

Editors

Rev. Daniel and Alena Guagenti

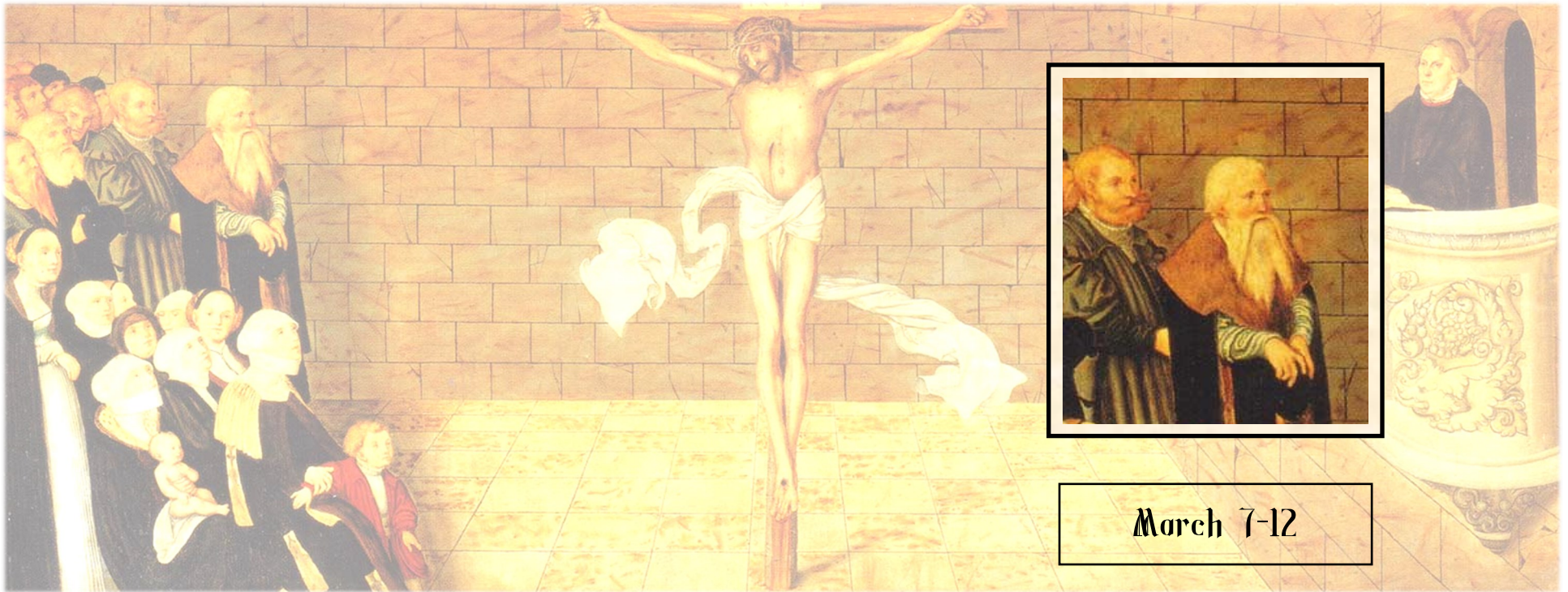
Writer

Rev. Matthew Brackman

Peace Lutheran Church, Texas City, TX

The Word Worth Dying For

Lenten Devotions with Martin Luther's
1522 Invocavit Sermons



Art

Lucas Cranach (pictured in the upper right of the congregation) painted this altarpiece for the Wittenberg church from 1547-1548. At the time, 30 years after the *95 Theses*, Luther had died and Wittenberg had been captured. Despite Wittenberg's worldly defeat, the Gospel pointing to Christ crucified was not silenced.

For the word of the LORD is upright,
and all his work is done in faithfulness.
He loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.
Psalm 33:4-5

March 7, 2022

Read

1 Corinthians 8

*Take care that this right of yours does not somehow
become a stumbling block to the weak.*

Let me illustrate. The sun has two properties, light and heat. No king has power enough to bend or guide the light of the sun; it remains fixed in its place. But the heat may be turned and guided, and yet is ever about the sun. Thus faith must always remain pure and immovable in our hearts, never wavering; but love bends and turns so that our neighbor may grasp and follow it. There are some who can run, others must walk, still others can hardly creep [cf. 1 Cor. 8:7-13]. Therefore we must not look upon our own, but upon our brother's powers, so that he who is weak in faith, and attempts to follow the strong, may not be destroyed by the devil. Therefore, dear brethren, follow me; I have never been a destroyer....

