Dear members of St. James, as many of you know by now, the elders and I decided to cancel Sunday worship on March 22nd and the Lenten services for the rest of March due to the seriousness of the COVID-19 crisis. We wanted to get your attention to address the fact that we are on board to try and slow the advance of this virus. That being said, we also are conscious of the fact we need God in our lives to help us through this time, so every Sunday [beginning March 29th] we are going to celebrate Holy Communion for those who are willing and able to come to worship.

**For those who do come please follow the directives of our government**. 1) If you or any member of your family doesn’t feel well, stay home. Don’t go to work or send your children to daycare. 2) If you do get COVID-19, please call the church office and leave a message to let us know of your illness. 3) If you are concerned about your own compromised health, stay home, work from home, and seek to stay connected to your church family at home. If you desire spiritual counseling or communion at home, arrangements can be made by calling the pastor. 4) You may not have fear because of your faith or your good health, but others may be struggling. Respect their fears, seek to encourage them and pray for them. St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8:9-13 “But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.” In exercising your freedom don’t harm the faith of those who are weaker.

**View “Main Street Living” at 10:00 am Sundays on KDLT-NBC Sioux Falls or on the web at** [**www.mainstreetliving.com**](http://www.mainstreetliving.com)**. “This Is the Life” also is aired at 10:00am on Sundays. The Sunday morning service at St. Paul’s in Pipestone is aired on radio on KLOH 1050AM at 11:30am.**

**Included in this issue are some sermons for Lent and Sunday** you are encouraged to read as you worship in your homes this next week. There is also an excellent article from Lutheran Witness on a Christian response to the situation we are in. More information and helps are available online at lcms.org along with an address to the church by our Synodical President Matthew Harrison.

**Pastor will be available in the church office Monday – Friday from 9:00am-Noon** to receive calls and set-up appointments to meet with families or for any other spiritual concerns or questions. He will be in the office Sunday morning, March 22nd from 9:00am till noon. The elders will be monitoring the situation and bring updates as needed through KLOH radio 1050am and our web page at “stjamesholland.com” or on facebook under St. James Lutheran Church.

It is my prayer that this “social distancing” will be short lived and things will return to normal quickly. Be assured, you are in my prayers, and I hope you continue to pray for all who are affected by this outbreak**.**

**In His Service, Pastor Petrich**

**When one Can’t Flee the Plague [An article from Lutheran Witness]**

We can’t flee from it. The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has [spread around the world without sign of stopping](https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/810452948/who-says-risk-of-covid-19-is-now-very-high-at-a-global-level). Global markets are shaking. The Dow Jones Industrial Average sank over [3,000 points in the last week](https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2020/02/28/dow-coronavirus-markets-wall-street-plunge/4901248002/). The media coverage vacillates between issuing public warnings and scoring political hits. The disease might affect the upcoming presidential election; we might be reeling from the effects of COVID-19 for years to come. From all appearances, we can’t escape the disease or its consequences.

To be clear, most of us will not die from COVID-19; it is not a new bubonic plague. Of 100 infected victims, 98 will probably survive and experience only mild, flu-like symptoms. But the effects of the disease on our lives will likely reverberate into the future. In 1527, Luther wrote a letter to a friend because the bubonic plague was passing through Europe again and had struck both Silesia, where his friend lived, and Wittenberg, where Luther lived.

In the 14th century, the Black Death (the bubonic plague) killed between 75 million and 200 million people in Eurasia; it undoubtedly affected the course of European history. Fleas ferried the nefarious bacteria that caused buboes, or swollen lumps of infection, to develop under the victim’s skin. Sometimes the lumps exploded in pustular discharge; other times they spread over the rest of the body. It usually killed its victims in two to seven days. When the plague struck a town, the wealthy would often flee to the countryside. The question put to Luther was simple: Should a Christian flee this horrific plague?

We cannot escape COVID-19 by fleeing to the countryside. How should a Christian live when he can’t flee an oncoming disease?

