

Pastor Kory's Page

Faith Lutheran Church, Sioux Falls, SD

February 14 & 15, 2015

Burying a Word

Transitioning into Lent

On this weekend of the Transfiguration of our Lord, we are privileged to sing together some words of triumphant praise:

Alleluia, alleluia! Praise to Thee who light dost send! Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia without end!
(LSB 578)

Alleluia! Sing to Jesus; His the scepter, His the throne; Alleluia! His the triumph, His the victory alone. (LSB 821)

Alleluia cannot always Be our song while here below; Alleluia, our transgressions Make us for a while forego; For the solemn time is coming When our tears for sin must flow.
(LSB 417)

These final words, from verse 3 of the hymn, "Alleluia, Song of Gladness," sound significantly less triumphant than most songs of praise. That's because this Transfiguration hymn is meant to get us thinking about the solemn season of Lent.

Lent, the forty-day time of preparation for Easter, has been celebrated since the early centuries of the Christian Church. For most Christians over time, Easter, not Christmas, was the primary celebration of the Church Year. Easter is why Jesus ultimately came: to rise in triumph over the curse of death, to demonstrate that the darkness of our sin has been removed, and to show that we too will arise to live with Him forever.

No wonder we sing, "Alleluia!" literally, "praise the Lord!" Alleluia/Hallelujah comes from ancient Hebrew. It was especially used in praise and worship to Yahweh in the Psalms (Ps. 104-106; 111-113; 115-117; 135; 146-150). As we sing "Alleluia!" we're joining with the saints journeying through the millennia as together we praise the Lord for the gift of life, for giving us the things we need (and so much more!), and especially for rescuing us by taking on our human flesh and sacrificing His life for our sins. (Take a look at Luther's explanation of the three articles of the

Apostles' Creed in the Small Catechism for a great summary of reasons to praise the Lord!)

Lent is a focused season of reflecting upon and repenting of our many sins. It is a time to fix our eyes upon the cross of Christ. It is a time to break old habits of self-indulgence and to forge new habits, ones that bring us back in touch with our Lord in His Holy Word and Sacrament and in the community of His Church.

Lent is a time of fasting. Perhaps you will fast or voluntarily give up something during these forty days. You don't have to, but it can help to focus your heart more on Christ in this season, and less on the distractions of the world around us.

We even take a fast from the wonderful word, "Alleluia." As Christians have done since the forth century, we "bury" our Alleluias for forty days as we repent and recognize our great need for Christ's death on the cross. Yet we still live as Easter people, gathering for worship on the day of Jesus' resurrection, and knowing that our Alleluias will return, for Christ is risen indeed!

A word of praise which we do take up during this Lenten season is "Hosanna." Hosanna literally means "help" or "save, I pray." This was the cry of Jerusalem's crowds as they applauded Jesus' arrival on the Sunday before His crucifixion. It's another Hebrew word, found in passages such as Psalm 118:25, "Save us, we pray, O LORD!" That was the prayer of faith in the Old Testament and on the first Palm Sunday. "Save us, we pray, O LORD!" is our plea as well. In a way, this is the highest form of praise – to come before our Lord, recognizing our weakness and need, and to look to Christ alone for forgiveness, life and salvation.

Even as we pray, "Hosanna," for ourselves and our loved ones, I encourage you also to remember the younger Christians among us, the children and youth of our congregation. We pray that their lives will be filled with "Alleluias!" and "Hosannas!" to the Lord and that He will keep them firm in faith until we join in the eternal praise and worship around our Lord's heavenly throne.

Blessed Lent,
Pastor Kory Janneke