

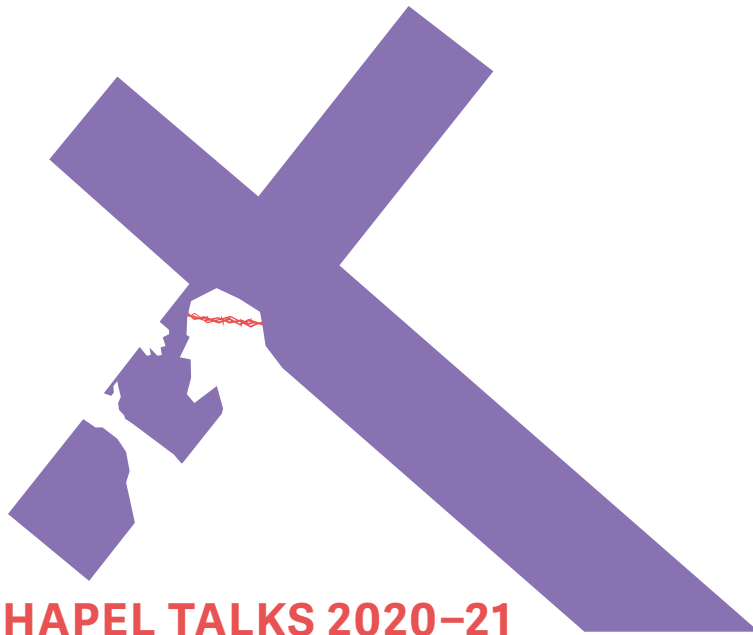
CHAPEL TALKS FOR LUTHERAN SCHOOLS 2020-21

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (MATT. 20:28).



Sent to Serve

by Rev.
Bob Riggert



CHAPEL TALKS 2020–21

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About the Author

The Rev. Bob Riggert was sent from Concordia Teachers College, Seward, Neb., to serve for 10 years as a Lutheran school teacher and principal in Euclid, Ohio, and Fort Wayne, Ind. Following graduation from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, he was sent to serve as pastor of congregations in Iowa District West for 16 years. Riggert also was sent to serve Lutheran schools and education and youth ministry as executive assistant in Iowa District West for 15 years. Semi-retired, his present favorite setting of service is his family: wife Diane, four children and 13 grandchildren. Riggert has had the privilege to author several previous series of “Chapel Talks” and National Lutheran Schools Week resources. He considers it a privilege to be sent to serve Lutheran schools by offering these “Chapel Talks” as a serving of God’s grace at the banquet table of Lutheran school worship.





The Theme

“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28).

Lutheran schools are sent to serve. They are sent to serve children. They are sent to serve children whose baptismal faith is also being nourished in Christian homes and Lutheran congregations. They are sent to serve children who first hear of their Savior in a Lutheran school classroom. Lutheran schools serve families from diverse backgrounds. The Lutheran school serves as a ministry of the local congregation and a mission outpost to the community. Lutheran schools serve in cultures and contexts around the world.

Lutheran schools serve because Jesus served. The Son of Man came to serve as teacher and miracle worker. Jesus came to serve the diseased and distraught. Jesus served by feeding thousands and washing the feet of His disciples. Jesus came to serve little children. Contexts of Jesus’ service and recipients of His service are noted in these chapel talks.

Jesus came to seek, save and serve sinners. Jesus’ ultimate act of service is seen in the “ransom” on the cross. Jesus came to pay for the sins of the whole world. “Sent to Serve” Chapel Talks direct children, staff, families and friends who are blessed to worship together to the cross of Jesus.

It is always challenging and humbling to develop a theme for Lutheran school ministry and the chapel talks resource. In 2019, LCMS Youth Ministry published “7 Practices of Healthy Youth Ministry.” One of the practices noted is “Serve and Lead.” The resource noted, “Young people are watching the church and looking for the love of Christ to overflow to their neighbors” (p. 28). Service doesn’t begin with teenagers after their confirmation. Blessed in the grace of the waters of Baptism, we are the Spirit’s instruments to serve from childhood. Children in Lutheran schools are “Sent to Serve.”

Celebrating the Savior who was “Sent to Serve,” Lutheran school ministry offers these chapel talks to Lutheran schools and other worshiping assemblies where children gather in the name of Jesus. Rejoicing in the Good News that Jesus was sent to serve, Lutheran school students, teachers and others blessed by the school ministry are then “Sent to Serve” in His name.





Using Chapel Talks

Lutheran school worshiping assemblies are served the Means of Grace as they gather together in weekly worship. Solomon celebrates, “He brought me to the banqueting house” (Song of Songs 2:4). The church sanctuary, the school gym or whatever the setting for the weekly chapel service becomes a banquet room where Jesus serves His children.

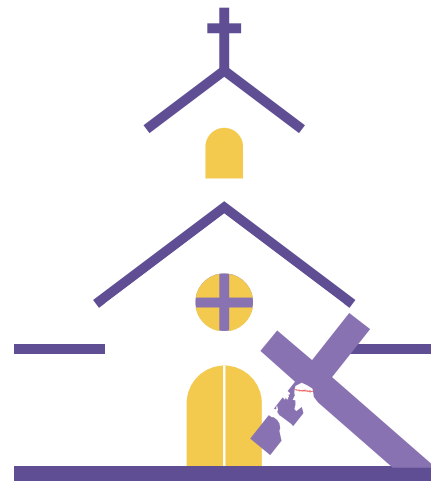
The weekly chapel outlines offer a worship menu.

Guided by a Scripture reading and text, worshipers are served an **“APPETIZER.”** The appetizer includes an opening object lesson or illustration that stimulates the appetite for the message that follows.

