

Blest Be the Tie that Binds



**Lenten Devotional
Written by Calvary Lutheran
Staff & Church Members
2009**

Table of Contents

Forward.....	5
How to Use this Booklet:	
Family Devotion Format.....	6
Week 1	
From These Ashes.....	7
Week 2	
Bound Together in Christ’s Church.....	15
Week 3	
The Communicating Church.....	23
Week 4	
The Consoling/Comforting Church	31
Week 5	
The Suffering Church	39
Week 6	
The Heaven Bound Church.....	49
Week 7	
Holy Week	57

Forward

It is my prayer that this little booklet would enrich your walk with Christ Jesus and His Church.

My family received a free week pass for the YMCA. We let it sit on the coffee table for almost three months. No strings attached! All we had to do was walk through the doors of the “Y” and enjoy a week of complementary services. Finally we did and sure enough everything was free and refreshing. Why did we wait? Although, now that we are using the free pass, it would be nice to have a year! In an even greater way, Jesus has offered us not a week of services but a lifetime of gifts just by believing in Him. He offers us His gifts through the Word and Preaching, the Lord’s Supper, Baptism, and Absolution.

Yet, Jesus also wants to give us gifts through a sometimes forgotten place. Martin Luther himself teaches us, that we receive gifts of Christ, “through the mutual consolation and encouragement of the brethren” (The Smalcald Articles IV). In common language, Luther was saying we receive free gifts through the church, as people get together and act out encouragement and comfort. Through this devotional we are going to learn about how this works. You will read very practical and real life experiences from fellow Calvary members and also my words and comments from scripture. I also challenge you to read further in the scripture with the suggested Bible reading in the boxes below each devotion. Acts is really the story of how the church began (The Acts of the Holy Spirit)..

Ultimately, it is my goal that as a whole church we would grow in what it means to walk together in Christ. “Blest be the tie that binds.”

Pastor James Travis

Note for Families with Children: The devotions may be difficult for children. If you would like to use these devotions with children, I would recommend reading the scripture from Acts, as part of the family devotion. Answer the questions as a family!

Family Devotion Format
Families with Young Children

Leader: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen

Leader (*Family Repeats*): **Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.**

Hymn (Read or sing one stanza each week.)

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above. | 2. Before our Father's throne
We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one
Our comforts and our cares. |
| 3. We share each other's woes,
Our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear. | 4. When here our pathways part,
We suffer bitter pain;
Yet, one in Christ and one in heart,
We hope to meet again. |
| 5. From sorrow, toil and pain,
And sin, we shall be free,
And perfect love and friendship reign
Through all eternity. | |

The Scripture Reading & Discussion Questions

Lord's Prayer

Prayers (Suggestion: Use ACTS—Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication/Requests as a prayer model)

Leader: Let us bless the Lord.

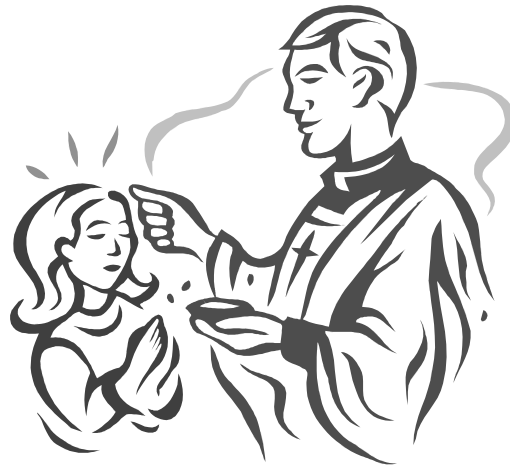
All: Thanks be to God.

Leader: The almighty and merciful God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us.

All: Amen

Week 1

From These Ashes



Week 1 “From These Ashes” Day 1, February 25

Luke 10:13: “Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.”

Pastor Ken McMillan, his wife, and twelve children did not ask for sackcloth and ashes, but it came anyway. Their Wall Lake Iowa home burnt to the ground five weeks ago.

Why would God bring ashes to a pastor and his family, especially one with twelve kids, one who already understands repentance and ashes? God probably will not answer that question this side of heaven. But, we can reflect on what ashes do: Ashes bring us to our knees. Ashes remind us that we are mortal. Ashes, bring us before God in need of His help and rebuilding. Whether it be building a new house our rebuilding from sin and guilt, God is able to lift us up out of the ashes.

God answers us when we are in ashes sometimes quickly and other times, from our perspective, slowly. A prayer for forgiveness is answered immediately through Baptism, Communion, and Absolution. After all, Jesus endured more than ashes on the cross to take away our sin. God answered, Pastor McMillan and His family from ashes also. How? God used His church to provide all of his family's needs. Clothes, shelter, and even a helping hand for the family.

I remember seeing Pastor McMillan speak after the event giving all glory to God despite this tragedy. Others have fallen away because of such events. Yes, ashes provoke extreme reactions. God does not like lukewarm responses. Today we reflect on how God uses the church to see ourselves in ashes and to bring us out of them.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank-you ashes and how they bring us to our knees. Thank-you also for your church. Use it to remind me of my sin but to also bring forgiveness. When I am at my weakest moments lift me up. When others are in need help me to work as part of your church. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 1:1-11

For Discussion: What new baptism was about to happen? Sometimes the book of Acts is called the Acts of the Apostles or Acts of the Holy Spirit. According to verse 1:8, what does the Holy Spirit still do today?

Week 1 “From These Ashes” Day 2, February 26

1 Thes 5:10-11: “He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

While my family and I were at the YMCA I learned a profound lesson about the church. The kids and I were in the kiddie pool, having a good time. At first, my youngest was afraid of the water. He screamed! The life guard suggested the inch-deep water. What a good suggestion. I threw his “noodle” into the water progressively deeper. Each time he ventured out a little deeper until he was comfortable in the water. He could not yet swim, but he discovered the water was not so bad! He was wearing a life vest.

At this point, I decided to go down to the deep end and do a couple laps. I told my boys to stay in the shallow water and for my wife to watch. I was gone but two minutes and my wife told me our son immediately went to the deeper end and could not keep his head above water. He was too young to realize he just needed to stand up. Thankfully, one of the other moms was quick and brought him back to the shallow end. Thank God for the other people and my wife!

What I realized from this experience is that, like my son, we get very comfortable in the world. Despite having salvation in Jesus (a life preserver), we find ourselves in some precarious situations, and in need of the eyes of the church to come and help us. Yes, it is true sometimes we can handle things on our own, but even an experienced swimmer knows it is foolish to be out without others around.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank-you for saving us from sin, the devil, and everlasting death. It is as if you have given us a life preserver. Thank-you also for giving us your church. Help me to be an instrument of Christ when people are in trouble. Help make me aware of these times. In Jesus name. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 1:12-26

For Discussion: How did the disciples choose a replacement for Judas? When we make decisions in the church, do we consult God? How could today’s reading change how we do meetings?

Week 1 “From These Ashes” Day 3, February 27

Psalm 133: “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.”

One of the biggest disappointments we have with the church is that not everyone gets along. One person offends another and then some of those involved stop attending church. All too often both sides are thinking, “They need to apologize for his/her wrongs.” And of course, both sides are too prideful to apologize. Then our relationships do not look like Mount Hermon or as precious oil pouring down the beard of Aaron.

It takes humility to approach a brother or sister who may have wronged us and admit the wrong from our perspective. Matthew 7:4-5 says, “How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.” This is really the first step in getting along with our fellow brothers and sisters: Falling down in ashes before Jesus for forgiveness for the plank in our own eye. Jesus will forgive us whether our brother or sister does or not. Plus, often when we come humbly to the other person admitting our own wrong, they are so taken aback they are ready for their own plank to come out.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, where there are hurt feelings, help me first to take out the plank, so that when I approach the other person I can see and talk clearly. Forgive me and others for our wrongs. Amen

Today's Bible Reading: Read Acts 2:1-13

For Discussion: Why did the Holy Spirit enable people to speak in other languages? Consider that the Holy Spirit is still very practical about reaching people for Jesus.

