

The Road to Emmaus

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The Season of Lent, as I have frequently explained, includes several different emphases. Among these, I suppose that we most readily think of its penitential character, which surely is one aspect of the season; yet, there are some other, equally important characteristics.

The forty days of Lent—beginning Ash Wednesday and continuing until Holy Week (but not including the Sundays, which are *in* Lent but not *of* it)—originated as a final period of intensive catechesis for those who would enter the Church through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism during the Great Vigil of Easter on Holy Saturday. Thus, it is a time for thorough instruction in the Christian faith, and also for a remembrance of one’s Baptism into the Cross and Resurrection.

It is especially in this respect that the Season of Lent becomes for us a penitential season, as we recall the significance of Holy Baptism: Drowning the old Adam through daily contrition and repentance . . . that the New Man (Christ) might rise in us . . . and live His Life in us.

It is important to understand that our Lenten discipline is not only a “spiritual” preparation, if by that terminology we exclude our bodies and our minds. Our Salvation in Christ, our faith and life as His people, is always concerned with all that we are: body, mind, and soul. Indeed, our souls are united with Christ only by the participation of our bodies & minds in His Gospel—Word and Sacraments.

So everything we are—our entire being—is prepared by repentance and forgiveness for the Cross and Resurrection of Holy Week. Our bodies are prepared as we attend the Divine Service, as we kneel for confession, as we fold our hands in prayer and make the sign of the Cross, as we receive into our hands & mouths the precious Body and holy Blood of Christ. Our bodies may also be disciplined by fasting.

Our minds are instructed by the Word of God as we hear the Holy Scriptures read and proclaimed; as we receive the preaching of the Holy Gospel; as we join together in singing (and hearing) the Psalms and Hymns of the Church; as we are taught and as we teach the faith.

It is precisely through these bodily and mental activities—that is, by hearing and receiving the Holy Word and Sacraments of Christ—that our souls are likewise prepared for Holy Week (and indeed, for the entire life that we are called to live as Christian people). It is not at all Christian to look for the answers inside of ourselves, within our own (sinful) thoughts and feelings, as though we could find and make our own way to God. Such efforts are the very essence of righteousness by works, which is the very opposite of grace and faith.

No, everything must come from outside of us; specifically, from Christ, Who speaks to us in the preaching of His Gospel–Word, and Who deals with us in the administration of His Holy Sacraments. As our Lutheran Confessions teach on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, anything that is attributed to Christ and His Spirit apart from this *external* Word and Sacrament is not, in fact, from Christ at all, but from the devil. But, oh, how easy it is to fall prey to such temptation. Which is why it is a matter of discipline to base our Christian faith and life on nothing more nor less than the Word of God. In this respect, we follow the example of Christ Himself, Who resisted the temptation of Satan—not with His own divine power and authority as the Son of God (which we could not do in any case)—but as our Brother in the flesh, He relied solely on the Scriptures: “It is written!”

Of course, there is a never-ending stream of situations, decisions, and opportunities set before us that are nowhere addressed specifically in Holy Scripture. Much of our life is a matter of Christian freedom. In all things, we proceed in the humility of repentance—knowing that even our best intentions and even our “righteous deeds” are tainted with sin like filthy rags. However, we also proceed in the confidence of faith, knowing that we are covered by the righteousness of Christ.

THE LORD JESUS SERVES YOU WITH HIS OWN LIFE

The Sermon Text is the Word of Jesus concerning the glory of His Cross and Passion, which His disciples are given to share, as recorded by Saint Mark (10:32–45).
In the Name + of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

“Behold,” He said to His disciples, “we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again.”

St. Luke records, that, after the Lord reveals for this third time — so clearly and explicitly, in advance — that He will suffer and die in Jerusalem, His disciples still fail to understand. St. Mark rather demonstrates this lack of understanding by recording what happened next: how James and John (through the agency of their mother) ask for positions of honor in the Kingdom of His Glory, and how the other disciples become so jealous and indignant (no doubt because they coveted these same positions for themselves, but were too coy or too timid to ask for them boldly and outright).

