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Communion Distribution: Evy Okerstrom, Cheryl Tucker
March 22, 2026 at 9:30am

Fifth Sunday in Lent *In today's gospel Jesus reveals his power over death by raising Lazarus from the dead. The prophet Ezekiel prophesies God breathing new life into dry bones. To those in exile or living in the shadows of death, these stories proclaim God's promise of resurrection. In baptism we die with Christ that we might also be raised with him to new life. At the Easter Vigil we will welcome the newly baptized as we remember God's unfailing promise in our baptism.*



GATHERING

Prelude

When Jesus Wept

George Frederick McKay

Welcome

Stand

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, + one God, who forgives all our sin, whose mercy endures forever. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin before God, who removes our guilt and blots out all offenses.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Gracious God, **have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.**

For seeking worldly delights that deceive us and dishonor you:

Gracious God, **have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.**

For desiring self-reliance instead of hungering for your word:

Gracious God, **have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.**

For failing to recognize your coming reign, and for hindering the work of the Spirit:

Gracious God, **have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.**

For drawing from the well of self-serving ambition, and for disdainful the living water Christ offers: Gracious God, **have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.**

For disregarding voices from the margin, and for distrusting signs of your healing and hope in the world:

Gracious God, **have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.**

For dwelling in tombs of self-pity and discontent, and for disregarding Christ's call to come forth to life:

Gracious God, **have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.**

God's steadfast love, grace, and forgiveness abound. Through faith, the free gift of God, you have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ. In the name of + Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. The Spirit of the One who raised Christ from the dead dwells in you, pours God's love into your hearts, and gives you life and peace. **Amen.**

Gathering Hymn 666

What Wondrous Love Is This



1 What won-drous love is this, O my soul, O my soul! What
2 When I was sink - ing down, sink - ing down, sink - ing down, when
3 To God and to the Lamb I will sing, I will sing; to
4 And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on; and



won - drous love is this, O my soul! What won-drous love is this
I was sink - ing down, sink - ing down, when I was sink - ing down
God and to the Lamb I will sing; to God and to the Lamb,
when from death I'm free, I'll sing on; and when from death I'm free,



that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the dread-ful curse for my
be - neath God's righ-teous frown, Christ laid a - side his crown for my
who is the great I AM, while mil - lions join the theme, I will
I'll sing God's love for me, and through e - ter - ni - ty I'll sing



soul, for my soul, to bear the dread-ful curse for my soul?
 soul, for my soul, Christ laid a - side his crown for my soul.
 sing, I will sing, while mil - lions join the theme, I will sing.
 on, I'll sing on; and through e - ter - ni - ty I'll sing on.

Text: North American folk hymn, 19th cent., alt.
 Music: WONDROUS LOVE, W. Walker, *Southern Harmony*, 1835

Apostolic Greeting

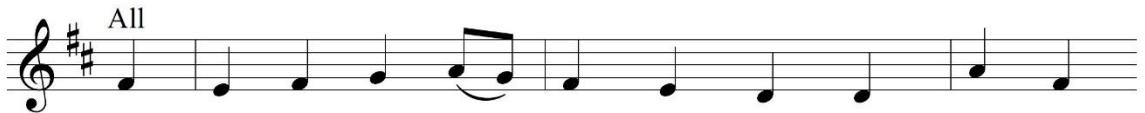
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

Kyrie: Your Heart, O God, Is Grieved

Hymn 602



1 O God, Father in heav - en, have mer - cy up - on us.
 2 O Son of God, redeemer of the world, have mer - cy up - on us.
 3 O God, Holy Spir - it, have mer - cy up - on - us.



Your heart, O God, is grieved, we know, by ev' - ry
 Your arms ex - tend, O Christ, to save from sting of
 O lav - ish Giv - er, come to aid the chil - dren



e - vil, ev - 'ry woe; up - on your cross - for -
 death and grasp of grave; your scars be - fore the -
 that your word has made. Now make us grow and



sak - en Son our death is laid, and peace is won.
 Fa - ther move his heart to mer - cy at such love.
 help us pray; bring joy and com - fort, come to stay.

