

# *Blessed Trinity Lutheran Church at Rosemont*

## DAILY MEDITATIONS — APRIL, 2025

### April 1, 2025

**(Paul said) “We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ ...”**

1 Corinthians 4:10

Most of us have childhood memories of playing jokes or pranks on this day, known as April Fools Day. The jokes and pranks were childish. Some kids would ring a doorbell, then run just as someone answered the door, and yell “April Fools!” from around the corner. On the playground, a classmate might shriek “There’s a giant spider on your shoulder!”, then giggle like crazy while you slapped yourself silly trying to get the non-existent ‘spider’ off. It was such innocent teasing, especially by today’s standards. April Fools Day is traced back to 16<sup>th</sup>-century France, when Pope Gregory ordered a change from the Julian calendar (which celebrated New Year’s Day in March or April), to the Gregorian calendar, which called for New Year’s Day to be January 1. The edict was obeyed, but news travelled slowly in the 1500s, so many people still celebrated the New Year in springtime. They were called ‘April Fools’, and jokes were played on them. Later this month, we will commemorate the events of Holy Week. After Good Friday, even after that Sunday-of-the-empty-tomb, many called the early Christians fools for believing the words, teachings, and resurrection of Jesus. But 2,000 years later, the gods of the Romans live only in history, while millions around the world live, love, serve, and sacrifice according to Christ’s example. Not foolish at all.

### April 2, 2025

**Your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds.**

Psalms 36:6

You never know when God will find a way to speak to you. A few years ago, we had a winter as frigid as this past one. On one unusually balmy day in that winter, I sensed several messages coming to me; messages – lessons – I shared, lessons worth repeating in a world in which not only our climate but our values, beliefs, and realities seem to be in flux. The lesson of the sun came on a day when the sun broke through a long spell of raw cold. For weeks, we’d had snowfalls and snow storms. It had been bitter cold, and it seemed the piles of snow would never melt. But on that day, amazingly, the temperature went into the 40s. Out I went, to sit on my porch, to soak up the sun, which was amazingly warm. I’m as drawn to the sun as I am to the sea, and as I looked up at the deep blue sky, and as I felt the sun’s heat on my face, something suddenly seemed so obvious: the sun had been that hot during all of our snow-drenched weeks. Our temperatures may have been frigid, but the sun was burning bright, right behind those snow-laden clouds and sleet-filled grey skies. Just so, God’s love and light are there, behind whatever clouds or coldness may come to our lives. The life-giving, warmth-giving, light-giving sun – like the life-giving, warmth-giving, Light-giving Son himself – is there, always, even in the winter days of our lives. The lesson of the sun.

### April 3, 2025

**To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.**

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Another lesson from that afternoon on my front porch came as I looked up at the blue sky, with its white clouds, forming layers and shapes and moving across the firmament. I noticed that some clouds – the large, fluffy ones that looked like cotton puffs – were barely moving. They seemed to be inching their way across the sky. Just underneath those puffs, horizontal bands of slender clouds were moving at a more visible pace, and the lowest clouds, the wispy ones that looked like feathers, seemed to change shape and form every few seconds. They were moving swiftly, as if they had somewhere to go and didn’t want to be late. Clouds form in layers, and, like the layers of water in the oceans, they can move in different directions and at different speeds. But on that afternoon, the three types of clouds seemed to speak about life itself— my life, all of our lives. Like the clouds in the sky, some parts of life move along at a rapid pace, eager to reach a goal or destination, changing and adapting to whatever winds come along. Other aspects of life move at a measured pace, neither hurrying nor delaying, while still other portions of life seem anchored, barely moving, like the big puffy clouds. In each of our lives, there are different elements of time and timing. There are years and days when parts of life move swiftly, other times when we are, whether we

like it or not, in a kind of holding pattern. Like those elegant clouds, our lives ... and their many components ... move at diverse speeds, in directions and formations that are right for us, ordained for us, by the God who created clouds, skies, seas, and each of us. The God who moves the clouds, the seas, and the planets is the God who moves us through life, as he deems best. God's timing and direction are always best for us. The lesson of the clouds.

