

## Editors

Rev. Daniel and Alena Guagenti

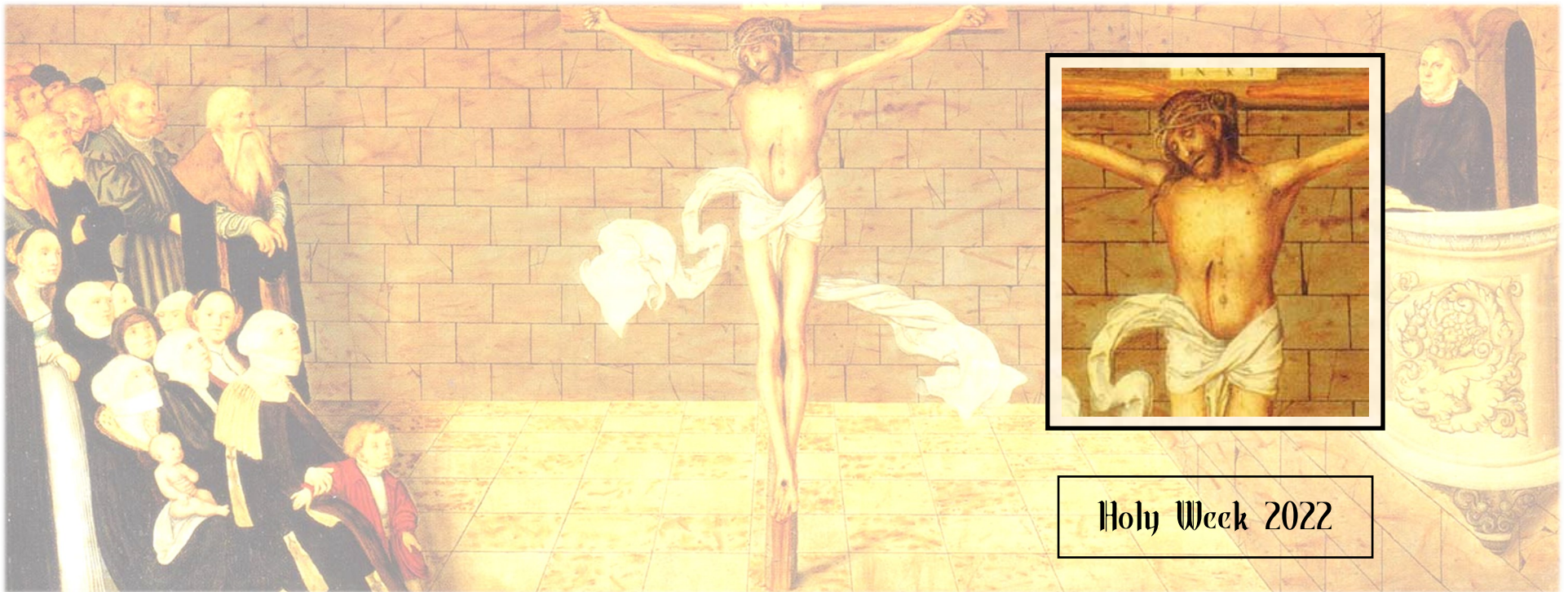
## Writer

Rev. Daniel Guagenti

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Shelbyville, KY

# The Word Worth Dying For

Lenten Devotions with Martin Luther's  
1522 Invocavit Sermons



Holy Week 2022

## Art

Lucas Cranach painted this altarpiece for the Wittenberg church from 1547-1548. At the center is Christ crucified, the content of apostolic preaching. The Apostle wrote to the church in Corinth, "I decided to know nothing among you except Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

I will tell of your name to my brothers;  
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:

You who fear the LORD, praise him!

All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him,  
and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

Psalm 22:22-23

April 11, 2022

Read

2 Samuel 12:1-13

*David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD has also put away your sin."*

If any one man is wrestling with his sins and wants to be rid of them and desires a sure word on the matter, let him go and confess to another in secret and accept what he says to him as if God himself had spoken it through the mouth of this person. However, one who has a strong, firm faith that his sins are forgiven may let this confession go and confess to God alone. But how many have such a strong faith? Therefore, as I have said I will not let this private confession be taken from me. But I will not have anybody forced to it, but left to each one's free will.