Their misunderstanding of Christ and His Glory could hardly be more obvious. But we are no better.

In order for Jesus to be the Christ and the King of Glory, He must suffer and die as a Servant and give His Life as a Ransom for the many. For His Passion & His death by Crucifixion are not His defeat, but His divine Glory as the Son of God, and the very way that He establishes the Kingdom of God among those He comes to serve.

In the footsteps and example of this Crucified King, Who serves the people of His Kingdom with Himself and His own Life, His disciples are called to carry His Cross; to live and die by faith under His Cross; and to find their glory and their life — not “in spite of” the Cross — but precisely *in* the Cross of Christ.

And to this end, His Apostolic Ministers — those who are sent to His Church in His Name and stead — are called to serve His people (like holy “waiters,” as it were) with His Cross, as servants and slaves of His Cross; neither seeking fame or fortune for themselves, but giving their entire lives in service for the sake of the many.

As one commentator has put it, the Word of Jesus contrasting the servants of His Church with the leaders of the world teaches “the Church to shun [such] secular leadership models; [for] the Church is to be a counter-culture within culture, not a poor imitation of culture.”

Because the Church is the Body and Bride of Christ, the Son of God who became Flesh and suffered death, she is wholly different than the world and its enterprises: She is not a business, nor a political entity, nor a marketplace or entertainment industry, nor a social club. None of these models work for the Church. She lives *in* the world, but she is *not of* the world. She takes her cues instead from Christ Jesus, and she follows His example. Her “Declaration of Independence” is the Cross of Christ, and her only “Constitution” is the Word of God.

That Word says to those who jockey for position, who plot and scheme and connive to get their way, that if you wish to be great in this Church and Kingdom of Christ, then you must become the servant of all the rest; and if you wish to be the first, then you must become a slave — and, taking up the Cross to follow Christ, you give your entire life for the sake of others.

It is much easier, of course, and far more in keeping with your sinful human nature, to follow the poor example of the disciples instead. You know it happens, and you see it all the time, just as I do:

Cozying up to those in authority, privately and covertly, seeking to wrap them around your finger, in order to get what you want. And justifying such intrigues on the premise of your good intentions. Or being too timid or too lazy to attempt such things yourself, but coveting the same opportunities, you gather together in cliques to gossip and complain. For surely *you* could do it all so much better.

And how ashamed we all should be, with all our worldly pride and sinful ambition, to be engaged in such disgraceful power struggles at the very foot of the Cross, in the presence of our gracious *Lord* and Savior, Jesus Christ — the Almighty and Eternal Son of the Living God, who, though He was rich beyond measure, yet for your sake He became utterly poor, that you might become the riches of God in Him; and though He is God Himself, He made Himself nothing, and He humbled Himself unto death, even the death of the Cross.

Handed over to death by His own Father; handed over to the Gentiles by His own people, the very ones He came to seek and to save and to serve. Mocked and Scourged and Crucified. But His divine greatness and glory as the Son of Man are precisely here in the depths of His humble service. And look at yourself and your life in contrast!

But thanks be to God, that Jesus does all this — not to shame you or condemn you, nor even just to leave you a good example, but in order to save you from yourself and from your sinful pride and arrogance. He does it in order to forgive your sins with His own Blood, shed upon the Cross, and now poured out for you in His Cup of Salvation. He does it in order to bear all your sins and griefs and sorrows, all your burdens and sadness, in His own Body on the Cross, now given to you (for the strengthening of your flesh) in His Holy Communion.

He serves you with His very Life, that He might share His Life with you, lift you up with Himself in His Resurrection, and usher you into His Kingdom: here in time, and hereafter in eternity.

All of this He has done for you, and once-for-all, upon the Cross — where God the Father sacrificed His Son, His only Son, Jesus, whom He loved. But also to this very day, and (as He has promised) to the close of the age, your dear Lord Jesus continues to serve you with His very Life, with His Body and His Blood, for the forgiveness of your sins and for new Life in Him.

You won't ever make it on your own. And this side of heaven, you won't ever follow perfectly the example of Christ Jesus. You will

continue to fall prey to your pride and arrogance, to your lust and ambition, to your selfishness and jealousy, to your backbiting and contempt, and to whatever other sins you struggle with.

