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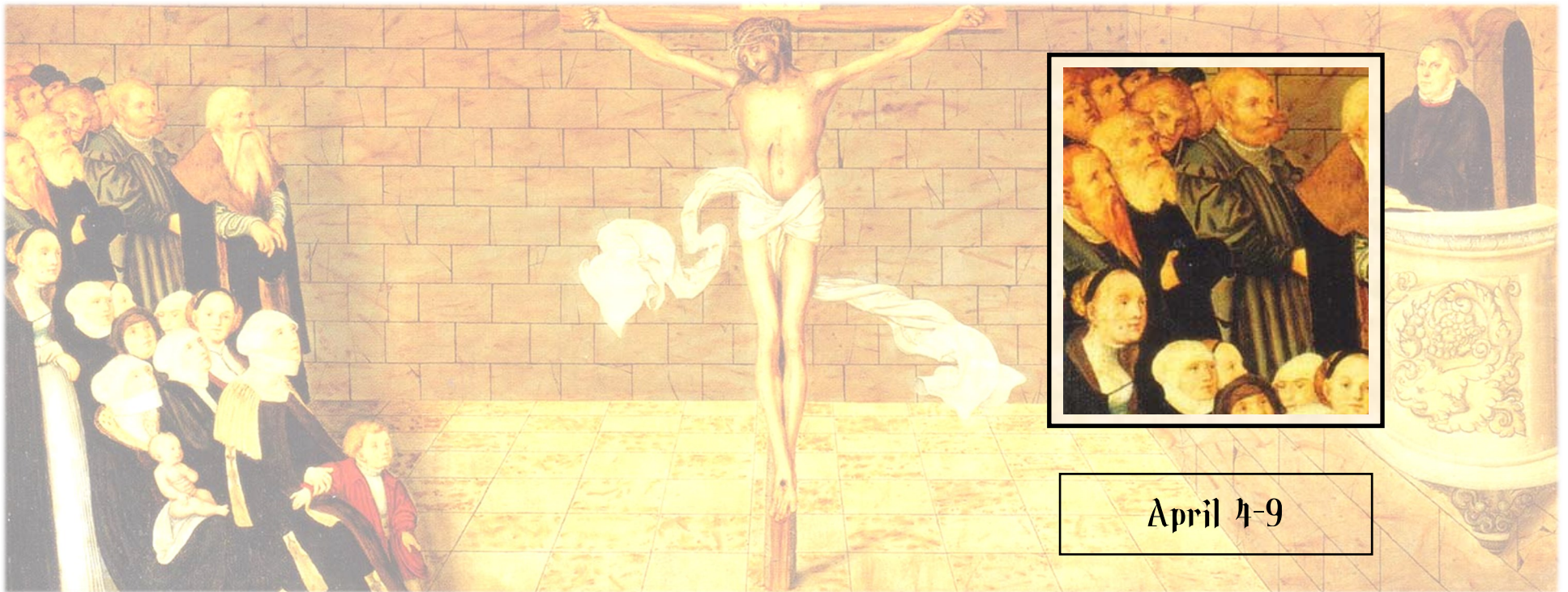
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The Word Worth Dying For

Lenten Devotions with Martin Luther's
1522 Invocavit Sermons



Art

Lucas Cranach painted this altarpiece for the Wittenberg church from 1547-1548. Within the Wittenberg congregation, we see adults and children, men and women, those focused on Christ and those distracted. Individually, Luther taught we are saint and sinner both; the same holds true for congregations.

Praise the Lord!

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good,
for His steadfast love endures forever!

Who can utter the mighty deeds of the Lord,
Or declare all his praise?

Psalm 106:1-2

April 4, 2022

Read

Matthew 26:1-29

[Jesus said] "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."

[The Lord's Supper] demands a hungry and longing man, for it delights to enter a hungry soul, which is constantly battling with its sins and eager to be rid of them.

