

Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2026





The Hope That Does Not Disappoint

We hope for all sorts of things over the course of our lives. Sometimes those hopes are wrapped up in very temporary, even silly things. We hope our team will win. We hope we will get a good parking spot at the grocery store. We hope Santa is able to deliver our entire list. Other hopes are more substantial. We hope to find someone to share our lives with. We hope to have a happy and healthy family. We hope for peace in our troubled world. We hope for an end to hatred and fear.

Time and time again, our hopes, both big and small, are disappointed. The darkness in the world proves deeper than we imagined. But there is one hope that will never disappoint. The hope that is ours in Christ Jesus is going to win out. When the darkness of this world has done all that it can, Jesus and his promises endure.

Over these 40 days, may you be renewed, once again, in the hope that will never disappoint.

- js

February 18, 2026

Romans 5:1-5

... and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you are our hope in the midst of suffering. Pour out your Spirit of compassion and mercy upon all those suffering in body, mind, or spirit. Keep our eyes fixed on you that the sufferings of this life do not overtake us. And when we can find no reason for hope, break into our darkness with your light and life. Amen.

DEVOTION

The church I grew up in did not impose ashes on Ash Wednesday. To this day I rarely receive ashes, but nearly every church I have served has included ashes as part of today's service. Despite rarely receiving ashes, I regularly mark people with ashes.

I have mostly thought of this as messy. Ashes embedded under fingernails, smudges on the white paraments, leaving a black mark when I reach for the microphone in the pocket of my alb – messy. Then one year, I found myself face to face with a young mother who was battling a very aggressive cancer. I put ashes on her head and said, “remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.” I wanted to stop the service right then. What a devastating thing to say to someone in that moment.

But those ashes were not just a smudge on her head. They were the cross marked upon her, marked upon every person there. And that devastating cross is the source of our deepest, our truest, our only enduring hope. Because of that cross, you can rest assured that when you have returned to dust, you will not remain there but will be raised to new life and will see the glory of God.

FOR REFLECTION

What do you think the glory of God looks like?

February 19, 2026

Romans 8:18-25

. . . the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay.

PRAYER

Gracious God, the whole universe awaits the day of your salvation. We await the day when the bonds of sin and death will be broken once and for all. Strengthen our faith as we wait and empower us to give an account for the hope that is in us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

DEVOTION

Paul has a way with words. It's not always the way we would like, but we cannot deny that this guy knows how to get our attention. And with today's reading the turn of phrase that stopped me in my tracks was "bondage to decay." When I first studied Romans seriously, as a 22-year old seminarian, this phrase made sense to me as a theological principle. Of course, the creation is in bondage to decay. That's just the way it is.

But today I read that and think about the chronic ache in my right hip, or the knees that are still angry about high school basketball exploits, or the five pairs of glasses scattered about my desk, none of which are quite right, or the fact that I have "purse ibuprofen," "car ibuprofen," "bedroom ibuprofen," and "office ibuprofen." There is nothing about "bondage to decay" that is at all abstract to me anymore. It is the reality of the human condition. It is the reality of my condition. It is the reality of the whole creation.

But this is not God's last word on this universe he has made. It's not his last word on you and me. He is not content to give us up to decay. Even as we speak, he is ushering in a new age of redemption. And in that new age, decay's grip on our bodies will be broken forever.

FOR REFLECTION

How does facing your mortality impact your sense of hope?

February 20, 2026

Hebrews 11:1-3

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,
the conviction of things not seen.*

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we long for assurance of what we hope for. We long for faith that overcomes fear and doubt. Give us this faith, this assurance, that by your Word and power, light is breaking into the darkness. Amen.

DEVOTION

In the movie *The Shawshank Redemption*, there is a recurring discussion about the danger of hope. “Red,” the long-term prisoner, is concerned that “Andy” holds out too much hope for a better day. From Red’s point of view, “Hope can drive a man insane.” He is trying to get Andy to understand the importance of accepting the circumstances of his imprisonment, rather than hoping for anything else. The very last line of the movie, after Red is released from prison and can finally imagine a different future, he can finally say, “I hope.”

As we live in the long shadow cast by death, it is only natural to turn away from hope, to ask as Israel asked, “How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” But it is in this strange land that we most desperately need the assurance of things hoped for. It is in this dark valley that we most need the light. And it is precisely into this dark valley that Christ comes, delivering his promise, delivering hope.

Belonging to Christ does not mean being naïve to the realities of our fallen world. Belonging to Christ is belonging to the one who is overcoming these realities with a new reality, a new creation. And you belong to this Christ.

FOR REFLECTION

Where in our world do we see a reflection of the view that hope is dangerous?

February 21, 2026

Psalm 39:1-13

And now, O Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in you.

PRAYER

Almighty God, our sin seeks to separate us from you, driving us into hiding, turning away from your face. Grant us faith to trust in your mercy, especially when we know too well that we do not deserve it. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DEVOTION

It's hard to know what is more terrifying for a child – getting caught doing something or living in fear of getting found out for something you have already done. For me, I rarely worried about getting caught in the act because those things I might get caught at were done far out of the sight of mom and dad. Going beyond the boundaries of where we were allowed to play, or fighting with my older sister, or ditching my younger brother – these things happened outside, while mom and dad were occupied with other things. But when I knew I had gotten away with something, then the guilt would just eat at me and drive me into hiding, sometimes quite literally.

The writer of Psalm 39 is in a difficult spot. He knows the weight of his transgressions. He knows the Lord would be right to hold them against him. But he also knows that the Lord is his only hope. No one else can rescue him from his situation. No one else can restore him.

Hope, confidence in God's mercy and loving-kindness, is the only thing that can bring us out of hiding when our sin is driving us to flee from God's presence. Hope sends us running to the one who is our salvation, despite the fact that he is also the one whose judgment we fear. Hope is the confidence that his judgment is mercy.

FOR REFLECTION

What drives you away from Christ's presence?

February 23, 2026

Psalm 71:1-6

For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you call us to have faith like a child, but we long to be grown up and self-reliant. When we run into the limits of our power, turn us back to you in faith. Forgive us for imagining we might outgrow our need for you. Amen.

DEVOTION

The expression “coming of age” carries within it the notion that we reach a point when it is time to take responsibility for our own lives. It implies maturity and perhaps a little hard-earned wisdom. It might also imply independence. To be “of age” means to no longer need anyone’s permission to live life as you see fit. It also means there is no one else required to help us out when we find ourselves in trouble.