Week 1 “From These Ashes” Day 4, February 28

1 Peter 5:8: “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”

I have wonderful memories of the church when I was a little boy. Often the conflicts and struggles were shielded from me and so the church seemed like a perfect place back then. Satan uses this to convince us that the church now is but an ash heap and not a good place. The reality is that Satan was wreaking havoc then and continues today. He tries his best to destroy the church that Christ is building. To get us to focus on memories instead of Christ himself.

Yet memories are also important. We can give thanks for God’s good work in the past and present. Thank Him for all the good that is going on. Don’t let Satan focus our attention on ourselves and on the evil. The devil will always work hardest right in the church. Why? Because those outside the church are already in his camp.

We resist him by being in the Word and secondly by encouraging one another with that same word. The church that is in the Word of God is a fortress that Satan can not break down.

Consider Martin Luther’s Words in the fourth stanza of *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, “Though hordes of devils fill the land all threat’ning to devour us, we tremble not, unmoved we stand; They cannot overpower us. Let this world’s tyrant rage; in battle we’ll engage. His might is doomed to fail; God’s judgment must prevail! One little word subdues him.” God’s Word!

Prayer: Keep Your church in Your Word. Day in and day out protect us from the devil. Forgive us when we have slipped and enable us always to be your people. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 2:14-41

For Discussion: What promise does Peter give in verse 38? Who is this promise for and for how long?

Week 1 "From These Ashes" Day 5, March 1

"Trust Me!" Author Unknown

Job 13:15: "Though He slay me, yet will I hope (trust) in Him."

Trust is a quiet, serene word. We picture a child with his hand in that of the parent, or a heart at peace because God is in charge.

Suddenly the scene changes. Unemployment wipes out our savings. Flood or fire or wind destroys the home we've taken a lifetime to build. Violence enters our world. Then trust becomes a challenge thrown at us. God asks us, as He did Abraham: Will you trust Me though I ask you to give up a child?

Can we really trust Him that much? When God's promise is all we have left, can we rest securely?

That kind of trust doesn't just victoriously appear when the bottom falls out of our lives. The quiet trust of peaceful days precedes and prepares us for the storms. As we daily come to God for strength, as we experience Jesus' love and forgiveness, as we grow in faith, we find Him to be reliable. In the day of calamity, God's Holy Spirit will sustain us.

Jesus asks us to trust Him today -- for today's needs. No more -- no less! Step by step, one day at a time! Trust that in Jesus all the promises of salvation are fulfilled!

PRAYER: I am trusting You, Lord Jesus, Trusting only You; Trusting You for full salvation, Free and true. Amen

Today's Bible Reading: Read Acts 2:42-3:10

For Discussion: What is different about the church in this reading than today? What is the same?

Week 1 “From These Ashes” Day 6, March 2

Planting Together with Thanksgiving

***Ephesians 5:19-20:** St. Paul writes, “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”*

Always...our gratitude is much deeper than one day each November. It’s an attitude. It’s a lifestyle. Thanksgiving is reflected in our everyday thoughts, words and deeds. **For everything**...Martin Luther’s list included, “my body and soul, eyes, ears and all my members, my reason and all my senses...also clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals and all I have.” He further explained, “For all of this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.”

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ... When asked, “How are you doing?” a Des Moines radio personality always answers, “Better than I deserve.” What a wonderful reminder that we do not deserve the blessings from God that we enjoy every day. They are gifts to us from a gracious God who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all...and who now graciously gives us all things. May the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ fill your heart and life with true thanksgiving.

Planting Together and other Iowa District West News can be found on www.idwlcms.org. This devotion is written by Rev. Dr. Paul Sieveking President of Iowa District West.

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 3:(1-10) 11-26

For Discussion: How does Peter use the situation with the beggar to tell about Jesus? How do we use situations today?

Week 1 “From These Ashes” Day 7, March 3

***Ephesians 2:19-21:** “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”*

This week's devotions have been all about how God raises us up from ashes to be His church. The church is built like a house on the foundation of the Word of God with Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone.

The foundation of God's house will never fall, but we fall. The cornerstone of Jesus will never sink, but we sink. The framework of God's house is built secure in God's Word, but we break His Word. Thank God that Jesus is constantly bringing us back with forgiveness and life.

The foundation of Jesus was laid 2000 years ago even planned from the beginning of the world. What is the cement that connects that foundation with us today? During the next week we will look at the practical ways that God still builds us on Christ, the ancient foundation. To help us with this the 8th grade confirmation class wrote devotions on practical ways God still builds His church on the apostles, prophets, and Jesus himself! We will read about Baptism, God's Word, Communion, Absolution, Worship, and Music. God binds us together on his foundation with these.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for building us on the one secure foundation. Continue to bind us together with Your gifts. Use Your Words, Your Sacraments to bind us together. Likewise, speak Your Word through worship and music. Amen

Today's Bible Reading: Read Acts 4:1-22

For Discussion: How does God help Peter and John in this tough situation? Will He help us when we are trying to share Jesus with others?

Week 2

Bound Together in Christ's Church

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred mind
Is like to that above.

**Note: These weeks devotions
are written by the 7th & 8th
grade confirmands.**

Week 2 “Bound Together in Christ’s Church” Day 8, March 4

Baptism Binds Us on the Ancient Foundation of Christ

Today’s devotion is by: **R. Burke**

Titus 3:3-7: “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”

- **Write the passage in your own words:** We used to be foolish, disobedient, and full of hatred. God changed us by making us loving and kind through Baptism.
- **Tell about a personal experience that is similar to this passage:** My friend was being mean, but I forgave him. I did this because I am baptized.
- **Tell how Jesus uses this passage to bind us together as a church:** “He gets us together and makes us closer to each other because we can see each other as new people, washed and forgiven.
- **Does the passage make you feel good or bad and why?**
“Good, because it reminds us that we are forgiven.”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank-you for binding us together as a church with Baptism. Help us to live the changed life everyday as the old sinful self is crucified and the new resurrected self sees new light even today. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 4:23-36

For Discussion: What changes happened because of prayer in the reading? Do people of the church still support one another today as in Acts 4:32-37? Does this demonstrate that they were bound together?

**Week 2 “Bound Together in Christ’s Church” Day 9,
March 5**

God’s Word Binds Us On the Ancient Foundation of Christ

Today’s devotion is by: T. DeLaughter

2 Timothy 3:16-17: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

- **Write the passage in your own words:** Everything God says is useful to everyone.
- **Tell about a personal experience that is similar to this passage:** During school I try to help people with there work by saying words to help them understand.
- **Tell how Jesus uses this passage to bind us together as a church:** People at church pray for everyone that is sick or who is hurt or maybe someone who is in the hospital. We use God’s words to help and encourage them. W learn how to live as Christians in Christ and like Christ.
- **Does the passage make you feel good or bad and why?**
“Bad because we do not always live up to God’s Word and good, because it makes you forgiven.”

Prayer: Lord, speak to me daily through your Word because it is useful for my life. Teach, rebuke, correct, and equip me for today so that I may do good works. Thank-you especially for your good work on the cross bringing me forgiveness and new life even today built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 5:1-11

For Discussion: What does this story teach us? Did Ananias have to give everything to God from their property sale? What should they have said to God? Notice that in verse 11 this is the first time the word “church” is used in Acts. Meaning: “local congregation” or “universal church.”