#### April 4, 2025

**Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.** Psalm 130:2

As I sat on my porch in the sun, a neighbor, Steve, came by, walking his little dog, Toffee. "I should have known," he said, laughing. "You're out sunbathing on the first day we hit 40!" He stopped to chat, and he asked, "How's work?" I told him I was retired, for several years. He was surprised. He hadn't known, and he apologized, but I understood. When we all moved into this new development, we saw each other often, helping each other to move in, getting advice about service providers, exchanging information, and visiting at each other's homes as we settled in. But as time went on, we were busy with our own lives. There was, and still is, a lot of friendliness here, but there's less interaction; mostly hellos shouted from cars, chats when we walk past houses. I understood how Steve could have missed the fact that I'd retired. I began to realize how much I, too, can miss along the way, not only in the lives of neighbors, but of family and friends. It's easy to miss the small things in people's lives, but it's possible to also miss major changes: deaths, separations, moves. It has been said that 'love begins by paying attention'. It's so easy to lose that attentiveness, that focus; so easy to let our awareness of others and our connection to them slip away. Blessedly, God never loses his focus on us. God is always paying attention. God always knows where we are in our lives, and what is happening, even if we try to hide from him. God knows our needs, our wants, our successes, and our struggles. God pays attention and he helps us to do so. The lesson of the neighbor.

#### April 5, 2025

**He has made everything beautiful in its time.** Ecclesiastes 3:11

As I roused myself from my reverie on that winter day, I glanced toward my snow-covered garden. Then, I spotted it. With the melting that had occurred, the snow had pulled back from the walkway near the porch, and I could see brown earth and dried grass. In the garden next to the wall of the garage – which holds the sun's warmth – several inches of snow had melted, and there, under an overhanging ledge of snow, peeking up and almost smiling, were the bright, vibrant green leaves of a snapdragon plant— no browning, no withering, yellow buds still on the stems. The leaves looked just as they did in mid-autumn. The plant looked as if it had been magically protected under its snow blanket. How could the plant be bright green in winter? After all that freezing, all that snow? How could those buds and leaves be yellow, vivid green, soft, supple, and life-filled? How? I never expected this: life; beautiful, resilient life: even in winter, even after frost, even under two feet of snow. Life prevails. Our lives prevail— resilient, beautiful, green with life. Even after frost, even after we've been buried under troubles and coldness. Even when we think life is over, life prevails. Life prevails. The lesson of the snapdragon.

#### April 6, 2025

**Be not far from me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help.** Psalm 22:11

A few hours after my relaxation in the sun, the skies turned dark and temperatures plummeted. High winds began to batter our area, and snow began to fall. All night, the winds roared – as they have so often in this past winter – sounding like a freight train, signaling that the brief day of spring-like weather was over. The next morning, we awoke to more snow, on top of what was already there. I groaned as I reached for the shovel. The final lesson: in this life, troubles can come at any time. It's not as though we each have a specific, lifetime allocation of worries and woes, and once we get through those, no more will come. We've all seen that famous decal or bumper sticker: 'S\_\_ Happens.' Think of it as 'Snow Happens.' But when 'snow' – whatever the trouble is – hits, we have the awareness, the lessons, that the sun, the light ... the Son and the Light ... are always there. In addition, our lives are moving, like the clouds, at the varied paces ordained by God. God helps us to pay attention to life and to each other, and life is always there, beautiful and resilient, just like the snapdragon. *"Thank you, Lord, for the lessons of the sun, the clouds, the neighbor, the snapdragon, and the snow. The lessons from the porch. Please keep teaching us, showing us, and leading us, always, closer to you."*

April 7, 2025

**Pray without ceasing.**

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Each day, millions of people around the world pray. What a powerful force for good! Many pray for their needs: healing, guidance, forgiveness. Many pray for their churches, communities, countries, even for the whole world. With so many diverse prayers – from people with different faiths, different nationalities, different tribal allegiances, different political views – how can any concerted effect for good come from these prayers? Perhaps it's as simple as praying... affirming ... God's most basic truths: that people may learn to live in peace, that we may see each other – all of us – as children of God, that we feel mercy and compassion toward one another, and that God's own truth will prevail and his Light will shine through our times of darkness. If everyone prayed for those simple, universal blessings, the power of those millions of prayers could, indeed, change the world. *"Dear God ..."*

April 8, 2025

**If you know these things, happy are you if you do them.**

John 13:17

The woman coming out of the store began to talk to me, even though we didn't know each other. "I came here for one item," she said, "and look at this," pointing to her overflowing cart. I laughed and replied, "Are you happy?" She looked startled for a second, and then gave me a big smile. "You bet I am!" she said, gleefully. "Then you're blessed!" I said, equally happily, and we wished each other well as we walked to our cars. Whatever the cause for happiness – large or small – let's be grateful for it. Whether it's a day of happiness, or an hour, or a few moments, be grateful for it, even if it's the simple joy of finding nifty items in a store, treating yourself to some ice cream, or getting a call from a friend. Gratitude and happiness go together; the one prompts the other. *"Thank you, Father, for every minute, every hour, every day, every season of happiness. Let me never take this blessing for granted."*

