

Spirit of Hope

Mount Hope Lutheran Church

Preschool and Childcare

April 6, 2020

Who is the King of Glory? The Lord of Heaven's Armies – he is the King of glory. Psalm 24:10 (NLT)

Here we are at the beginning of another Holy Week. As you may remember, we were separated at this time last year as well. I was at the beginning of a long process of healing my broken body that continues today. Now we find ourselves again apart as we are all “staying home” trying to slow the spread of COVID-19. I cannot count the number of times I have uttered words like, “unbelievable”, “unprecedented”, “crazy”, and “incomprehensible”. And while the earth is in need of much healing, the Tomb remains empty! We truly have the hope that brings peace that surpasses all human understanding. I hope that you are finding peace in the midst of this struggle.

I'd again like to share a daily devotion from our Lenten study, authored by Pastor Michael Hoy:

Little children...“where I am going, you cannot come.” John 13:33

Jesus had just spoken of his betrayal to his disciples. He knew that the hour of his death was now before him. Yet in this time, he prepares his disciples for his departure, like a parent for his or her little children, with a comforting word: ‘Yes, I am going on a journey to the cross and to death, and you cannot come with me.’ But this word from Jesus’ lips on this occasion is meant to suggest that more is coming – there is life at the end of this tunnel! ‘I will return to claim you as my own! This journey is for your good, and for the good of all people!’

When I stood by my mother at her hospice deathbed, there were conversations about life and death. My mother, ever faithful in the promise, turned to me and said, “Mike, you know it’s all going to be OK, don’t you?” I nodded, knowing full well what she meant. The next day, she stopped breathing. But I know that the breath of Life was still with her on this journey. There are many happy returns in the kingdom of heaven and many days to live in hope for joy!

Lord, you are the guardian of our souls. May we look to your presence today and your coming again in our journey of life in the midst of death. Amen.

The newsletter continues now.

In the conversations that I've had with members of our Mount Hope family, I am so pleased to hear of your faithfulness and concern for each other. I am hearing of phone calls, emails, and social media contacts that are being made. Please continue and let us know how we can help and serve you. The church office is staffed, and our contact information is on our website, mthopelutheran.org.

For this week, we have included material for Maundy Thursday and Good Friday as part of our Lenten study, *By His wounds, we are healed*. There is a children's message, sermon, and prayers provided for both days. Please work through this with your family or maybe even someone on the phone or online.

Please remember to give, your offerings are needed for the mission of Mount Hope to continue. You may mail in or give through the "Giving" link.

In case you did not know, Christina and I recorded a worship service for Palm Sunday that is available on our website, mthopelutheran.org/sermons. We will also be preparing an Easter Sunday worship celebration. Keep an eye out for that.

Finally, our website includes a growing selection of past sermons mthopelutheran.org/sermons. If you haven't already done so, look for the email with information on subscribing to our YouTube page. We continue to put content there, including *Five with Fran*, a short time of Scripture and prayer. Please keep an eye on the website for updates and information.

If you or anyone you know has been unable to view our services online, please contact the church office and we will create a DVD copy for you.

Please continue to pray for Mount Hope, our country, the leadership, and our world that COVID-19 will be conquered.

Serving together,
Pastor Fran Green

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Please contact the office at 952 888 5059 if you are interested in receiving the videotaped services on DVD.

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In celebration of Easter, Mount Hope will be putting crosses out on the north side of the building along with Easter lilies. We hope this display brings joy to all those who pass by and serves as a reminder of Christ's death on the cross, His glorious resurrection and His love for all.

By His Wounds We Are Healed

Maundy Thursday

Children's Message

Do you remember the day that you were baptized? Not many of us do. I can tell you that we probably cried a lot when the water was poured on our heads. It wasn't something we were expecting all nestled in our parent's arms. But that's even more a sign of what was happening in that moment. As we were washed in the waters of baptism, we were dying—yes, dying!—and rising with Christ. But best of all, we were being claimed as God's children. We might have even been paraded around the sanctuary as the newest member of the body of Christ! How many of you like bath times? Even if we don't like it, it's good for us, isn't it? It washes all the dirt from our bodies and makes us clean. That's who and what we are in the tender love of Jesus.

Let us pray. God, we thank you for claiming us as your own, and washing us clean from the sins of our lives. Amen.

Prayers

• The **Prayers** are spoken responsively by family members:

P Let us pray for the Church, for all in need, and for the whole of God's creation. That during these three holy days, you may give your people hope that it is Jesus, our Lord, who leads the way and takes into his body on the cross the sins of the whole world.