He who is not thus prepared should abstain for a while from this sacrament, for this food will not enter a sated and full heart, and if it comes to such a heart, it is harmful. Therefore, if we think upon and feel within us such distress of conscience and the fear of a timid heart, we shall come with all humbleness and reverence and not run to it brashly and hastily, without all fear and humility.

...Therefore those who are most worthy, who are constantly being assailed by death and the devil, and they are the ones to whom it is most opportunely given, in order that they may remember and firmly believe that nothing can harm them, since they now have with them him from whom none can pluck them away; let come death, devil, or sin, they cannot harm them.

This is what Christ did when he was about to institute the blessed sacrament. First he terrified his disciples and shook their hearts by saying that he was going to leave them [Matt. 26:2], which was exceedingly painful to them.... After he had made them all tremble with fear and sorrow, only then did he institute the blessed sacrament as a comfort for the sorrowing, a healing for the sick, a life for the dying, a food for all the hungry, and a rich treasure for all the poor and needy.

Luther's Works, vol. 51, pp. 94-95

Lord Jesus Christ, bring Your Word to bear upon me so that I hunger and thirst for Your righteousness. Fill me with Your love so that sin, death, and the devil have no power over me. Amen.

April 9, 2022

Read Luke 7:1-10

By Rev. Brackmon

I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed.

In our sermon this week, Luther describes the incredible power of the Sacrament of the Altar. We commonly speak about the forgiveness of sins offered in our Savior's body and blood. We will often add strengthening of our faith, but we don't speak very often about what that means. Luther speaks of emptying ourselves through examination of ourselves and confession. We are then filled with Christ. He arms us to fight against the world, our sinful flesh, and the power of the devil. When we are filled with Christ these enemies cannot prevail.

You may have noticed the chastisement Luther gives to the people of his day. He accuses them of coming to the table full instead of to be filled. He accuses them of leaving the table and not loving their neighbor. They receive the love of God yet do not give it. They receive forgiveness yet do not forgive others. They take care of themselves and "let everything else go hang." They do not care for the poor.

This chastisement seems especially apt for our day. The zeitgeist or spirit of our age is extremely self-centered. I deserve to be happy. I need some me time. We easily take offense and condemn our neighbor while saying what we feel without caring if we give offense. Hang our neighbor. We often spout off about what we think with no interest in listening. We talk a good talk about helping our neighbor but manage to make it someone else's responsibility to do the giving and the work.

So we examine ourselves. We confess where we have done wrong. We empty ourselves of our sin and our own righteousness so we can be filled with Christ. Filled with His love, we then give His love. In this way the world, our own sinful flesh, and the devil are put to flight. This sacrament enlivens and empowers God's people in their crusade against these evils.

Come, Lord Jesus, and fill us with Your love and righteousness so we might live and take our stand against the devil and all his schemes. Amen.

April 6, 2022

Read

James 2

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

You are willing to take all of God's goods in the sacrament, but you are not willing to pour them out again in love. Nobody extends a helping hand to another, nobody seriously considers the other person, but everyone looks out for himself and his own gain, insists on his own way, and lets everything else go hang. If anybody is helped, well and good; but nobody looks after the poor to see how you might be able to help them. This is a pity. You have heard many sermons about it and all my books are full of it and have this one purpose, to urge you to faith and love.

And if you will not love one another, God will send a great plague among you; let this be a warning to you, for God will not have his Word revealed and preached in vain. You are tempting God too far, my friends; for if in times past someone had preached the Word to our forefathers, they would perhaps have acted differently. Or if it were preached even now to many poor children in the cloisters, they would receive it more joyfully than you. You are not heeding it at all and you are playing around with all kinds of tomfoolery which does not amount to anything.

I commend you to God.

Luther's Works, vol. 51, p. 96

Lord Jesus Christ, we give You thanks for hanging upon the tree to forgive our sins. We give You thanks for Your Body and Blood which forgive our sins and strengthen our faith. Grant that Your Body and Blood empower us to love to our neighbor instead of allowing them to hang. Fill us so that our Father declares, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Amen.