**Week 2 “Bound Together in Christ’s Church” Day 10,
March 6**

Absolution Binds Us on the Ancient Foundation of Christ

Today’s devotion is by: J. Lee

John 20:21-23: “Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

- **Write the passage in your own words:** Jesus tells the disciples that he is the flesh and blood of God and how he forgives people when the church forgives them. If the church does not forgive they are not forgiven.
- **Tell about a personal experience that is similar to this passage:** There are people that do not like me at school, but I forgive them, unlike them. They do not forgive. They seem to be living in eternal sin. I pray that they come into the church and know the forgiveness I know.
- **Tell how Jesus uses this passage to bind us together as a church:** He forgives us as we forgive each other. We all have a similarity: sin.
- **Does the passage make you feel good or bad and why?** It makes me feel good because it tells us how and why we get into heaven.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank-you for the gift of Holy Absolution. Whether it be the pastor publicly announcing absolution to the congregation or absolution given through a parent, a friend, a child or spouse, we know such forgiveness is given as if Christ himself spoke it to us and others. May those who live outside of forgiveness come to faith and repentance in you. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 5:12-16

For Discussion: Why did God allow so many miracles by the apostles?

**Week 2 “Bound Together in Christ’s Church” Day 11,
March 7**

Communion Binds Us on the Ancient Foundation of Christ

Today’s devotion is by: C. Groetken

***I Corinthians 11:23-26:** For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

- **Write the passage in your own words:** When you eat and drink the Lord’s supper, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes back and you really receive His body and blood from the Lord.
- **Tell about a personal experience that is similar to this passage:** I went up and saw my parents eat and drink the bread and wine. They felt good when they ate it.
- **Tell how Jesus uses this passage to bind us together as a church:** We are all receiving Jesus. We become part of the one loaf and one cup.
- **Does the passage make you feel good or bad and why?** “Good, because we are getting closer to God when we eat and drink. He is there in a special mysterious way.”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you come to us in your body and blood to bind us together in community. Strengthen us and preserve us, give us strength to be your people. We are indeed part of your body, not just a symbol, but you really give us Your body and blood when I take your Holy Supper. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 5:17-42

For Discussion: When do we have to make a decision to obey God rather than man today? What can happen because of such a decision?

**Week 2 “Bound Together in Christ’s Church” Day 12,
March 8**

Worship Binds Us On the Ancient Foundation of Christ

Today’s devotion is by: M. Anderson

Acts 2:46: “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts”

- **Write the passage in your own words:** “They devoted themselves to God and they enjoyed the favor of the people.”
- **Tell about a personal experience that is similar to this passage:** “My family goes to church every Wednesday to devote themselves to God and receive Jesus’ forgiveness of sins.”
- **Tell how Jesus uses this passage to bind us together as a church:** “It brings us together to tell God what we did wrong. It also brings us together so that we can praise him and tell about all the good things He does!”
- **Does the passage make you feel good or bad and why?** “Good, because they devote themselves to God”

Prayer: Lord, Jesus the people of the early church give us a model to follow that sets the bar very high. They worshipped daily. They ate together and their enthusiasm was great. Give us the same joy that we can go about the tasks of life with your church with such enthusiasm. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 6:1-7

For Discussion: What problem was happening here? How did they go about getting help? What lesson does this teach for today?

**Week 2 “Bound Together in Christ’s Church” Day 13,
March 9**

Music Binds Us on the Ancient Foundation of Christ

Today’s devotion is by: E. Buckholtz

Psalm 150: Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.

- **Write the passage in your own words:** “Tell people about the Lord. Tell about God in His sanctuary. Tell about Him with all sorts of musical instruments and voice.”
- **Tell about a personal experience that is similar to this passage:** “Every Sunday when I go to church, we praise the Lord!”
- **Tell how Jesus uses this passage to bind us together as a church:** “You feel better when you praise the Lord and if everyone around you is praising Him then you feel like you are closer to each other.”
- **Does the passage make you feel good or bad and why?**
“This makes me feel good because if we praise the Lord, then we are already showing we are the ones on the way to heaven. We also experiencing a little of heaven already here on earth.”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You let us praise You by telling others in word and song about the great things You do. It is awesome to get together with others no matter how imperfect our cracking voices, or squeaking instruments, because You are definitely worthy of praise. For You died and rose for us giving us forgiveness and eternal life. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 6:8-15

For Discussion: Stephen is one of the seven deacons (people who wait on tables.) What can happen when a person is faithful?

Week 2 “Bound Together in Christ’s Church” Day 14, March 10

Ephesians 4:4-6: “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

The Pittsburg Steelers are a great Football Team. They used to win football games totally by having the best defense. They would shut the other team down. Yet, this year they had multiple weapons. They could also win by having a good quarterback, a good running game, and a good defense. In actuality a good defense can win the game, but how much better when the whole team is good.

It would have been good enough if God had just given us His Word. The Word about Jesus’ life, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension would have been good enough to save us and bind us together. Yet, God uses so many other avenues to bind us together: song, getting together as a church, Absolution, the Lord’s Supper, and Baptism. God gives us the complete package. Common things to do together as a church. We are indeed one in Christ.

Today marks our last devotion on how we are bound together in Christ’s Church. I thank God for our youth and their insight towards this important subject. Next week we shift our attention to how Christ makes the church a communicating church. We see that he has called us to pray for one another. I pray these devotions will also strengthen you.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you shower us with your love from every angle. You give us forgiveness through your Word, Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, Absolution. You bind us together with these and we express them in worship and music. Be with those shut-ins who can no longer come together with us. Shower your love on truckers who have no regular church home. Bind all your church together, both those who we see all the time and those who are not as visible. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 7:1-54

For Discussion: Stephen summarized the whole Old Testament, could you do the same? What made the people angry?

Week 3

The Communicating Church

Before our Father's throne
We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one
Our comforts and our cares.

Week 3 “Communicating Church” Day 15, March 11

Acts 12:5, 11-12: “So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. . . Then Peter came to himself and said “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating. When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.”

As a church we are not here to just pray for ourselves. “God, I need a new car... God, I need a job that pays 23.50 an hour...God I need my birthday party to have fireworks and a trip to Hawaii. Amen”

Certainly, God will answer such prayers if done in faith. The answer may be yes, no, or wait awhile. The answer will also be according to God’s will. Jesus calls us to pray, “Thy will be done.” Yet no prayer is to be selfish, we are to pray for ourselves and other Christians. They too need God’s help.

When Peter was in prison, the church gathered together and prayed corporately that he would be released. God’s answer: A miracle! It was God’s will that he be released!

As Christians we are called to go into our closed room and pray in secret, but there are also times we are called to pray together with other Christians. Prayer binds us together. We care for one another therefore we pray for one another. Check out the Calvary Call and the bulletin and remember those in need in your prayers. Pray also for those who are looking for jobs, those who are in need of transportation, those that need time off and rest. Pray for God’s will to be done in these situations.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we are your people! You call us to pray for one another, for our pastor, for those in need, help me to be about talking to you day after day individually and together with other Christians. In Jesus name. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 7:54-8:3

For Discussion: Name a time we are persecuted for the faith. How can we pray for those who do the persecution as Stephen does?

Week 3 “Communicating Church” Day 16, March 12

“Lord, teach us to pray.”

Cindy Storm DCE

Matthew 6:9-13 & Psalm 139:1-4

At my first encounter with Calvary members I was asked to lead a prayer. Panic hit my heart! I had never led a prayer for a group. I declined the invitation.

My mind began to whirl. How could I possibly be a Called Minister in the church if I cannot even lead a prayer? Since that time, I have constantly searched to learn HOW to pray. I know the facts and the facts are simple. Prayer is simply talking to God. How hard is that? For me, it has been hard!

D. Bonheoffer offered me hope. In his book *Prayer Book of the Bible* he states, “The child learns the language of the parent because the parent speaks to the child. The child learns the language of the parent. So we learn to speak to God because God has spoken and speaks to us in the Psalms.” **Prayer starts with God, not me.** As we read the book of Psalms and Jesus’ Words, we are, in essences, using Jesus’ words to speak/pray to our heavenly Father.