C Heal us, O God.

P That we may trust that our only true identity and hope is the one that comes through the death and resurrection of Christ, our Lord.

C Heal us, O God.

P That those who are ill in body, soul, or mind may receive the tender service of Christ's humble and gentle love.

C Heal us, O God.

P That our leaders may learn from the compassion of Christ and seek to be servants of justice for the least of these among us.

C Heal us, O God.

P For those who are on the verge of death or have now joined the saints in light, that the vision of love might shine brightly for all eternity.

C Heal us, O God.

P Into your healing, wounded hands for our sake, we commend all for whom we pray.

C By Christ's wounds, we are healed. Amen.

Sermon

A person is often judged by his or her reputation. That is why the commandment not to bear false witness is intended to protect the reputation of others, and not simply a prohibition against lying (though it is that, too).

Needless to say, there is an abundance of evidence that demonstrates how much the eighth commandment gets broken daily. Some of what is said may actually be true; but truth can also be used to deliberately hurt and harm the reputation of others (as in gossip or social media) rather than to seek to uphold their reputation. People, all people, are creatures of God to be loved and cherished. That is why there is always a danger in criticizing another human being. This is not meant to prohibit criticism but to use it properly and wisely. Especially in our politically diverse culture, all kinds of evil are spoken against others who do not share our views.

The “mandate” of Maundy Thursday is that we love one another, become servants of one another. It is exemplified in Jesus’ act of foot washing—an act of tremendous humility. All of the disciples’ feet were washed, including the feet of Judas, his betrayer.

To be sure, the reputation of Jesus is a bewilderment to many who sought to understand him. His critics engaged in false accusations against him, but they did not understand him. Pilate does not understand who Jesus is, where he came from, who he represents, and even the meaning of Jesus’ testimony to the truth—the truth of love. Even Peter, Jesus’ closest disciple, objects to Jesus washing his feet because he does not see how this humble, servant-like posture presents what it means for Jesus to be Lord.

But the greater issue is not about the reputation of Jesus. Even when he is crucified and dies on the cross, condemned as one who hangs from a tree, and abandoned by God, the issue is not about Jesus’ reputation. On the contrary, it is about our reputation. This is why Jesus suffers and dies for us. Jesus’ reputation in the foot washing, as in all his ministry and also in his death upon the cross, is all about being a servant to all of us—a suffering servant, by whose wounds we are healed. He heals our reputation.

Who we are apart from Christ is unbearable even for ourselves. Perhaps our narcissism and sense of entitlement prohibit us from seeing how damning our reputation truly is—under the truth and microscope of criticism. We are the ones condemned and abandoned. But it is precisely because we are so judged that Jesus came to save us, to rescue us, and to make us whole.

And so, we come full circle in this Lenten reflection on the commandments. We come back to where it all started for us: when we were baptized. “I bind unto myself today the strong name of the Trinity” (from St. Patrick’s Breastplate).

Our reputation is seen differently in the eyes of God through Christ. We are not regarded as outcasts and strangers, brigands against authority, adulterers, murderers, and thieves by our words and deeds, and even our covetous thoughts. Instead, we get to enjoy a new reputation: we are children of God! And the mark of our baptism, the cross on our brows, will be the final assessment in the midst of all the trials and journeys through the valley of the shadow of death. Jesus, the suffering servant, loves you and calls you his sister and brother. And the Father welcomes you home.

Such a reputation is too good to keep to ourselves. We look to share it with as many as we possibly can. We look to speak this truth of love to as many as we encounter. Let it reach as far as the ends of the earth and as high as the heavens above. Let it reach so far and so wide that when Pilate or anyone else comes asking about this truth, we can say, "I thought you'd never ask!"

The truth is, you are God's own kids. On to the death and resurrection that makes us so!

By His Wounds We Are Healed

Good Friday

Children's Message

P *(If there are small crosses available, hand them out to the children.)* Today, we remember the cross of Jesus. We remember the cross of Jesus, really, every time we gather here. But we especially remember it because it is a special day of remembrance. It is Good Friday, the day on which Jesus died on the cross. Have any of you ever played or heard of the game called "Monopoly"? It's a board game, and there's one place on the board that you never want to land. Do you know what it is? It says, "Go to jail." When you do, you're kind of stuck there for a while. You don't get to play with the other players. You just sit there and stay there like a penalty box in hockey. Still, there's one card in the deck that says, "Get out of jail free!" That's a nice card to have if you're stuck in jail, isn't it? Well, consider the cross our "get out of penalty free." It's free for us, and we are forever free through the cross—and that's good news for us. But it wasn't free for Jesus. He gave his life for us. We are drawn to him for that because without him we could never really be free. But through him, we are free, indeed.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, thank you for making me free from death and sin through your cross. Amen.