April 9, 2025

**Do not think I came to destroy the law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.** Matt. 5:17

The law – what ancient Israelites called the law – is very much in focus in the Biblical accounts of Jesus's ministry and in the readings for Lent. Jesus saw, and cried out against, the ways in which the law was perverted to oppress the poor and benefit the rich. Even God's law in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) was made complicated by religious leaders. It was, in practice, expanded and embellished into a collection of rules, rituals, and requirements so complex that the spirit of the law – God's guidelines for people to live in peace, purpose, and right relationship to God and each other – was often lost in man-made minutiae. Thousands of years later, God's teachings, God's law, can still be misused and misinterpreted. Human law, secular law, can also be made into a tool for the rich and powerful rather than a defense for the innocent and oppressed. I've seen the latter up close. For someone who isn't a lawyer, I've spent a lot of time in courtrooms. My work required me to testify before grand juries, to participate in hearings, depositions, jury trials, non-jury trials, a federal trial, a murder trial, and a trial that should have been about a murder. The witness stand is a familiar place to me. That part of my work was also a good match for me. I despise those who deliberately do harm to others and who pervert the law, and I found deep satisfaction in helping to put lawbreakers away. I lost only once in the pursuit of justice, and that loss is a thorn in my heart to this day. I have profound respect for the law. I love the intellectual architecture of the law, and the majesty of its highest purposes. I greatly admire the attorneys with whom I've worked, especially those in the Pennsylvania Attorney General's office. But human law can be as flawed and imperfect as human beings are. It can also be as good and great as its most moral and righteous principles. In Jesus's time, the lines between religious law and secular law – Roman law – could be blurry, and both sides could trade favors to manipulate the law for their profit or power. Jesus was betrayed by those representing both types of law. No one seems to have protested his sham of a trial, or the twisted thinking of his religious accusers. He was betrayed on all sides. The weak and self-serving, who wanted to stay in favor with Pontius Pilate and the religious leaders, turned a blind eye to injustice, to evil. Their silence helped crucify Him who came to "fulfill the law". Law matters. It matters to God and it should matter to us. It mattered in Jesus's time, and it should matter in ours. From ancient times until now, two bedrock principles of God's law, and man's law, are that all people, all of us, are equal before God and the law, and no one is above the law. The law matters enough that we should understand it, respect it, obey it, and defend it ... unlike those surrounding Pontius Pilate who failed to do so. Would we crucify Jesus today? Ponder that.

April 10, 2025

**The law of truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips.**

Malachi 2:6

Speaking of the law.... One of the most important lessons for us to learn – the importance of silence – was taught to me in an unexpected way. One of my first legal assignments was to give a deposition for a lawsuit. Prior to giving my testimony, an attorney friend of mine gave me some of the best advice I've ever gotten, for life as well as for legal matters: "Keep your mouth shut." My friend told me to "Answer the questions, but then shut up. Don't keep talking." He explained that most people can't stand silence. It's uncomfortable for them. They'll turn on a radio or TV just to fill the air. In a courtroom, they'll keep talking, saying anything, just to fill the silence. "They'll blab away," he said, "carelessly saying things they shouldn't say, just to fill the silence. Don't fall for it. Keep your mouth shut." At the deposition, the plaintiff's attorney questioned me and I answered. Then, he went silent, as if baiting me. He looked at his notes, he walked around the room, he made new notes, and he stayed silent. At times, he would look at me, as if he was waiting for me to add more to my answers. While he busied himself with his notes and with walking around the room, I silently counted the tiles in the ceiling. It was an old-fashioned ceiling, made of tin squares that had been punctured with a tool. The punctures formed different designs on different tiles. After I counted the tin tiles in vertical and horizontal rows, I began to count how many star designs were in the ceiling, how many circles, how many crescents, etc. When the attorney stopped his strolling and gave me a hard, expectant stare, I simply looked back at him, and I gave him a slight smile. I actually enjoyed the discipline of being silent. I liked knowing that I was spoiling his attempt to entrap me. The attorney played this game for 20-30 minutes; 20-30 minutes in which I counted ceiling tiles, window panes, and door panels, all the while keeping my mouth shut. By the time the attorney spoke again, he was clearly displeased with me, agitated, even a bit rattled by my silence. Weeks later, we won the case. I carried the 'keep your mouth shut' advice into my professional work, community service, relationships, and even my spiritual life. It wasn't difficult to do. From grade school on, I've instinctively stayed quiet in new situations: the first few days in school, being with new classmates; later, in new work locations, meetings, public settings. I like to get a sense of what the situation is, who people are; to see who is defensive, who is well-informed, who is combative. Keeping an initial low profile has the added advantage of having people pay attention to you when you finally do speak. Staying silent allows us to hear others, to make it less likely that we'll speak in haste or say things we regret. Most of all, the discipline of silence, of listening, of not needing to fill the air, rewards us richly when we want to be with God. Certainly, God wants to hear our prayers: the praise, thanks, requests, pleas, fears, and hopes we need to express. But it is in silence that we can best hear our own deepest thoughts, our own truths, and hear God's words and responses to us. It is often in silence that we receive comfort, sense love, feel known, and open ourselves to God's healing and hope. "Keep your mouth shut" was an inelegant ... even crude ... way for my attorney friend to advise me all those years ago, but that advice has so beautifully guided me to the many blessings of silence. May we all be so blessed.