The **“MAIN COURSE”** is the message of the day. Messages include the Law, which reminds us of our sinful thoughts, words and deeds. The Gospel brings the Good News of Jesus who was sent to serve and to save. The main course is not designed to be a full “serving” of the text. While it may be the main course of the worship menu, the worship leader is encouraged to serve “side dishes” — fuller explanations of the biblical account, as well as additional illustrations and applications fitting to the local setting. The local pastor and other worship leaders are encouraged to do their own textual study to expand and enhance the message.

Each chapel talk also includes a prayer shaped by the theme of the day. Additional petitions reflecting the weekly blessings and needs of the church and school are encouraged. Another feature is a weekly **“DESSERT.”** This section includes additional teachings (often Small Catechism selections), classroom or school activities, or resources to further explore a topic.

Approximately half of the chapels are based on the weekly readings (Series A through the first weeks of the school year; Series B from Advent through the Easter season). In addition, there are several worship “series.” One series centers on biblical children who were “Sent to Serve;” a



“He brought me to the banqueting house.”

SONG OF SONGS 2:4

Lenten series focuses on the “Suffering Servant” prophesied by Isaiah; an Easter season series focuses on several faithful Old Testament believers who were noted to be “servants.”

Children welcome liturgical structure in their worship. The extent and format of that structure may be determined by customs and preferences of the school and congregation. Some settings may include the chapel talk as part of a Divine Service. Others may be more informal in worship style. Hymn selections from both *Lutheran Service Book* and *All God’s People Sing* are included.

These chapel talks are written for an elementary school “congregation.” The weekly messages may be adapted or expanded for younger or older children.

The blessings and applications of worship extends beyond the sanctuary and other worship settings. Lutheran schools may want to emphasize the text and theme of the week in daily staff and student devotions. Families, congregation members and friends may be invited to worship with the children.

May those blessed by the Lutheran school ministry and its worship be “Sent to Serve” in Jesus’ name.



HYMN: "We Have Been Sent to Serve"

TEXT BY JEFFREY E. BURKART

2021 National Lutheran Schools Week theme: "Sent to Serve" based on Matthew 20:28
"Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (ESV).

We have been sent to serve *Matt. 20:28*

By Christ, our Servant King,
Who gave His life that we might live;
New life to others bring.
Our Lord and Master's grace
Impels each faithful one
To hold the lost in His embrace; *Luke 19:10*
Each daughter, ev'ry son!

No longer slaves to sin *Rom. 6:3-7; 22*

We serve in lowliness.
Through Word and water we begin
A life of holiness.
May we, through servanthood,
Proclaim Lord Jesus' love,
So all might know that God is good, *1 Chron. 16:34; Ps. 23:6; Ps. 34:8*
And trust the LORD above. *Jer. 17:7-8; Prov. 3:5-6*

To those who are ignored,
Who live with troubled hearts, *John 14:1-3*

May we, as servants of the LORD,
Tend them till fear departs. *John 21:15-17*

May they, by grace, be blest
Through faith in Jesus Christ,
Who gave His life so all would rest *Matt. 11:28*
In His great sacrifice.

Our ransom has been paid *Matt. 20:28; 1 Tim. 2:3-6*

For Christ, who conquered death,
Rose from the grave, came to our aid,
With His life-saving breath.
He reigns as LORD of all;
He shall return again. *Acts 1:1-10*
Until His coming, heed His call
That all might heaven gain.

△ To God the Father sing *Ps. 45:17*

A high doxology;
Unto Christ Jesus ever bring *Rev. 5:13*

A hymn sung glor'ously!
Then to the Spirit raise
Psalms of unending joy,
As we, with willing spirit, praise *Ps. 51:12*
Our LORD and God on high! *John 20:28*

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Tune: DIADEMATA ("Crown Him with Many Crowns," LSB 525). Music: Public domain. S M D (66 86 66 86)



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Opening Service

THEME: Jesus Came to Serve

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 20:20–28

TEXT: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28).

SONGS: “Son of God, Eternal Savior” (LSB 842), “A Time to Serve” (AGPS 53)

APPETIZER (Introduction)

Develop a listing (or pictures) of those who will serve in the school ministry setting during the school year (teachers, pastor, secretary, custodian, aides, etc.). We are thankful for all who will serve us during this school year. We are thankful for each one of them. Our school could not operate without them.

Show a picture of Jesus. Our Bible reading for today tells of Jesus who came to serve us in a very necessary way. In our chapel worship this year, we will meet the most important servant for our school and for the whole world.

MAIN COURSE (Chapel Talk)

We all like to think we are important. Your parents, grandparents and others also think you are important, and in many ways you are. We often measure our importance by what we do or accomplish. The mother of disciples James and John loved her sons and wanted them to receive the honor she felt they deserved. The other disciples heard the conversation, and they were jealous of James and John and the attention they were receiving.

Jesus, the perfect teacher sent from God, teaches the importance of serving. While the world thought that those who had important titles or positions were most important, Jesus taught that the ones who served others were most important. Jesus said, “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant” (v. 26).

Then Jesus teaches the most important lesson of all. It’s a lesson that will be our school theme for this year: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Jesus, the Son of Man, served during His earthly ministry. He served by healing others. Jesus served by miraculously feeding thousands. More important than any of Jesus’ miracles was His going to the cross and giving His life as the sacrifice for all our

sins. Only Jesus, the perfect Son of God, could serve in this way. Only the sacrifice of Jesus could pay for our pride and other sins.

Because we are blessed in receiving Jesus’ service through our Baptism, we are now blessed to humbly serve together this year. This year, we will serve one another and others in Jesus’ name.

PRAYER

Jesus, You are the Ruler over all creation. However, You chose to be our Servant by giving Your life as the ransom for our sins. We thank You for saving and serving us. In Your grace and mercy, teach us to serve You by serving one another this school year. Amen.

