**4th sunday of lent- March 14, 2021**

**zion lutheran church, philipsburg**

**st peters lutheran church, linwood**

Welcome to everyone on this 4th Sunday of Lent where we continue to gather in love for one another from the safety of our homes. I am Leanne Darlington, pastor at Zion, Philipsburg and interim pastor at St. Peters, Linwood. I hope you were able to get and enjoy the beautiful weather this week. It reminds that spring is around the corner. If you forgot…the clocks moved ahead last night!

Our Lent in a bag item this week is the pipe cleaner human figure. Jesus was fully human, as well as fully divine. He experienced pain and joy and sorrow just like we do. Jesus fed the hungry and healed the sick, he taught, and he blessed people. As Christians we are called to be in his image, to care for one another, to love one another, to be the hands and feet of Jesus in a broken world. Add your pipe cleaner human to your plate of sand, as a reminder of our call in the world.

Our service next week will be live on Facebook at 9:30 a.m! Zion and Trinity New Hamburg will be joining together for worship as ministry partners in the NVMA. A link will be sent out later in the week, you do not have to be on Facebook to enjoy the service.

A reminder that out Goto Coffee hour takes place today at 11:00. Please join us! Zion relies on your continued support to meet our monthly expenses during this continuing pandemic and shutdown. If you have not contributed lately, please consider doing so. Thank you to all, for your continued prayers and support.

**GATHERING**

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

**CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS – Rev. Brooklynn Lane**

Three in one God, Creator, Child, and Holy Spirit,☩

We give thanks for your mercy and ask for forgiveness. Amen. *Silent reflection*

Loving God,

**Forgive us.**

We have neglected to see the face of Christ in our neighbour.

We have walked past the person begging on the street and neglected to recognize their humanity.

We have become estranged from humanity, forgetting the web of life connects us all.

**Forgive us.**

We are quick to anger, to cast judgement, and our words pierce like swords when we speak from these places.

We let fear, doubt, and unknowingness guide our actions.

**Forgive us.**

We confess are self-centeredness, need to succeed, and capitalistic-like thinking has turned us from you and your message of justice and love.

**Forgive us.**

God who meets us in the face of each person we meet.

Who paints the sky with colours that calm the soul,

Who creates a soundscape of rushing rivers,

Who gives grace to the world through the winds of the Holy Spirit,

**Open our hearts to be transformed and changed.**

You are forgiven.

Through the love of God, in the name of God, ☩ your sins are forgiven. Baptism remains forever. God’s love is here!

Inspiring God, guide us to be agents of change, knowing that our decisions, our actions and inactions affect all people. Help us to have the courage and strength to move forward, to let our hearts and minds be overflowing with love, grace, and a deep awareness that you are with us, guiding us on the journey.

Compassionate God, Three in one.☩. **Amen**

**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.**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Let us pray.

O God, rich in mercy, 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.**

**GATHERING SONG*God Loved the World* (ELW 323)**

1 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.

2 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.

3 If you are ill, if death draws near,
this truth your troubled heart can cheer:
Christ Jesus rescues us from death;
that is the firmest ground of faith.

4 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.
5 All glory to the Father, Son,
and Holy Spirit, Three in One!
To you, O blessed Trinity,
be praise now and eternally!

**WORD**

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

**FIRST READING: Numbers 21:4-9**

A reading from Numbers.

4From Mount Hor [the Israelites] set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. 5The people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.” 6Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. 7The people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. 8And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.” 9So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

The word of the Lord.

**PSALM: Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22**

 1Give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good, for God’s mercy endures forever.
 2Let the redeemed of the Lord proclaim that God redeemed them from the hand of the foe,
 3gathering them in from the lands; from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.
 17Some were fools and took rebellious paths; through their sins they were afflicted.
 18They loathed all manner of food and drew near to death’s door.
 19Then in their trouble they cried to the Lord and you delivered them from their distress.
 20You sent forth your word and healed them and rescued them from the grave.
 21Let them give thanks to you, Lord, for your steadfast love and your wonderful works for all people.
 22Let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and tell of your deeds with shouts of joy.

**SECOND READING: Ephesians 2:1-10**

A reading from Ephesians.

1You were dead through the trespasses and sins 2in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. 3All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. 4But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us 5even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—6and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—9not the result of works, so that no one may boast. 10For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

The word of the Lord.

**GOSPEL: John 3:14-21**

The holy gospel according to John.

[Jesus said:] 14“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.
  16“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.
  17“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

The gospel of the Lord.

**SERMON**

 We recently held our bimonthly worship committee meeting at Zion. It was like most any committee meeting, we opened with a devotion and check in. We discussed how the services were going in these pandemic times, and what the Holy Week services would look like this year. With the doors of Zion still shuttered due to the pandemic, we were trying to come up with some creative ideas to keep us connected as we prepare to share in the emotion of Holy Week 2021. Lots of ideas were brought to the table or the computer screen (we were online), and soon we had a vision of what these services might look like. We finished the agenda and as the meeting was about to end, one of the members wondered if she could ask a question, but comings up with the words to make the question was difficult. After some thought and encouragement, she asked the group “Why do we do what we do?

 There was a moment of silence as we all pondered her question. You would think that there was an easy answer, but, in a world where the church is often thought of as irrelevant or full of hypocrisy, why do we do what we do? In a world where the church is often thought of as an establishment offering judgment instead of loving one’s neighbour, why do we do what we do? In a world that is becoming increasingly secularized, why do we do what we do?

