

Editors

Rev. Daniel and Alena Guagenti

Writer

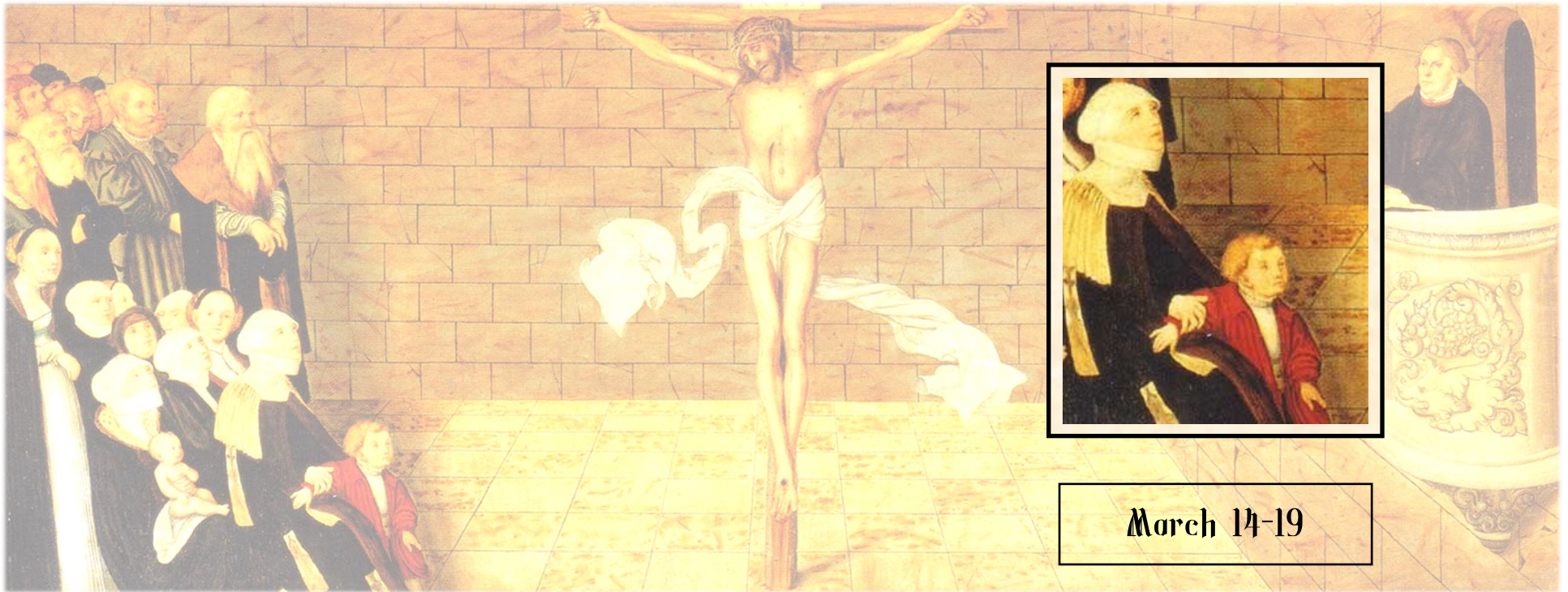
Rev. Jonathan Mueller

Risen Lord Lutheran Church, Taylorsville, KY

Peace Lutheran Church, Louisville, KY

The Word Worth Dying For

Lenten Devotions with Martin Luther's
1522 Invocavit Sermons



March 14-19

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's wife Katie and son are pictured. Luther called Katie the "morning star of Wittenberg" for all her early-rising industriousness. Here she multi-tasks, listening while restraining her child.

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.

Psalms 33:4-5

March 14, 2022

Read

Mark 4:21-28

The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.

For the Word created heaven and earth and all things [Ps. 33:6]; the Word must do this thing, and not we poor sinners.

In short, I will preach it, teach it, write it, but I will constrain no man by force, for faith must come freely without compulsion. Take myself as an example. I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept [cf. Mark 4:26-29] or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything. Had I desired to foment trouble, I could have brought great bloodshed upon Germany; indeed, I could have started such a game that even the emperor would not have been safe. But what would it have been? Mere fool's play. I did nothing; I let the Word do its work. What do you suppose is Satan's thought when one tries to do the thing by kicking up a row? He sits back in hell and thinks: Oh, what a fine game the poor fools are up to now! But when we spread the Word alone and let it alone do the work, that distresses him. For it is almighty and takes captive the hearts, and when the hearts are captured the work will fall of itself.

Luther's Works, vol. 51, pp. 77-78

Father in Heaven, You sow the Word throughout the world. Give us the wisdom and faith to let Your Word do its work without our interference, in the world and in ourselves. In Jesus' name, Amen.

March 19, 2022

Matthew 26:51-56

By Rev. Mueller

Put your sword back into its place...But how then should the scripture be fulfilled, that it must be so?

Peter thought he was doing the right thing. When Jesus was arrested, Peter decided to fight. He was going to save the day by doing something courageous. Peter thought he was fighting for what was right.

The people Luther preached to also wanted to fight for what was right. They had seen the truth of the Gospel. They were ready to throw off the yoke of the Roman Catholic church. They were convinced that the truth was at stake. So it was time to fight! To start, they were going to tear out all the statutes, picture, candles, altars, and any other church decorations that looked "Catholic." But this was only the beginning. There were other things they wanted to fight about, too. They were ready to do whatever it took to protect the truth.

If we didn't know better, we might be inspired by the people of Wittenberg. If we know the truth, don't we have to fight for it, like they did?