April 11, 2025

**See, now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation!**

2 Corinthians 6:2

Are you a procrastinator? Do you put off doing things you know you have to do or want to do? Most of us forget to make calls, or send cards or notes to cheer someone up. We mean to do it, but .... We all put things off once in a while, but when it comes to our faith ... discovering it, expressing it, or acting on it ... 'now' is always the right time. There is no need to wait for the right time to live in faith. Today, someone may need an example of faith that only you can convey to them. Today, God may need you to offer a word of hope or comfort to someone in distress. Today. Now. Now is the acceptable time. God never waits for tomorrow to love us, hear us, or save us. Let us use our 'now' to hear and to serve God, to celebrate our relationship to God, our salvation. Now. Today.

April 12, 2025

**If I speak in the tongues of mortals and angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.**

1 Corinthians 13:1

The 'love passages' from the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Corinthians are among the most familiar words of the Bible. They are well known, not only because we've often heard them, but also because we understand them, we know the truth of them. We know that people can say one thing and do another; they can pretend to be kind but behave entirely

differently. These verses pull the veil off of any pretenses. Love is not only the most important quality we can cultivate and offer; it is also one we can't fake. We love or we do not. It doesn't matter what we say, even if we have the 'tongues of angels'. What matters is that we have love in our hearts and show that love, to as many people as we can, as often as we can, in as many ways as we can. God calls us to give and receive love. Everything else follows from that.

### April 13, 2025 – Palm Sunday

**When he had said these things, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem ... Now as he drew near, He saw the city and wept over it.**

Luke 19:28, 41

There is no way to know what thoughts were in Jesus's mind as he headed toward Jerusalem. Crowds greeted him and cheered him. Surely, there were many in the crowds who had heard his teachings. Many had seen his miracles. Many had been given new hope, new strength, and a new connection to God's love for them. Some had even been healed by him. Perhaps others were simply curious about him. As Jesus heard the hosannas and saw palms being spread on the road before him, did he have a sense of triumph or foreboding, fulfillment or fear? We, who cannot even know the inner thoughts of family and close friends, certainly can't know what was passing through Jesus's mind. We know that he was extraordinarily intelligent and insightful. He was a realist, and he didn't flinch from the truth. All of that suggests that he saw all possible aspects of his near-term future as he drew closer and closer to Jerusalem, even if he didn't know ... couldn't know ... how brief that earthly future would be. Like us, in our lives, Jesus simply went on, one step at a time, one hour at a time, knowing most of all – and most importantly of all – that God was with him. It is what we can know now, in our lives.

### April 14, 2025

**See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God.**

Deuteronomy 11:26-28

With all of the Biblical references to the power of God, and with the many references in these Meditations to the constant watchfulness of God, it can seem as though we humans have nothing to do in our relationship to God. Not so. We have, perhaps, the most important role imaginable, the 'ace in the hand', if you will. We have the power of choice. We have free will. God could have created us as spiritual robots who just parrot back words of praise at him. God could have also arranged it so that those who pray and have faith in him never have any bad things happen to them—ever. Of course, with a guarantee like that, everyone would be proclaiming their faith in God. Instead, God has done something almost inconceivable. After creating the miracle of human intellect, perception, creativity, insight, and emotions, God stepped back and gave us free will. God hopes for our love, but does not demand it. He welcomes our faith, but does not require it. God longs for a relationship with us, but does not force it. The choice is ours, always ours. In many ways, it is a choice between blessing and curse, between life and death. "Therefore, choose life," advises the Bible. But it is our choice to make.

### April 15, 2025

**The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.**

Matthew 13:45-46

The merchant in today's verse knew the value of his wares, his commodities. Any merchant who dealt in fine pearls would recognize an outstanding pearl when he found one. Such a merchant would sell "all that he had" in order to buy that pearl. Do we know what has value and what doesn't? Is there something so valuable that we would sell or give up all we have in exchange for it? Most of us would pay anything ... even giving all we have ... to secure the health or safety of a loved one. We pay a great deal for a house we want, because we know it isn't just a house – a shelter – it is a home, a place where we will build our lives, a place that is precious to us. Sometimes, we leave our homes, friends, and family to move far away, to be with someone we love or to build a new life. We give up something valuable for something more valuable. The kingdom of heaven is like that rarest of pearls. It is so priceless and precious that we should give all we have ... meaning our lives, our wills, and our devotion ... to the God who has prepared that kingdom for us.