April 7, 2022

Read

Matthew 18:7-35

Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom temptation comes!

Now we have heard all the things which ought to be considered here, except confession. Of this we shall speak now.

There is a confession which is founded on the Scriptures, and it is this: when anybody committed a sin publicly or with other men's knowledge, he was accused before the congregation. If he abandoned his sin, they interceded for him with God. But if he would not listen to the congregation, he was cast out and excluded from the assembly, so that no one would have anything to do with him. And this confession is commanded by God in Matt. 18 [:15], "If your brother sins against you (so that you and others are offended), go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone." We no longer have any trace of this kind of confession any more; at this point the gospel is in abeyance. Anybody who was able to re-establish it would be doing a good work. Here is where you should have exerted yourselves and re-established this kind of confession, and let the other things go for no one would have been offended by this and everything would have gone smoothly and quietly.

Luther's Works, vol. 51, p. 97

Lord Jesus Christ, forgive me for the sins I have committed against others and before others. Give me the fortitude to confess my sins to those I have offended and ask for their forgiveness. Grant me the strength to forgive those who have sinned against me and wherever possible may we be reconciled to one another so that Your love prevails among us. Amen.

April 8, 2022

Read

Psalm 32

*Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts
no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away.*

Secondly, we need a kind of confession when we go into a corner by ourselves and confess to God himself and pour out before him all our faults. This kind of confession is also commanded.... As it is written, “Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times” [Ps. 106:3]. Judgment is nothing else than a man’s knowing and judging and condemning himself, and this is true humility and self-abasement. Righteousness is nothing else than a man’s knowing himself and praying to God for the mercy and help through which God raises him up again. This is what David means when he says, “I have sinned; I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin; for this all thy saints shall pray to thee” [Ps. 32:5-6].

Thirdly, there is also the kind of confession in which one takes another aside and tells him what troubles one, so that one may hear from him a word of comfort.... I will allow no man to take private confession away from me, and I would not give it up for all the treasures in the world, since I know what comfort and strength it has given me. No one knows what it can do for him except one who has struggled often and long with the devil. Yea, the devil would have slain me long ago, if confession had not sustained me.

Luther’s Works, vol. 51, p. 98

*Lord, I confess that I have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed.
I have sinned in the sight of others. I have sins known only to You and me.
I have even more sins of which I am not aware and others I do not even
remember. May Your Body and Blood in the sacrament forgive my sins
and set me on my feet with You as the Rock upon which I stand. Amen.*

*By this we know love, that He laid down His life
for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the
brothers.*

April 5, 2022

Read

1 John 3

We shall now speak of the fruit of this sacrament [of the altar], which is love; that is, that we should treat our neighbor as God has treated us. Now we have received from God nothing but love and favor, for Christ has pledged and given us his righteousness and everything he has; he has poured out upon us all his treasures, which no man can measure and no angel can understand or fathom, for God is a glowing furnace of love, reaching even from the earth to the heavens.

Love, I say, is a fruit of this sacrament. But this I do not yet perceive among you here in Wittenberg, even though you have had much preaching and, after all, you ought to have carried this out in practice. This is the chief thing, which is the only business of a Christian man. But nobody wants to be in this, though you want to practice all sorts of unnecessary things, which are of no account. If you do not want to show yourselves Christians by your love, then leave the other things undone, too, for St. Paul says [in 1 Cor. 13:1], “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.” This is a terrible saying of Paul. “And 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.”

Luther’s Works, vol. 51, pp. 95-96

*Lord Jesus Christ, Your Body and Blood bring Your love to me. Without
Your love I am nothing. Fill me to overflowing with Your love and mercy.
Let me give Your love to those around me. Let Your love transform my
heart, my family, my church, and my community. Amen.*