

Editors

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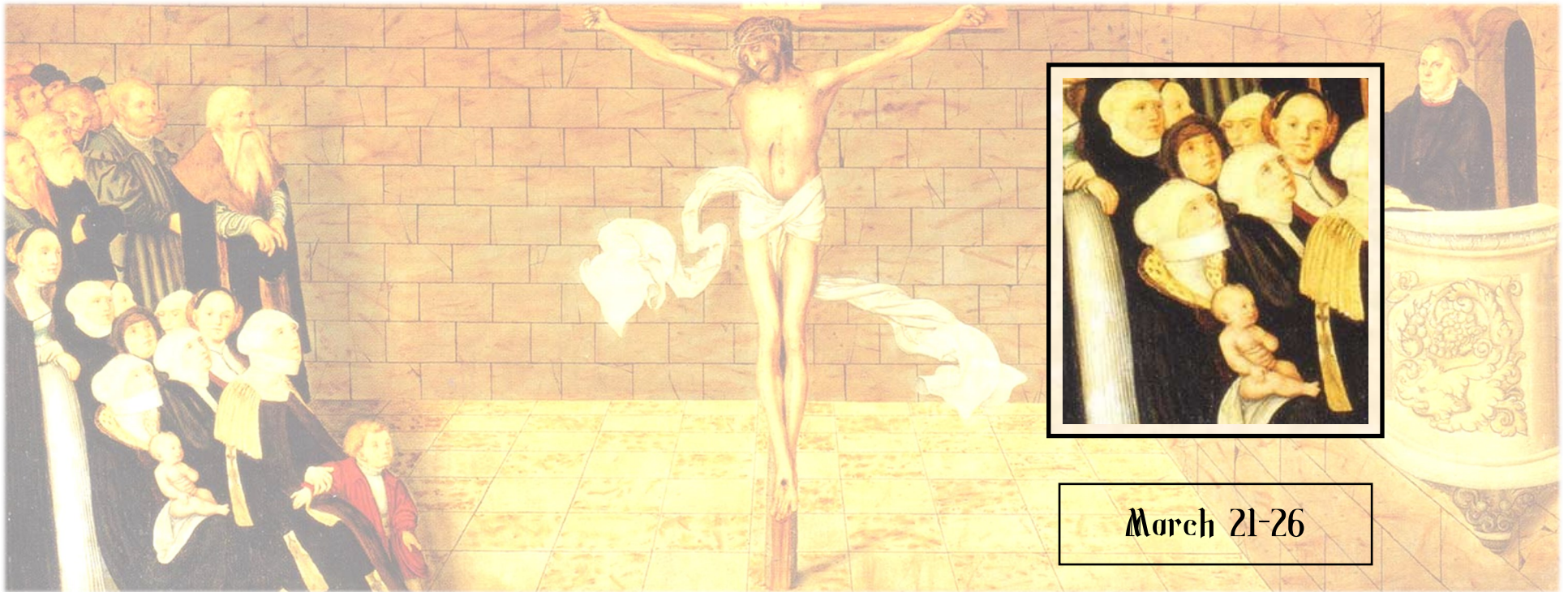
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The Word Worth Dying For

Lenten Devotions with Martin Luther's
1522 Invocavit Sermons



March 21-26

Art

Lucas Cranach painted this altarpiece for the Wittenberg church from 1547-1548; Cranach himself is pictured in the top right of the congregation. Did a 16th-century baby prove as much a distraction from preaching as in today's churches? Not for everyone. Even with distractions, the Word of the Lord does not go out void.

The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;
He frustrates the plans of the peoples.
The counsel of the LORD stands forever,
The plans of His heart to all generations.
Psalm 33:10-11

March 21, 2022

Read

Matthew 22:15-22

Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.

For whoever places an image in a church imagines he has performed a service to God and done a good work, which is down-right idolatry. But this, the greatest, foremost, and highest reason for abolishing images, you have passed by, and fastened on the least important reason of all. For I suppose there is nobody, or certainly very few, who do not understand that yonder crucifix is not my God, for my God is in heaven, but that this is simply a sign....

Do you think that Duke Frederick, the bishop of Halle, and the others would have dragged so many silver images into the churches, if they thought it counted for nothing before God? No, they would not bother to do it. But this is not sufficient reason to abolish, destroy, and burn all images. Why? Because we must admit that there are still some people who hold no such wrong opinion of them, but to whom they may well be useful, although they are few. Nevertheless, we cannot and ought not to condemn a thing which may be any way useful to a person. You should rather have taught that images are nothing, that God cares nothing for them, and that he is not served nor pleased when we make an image for Him, but that we would do better to give a poor man a gold-piece than God a golden image.

Luther's Works, vol. 51, p. 84-85

Heavenly Father, grant us humility, so that we neither praise our own vain works nor brazenly harm the faith of our neighbors. In Jesus' name, Amen.

March 26, 2022

Read Galatians 5

By Rev. Brown

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Our sinful flesh hates freedom. Oh, the world and the flesh trumpet so many things that they call “freedom,” but what they really mean is “license.” They mean the ability to do whatever we want in the moment without a thought for whether it is right or wrong, or whether it helps or harms our neighbor. That “freedom” in reality is nothing but slavery to our sinful passions.

To the contrary, Christian freedom is this: as forgiven children of God, we are free to live our lives and love the neighbors God has given us without worrying about trying to earn God's love. We are free to show love and care for our neighbor in a multitude of ways, just as they too are free.

