

## Editors

Rev. Daniel and Alena Guagenti

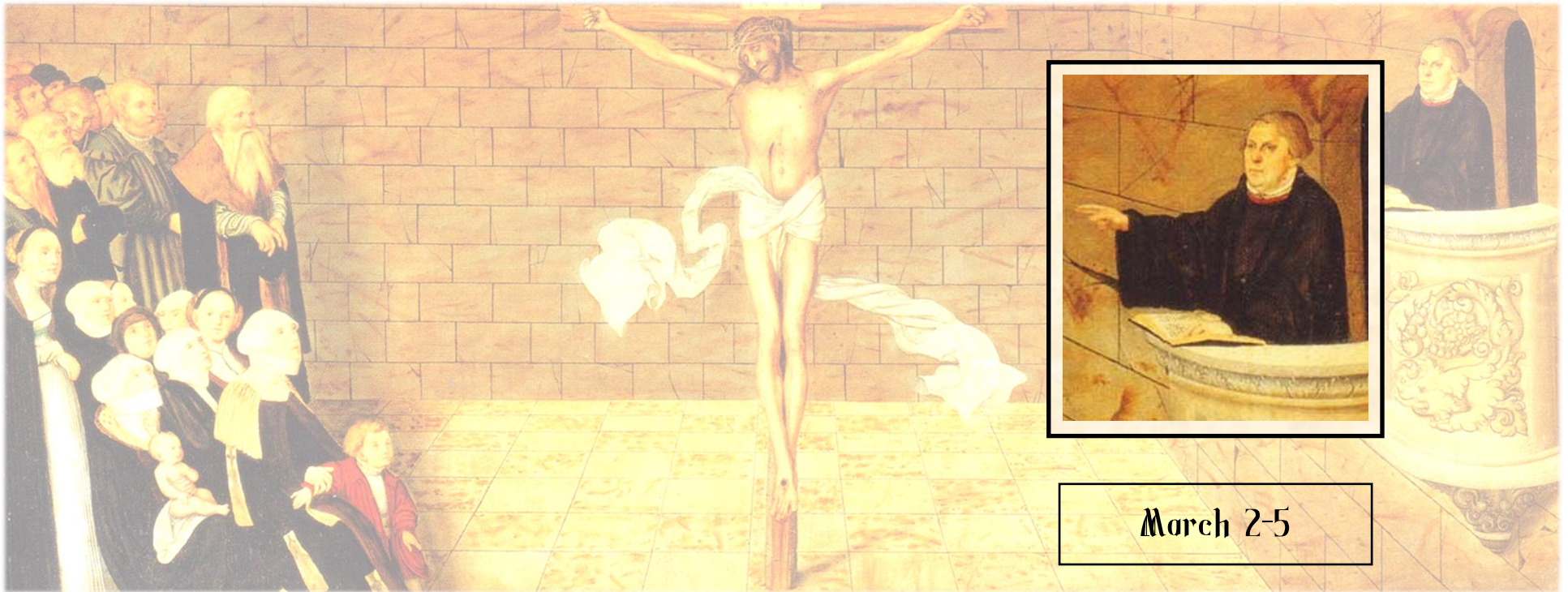
## Writer

Rev. Daniel Guagenti

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Shelbyville, KY

# The Word Worth Dying For

Lenten Devotions with Martin Luther's  
1522 Invocavit Sermons



March 2-5

## Art

Lucas Cranach painted this altarpiece for the Wittenberg church from 1547-1548; Cranach himself is pictured in the top right of the congregation. Luther rests one hand on God's Word, and the other points to Christ crucified. This is the content that Lutheran preaching delivers.

Our soul waits for the LORD;  
he is our help and our shield.  
For our heart is glad in him,  
because we trust in his holy name.  
Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us,  
even as we hope in you.  
Psalm 33:20-22

## Martin Luther's *Invocavit* Sermons

In April 1521, Martin Luther stood before the Emperor and refused to recant his teachings. On his way back to Wittenberg, Luther was kidnapped by friends who wanted to keep him safe. He was hidden in the castle Wartburg. There, Luther was able to write and translate the Scriptures. Meanwhile, in Wittenberg, other teachers stirred up the people. Revolution was in the air. The Reformation was swerving away from the Word which had taken Luther's heart captive. Wittenberg was swerving toward violence.

Luther could not stay away. He came out of hiding and mounted the pulpit in Wittenberg. On March 9, known as *Invocavit* Sunday, Luther began to preach each day for eight days. John W. Doberstein, who translated and edited these sermons, describes them: "This remarkable series of sermons, which are powerful, inspired preaching of the gospel, had the effect of restoring tranquility and order almost at once" (LW vol. 51, pp. 69f.).

We find these sermons hold their power and inspiration. They apply as easily to events of today as they did five hundred years ago. Luther is ever encouraging us to entrust the coming of God's kingdom to the work of the Word. As Luther would later inscribe in the *Small Catechism*, "God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity."

These devotions will walk you through extensive selections from the eight 1522 sermons from Wittenberg. Each weekday of Lent will complement a sermon selection from Luther with a Bible text and a prayer written by a contemporary pastor. Each Saturday, that same pastor will write a contemporary devotion tying Luther's preaching to our own lives today.

*Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, that He may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine.*

March 5, 2022  
Read Psalm 33  
By Rev. Guogenti

Martin Luther began his great sermons to Wittenberg with the words, "The summons of death comes to us all." It is the great Ash Wednesday reminder: "Remember, you are dust and to dust you shall return."