**Live like you are baptized.** Baptism is not a magical incantation to keep Christians safe. But, in Baptism, the Holy Spirit unites you to Christ and His resurrection. St. Paul writes, “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

You “live like you are baptized” when you believe that nothing separates you from God’s love in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:31–39). You live in Baptism when you laugh at the devil’s attempts to induce you to fear and dread. As Luther says, “Send those terrors right back to him” (LW 43:127). Be confident; you do not fear death, for you are united to Christ.

Death, however, still looms on the horizon for us all: “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Or in the words of Luther: “Since death is God’s punishment, which he sends upon us for our sins, we must submit to God and with a true and firm faith patiently await our punishment” (LW 43:119).

Christ’s death paid the price for your sins so that even though you “patiently await” physical death, you wait with the hope of the resurrection. To “live like you are baptized” means not fearing the deadly plague — or any disease — more than you fear, love and trust in God.

**Fulfill your vocations even unto death.** Christians fulfill their vocations for the neighbor. Husbands care for wives; parents care for and protect their children; children help aging parents. So also a pastor stays and cares for dying parishioners. He stands by the deathbed of the plague-ridden and points them to Christ. He buries them. Likewise, doctors and medical professionals should remain at their stations to care for the sick. Business owners should operate their businesses so their employees can continue to provide for their families. Parents must care for their children; children likewise must provide for their aging parents.

Christians have a duty to friends and neighbors also. The Christian must serve the infected neighbor. This sometimes involves contracting the disease, but Luther says, “Anyone who does not do that for his neighbor, but forsakes him and leaves him to his misfortune, becomes a murderer in the sight of God” (LW 43:126).

**Do not tempt God.** While the Christian must care for his neighbor unto death, he should not tempt God. Some people in Luther’s day refused to take measures against the plague: “They say that it is God’s punishment; if he wants to protect them he can do so without medicine or our carefulness. This is not trusting God but tempting him” (LW 43:131).

Not only does the careless man test God, he also risks the health and safety of his family. Take your medicine; wear your mask. Follow your doctor’s direction and try to prevent the disease from spreading to others in your home. Luther encouraged his readers to “fumigate your home.” Today we might say, “Follow the CDC’s guidance.”

As far as you are able, obey the directives of the government. Do not, of course, give up your hope in Christ Jesus, but God has provided those in authority to care for us. We obey their directives to care for our neighbor.

**Finally …**In all things, cling to Christ. Go to church. Confess your sin. Receive absolution. Receive the Lord’s Supper, which Luther described as “a pure, wholesome, comforting remedy that grants salvation and comfort” (LC, Sacrament of the Altar, 68). If you become ill, do not fear an illness that merely harms your body, but fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell. He chose to die for you and to redeem you from every illness of soul and*body*.

**Midweek Lenten IV: The Faithful Word (Matthew 27:45–46)**

The fourth word of the cross is an entirely different word. It is a word directed to the Father, a cry of abandonment in the God-forsakenness of our sin. ***“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*** spoken in Jesus’ native tongue, Aramaic. This emanates from the very depths of His soul.

Onlookers would have recognized the opening verses of Psalm 22, the desperate cries of King David in his time of trial. ***“My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Why are You so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?”*** (v. 1). If they had the psalm committed to memory, and many did, they would have remembered David’s vividly prophetic portrayal of a crucifixion long before crucifixions were even invented. ***“For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots”*** (vv. 16–18). Jesus is living and dying this psalm.

With His cry of disregard, Jesus underscores the prophetic nature of His death. This is no accident, no simple miscarriage of justice, no quirk of history. His death in the darkness between noon and three is written large into every page of the Old Testament. It is the thread that connects the Torah and the Prophets and the Psalms into a unified whole. David’s sufferings are a picture, a type, of the Davidic King in His time of trial, of Jesus on the cross. The sentences are no coincidences; they are the plan of God from all eternity that the world should find its redemption in the death of the Son of David, the Son of God.