Freedom means I do not have to compare myself to my neighbor anymore. My worth is not established by my doing more or being “better” than my neighbor. I do not get to point out to God how I have done more than the other guy. We are both forgiven and loved in Christ, so that comparison is pointless. My value is not my works but rather all that Christ Jesus has done for me and given to me!

Our sinful flesh cannot stand the fact that we rely upon Christ and receive all things from Him as gifts. However, faith believes all this and rejoices in it. Living in Christ, faith flows forth freely in multifaceted love and forgiveness for our neighbor. Nothing keeps you from caring for your neighbor.

Dearest Jesus, create in us clean hearts, that as we have received forgiveness and love from You, we would also freely forgive and love the neighbors You have placed in our lives. Amen.

March 23, 2022

Read

Acts 10:9-23

What God has made clean, do not call common.

Let us proceed and speak of the eating of meats and what our attitude should be in this matter. It is true that we are free to eat any kind of food, meats, fish, eggs, or butter. This no one can deny. God has given us this liberty; this is true. Nevertheless, we must know how to use our liberty, and in this matter treat the weak brother quite differently from the stubborn. Observe, then, how you ought to use this liberty.

First, if you cannot abstain from meat without harm to yourself, or if you are sick, you may eat whatever you like, and if anyone takes offense, let him be offended. Even if the whole world took offense, you are not committing a sin, for God can approve it in view of the liberty he has so graciously bestowed upon you and of the necessities of your health, which would be endangered by your abstinence.

Secondly, if you should be pressed to eat fish instead of meat on Friday, and to eat fish and abstain from eggs and butter during Lent, etc., as the pope has done with his fool's laws, then you must in no wise allow yourself to be drawn away from the liberty in which God has placed you, but do just the contrary to spite [the pope], and say: Because you forbid me to eat meat and presume to turn my liberty into a law, I will eat meat in spite of you. And thus you must do in all things which are matters of liberty.

Luther's Works, vol. 51, pp. 86-87

Grant us, O Lord, courage to ignore the foolish complaints of our neighbor; rather, make us always attentive to Your Word. In Jesus' name, Amen.

March 24, 2022

Read

Acts 16:1-5

So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

Thirdly, there are some who are still weak in faith, who ought to be instructed, and who would gladly believe as we do. But their ignorance prevents them, and if this were preached to them, as it was to us, they would be one with us. Toward such well-meaning people we must assume an entirely different attitude from that which we assume toward the stubborn. We must bear patiently with these people and not use our liberty; since it brings no peril or harm to body or soul; in fact, it is rather salutary, and we are doing our brothers and sisters a great service besides. But if we use our liberty unnecessarily, and deliberately cause offense to our neighbor, we drive away the very one who in time would come to our faith.

Thus St. Paul circumcised Timothy [Acts 16:3] because simple-minded Jews had taken offense; he thought: What harm can it do, since they are offended because of their ignorance? But when, in Antioch, they insisted that he ought and must circumcise Titus [Gal. 2:3], Paul withstood them all and to spite them refused to have Titus circumcised [Gal. 2:11]. And he stood his ground.

Luther's Works, vol. 51, p. 87

Heavenly Father, grant that we would use the freedom Christ has won for us in service to the neighbors you have given to us in love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

March 25, 2022

Read

Luke 7:36-50

You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven.

You have heard how I preached against the foolish law of the pope and opposed his precept, that no woman shall wash the altar linen on which the body of Christ has lain, even if it be a pure nun, except that it first be washed by a pure priest....

Against such fool laws we have preached and exposed them, in order that it might be made known that no sin is involved in these foolish laws and commandments of the pope, and that a layman does not commit sin if he touches the cup or the body of Christ with his hands. You should give thanks to God that you have come to such clear knowledge, which many great men have lacked. But now you go ahead and become as foolish as the pope, in that you think that a person must touch the sacrament with his hands. You want to prove that you are good Christians by touching the sacrament with your hands, and thus you have dealt with the sacrament, which is our highest treasure, in such a way that it is a wonder you were not struck to the ground by thunder and lightning....

If you want to show that you are good Christians by handling the sacrament and boast of it before the world, then Herod and Pilate are the chief and best Christians, since it seems to me that they really handled the body of Christ when they had him nailed to the cross and put to death. No, my dear friends, the kingdom of God does not consist in outward things... but in faith.

Luther's Works, vol. 51, p. 88-89

O Lord, make us, by faith in You, glad to live in Your kingdom and receive Your forgiveness. In Jesus' name, Amen.

March 22, 2022

Read

Jeremiah 17:1-10

I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds..

We must, therefore, be on guard, for the devil, through his apostles, is after us with all his craft and cunning. Now, although it is true and no one can deny that the images are evil because they are abused, nevertheless we must not on that account reject them, nor condemn anything because it is abused. This would result in utter confusion. God has commanded us in Deut. 4 [:19] not to lift up our eyes to the sun [and the moon and the stars], etc., that we may not worship them, for they are created to serve all nations. But there are many people who worship the sun and the stars. Therefore we propose to rush in and pull the sun and the stars from the skies. No, we had better let it be. Again, wine and women bring many a man to misery and make a fool of him; so we kill all the women and pour out all the wine. Again, gold and silver cause much evil, so we condemn them. Indeed, if we want to drive away our worst enemy, the one who does us the most harm, we shall have to kill ourselves, for we have no greater enemy than our own heart, as the prophet, Jer. 17 [:9], says, "The heart of man is crooked," or, as I take the meaning, "always twisting to one side."

Luther's Works, vol. 51, p. 85

Gracious Lord, we thank You for the many gifts You give us. We ask that You give us wisdom to rightly receive them. In Jesus' name, Amen.