Let us, therefore, let us act with fear and humility, cast ourselves at one another's feet, join hands with each other, and help one another. I will do my part, which is no more than my duty, for I love you even as I love my own soul. For here we battle not against pope or bishop, but against the devil [cf. Eph. 6:12], and do you imagine he is asleep? He sleeps not, but sees the true light rising, and to keep it from shining into his eyes he would like to make a flank attack—and he will succeed if we are not on our guard. I know him well, and I hope, too, that with the help of God, I am his master.

Luther's Works, vol. 51, pp. 72-73

Almighty Father may the light of Your Son enliven our hearts. May the warmth of Your Holy Spirit melt the coldness we have toward our neighbors. Grant as our life comes through Your Son that we may live in service to our neighbor. Help us to keep our priorities in order: Love God, and love our neighbors as ourselves. In this way, the victory we have through Your Son continues to defeat our true enemy, the devil. Amen.

March 12, 2022

Read 1 John 4:7-21

By Rev. Brackman

*There is no fear in love,
but perfect love casts out fear.*

This week Luther skillfully teaches and admonishes his hearers. It is the Lord who wins the heart. We show His love to others. Faith is a gift of God created and sustained in us by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament. As a people of faith, we demonstrate love to our neighbor. Notice how Luther admonishes the people to be patient and long-suffering with one another. When Luther wrote these sermons, Lutherans were still figuring out the “how to’s” of the Reformation. He admonishes them to wait for the Lord to move hearts and minds. Rather than leaders or even a simple majority forcing changes, the Word will bring change among the people together. This requires great humility.

We could certainly use a little of this admonishment. We could use this within the life of our churches and communities. Fear God and love your neighbor. Love your neighbor who disagrees with you concerning Covid regulations. Love your neighbor who has a different political stance. Love your neighbor in Russia as well as in the Ukraine. We have spent much time in recent years fearing one another or fearing “the other side.” We are to fear and love God. We are simply to love our neighbor.

We humble ourselves in Lent. We remember our great need for a Savior. We meditate upon our Lord's great patience with us. We then show patience. We demonstrate His love.

His Word works and is at work. Let us cling to the truth of His Word, and let His Word inform our hands and feet what to do. Let us cling to His Word and trust Him to work in the world. The challenging part for us is to not compromise on the truth of His Word and to be patient with those who disagree. This requires great humility.

Your Word, O Lord, is living and active. May Your Word be living and active in and among us. Let us be one even as You are one. Let those who do not believe see the great love Your people have one for another. Amen.

March 9, 2022

Read

Luke 10:38-42

One thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.

Dear friends, you heard yesterday the chief characteristics of a Christian man, that his whole life and being is faith and love. Faith is directed toward God, love toward man and one's neighbor, and consists in such love and service for him as we have received from God without our work and merit. Thus, there are two things: the one, which is most needful, and which must be done in one way and no other; the other, which is a matter of choice and not of necessity, which may be kept or not, without endangering faith or incurring hell. In both, love must deal with our neighbor in the same manner as God has dealt with us; it must walk the straight road, straying neither to the left nor to the right. In the things which are "musts" and are matters of necessity, such as believing in Christ, love nevertheless never uses force or undue constraint....

Christian love should not employ harshness here nor force the matter. However, it should be preached and taught with tongue and pen to hold mass in such a manner is sinful, and yet no one should be dragged away from it by the hair; for it should be left to God, and his Word should be allowed to work alone, without our work or interference.

Luther's Works, vol. 51, pp. 75-76

Lord of heaven and earth, we give thanks that You are in control. Grant us steadfast faith, trusting in Your divine mercy and goodness as we live each day in this chaotic and fallen world. Help us show mercy to one another. As You have shown compassion to us, let us show compassion to those around us. Amen.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship...

March 10, 2022

Read

Ephesians 2:1-10

It is not in my power or hand to fashion the hearts of men as the potter molds the clay and fashion them at my pleasure. I can get no farther than their ears; their hearts I cannot reach. And since I cannot pour faith into their hearts, I cannot, nor should I, force anyone to have faith. That is God's work alone, who causes faith to live in the heart. Therefore we should give free course to the Word and not add our works to it. We have the *jus verbi* [right to speak] but not the *executio* [power to accomplish]. We should preach the Word, but the results must be left solely to God's good pleasure.

Now if I should rush in and abolish it by force, there are many who would be compelled to consent to it and yet not know where they stand, whether it is right or wrong, and they would say: I do not know if it is right or wrong, I do not know where I stand, I was compelled by force to submit to the majority. And this forcing and commanding results in a mere mockery, an external show, a fool's play, man-made ordinances, sham-saints, and hypocrites. For where the heart is not good, I care nothing at all for the work. We must first win the hearts of the people. But that is done when I teach only the Word of God, preach the gospel....

Luther's Works, vol. 51, p. 76

You are the potter. We are the clay. We give You thanks for creating and sustaining faith in us by Your Spirit. Rule our hearts and minds; direct our hands and feet. Grant us greater understanding of Your Word. "Grant us wisdom, grant us courage/ For the living of these days,/ For the living of these days." Amen. (LSB 850)

March 11, 2022

Read

Acts 17:16-32

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything.

So when you have won the heart, you have won the man—and thus the thing must finally fall of its own weight and come to an end. And if the hearts and minds of all are agreed and united, abolish it. But if all are not heart and soul for its abolishment—leave it in God’s hands, I beseech you, otherwise the result will not be good. Not that I would again set up the mass; I let it lie in God’s name. Faith must not be chained and imprisoned, nor bound by an ordinance to any work. This is the principle by which you must be governed....

Love, therefore, demands that you have compassion on the weak, as all the apostles had. Once, when Paul came to Athens (Acts 17), a mighty city, he found in the temple many ancient altars, and he went from one to the other and looked at them all, but he did not kick down a single one of them with his foot. Rather he stood up in the middle of the market place and said they were nothing but idolatrous things and begged the people to forsake them; yet he did not destroy one of them by force. When the Word took hold of their hearts, they forsook them of their own accord, and in consequence the thing fell of itself.

Luther’s Works, vol. 51, pp. 76-77

You, O Lord, know the hearts of man. May Your Word rule our hearts. Let us speak Your Word in love to one another, allowing Your Word rather than our own hands to knock down false idols. Let Your Word unite us as a people so that we are one even as You and our Father are one.
Amen.

March 8, 2022

Read

Matthew 15:1-20

Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up.

Not that it was not a good thing, but...it was not done in an orderly way. You say it was right according to the Scriptures. I agree, but what becomes of order? For it was done in wantonness, with no regard for proper order and with offense to your neighbor. If, beforehand, you had called upon God in earnest prayer, and had obtained the aid of the authorities, one could be certain that it had come from God....

Take note of these two things, “must” and “free.” The “must” is that which necessity requires, and which must ever be unyielding; as for instance, the faith, which I shall never permit any one to take away from me, but must always keep in my heart and freely confess before every one. But “free” is that in which I have choice, and may use or not, yet in such a way that it profit my brother and not me. Now do not make a “must” out of what is “free,” as you have done, so that you may not be called to account for those who were led astray by your loveless exercise of liberty....

Let us, therefore, feed others also with the milk which we received, until they, too, become strong in faith. For there are many who are otherwise in accord with us and who would also gladly accept this thing, but they do not yet fully understand it—these we drive away. Therefore let us show love to our neighbors; if we do not do this, our work will not endure.

Luther’s Works, vol. 51, pp. 73-74

If the Son sets you free you are free indeed. We give You thanks, O Lord, for setting us free from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Thank You for the free gift of faith through Your Spirit who sustains our faith. May we decrease that You may increase. Let our “must” be only in You and let our “free” be generous to others in every way. Amen.