For our God, the God we have, is not so niggardly that he has left us with only one comfort or strengthening for our conscience, or only one absolution, but we have many absolutions in the gospel and we are richly showered with many absolutions. For instance, we have this in the gospel: "If you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you" [Matt. 6:14]. Another comfort we have in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses," etc. [Matt. 6:12]. A third is our baptism, when I reason thus: See, my Lord, I have been baptized in thy name so that I may be assured of thy grace and mercy. Then we have private confession, when I go and receive a sure absolution as if God himself spoke it, so that I may be assured that my sins are forgiven.

*Luther's Works, vol. 51, pp. 99*

*Father above, it is hard to come before You to own that we keep sinning. Though You have cared for us, found us when lost, provided again and again for our needs, we do the very things we do not want to do. Thank you for easing our confession by showering grace after grace upon us. Thank you for sending Jesus to pay for our sins and declare the height and width and depth of You gracious love. Amen.*

April 16, 2022

Read Matthew 27

By Rev. Guagenti

*Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, "He has risen from the dead."*

The Gospel according to John provides insight into the things Jesus said in the upper room the night He was betrayed. "I still have many things to say to you," Jesus promised, "but you cannot bear them now" (16:12). The work Jesus would accomplish the rest of that first Holy Week, His rejection, suffering, and death, would change everything.

"A little while, and you will see me no longer, and again a little while, and you will see me," He continued (16:16). He promised that, as a mother goes through suffering in giving birth but then rejoices to receive the new life of her child, so "no one will take your joy from you" (16:20-22). Jesus came through the suffering of the cross. He rose again, unsealing the scroll of all the prophets had promised. Jesus' resurrection breathed new life into the faith handed down from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The same was true for Luther as he was given to rediscover the Gospel. Jesus' cross works as a mighty flood washing away all which keeps us from joy in Christ. Our guilt, shame, and self-doubt are all picked up by those waters and blasted away. So Luther takes up every tool of the Gospel: the Word, the sacraments, private absolution, even our suffering in faith. They all work to confirm our assurance that our sins are forgiven. When even our suffering can give us joy and confirm God's love, we know how much the cross has turned the world upside down.

That is just the beginning. Jesus fulfills the Sabbath, resting in the tomb. On the Eighth Day, He will dawn new creation.

*Precious Lord, Jesus, as You fulfilled the Sabbath, give us grace to enter Your rest. Let not the troubles of this world dampen our joy in You, for truly, You are making all things new. Amen.*

April 13, 2022

Read

Matthew 21:1-11

*Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.*

[From Luther's Palm Sunday Sermon in 1522]

We read of Him coming in two ways: the first was when He wanted to give the Law on Mount Sinai, and the second was when He gave the Gospel, that is when He wanted to confirm it as He rode into Jerusalem.

When God came the first time, He did so in a terrible, thick, black cloud, with fire, smoke, and thunder, accompanied by the loud blaring of trumpets [Exod. 19:16]. This was so terrible that the children of Israel were terribly afraid and said to Moses: "We will do everything God wants, but only you should speak to us. We cannot hear the voice of God, lest we die" [Exod 20:19]. Then He gave them the Law. We notice this account; the Law is terrible. People do not like to hear the Law preached....

The second coming of Christ was not terrible, but He came with gentleness, as the Gospel reading says [Matt. 21:5]; not with terror, the way God came in the Old Testament, but with gentleness, mercy, and in the form of a man; not on the mountain, but in the city; not in the wilderness of Sinai, but in Jerusalem the place of security. In Sinai, He came with fear; here He comes with gentleness.