DESSERT (Additional Applications and Activities)

Introduce the children to those who will serve them during the school year. Emphasize that administration, teachers and staff all serve in Jesus’ name and as His representatives. Perhaps a bulletin board or other display could share the pictures and names of school servants. Remind the children to thank their servants often.



WEEK 1: Proper 15

THEME: Jesus Serves Everyone

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 15:21–28 (Gospel Lesson)

TEXT: “She said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table’” (Matt. 15:27).

SONG: “In Christ There Is No East or West” (LSB 653, AGPS 135)

APPETIZER

Arrange a setting where one student or teacher gets served and another does not. (Perhaps an imaginary table/meal setting; perhaps giving one student homework assistance while ignoring another student.)

Discuss the scenario. What did you see happening? How did the person feel who wasn’t getting any help? Was everybody treated fairly?

Today’s Bible lesson tells about a woman who didn’t seem to deserve or get Jesus’ service.

MAIN COURSE

Jesus went to many different places and people sharing and showing that He was the Son of God and the promised Messiah. In one of those travels, a woman who was from another region came to Jesus begging Him to drive the demon from her daughter. Many people, including the disciples, felt that Jesus should not give His attention to somebody who was not part of the Jewish family.

The woman was determined to have Jesus hear her plea and help her daughter. She keeps begging, “Lord, help me!” In order to teach the disciples and to demonstrate the woman’s faith, Jesus tells the woman that He came only to help the people of Israel, the ones who had first received the promise of the Savior. Jesus compares the woman’s request to giving good food that should be served to children instead to pets, to dogs. The woman believes Jesus can help her and asks that Jesus just give her some “crumbs” of His power.

The woman had great faith. She believed that Jesus was the Servant and Savior for her and for everyone. Jesus then served her by healing her daughter. Jesus also serves us from His table of grace. Jesus gives us more than crumbs. He gives us a full cup of grace in the waters of our

Baptism. He gives us a full helping of His Word every day in our classroom and in our worship together.

We may think that we deserve rich helpings of God’s grace. Like the woman, we, too, are unworthy sinners. In His love, Jesus gives us more than crumbs. Jesus gives us a full helping of His forgiveness. As we have received a serving of God’s grace, God wants us to lovingly and generously share His grace with everyone!

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for coming as the Servant and Savior for everyone, including us. Thank You for giving us a generous serving of Your Word. Give us the faith of the Canaanite woman. We trust in You to provide for all our needs, especially our need for the forgiveness of our sins. Amen.

DESSERT

Are there some people or groups whom we find challenging to serve because of the color of their skin, the language that they speak or the place where they are from? What would Jesus have to say about our prejudices?



WEEK 2: Proper 16

THEME: What Do We Serve?

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 16:13–20 (Gospel Lesson)

TEXT: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:19).

SONG: “Amazing Grace” (LSB 744, AGPS 63)

APPETIZER

Share a list of eating establishments (pizza, chicken, hamburgers, etc.). Ask, what food item is the restaurant or fast-food business known for? (Pizza Hut — pizza; Chick-fil-A — chicken; McDonalds — hamburgers.) While most restaurants serve a variety of choices, we can often identify one particular item that the business is known for.

What does the church serve?

MAIN COURSE

Today’s Gospel reading shares Jesus asking the disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” The disciples share the responses of others that they have heard. There was obviously still a lot of uncertainty as to who Jesus was and what His true mission was.

Peter, who was often the spokesman for the disciples, gives the “right” answer: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Peter had heard Jesus’ teaching and seen Jesus’ miracles. The Holy Spirit had given Peter the faith to confess the truth about Jesus.

After Jesus compliments Peter’s response, Jesus shares with Peter and the other disciples the message they were to share. Peter, the other disciples and all who came to faith in Jesus would become the first leaders of the church. The church would share Peter’s announcement that Jesus was the Son of God and the promised Savior. Because Jesus died for the sins of the world, all who believed in Jesus would have heaven unlocked for them. Those who did not know Jesus as the Savior would be locked out of heaven.

Peter and the church would serve the Good News of the forgiveness of sins, so that all who believed in Him would be with Him forever.

Like Peter, we know and believe that Jesus is our Savior. We are blessed to be the church that shares the Good News of Jesus. Our church and school serve many things to many people. We serve school subjects. We serve an important need in our church and community. The most important thing that we serve is the news that Jesus died for our sins and that by confessing Him we, too, will be with Him forever.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for the confession of Peter, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Thank You for bringing us into Your church through our Baptism. Help us to serve and share Your Word so that others might be in heaven with You forever. Amen.

DESSERT

Review the “Office of the Keys” from Luther’s Small Catechism.



WEEK 3: Proper 17

THEME: How to Be a Servant

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 16:21–28 (Gospel Lesson)

TEXT: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24).

SONG: “Come, Follow Me, the Savior Spoke” (LSB 688, AGPS 85)

APPETIZER

Bring games that may be challenging to play or projects (assembling a bicycle, etc.) that might be challenging to complete.

What’s the first thing we should ideally do before we start a game or project? We should read the directions! (Share examples of game or project directions.)

MAIN COURSE

In today’s Bible reading, Jesus reminds His disciples of His “project”: “He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” God the Father’s project was to save the world from sin. The only person who could perfectly follow and complete the directions was Jesus.

Peter and the disciples could not understand why and how Jesus was to suffer. Because of his love for Jesus, Peter wanted to stop Jesus on His mission. Peter says, “This shall never happen to you!” The Good News for us is that Jesus followed God’s directions. Jesus allowed Himself to be tortured and to die on the cross. Jesus did rise from the dead!

Jesus follows the directions for His serving with directions for all who believed in Him and followed Him. Only Jesus’ suffering and death could pay for the sins of the world. Jesus shares that all who follow Him could also expect to suffer for their faith. Jesus gives directions for our faithful following and service: “deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (v. 24).

