

Lent 4, 2021, Order of Worship (March 14, 2021)

Greeting In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

A note on today's texts: God makes a promise to Moses: those who look on the bronze serpent will live. In today's gospel Jesus says he will be lifted up on the cross like the serpent, so that those who look to him in faith will live. When we receive the sign of the cross in baptism, that cross becomes the sign we can look to in faith for healing, for restored relationship to God, for hope when we are dying. (*Sundays & Seasons*, 2020, Augsburg Fortress, p. 120).

Call to Worship, Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say this—those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south. . . . Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their sins. They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He sent forth his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave. Let them thank the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for humankind. Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy.

Confession and Forgiveness for Lent (from *Sundays & Seasons*, 2020, Augsburg Fortress, p. 100)

God hears us when we cry, and draws us close in Jesus Christ. Let us return to the one who is full of compassion. Fountain of living water,
pour out your mercy over us. Our sin is heavy, and we long to be free. Rebuild what we have ruined and mend what we have torn. Wash us in your cleansing flood. Make us alive in the Spirit to follow, in the way of Jesus, as healers and restorers of the world you so love. Amen.

Beloved, God's word never fails; the promise rests on grace. By the saving love of Jesus Christ, and by the eternal mercy and power of God, your sins are forgiven. God remembers them no more! Journey in the way of Jesus. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn

Amazing Grace (public domain)

LBW 448, ELW 779, HP 3023

***Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.***

***'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!***

***Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.***

The Kyrie

In peace, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.**

For the peace from above, and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.**

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.**

For this holy house, and for all who offer here their worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.**

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord. **Amen.**

Prayer of the Day O God, by the humiliation of your Son you lifted up this fallen world and rescued us from the hopelessness of death. Lead us into your light, that all our deeds may reflect your love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

A reading from Numbers, the 21st chapter (21:4-9) Though God provides food and water for the Israelites in the wilderness, they whine and grumble. They forget about the salvation they experienced in the exodus from Egypt. God punishes them for their sin of ungratefulness, but when they repent God also provides a means of healing: a bronze serpent lifted up on a pole (*Sundays & Seasons*, 2020, Augsburg Fortress, p. 120).

The Israelites traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom (enemy country). But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable manna!"

Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people. The Lord said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.

Word of God, word of life.

A reading from Ephesians, the 2nd chapter (2:1-10) While we were dead in our sinfulness, God acted to make us alive as a gift of grace in Christ Jesus. We are saved not by what we do but by grace through faith. Thus our good works are really a reflection of God's grace at work in our lives (*Sundays & Seasons*, 2020, Augsburg Fortress, p. 117). These verses are from *The Message*, a scriptural interpretation by Eugene Peterson.

It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in the highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah.

Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Jesus Christ. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and the saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.

Here's the NIV translation of the underlined verses (vv. 8-10): ***For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*** (Do you recognize the verse in larger type? This is one that changed how Martin Luther understood the Bible.)

Word of God, word of life.

Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and abounding in steadfast love.

The gospel according to John, the 3rd chapter (3:14-21), sermon (page 6)

**Sermon Hymn *God Loved the World* (public domain) ELW 323, HP 2507
Sing to Old 100th (Doxology), ELW 883**

***God loved the world so that he gave his only Son the lost to save,
That all who would in him believe should everlasting life receive.***

***Christ Jesus is the ground of faith, who was made flesh and suffered death;
All who confide in Christ alone are built on this chief cornerstone.***

***Be of good cheer, for God's own Son forgives all sins that you have done,
And justified by Jesus' blood, your baptism grants the highest good.***

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Apostle's Creed

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

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers (from *Sundays and Seasons*, 2020, p. 117)

Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all who are in any kind of need.

You sent your Son so that the world might be saved through him. Inspire the witness of the church throughout the world. Empower missionaries, Bible translators, and ministries of service in your name. Bless our partners in ministry, our sister synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi, and all faithful Christians everywhere. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

From east to west your steadfast love is shown. Nourish seas and deserts, wilderness areas, cities, and ghettos. Give water to thirsty lands; nurture spring growth that feeds hungry creatures; and bless farmers as they prepare for the growing season. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You sustained your people in the wilderness. Give courage to all who lead in times of crisis and scarce resources. Prosper the work of those who aid victims of famine, drought, and pandemic. Bring peace in places where scarce resources cause violence. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Your mercy endures forever. Deliver all who cry to you, especially those who are hungry or without homes. Give life in places where death seems triumphant; give healing to those who are sick and comfort to those who mourn. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

By grace we have been saved. Fill this congregation to overflowing with that grace, that we may show mercy to others. Nourish any in our community who are hungry, especially children, and bless our ministries of feeding and shelter. Give us patience and courage when the way seems long. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

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Your Son was lifted up so that whoever believes might have eternal life. We praise you for all who have died in Christ. Bring us with all the saints into the fullness of your promises. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We entrust ourselves and all our prayers to you, O faithful God, through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, who taught us to pray, saying **Our Father, who art in heaven . . .**

Benediction:

You are what God made you to be:
created in Christ Jesus for good works,
chosen as holy and beloved,
freed to serve your neighbor.

God bless you that you may be a blessing,
in the name of the holy and life-giving Trinity.
Amen.

Sending Song *Christ, the Life of All the Living* (public domain) LBW 397, ELW 339, HP 1388
Sing to *Infant Holy, Infant Lowly*, LBW 44

*Christ, the Life of all the living, Christ, the death of death, our foe,
Christ, yourself for me once giving to the darkest depths of woe;
Through your suffering, death, and merit life eternal I inherit.
Thousand, thousand thanks are due, dearest Jesus, unto you.*

*You have suffered great affliction and have borne it patiently,
Even death by crucifixion, fully to atone for me;
Thank you for the groaning, sighing, for the bleeding and the dying,
For that last triumphant cry, praise you evermore on high.*

Dismissal Go in peace to love and serve the Lord!

Thanks be to God!