For all of these sins, you need forgiveness. The answer and solution isn't "trying harder" or "doing your best," but only forgiveness — from Jesus. Which is why He has so arranged *everything* in His Church on earth for the forgiveness of your sins, through many and various means: the preaching of the Holy Gospel, the washing of the water and the Word in Holy Baptism, the spoken and personal Word of Holy Absolution, His Body and Blood in the Holy Communion, and the mutual consolation and support of His Holy People (that is, you and your brothers and sisters in Christ, forgiven and *forgiving*).

And to this end, and for this purpose, He has Called, Ordained, and Sent some of His Christian disciples to be His Ministers of this Gospel of forgiveness unto His Church — so also unto *you*.

To be a "Minister" of Christ is to be a *waiter* at His Table — not a Table at which *He* is seated as the honored Guest (for He does not come to be served, but to serve) — but the Table of His Church, at which He serves and feeds His people with Himself. That is what the Greek word for "Minister" here means and implies: the formalized, ritual service of a *waiter*, serving his Master's Food to his Master's people at his Master's Table (in his Master's way). First in *service*, as a slave to all the others, a Minister of Christ washes them in preparation for the Meal (in the waters of Holy Baptism), just as Jesus washed the feet of His disciples at the Last Supper. A Minister of Christ also carefully instructs the guests in the reading of the "Menu" (catechizing them in the Gospel—Word of Jesus); and he faithfully serves them with the Supper, so carefully & lovingly prepared.

He serves the people, and he serves Christ, by serving the Meal of Christ to His people.

And that is how Christ serves you through me.

Once again, you may be thinking to yourself, it's always the same old, same old thing. Everything always comes down to the Lord's Supper. It's always Holy Baptism and the Holy Communion. A complaint? Yes, maybe so, for some, but one that is exactly right.

Listen to what Jesus says: "Can you drink the Cup that I must drink? Can you be baptized with My Baptism?" You can. You must. "You will," He says! But how? Do you hear how He describes His entire Life, and His Ministry unto death, in the terms of these two Holy Sacraments? These really are the heart and center of everything — of all that Jesus does for you, and gives to you, and shares with you.

His Baptism, His Cup, these are the Means whereby His Cross (and His Resurrection) become yours, whereby your sins are all forgiven, whereby you receive His Life and are seated with Him in the heavenly places, in the Glory of His Kingdom.

If we consider, first of all, the Cup: In the Old Testament, it was used by the Prophets as an image of God's wrath and His judgment against sin. And that is likewise the first sense in which it is used here by Christ, as again when He later prays in the Garden of Gethsemane: One can only imagine (in a limited way) the trembling apprehension of our truly human Brother in the flesh, when He asks, "Father, if possible, take this Cup from Me. . . ."

The physical pain of the Crucifixion would be enough all by itself to cause the bravest hearts among us to faint; but this "Cup" that our Lord was drinking is far worse — the everlasting wrath and judgment of hell and damnation, leveled against the sins of the entire world, of all times and place (including all of your sins), carried in the body of the holy Son of God, and judged forever in His flesh on the Cross.

That is the Cup, which He drained down to the dregs for you and for the many.

How is it, then, that James & John — *and you* — will drink this Cup that Christ is drinking? Surely you are not able to drink the Cup of

wrath and judgment against even your own sins; far less the sins of others. But it is possible for you to drink the Cup of Christ, because He has already drained that Cup for you; because He has poured out His Blood of the New Testament for the forgiveness of your sins; because what is wrath and judgment for Him is mercy and everlasting life for you and for the many. In receiving the Cup of Christ, which He pours out for you in the Holy Communion, you drink to the dregs the fullness of His Life and Salvation.

The same thing holds true in the case of His Baptism, with which you are also baptized. From the moment that He stepped into the waters of the Jordan River and submitted Himself to Saint John's Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, the Lord Jesus took the sins and iniquities and frailties and burdens of the entire world upon Himself and bore them in His own Body all the Way to the Cross.