Prayer of the Day

Let us pray. Almighty God, your Son came into the world to free us all from sin and death. Breathe upon us the power of your Spirit, that we may be raised to new life in Christ and serve you in righteousness all our days, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Sit

WORD

First Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones is a promise that Israel as a nation, though dead in exile, will live again in their land through God's life-giving spirit. Three times Israel is assured that through this vision they will know that "I am the LORD."

A reading from Ezekiel. ¹ The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ² He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³ He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵ Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ I will lay sinews on you and will cause flesh to come upon you and cover you with skin and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD." ⁷ So I prophesied as I had been commanded, and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them, but there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰ I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. ¹¹ Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' ¹² Therefore prophecy and say to them: Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people, and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the LORD when I open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ I will put my spirit within you, and you shall

live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD.” The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

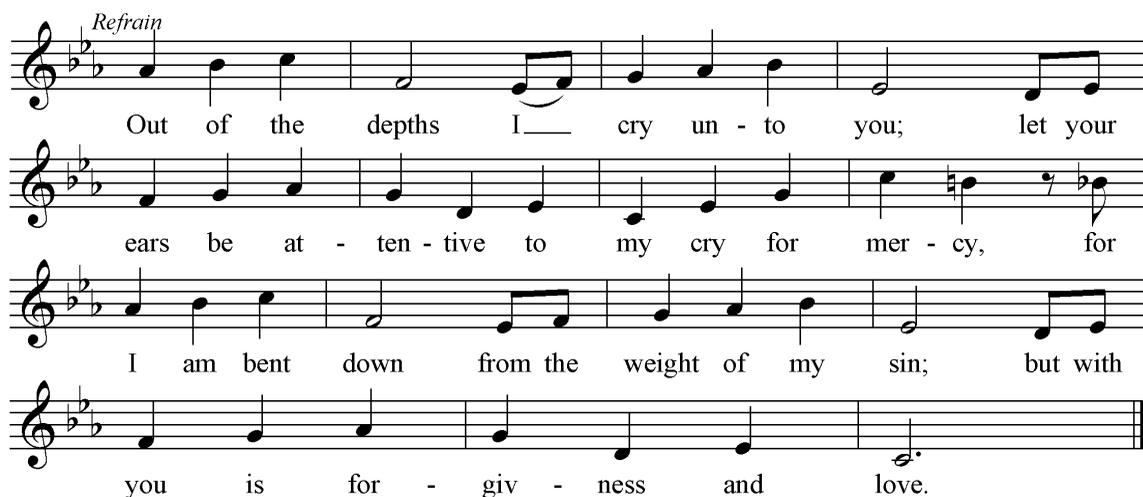
Psalm 130

Setting by Jayne Southwick Cool

O Lord, I call to you; look upon me with compassion.

Calm my disquiet within; hear my voice when I call to you. Refrain

Refrain



Out of the depths I cry un - to you; let your
ears be at - ten - tive to my cry for mer - cy, for
I am bent down from the weight of my sin; but with
you is for - giv - ness and love.

O Lord, I wait for you; my spirit longs for your coming.

Turn darkest night into day; comfort me as I wait for you. Refrain

O Lord, I hope in you, undying source of assurance;

your word is faithful and sure, so I place all my hope in you. Refrain

Full redemption and unfailing love.

Second Reading: Romans 8:6-11

For Paul, Christian spirituality entails living in the reality of the Holy Spirit. The driving force behind our actions and values is not our sinful desire for self-satisfaction but the very Spirit by which God raised Jesus from the dead and will also raise us from the dead.