## April 16, 2025

**Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.**

Mark 16:20

Few people have ever felt the whiplash swings of events and emotions that Jesus felt in the last days of Holy Week. First, there were cheers, hosannas, and palms at his feet; days and hours of last words, last teachings, and last lessons for his disciples. Then came the companionship of the disciples at what would be a last, shared supper. Finally, there was the swirl of that final day, from sunset on Thursday to sunset on Friday. In Jewish belief, each day begins at sunset, not sunrise, and ends at the next sunset. Within a span of 24 hours on his last day on earth, sunset to sunset, Jesus would know the peace of a garden, the agony of praying for his life – “take this cup from me” – and the terrifying arrival of armed soldiers in that same garden. They would seize and arrest him. There would be a sham of a trial, betrayal by many, and a sentence of death pronounced on him. The shame and agony of the crucifixion would follow. It must have been like being caught in a nightmare he could neither control nor fully comprehend. Even if Jesus believed, even if he knew, soul-deep, that his life would not end and deliverance would come, the torment he endured on the way to the resurrection, including the torment of doubt and fear from the cross (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”), was hideously real. Let us walk with him, watch with him, wait with him. It is the least we can do for One who endured so much for us.

## April 17, 2025 – Maundy Thursday

**(Jesus said) “But behold the hand of my betrayer is with me on the table.”**

Luke 22:21

It was to be a time of respite and renewal; time for Jesus to be with his friends, his disciples; time to share a meal with them in a quiet, safe, and comfortable place. By now, the disciples knew that Jesus had both a profound intellect and a deeply loving heart. He brought both to that supper table. While he focused on his friends at the table ... on the pleasure of their company and the importance of their friendship ... he also knew what he had to tell them, to teach them, to prepare them for that night, for the next day, and for the days and years to follow. Jesus managed to blend the necessary relaxation of that shared supper with the intense message – which the disciples could not yet fully understand – of his coming ordeal and their everlasting connection to him, symbolized by the bread and wine he shared with them. Jesus even balanced the accepted normality of Judas’s being at the table, with the crushing reality of Judas’s betrayal, already underway: “... behold the hand of my betrayer is with me on the table.” The contrasts and contradictions of this last supper, this last night together, are known to most of us, to some degree, in our human moments of highest elation and deepest fear. Christ is with us in those moments. Let us be with him on this night, at this supper, in these contrasts.

## April 18, 2025 – Good Friday

**Christ died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.**

2 Corinthians 5:15

Imagine if Jesus, facing the inevitability of his crucifixion and death, had tried to create categories of people for whom he would make this sacrifice, and those he would exclude. Would the ‘sure picks’ be those who had the fewest sins? Those who had done the most good in the world? Those with the purest hearts? Where would he draw the line to cut off those who would not be saved? Beyond those who choose evil and worship false gods, would he eliminate those who were quarrelsome? Those who didn’t love their parents or spouses? Those who lied? The whole idea of Christ making such distinctions is ridiculous, not only because it would be impossible to do, but because we know him. He would never have looked down from that cross and thought, “You will be saved ... you will not.” We’re the ones who are good at making distinctions: ‘This person I will like, that one I won’t. I’ll help those poor people but not those others. I’ll talk to him, but I won’t talk to her. I’ll forgive but I’ll never forget, never really let go.’ Christ died for all, and he asks in return that we no longer live only for ourselves, but live for him, for his teachings, for him who loves us completely, for him who will raise us to be with him forever. We have walked with him this week and throughout Lent. We are here with him now, at the foot of the cross. We must continue to walk with him, be with him. And in living for him and with him, we learn to not make distinctions, and to love all.