We all get very selfish in wanting to do what is easy and best for ourselves. Following and serving Jesus is not doing what is easy or convenient. The “how to” of serving Jesus is to put Him first in our lives. Following those directions may not be easy. It may mean being made fun

of or suffering in other ways for Jesus’ sake. While there is only one Savior and one faith that saves us, there is not just one plan for following Jesus. God has a plan for each of us, and we follow His plan. We listen to His Word in our classroom and in our worship so that we may be faithful to all His directions for us.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for being the servant who followed Your Father’s directions perfectly. Thank You for taking up Your cross, for dying on that cross, and for rising again so that we might be Your children and servants. Bless us as we follow all Your directions and carry our crosses obediently. Amen.

DESSERT

Can you think of missionaries and others who have made sacrifices to serve Jesus? What are some crosses that we might be asked to carry in following Jesus?



WEEK 4: Proper 18

THEME: Great Servants

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 18:1–6

TEXT: “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:4).

SONG: “Father Welcomes” (LSB 605, AGPS 95)

APPETIZER

Show pictures of individuals who might be considered “great”: presidents, athletes, actors, scientists, etc. Many people would consider these individuals great because of their leadership or abilities.

Show a picture of a little child or bring a little child from the school before the worshipping group. Is this child great? Why or why not?

MAIN COURSE

Jesus’ disciples were regular human beings like you and me who often got distracted or got their priorities mixed up. In today’s Bible reading, the disciples are discussing greatness. “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” This is a conversation they had several times. The mother of James and John thought that her sons were the greatest. Like many others, the disciples thought that greatness had to do with important positions or important accomplishments.

Perhaps we get distracted like the disciples when it comes to greatness. We see pictures or hear about great athletes or those in other roles, and we admire them and want to be like them. While there are many great people who are good role models for us, Jesus has a more important lesson.

Jesus teaches the disciples and us a lesson by bringing a little child into the group and teaching, “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (v. 4). What makes the little child so great? It isn’t the child’s size, looks or abilities. The child is Jesus’ example because the child has no influence, power, money or anything else to offer. The child is just small and humble.

Jesus, who teaches the lesson on greatness, is Himself the greatest. While Jesus had great power and while Jesus was

the holy Son of God, His greatness came in humbly going to the cross for us. The apostle Paul shared, “He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross” (Phil. 2:8).

As we believe in Jesus as our humble and great Savior and follow Him, we become great. We are a great school and a great group of students because of what Jesus has done for us. While we give great effort in the classroom and in all school activities, we are always His humble believing children who serve others in His name.

PRAYER

Jesus, You truly are the greatest! You have shown Your greatness in the world You created. You can and do show Your greatness in so many powerful ways. We thank You that You showed Your greatness by humbly going to the cross for us. Bless us as we seek to show greatness by serving others. Amen.

DESSERT

What do the great children of our school do to humbly share the greatness of Jesus in our school, church and community?



WEEK 5: Proper 19

THEME: Forgiven and Forgiving Servants

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 18:21–35

TEXT: “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-times seven” (Matt. 18:22).

SONG: “Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive” (LSB 843, AGPS 96)

APPETIZER

Share a listing of potential school or personal bills to pay: utilities, supplies, etc. The leader may reflect, “How are we going to pay all these bills?”

Perhaps you have heard your parents or others talking about the bills they have to pay and maybe even wondering if the monthly income is going to be enough to pay the bills. Paying the bills is an obligation that we have. Sometimes people worry about paying their bills.

MAIN COURSE

In today’s Bible reading, Peter comes to Jesus asking how often he should forgive someone who has sinned against him. Perhaps we have struggled with Peter’s question after a playmate, classmate, brother or sister, or someone else has said something bad about us or hurt us in other ways. Peter wondered if forgiving someone seven times was enough. Jesus answers Peter’s question by telling a parable (story) about paying bills.

A servant owed 10,000 talents to his master. This was a big, impossible-to-pay bill. It was much more than could ever be paid in a lifetime. (Note that just one talent was 20 years of income.) When the servant begs for mercy, the master forgives the debt. The master considers the big bill paid!

The servant who had his bills paid contacts another servant and tries to collect a small bill (a couple of days’ wages). The servant angrily demands that the small bill be paid to him. Those who observed what was happening reported back to the master that the servant whose bill had been paid had now been mean and unkind to another servant. The master was not happy about how the servant had responded and ended up putting him in prison.

Jesus’ stories always had an important lesson. Our sins might be compared to unpaid bills. We all have a really

big, unpayable bill from disobeying God, saying unkind things about others, and breaking the commandments in many other ways. God, the Father, sent Jesus who paid our bill when He died on the cross for our sins. Because our bill has been fully paid, we now forgive the bills of others. We don’t keep track of who owes us what or how many times we say, “I forgive you.” We forgive others seventy times seven, or even more

Do we ever try to collect our bills? Has someone hurt our feelings, taken something from us or “owed” us in other ways? When we are tempted to collect the payment, we remember that Jesus took care of all the bills that we owe Him. We no longer need to collect the debts of others.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for giving Your life on the cross as the payment for my sins. Because I am thankful for the forgiveness I have received, I am now blessed to forgive others. Give me a forgiving heart to free others of their debts. Amen.

DESSERT

Review the Fifth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer.



WEEK 6: Proper 20

THEME: Grace-Paid Servants

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 20:1–16

TEXT: “I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you” (Matt. 20:14b).

SONGS: “Thy Works, Not Mine, O Christ” (LSB 565), “Thy Loving-Kindness” (AGPS 245)

APPETIZER

Display a sign with the words “That’s Not Fair!”

Share several home or school scenarios and have the children respond, “That’s not fair!”

- The first grade gets recess, but the second grade doesn’t. That’s not fair!
- A brother or sister gets to spend the night with a friend, but you don’t. That’s not fair!
- Another family goes to Disney World for spring break, but your family can’t. That’s not fair!