A reading from Romans. ⁶ To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law—indeed, it cannot, ⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not

belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

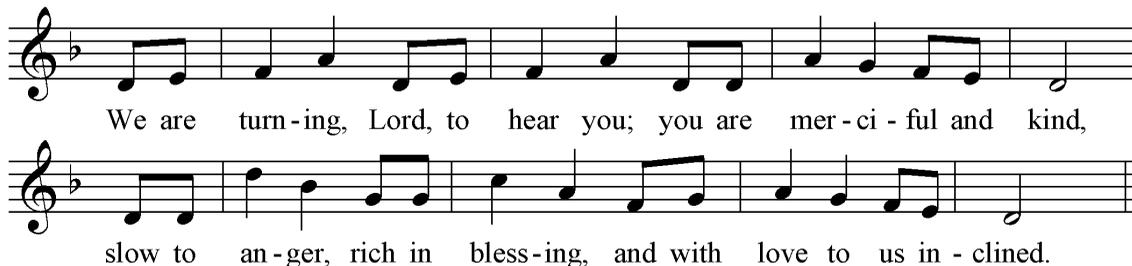
The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Children's Message

Stand

Gospel Acclamation

All sing the Acclamation; Choir sings the Verse.



We are turn-ing, Lord, to hear you; you are mer-ci-ful and kind,
slow to an-ger, rich in bless-ing, and with love to us in-clined.

I am the resurrection¹ and the life; whoever believes in me will¹ never die.

(John 11:25, 26)

Gospel: John 11:1-45

Jesus is moved to sorrow when his friend Lazarus falls ill and dies. Then, in a dramatic scene, he calls his friend out of the tomb and restores him to life.

The holy gospel according to John. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

¹ Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴ But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather, it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶ after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸ The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰ But those who walk at night stumble because the light is not in them." ¹¹ After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken

him.”¹² The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.”¹³ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep.¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead.¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”¹⁶ Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away,¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother.²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home.²¹ Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.²² But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.”²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”²⁴ Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”²⁷ She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”²⁸ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.”²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him.³¹ The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there.³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”³³ When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.³⁴ He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”³⁵ Jesus began to weep.³⁶ So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.³⁹ Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.”⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me.⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.”⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a

loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." ⁴⁵Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him.

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Sit

Sermon

Silence for reflection follows the sermon.

Please stand when the hymn introduction begins.

Hymn of the Day 750

Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart



1 Lord, thee I love with all my heart; I pray thee, ne'er from me de-part;
2 Yea, Lord, thine own rich boun-ty gave my bod - y, soul, and all I have
3 Lord, let at last thine an-gels come, to A-br'ham's bos - om bear me home,



with ten-der mer-cy cheer me. Earth has no plea-sure I would share,
in this poor life of la - bor. Lord, grant that I in ev - 'ry place
that I may die un-fear - ing; and in its nar - row cham-ber keep



yea, heav'n it - self were void and bare if thou, Lord, were not near me.
may glo - ri - fy thy lav - ish grace and serve and help my neigh - bor.
my bod - y safe in peace-ful sleep un - til thy re - ap - pear - ing.



And should my heart for sor-row break, my trust in thee can noth-ing shake.
Let no false teach-ing me be-guile, let Sa - tan not my soul de - file.
And then from death a-wak-en me, that these mine eyes with joy may see,



Thou art the por - tion I have sought; thy pre - cious
Give strength and pa - tience un - to me to bear my
O Son of God, thy glo - rious face, my Sav - ior



blood my soul has bought. Lord Je - sus Christ, my God and Lord,
cross and fol - low thee. Lord Je - sus Christ, my God and Lord,
and my fount of grace. Lord Je - sus Christ, my prayer at - tend,



my God and Lord, for - sake me not! I trust thy word.
my God and Lord, in death thy com - fort still af - ford.
my prayer at - tend, and I will praise thee with - out end!

Text: Martin Schalling, 1532–1608; tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1827–1878, alt.
Music: HERZLICH LIEB, B. Schmid, *Orgeltabulaturbuch*, 1577

Apostles' Creed With the whole church, let us confess our faith.

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

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come 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.