I am still an infant at prayer. I have much to learn about prayer.

Prayer is hard for many people. But it does not have to be. When you feel the need to pray, open up the Book of Psalms, and with a quiet, confident heart, speak the Words of our Lord.

Prayer: Father, thank you for giving me words to speak to you. In your precious name we pray. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 7:8-25

For Discussion: What is Simon the Sorcerer’s motivation for asking for the Holy Spirit? What is the true reason we want the Holy Spirit?

Week 3 “Communicating Church” Day 17, March 13

Psalm 46:10: “Be still...”

Cindy Storm DCE

We are busy people. Talk to anyone. It is almost as if we feel guilty or not important if our life is not FULL and busy. That is why Psalm 46, verse 10 is so hard for me to say. God wants me to “be still and know that He is God.”

I think, “But God, I have so much to do, how can I sit still and listen to you. Every minute I sit, trying to be still, is one minute I could be using to get some of my work done.”

I struggle a lot with being still, still to hear God’s Word for my life. It is so much easier when I am in charge. I also find myself in a lot of trouble when I am in charge.

So before I begin my daily devotions, I repeat Psalm 46:10 over many times. It is my way of letting go of all my thoughts and my plans before I hear God’s Word to me. It is only with the strength of the Holy Spirit that stillness is given to me, to hear God’s Word in my mind and in my heart.

In that still time, prayer begins. God talks to me through His Word and I can talk to Him. In that stillness, there is peace. In that stillness, I know joy. In that stillness, I meet my heavenly Father.

Prayer: Dear loving Father, thank you for the quiet moments with you. Thank you for your Words, your care, and your love. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 8:26-40

For Discussion: How is the Ethiopian converted to Christianity? What is his first action after believing? What did he do on the way home?

Week 3 “Communicating Church” Day 18, March 14

John 17:20-26: “My prayer is not for them (Jesus’ apostles) alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.”

Cindy Storm DCE

Literally hours before Jesus hung on the cross, he stopped to pray for you and me, believers in Him as the true Son of God. It stirs my heart. Here am I, a totally thoughtless, self-centered, indifferent, (and the list goes on) sinner. I am the one who pounded the nails in his hands and feet. I am the one who threw insults at Him and spat at Him. I am the one who denied Him. I am full-blown sinner and He prays for me.

What does this prayer of Jesus tell me about my prayers? How should I pray for those who hurt me by their words? How should I pray for those who hurt me by their actions? How hard it must have been for Jesus to pray for me, me - the cause of all the anguish He suffered, hours before He endured a most cruel death. Are there words in His prayer that I can use to help me pray for my “enemies”?

Listen to the last words of His prayer. *“I have made you (Father) known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”*

He prayed that I might know His love so that I can pray for my enemy as He prayed for me.

Dear Lord, You suffered so much because of me. Now let me love my enemies with the strength of the love You have given me.
Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 9:1-19

For Discussion: Does God care about unbelievers? Should we pray for those persecute the church today? Name some modern people doing persecution. Pray for them.

Week 3 “Communicating Church” Day 19, March 15

“Prayer”

Cindy Storm DCE

Psalm 25:1, 4-7

Be still and know that He is God as you read through this devotion written by Jesus through His servant, David.

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul;
in you I trust, O my God.

Show me your ways, O LORD,
teach me your paths;
guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long.
Remember, O LORD, your great mercy and love,
for they are from of old.
Remember not the sins of my youth
and my rebellious ways;
according to your love remember me,
for you are good, O LORD.

Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 9:19b-31

For Discussion: How did people of the church help Saul? Are there people we can stand up for and help in the church today? Go and help them!

Week 3 “Communicating Church” Day 20, March 16

James 5:14: “Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.”

The church is not here just to worship, take the Lord’s Supper, and deliver the Good News of Jesus, it is also called to pray for and those who are sick.

HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) makes this verse all the more important, because the hospital cannot call the church. No, “*He* should call the elders...” In other words in Bible times like today, the pastor and elders do not know about the sickness unless they are called. True Story: A person went to the nursing home, but the family never notified the pastor. Six years went by without communion being brought. Finally, the family called when the lady only had a week left to live. She missed out in having the church pray for her over those six years. Thankfully a kind hearted pastor in the LCMS had been visiting the sick lady off and on over the year, not realizing the situation.

This passage reminds us the job of elder and pastor to see those who are sick and in need and to pray for them. Likewise it is the responsibility of the church that is bound together in Christ to support one another in prayer.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, be with each of our elders and pastor that they can do the work you have given them to do in such a way that your church is built up. In Jesus name Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 9:32-42

For Discussion: What did Dorcas (Tabitha) do to gain the respect of people? How can members of the church continue to do what Dorcas did?

Week 3 “Communicating Church” Day 21, March 17

Ephesians 4:2: “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, **bearing with one another in love.**”

Many marriages fail because of lack of communication. In fact our relationship with God can fail because of lack of communication.

Today we complete our third week of devotions about prayer. Prayer, as we have seen, is not just an individual communicating with God (Heart to heart talk), but talking on the behalf of other Christians, talking to God with other Christians. It involves being still, it involves actually speaking/thinking words, learning, and praying for people who are enemies.

This coming week we look at the third stanza of *Blest Be the Tie that Binds*. Our focus is on the consoling church. Just as communication is good for a relationship, so also being present, bearing with one another, is important: “We share each other’s woes, Our mutual burdens bear; And often for each other flow, The sympathizing tear.” We are not called to simply pray for one another but bear with one another. It is tough for Lutherans to show emotion for fellow Christians, but it is part of our calling. We are called to love our fellow Christians just as Christ loved us. We don’t have to like everyone, we are not going to understand everyone’s personality, but we are to show love to them, especially those in our own congregation. Who else will show them Christ’s love? Likewise, who but the church will show us the comfort and consolation that is from Christ Himself?

Prayer: Thank-you for letting us pray for people in our congregation. Now help us to also physically become involved in their lives, to share woes, to bear burdens, and even have a sympathizing tear. Thank-you for your own bearing of our burdens on the cross. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 10:1-23

For Discussion: How does God prepare Peter to meet Cornelius? Consider that Jews do not eat Pork whereas Roman Gentiles do. Does God prepare us through our present experiences for the future?

Week 4

The Consoling/ Comforting Church

We share each other's woes,
Our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.

**Note: Some of these devotions are by
the 7th & 8th grade confirmands.**

Week 4 “Consoling Church” Day 22, March 18

Hebrews 12:1-2: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

As a sixth grader, we were asked to sign up to participate in the annual track and field day. I took my time in looking over the events and finally decided on the 100 and 400 meter dashes. Surely I would be in good company. After all, there were more females than males in my class. The day of the events, I ran the 100 three times as I competed for the finals. Towards the end of the day, they called for the 400, both girls and boys. I eagerly went up but realized something within minutes of my standing up to go to the front: I was the only girl. Our P.E. teacher took me aside and explained that I was the only girl competing for this race so I would automatically take first place but he wanted me to run. He thought it would be awful to run by myself so he had me run with a group of boys. I started out doing all right against those boys. After all, I was no longer competing for just first place-I wanted to beat the boys! During the race however, there were just some that proved themselves to be more athletic. As I rounded the corner for the last 100 m of the race, I could hear my name being chanted in the stands, "Stacy! Stacy!" The entire class was cheering for me! What a great feeling to have not just a friend or two cheering but the entire group of people in the stands! In the reading for today we are given a vision of a race. The witnesses mentioned here are those that set examples of Christ-like lives for us. So many times in our lives we have conflict of what to do and what words are necessary and we just need to look to people like Abraham to see that God gives us all the right tools to finish our race and testify to His promises.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, I thank You for giving me people like Abraham and Moses to set an example for me. Please use me as a vessel to reach out to others through the gifts you give me. In Jesus' name Amen.