Have you ever thought or said, “That’s not fair”? I’m sure we all have at some time.

MAIN COURSE

In today’s Bible reading, Jesus shares another story (parable). Remember Jesus’ stories had important lessons for His listeners.

A vineyard owner hires people to work in his vineyard. The story doesn’t share what they were to do. Perhaps they were to trim vines, pick grapes or some other jobs. The vineyard owner promises the workers a fair payment for the day. A couple of hours later, the owner hires more workers and gives them the same wage as the first workers. Several hours later, he hires even more workers and gives them the same wage. He hires more workers as the day goes on and promises them all the same wage.

When the day’s work is done, each worker gets paid the same. Do you see a possible problem? (Get responses from the children.) “It’s not fair!” Imagine doing twice as many family chores than someone else in the family, but everybody receives the same allowance. “It’s not fair!”

Jesus comes into the world as the perfect Son of God. He takes care of all the work for our salvation. Jesus does nothing wrong, yet He is beaten by the soldiers

and condemned to death by Pilate. Jesus, who has never sinned, takes all the sins of the world on Himself. Jesus might have said, “It’s not fair!” Yet, Jesus never complains!

There is no work that we could do to earn our salvation. Jesus did all the work for us. Jesus’ work pays for the sins of everyone equally. Therefore, the blessings of our salvation are the same for everyone. Whether we have been a follower of Jesus for a lifetime or for just a few minutes, we all receive the same blessing of His saving work for us. No amount of work on our part could ever earn our salvation. We are thankful for His grace to all of us!

PRAYER

Jesus, You did it all to secure our salvation. We rejoice that You share that grace equally and generously with all who believe in You. Help me to be generous in sharing this Good News with others. Amen.

DESSERT

What does it mean to be saved by grace and not by works? Review the words of “Amazing Grace” or another grace-proclaiming hymn.



WEEK 7: Proper 21

THEME: Serving Faithfully

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 21:28–32

TEXT: “Son, go and work in the vineyard today,” And he answered, “I will not,” but afterward he changed his mind and went” (Matt. 21:28b–29).

SONG: “Lord, Whose Love through Humble Service” (LSB 848, AGPS 172)

APPETIZER

Ask a student to go on an errand. “Would you go get the Bible I left in my office?” (Or send the student on another task.) Most likely, the student will be honored to have been chosen for the errand and will complete it quickly.

Discuss: What if _____ had agreed to do the errand but then had remained sitting in the assembly? Obviously, the leader and others would have been very disappointed.

MAIN COURSE

Jesus again shares a story in today’s Gospel reading. What do we call Jesus’ stories? (Parables.) The stories always had an important lesson about Jesus and His kingdom.

The vineyard owner asks one son to work in the vineyard and the son says, “I don’t want to.” But then he changes his mind and does what his father had requested. The vineyard owner shares the same request with another son who says he will help, but then doesn’t do what he said he would do. Jesus asked the audience, “Which of the two sons is obedient to his father?”

In many of Jesus’ stories about vineyards, the vineyard owner represents God the Father. God owns more than a vineyard. He owns all of creation! The Son of the Father is Jesus. Jesus is the perfect Son who did everything His Father asked Him to do. Jesus kept every commandment perfectly. Jesus obeyed His Father all the way to the cross. On the cross Jesus prayed, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

Jesus had invited many to follow Him. Jesus invited the Jewish officials to believe in Him as their promised Savior. They refused to believe. They said they wanted to be among His vineyard workers, but they chose not to go into the vineyard. To be His vineyard workers, they were

invited to simply believe in Jesus. They were the ones who had said, “I won’t go!”

Jesus came for everyone. Some, whom the Jewish officials thought too sinful or unworthy to follow Jesus (tax collectors and other obvious sinners), believed in Him. They were blessed with faith to change their minds and go.

In our Baptism, we are given faith to believe in Jesus. We are in the vineyard of the church. We give thanks to Jesus for His service, and now we serve Him faithfully. We pray that we will never say “I won’t go” to His invitation to serve. Our Spirit-blessed response is, “I will go for you.”

PRAYER

Jesus, we are thankful that You said to Your heavenly Father, “I’ll go into the world as the Savior.” Thank You for going all the way to the cross for each of us. Give us a willing servant heart that says, “I’ll go as Your servant and witness.” Amen.

DESSERT

How can we say, “I’ll go”? What are some errands we can do for others to serve in our school, church, family or community?



WEEK 8: Proper 22

THEME: Respecting the Servant

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 21:33–46

TEXT: “Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance’” (Matt. 21:37–38).

SONGS: “Hail, Thou Once Despised Jesus” (LSB 531), “There Is a Name I Love to Hear” (AGPS 236)

APPETIZER

Discuss: Who and what do we respect?

Answers may include: We respect our teachers, parents, the flag, etc.

Discuss: How do we show respect?

Answers: We show our respect with our words and actions. We obey others. We stand for the flag. Etc.

Discuss: How do we show respect for Jesus?

MAIN COURSE

Once again, we have another story/parable of Jesus. (The Gospel of Matthew has approximately 20 parables of Jesus.) Jesus’ story again takes place in a vineyard. (There were many vineyards in the region where Jesus taught, and the setting was familiar to Jesus’ audience.)

The owner of the vineyard rents his property to others and trusts that they will take care of the vineyard and give him a fair share of the harvest of grapes. The renters don’t appreciate the supervision of the owner. They not only beat the supervisors, but they ultimately kill those who came to check on the vineyard.

Finally the vineyard owner sends his son to check on the vineyard. The greedy renters also kill the son of the owner.

Jesus’ stories always have an important lesson. Who is the vineyard owner? (God.) Who is the son he sends into the vineyard? (Jesus.) Who kills Jesus, the Son? (The chief priests and Pharisees; ones from the family of Israel to whom God had first given the promises of His vineyard.) The ones who should have welcomed Jesus did not believe that He was their Savior. They did not respect God’s promises of His Son.

God sent His Son into the vineyard of the world. The Son who was rejected was killed for the sins of the world. Jesus died for all who rejected Him. Jesus died for each one of us.

Do we always welcome Jesus into the vineyard of our church and school? Every day He comes through His Word. Sometimes we think we are too busy to welcome Him. Sometimes our words and actions imply that Jesus isn’t welcome. May Jesus open our hearts to respectfully welcome Him. May we be excited about Jesus’ presence among us.

PRAYER

Jesus, we confess that often we are not respectful of You and others. Thank You for being respectful of Your Father’s will and coming into the vineyard of the world to die for us. Help us to be respectful of one another and others. Amen.

DESSERT

Why is it important to be respectful at school? How are we respectful of Jesus in our worship? How do we show our respect for Him by respecting others?



WEEK 9: Proper 23

THEME: Well-Dressed Servants

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 22:1–14

TEXT: “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless” (Matt. 22:12).

SONG: “The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns” (LSB 348, AGPS 228)

APPETIZER

Explore times and places where how we dress is important.

The restaurant may have a sign that reads, “No shirt, no shoes, no service.” Perhaps your school has a dress code or requires school uniforms. All members on a team wear the same uniform.

MAIN COURSE

Our Gospel reading for today shares Jesus’ story about being properly dressed for a wedding banquet. Wedding celebrations in Jesus’ time were important celebrations that often lasted several days. (Students may remember that Jesus Himself was invited to a wedding in John 2.) Just like a wedding invitation may indicate some clothing suggestions, this was especially true in Jesus’ day.

Jesus shares that the king’s wedding for his son had several challenges. First of all, some of the invited guests refused to come. Secondly, not all the guests invited came dressed properly.

Again, we learn and apply the lesson from Jesus’ story. The King is? (God.) The Son is? (Jesus.) Who’s invited to the wedding? (Everyone.) Who first refused the invitation? (Many of the Jewish leaders of the day.) Who was invited after the first guests refused to come? (Jesus invited tax collectors and sinners; the invitation goes to all.)

Let’s explore what it means to be properly dressed for the king’s banquet. If we were to compare our lives to being properly dressed, we all would confess that we are “dressed” only in our dirty sinful “cloths.” The prophet Isaiah confessed, “All our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” (Is. 64:6). There is nothing we can wear or do to take away our sin.

Jesus comes dressed in rags in a manger. Jesus comes dressed in the plain robes of His day. Jesus comes and wears the dress of a crown of thorns and whip marks on His body. Jesus clothes Himself with the sins of the whole world as He hangs on the cross.

Because Jesus clothes Himself with our sins and dies on the cross, we are blessed to be dressed in His holiness and righteousness. We can’t buy or earn the right dress for a banquet with Jesus. He gives us the clothing of faith that we need to be at a heavenly banquet with Him.

We are blessed to have the best clothes possible. By faith, Jesus clothes us with His righteousness in our Baptism. Every day we are blessed to be Jesus’ guests in His church and school. We are welcomed at His banquet now and for all eternity.

PRAYER

Jesus, in our Baptism You have clothed us with the robe of Your righteousness. We thank You that You have reserved a place for us at the heavenly banquet table. As we await that feast, keep us faithful to You and help us invite others to Your feast. Amen.

DESSERT

Review the baptismal custom of a white cloth or garment (*Lutheran Service Book: Agenda*, p. 9). What is the significance of the white garment? What has God given you to wear?



WEEK 10: Proper 24

THEME: Government as God's Servant

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 22:15–22

TEXT: "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21).

SONG: "God Bless Our Native Land" (LSB 965, AGPS 106)

APPETIZER

Note the American flag in the church or classroom. Discuss how we show respect to our flag. If we are at a parade and our country's flag goes by, what do we do? If you are at a ball game or an event where "The Star-Spangled Banner" is sung, what do we do? Why is it important to show respect for our flag and country?

MAIN COURSE

Jesus lived 2,000 years ago. At the time, there was tension between the Jewish citizens and the Roman government. In today's Gospel reading, "Caesar" was the Roman governor of the region and represented the Roman authority in that place. Jesus and His followers lived under the rule of the Romans.

We pay taxes to have many benefits from the government. (With an older group, the services from local, state and national taxes might be explained.) All citizens in Jesus' time (Jews and Romans) were required to pay taxes. (Remember from the Christmas story that the Roman government required Joseph to register in Bethlehem. Joseph had to register for tax purposes.)

Trying to trick and test Jesus, the Pharisees, who disliked Roman rule, asked Jesus if they should pay taxes to Caesar. In that context Jesus shares the words, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

We first show our respect to God. We respect Him as the all-powerful and all-caring creator. We give thanks for our salvation through Jesus Christ. We have forgiveness of sins, life and salvation only because of Jesus' death and resurrection. Because we are baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection, we have a citizenship in heaven now and forever. We live obediently and respectfully as members of the church.

While we are here on earth, we are citizens of our community and country. Our government is also God's gift to us. As we give thanks for all that God has given us, we give thanks for our rulers. We show our thanks by giving respect to the flag and all the leaders under the flag. It is our duty to serve as faithful and respectful citizens.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for earning the freedom from sin and death for us. Thank You for the freedoms that we have in our country. Bless the leaders and servants who preserve and protect those freedoms for us. Help us to give them the respect You demonstrated and desire. Amen.

DESSERT

Review the "Of Civil Government" and "Of Citizens" sections in the Small Catechism. Explore how we can show respect to our community government leaders.



WEEK 11: Reformation

THEME: Free to Serve

SCRIPTURE: John 8:31–36

TEXT: “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31–32).

SONG: “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” (LSB 656, 657; AGPS 50, 51)

APPETIZER

Share two signs:

- 1) You have to...
- 2) You're free to...

Where have you heard or seen the first message? Where have you heard or seen the second message? What's the difference between the two messages? Which message would you rather hear or see?

MAIN COURSE

Martin Luther heard many “I have to...” messages. From his father, Martin heard, “You have to go to school to be a lawyer.” Martin was led otherwise and became a priest. Martin heard, “You have to obey the Pope and the rulings of the church,” and “You have to pay for the forgiveness of sins by purchasing indulgences.”

From his own conscience, Martin heard, “You have to be a better person,” and “You have to do more so that God will love you more.” Martin found out that he could never do enough to please others and especially God. We are in the same situation. We are born sinners. Every day we sin with our thoughts, words and deeds. We can never do enough to pay for our sins.

God led Martin to God's Word and God's truth. The truth is that Jesus came as our Savior. The truth is that Jesus freely chose to obey God's will and to suffer our punishment. The truth is that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross paid for all of our sins. The truth is that we are free from our sins and the punishment for our sins by believing in Jesus' sacrifice for us. The truth is that we will be free from death and the grave.

Through Jesus, the Son of God, we are free indeed (v. 36). We are now free to serve. As we observe the Reformation, we give thanks for Martin Luther and others who were God's servants at an important time in the history of the

world and the history of the church. Even though Martin Luther faced threats and persecution as he shared the truth, he was joyfully free to do God's will.

Because of our freedom, our “free to” list includes: We are free to worship. We are free to go to a Lutheran school. We are free to bring our offerings to support our church and missions. We are free to obey our parents and teachers. We are free to live as God's children and to serve Him and one another. We are free to share the Good News of our salvation. We are free to celebrate the blessings of the Reformation.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Thank You for Martin Luther and the Reformation leaders who were Your instruments to preserve that truth. May our church and school always share and live in Your truth. Amen.

DESSERT

Review Reformation history. Who were God's servants who brought the truth of God's Word to the church? Who are God's servants who keep us in the truth of the Word today?



WEEK 12: All Saints

THEME: Blessed to Serve

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:1-12

TEXT: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account" (Matt. 5:3-11).

SONGS: "For All the Saints" (LSB 677), "I Sing a Song of the Saints of God" (AGPS 131)

APPETIZER

Display/share statements of affirmation or celebration:

"Awesome!" "Great job!" "Good game!" "Super!"

Can you think of other statements like these that you have heard or shared? When have you heard these statements? How do those comments make you feel?

MAIN COURSE

In today's Gospel reading, we hear Jesus share what sounds like a positive comment. Nine times Jesus tells His listeners (who happened to be the disciples listening to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount) they are "blessed." "Blessed" is a more complimentary word than any of the words that we used when we began today's message.

"Blessed" is a word that describes those who listen to Jesus' words, believe in Him and follow Him. We are blessed to have Jesus as our Savior. Sometimes we talk about and think about our blessings. Usually we think about our family, friends, and other people and things that God gives us. The greatest blessing we have is to learn about Jesus and to believe that He came to be our Savior. We are blessed to be baptized and to be members of His family. We are blessed to have our sins forgiven. We are blessed to know that we will be in heaven with Him.

All who believe in Jesus are called "blessed" by Him. Sometimes, following Jesus is not easy because the devil doesn't want us to believe in Jesus. People who don't know Jesus may make fun of Him and may ridicule us. However, Jesus promises that all who faithfully follow Him will be blessed as His children now and will be blessed to be with Him forever.

This week the church celebrates All Saints' Day. We remember all those who were blessed to know Jesus and are with Him now. They are not saints because they had important positions, did important things or were good people. They are saints because they were blessed to have faith in Jesus and to faithfully follow and serve Him.

Because we are blessed through our Baptism to be children of God, we are blessed to worship and serve Him now, and we look forward to also being with Him forever.

We are super, awesome, great ... and, most of all, blessed in Jesus' name.

PRAYER

Jesus, You declare us to be Your saints because You have made us holy through Your blood. Thank You for the saints already in glory whom You kept faithful throughout their lives. Thank You for gathering Your saints together for eternity. We are blessed! Amen.

DESSERT

Review and sing hymns which celebrate the saints: LSB 671, 675, 676, 677, 678 and 679.



WEEK 13: Proper 27

THEME: Wise Servants

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 25:1–13

TEXT: “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour” (Matt. 25:13).

SONGS: “The Bridegroom Soon Will Call Us” (LSB 514), “Praise God. Praise Him” (AGPS 199)

APPETIZER

Share several “be prepared” scenarios:

- The classroom transitions to another subject or activity. How do you prepare for the next class? (Put away books from previous class, get out books or work for next class, etc.)
- The weather report says a storm is coming. How does your family prepare?
- We anticipate going to chapel/worship. How do we prepare to worship?

It’s important to be prepared!

MAIN COURSE

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus shares another story (parable). The Bible readings for the last weeks of the Church Year focus on the last days. We are to be prepared for Jesus’ coming again.

Jesus shares a story about preparations for a wedding. Wedding customs in Jesus’ day were much different than many wedding celebrations today. The bridegroom would lead a march to meet his future wife. The time of the meeting was a surprise to the bride and many others. Guests were invited to join the bridegroom on the walk through the streets to meet his bride. In Jesus’ time, there were no street lights. They walked in the dark to their destination. Jesus’ story emphasizes the importance of having a lamp and having oil to keep the lamps lit. (Depending on the time and interest of the students, other aspects of wedding celebrations in biblical times might be shared.)

Five of the wedding guests were wisely prepared with their lamps and oil when the bridegroom arrives. Five of the guests were foolishly not prepared. They did not have enough oil in their lamps to make the journey with the bridegroom.