 The committee began to respond. We do it because we are passionate. We do it because it makes us feel good. We do it because it is what we are called to do. Now, they were all wonderful answers, but as I listened, felt more contemplation was needed, this was not an easy question to answer after all. Why are we passionate? Why does it make us feel good? To answer these questions probably would have made for an all-nighter and we all needed our beauty sleep, so we ended the meeting. Before I went to bed, I decided to read over the lessons for this week and as I began to read, suddenly an answer started to come to me.

 Our gospel reading is one of the most well-known verses in Scripture, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). God is love and throughout history, we have been wholly and completely loved by God. It was love from God that saw the Israelites freed from the slavery of the Egyptians. It was love from God that saw the gift of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai to be shared with the world. It was love from God that saved the Israelites from the poisonous snakes in our Numbers readings. It was love from God that took on human flesh and form in that of a tiny babe lying in a manger whose name was Jesus. It was love from God that led Jesus on his journey to the cross, transforming lives through his miracles and teachings, through his love, grace, and mercy. It was love from God that lifted up Jesus on the cross, not only to his death but also to his resurrection and ascension into heaven. This is the ongoing and never-ending love of God in relationship with humankind.

 Our epistle reading from Ephesians speaks of our relationship with a God of love as well. We are human and we live in a world where the passions of our flesh can devour us. Yes, Paul was probably talking about irresponsible sexual behaviour or adultery, but passions of the flesh can also include putting our trust in and idolizing material objects instead of the one true God. It is using our power and greed to better our own lives instead of being generous in our time and talents. It is acting complicit to the events of the world around us because it may not affect us. Yes, we are imperfect, we are dead and disobedient, we are after all human.

 But through all of our imperfections and all of our mistakes, we are loved. You are loved. We find hope and trust in the words of Paul when he states, “But God who

is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ….for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing but a gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:4-8).

 These words of Scripture are the basic tenets of our Lutheran faith….. this gift of grace and love from God is freely given. There is nothing we can do to deserve God’s love. There are no good works or good deeds that we can do to earn God’s favour and salvation in the world. God has taken care of our sins and provided for our future, we know that there is a place for us in heaven, so that enables us to live in the present, in the here and now, giving us the opportunity and joy to make a difference in the world.

 We do this by feeding the hungry, by providing warmth and shelter to those who are homeless, by tending and praying for the sick and the grieving, by worshipping together to share the good news that God gives to us. This is why we do what we do! This is what gives us passion and purpose. This is what gives us the courage and strength to continue on as the pandemic moves into its second year. This is what gives us comfort when a loved one dies. This is the love of God. This is the grace of Jesus Christ; this is the light of Christ shining in the world through the darkness of our lives. This is why we do what we do! Let it be so. Amen

**HYMN OF THE DAY*Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound* (ELW 779)**

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| 1 | 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. |
| 2 | ’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  And grace my fears relieved;How precious did that grace appear  The hour I first believed! |
| 3 | The Lord hath promised good to me,  His word my hope secures;He will my shield and portion be  As long as life endures. |
| 4 | When we’ve been there ten thousand years,  Bright shining as the sun,We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise  Than when we first begun. |

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need. *A brief silence.*

You sent your Son 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 ELCIC global partner churches and the CLWR. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

From east to west your steadfast love is shown. Nourish seas and deserts, wilderness areas and cities. Give water to thirsty lands; nurture spring growth that feeds hungry creatures; bless farmers as they begin preparations 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, pandemic, and scarce resources. Prosper the work of those who aid victims of famine and drought. 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 with illness or injury and comfort to those who mourn. We especially remember Eddy, Elaine B, Susie, Donelda, Lynette, Barb, Sarah, Alea, Mary Ann, Cheryl, Bonnie, Mary, Ruth, Tilly, Danielle, Kyle, and their new arrivals Mila, and Theo, Nancy, Dave, and those we name in the stillness of our hearts. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Your comfort and care have sustained us in this past year of pandemic. We remember all who have died of Covid, and all whose lives have been affected physically, mentally, and emotionally. Allow vaccines to come quickly for all who wish to receive them and be with all essential workers who continue to do their jobs selflessly. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

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

Your Son was lifted up 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 Lord. **Amen.**

**PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

**THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD**

O God of justice and love, we give thanks to you that you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, awaken us to the needs of others, and at the end bring all the world to your feast; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever.

**Amen.**

**LORD’S PRAYER**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,**

**hallowed be thy name,**

**thy kingdom come,**

**thy will be done,**

**on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread;**

**and forgive us our trespasses,**

**as we forgive those**

**who trespass against us;**

**and lead us not into temptation,**

**but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,**

**and the power, and the glory,**

**forever and ever. Amen.**

**SENDING**

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

**BLESSING**

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord’s face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and ☩ give you peace. **Amen.**

**DISMISSAL**

Go in peace. Share the good news.

**Thanks be to God.**

**SENDING SONG*Christ, Be Our Light* (ELW 715)**

1 Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.

Refrain
Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.

2 Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has pow'r to save us.
Make us your living voice. Refrain

3 Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed. Refrain

4 Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone. Refrain

5 Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
signs of your kingdom come. Refrain

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