He entered the water sinless, holy and perfect, but He emerged thoroughly soaked in our sin. And as such, He thus describes His Life — here in this Gospel and elsewhere — as one long continuous Baptism unto death. A Baptism in which He undergoes the death-dealing Flood of God's wrath and judgment against sin.

Consequently, as in the case of the Cup which He has drained in our place, the waters of Baptism are one thing for Him and quite another for you. In each case, it is a Baptism into His Cross (as you know from the Catechism and from the words of St. Paul in Romans Six): We were buried with Him, therefore, through Baptism into His death.

But whereas this Baptism is (again) for Christ a drowning of judgment and wrath, it has thus become for you a rich and full washing away of sins and a gracious water of Salvation. For you enter those waters thoroughly sinful and unclean, but you emerge in the beautiful white robes of Christ's perfect righteousness — united with Him as an adopted son of His Father, a recipient of His Holy Spirit, and born again as a brand new creation.

Now, as you have received this Gospel of Christ in Holy Baptism, and as you continue to receive it, poured from His Cup; as you are served by His Ministers of the Cross, so do you become “great” in Christ within your own particular vocation. And for you, too, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, your “greatness” is that of His Cross.

Which means what? Not that you go looking to be put death, and not that you should become some kind of masochist in search of suffering and pain. But no, your greatness in the Cross means living by faith in all manner of circumstances — neither prideful nor despairing, but confident in Christ, come what may.

It is a greatness that dedicates your life to others, beginning with your spouse and children, sacrificing your own will, and laying aside your own ambitions . . . working day after day to support your family, but saying “no” to the promotion that would take you too much away from them . . . visiting your in-laws, or taking your family to the zoo, when you would rather be fishing or watching the game . . . wiping noses, wiping bottoms, and cleaning up after a sick child in the night . . . or giving up the career you always wanted for the child you hadn’t planned . . . caring for Grandpa, even if he can’t remember you or your name, and he’s mad at the world for going on without him.

The list of examples could go on forever, as many as there are faithful Christian people bearing the Cross, and bearing up under the Cross, living by grace through faith in Christ alone, sharing His glory in humble service, and trusting all the while — not in themselves — but in His Baptism and His Cup.

Yet, all the while you’re rejoicing in this life that you live in Christ, in the glory and the greatness of His Cross, at the same time you must admit and bemoan all the many ways you still seek and strive for the glory of the world instead — far too often at the expense of others, and certainly *not* to the glory of God and the benefit of your neighbor. All the times you push and elbow your way to the front, you claw your way to the top, you turn up your nose and turn your back on those who need your love.

When even your own husband or wife is neglected; and your friendships are selfish and self-serving; and your job is just a job, and not a means of serving others; and you're far more likely to promote your children over and above all others, than you would ever be to sacrifice their lives in deference to the Lord.

Which is why, again, it was necessary for the Son of Man to be handed over to His voluntary suffering and death, by the Father who *has* sacrificed His beloved Son in your place — the Lamb of God who takes upon Himself and takes away the sin of the world; the Bridegroom who is always faithful and attentive, even when you are not; the Friend who seeks not His own, but always your best interests, even at great cost and personal hardship to Himself; the One who came not to be served, but to serve — with His own Life, and with His own flesh and blood, freely given as a ransom for the many.

Thus does He ever and always call you and gather you to Himself, again and again, to lift you up in the forgiveness of His Cross, as often as you have fallen down. By the waters of your Baptism into His Cross and Resurrection, however long ago that was, He continues to cleanse you of all your sins — and to usher you into His Kingdom. And here, within His Holy Church, He seats you at His Table, and He girds Himself to serve you, presenting you with His cup and speaking His Word of mercy:

“Take, drink; this Cup is the New Testament in My Blood, which is poured out . . . *for you* . . . and for the many, for the forgiveness of all your sins,” for the strengthening of your faith, and for life everlasting.

In His dear Name, and for His sake. Amen.

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God the Father, the Communion of His Holy Spirit will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.