*Luther's Works*, vol. 56, pp. 5-6

*Dear Jesus, we thank and praise You as You still come among us humbly, speaking through Your Word and hidden in, with, and under the Sacrament. You are seated at the right hand of power, interceding for us even now. You endured the awfulness of the Lord's thick darkness, the judgment for sin in our place. Grant us more and more appreciation this Holy Week, that we sing Your praises, not only here but in eternity. Amen.*

April 14, 2022

Read

Matthew 26:26-56

*I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*

[From Luther's Maundy Thursday Sermon in 1522]

We must never cease to treasure the comforting promise, but should be mindful of it in every trouble, most especially at the time of death, so that we can say:

"I believe that Christ gave His body and blood for my sin, in order that neither devil nor death can harm me, for He said, 'Take this is My body, given for you, and this is My blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins' [Luke 22:19; Matt. 26:27-28]. Those are His words, and I depend on them. Furthermore, He confirmed these words of His when He then died; and as a sign for us, and as a confirmation of His words, He gave me His body and blood. This is my comfort. Therefore, I will receive His flesh and blood in order that I may be certain about these thing and that my faith may be strengthened."

Whoever believes this may consider devil, death, hell, and whatever else may subject a man to tribulation to be totally abolished. It is faith that brings it all about.

*Luther's Works*, vol. 56, p. 10

*Dear Jesus, while You were offering Your body, Judas plotted betrayal, apostles gathered swords, disciples argued about who was the greatest, and even Peter fell asleep while You prayed feverishly. Still today, we are too easily distracted, too tepid in receiving the blood that washes away all our sins. Zeal for us consumed You; pour that zeal into our hearts that we may follow You in joy and hope. Amen.*



April 15, 2022

Read

Psalm 90

*Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil.*

[From Luther's Sermon on Cross and Suffering at Coburg, where he stayed for the Diet of Augsburg, April 16, 1530]

Just as we cannot get along without eating or drinking so we cannot get along without affliction and suffering. Therefore we must necessarily be afflicted of the devil by persecution or else by a secret thorn which thrusts into the heart, as also St. Paul laments [cf. II Cor. 12:7]. Therefore, since it is better to have a cross than to be without one, nobody should dread or be afraid of it. After all, you have a good strong promise with which to comfort yourself. Besides, the gospel cannot come to the fore except through and in suffering and cross.

Lastly, Christian suffering is nobler and precious above all other human suffering because, since Christ himself suffered, he also hallowed the suffering of all his Christians. Are we not then poor, foolish people? We have run to Rome, Trier, and other places to visit the shrines; why do we not also cherish cross and suffering, which was much nearer to Christ and touched him more closely than any garment did his body. This touched not only his body but his heart. Through the suffering of Christ, the suffering of all his saints has become utterly holy, for it has been touched with Christ's suffering. Therefore we should accept all suffering as a holy thing, for it is truly holiness.

*Luther's Works, vol. 51, p. 207-208*

*Father, we marvel to hear that it was for the joy set before Him that our Lord Jesus endured the shame of the cross. Further, His apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for His name. What victory over death, the devil, and the world, that even enduring their best shot, You give joy and establish the work of our hands! Teach us to number our days by the power of Jesus' cross, ready to follow Him always. Amen.*

*Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.*

April 12, 2022

Read

1 Peter 5:1-11

Finally, I take to myself the blessed sacrament, when I eat his body and drink his blood as a sign that I am rid of my sins and God has freed me from all my frailties; and in order to make me sure of this, he gives me his body to eat and his blood to drink, so that I shall not and cannot doubt that I have a gracious God.

Thus you see that confession must not be despised, but that it is a comforting thing. And since we need many absolutions and assurance, because we must fight against the devil, death, hell, and sin, we must not allow any of our weapons to be taken away, but keep intact the whole armor and equipment which God has given us to use against our enemies. For you do not yet know what labor it costs to fight with the devil and overcome him. But I know it well, for I have eaten a bit of salt or two with him. I know him well, and he knows me well, too. If you have known him, you would not have rejected confession in this way.

I commend you to God. Amen.

[Here, Luther's *Invocavit* sermons conclude. For the rest of Holy Week, we will take selections from Luther's Holy Week sermons.]

*Luther's Works, vol. 51, pp. 99-100*

*Lord, our Mighty Fortress, we run to You for protection from the evil one. He seems to know us too well, afflicting us with every sin, accusing our hearts daily. You know us better. You know who we will become in the new creation. You know who You made us to be. May we enter Your rest, secure in salvation, in the covering of every sin by Jesus' glorious righteousness, given us in Baptism, confirmed in Your Supper. Amen.*