Sit or kneel

Prayers of Intercession

A: Reconciled by God's mercy and sustained by God's presence, let us pray for the world and its needs. *A brief silence.*

We pray for the church. Grant life and peace to all who gather in your name. Breathe into us so that we may share your message of forgiveness, hope, and love.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for creation. Renew landscapes that have dried up, prosper the work of those who restore homes and habitats after natural disasters, and sustain places where biodiversity thrives. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for the nations. Unbind leaders trapped by fear to act boldly for justice, free all who live in places of war and violence, and guide refugees and asylum seekers to safety. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for all people in need. Take away the stone of poverty that weighs down so many. Console any who weep and heal all who are sick.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for this assembly. Ready the hearts and spirits of all preparing to be baptized. Deepen our wonder at the mystery of your resurrection and life.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We offer our thanksgiving for all people who have died in faith. Give us faith to trust in your power to redeem and save, and bring us up from our graves to life in you.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

P: Receive our prayers, O God, through Jesus Christ, our strength and salvation.

Amen.

Stand

Peace The peace of Christ be with you always. **And also with you.**

MEAL

Sit

Setting the Table + Presentation of Gifts

Choir **When Jesus Learned His Friend Had Died** Randall Sensmeier

*When Jesus learned his friend had died, in sympathy and pain he cried,
though this was not the end. The people saw that Jesus cared,
but wondered why he had not spared the life of his dear friend.*

*Then Jesus went to see the grave and, standing there before the cave,
said, "Take away the stone!" He prayed to God for all to hear
so that the message would be clear: "Through me may God be known!"*

*"In me you live if you believe; and those who live in me receive
my life, though they may die." Then Jesus called out with a shout,
"Dear Lazarus, my friend, come out!" The dead man heard the cry.*

*When loved ones fall to death's dread sleep, like Jesus, we can freely weep
and give our anguished breath. With Christ, we turn to face the cross
where he confronted pain and loss and rose, defeating death.*

Text: Adam M. L. Tice, 2003.

Offering Prayer

A: Let us pray. O God, maker of heaven and earth, your steadfast love embraces all creation. You send rain and sunshine to nourish the earth and bring forth its bounty. Through these gifts of bread and wine, draw us into the death and life of your Son, who calls us to bear witness to his saving work. We ask this in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ. You call your people to cleanse their hearts and prepare with joy for the paschal feast, that renewed in the gift of baptism, we may come to the fullness of your grace. And so, with all the choirs of angels, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of pow'r and might,



heav - en and earth are full of your glo - ry.



Ho - san - na in the high - est.



Bless - ed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.



Ho - san - na in the high - est.

Eucharistic Prayer

Blessed are you, O God of the universe. Your mercy is everlasting and your faithfulness endures from age to age.

Praise to you for creating the heavens and the earth. Praise to you for saving the earth from the waters of the flood. Praise to you for bringing the Israelites safely through the sea. Praise to you for leading your people through the wilderness to the land of milk and honey. Praise to you for the words and deeds of Jesus, your anointed one. Praise to you for the death and resurrection of Christ. Praise to you for your Spirit poured out on all nations.

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

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

With this bread and cup we remember our Lord's passover from death to life as we proclaim the mystery of faith:

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

O God of resurrection and new life: Pour out your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts of bread and wine. Bless this feast. Grace our table with your presence.

Come, Holy Spirit.

Reveal yourself to us in the breaking of the bread. Raise us up as the body of Christ for the world. Breathe new life into us. Send us forth, burning with justice, peace, and love. **Come, Holy Spirit.**

With your holy ones of all times and places, with the earth and all its creatures, with sun and moon and stars, we praise you, O God, blessed and holy Trinity, now and forever. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.



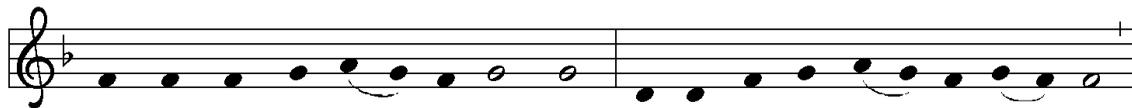
Our Fa - ther in heav - en, hal - lowed be your name,



your king - dom come, your will be done, on earth as in heav - en.



Give us to - day our dai - ly bread. For - give us our sins as we



for - give those who sin a - gainst us. Save us from the time of tri - al

and de - liv - er us from e - vil. For the king - dom, the pow'r,
 and the glo - ry are yours, now and for - ev - er. A - men.