The Services of Holy Week and Easter, Anno Domini 2010:

In order that we might be called by the Lord to repentance and receive forgiveness in His Cross and Resurrection, we avail ourselves of His Word and the preaching of His Gospel. To this end, please be aware of the following special services in Holy Week and Eastertide:

- **28 March** ('Palm Sunday'): Divine Service of the Holy Communion, beginning 9:00 a.m. *with the processional of Palms (in which all of the children are invited to participate!)*.
- **29 March** (Monday): The Order of Matins at 9:00 a.m. to mark the beginning of Holy Week with Scripture and prayer.
- Also on **Monday (29 Mar)**, the Divine Service at 7:00 p.m.
- **30 March** (Tuesday): The Order of Matins at 9:00 a.m. to continue our observance of Holy Week with Word and prayer.
- Also on **Tuesday (30 Mar)**, the Divine Service at 7:00 p.m.
- **31 March** (Wednesday): The Order of Matins at 9:00 a.m. to continue our observance of Holy Week with Word and prayer.
- Also on **Wednesday (31 Mar)**, Divine Service at 7:00 p.m.
- **1 April** (Maundy Thursday): Service of Corporate Confession and Absolution, beginning at 9:00 a.m.
- Also on **Maundy Thursday (1 April)**, the Divine Service of the Holy Communion, beginning at 7:00 p.m. This special service concludes with the ceremonial stripping of the Altar.

- **2 April** (Good Friday): Solemn Divine Service, beginning at 7:00 p.m., celebrating and proclaiming the victorious Cross and Passion of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
- Also on **Good Friday (2 April)**, the *Tre Ore* Service at Our Redeemer, South Bend, from 12:00 Noon until 3:00 p.m.
- **3 April** (Holy Saturday): An abbreviated Order of Matins at 9:00 a.m. marks the Sabbath Rest of our dear Lord Jesus.

• *Following the Order of Matins (before or after lunch), I am again counting on the Emmaus Youth to assist with preparing the Sanctuary for the Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord.*

- Also on **Holy Saturday (3 April)**, the Great Vigil of Easter, with a reaffirmation of Holy Baptism and the Divine Service of the Holy Communion, celebrating the Lord's Resurrection.

• *We are discussing some potentially new approaches to the scheduling of the Easter Vigil and the Easter Sunrise Service; so please watch for further information on those Service times.*

- **4 April** (Easter Sunday morning):

The Divine Service of the Holy Communion at Sunrise.

The Divine Service of the Holy Communion, celebrating the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord, beginning at 9:00 a.m.

• *Note, also, that an **Easter Breakfast/Brunch** will be served following each of the Divine Services on Easter Sunday.*

- Throughout the first week of Easter, the Divine Service will be celebrated each day at Emmaus, as we revel in the Lord’s triumphant victory over sin and death:
 - At 7:00 p.m. on **Easter Monday (5 April)** and **Easter Wednesday (7 April)**
 - At 9:00 a.m. on **Easter Tuesday (6 April)**, **Easter Thursday (8 April)**, **Easter Friday (9 April)**, and **Easter Saturday (10 April)**

Opportunities for Individual Confession & Absolution:

Among the Six Chief Parts of the Christian faith and life, as taught and explained in the Small Catechism, is the Office of the Keys, exercised in Confession and Holy Absolution. It is meet, right and salutary for Christians to review this part of the Catechism regularly, and to avail themselves of this means of grace and forgiveness.

To that end, please note those times when either Pastor Grobien or I will be vested and available in the Emmaus Sanctuary, specifically for the sake of hearing confession and granting the Holy Absolution of Christ. These times are indicated on the calendar each month, and in the weekly announcements ahead of time. In addition, I am always available (as is Pastor Grobien) to hear your confession and to grant the Holy Absolution of Christ, upon request.

All confessions are strictly confidential, as I promised under oath before the Holy Triune God and His Church at my ordination. No one is required or “expected” to come, but all are quite welcome. Those with questions regarding the Christian practice of Individual Confession and Absolution are urged to review the Catechism, and are invited to speak with me about it at any time.

Your servant in Christ Jesus, Pastor Rick Stuckwisch

JESUS CAME TO PREACH TO EVERY CITY

Reflections on the Sermon of 1–31–10

The Sabbath is fulfilled by Christ's preaching.
May our minds ever be open to His teaching.