Stacy Travis

Week 4 “Consoling Church” Day 23, March 19

Today’s devotion is by: C. Baker

Hebrews 10:24-25: And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

- **Write the passage in your own words:** “We should encourage one another to do good things for each other. Keep meeting with each other and always encourage each other to meet as much as possible.”
- **Tell about a personal experience that is similar to this passage:** “I encourage my friends to go to church with me or even by themselves.”
- **Tell how Jesus uses this passage to bind us together as a church:** “He tells us to keep coming to church and encourage others to go too!”
- **Does the passage make you feel good or bad and why?** “Good, because it reminds me to always tell people to go to church and always pray.”

Prayer: Lord, sometimes I need spurred on to do love and good works in the church. Sometimes, you use me to spur others on around me. Lord forgive me when I have failed and send me and people around me to do this spurring and these good works before you come on the last day. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 10:23b-48

For Discussion: God came to save the Jews first and then the Gentiles. How does God use Peter to make this reality possible?

Week 4 “Consoling Church” Day 24, March 20

Today’s devotion is by: **S. Blakey**

Acts 9:36-42 : “In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, “Please come at once!” Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.”

- **Write the passage in your own words:** “Dorcas did good for others, but she became sick and died. Peter came to Lydda and prayed and God made her come back to life!”
- **Tell about a personal experience that is similar to this passage:** “My mom makes food for me, that is how she helps me. At church quilts are made for those in need, the food bank for those needing food, etc.”
- **Tell how Jesus uses this passage to bind us together as a church:** “It brings everyone together and makes everyone happy. It keeps me alive. The resurrection will happen to all believers.”
- **Does the passage make you feel good or bad and why?** “It made me feel bad at the beginning but at the end I was happy.”

Prayer: Lord, out of death you raise us to new life. We thank-you for Dorcas and her example for Christian life. She indeed brought consolation to the poor and sick. Help us to do the same for others around us. In Jesus name. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 11:1-18

For Discussion: Sometimes even the church may not know why something is done. How does Peter clear things up?

Week 4 “Consoling Church” Day 25, March 21

Today’s devotion is by: Hanks

Acts 4:32-35: “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.”

- **Write the passage in your own words:** “Believers are all one in heart and mind. No one claimed that their possessions were their own. With great power the apostles continued to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.”
- **Tell about a personal experience that is similar to this passage:** “When you give cans to the food bank it helps poor people eat.”
- **Tell how Jesus uses this passage to bind us together as a church:** “As we bring the cans to church we are all coming together and binding as one to give the cans to poor or needy people.”
- **Does the passage make you feel good or bad and why?** “Good, because it shows people are one in mind and giving to others.”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, everything we have ultimately belongs to you. Even we belong to you because you created us and redeemed us. Help us to manage all that we have in such a way that we take care of ourselves, family, church, and those in need around us. Provide all that we need. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 11:19-30

For Discussion: Verse 29 describes the Church showing mercy on fellow Christians in aid. Do we do enough for human care work today? See also <http://www.lcms.org/ca/worldrelief/>

Week 4 “Consoling Church” Day 26, March 22

Today’s devotion is by: N. Ohl

John 13:2-5, 12-15: “Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. ²On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.”

- **Write the passage in your own words:** On the first day of the week put aside a sum of money saving it up so that when he comes, no collections will have to be made for those in need.
- **Tell about a personal experience that is similar to this passage:** At our school, we do a fundraiser called “Adopt-a-Family.” We raise up money and buy toys for a family before Christmas. We wrap the gifts and give them the left over money.
- **Tell how Jesus uses this passage to bind us together as a church:** We give money as an offering at church (to God). It binds us together because they need money to keep the church (Calvary budgets for: Pastor, DCE, Missions, Church Building, Helping needy, Evangelism, Music, Youth Activities, Iowa District West [Camp Okoboji, Pastor Witte, Lutheran Family Services [Counseling], Chaplains at Hospitals, etc.]) going.
- **Does the passage make you feel good or bad and why?**
Good you give money and giving binds us all together.

Prayer: Lord, you give us the ability to decide to give a certain amount of money to help those in need on the first day of the week. You also give us the freedom to decide how we will support your church. Help us to realize we are not just helping a building, but being bound together as church. Thank-you for your work and forgiveness in our lives. In Jesus name. Amen.

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 12:1-19

For Discussion: How do the people pray in today’s reading?
How does God answer? Are we this bold in our prayers today?

Week 4 “Consoling Church” Day 27, March 23

Today’s Devotion is by Pastor John Mehl (Missionary to Hong Kong—These Words are Taken from His June 2008 Article in Asia Ablaze Newsletter—Pastor Mehl is being supported by Calvary offerings during 2009)

“In Acts 11, St. Luke reports on a famine in Judea and the response of the Christians in Antioch who were determined to help. We read, “The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for their brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.”

“We live in a world that becomes increasingly flat. Our eyes see desperate need in the short time it takes for a radio wave to reach our televisions or computers. As God’s children, we have the privilege of helping those in need as His hands of mercy. Luther says that we become the “masks of God” when we show His love to our neighbor. While we can’t help everyone, we can make a difference.

“There are many Christians and non-Christians alike who are suffering greatly in Myanmar and in China after natural disasters. They desperately need help restoring their broken lives. . .”

John urges us to read more about the needs in Asia in the Quarterly Newsletter at www.asiaablaze.org

Prayer: Almighty God, merciful Father, Your thoughts are not our thoughts, Your ways are not our ways. In Your wisdom You have permitted fire/flood/earthquake/plane crash/terrorist attack/other to befall us. We ask You, let not the hearts of Your people despair nor our faith fail us, but sustain and comfort us. Direct all efforts to attend the injured, console the bereaved, and protect the helpless. Bring hope and healing that we may find relief and restoration; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 12:19b-13:12

For Discussion: Saul and Barnabus had been teaching in Antioch for a year (See Acts 11:25-26). How does Paul’s first missionary journey begin (Acts 13:4-14:28). What was Paul’s approach?

Week 4 “Consoling Church” Day 28, March 24

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, 18: “Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. . . . Therefore encourage each other with these words.”

Have you ever been to the funeral of an elderly person in their 90s or even 100? Often there are very few in attendance. It is even more disappointing when the only ones in attendance are family members who have no faith or have fallen away from the church.

Funerals are probably the number one opportunity for evangelism, that is, sharing the love of Jesus with people. Yet, when no church members are present, the only one with any opportunity to share Jesus is the pastor. Consider the words of *Blest Be the Tie that Binds* for this week: “We share each other’s woes, our mutual burdens bear; and often for each other flows the sympathizing tear.”

I would encourage you to consider attending funerals of some families who you do not even know well, not for your own benefit, but for the people who might not know Jesus. It speaks volumes to those present. It also speaks volumes to those who already know Jesus.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, be with those church members who have lost loved ones in the past year. Bring them comfort, help us to sympathize with them and support them, and forgive us when we have neglected these opportunities Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 13:13-52

For Discussion: How do the Jews react to Paul? How do the Gentiles react? How do we react?

Week 5

The Suffering Church

When here our pathways part,
We suffer bitter pain;
Yet, one in Christ and one in heart,
We hope to meet again.

Week 5 “Suffering Church” Day 29, March 25

“No Pain No Gain”

It is well known that one of the reasons the early church grew was because many early Christians were martyred for the faith. God grew the church miraculously in this peculiar way. The word martyr in Greek literally means to “confess one’s faith.” However, confessing the faith became synonymous with losing one’s life. The church grew like wildfire because suffering showed the genuineness of Christianity. People were not killing others for their beliefs (Suicide Bombers). No, they were dying because they loved their Lord Jesus so much, they would be killed rather than deny Him.

In confirmation our youth and adults are asked, “Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?” The answer, “I do, by the grace of God.”