Prayers

- The **Prayers** are spoken responsively by family members:

P Let us pray for the Church, for all in need, and for the whole of God's creation. That in these three holy days you may give your people hope that it is Jesus our Lord who leads the way and takes into his body on the cross the sins of the whole world.

C Heal us, O God.

P That the cross of Christ, our Lord, may be our final hope and salvation.

C Heal us, O God.

P That the cross of Christ may be held before the eyes of all who are seeking hope beyond the depths of despair and doom.

C Heal us, O God.

P That the cross of Christ may be the throne of grace that is more powerful than all the thrones and kingdoms of this world.

C Heal us, O God.

P That the cross of Christ may gather all the saints together as the sign and symbol of our victory over death.

C Heal us, O God.

P Into your healing, wounded hands for our sake, we commend all for whom we pray.

C By Christ's wounds, we are healed. Amen.

Sermon

On the cross, the wounds of Jesus are fully and publicly displayed in his hands, his feet, and his pierced side. His wounds are visible in the crown of thorns he wears upon his head, his struggle for breath, his thirst, his prayers and cries to his Father, and his last words of committing himself into the Father's hands. Then he gives up his spirit and bows his head in death.

Death is the last wound for Jesus. It will be the last wound for us as well who have followed him to the cross. Indeed, St. Paul would call death "the last enemy"—an enemy that would seem to win the battle, were it not for those powerful words that Jesus spoke from the cross, "It is finished." These words are not spoken in defeat but as words of a victory that has been achieved for us all.

Our whole human history bears out how much we have transgressed against God. Death is a fitting judgment for our wrongs. We hear the judgment again, as we did on Ash Wednesday, “You are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3). We know that we have been slaves to sin and that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6). But Jesus speaks no words of condemnation to us from the cross. His desire is that we see his sacrifice as a sacrifice of love, and by his love, the church shall come into being: “Woman, here is your son.” “Here is your mother” (John 19).

By his wounds we are healed. We are brought from the brink of condemnation into the joys of being united with him and with all who are part of his community of faith. When we look upon the cross, yes, we should see his wounds; but we should especially see how by his wounds he has taken his place with us in the death and condemnation so that we may be restored to life and salvation. “It is finished.”

It is sometimes customary to refer to funeral services of sisters and brothers as their “final crossing.” Crossing ties together the whole history of these loved ones. It brings a sense of completion that began in the promise of their baptism that now comes to completion in this final moment of death. Each has been marked with the cross of Christ as the source of his or her crossing.

Truth be told, there are many “crossings” in life. We may have moments of great joy and celebration, and we may also have moments of deep sadness and loss. There may be words we have spoken which we wish we could take back, or deeds we did or failed to do, all of which lead us to penitently confess them and make the sign of the cross. We may even behold the wounds of Jesus upon the cross and know just how much we have contributed to those wounds.

But in every crossing, because it is with Jesus our Lord, death, and defeat are not victors over us. “I am baptized,” Luther said in his moments of deepest despair, “and if I am baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body.” Martin Luther King sank to his knees in the abyss of despair, fearing for his life, when he then rose and confessed, “I heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone.”

This is what makes Good Friday good. It is not that Jesus is so deeply wounded upon the cross, as he was throughout his life and ministry by all those who criticized him and sought to have him put to death. It is good because Jesus makes it good for us.

“It is finished.” The days of wounding by death and despair, though still carried in our mortal bodies, have been carried into death with Jesus. The final judgment is the judgment of hope and love.

Sunday Worship Schedule

8:15am Traditional Worship Service
9:30am Connecting Hour
Bible Study / Sunday School
10:45am Praise Worship Service

Phone: 952-888-5059

E-mail: church@mthopelutheran.org

Website: www.mthopelutheran.org

Mount Hope's Staff

Fran Green	Pastor
Candy Frein	Administrative Assistant
Christina Brantner	Music Director
Kathy Sundseth	Custodian
Kim Woebke	Preschool and Childcare Director Administrative Assistant
Steve Sundseth	Custodian
Sam Killam	Custodian

Mount Hope Lutheran Church
3601 W Old Shakopee Rd
Bloomington, MN 55431

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