

**Grace Lutheran Church Worship Service
March 29, 2020**

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

In the name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning your Spirit moved over the waters and by your Word you created the world, calling forth life in which you took delight. Through the waters of the flood you delivered Noah and his family.

Through the sea you led your people Israel from slavery into freedom.

At the river your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Holy Spirit.

By water and your Word you claim us as daughters and sons, making us heirs of your promise and servants of all.

We praise you for the gift of water that sustains life, and above all we praise you for the gift of new life in Jesus Christ.

Show us with your Spirit, and renew our lives with your forgiveness, grace, and love.

To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Amen.

KYRIE

Lord, have mercy: Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy: Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy: Lord, have mercy.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

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.

FIRST READING: Ezekiel 37:1-14

¹The 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. ²He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry.

³He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶I 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."

⁷So 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. ⁸I 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. ⁹Then 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." ¹⁰I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

¹¹Then 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.'

¹²Therefore 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. ¹³And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I 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."

PSALM: 130

¹Out | of the depths

I cry to | you, O LORD;

²**O LORD, | hear my voice!**

Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my | supplication.

³If you were to keep watch | over sins,

O LORD, | who could stand?

⁴**Yet with you | is forgiveness,**

in order that you | may be feared.

⁵I wait for you, O LORD; | my soul waits;

in your word | is my hope.

⁶**My soul waits for the Lord more than those who keep watch | for the morning,**

more than those who keep watch | for the morning.

⁷O Israel, wait for the LORD, for with the LORD there is | steadfast love;

with the LORD there is plenteous redemption.

⁸**For the LORD shall | redeem Israel**

from | all their sins.

SECOND READING: Romans 8:6-11

⁶To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For 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, ⁸and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹But 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. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

GOSPEL: John 11:1-45

¹Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴But 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." ⁵Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

⁷Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹Jesus 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. ¹⁰But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." ¹¹After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." ¹²The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." ¹³Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

¹⁷When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

²⁸When 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." ²⁹And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹The 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. ³²When 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." ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

³⁸Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a

stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus 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." ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I 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." ⁴³When 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.

SERMON

When I was nine years old, I went on my first camping trip. Late the first night, I had to walk back from the well-lit bathrooms to my tent ... alone. There was no moon. By the time I had walked down the path a few yards into the woods, the light from the bathrooms was out of sight. It was pitch black. I was alone. I was nine years old. And I was scared to death. Standing there, shivering with fear, very softly, almost under my breath, I started to sing ... "Jesus loves me this I know..."

I can laugh now. But I remember very well how desperately I clung to the hope that maybe, just maybe, Jesus would save me from whatever was lurking out there in the darkness.

That is my first memory of fear, deep down, paralyzing fear. Over the years, my fears changed, of course. I no longer fear the mere darkness. I began to fear the possibilities of what I knew the darkness might be hiding ... the reality of my own death.

Yes, I still have those funny little fears we all have — for some of us it's snakes, or spiders, or riding a roller coaster, or heights. But those fears, some silly, some not so silly, are not the kind that truly terrified me like that night alone in the woods, in the dark.

Deep within you, where only you can see, what strikes fear in your heart? What are you most afraid of? There are some fears we might all name: like the threat of nuclear war, or the coronavirus pandemic, or the loss of our jobs. No matter what we might name as our greatest fear, I am convinced that a fear of death underlies all our other fears.

Jesus told his disciples that they were returning to Judea because their friend Lazarus had died. The last time Jesus and the disciples were in Judea, the religious leaders had tried to kill Jesus. Now Jesus tells his disciples that they are going to return there! So Thomas says, "Let us go also, that we may die with him." Underlying Thomas' remark is the fear of death, certainly that of Jesus, but perhaps also his own.

Our big fears hold us hostage and threaten our having a full relationship with God and each other. And death is the greatest threat of all. The utter finality of death overwhelmed Martha as she came to Jesus and said, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." Jesus sees how tied up Martha is by her fears and he speaks the words we know well: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who

believe in me, even though they die, they will live; and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." Even death itself need not threaten us. Jesus offers us a promise about how those who trust him will LIVE their lives, not just about what will happen to them after they die. How do you experience this life that Jesus promises us? For me it looks something like this:

- Scared silly of heights, but riding on a ski lift with my husband for the first time, and turning to see Lake Superior stretching out behind me.
- Hearing the sound of my motorcycle as I start it up for that first ride in the spring.
- Tasting the smooth, velvet of good German chocolate.
- Feeling the difference of my child's hugs from childhood to now as she begins her own marriage.
- **Knowing deep in my soul that eternal life starts right NOW, and goes on in a new, imperishable body when this one dies.**

"I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, they will live; and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." I trust those words. I would guess you do too. Yet when we are left to ourselves, our fears, no matter how great or small, defeat us, and threaten our relationship with God and our ability to really live our lives. But we are not left alone. God came to us in human form; and in the human form of Jesus, God says to us, "I am the resurrection and the life."

Perhaps I will never lose some of my childhood fears, and even if I do, they will be replaced by others. But of this I can be sure: my fears will never defeat me. Yours won't defeat you either. Because whenever you find yourself alone in the fears of your nights, Christ comes to you and speaks words of hope: "Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." Jesus gives us this promise about how we can LIVE NOW, not just about what happens when our lives here end.

APOSTLES' CREED

**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.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

*Prayers reflect the wideness of God's mercy for the whole world—
for the church universal, its ministry, and the mission of the gospel;
for the well-being of creation;
for peace and justice in the world, the nations and those in authority, the community;*

*for the poor, oppressed, sick, bereaved, lonely;
for all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit;
for the congregation, and for special concerns.*

Additional prayers may be added.

Prayers of thanksgiving for the faithful departed may include those who recently have died.

End the prayers with these or similar words:

Into your hands, gracious God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

OFFERING:

Please remember to mail in your offerings so that Grace can continue to serve 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

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.

BLESSING

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.