### April 19, 2025 – Holy Saturday

**Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath, according to the commandment.**

Luke 23:56

For most of us, the word ‘Saturday’ usually prompts smiles, happy thoughts, and anticipation of some welcome free time; time to relax, have fun, and catch up on things we want to do or need to do. Saturday is ‘our time’. The Saturday of Holy Week was also, for the disciples and those who loved Jesus, a free day, but in a very different sense. For the first time in three years, they truly had nothing to do; no teacher to follow, no message to share, no crowds to manage, no healings at which to marvel and rejoice. The disciples were free, but free in the sense of being lost, empty, adrift. They were filled with questions, doubts, confusion, and fear. Pilate and the religious authorities also felt a kind of freedom on that Saturday, but it was not like the disciples’ anxiety-filled lostness. Instead, it was the feeling – the illusion – that they were finally free of this troublesome Jewish teacher and healer; free from any threat that people would follow him and align themselves with the God of whom he spoke— a God of love, compassion, and connection to all of his children. Belief in such a God would undermine the authority of Rome and the religious leaders, and that they could never permit. Now, at last, their problem was solved. Jesus was dead and buried. They were free of him. But in time, beginning on the very next day, when Mary Magdalene and the other women went to the tomb, which they found empty, the disciples’ fearful freedom would turn into the freedom of resurrection and redemption, the fulfillment of Christ’s message. And the freedom felt by Pilate and the authorities would begin to evaporate in that same 24-hour period. From Sunday on, the message of Jesus ... the itinerant Jew they dismissed and thought they had destroyed ... would take hold, would transform the world, and would outlive not only Pilate, but the whole Roman Empire. We have walked with Jesus this week. Today, let us wait with him; wait with a hopeful freedom, because – unlike the disciples on that sorrowful Saturday – we already know the end of the story. *“I’m with you, Lord. Waiting right here, near the tomb. Waiting for the sunrise, because I know what is coming. The Son-rise. The Son-rise!”*

### April 20, 2025 – Easter

**(Jesus said) “Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them, in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”**

Matthew 28:19-20

Our Lenten walk with Jesus ends where his journey through life ended: at the tomb in the garden. And our new life with him, our new journey with him, begins where his new life began: at the tomb in the garden, the empty tomb, from which he emerged into a new and eternal life, a life which he revealed to his disciples, and which he reveals to us, through the Holy Spirit, each day and forever. No wonder the secular symbols of Easter – sunrise, flowers, eggs, and bounding bunnies – all resonate with new life. New life. Ours. Today and every day. *“Thank you, God – Creator, Savior, Spirit – thank you!”*

### April 21, 2025

**...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily all those who were being saved.**

Acts 2:47

In the days, weeks, and months following Christ’s crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, the disciples and followers of Jesus had a new task ahead of them: fulfilling the Great Commission (“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ...”). Thus, the church was begun, with one group of followers after another. In the past few years, I often heard the words “the church is not a building”. Those words were offered as perspective and comfort to those of us in three congregations who were facing the closing of our churches. We knew, of course, that a church is not a building, but we felt real heartache when we left the sanctuaries in which many of us had worshipped for a lifetime. We were truly stepping out in faith with every meeting, every decision. Our three churches combined, and soon after, we joined with a fourth congregation to create Blessed Trinity Lutheran Church at Rosemont, Rosemont being the area where the church is located. Many people participated in the discussions, planning, and decision-making involved in creating a new church. It was hard work, but we had hopefulness, faith, and a positive attitude. There were many unknowns, tense times, difficult decisions, and no guarantees. We didn’t

know if church members would stay or leave. We didn't know how far our assets would stretch. We didn't even know where we would worship after our church properties were sold. When we made a blessed connection with Rosemont Lutheran Church, that sanctuary became our new home. We had no guarantees, but we had God. God guided us, even when we felt overwhelmed. God saw what we would become: a real church family. Warm hellos, hugs, and how-are-yous abound on Sunday mornings. People who didn't know each other two years ago now feel like life-long friends. Laughter and good will are in the air. Committees bustle with activity and camaraderie. Commitment to community service is heartfelt and vital. Our traditional but non-rigid format for worship allows for special music, for 'Words from the World' (secular readings that are spiritual and inspirational), as well as for the timeless, established components of a liturgical service. The structure of the service can vary, with the wonderful effect of being fresh and new each week. Five years ago, when we began this transition, we didn't know what was ahead for us, what we would be creating, but God knew. We didn't realize how much like those early Christians we were. Like them, we had no guarantees, but we had God.

#### April 22, 2025

**This is God, our God forever and ever. He will be our guide forever.**

Psalm 48:14

In spring of 2023, I was asked to deliver the sermon at the last regular worship service at my church, where I had substituted for our pastors, in the pulpit, for more than 30 years. God gave me the theme almost instantly: 'Losing, leaving, and letting go.' As always, God also gave me the words that followed. As I wrote that sermon, it was clear that what we were experiencing in our soon-to-be-closed churches is what we each experience in life. We cannot grow, change, evolve, and fulfill our purposes without also losing, leaving, and letting go. But God provides new life, new growth, new awareness, for us as for our churches. God provides.