Life in this world would not be possible without this kind of growing up. Perpetual adolescence would result in chaos. We depend on people becoming responsible adults and carrying out their callings with maturity and faithfulness.

That’s what makes faith a little bit confusing. Faith is the kind of trust that a child has when they know they can rely on their parents. When it comes to God, we don’t ever want to grow out of that kind of trust. We don’t ever want to get to a point of needing him less. In fact, growing in faith means depending on Christ’s mercy more and more.

Certainly over the course of a lifetime of faith we come to some new understandings. But no amount of understanding ever replaces faith. Before God we remain a child in the hands of our loving and faithful Father. There is no better place for you to be.

FOR REFLECTION

When have you thought you had outgrown faith?

February 24, 2026

Psalm 130

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope.

PRAYER

Merciful Father, sometimes the trials of this life overwhelm us. We can find no way out of the darkness. Teach us to cry out to you from the depths and hear our cries when we need you. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

DEVOTION

I couldn't even make a guess how many times I have read Psalm 130 in a hospital room or at a funeral home. In those moments of our own raw emotions we are more comfortable with the raw emotions we find in the psalms. Any pretense of politeness or concern about tone goes out the window when we find ourselves in the depths of darkness. What a relief it is to have such scripture close at hand in those times!

The psalmist speaks of waiting for the Lord, and perhaps we imagine this as a call to patience. But he waits for the Lord "more than watchmen for the morning." He waits with eager anticipation. He waits with longing. He is watching the clock. Those dark hours of the night can seem endless to one who watches for the morning.

But no matter how patiently or impatiently we wait, the Lord acts in his time. We do not force his hand. Sometimes that is a source of deep frustration to us. It might even feed our doubt of the Lord's presence in our lives. We can begin to wonder whether the one in whom we hope is paying any attention at all to our plight. But the Lord's fulfillment of his promises is more certain than the arrival of tomorrow morning. He is rescuing you from those darkest depths. You can count on that!

FOR REFLECTION

How has suffering impacted your faith?

February 25, 2026

Jeremiah 29:10-14

*For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord,
plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.*

PRAYER

Lord of the Universe, we keep ourselves busy with making plans, and sometimes that distracts us from the plans you have for us. Release us from our plans that we might cling to yours, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

DEVOTION

I love planners, checklists, color coding. I love seeing an agenda laid out in front of me with all the steps anticipated. It is so satisfying. And yet, I'm not a particularly good planner. I drove into a blizzard last week without having checked the weather forecast, unsure if I had my winter coat along, not currently owning an ice scraper.

The theme verse for today is frequently found on graduation cards. It is meant to give some assurance that there is a plan unfolding in the life of the graduate. And not just any plan – God's plan. And yet, we often read those words with an expectation that the fulfillment of God's plan for me is entirely dependent on my careful planning. God has a plan for me, and it happens to match up nicely with my plan for myself, so I just need to execute the steps and God and I will both be happy with the result.

The Lord's word to Jeremiah was quite different than that. God's plan for his people did not coincide nicely with their plans for themselves. Their plans had landed them in exile, without an ice scraper or a winter coat. The salvation God had in store for them was not a beautiful alignment of God's plans with theirs. It was a whole new plan. And while our plans often get us in trouble, God's plan is our salvation.

FOR REFLECTION

When have you found your plans at odds with God's plan?

February 26, 2026

Lamentations 3:19-24

*The steadfast love the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end.*

PRAYER

Gracious Father, in times of affliction sometimes that is all we can see. Our hearts and minds are weighed down with sorrow. Hope seems far away. Come to our aid. Show us your unending mercy, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

DEVOTION

The conventional wisdom of our age is that, in times of trouble we must look inward and dig deep to find the reserve of strength and grit to get ourselves through. We admire stories of perseverance against the odds. We hold up the rugged, self-reliant individual as our ideal. How many movies depend on such a character to save the day? To what extent is our national identity driven by this dream?

When that's the ideal we aspire to, it's a pretty big problem when the realities of life knock us flat. When we go digging around in our psyches in search of those reserves of inner strength and find nothing but wormwood and gall what are we supposed to do? The only storyline we seem to know is, "dig deeper."

Scripture tells us something entirely different than this. It is not deep within us that we find our strength, our courage, our hope. These come to us from outside, from the one whose steadfast love never ceases. The life of faith is not about resilience or grit or fierce determination or personal strength. It is being drawn into the one who is our strength. Faith doesn't look inward. It looks out. It looks to Christ, whose faithfulness never wavers. In the midst of our deepest shadows, his brilliant light sees us through.

FOR REFLECTION

When you look inward with honesty, what do you see?

February 27, 2026

Isaiah 40:27-31

*But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, help us to wait for you. When our sin would have us doubt you, renew us by your Spirit. When our rebellion leaves us alienated from you, bring us home once again. Amen.

DEVOTION

Sometimes I am astonished by what we imagine God owes to us. When trouble comes our way, it is easy—and tempting—for us to decry how “unfair” God is. We sometimes speak as if we are owed a long and happy life filled with prosperity and good health and that anything less than that is an injustice. When bad things happen we are not all that likely to think, “this seems about right. I probably had this coming.”

Isaiah delivered God’s word to a people who felt the same way. I’d like to say I can’t imagine saying, “my right is disregarded by my God,” but, in fact, we say various equivalents of that all the time. “How could God let this happen?” “Why am I being punished?” “Where is God in the midst of this?” These words roll off our lips with ease.

The prophet seems baffled by the attitude of his people, and yet he does not chastise them. He simply reminds them, once again, of who the Lord is. In the face of impatience, doubt, rebellion, complaining the Lord remains relentlessly *for* his people. He relentlessly refuses to unleash on us what we have coming. Instead, over and over and over again he pours out his mercy, renewing our strength.

FOR REFLECTION

What kinds of experiences make you wonder if God is fair?

February 28, 2026

Romans 15:7-13

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

PRAYER

God of hope, open our eyes to your presence in our midst. Turn us away from those voices that only know anger and destruction, chaos and fear. Help us to see your light in our darkness. Amen.

DEVOTION

One of my responsibilities is welcoming new member congregations to LCMC. We want to make sure churches know what they have joined. We tell them about districts and fellowships they could participate in. We tell them how the Annual Gathering works. We make sure they know about the benefit plans and the call process. We also make sure they understand our “culture,” our core values, or what we sometimes call “our DNA.” The underlying question is, “Will they fit in?” This makes good organizational sense. It’s hard to function when there are not shared values or assumptions.