Sit

Invitation to Communion

*Gluten-free wafers are available. Please ask your server.
 Red wine and white grape juice are available in each tray.*



Lamb of God

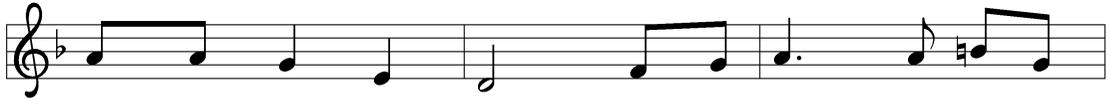
Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the
 world; have mer - cy on us. Lamb of God, you
 take a - way the sin of the world; have mer - cy
 on us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the
 sin of the world; grant us peace. A - men.

Communion Hymn 334

Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery



1 Tree of Life and awe - some mys - t'ry, in your
2 We re - mem - ber truth once spo - ken, love passed
3 Christ, you lead and we shall fol - low, stum - bling



death we are re - born; though you die in all of
on through act and word; ev - 'ry per - son lost and
though our steps may be; one with you in joy and



his - t'ry, still you rise with ev - 'ry morn, still you
bro - ken wears the bod - y of our Lord, wears the
sor - row, we the riv - er, you the sea, we the



rise with ev - 'ry morn.
bod - y of our Lord.
riv - er, you the sea.

4 God of all our fear and sorrow,
God who lives beyond our death,
Hold us close through each tomorrow,
love as near as ev'ry breath,
love as near as ev'ry breath.



Text: Marty Haugen, b. 1950
Music: Marty Haugen

Communion Hymn ACS 1086

O God, Who Gives Us Life



1 O God, who gives us life and breath, who shapes us in the womb,
2 O God, who calls your peo - ple out to ven - ture and to dare,
3 O God of cov - e - nant and law, re - vealed in cloud and flame,



who guards our lives from birth to death, then leads us from the tomb:
to plumb the bleak a - byss of doubt and find you e - ven there:
your might - y deeds e - voke our awe; we dare not speak your name.



de - liv - er us from fears that kill the life we have from you.
when we de - spair in wan - der - ing through wastes of emp - ty lies,
Yet we by faith are drawn to you and will your peo - ple prove,



Help us to know your Spir - it still is mak - ing all things new.
re - fresh us with the liv - ing spring of hope that nev - er dies.
as on our hearts you write a - new the cov - e - nant of love.

Text: Carl P. Daw Jr., b. 1944

Music: NOEL, English melody; arr. Arthur S. Sullivan, 1842–1900

Table Blessing and Communion Prayer

P: The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in God's grace. **Amen.**

A: Let us pray. God of our salvation, we give you thanks for this meal that restores our souls, reconciles us to you, and strengthens us for the journey. Through the body and blood of your Son, may we become Christ's body in the world, bearing witness to your love for all creation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

Blessing

Receive the blessing of the holy Trinity: God, who calls all things into existence, Jesus Christ, who redeems us, and the Holy Spirit, whose breath sustains creation, + bless you now and always. **Amen.**

Sending Hymn 629 (see next page)

Abide with Me

Sit

Announcements

Dismissal Go in peace. Believe the good news. **Thanks be to God.**

Voluntary

Abide with Me

Robert A. Hobby

Everyone is invited to enjoy light refreshments and conversation in the fellowship hall following worship.

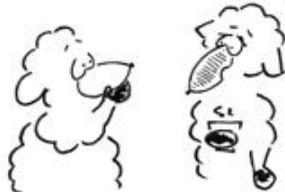
The comic strip *Agnus Day* is a lectionary-based comic strip. Each week, Rick (the one with the dark nose) and Ted discuss one of the assigned readings from the Common Lectionary. Their conversation drives at a point and sometimes sparks a laugh. *Agnus Day* is the creation of Pastor James Wetzstein, a Lutheran pastor who serves as one of the campus pastors at Valparaiso University. *Agnus Day* appears with the permission of www.agnusday.org.