Many, even in our midst, do not know Him.
Without Christ, their future is grim.

We worship Jesus as God and Son.
Either way, He is our Holy One.

He preaches love and sees our every need.
If a great need arises, He will provide indeed.

Our pastors preach God's Word.
May it, by everyone, be heard.

They preach confession, forgiveness, and absolution.
To listen more intently, should be our resolution.

Love your neighbor and show them you care.
Whenever you can, then God's Word share.

Love one another, as Christ has loved you.
It is ever the good and proper thing to do.

(Emmaus Elder, Eldon Knepp)

One and all, youth, adults and supervised children, are invited to assist in *a thorough cleaning of the church in preparation for Holy Week and Easter*. There will be a special opportunity to do so on **March the 27th**, the **Saturday before Palm Sunday, from 9:00 a.m. until Noon** (*or whenever you can help that week*). All volunteers are deeply appreciated! SOLI DEO GLORIA!

On Fasting

Some Helpful Comments and Guidance from Pastor Grobien

The Christian is invited to and expected to fast. Although Christians typically fast on certain days throughout the year—except the Easter season—Lent is an especially appropriate season to practice fasting. Fasting is a bodily exercise of self-control and repentance, both themes of the Lenten season.

Christians do not fast just to “give something up.” Fasting is not a punishment or a kind of religious masochism. Instead, we fast for two general reasons: 1) to increase the joy of the festive seasons, such as Easter, and 2) to train our souls to be self-controlled.

Firstly, fasting enhances the rhythms of life. When you fast during solemn times, the joy of festivity is enhanced. Small servings of potatoes and vegetables during Lent makes the lamb and pies of Easter taste richer and sweeter. By engaging the body in the mood of the season, the experiences of restraint and of plenty are heightened. Fasting joins your body to what is happening with your spirit.

Secondly, fasting trains your *soul*. That isn't a typo. It should not seem odd that bodily exercise ends up training your soul, for your soul is the center and source of your desires. When you intentionally deprive your soul of what it wants, it has to get by without. When you *want* supper but don't eat it, not only your belly, but your soul also learns temperance and resiliency. Fasting trains not only your body, but also your self-control.

Why is that important? Your desires, uncontrolled, give in to temptation. They lead you into sin. Uncontrolled desires make idols of what your soul wants: desiring excess food is gluttony; desiring extravagant clothing or cars or décor is greed; desiring a man or woman outside of marriage is adultery. Desiring anything outside of God's order makes you an idolater.

Fasting is like working out. It is *spiritual* exercise. As jogging or lifting weights conditions your body, fasting conditions your soul.

So how should you fast? Like exercise, start with a routine you can handle. If you have never fasted before, don't try to give up food for a whole day. But, on the other hand, make it noticeable. **Everyone should be able to give up dessert and second helpings.** For moderate fasting, eat smaller portions at each meal. To step it up a bit, replace two meals each with a small snack, and, for the third meal, eat only about half of what you normally would.

Can't do it every day? Fast on Wednesdays, and Fridays, the days Christians traditionally fasted throughout the year.

Want to fast in a specific way to address your particular weaknesses and temptations? Think about what tempts you, and limit your exposure. If shopping is your weakness, no shopping sprees of comfort purchases during Lent. Too much time wasted on the internet, or visiting sites you shouldn't be? Only use it at work or when someone else is with you. If you need encouragement, counsel, or more ideas, talk with your pastor.

Fasting makes you more conscious of your desires. Even as you try to control them, they will seem enhanced, simply because you're thinking about them. As you become more aware of temptations and sinful desires, confess them. Confess them in your prayers, confess them in preparation for the Divine Service, and confess them to your pastor. Then receive the Absolution of Christ, and His life and Spirit to encourage and refresh you on your spiritual journey.

Note: Sundays are never fast days, so go ahead and enjoy the good gifts of creation to their fullest on these days! Also, expectant or nursing mothers, children and the ill are never expected to fast from food, but to provide the nourishment their bodies need.