Today’s passage from Romans stands in shocking contrast to that instinct. Speaking to Gentiles about the promises made to Israel, Paul doesn’t come to them with a list of expectations in order to become part of the family of faith. He simply bears witness to the fact that in Christ Jesus, the promises made to Abraham now belong to the Romans. He doesn’t seem too concerned about how well these Gentiles will fit in. He displays no fear of these new brothers and sisters in faith who may bring some ideas of their own about how to live together as God’s people. What a radical vision of God in a world bent on division!

FOR REFLECTION

What do you think is essential for Christians to agree on?

March 2, 2026

1 Peter 1:3-9

By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

PRAYER

Gracious God, when we get caught up in the desire for earthly blessings, remind us of the true source of our deep and everlasting hope. For there is no greater blessing than the new life you have promised in Christ Jesus. Amen.

DEVOTION

This week I found myself deep in a Wikipedia-based rabbit hole reading up on the lives of various entertainment personalities I recall from my youth. Somehow these people have all become very old! Peter's description of the inheritance that awaits us stands in stark contrast to that – "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading." When we think of the things that consume our attention and energy, the things that demand our loyalty or inspire our faith, how many can be described as "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading"? Certainly not anyone whose poster hung on my wall!

But it's not only those cultural icons that fade. The house we sunk all of our spare resources into, the job that required all of our time, the family that was supposed to make us whole and secure and safe, the bank account that always just needed a little bit more, the institutions that we were certain were untouchable, all of it is fading. None of it is actually up to the task of providing a living hope.

But you have an unfading inheritance waiting for you. Nothing can touch the new life that is yours in Christ Jesus. No darkness or suffering or disappointment or anxiety can ever undo what Jesus has done for you or stop him from what he is doing for you next!

FOR REFLECTION

When do you find material concerns undermining hope?

March 3, 2026

Hebrews 6:13-20

We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul . . .

PRAYER

Lord of the Universe, you have shown your steadfast faithfulness from generation to generation. Keep us anchored in the hope that flows from your mercy and faithfulness. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

DEVOTION

It's a strange thing to stop and think about how God might swear an oath. There is no one the Lord of the Universe can appeal to back up the truth of his word. There is no higher authority. And yet, it is the nature of humanity, even the beloved Abraham, our forefather in faith, to wonder about God's credentials. On what basis was Abraham supposed to trust in God's promise? On what basis are we supposed to trust in God's promise? It's hard to imagine expecting God to prove himself.

Except that is precisely our expectation. Time and time again we wonder if God is one we can really trust. Time and time again we question whether he will fulfill his promises. In the face of this, God does a strange thing. He swears an oath *by himself*. There is no one else whose reputation he would use to back up his word. This is something like the divine equivalent of when a parent says, "Because I said so." A parent's authority in relation to their child speaks for itself.

But the key difference between God's "because I said so," and that of any other parent is that it's not backing up a command. He is not saying, "Do this because I said so." He is saying, "I will do this because I said so." He is saving you . . . because he said he would.

FOR REFLECTION

How God has shown his faithfulness to you?

March 4, 2026

Psalm 42:1-11

*As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.*

PRAYER

Gracious God, there are times when the attacks of this world drive us to wonder whether you have forgotten about us. We long to see your face. We long to come into the new kingdom you have prepared. Help us to wait for you. Amen.

DEVOTION

Most children have, at one time or another, confronted the fear that their parents would forget them somewhere. It is one of those primal, instinctive fears. It probably starts the first time a mother hands her newborn to someone else. The possibility that we might be forgotten by those whose care we rely on the most is terrifying. And when parents prove that they are not unfailingly reliable, or worse yet, when they abandon their responsibilities entirely, that primal fear takes control of our lives in all kinds of destructive ways.

It's probably no surprise, then, that we transfer this fear onto our Heavenly Father. We are on the lookout for signs that he has forgotten about us, and when he does not respond in the ways we would like we are quick to conclude he has forsaken us. "Where are you?" we ask, in those dark nights of the soul. "Will I ever see you?" "Have you forgotten that I'm your child?"

Our parents might lose track of us from time to time as they go about living their own lives. God, by contrast, is not busy living his own life, forgetting about you. He has given his life for you. He has bound himself to you. He will never forget you because you are attached to him, forever.

FOR REFLECTION

What would make you think God has forgotten you?

March 5, 2026

Psalm 119:114-116

You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in your word.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, sometimes we run from you and sometimes we run *to* you. Be our hiding place and shield from all that would harm us. And when we are hiding from you . . . find us. Amen.

DEVOTION

A teacher of mine used to read a psalm every morning with his wife and he always dreaded it when they got to Psalm 119. It's so long and it is such an ode to how wonderful the law is and how diligent the psalmist is in following it. A real sinner might choke on these words.

We want to imagine ourselves as those who are just trying to be good people and live the best lives we can. We know how to justify our own actions, while being quick to judge similar actions in others. The writer of Psalm 119 wants all evildoers to go far from him. He seems not to seriously consider the possibility that he is, himself, an evildoer.

But what if we are evildoers? What if we are not those who are living according to the Lord's statutes? What if darkness lives in our hearts, even when we try to pretend it does not? Is there any hope to be found for us in these words?

Our psalmist who so delights in the law puts his finger on something crucially important that we might easily miss. The Lord is our hiding place. Our sin tells us we need to hide *from* him, that we cannot let him see the depths of the darkness within us. Faith brings us to hide *in* him. It calls us to find refuge from everything and everyone we fear in the one who is our salvation. That's hope for real sinners.

FOR REFLECTION

What sin have you been trying to hide from God?

March 6, 2026

Colossians 1:24-28

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

PRAYER

Gracious God, give us patience and faith in the midst of suffering, that we might remain confident of your steadfast love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

DEVOTION

I can't say that I have ever rejoiced in suffering. I do not like being in pain. I do not like having less than I think I need. I do not like being disliked. I do not like being sad. I like it when life is easy and the way ahead is clear. So when Paul says that he rejoices in his suffering my only conclusion is, "you're a better person than I am, Paul."

But whether we like it or not, the gospel and suffering go hand in hand. We belong to the one who came to save sinners bent on rejecting him. We belong to the one who met opposition at every turn. We belong to the one who finally went to death for the sake of his people. What would make us imagine that being attached to him would keep us safe from suffering? When we were baptized into Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death. There's no avoiding that.

But the hope that is poured into us through that baptism is the hope of Christ *in* us. Just as suffering and death were not the end of his story, neither will they be the end of ours. The suffering that comes our way in this life is not a sign of being forsaken by the Lord. Christ has attached himself to you. He has taken up residence with you. Forsaking you is not part of his plan.

FOR REFLECTION

How do you usually respond to suffering?

March 7, 2026

Galatians 5:1-6

*For through the Spirit, by faith,
we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.*

PRAYER

Lord, keep us steadfast in your Word so that we would not be lured away from your promise of salvation. When we are tempted to go astray, call us back, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

DEVOTION

We do not encounter an angrier Paul than the one we meet in Galatians. And all this frustration and anger is tied to the adoption of a religious ritual, circumcision, that Paul's own people had been practicing for centuries.

It's hard to imagine getting so upset about a religious ritual. Christians have picked up all sorts of things from other faiths – Seder meals, yoga, acupuncture, knocking on wood, throwing salt over your shoulder, mantras and chants, various forms of meditation and mindfulness. We hardly give any thought to the origins of these practices.

But in Galatians, Paul went so far as to declare that practicing circumcision would mean Christ was of no benefit to the Galatians. Far from being harmless, this practice was a direct attack on faith. It reflected the desire carried deeply within us all to rely on ourselves rather than God, to be righteous according to the law.

But our true hope and our true righteousness is never found in ourselves. It's never found in fixing ourselves up, getting our hearts and minds right, cleaning up all of our messes, smoothing out all of our rough edges. It's never found in creating "inner peace." Our hope comes from the Prince of Peace, who has rescued us from ourselves.

FOR REFLECTION

What are some rituals you practice? Where did they come from?

March 9, 2026

Ephesians 1:15-23

So that...you may know what is the hope to which he has called you.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, open the eyes of our hearts so that we would see you as you wish to be seen and know you as you wish to be known. And with our hearts opened, turn us toward our neighbors in love. Amen.

DEVOTION

This is a different Paul than the one we met in Galatians. The anger and frustration have given way to affection and thanksgiving. He is thankful for the faithful witness and love that is being reported out of Ephesus.

Those aren't bad things to be known for – faithfulness and love. Of all the things a church, or individual believers, might hope to be known for, it would be nice if faithfulness and love were somewhere near the top of the list. And yet, we settle for things of so much less significance. We seek to be known for our worship style, our political and moral positions, our cutting-edge programs, our inclusivity or exclusivity. Perhaps faithfulness and love are supposed to be a given. They don't need to be mentioned because they go without saying. *Of course* Christians are faithful and loving. And yet, we know from the record of scripture and our own personal experience in the church that such things can never be assumed. Sin has a tight grip on Christians, derailing our faithfulness and love.

That is precisely the grip Christ has broken in his death and resurrection. He is releasing our hearts from sin's tight grip. Faithlessness and hatred are giving way to his light and love.

FOR REFLECTION

Where have you seen faithfulness and love in your church?

March 10, 2026

Ephesians 4:1-6

*There is one body and one Spirit,
just as you were called to the one hope of your calling.*

Gracious God, thank you for the callings to which you have called us. Direct our days that we would be faithful in those callings. When we are unsure where to go, show us the way, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Lutherans are well known for having a “low anthropology.” We are not optimistic about the human capacity to improve or do good. Some imagine that the obvious conclusion of this low view of humanity is to just give up on life in this world and wait for the new kingdom to come.

What’s strange about this low anthropology is that it goes hand in and hand with an extremely high view of what we owe to our neighbors. We are given callings to carry out in this world for the sake of others. Here in Ephesians Paul begs that we would live out those callings faithfully.

It’s actually not strange that this low anthropology and high view of vocation go hand in hand. For Jesus’ sake we have been set free from the demand to improve ourselves. We have been made perfect through his redeeming love. Now that we are free from being endlessly worried about ourselves, we can turn our attention to those around us. Our callings are as varied as we are, but what they all have in common is that they are given to us as a way of serving our neighbors. And we live in the holy and certain hope that through these callings, all will come to know Christ as he wants to be known.

What are some ways you have carried out your vocations?

March 11, 2026

Zechariah 9:9-12

Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope.

PRAYER

Merciful Father, you have promised redemption and a new creation, free from sin that holds us captive. Be our stronghold as we await your new day. Grant that we would never be overtaken by despair, no matter what life brings us. Amen.

DEVOTION

I read recently that Americans, as a group, are angrier than we were a generation ago. Watching the news or reading the paper or looking at our phones provides more than enough evidence to believe this assessment. “The Algorithm” figured out that we are more likely to pay attention to something that makes us angry than makes us happy. So we are fed a constant diet of outrage.

There are many roads that anger takes us down, but one not talked about much is how closely anger and depression or despair are linked. They feed off of each other, leaving us mired in deep darkness. Leaving us stuck in the valley of the shadow of death.

Our stronghold against this assault of darkness is not cute puppy videos or binge-watching cooking shows. Our stronghold is Christ Jesus himself. Zechariah prophesies the arrival of the triumphant king who will finally bring peace to God’s people. That peace is not achieved through treaties or mutual assured destruction or superior fire power. That peace is achieved by Jesus simply declaring us no longer his enemies. He has set us free from the prison of anger and made us prisoners of hope.

FOR REFLECTION

How much time do you dedicate to things that make you angry? Why?

March 12, 2026

Psalm 31:21-24

*Be strong, and let your heart take courage,
all you who wait for the Lord.*

PRAYER

Mighty Lord, our strength often fails us, but yours never does. When we are crushed under the weight of our fears, be our strength. When we are empty, fill us with your steadfast love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

DEVOTION

My oldest nephew was terrified of the dark when he was little. No matter how much we tried to encourage him and pump him up, nothing made a difference. He wanted every light in the house on, every closet door closed, every exterior door locked. You couldn't know where all the monsters were, but surely somewhere dark.

One day he accidentally summed up a key aspect of the human condition. My dad gave him a pep talk and assured him that he could get safely from the den to the family room, even though not all the lights were on, because he was a brave boy. He took two steps into the darkened hallway and immediately returned to report to grandpa, "I'm not that brave." So grandpa walked him down the hall.

The dangers in our world are real and they are more powerful than we are. We cannot face them down with nothing but our courage. But God does precisely what my dad did for my frightened nephew. He walks with us through the darkness, through the danger, and brings us safely to the light. The Lord never forsakes his beloved people and he doesn't just give us pep talks. He has gone before us into death's dark valley. It is not our courage that makes the difference, but his faithfulness.

FOR REFLECTION

What makes you afraid?

March 13, 2026

Psalm 62:1-7

For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him.

PRAYER

Merciful God, all too often we are quick to fill silence with mindless chatter. We get nervous in the quiet. Teach us to wait for you, especially in those moments of silence. Overcome our need to have the answers and give us patience to trust in your time. Amen.

DEVOTION

There is quite a lot of silence in my house. At this moment, the only sound is the tapping of the keyboard and the faint buzz that always goes with electronic devices being plugged in. The furnace isn't even making any noise right now. Much of the time I am not aware of how quiet it is. But when I stop and think about it, if I haven't had any phone calls or online meetings or visitors (like today), I sometimes find myself thinking I need to call someone or text someone or turn some music on. Becoming aware of the silence creates a need to make some noise.

The psalmist writes of waiting in silence for God. As he feels himself attacked on all sides by those who wish to do him harm, he also experiences silence. Silence from God. Silence in his own soul. A silence he does not rush to fill, even if the silence is a time of great difficulty.

The psalmist is waiting in silence because he knows the next word, the next action belongs to God. As he awaits rescue from his afflictions, he knows that rescue will not come from chatter or a white noise machine. Rescue will come from the Lord. And the psalmist's enduring confidence is that the Lord is his rock and refuge. When he finally speaks, it will be the word of salvation.

FOR REFLECTION

What makes you comfortable or uncomfortable in silence?

March 14, 2026

Psalm 146:1-10

*Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God.*

PRAYER

Lord of the Nations, break us free from the grip of rulers and powers that seek the worship that belongs only to you. When we are tempted to chase after idols, restore us to faithfulness. Remind us of the hope we have in you. Amen.

DEVOTION

A few years ago we experienced a flurry of activity related to tearing down statues and monuments to those who were deemed unworthy of such honor. Plenty of indignation flowed from all directions, whether one was concerned with erasing history or with misplaced honor, the level of outrage was similar.

But why do we build statues to anyone? What makes someone worthy to be remembered for generations? How much of their story must be told? If they were amazing in one aspect of their life does that erase ways they were horrifying in other aspects? Or vice versa? If we were really going to tell the truth about the people we build statues for, we would have to admit that every one of them is deeply flawed. If we were willing to tell it, the story we would tell is of sinners accomplishing something of value, in spite of their sin. But we are impatient with complex stories. We like good guys and bad guys.

When we put our ultimate trust in sinners, we are always going to be disappointed. More than disappointed, we are going to be led into deep darkness. But there is one in whose hands all of creation finds its future. Christ Jesus is the one we can trust in all things. He will never fail us.

FOR REFLECTION

Where do you see idols vying for your worship?

March 16, 2026

Micah 7:1-7

*But as for me, I will look to the Lord, I will wait
for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.*

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, sometimes when we look at the darkness loose in your world we are overcome. We see the wicked flourishing, the poor forgotten, the stranger oppressed. As we wait for your salvation, open our hearts and our hands for all who suffer. Amen.

DEVOTION

Micah records a bleak picture of the world. Micah looked around at society, his own society, and was appalled. The rich exploited the poor. The powerful ran over the weak. The courts were in the hands of the unjust. Micah's announced that the Lord would not stand for this. A nation that operated this way could not expect the blessings of the Lord upon such endeavors.

Micah was not popular in his day. Political, economic, and religious leaders all had a big problem with his message. I wonder how he would be received today. Can we tolerate critiques of our systems? Can we receive correction? Do we really want to hear about the specifics of corruption in our world? To hear such things is to admit that we have not created any institutions that can save us. And where does that leave us? Just one more nation, one more people that will eventually be known only to archaeologists.

But Micah does have a word of hope for us. What he knows clearly is that salvation is never found in anything built by sinners. It is in the hands of the Lord. He recognizes the plight of all his children who need saving. Even the ones who imagine they don't.

FOR REFLECTION

What makes you quiet in the face of injustice? What moves you to speak or act?

March 17, 2026

Romans 12:9-21

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

PRAYER

Almighty God, as we wait for you, teach us to live with one another in love and peace. Bring harmony to our homes, our communities, our churches, our nation. Make us reflections of your love and mercy to all we meet, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

DEVOTION

I occasionally find myself sucked into online forums of people describing something that has happened to them and the entire internet offering their opinion on who was right and who was wrong in the story that has been told. A recurring issue is people being in relationships in which they do not seem to even like the other person. When Paul says, "Let love be genuine" he probably didn't have internet forums or reality television in mind, but he did understand that love is not always genuine.

We give lip service to love for one another while much of the time we are firmly focused on ourselves and what we want or need or think we deserve. The genuine love Paul speaks of is love that places the other ahead of ourselves. It is the love Christ has poured into us that overflows to another. It is love that doesn't keep score.

This love is alive in us only because it is the love Christ has first given us. And so Paul calls us to persevere in prayer, to call upon the one who is the source of our love, to continue to give us what we need to love one another. Rather than keeping score on whether that love is returned, we rejoice in the one whose love sustains us. His genuine love remains when all else has faded.

FOR REFLECTION

What makes a person hard to love?

March 18, 2026

1 Timothy 4:9-16

We have our hope set on the living God . . .

PRAYER

Living God, even as our ultimate hope is set on you, we continue to have duties in this world. Make us faithful in our service to you and our neighbors, that all people might come to know you as Savior, through Jesus Christ, Amen.

DEVOTION

One of the oldest debates in the church is whether the freedom of the Gospel will make us lazy. If we are not living under the constant threat of condemnation because of our hope in Christ, will we just put our feet up and coast until the new day? We see this concern raised in Paul's letters both when he has to defend his teaching against this accusation and when he has to respond to situations in which putting their feet up and coasting is precisely what Christians are doing.

The Pastoral Epistles, like 1 Timothy, were written a little later, when the church was somewhat more established. The reality was starting to sink in that the new day might be delayed and the church had to figure out how to live together for the long haul.

These letters are clear that having a deep, abiding hope in the promises of Christ and being deeply engaged in the world are not at odds with one another. We are citizens of two kingdoms. One of them will pass away, but until it does, we have work to do in it. And one thing that prepares us for this work is the "public reading of scripture." Being immersed in God's Word establishes the ground under our feet and sends us out into the world as people filled with hope and confidence in God's steadfast love and mercy.

FOR REFLECTION

How is your life shaped by Scripture?

March 19, 2026

1 Timothy 6:11-19

Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life.

PRAYER

Triune God, thank you for all the ways you provide for us. Stir our hearts to generosity and kindness. Hold us fast in the confidence that eternal life has already been won for us and even when all else goes away this never will. Amen.

DEVOTION

When I hear people use the expression “fight the good fight” I’m not always sure what they mean. Or maybe more precisely, I’m not sure that they mean what the Bible means. Often it seems to be applied to forwarding a particular agenda, advancing a cause. That cause or agenda might have something to do with the Gospel, but it is just as likely to just be our views on something. We want to believe it is the “good fight” because we want to believe that we are always on the side of “good.”

But 1 Timothy is talking about something specific. It is talking about the good fight *of faith*. This is the fight that holds fast to the promises of Christ when we are constantly tempted to hold on to other things for our security. We hold to our causes, our agendas, our possessions, our reputations, our legacies, imagining that these are what is most important. These are what give our lives meaning, what give us an identity.

The very first line of today’s reading sets out our true identity and meaning. “Man of God.” Beloved of God. Child of God. That’s the deepest truth about you. The good fight of faith is clinging to that life that really is life. There is nothing else to cling to that will endure. There is no other identity you create for yourself that can give you life.

FOR REFLECTION

Where do you see yourself tempted to give up faith?

March 20, 2026

Hebrews 10:19-25

He who has promised is faithful.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, make us bold to cling to your promises even when our sin seeks to tear us away from you. Give us the clear conscience that is only possible through the forgiveness of our sins. Amen.

DEVOTION

Guilt and shame are somewhat out of fashion these days. We are supposed to embrace our whole selves, warts and all. We should be proud of our accomplishments. We should celebrate ourselves. Go through life with swagger and confidence, and step away from anyone who holds you back.

Despite guilt and shame being out of vogue, there doesn't seem to be a lack of it around. People are hiding from all sorts of things, putting on masks and disguises so that no one sees behind the swagger and bravado. We live in fear of being "found out" in some way – as not good at our jobs, at parenting, at taking care of our health and our homes, at being a neighbor, at protecting ourselves and those we love, at controlling our anger, at breaking bad habits, at handling money, at faith. The demands of our lives are endless, and it is simply a fact that we fail on a variety of fronts every day and hope no one notices.

Guilt and shame do not just go away if we stop talking about them. Instead, they do their work in the dark, convincing us that we are on our own in this suffering. But Christ Jesus has an answer for this. It's not a self-help program. He simply washes you clean with his forgiveness. And what he washes away can never touch you again.

FOR REFLECTION

What do you hope no one notices about you?

March 21, 2026

1 Peter 1:10-16

Set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring when he is revealed.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, send your Spirit upon us that we would set all of our hope on your grace. Turn us away from false hopes that can only disappoint us. Give us the faith to let go of whatever is not of you. Amen.

DEVOTION

It's a tricky thing for us to discern what is our desire and what is Christ's will for us. We have an uncanny ability to convince ourselves that what we want and what God wants for us are exactly the same thing. After all, God would never want anything but good for us, right? He is gracious and merciful and eager to bless us. And we know just how he ought to bless us.

But the reality for sinners is that our desires are hardly ever aligned with Christ's will for us. We are constantly setting our hope on temporary things, constantly placing our wills ahead of God's will for us. We place our hope in our government, our bank account, our reputation, our resourcefulness, our strength. Despite constant warnings about idolatry, we cannot stop ourselves from placing our trust in the wrong things.

It's a painful thing when the Lord shows us the futility and powerlessness of our false gods. It's a painful thing to be confronted with the reality that our hope is misplaced. But it is precisely out of that pain, that death of our idolatry, that true hope can finally break through. Your true hope is not in the works of your own hands. It is in the holiness of Christ Jesus himself, poured out upon you for salvation.

FOR REFLECTION

When has your hope been disappointed?

March 23, 2026

Psalm 27:1-14

*I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.*

PRAYER

Almighty Lord, at times it seems that trouble is coming at us from every direction. We are on the brink of being overwhelmed. Rescue us from the darkness in our world and in our hearts. Amen.

DEVOTION

I can't say I have ever had an army encamped against me. Living in the place and time that I have lived, I have enjoyed a pretty safe, peaceful life, compared to what many in the world experience. I've never seen my street turned to rubble by a bomb. Soldiers have never taken up posts in my neighborhood. I have never felt unsafe in my own home. Having an army being encamped against me is quite a long way from anything I have experienced.

That does not mean that the sentiment in Psalm 27 is entirely foreign to me. Sin and death camp out on the doorstep all the time, waiting for the perfect moment to strike. They pounce when we are least prepared, most vulnerable. And they are ruthless. They introduce real danger into even the most peaceful of environments. And our defenses are no match for them.

But our Lord is up to the challenge of meeting even sin and death. He has defeated these enemies and emptied them of their power to make us fearful and ashamed. They cannot separate you from God. They cannot drag you into the deep darkness. You will see God in the land of the living, where sin and death have no place. That is a promise from Christ Jesus, himself.

FOR REFLECTION

When do you feel overwhelmed? What do you do?

March 24, 2026

Jeremiah 17:5-8

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for the blessings that you pour out upon us. Give us courage and faith, so that even in the years of drought, we would not be anxious, but would cling to your promises. Amen.

DEVOTION

It's a common story. Someone wins the lottery and five years later their life is in shambles. But when the jackpot reaches a certain level, we rush to buy a lottery ticket. Child stars grow up to be troubled adults. But parents are still eager to push their kids into the public eye, something made even easier by social media.

It's one thing to realize that false gods and false hope cannot bless us. That they will disappoint. But Jeremiah takes things even further in this passage. Misplaced trust, misplaced faith brings a curse upon us. It separates us from God's blessings. That is a hard word to hear, and it might sound unnecessarily harsh to our ears. Why does God need to curse us? Withholding his blessings is punishment enough.

But before we go blaming God for everything, perhaps we better look again. The curse of trusting in that which is untrustworthy is self-inflicted. Over and over and over again our false gods prove that they are not up to the task. But that does not stop us from chasing after them. We still imagine that our story will be the exception.

But there is one eager to bless us, eager to save us. There is one who is trustworthy at the deepest level. His blessings are yours, and they are more than enough.

FOR REFLECTION

Where have you misplaced your trust?

March 25, 2026

2 Corinthians 1:8-11

On him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again.

PRAYER

Gracious God, day after day you hold us fast in the face of the powers of darkness. Put us to work in your world on behalf of those who live in constant peril, for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

DEVOTION

There are certain things a person learns to say as a Christian, even if these things do not match how he really feels. We say, with Paul, that we are chief of sinners, even if, in our heart of hearts we are pretty sure there are other sinners around who are much worse. We say that God provides for our every need, while demonstrating by our words and actions that we are pretty sure that we provide for ourselves, and other people should too.

In today's reading, Paul talks about suffering great affliction in Asia. I cannot say that I have ever felt like I was suffering great affliction or experiencing deadly peril. Part of why that has been my experience is that the times I was in actual peril for my life, I was prescribed pretty strong painkillers that left me oblivious to the danger.

We kind of live our lives in that oblivion. If there is not immediate physical peril present, we float along as if everything is fine. We float along oblivious to the destructive power of sin and death that are constant threats, even when they are hidden.

Whether we recognize our need for it or not, Christ Jesus does not leave us to fend for ourselves against powers much greater than we are. He rescues us from all that would separate us from him, including our own sin.

FOR REFLECTION

Where do you see neighbors in peril?

March 26, 2026

Philippians 3:17—4:1

But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

Lord of the nations, overcome in us any temptation to equate our nation with your kingdom. When we have our mind set on earthly things, turn us back to you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

DEVOTION

I live in Minnesota, and as I write this, our state is in the midst of deep turmoil on many fronts. I look around and I see “religious leaders” of all sorts offering statements, assessments of the current situation, calls to action, calls to prayer. I have remained silent. It might be cowardice. It might be the principle that a statement from me could be perceived as being on behalf of our association. It might be that the principle provides handy coverage for cowardice.

What I am sure of is this. Every nation in the history of humankind has been led and populated entirely by sinners, and the first use of the law, the purpose of government, is to contain that sin as much as possible. But what the law can never do is make us the kingdom of heaven on earth.

Wherever you may be sitting as you read this, you are living under some sort of governing authority. Some day that authority will go away. It will disappear completely. That's what we are praying for when we say, “thy kingdom come.” Until that day, our callings move some to govern and some to protest, some to enforce laws and some to demand reform, some to proclaim the promises that usher in the new kingdom. When that new day finally comes, we will all throw ourselves upon Christ's mercy for all that we have done and failed to do. He, alone, is our righteousness.

FOR REFLECTION

How do you discern what your neighbor needs from you?

March 27, 2026

Psalm 94:16-23

*When I thought, "My foot is slipping,"
your steadfast love, O Lord, held me up.*

PRAYER

Merciful Father, at times the cares of this world are more than we can bear. We reach the end of our strength and our feet are slipping. In those times, show us your steadfast love, and hold us up. Amen.

DEVOTION

One of my favorite songs includes the lyric, "the weight of all the world can blind me to its beauty." I think about that sentiment often. The news that comes in day after day is deeply discouraging. At times it seems entirely naïve to live as people of hope in this world. And if the weight of all the world rests upon our shoulders then there really is no grounds for hope.

But the weight of all the world actually rests upon someone else. It rests upon the one who holds the world in his hands. It rests upon the one who holds us up when all other foundations give way.

The source of our deepest hope is not human resilience or ingenuity or creativity. It is not in our capacity to rise to the occasion. It is not in some imagined goodness at our core. The source of our deepest hope is the one who has overcome the world. All of the darkness we see in our world, the darkness that would drive us into despair, all of it has been taken up into the cross of Christ. All of it has been defeated.

It is not up to us to be the light in a dark world. We are reflectors of the light of Christ, who will never be overcome. The power of darkness has done all it could to him, and still, he lives. So will you.

FOR REFLECTION

When have you felt like your foot is slipping?

March 28, 2026

Romans 15:1-6

*May the God of steadfastness and encouragement
grant you to live in harmony with one another.*

PRAYER

God of steadfastness and encouragement, you see your world and your church living in turmoil and strife. As you have turned our hearts to you, so turn us to one another, that we might glorify your name, in Jesus Christ. Amen.

DEVOTION

One of things I love about Paul's letter is his honesty about the human condition. He never displays undue optimism in our capacities. He recognizes us for the sinners that we are. And at the same time, he does not shy away from calling us to reject our darkest impulses. Knowing the truth about our condition does not mean embracing it or reveling in it.

As he reaches the end of his letter to the Romans we see him calling us to reject our basic self-centeredness. Our calling is to build up the neighbor, not to build up ourselves. That's a radical word to people curved in on themselves, people caught in the grip of sin. Something deep within us believes strongly in 'survival of the fittest'. Our instinct is to look after ourselves first. The emergency instructions before every commercial flight are clear – put on your own mask before helping others. We carry that instinct out into the world. First I will take care of myself, and if there is something left over after that, I will think about others.

Christ's kingdom operates in a fundamentally different way. Knowing that we are in the hands of the Living God, we need not cling so tightly to whatever we can grab onto in this world. Your neighbor is not your competition for scarce resources, but another for whom Christ died.

FOR REFLECTION

What prevents you from living in harmony with others?

March 30, 2026

Philippians 2:5-11

. . . so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend . . .

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, at times we wonder if it is really the case that every knee shall bend at the name of Jesus. We look at our world, we look at the church, and we are overcome with doubt, unsure whether your word and will will carry the day. Continue to fill us with faith in the midst of our doubt. Amen.

DEVOTION

Today's passage from Philippians is one of the oldest statements of faith in Christianity. It is often referred to as the "Christ Hymn." Whether it originated with Paul, or was passed along to him, it captures the heart of Paul's gospel, making a clear statement of who Jesus is and what he has accomplished.

The hymn ends in the certainty of Christ's triumph. The day will come when every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. The whole creation will know who God is and what he has done for his beloved people. This triumphant ending is shocking, given where the hymn begins. Christ Jesus began his work on our behalf by emptying himself of his equality with God and becoming a slave to sinners, sinners who put him to death.

If I wanted the whole creation to recognize me as Lord, I can't imagine starting by emptying myself. Every instinct would be to offer up some impressive displays of power. Make some noise. Crush some enemies. Then people would understand who they are dealing with.

When Jesus wanted us to know who we were dealing with, he gave himself away. What a remarkable thing!

FOR REFLECTION

What causes you to doubt whether every knee will bend to Jesus?

March 31, 2026

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

We proclaim Christ crucified.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, make us bold in our proclamation of your cross. When we are tempted to proclaim power and glory according to our standards, fill our hearts with the foolish wisdom, the weak power, of the cross. Amen.

DEVOTION

As Paul roamed around the Roman Empire preaching the Gospel he ran into a recurring problem. People either wanted some sign that would prove the truth of his message, or they wanted to be persuaded by the strength of his argument. Signs would convince those who were inclined to be religious and a good argument would convince those trusted in reason.

The problem was that Paul had not been given either signs or wisdom, at least not signs or wisdom that anyone recognized. What he had been given was the message of the cross. His work would have been so much easier if he could have called down fire from heaven or gone toe to toe with the greatest philosophers Athens had to offer.

For much of the history of the church since Paul's day, we have been tempted to "give the people what they want" in terms of signs and wisdom. Because it's not just that coming into the world and dying would not be our *first* choice for what God should do. It is incomprehensible to us. It's foolishness and a stumbling block. It's no way for God to behave.

This is the wisdom and power of God. His wisdom refuses to persuade. His power refuses to dominate. Instead, he makes a promise: by this death you have life.

FOR REFLECTION

What are some ways you try to avoid the cross?

April 1, 2026

Romans 5:6-11

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

PRAYER

God of Love, thank you for the truly stunning act of love for us that Christ worked in his cross. Forgive us for our constant demands that you prove yourself to us. Open our eyes and hearts to your steadfast love, which has never failed us. Amen.

DEVOTION

The public discourse we engage in these days is a stark reminder of how we think about friends and enemies. We can, and will, defend any actions by those we love and we can, and will, condemn any actions by those we hate. The exact same actions can be judged righteous or unrighteous based entirely on whether we hold the same views as the person engaging in those actions. Our friends are right and deserving of praise and honor. Our enemies are wrong and should probably be locked up, or worse. That's what lives in the darkest recesses of the hearts of people. From time to time we trot those darkest recesses out into the light of day and embrace them as if they are not sin.

What a strange thing, then, to carry the name of the one who gave his life for the salvation of his enemies. Christ Jesus didn't come into the world gathering up the righteous. He came into the world to gather up sinners, not for condemnation, but for life, forgiveness, salvation.

There would be no hope for the likes of us if Jesus were not a friend of sinners. All we have to offer him is the darkness in our hearts. And he gives his light in exchange.

FOR REFLECTION

Why would God save a sinner like you?

April 2, 2026

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, on this night of your betrayal you remained steadfast in your devotion to your beloved. Through the gift of your Holy Supper keep us steadfast in faith that we might live in hope of forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation. Amen.

DEVOTION

“For where there is forgiveness of sin there is also life and salvation.” I have not always fully appreciated these words from the Small Catechism. The connection between forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation has not been obvious to me. These seem like three distinct things and it would be easy enough to have any one of them without the other two.

But to imagine that these can be separated is to fail to understand any of them and to fail to recognize what God in Jesus Christ has for us. Life lived constantly in the shadow and condemnation of our sin is a living death. That is evident when we cling tightly to the wrongs others have committed against us, refusing to forgive. Relationships die a painful death. And salvation that just drags our sin forward into the new creation leaves us still estranged from God, but now eternally.

But what Christ Jesus came into this world to do, what he has accomplished through his cross, what he gives to you in his Supper, is forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation. Anything that might stand between you and God, anything that makes for death, anything that would leave you condemned, has been taken up into his death. Forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation are yours. Forever.

FOR REFLECTION

How does being a forgiven sinner shape you?

April 3, 2026

Psalm 22

*Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord,
and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.*

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, in those moments when we feel forsaken, lost, crushed, abandoned, give us the certainty of salvation, the abiding hope that your deliverance is certain. And with this hope sustaining us, inspire us to proclaim that deliverance to our neighbors near and far. Amen.

DEVOTION

My childhood pastor used recite Jesus' last words during the Maundy Thursday service, which in our church was more like a Good Friday service. I always found that service deeply disturbing, and, to this day, when I read the words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" I hear them in Pastor Erickson's voice. This cry from the cross eliminates any abstractions from the horrific violence enacted against our Savior. The violence *we* enacted. On this day so long ago, Jesus suffered real pain and real death on account of our sin. There's no denying that. No glossing over it. No hiding from it.

But the Father to whom he cried out was not standing idly by in the midst of this. Salvation for his beloved people arose out of this deep darkness. For millenia, the church has tried to tidy this up and make it make sense, make it inevitable, make it right and fitting. But the reality is that out of our deepest darkness, our deepest sin, our deepest rebellion and rejection, God brought life and salvation, delivering us from sin and death, delivering us from ourselves. He has not and will not forsake us.

FOR REFLECTION

How does reading all of Psalm 22 inform your reading of the first verse?

April 4, 2026

2 Corinthians 3:12-18

Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness.

PRAYER

Gracious God, when we are timid, when we are fearful, when we are unsure, restore in us the hope that makes us bold. Send us out into the world, out to our neighbors, not with arrogance, but with confidence and compassion. Make us bold to share your word of salvation. Amen.

DEVOTION

I would not be described as “bold.” I don’t make bold fashion choices or announce bold political positions or boldly go where no one has gone before. My preference is to blend in. And yet, for 30 years I have spent my life standing in front of people speaking on behalf of the Living God. That is not attributable to natural boldness. When the Gospel grabbed hold of me—a moment I have no recollection of, being ten days old when I was baptized—Christ created in me a boldness that is entirely alien. There is no longer any choice for me about whether to speak or be silent because this hope that has been given to me is Christ’s gift to all of creation and that requires sharing it.

Timidity and fear and doubt still manage to rear their heads. Many days, in many situations, I have absolutely no idea what to do or say. But in the face of sinners desperately in need of rescue, even sinners who have no sense that they need a rescue, Christ Jesus has made me bold to announce, with confidence and certainty, that all that is his is yours. All that is yours is his. All that is driving you into hiding, despair, guilt, anger, fear, all of it has been defeated and will never stand between you and God again. That promise is certain!

FOR REFLECTION

Who could you invite to Easter worship?