Not always. Luther's words this week remind us of something we may have forgotten. The truth we fight for is not ours. It is God's truth. This truth is found in God's Word, not in our judgments and opinions. God's Word does its work without our help.

Like Peter, the people of Wittenberg were ready to fight. So too, we might also think we need to fight, especially when others deny God's truth.

But Jesus tells Peter to put his sword away. God's Word needs no defending here. We are called to share the Word and to speak the truth. We are not called to fight or force this truth on others. The Word will do its work all by itself.

Holy Father, lead us to be content with the Word's power, that we may not interfere in the Word's work. In Christ, Amen.

March 16, 2022

Read

Romans 8:1-11

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

Thus, dear friends, I have said it clearly enough, and I believe you ought to understand it and not make liberty a law, saying: This priest has taken a wife, therefore all priests must take wives. Not at all. Or this monk or that nun has left the cloister, therefore they must all come out. Not at all....

For they who cannot retain their chastity should take wives, and for others who can be chaste, it is good that they restrain themselves, as those who live in the Spirit and not in the flesh [Rom. 8:4; 1 Cor. 7:40]. Neither should they be troubled about the vows they have made, such as monks' vows of obedience, chastity, and poverty (though they are rich enough withal). For we cannot vow anything that is contrary to God's commands. God has made it a matter of liberty to marry or not to marry, and you, you fool, undertake to turn this liberty into a vow contrary to the ordinance of God! Therefore you must let it remain a liberty and not make a compulsion out of it; for your vow is contrary to God's liberty. For example, if I vowed to strike my father on the mouth, or to steal someone's property, do you believe God would be pleased with such a vow? Therefore, little as I ought to keep a vow to strike my father on the mouth, so little ought I to abstain from marriage because I am bound by a vow of chastity, for in both cases God has ordered it otherwise.

Luther's Works, vol. 51, p. 81

Almighty God, You decide what is good and what is evil. Protect us from substituting our judgments for yours, that we may not call evil "good" and good "evil." In Christ, Amen.

March 17, 2022

Read

Exodus 20:18-26

They stood far off and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die."

A great controversy arose on the subject of images between the Roman emperor and the pope; the emperor held that he had the authority to banish the images, but the pope insisted that they should remain, and both were wrong. Much blood was shed, but the pope emerged as the victor and the emperor lost. [Luther is referencing the iconoclastic controversy of the 8th and 9th centuries.] What was it all about? They wished to make a "must" out of that which is free. This God cannot tolerate. Do you presume to do things differently from the way the supreme Majesty has decreed? Surely not; let it alone....

[Luther reviews Biblical arguments about the First Commandment, concluding each side can make good points.] In the face of such uncertainty who would be so bold as to destroy images? Not I. But let us go further. They say: Did not Noah, Abraham, Jacob build altars? And who will deny that? We must admit it. Again, did not Moses erect a bronze serpent, as we read in his fourth book [Num 21:9]? How then can you say that Moses forbade the making of images when he himself made one? ... Here we must admit that we may have images and make images, but we must not worship them, and if they are worshipped, they should be put away and destroyed, just as King Hezekiah broke in pieces the bronze serpent.

Luther's Works, vol. 51, pp. 81-82

Father, as You once directed Moses to make the bronze serpent on the pole, lead us to use images correctly for our benefit, not confusing You with Your creation. In Christ's name, Amen.

March 18, 2022

Read

Acts 28:1-16

After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead.

Therefore it should have been preached that images were nothing and that no service is done to God by erecting them; then they would have fallen of themselves. That is what I did; that is what Paul did in Athens, when he went into their churches and saw all their idols. He did not strike at any of them, but stood in the market place and said, “You men of Athens, you are all idolatrous” [Acts 17:16, 22]. He preached against their idols, but he overthrew none by force. And you rush, create an uproar, break down altars, and overthrow images! Do you really believe you can abolish altars in this way? No, you will only set them up more firmly....

St. Paul, as we read in the Book of Acts [28:11], sat in a ship on whose prow were painted or carved the Twin Brothers [i.e., Castor and Pollux]. He went on board and did not bother about them at all, neither did he break them off. Why must Luke describe the Twins at this point? Without doubt he wanted to show that outward things could do no harm to faith, if only the heart does not cleave to them or put trust in them.

Luther's Works, vol. 51, p. 83

Father, we exist in a world surrounded by idols of various kinds. Remind us that such things hold no danger and no appeal to all who live by faith. In Christ, Amen.

March 15, 2022

Read

1 Timothy 4:1-10

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

In the things that are free, such as being married or remaining single, you should take this attitude: if you can keep to it without burdensomeness, then keep it; but it must not be made a general law; everyone must rather be free. So if there is a priest, monk, or nun, who cannot abstain, let him take a wife and be a husband, in order that your conscience may be relieved and see to it that you can stand before God and the world when you are assailed, especially when the devil attacks you in the hour of death.... Every one must stand on his own feet and be prepared to give battle to the devil. You must rest upon a strong and clear text of Scripture if you would stand the test. If you cannot do that, you will never withstand—the devil will pluck you like a parched leaf....

[Those in the cloisters] have no understanding of the matter (for no one preaches it to them); they hear about others who are leaving the cloisters in other places... and they want to follow their example, but have not yet fortified their conscience and do not know that it is a matter of liberty. That is bad, and yet it is better that the evil should be outside than inside. Therefore, I say, what God as made free shall remain free.... The cowl will not strangle you, if you are already wearing one.

Luther's Works, vol. 51, pp. 79-81

Holy Father, You give us freedom. Grant to us also wisdom, that we may always stand on Scripture, seeking good in Your Word only and not in our personal preferences and judgments. In Jesus' name, Amen.