#### April 23, 2025

**He spoke and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.**

Psalm 33:9

The book of Genesis speaks about the power of God in making the patterns and times of creation. The Psalms speak just as clearly of God's creative power. In today's verse, we read of the power of a Creator God; a God whose very words produce the forms of nature and the beauty of seasons, the skills of humans, and the complexity of cells. I remember my mother telling me, many times, that, when I was born, it was my tiny fingernails that stunned her into awe. "So perfectly formed," she'd say, "so tiny and yet so perfect. The curve of the ear, the perfect shape of each nostril, of that tiny baby mouth. Surely," she always said, "anyone who has seen a newborn baby must know that there is a Creator God." God "spoke ... commanded", and it came to be; it was firm in its reality. For a day or even a moment, let us be silent in the face of this power that is almost beyond our imagining: the power of creation, visible in a butterfly's wing and a mountain's peaks, in a deer's brown eyes and the curve of a baby's ear. *"I look at your world, Lord, and I look at the extraordinary complexity of nature, and of my own being ... my ears, my lips, my fingernails ... and I am silent in wonder, and in thanks."*

#### April 24, 2025

**Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers up all offenses.**

Proverbs 10:12

Few things are as opposite as love and hate. Not only are they very different emotions, they create wildly different reactions in us, and they trigger polar-opposite responses that radiate out, for good or evil, once they leave our hearts. When we hate, we poison our own souls. We are the first and greatest victims of our hate. Hate for others harms them, too. In a world that needs all the compassion it can find, hatred pulls us in the opposite direction. But love blesses us with its warmth when we offer it to others. Love radiates out, like light, to bless everything and everyone it touches. And love has a very long shelf-life; it lasts. It lasts long after we forget that we even sent it out into the world. We hear people say "I'll never forget my grandfather's hugs", "I always remember how mom said 'I love you.'" Love can last far longer, in its effects for good, than we can imagine. Children who won't be born until the next century will hear about your love from a great-great grandchild who will have heard of it from his or her parents or grandparents. Love lasts long and reaches far. Love also has one more quality that hate does not have: love can cover, neutralize, and dissipate hate. The opposite is not true. Hate has no such power over love. In all things, choose love. Today, choose love. Every day, choose love.



### April 25, 2025

**Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.**

1 Peter 5:7

We wish we could live our lives free from anxiety, fear, and worry. For some, such fears and worries have a paralyzing effect on their lives. Fear seems to shut them down and casts a dark cloud over everything. We know troubles and difficulties will come. Problems are part of life; an unavoidable part. But when fears or troubles come, we have a choice. We can let these negative feelings overwhelm us and make us ill, or we can take these worries to God. *“Lord, I can’t handle this: \_\_\_\_\_ . It’s too big for me, too much for me. You tell us to cast our anxieties on you, and that’s what I’m doing, Lord. I give this to you. I trust you to bring your will and wisdom to this problem, and to give me your peace in place of my fear, working your will for good, even in this.”*

### April 26, 2025

**I will save you from all your uncleannesses.**

Ezekiel 36:29

Only we know if we have been ‘unclean’ in the sight of God and in our own eyes. Maybe we drink too much. Maybe we’ve been dishonest in some way. Maybe we gossip or saying unkind things. Maybe we can’t forgive. The list of ‘maybes’ could go on and on, because we humans have so many ways in which we trip, fall, and fail. No matter what we have said or done that makes us feel unclean, God already knows about it. Nothing is hidden from him. God knows and sees our sorrow. More than that, God forgives. God saves us and cleanses us; cleanses us as no one else can. Whatever is unclean within us, no matter how painful or hidden or long-lasting, let us give it to God today, and then let us accept the cleansing God gives to us. *“Thank you, Forgiving God. Thank you.”*

