursting with life. “That means Easter isn’t just today—it’s *every* day.”

Rachel grinned. “Because Jesus will never stop being alive!”

Mom and Dad laughed, pulling them into a hug. The bells kept ringing, the sun kept shining, and joy filled the air. Jesus *was* alive—and so were they.

Activities:

Jump up and shout **“Alleluia!”** Jesus is alive! Make joyful noises with instruments, clapping, or bells. Use paper, markers, and stickers to make an **“Alleluia! Jesus is Alive!”** banner.

Closing Prayer:

Jesus, you are alive! In baptism, you make us alive with you. Thank you for giving us your forgiveness and love forever. Fill us with joy today and always. Alleluia! Amen.





Prayers for Holy Week and Easter Sunday

Palm Sunday

Lord,

You ride in low and slow, no warhorse, no banners, just the dust of the road and a borrowed donkey.

The people cheer. They wave branches. They cry, “Hosanna!”

They will cry “Crucify” soon enough.

So will we.

We want a king who fixes everything, a king on our terms,
but You are the King we need.

The One who takes our sin and rides straight to the cross.

You have spoken Your Word over us: “You are mine.”

We are baptized. We belong to You, no matter what our hearts say.

Your promise holds when our faith fails.

Amen.

Monday of Holy Week

Lord,

You walked into the temple and upended everything.

Coins crashed, tables tumbled, and You drove out what didn’t belong.

Do the same in us.

Turn over the tables of our self-righteousness.

Clear out the clutter of our fears, our need to control, our attempts to earn Your love.

You don’t ask us to fix ourselves up for You.

You simply speak, and it is so.

You have said: “You are washed. You are clean.”

In Baptism, You drown the old us. Make us new.

Amen.

Tuesday of Holy Week

Lord,

The world runs on the wisdom that climbs,
that pushes to the front,
that demands to be seen,
but You came speaking parables that don't make sense.
You said the first will be last,
that the lost are found,
that the weak inherit the kingdom.
And then You made it true,
not by climbing but by falling,
not by winning but by dying.
And You have made it true for us.
You have spoken: "You are buried with Me. You are raised with Me."
Your Word of Promise stands.
Make us fools in the world's eyes
if it means clinging to Your cross alone.
Amen.

Wednesday of Holy Week

Lord,

You knew.
You knew Judas would sell You out, Peter would deny You, the rest would scatter.
You knew, and still, You knelt to wash their feet.
Still, You fed them.
Still, You went to the cross for them.
You know our failures too.
You know every betrayal, every moment of silence when we should have spoken,
every time we have run away instead of trusted.
And still, You kneel.
Still, You feed us.
And You have promised: "I will never leave you nor forsake you."
In Baptism, You have made us Your own,
not because we are faithful,
but because You are.
Hold us even when we let go.
Keep us even when we stray.
Amen.

Maundy Thursday

Jesus,

On the night You were betrayed,

You did not hold back.

You knelt. You served.

You took bread, took wine,

Your body, broken.

Your blood, poured out.

For them.

For us.

For sinners.

For the ones who doubt and fail and fall.

You could have left us with commands, with laws, with warnings,

but instead, You left us with a meal. A last will and testament.

A table where we bring nothing, and You give everything.

And You have spoken: "Take and eat. Take and drink. This is for you."

Just as in Baptism, where You spoke our names and called us Yours.

Feed us again, Lord.

That we may taste and see that You are good.

Amen.

Good Friday

Lord,

They lifted You up on the wooden cross,

would we have looked away?

The nails, the thorns, the blood,

it should have been us.

But You took our place.

Not reluctantly, not bitterly,

but willingly.

You did not hold out for our repentance.

While we were still sinners, You died for us.

And now there is nothing left to prove,

nothing left to earn,

nothing left to fear.

Only grace.

Only forgiveness.
Only mercy.
Only You.
And You have spoken: "It is finished."
Hold us in Your dying.
Raise us in Your living.
We are baptized. We are crucified with You, and You live in us.
Your promise stands forever.
Amen.

Holy Saturday

Lord,
The tomb is shut.
The world is quiet.
Everything feels like loss.
This is the space between sorrow and joy,
between death and resurrection.
You are silent,
but You are not absent.
You are waiting,
but You are not defeated.
Teach us to trust You in the in-between places,
in the long nights,
in the unanswered prayers,
in the waiting.
Because the stone will roll away.
And You will rise.
And we, already buried with You in Baptism, will rise too.
Because You have bestowed your promise: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."
Amen.

Easter Sunday

Lord,
The grave is empty.
The stone is rolled away.
Death has lost, and You have won.

And yet,
our hearts are slow to believe,
still tangled in fear,
still clinging to yesterday.
But You are risen whether we feel it or not.
You are risen for the doubters, the weary, the broken.
For us.
Raise us with You.
Pull us into Your victory.
Let us walk in the light of Your never-ending mercy.
And You have spoken: "I have called you by name. You are Mine."
You have raised us in Baptism,
clothed us in Your righteousness.
Your Word is stronger than our doubt.
You are risen! Indeed!
Amen.





CHILDREN'S EASTER SONGBOOKS

Lutheran Publishers:

1. **Concordia Publishing House (CPH):**
 - Offers a variety of children's books for Easter, including songbooks and activity books celebrating the resurrection of Jesus.
 - <https://www.cph.org/c-2763-books/c-2772-books-for-children/easter>
2. **Augsburg Fortress:**
 - Provides resources like "Kids Celebrate Worship," which includes materials to help children engage with Lutheran worship, including songs for Easter.
 - <https://www.augsburgfortress.org/store/category/286369/Kids-Celebrate-Worship>

Other Easter Songbooks for Kids:

3. **"Songs for EVERY Easter"** – Out of the Ark Music
 - <https://www.outoftheark.co.uk/songs-for-every-easter.html>
4. **"Easter Musical Book"** – Cali's Books
 - <https://www.calisbooks.com/products/easter-musical-book>
5. **"The Big Book of Bible Songs for Kids"** – Hal Leonard
 - <https://www.halleonard.com/product/75714297/the-big-book-of-bible-songs-for-kids>
6. **"Cedarmont Kids: Bible Songs"** – Cedarmont Music
 - <https://www.cedarmont.com/bible-songs>
7. **"Hymns for a Kid's Heart: Easter Edition"** – Bobbie Wolgemuth & Joni Eareckson Tada
 - <https://www.amazon.com/Hymns-Kids-Heart-Easter/dp/1581345270>
8. **"Sing Easter!"** – Church House Publishing
 - <https://www.chpublishing.co.uk/books/9780715142222/sing-easter>
9. **"The Complete Children's Worship Songbook"** – Brentwood-Benson
 - <https://brentwoodbenson.com/Choral/Children/product/The-Complete-Children-s-Worship-Songbook-35000002>
10. **"Wee Sing Bible Songs"** – Pamela Conn Beall & Susan Hagen Nipp
 - <https://www.weesing.com/>
11. **"Lift Up Your Hearts: Easter Songs for Kids"** – Faith Alive Christian Resources
 - <https://www.faithaliveresources.org/Products/020000/lift-up-your-hearts.aspx>