We all die. It is the price of sin (Rom 6:23). God sets a line past which our sinful self may not continue. In one sense, death sets the baptized free. In another sense, for now death remains an enemy, separating us from loved ones. Either way, death eludes our control and breaks upon us without warning.

Untamed death sparks fear and keeps us from much that is good. Some trust or fear the warhorse to raise us above death (Ps 33:16-17), but the faithful Christian learns to trust only the Word. When Luther came out of hiding from the Wartburg, he did not know if he would be snatched up and killed. The Word which had held him captive before the Emperor now sent him to the pulpit to keep Wittenberg steadfast.

Luther knew it was worth risking an early return to the dust in order to continue the work of the Word. The Word, after all, created everything in the beginning. Through Christ's death and resurrection, it holds the keys to eternal life.

"Remember, you are dust," is not a gloomy summons. Rather, it vaccinates us against fear of death. It teaches us to set our values straight. The kingdoms won by warhorses also turn to dust. The kingdom of the Word rises eternally.

*Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word; / Curb those who by deceit or sword / Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son / And bring to naught all He has done. Amen. (LSB 655)*

March 2, 2022

Read

Ephesians 2:1-10

*God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved.*

The summons of death comes to us all, and no one can die for another. Every one must fight his own battle with death by himself, alone. We can shout into another man's ears, but every one must himself be prepared for the time of death, for I will not be with you then, nor you with me. Therefore every one must himself know and be armed with the chief things which concern a Christian. And these are what you, my beloved, have heard from me many days ago.

In the first place, we must know that we are the children of wrath, and all our works, intentions, and thoughts are nothing at all. Here we need a clear, strong text to bear out this point. Such is the saying of St. Paul in Eph. 2 [:3]. Note this well; and though there are many such in the Bible, I do not wish to overwhelm you with many texts. "We are all children of wrath." And please do not undertake to say: I have built an altar, given a foundation for masses, etc.

Secondly, that God has sent us his only-begotten Son that we may believe in Him and that whoever trusts in Him shall be free from sin and a child of God, as John declares in his first chapter, "To all who believed in His name, He gave the power to become children of God" [John 1:12]. Here we should all be well versed in the Bible and ready to confront the devil with many passages.

*Luther's Works, vol. 51, pp. 70-71*

*Day after day, Lord God, we see the message that we are dust and to dust we shall return. We thank and praise You for sending messengers to preach the Gospel faithfully. Even more, we give thanks that You sent the Word made flesh to die for us but not to return to dust. Instead, You raised Him and show us the way to eternal life. Bless us this Lent on our way to our celebration of Jesus' precious death and resurrection. Amen.*

*If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*

March 3, 2022

Read

1 Corinthians 13

Thirdly, we must also have love and through love we must do to one another as God has done to us through faith. For without love faith is nothing, as St. Paul says (1 Cor. 2 [13:1]): If I had the tongues of angels and could speak of the highest things in faith, and have not love, I am nothing. And here, dear friends, have you not grievously failed? I see no signs of love among you, and I observe very well that you have not been grateful to God for His rich gifts and treasures.

...I notice that you have a great deal to say of the doctrine of faith and love which is preached to you, and this is no wonder; an ass can almost intone the lessons, and why should you not be able to repeat the doctrines and formulas? Dear friends, the kingdom of God,—and we are that kingdom—does not consist in talk or words [1 Cor. 4:20], but in activity, in deeds, in works and exercises. God does not want hearers and repeaters of words [Jas. 1:22], but followers and doers, and this occurs in faith through love. For a faith without love is not enough—rather it is not faith at all, but a counterfeit of faith, just as a face seen in a mirror is not a real face, but merely the reflection of a face [1 Cor. 13:12].

*Luther's Works, vol. 51, p. 71*

*Gracious Savior, as we examine our hearts this Lent in the mirror of Your Word, do not let us walk away unchanged. Fill our hearts with Your love, reflecting the face of our Lord. May His grace overflow our cups in grace to our neighbors and even to our enemies. If we have not love, we are nothing, but in Christ, we know, we have Your love. All praise to You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*



March 4, 2022

Read

Romans 5:1-11

*We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame.*

Fourthly, we also need patience. For whoever has faith, trusts in God, and shows love to his neighbor, practicing it day by day, must needs suffer persecution. For the devil never sleeps, but constantly gives him plenty of trouble. But patience works and produces hope [Rom. 5:4], which freely yields itself to God and vanishes away in Him. Thus faith, by much affliction and persecution, ever increases, and is strengthened day by day. A heart thus blessed with virtues can never rest or restrain itself, but rather pours itself out again for the benefit and service of the brethren, just as God has done to it.

And here, dear friends, one must not insist upon his rights, but must see what may be useful and helpful to his brother, as Paul says... “ ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are helpful” [1 Cor. 6:12]. For we are not all equally strong in faith, some of you have a stronger faith than I. Therefore we must not look upon ourselves, or our strength, or our prestige but upon our neighbor.... So we should also deal with our brother, have patience with him for a time, have patience with his weakness and help him bear it.

*Luther's Works, vol. 51, pp. 71-72*

*Gracious Lord, we hardly know how to count Your patience with us. We are the straying sheep of Your flock, yet You seek us out and bring us home. Give us patience with our brothers and sisters, no less so your sheep, no less so loved and forgiven. Grow this patience into character and into hope as You pour Your Holy Spirit into our hearts. All praise to You, gracious Lord. Amen.*