### April 27, 2025

**But there is a spirit in human beings, and the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding.** Job 28:12

‘The view from 30,000 feet.’ That phrase is heard in businesses and large organizations, notably those with boards of directors or trustees. ‘The view from 30,000 feet’ refers to the fact that governing boards must take a long and broad view of an organization’s current and prospective situation— a view from 30,000 feet above, like the view from a plane flying at that altitude. It is the role of such boards to have that panoramic view. It isn’t the board’s role to hire a technician or choose a phone service. Those are operational issues, ‘ground level’ matters handled by employees and managers. It is the board’s responsibility to hire (and, if necessary, dismiss) the CEO, to assess the organization’s strengths and weaknesses, and to work with the CEO on goals, visioning, and strategic planning: the view from 30,000 feet. Although I worked with such a structure for most of my adult life, it was years before I realized that the same view applies to our personal and spiritual lives. Each of us is the CEO/board chairman of our lives. We do the dreaming, planning, motivating, and goal-setting for our lives. Most of us are also the ‘chief cooks and bottle washers’ in our lives. We do the operational things: pay bills, do laundry, grocery shopping, car maintenance. These necessities take up most of our time. The need to be inspired, to dream, to think about our purpose and calling – the 30,000-foot view – can be easily lost. We can miss God’s signs and signals, God’s vision and inspiration, because we look no higher than the stain on our carpet or the dishes in the sink. We forget we’re part of God’s glorious creation, made in his image, with our own gifts and purposes. We’re defined not by what we made for dinner or how we let the laundry pile up, but by how much we love, care, rejoice, help, and believe. We can also lose sight of our own value to God: the need to take care of ourselves – physically, mentally, spiritually – while we’re also taking care of everyone and everything else. The Bible speaks of ‘mountain top’ experiences, where faith and vision seem close at hand, where we sense God’s presence and are inspired, even transformed. From the mountaintop, we return to the valleys to live our lives and do our work, with God’s help. Pausing to look at life from 30,000 feet, to ascend to the mountaintop occasionally, is vital for us. When we speak with God now, or meet him in the next life, God will not ask, “Why were you always so behind with your checkbook?” God will speak, instead, of what we gave to the world and to his people: in his name, with his gifts, through his love.

### April 28, 2025

**Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and glorious habitation. Where are your zeal and your might?**

Isaiah 63:15

When Isaiah wrote these words, he was speaking of the contrast between the power and presence of the God who led the Israelites out of Egypt, and the God who seems to have abandoned them. Isaiah knew God was still there; he was speaking to him. But in his sorrow, Isaiah cried out, as we often do, when God seems absent or hidden. Perhaps nothing is more frightening to us than the idea that God has left us, that God does not see or hear us ... or care. The Israelites had many times of being sure of God's presence, and many times when they feared his absence. But God is still there. God hears us, and it is always all right to cry out to him in our need.

### April 29, 2025

**Why do you look for the living among the dead?**

Luke 24:5

When the women went to Jesus's tomb, to anoint his body, they found the tomb empty. They also found something else— two beings who appeared to be men, but who were, in fact, angels. The angels asked why they sought the living among the dead. It was the first announcement that Jesus was no longer in the tomb, no longer dead. He was alive, and he would be found among the living. How often in our lives do we look for answers or guidance or future paths among the dead failures, sins, and regrets of the past? When we have learned from our mistakes or repented of our sins, these things are dead and should be left behind. As we move forward in life, let's remember the words of the angels at the tomb, and let's not look for the living among the dead.

### April 30, 2025

**Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue, and if there is anything praiseworthy, think on these things.**

Philippians 4:8

As this month ends, one effect of the Lenten season continues for me. This year, with sincere intent, for spiritual and other reasons, I gave up two things: skepticism and raw politics. The first was natural, as I returned to readings on visualization, manifestation, and positive, expectant thinking. There are so many things I want to accomplish; dreams I want to fulfill. I want and need to be focused on my hopes, on the God to whom all things are possible. There is no room for negative thinking in such a focus, with such a God, and with such optimism in my heart. The second, turning away from the ugly side of politics, was necessary. I was simply tired of the vileness and viciousness of it all. Of course, all citizens have to be aware of what's happening in their community, in their country, and in the world. We can't live with blinders on, and God expects us to be aware and active in our world. As it happens, I found that, as a human being and as a Christian, I could not turn away from the chaos unfolding in so many directions, and from its roots in raw politics, in rulers' quests for absolute power. I could not ignore the very real harm happening to human beings, to God's children, because of turmoil and upheaval. Then I discovered that my rejection of skepticism – my 'gentler' Lenten vow – is exactly right for this moment, this time of uncertainty, disorder, and fear. Trust in God, even when we can't trust in human beings, is the opposite of skepticism, and certainly of cynicism. My readjusted focus on the connection between those who rule and what they do ... in the context of God's power and purpose ... is also right and necessary for these times. Like everyone else, I have no crystal ball. I don't know what tomorrow's headlines will be, where some national crisis or tragedy will hit, or where violence will reignite in the world. I also have an undeniable loathing for those, all over the world, who profit from ... and delight in ... creating chaos, subjugating and harming human beings. But my rejection of skepticism allows me to focus on God's power to defeat evil in any of its forms, and to ultimately triumph. To strike this balance – to stand for what is right and just while trusting in God's plans – we only have to look at Jesus. For all of his earthly life, Jesus, at his peril, courageously spoke out against and fought against the abusive and vindictive rulers of his day. But he also trusted that God is always present – even in the worst moments, even when it seems that chaos rules – and that God's righteousness always triumphs. I thought I was giving something up for Lent. Turns out, I was getting something: new wisdom, new hopefulness, and new confidence in God's presence and purposes ... which will last long after Lent.