I do not wish suffering on anyone at Calvary, but we must be mindful that suffering for the faith is mentioned 30 plus times in the New Testament alone. Being a Christian is a dangerous lifestyle. People make fun of us. People disregard true Christian beliefs making us feel outdated, but in reality we have the best faith of all. Jesus is still the greatest gift of all. This week we meditate on the 4th stanza of *Blest be the Tie that Binds*: “When here our pathways part, We suffer bitter pain; Yet, one in Christ and one in heart, We hope to meet again.”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank-you for suffering and dying for us. Use us as your people. Bring us through both times of suffering and joy. Allow our trials to help others to grow and grow your church. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 14:1-28

For Discussion: How does Paul and Barnabas react to being called gods? Is it worth standing up for the truth? What do they do before finishing the missionary trip verses 21-28?

Week 5 “Suffering Church” Day 30, March 26

“One in Christ and one in heart, we hope to meet again.”

Devotion by: L. Umland

Romans 5:1-3: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance”

Pastor Carl Hanson is married to Chen His Li and with their two daughters, serve as missionaries in Hong Kong. During a talk Chen was making in a Lutheran Church, she asked two women how long they have known Jesus. Both replied “All of my life.” Chen His replied, “you are lucky, I have only known Jesus 13 years. If a missionary had not come to China, Christ would not be in my heart.”

We tell others about Jesus so we can all be in heaven. The word “hope” as we use it in our English language has an element of doubt in our translation. When hope was translated in the original language the Bible was written in, it meant complete assurance. When we believe in Jesus, we have complete assurance we will be in Heaven with Chen His Li and all believers.

Prayer: Loving Savior: I thank you that we are one in Christ and assured of our eternity in Heaven.

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 15:1-41

For Discussion: How did the early church settle disagreements? What does this teach us? (Note that Paul’s second missionary journey begins in Acts 15:39 and concludes in Acts 18:22)

Week 4 “Suffering Church” Day 31, March 27

Romans 8:18: *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”*

Many false prophets tell us that if we become Christians everything will go well for us. We will become healthy, wealthy, and wise. This is sometimes called the “theology of glory” or “prosperity theology.” It comes from the idea that God is good and rewards all who follow him.

Yet, tell this to Paul who wrote Romans or any number of Christians in Eritrean, “The Eritrean government targets Christians, often placing them in metal containers that are extremely hot during the day and cold during the night. Nearly 1,800 Eritrean Christians are believed to be under arrest because of their religious beliefs, held in police stations, military camps and prisons in 12 known locations across Eritrea. It is believed more than 28 clergymen are being held.” (www.persicution.com Posted Feb. 5, 2009)

Instead, we find that the Bible teaches the theology of the cross, namely that as we follow Christ there are often hardships. We often will have to carry crosses. But, do not give up, rejoice when we have suffering because we experience a bit of what our Lord and Savior experienced. Remember such suffering will be no more and exchanged for glory when Jesus comes a second time! Thank God that it is Jesus who makes us worthy of eternal life and not our ability or amount of suffering in this world.

Prayer: Lord, forgive me when I have caved to the pressures of the world and not stood up for you. Forgive me when I have given up on you and the church when I have not received rewards now. Instead, thank-you for allowing me to go through suffering for you. Give courage to the Christians in Eritrean. Protect them and ultimately show the people that you have come to save them. In Jesus name. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 16:1-40

For Discussion: This begins the second missionary journey. How does the early church do Baptism? Is Baptism a work of God or a work of man?

Week 5 “Suffering Church” Day 32, March 28

Romans 8:20-21: *“For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*”

No one likes being in the hospital for prolonged periods of time. No one I know likes to endure cancer, a stroke, or even pneumonia. These gruesome experiences are evidence that creation is frustrated. They create suffering in a person’s life. Granted, this suffering is different from the suffering described in yesterday’s devotion. There suffering was caused by standing up for Jesus. Today’s devotion is about suffering just because that is what creation does. After all, creation itself is groaning. Earthquakes and tornados are indicators that the world is not right. The earth wants something better. It is looking for liberation from the bondage to decay.

Why would God do this to us? The reason is so that we would not become too attached to this life. God wants us to ultimately look forward to heaven. Paul goes on, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons the redemption of our bodies. . . We wait for it patiently” (Romans 8:22-23, 25)

Prayer: Lord, God it is tough to wait for the day you change everything to perfection. Yet keep us focused on the goal and help us to live for you while we are here. Help us to bear with fellow Christians as they go through the same things. Amen.

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 17:1-34

For Discussion: From the Thessalonians we learn that not everyone responds favorably to the Gospel message. What do we learn from the Bereans? What do we learn about Paul’s evangelism technique in Athens? His reliance on Christ alone?

Week 5 “Suffering Church” Day 33, March 29

Being the Church to Those Suffering

(The Body = The Church) I Corinthians 12:12, 26: “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ . . . If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoice with it.”

I think one of the worst mistakes the church can make is to see someone in need and then ignore them. The church after all is the body of Christ. When one person is hurting, it makes the whole body of Christ hurt.

Who in the church is hurting? How can you pray for them? What could you do for them this week? Does the pastor know about this pain?

Only after those in the church are hurting do we turn to those outside. Who can you pray for outside the church that we might win to know Jesus?

Prayer: “O Father of mercies and God of all comfort, our only help in time of need, look with favor upon Your servant _____ . Assure him/her of Your mercy, deliver him/her from the temptations of the evil one, and give him/her patience and comfort in his/her illness/hurt/need. If it please You, restore him/her to health/normal life, or give him/her grace to accept this tribulation with courage and hope; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 18:1-28

For Discussion: Corinth was a hot bed for immorality and pagan worship. Yet, God still used Paul to bring the Gospel to it. Have you known immoral people? Does God want the message of Jesus to be given to them. Pray about it! (Note that Paul’s Third Missionary Journey starts in Acts 18:23 and goes till 21:17)

Week 5 “Suffering Church” Day 34, March 30

Matthew 25:31-46: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

³⁷"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

⁴⁰"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

⁴¹"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴²For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

⁴⁴"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

⁴⁵"He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for

(Continued on page 46)

(Continued from page 45)

one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

⁴⁶"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Note: "The great Shepherd who separates the sheep from the goats once said: "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters (12:30). The separation takes place before any deeds are mentioned. Whether a person has been against him or for him has been documented by that person's deeds—deeds of mercy done or left undone. The merciful will find mercy in the judgment, as Jesus had promised (5:7)—mercy it is; for the Judge buries all their failures in forgiving silence and remembers only their deeds of mercy. The unmerciful have committed themselves to the unmerciful enemy of God and share his doom, that eternal fire which God did not design for human beings."

Today's Bible Reading: Read Acts 19:1-41

For Discussion: Paul demonstrates here is missionary strategy. Was this Paul or was this God's work? How must mission work be done today? How does Paul handle the riot to follow? What is God's part in handling the riot?

Week 5 “Suffering Church” Day 35, March 31

"A Savior For The 2nd Century" Author: Pastor Ken Klaus

1 Peter 4:16: "However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."

It was around the year 200 that the Roman emperor Septimus Severus was cracking down on traitors. He really didn't want martyrs, but when Christians refused to perform a simple, patriotic gesture, like burning incense to the gods, something had to be done. Perpetua was an educated woman. As a follower of the Way, she felt that offering a sacrifice was the same as denying Jesus as the Savior for the centuries. Her prison diary is the first writing that we have from a Christian woman. As she was led to out to be thrown before wild animals, an eyewitness records that Perpetua left the prison as "joyfully as though she was on her way to heaven." "You must all stand fast in the faith and love one another," she called to the other martyrs, "and do not be weakened by what we have gone through!" When she was thrown to the ground by a wild beast, she modestly covered herself and fixed her hair, lest anyone think that she was afraid to die.