JESUS' ENEMIES
DECIDE TO KILL HIM
**BECAUSE HE
RAISES LAZARUS?**



WWW.AGNUSDAY.ORG

IT'S LIKE THE **LAST
STRAW** FOR THEM. A FEW
VERSES LATER THEY'VE
DECIDED HE HAS TO DIE.)



GIVEN HOW THINGS
WORKED FOR LAZARUS,
THEY THOUGHT JESUS
WOULD **STAY DEAD?**



JOHN 11:1-45

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Sending Hymn

Abide with Me

1 A - bide with me, fast falls the e - ven - tide.
 2 Swift to its close ebbs out life's lit - tle day;
 3 I need thy pres - ence ev - 'ry pass - ing hour;
 4 I fear no foe, with thee at hand to bless;
 5 Hold thou thy cross be - fore my clos - ing eyes,

The dark - ness deep - ens; Lord, with me a - bide.
 earth's joys grow dim, its glo - ries pass a - way;
 what but thy grace can foil the tempt - er's pow'r?
 ills have no weight, and tears no bit - ter - ness.
 shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies;

When oth - er help - ers fail and com - forts flee,
 change and de - cay in all a - round I see;
 Who like thy - self my guide and stay can be?
 Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy vic - to - ry?
 heav'n's morn - ing breaks, and earth's vain shad - ows flee;

help of the help-less, oh, a-bide with me.
 O thou who chang-est not, a-bide with me.
 Through cloud and sun-shine, oh, a-bide with me.
 I tri-umph still, if thou a-bide with me!
 in life, in death, O Lord, a-bide with me.

Text: Henry F. Lyte, 1793–1847
 Music: EVENTIDE, William H. Monk, 1823–1889

Commemorations this Week

Sunday, March 22 Jonathan Edwards, teacher, missionary to American Indians, died 1758 A Puritan minister in Connecticut, Edwards is remembered as being a great preacher. Though his most famous sermon talks at length about hell, he was more concerned with God's love. He served both as missionary to the Housatonic people in Massachusetts, and as president of the future Princeton University.

Tuesday, March 24 Oscar Arnulfo Romero, Bishop of San Salvador, martyr, died 1980 Romero was deeply concerned with injustices evident toward the poor and powerless in El Salvador, and worked forthrightly against political repression. He was assassinated while presiding at the eucharist in a chapel near the cathedral in San Salvador.

Wednesday, March 25 Annunciation of Our Lord Nine months before Christmas we celebrate the annunciation, in which the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would give birth to the Son of God. The ancient church believed that this was also the date of the world's creation and of Jesus' death on the cross.

Roll the Stone Away

You can understand why they don't want to roll the stone away. "Already there is a stench," Martha says (John 11:39). Why open the grave? Why let out that smell? There could be no purpose. After all, Lazarus is dead.

This is not unbelief. "I believe that you are the Messiah," Martha says (v. 27), confident that her brother would one day rise again. But it is a faith that desperately wants God to provide an escape from suffering and struggle: "If you had been here," both sisters say, "my brother would not have died" (vv. 21, 32). The presence of Jesus, they think, should protect them from pain and death.

What they don't understand, though, is that the places of pain and suffering are exactly where Jesus goes. He enters dead places to bring hope to life. He transforms the stench of decay into an aroma of thriving. He summons Lazarus out of the tomb to walk into freedom.

This is why Jesus tells them to take away the stone. He wants to open the place that they are convinced holds only grief, and to expose what they believe to be a shameful smell. Yes, it is difficult to face. However, only when the grave is opened can Lazarus respond to Jesus' call. Martha and Mary must remove the stone that hides what they do not want to bear, so that new life can emerge from the tomb.

What are the stone-covered places in your life? What are the places in your heart that you are convinced hold only pain, decay, and fear? In the tender love of Jesus, you do not need to hide them. Jesus is calling you to open them. He will enter these places with resurrection power, transforming death into life and shame into glory. Facing these tombs takes courage. But you can trust that Jesus will bring healing to your brokenness. He is in the business of calling the dead back to life. Let the stones be rolled away.

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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA)