**St. Paul’s Lutheran Church  
Wildwood, Missouri**

**Return after Quarantine  
Isaiah 53/Matthew 28  
June 7, 2020**

Admittedly, I was beginning to wonder if this day would ever come. After almost three months to the day, we are finally able to gather as God’s people in his house around his Word and Sacraments.

It has been a tough three months; nothing like I have ever seen in my lifetime and hopefully that I will never see again. Life radically changed in that relatively short span of time. We have seen shortages in the grocery stores. Especially of toilet paper which, I must say, is still a mystery to me. We have all started wearing masks everywhere. We have isolated ourselves from each other. On top of that, we even have a whole new lexicon from which we now draw for conversation

I had no idea what a *“novel virus”* was. I suppose it is self-explanatory had I thought about it but I think I was happier not knowing. And to be honest, I have a whole bunch of phrases I now considered banned in my home. *“Social distancing”* ranks right at the top. If another reporter tells me to remember to *“properly social distance,”* I fear I might lose it. Any word in front of “*times”* is also forbidden. *“Difficult times,” “uncertain times,” “challenging times,”* and *“unprecedented times”* raise my ire immediately. Especially that phrase, *“unprecedented times.”* If everything is unprecedented, isn’t that setting a precedent? I am just done.

But this three-month hiatus from life has caused us to miss so much. Graduations. Family gatherings. Birthday parties. Concerts. Worst of all, we missed opening day for the Cardinals. But, I think this is especially true for the church. All this started right at the beginning of one of the most important seasons for we Christians: the season of Lent. We barely got in Ash Wednesday before we shuttered our doors. Personally, I missed Lent tremendously. I don’t know what this says about me but Lent is my favorite liturgical season. It is that time when we ponder the passion and death of our Lord Jesus more deeply. We see the tremendous price paid for our sin. It is that build up to Good Friday and our Tenebrae Service, the Service of Darkness; which is my favorite service of the year.

Moreover, it is the build up to celebrating the Resurrection of our Lord. Easter without Lent just seems to be lacking. Granted, we did a Zoom service but that wasn’t quite the same was it? No smell of Easter Lilies. No choir singing, *“Christ is Arisen! Alleluia!”* No Bell Choir. No greeting each other with, *“He is risen! He is risen, indeed!”* And there was no sharing in the Body and Blood of our Lord as his redeemed people. Because of a microscopic bug, we missed it all and that is disappointing.

And that is why the service for today is structured the way it is. While we can’t recreate an entire liturgical season, we can give you a taste of it. From, *“Come to Calvary’s Holy Mountain,”* to Isaiah 53, to Matthew 28, to “*Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds*” we have quickly run through the season to drive home this point: our faith is all about Jesus Christ and him crucified and risen for us.

And to emphasize that point even more, we need look no further than our Old Testament Lesson for today. Nothing speaks to that more than Isaiah 53. In many ways, this passage from Isaiah is the entire season of Lent in a nutshell If you wonder why Jesus came into this world, you need look no further than what the Isaiah tells us. *“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”* It gets no clearer than what the prophet Isaiah tells us. *“He was pierced for our” sins. “By his wounds we are healed.”* Isaiah speaks of our Savior as our substitute. He died for us. But why? Why did we need a substitute? Well, the debt of sin needed to be paid and we could not pay it ourselves.

It is so common for people to wonder why a sacrifice, a payment, for sin was needed. I have heard many a Christian ask, *“Why couldn’t God just overlook sin?”* If I am honest, I have thought that myself. If he is God, surely he can do what he wants. This is especially troublesome to nonbelievers. To them, it seems ridiculous. Atheist Bob Seidensticker doesn’t understand why God can’t just say let bygones be bygones*. “You and I are asked to forgive wrongs done against us, so why can’t God? Some Christians say that to forgive would violate God’s sense of justice, but when one person forgives another’s debt, there’s no violation of justice.”*

The problem when we think that is that we are applying to God human characteristics and we just can’t do that. God does not think or act like us. Which, believe me, is a very good thing. But, for we humans, words don’t mean a whole lot. We like to think they do but they don’t really. People break their word all time for things both big and small. “*Oh, you can count on me to be there Saturday to help you move!”* But when Saturday rolls around, those words are forgotten. Promises are notoriously broken because, for the most part, there are no consequences for breaking them. So we dismiss words quickly.

But with God it is different. What he says carries the weight of truth and it stands . . . not just for the moment . . . but forever*. “In the day you sin, you die.”* Those were not idle words. God meant them when he spoke them and they still stand today. Sin, all sin, is punishable by death. For God to simply overlook it as *“no big deal”* would be to deny himself and his character, which he cannot do. It would mean that he was a liar, saying things he didn’t mean. Again, that is against the very nature of God. What that means is that the demands of the law must be met and either we meet them ourselves or Jesus does it for us. Trust me, the latter is the better way to go.

The cross of Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah 53. Everything that God had prophesied, everything that he had been planning, and everything which he set in place to bring about salvation finds its culmination on Good Friday. That was is mission. Jesus came to die in our place. When we speak of Jesus being our substitute, we mean that he stood in and took what you and I deserve. The cross was meant for you and for me. By all rights, we should all have been hung there to die. To be more direct, when you read the passion of our Lord from Matthew or any of the gospels, you are reading what you deserve. When I look at our Lord’s passion, your every thought should be, *“That should be me.”* When the soldiers took Jesus, stripped him, beat him, placed a crown of thorns on his head and struck him we should think, *“that should be me.”*  When they spit on him and mocked him we should shutter at the thought, *“that should be me.”* When they made him carry the cross, I should be saying, “*That is my cross.”* When they drove the nails into his hands and his feet it should have been you and me who cried out, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

But, you and I did not endure the cross and the good news, the gospel is that because of Jesus, we never will have to endure the cross and that is the point. Jesus was there for you and for me and for all people. Indeed, we all like sheep have gone astray, but the Lord God has laid the sin of us all upon him. And upon us, by his mercy and grace, he has laid all the righteousness of Christ. That punishment, so violent and brutal, which Jesus took, has now brought each of us peace.

The much renown preacher, Charles Spurgeon, put it this way back in 1860, *“He wore my crown, the crown of thorns; I wore his crown, the crown of glory. He wore my dress, nay, rather, he wore my nakedness when he died upon the cross; I wore his robes, the royal robes of the King of kings. He bore my shame; I bore his honor. He endured my sufferings to this end that his joy may be fulfilled in me. He laid in the grave that I might rise from the dead and that I many dwell in him.”*

And that leads us to Easter Sunday! *“Do not be afraid,”* said the angel*, “for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. He is risen, as he said.”* The point of the resurrection is so much more than, *“My friend is now alive!”* The significance of the resurrection is what it means. Actually, more than that, what it means for you and me.

You see, when Jesus stepped forth from the tomb alive, it demonstrated that God’s justice was satisfied. The wages of sin, which is death, had been paid. As I said, God would not deny himself. However, to be more to the point, the debt you and I owed had been paid and God no longer required payment for sin.

This is why the substitutionary death of Jesus for sin is so important. The sins for which he was put to death were your sins and my sins. Again, when on Good Friday, Jesus cried out, *“My God, my God why have you forsaken me.”* He was not just quoting Psalm 22 to fulfill some sort of prophetic checklist. God truly had forsaken him to death for sin because with all of our sin and the sin all people for all time placed on him, he became the embodiment of sin for us. As Luther put it, *“All the prophets of old said that Christ should be the greatest transgressor, murderer, adulterer, thief, blasphemer that ever was or ever could be on earth. When He took the sins of the whole world upon Himself, Christ was no longer an innocent person. He was a sinner burdened with the sins of a Paul who was a blasphemer; burdened with the sins of a Peter who denied Christ; burdened with the sins of a David who committed adultery and murder, and gave the heathen occasion to laugh at the Lord. In short, Christ was charged with the sins of all men, that He should pay for them with His own blood. The curse struck Him. The Law found Him among sinners. He was not only in the company of sinners. He had gone so far as to invest Himself with the flesh and blood of sinners. So the Law judged and hanged Him for a sinner.”*

Not to rewrite or edit what Luther said, but as he also said, *“sin boldly*,” but he could have continued, “*So the law judged and hanged him for a sinner so that we would not be hanged as a sinner”* And that my dear friends in Christ is the gospel. The proof that the debt of sin had been paid in full was Jesus walking forth from that grave fully and completely alive. Were he still in that tomb, it would mean that the debt for our sin was still outstanding and we would have no hope. However, Jesus saw that our debt is not outstanding. The beauty of him being our substitute is that you and I now owe God nothing for our sin. Not one thing.

Instead, God now, for the sake of Jesus, promises us eternal life. We, along with all those sinners who believed before us, Paul the blasphemer, Peter the denier, David the adulterer and so may others, will share paradise with him. Their debt and yours has been paid.

Granted, it is a shame with this pandemic that we missed Lent and the celebration of Easter, but in reality, this message of Jesus Christ and him crucified and risen, has always been with us. So, let me break one of my own speech rule if I may, even when *“social distancing,”* the truth of his gospel for us didn’t go away when we had no services. It was there, always, just as it was before, as a gift granted each of us by his grace. He is risen! He is risen, indeed. Alleluia! In Jesus’ name. Amen.