This is an easily misunderstood cry. Those who heard Jesus misheard Him and thought He was calling out for Elijah to save Him. They offer Jesus a drink of sour wine and wait to see if Elijah comes.

But Jesus has no need for Elijah’s services. He has come to fulfill Elijah and all of the prophets. His cry is not a call for help, but a cry out of the depths of our fallen humanity, out of our own death and despair. This is your abandonment, your darkness, your sin, your death that Jesus is experiencing in His own flesh.

He became the Sinner, damned under God’s wrath, cursed on the tree. He is the adulterer, the thief, the murderer, the idolater. He is you. He willingly, knowingly, freely offers Himself on the altar of God’s justice, taking on Adam’s sin and rebellion and yours and making it His own. ***“For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God”*** (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Sin destroys relationships. It drives a wedge between God and us and between each of us. Because of sin, Adam and Eve were driven from the garden and barred from the tree of life. Because of sin, we are driven into the isolation of self, the solitary confinement of our own selves curved inward. Sin would shut us from God and from one another, leaving us permanently warped inward in a prison locked from the inside. In our time of darkness and despair, we cry out, ***“My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?”*** but the truth of the matter is we have forsaken God. We have turned from Him. We like sheep have gone astray, each in his or her own way. We have turned from God; God has not turned from us.

Jesus, as the perfect Substitute, takes our place. He puts Himself where we are, and in so doing, experiences the silence and darkness and despair, the “dark night” of our collective human soul. He places Himself into our killing fields, our death camps, our concentration camps, our abortion clinics, our prisons and gulags. He enters into all the God-forsaken places where we cry out in despair, ***“Where are You, God? Why have You forsaken us?”*** Jesus utters the **“why**” question on behalf of all of us. Why does God permit this to happen? Why do the innocent suffer? Why does a just God permit suffering and a merciful God not prevent it?

There is paradox in this cry. Jesus prays to a Father who appears to have abandoned Him in His time of need; the God who is absent and silent. He cries out into the darkness from His cross, and His cries trail off into the silence of space. And still, like David who prayed these words before Him, He prays. Here is the paradox of faith. Faith prays to the God who is silent, who appears to have withdrawn, whose hand of blessing has shut tightly, who appears not to be there. Faith calls out “my God” and will not let God off the hook. This is faith that clings to the promise of God, when all that you have is the promise of God. Like the centurion who said to Jesus, ***“Only say the word, and my servant will be healed”*** (Matthew 8:8), faith trusts that the word of Jesus is sufficient.

This is the faith of Jesus that is at the heart of our faith. He trusts for us. He prays for us. He cries out for us. He suffers for us. He dies for us. He embraces us so that we will never be forsaken in our time of need; we will never be alone in the hour of our death; we will not be abandoned in the Day of Judgment. Jesus is there, joined to us and we to Him in baptismal faith. He is with us, always, promising never to leave or forsake us.

Remember this faithful word when God seems to have forsaken you, on your dark Good Friday afternoon. Remember this cry of the Son of God calling out to heaven in your place, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”, and know that God has vindicated Jesus in His death, and He vindicates you in Jesus. ***“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”*** (Romans 8:1). You are reconciled to God in Jesus. You are justified in Jesus. You are safe in Jesus. And you are never forsaken.

For Your suffering in the darkness, for Your cry of abandonment, for Your becoming our sin so that we in You might become the righteousness of God, for Your taking upon Yourself our alienation, our division, our estrangement, our death, we give You thanks, most holy Jesus. Amen.

SERMON: Spotlight on Jesus John 9:1-41 4th Sunday in Lent ‘20

*[Sorry that it is in outline form. I didn’t have time to finish it before the newsletter deadline.]*

*Introduction:* Some people thrive in the spotlight. When the pressure’s on, they can even perform at their best. Others want nothing to do with the spotlight, content with the vocations God has given them and thrilled to be of service without the attention. The spotlight shines on many people in today’s Gospel. But what does it reveal?