Years ago, a wise man told me, "List what you are willing to die for, and then you will know what you should live for." Perpetua's list was short: Jesus Christ. Although she loved father, mother and child, she loved Jesus more. Perpetua was willing to turn her back on those who loved her, because she found Someone who loved her more. Through the words of the Apostles, she had gazed into the Bethlehem manger and seen God's Son who had come to save her from her sins. Her heart, by the Spirit's power, had allowed her to look into the open tomb. That is why, when it came time to make her choice between confession and cowardice, Perpetua, like many others, before and since, courageously chose to follow the Christ. Now the question that Perpetua answered, remains for you. For what are you willing to die, and live? It is the Christmas prayer of Lutheran Hour Ministries that at the top of your list is God's Good News of Great Joy: Jesus Christ, the Savior for the centuries.

(Continued on page 48)

(Continued from page 47)

Prayer: Fill my heart with an appreciation of what you have done. Whatever I am called on to sacrifice, let it be done with gladness and joy. In your name. Amen.

www.lhm.org daily devotion

Today's Bible Reading: Read Acts 20:1-38

For Discussion: How do we say farewell to people? Consider how Paul said farewell and how it might change our own.

Week 6

The Heaven Bound Church

From sorrow, toil and pain,
And sin, we shall be free,
And perfect love and friendship reign
Through all eternity.

Week 6 “Heaven Bound Church” Day 36, April 1

1 Peter 1:1: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus . . .”

A favorite funeral hymn is *I’m But a Stranger Here* (LSB 748). We are strangers in this world or as Stanley Hauerwas put it, “We are Resident Aliens.”

A few years ago I met a man studying in the United States from Mexico. His pure purpose while here in the United States was to get a good education so that he could take his learning back to Mexico and use it to better the country. While he was here he was respectful and even used the time to help educate people of the United States about Mexico.

Ultimately, we are like this young man except our residency is ultimately in heaven. When Jesus comes a second time or we die we will be with our Lord. Yet, in heaven we will not be strangers we will know our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ from all time. Moses, Elijah, Matthew, Mark, Paul and Barnabus, some of our friends and relatives will be there with us. The church bound together under Christ will be there praising God forever in heaven!

It reminds us all the more that we are called to walk together with our brothers and sisters in Christ even now. After all through Christ they are forgiven just as we are.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank-you that we can live and walk with fellow Christians, resident Aliens, forgive us, and renew us each day. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 21:1-36

For Discussion: Paul here travels to Jerusalem despite several Christians telling him not to go. Paul pays for four Jewish men to go through a rite for purification to prove to the Jews that he is still Jewish. How does it backfire? How do our best plans sometimes backfire? Tomorrow we will read how God uses this for good!

Week 6 “Heaven Bound Church” Day 37, April 2

Today’s devotion is by: **A. Osterholt**

Acts 2:42-45: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.”

- **Write the passage in your own words:** All believers came and shared God's Word as well as their possessions with each other. With the grace of God, they spread the word of the resurrection. All the people's needs were provided for because people shared what they had with the church, which then provided for those in need.
- **Tell about a personal experience that is similar to this passage:** The school (St. Paul Lutheran School) each year has a food drive for the poor and needy. I always bring food cans to contribute to that effort.
- **Tell how Jesus uses this passage to bind us together as a church:** This verse is about sanctification because it guides us to treat our fellow Christians as brothers and sisters. To help provide when there is a need, following Christ's example of serving others.

Prayer: Lord Jesus we thank-you that while we live as strangers in this world we can get together for the Lord’s Supper and hearing God’s Word, but we also thank You for allowing us to help others that have need. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 21:37-22:29

For Discussion: What immediate opportunity does Paul get because he is arrested? Paul tells his personal story of how God called him. How did God call you?

Week 6 “Heaven Bound Church” Day 38, April 3

“Praise Be to God for a Living Hope” D. Krause

Exodus 14:13-14: “Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

Hebrews 10:1-18

Moses tells his people to not be afraid, to stand firm, that they will see deliverance from God. He tells them that God will fight for them, that they need only be still and trust! So too, today, Jesus' unfailing love leads those whom He has redeemed, those who are heaven bound. Each of us has been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus. May we live our lives honoring this great blessing and calling. Our love for Christ is shown through loving Christ's people! Allow the Lord to be your guide, your strength, and your salvation. Trust in Him to provide your every need. Seek Him, listen to Him, serve Him, and remain firm in Him.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your great gifts. Help us to continue to seek your presence and to truly do your will in service to others as needed here on earth. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 22:30-23:35

For Discussion: How does Paul use his roman citizenship to help him as a Christian to do God’s work? How can we use our earthly positions for the Lord?

Week 6 “Heaven Bound Church” Day 39, April 4

“Beauty in a Weed: Bring Others into Heaven” S. Travis

Matthew 13:31-32: “He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.”

Many of you used to make necklaces, bracelets, and even rings out of them. You would put them in your hair to look beautiful and gather them up to bring them to your mothers. It was a fine flower and you never ran out. So the necklace broke: you made a new one. As you grew up however, the beauty of the small flower fizzled and you were stuck wondering why you would ever love a flower that multiplied with just with wish of the wind. Dandelions were no longer your favorite flower. In fact, you would do anything to rid yourself of them! You could lose neighbors just because you were not fertilizer friendly. Think about how one lone dandelion one day can end up being a whole field of beautifully colored dandelions and ask yourself why one would crush the beauty that lies within that field. Likewise as Christians it started with one person and as the message spreads, we too, are like a whole field of dandelions. We are beautifully handcrafted by our master and it takes everyone to keep the field growing.

Prayer: Dear Father in Heaven Thank you for the beauty of your creation. Help me to spread your word to my friends and family so that Your field will be full at the harvest. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 24:1-27

For Discussion: What defense does Paul give? How do we defend our own faith? Note that the Gospel is always the central message!

Week 6 “Heaven Bound Church” Day 40, April 5

“What Really Matters?”

D. Krause

***Deuteronomy 17:18-19:** But do not be afraid of them; remember well what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt. ¹⁹ You saw with your own eyes the great trials, the miraculous signs and wonders, the mighty hand and outstretched arm, with which the LORD your God brought you out. The LORD your God will do the same to all the peoples you now fear.*

***John 1:14:** “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

We as sinful human beings can often become caught up in what is really not necessarily that meaningful or important on our journey towards heaven. What is most important is knowing the Lord and obeying Him in all that matters. This is where God-pleasing leadership begins. This is where authority links up with responsibility. A servant's heart is born! As God's laws are obeyed each of us is commanded to love the Lord and to walk in His ways. We pray for open ears and willing and obedient hearts to do just that, to serve mightily as God has so gifted each and everyone.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we ask your blessings in each of our respective faith journeys. Help us not be faint-hearted but to be loyal and bold witnesses for YOU! Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 25:1-22

For Discussion: “Nero had become emperor by this time. It was the right of every Roman citizen to have his case heard before Caesar himself in Rome. This was the highest court of appeal, and winning such a case could have led to more than just Paul’s acquittal. It could have resulted in official recognition of Christianity as distinct from Judaism.” (Concordia Self Study Bible Note pg 1705)

Week 6 “Heaven Bound Church” Day 41, April 6

“Keep Strong in the Lord”

D. Krause

2 Timothy 3:14-16 : “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”

See Also: Psalm 119:89-112

Paul, in his first letter to Timothy, gives Timothy many encouragements and instruction. Life is often tough. Challenging things happen. People say and do what is not God-pleasing. Things don't go the way we think they should. Despite everything, God tells us to not give up in doing his work. He encourages us to stay in the Word and to stay true to Him. He tells us to remain loyal to our faith, to loved ones whom He has given to us, and to vocation in which He blesses each of us. God equips his children to have kingdom authority. Use it!

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the statutes you have given me. They are truly the joy of my heart. May I be strong in and through you all the days of my life. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 25:23-26:32

For Discussion: Paul uses his time before Agrippa for sharing his faith. Do we share our faith so boldly?

Week 6 “Heaven Bound Church” Day 42, April 7

“Help for Doubt”

Unknown Author

Matthew 28:17: "When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted."

"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?" says the psalmist (Psalm 42:5). Who has not experienced the pangs of doubt and depression? Sometimes these moods assail us when it makes no sense at all that we feel this way. Everything is fine, and we should be exuberant. But doubt creeps in, and we wonder why.

It is astounding that some should doubt after Jesus rose from the dead and showed Himself to the disciples. It makes no sense. But that is the way we are. These uncertain moods and doubts come over us; we know there is no good reason, but how do we fight them off? The psalmist helps us: "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God" (Psalm 42:5-6).

It is a comfort to know that Jesus had much experience with weak and doubting followers. And always He was kind and warm and receptive. He fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out" (Isaiah 42:3). Jesus sought to sustain weak faith. Listen to the psalmist: "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God." There is help for doubt.

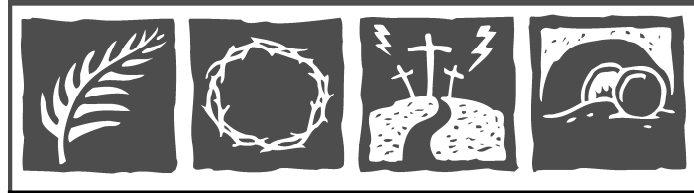
PRAYER: Dear Lord Jesus, I am sorry for my doubts and fears. Please forgive me and hold me tight. Amen.

Today's Bible Reading: Read Acts 27:1-42

For Discussion: How was God at work while Paul was traveling to Rome? What is the ship's crew's response to God and Paul?

Week 7

Holy Week



Wednesday: Service of Confession and Absolution 7 pm

Thursday: Worship with the Lord's Supper
Noon & 7 pm

Friday: Good Friday Tennebrae Service 7 pm

Saturday: Easter Egg Hunt — Invite Friends & Neighbors (2-4 year olds in the Parish Hall, 5-9 years of age on the Church Grounds or Basement if there is rain) 10 am

Easter Sunrise: Worship 6 am @ the Eppley Auditorium.

Easter Sunday: Worship at 8 & 10:30 am

Week 7 “Confession and Absolution” Day 43, April 8

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

You probably aren't acquainted with the Swat valley of Pakistan. I wasn't either until I heard that in that valley Taliban militants have said girls cannot go to school. Because of the order, which was broadcast on an illegal FM radio station, government schools have been shut down and 300 private schools, which had been closed for winter break, will probably stay that way.

Here's something else: in Mingora, the main city in Swat, women are not allowed in the marketplace. And if you're thinking, "What will they do if a woman goes shopping in the market -- kill her?" The answer is, "Yes." That's their threat.

Most of the shop owners have sold or shut down their business because of falling sales.

Now, I don't want anyone to think this ban directed against women is universal in Islam. It isn't. In Saudi Arabia, female students make up more than half of the school and university population. Yes, women are strictly segregated in that country, but they can still get an education.

No matter how you look at it, Christianity is different. Christianity is different because Jesus is different. The Savior entered this world to seek and save the lost, both male and female. He came to heal the sick, both male and female. And when He took up the sins of humankind, He did so for sinners -- no matter their gender.

As St. Paul said, "If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." (Galatians 3:29)

Comforting, isn't it? We have a Savior whose only criterion for redemption is an acknowledgment of guilt and a dependence upon His sacrifice, suffering, death, and resurrection.

PRAYER: Dear Lord Jesus, I am a sinner, a sinner loved by You. I don't deserve Your love; I haven't earned it and I don't always appreciate it. Still, I give thanks for Your sacrifice. In Your Name I am saved and offer up this prayer. Amen

Today's Devotion is by Dr. Ken Klaus Daily Devotions.

See www.lhm.org to sign up for daily devotions to your computer!

Week 7 “Maundy Thursday” Day 45, April 9

Today’s devotion is by: **K. Clayton**

John 13:2-5, 12-15: The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus.

³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. . . . When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

- **Write the passage in your own words:** In the first half, Jesus washed the disciples feet. In the second half Jesus told the disciples to wash other people’s feet.
- **Tell about a personal experience that is similar to this passage:** Volunteering with autistic kids in the summer. It is not exactly washing feet but close!
- **Tell how Jesus uses this passage to bind us together as a church:** As we help each other, God binds us together. It allows the autistic kids to possibly come to Sunday School.
- **Does the passage make you feel good or bad and why?**
Good because when you help others you have opportunity to help them with God’s Word.

Prayer: Lord, it is humbling to have you wash our feet. We would love to be in control, but we know we need you to clean the stench of our lives. Then and only then are we ready to wash other feet, to help others in their humble circumstances. Provide us opportunities today and this week. Amen

Today’s Bible Reading: Read Acts 28:1-30

For Discussion: What opportunities does Paul get in Rome? How does the book end? How should the book continue in our own lives?

Week 7 "Good Friday" Day 46, April 10

"From Sorrow to Joy"

Author Unknown

:

Matthew 26:22: "They (disciples) were very sorrowful..."

Deep-sea fishing may be on the list of activities of some who are vacationing on the coast. Some will be disappointed at the results. But, very likely, none will have so frustrating an experience as did the deep-sea fisherman in Ernest Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea," who caught a marlin on his 85th day out, only to have the sharks eat it before he could bring it in.

The disciples were sorrowful when they heard Jesus say that one of them would betray Him. Unquestionably their sorrow was occasioned also by the expectation that Jesus would be taken from them and cause the whole movement to collapse. The fishermen among them -- Peter, Andrew, James, and John -- might have thought of it as the frustrating experience of having something big on the line but seeing the catch get away.

"We had hoped that He was the One to redeem Israel," said the downcast Emmaus disciples. With Jesus dead and buried, they thought all their hopes were in vain. How wrong they were! For all the while Jesus was very much alive, a sure proof that He had succeeded in redeeming Israel and all mankind.

We all have our disappointments. Sometimes it seems that we are frustrated in everything we try to do. Then we need to listen to Jesus: "Your sorrow will turn into joy." And if we must live with grief for a while, we can be, in Saint Paul's words, sorrowful but always rejoicing."

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, keep us from becoming discouraged by life's reverses. Give us confidence in Your enduring love. Amen.

Week 7 “Heaven Bound Church” Day 46, April 11

"God Supplies All Our Need" Author Unknown

Luke 22:35: "Did you lack anything?' 'Nothing,' they answered."

Our Lord took time to discuss the practical questions of food and clothing, money and sustenance, even in the last hours He spent in the company of His disciples. Reminding them of the early days when they were first commissioned to go out in His name, Jesus asked the disciples this question: "When I sent you out with no purse or bag or sandals, did you lack anything?"

When the disciples remembered how they had been miraculously sustained and preserved during the entire course of their discipleship, they were compelled to answer, "Nothing."

God's children are always under His gracious and providential care. While some enjoy affluence and wealth, most have to be careful with their resources, and some may continually experience serious financial concerns. But somehow, and in His own definite way, God provides for them, although His methods may be above their knowing and understanding.

Christ is our King. Therefore our Lord will rule our individual affairs, solve our personal problems, and cause all things, even adversities, sickness, sorrow, and death, to work together, under His harmonious rule, for our good. He who saved us in Christ "how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

PRAYER: Dear Lord, provide us with all things needful. Amen.

Easter Sunday April 12

The church starts with Jesus. Jesus' love for us. The church is empowered with His love through us. Amen

PRAYER: .Thank you Lord, for binding us together in the church. Equip us to be your church. To be a communicating, praying, consoling church of the cross and heaven-bound church. Use us to show all of this to one another, those active and inactive. Help us to likewise show mercy without any strings attached to those outside the church. Lord , thank you for your unconditional love. Amen.