 ***3. The spotlight shines on the man born blind, revealing to him the light of the world.***

 **a. The man is born blind, with no light in his eyes (vv 1–2).**

 (1) Our eyes react to light, and so we see.

 (2) This man did not know light. His eyes didn’t react to the light so he couldn’t see.

 **b. The man is thrust in the spotlight because of Jesus’ miracle (vv 3–7).**

 (1) His neighbors saw him, and the man told the story of Jesus’ healing (vv 8–11).

 (2) The Pharisees were brought in to determine if the healing was from God (vv 13–16).

 (3) The spotlight of investigation was put on the man who had formerly known no light.

 **c. The Pharisees, who put the man in the spotlight, are blind to Jesus’ divinity.**

 (1) The man claims that Jesus is a prophet (v 17).

 (2) The Pharisees turn the spotlight from the man born blind to Jesus.

 (3) They claimed that since Jesus healed on the Sabbath, he was not from God (vv 14–16).

 **d. But the man in the spotlight comes to see Jesus in the true light In fact Jesus comes to him to help him see the truth of who he really is. (vv 35–38).**

***2. The spotlight shines on us, revealing our darkness to be ended in death.***

 **a. We are born spiritually blind.**

 (1) God is light, and truth, but we cannot react to that light. (Jn 9:5; 1 Jn 1:5).

 (2) We are born in sin and as enemies of God.

 (3) We are born without knowledge of the light of God. Which means we are bound to end in eternal darkness.

 **b. Like the Pharisees, we put the spotlight on Jesus to examine him.**

 (1) Our sinfulness clouds the light of Christ.

 (2) We turn the spotlight on Jesus and examine him on our own terms.

 (a) We examine the life of Jesus and only see him as a moral example to be followed.

 (b) We examine the teaching of Jesus and only listen to the words that support our opinions.

 (3) The spotlight shines on Jesus, but because of our sin we have macular degeneration, you don’t really see him! With macular degeneration, one loses vision in the center of one’s field of view. Your peripheral vision, the vision that’s around the center of your sight, is usually unaffected. In some ways, the Pharisees were seeing Jesus with macular degeneration. They could tell Jesus was there, but not as Jesus revealed himself to be.

 (4) When we put the spotlight on Jesus, we tell him we would rather be his light than to be enlightened by him.

 **c. A different spotlight—God’s Law—shines on us and reveals us to be sinners lost in the darkness of death (vv** 39–41).

***1. The spotlight shines on Jesus, revealing the light we need to see.***

 **a. Even though we would turn the spotlight on Jesus in sinfulness, nevertheless, when the spotlight is on Jesus, it reveals him on the cross.**

 (1) When we examine Jesus as a moral example, his light reveals that he obeyed his Father perfectly, even to the point of death on the cross.

 (2) When we examine Jesus’ teaching his light reveals his word of promise that because of the cross, the sins of the whole world are forgiven.

 **b. Jesus now shines with the light of the resurrection, casting out the darkness of death.**

 (1) Jesus passed through the darkness of death to life and light in his resurrection.

 (2) His resurrection light now shines through the darkness that engulfs our sinful world.

 **c. Through Baptism, Jesus’ light shines in you.**

 (1) Jesus said, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (v 5).

 (2) Jesus is still in the world, administering Baptism through his ministers to those born in the darkness of sin.

 (3) The gift Jesus sends is the Holy Spirit who has enlightened you with Baptism, so that Christ’s light now shines through you.

The Spotlight Shines on Jesus to Reveal Him as the Light of the World Who Casts Out the Darkness of Death.

*Conclusion:* Like the man born blind, we are born without the light of Christ. But Jesus has come into the world to illuminate our darkness. When the spotlight shines on Jesus, we see his light ever more clearly, shining from the cross. In Baptism, we are enlightened with the light of Christ, which now shines in us.