Jesus’ stories always have an important lesson about His kingdom and our relationship with Him. Jesus, who is the bridegroom in the story, teaches that we are to be prepared to meet Him. We are to be prepared for His coming at any time because we do not know when He will come again to judge the world. When Jesus comes, those who believe in Him will be welcomed into eternal life with Him. Those who are not prepared will be separated from Him forever.

How do we prepare for Jesus’ coming? What’s the “oil” that we are to have in our lamps? When getting ready for a class or storm or other situation, we have to do something to make preparations. To be prepared for Jesus’ coming is to believe in Him. God has done everything to prepare the world for Jesus’ return. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus took care of all the details. The Bridegroom gave His life for His Bride, the church. Jesus has given us the oil of faith in our Baptism. He continues to fill our lives with the oil of His Word. We continue to rejoice in the grace He provides, and we joyfully wait for His final arrival.

PRAYER

Jesus, You keep us prepared for Your second coming through the preaching and teaching of Your Word. Prepare our hearts to hear and believe so that we will be prepared when You come again to welcome us and all believers to be with You forever. Amen.

DESSERT

Review the Small Catechism explanation of the Second Petition of the Lord’s Prayer.



WEEK 14: Proper 28

THEME: Faithful Servants

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 25:14–30

TEXT: “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master” (Matt. 25:21).

SONGS: “Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers” (LSB 515), “Soon and Very Soon” (AGPS 218)

APPETIZER

Share or display items (trophies, awards, certificates, ribbons) that recognize some of the talents (academic, athletic, artistic) of the students: spelling champion, athletic tournament champion, honor choir/band, etc.

It’s obvious that we have a very talented group of students in our school.

MAIN COURSE

The Gospel of Matthew includes many of the stories/parables that Jesus told about His kingdom. The parable today is another of Jesus’ parables about the end times. Jesus will come back again on the Last Day. He wants all of us to welcome Him and be with Him.

Jesus gives us the gift of faith through our Baptism. The blessings of forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are ours. We are members of His family, the church. Together we wait, excited about His return and being with Jesus forever. God not only gives us the gift of faith, but He gives us abilities and gifts that we can use to give Him glory and to share the Good News with others while we wait for His return.

Jesus’ story tells about “talents” a master gives to his servants. The master is Jesus. The servants are people. In Jesus’ time, the “talents” were generous amounts of money. The servants were to use their talents wisely. Jesus commends the wise servants and harshly judges the unwise servants.

The God who through the Holy Spirit so generously gives us our spiritual blessings also gives us gifts to glorify Him. If God has given us musical gifts, we are to use them to sing and play to His glory. If God has given us artistic gifts, we are to use them to share the beauty of His creation. We are to use our minds to learn about His Word and to be

the best students possible and to develop abilities to serve others. We use the talents God has given us to learn in school, to help our parents at home, to serve in our community and to bless His church. In every place, we use our talents wisely to serve Jesus.

Because we have been blessed with faith in Jesus, we will be with Him when He comes again. It will be exciting to hear Jesus also say to us, “Well done, good and faithful servants.”

PRAYER

Jesus, all that we are and all that we have is Your gift to us. Thank You for the talents You have given to each of us. Help us to use those talents to give You glory and help Your kingdom to grow. Amen.

DESSERT

What are some of the talents that God has given to the adults who serve in our school? How are they using their talents to serve God and to serve us? How can we thank them for sharing their talents with us?



WEEK 15: Thanksgiving

THEME: Thanking the Server

SCRIPTURE: Luke 17:11-19

TEXT: "Then Jesus answered, 'Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?'" (Luke 17:17-18).

SONG: "Praise and Thanksgiving" (LSB 789, AGPS 197)

APPETIZER

Share some "thank you" responses:

- Your grandparents send you a gift for your birthday, and you say ...?
- A friend takes you along to a movie or some other special activity, and you say ...?
- A classmate (or teacher) helps with an assignment you don't understand, and you say ...?

It's important to say, "Thank you!"

MAIN COURSE

During Jesus' earthly ministry, He did many miracles. (You may want to review some of Jesus' miracles with the students.) Today's Gospel reading tells how Jesus healed 10 people of the dreaded and very contagious skin disease of leprosy. (Depending on the time available and the age/interest of the children, more details about leprosy might be shared.)

The all-powerful Jesus simply tells the lepers to go show themselves to the priests, which was a requirement for being accepted back into the community. On their way to the priests, all 10 lepers are healed. Do you remember from the reading how many came back to give thanks? (Just one!)

Do we always remember to say "thank you"? Do we always remember to say "thank you" to God? Often we are like the nine lepers who did not return to give thanks.

God has given us Jesus as our Savior. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has forgiven all our sins. We are blessed to be part of God's family, the church. We are blessed to learn about Jesus and worship Him in our school. What should be our response? "Thank you!" As a church and school, we say, "Thank You, God."

As a country, we celebrate a national day of Thanksgiving. It is an important time for us as a country to say, "Thank You, God." What are some of the things for which we give thanks in our country?

Many of us will gather with family for Thanksgiving. It is important to give thanks to God for the blessing of family. What are some of the things for which your family will give thanks?

While we give thanks with others, we also give thanks individually for the blessings God has given us. What's on your thanksgiving list? Food, friends, family, faith? God has blessed us in many ways. We say "thank you" to Him.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for being our Savior! Thank You for all the blessings that You give us every day. Especially at this time of national Thanksgiving, we give thanks for ... (leader shares various blessings). Amen.

DESSERT

Review the explanation to the First Article of the Apostles' Creed and note the listing of all the blessings for which we give thanks.



WEEK 16: First Week in Advent

THEME: Shaped to Be Servants

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 64:1–9

TEXT: “But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand” (Is. 64:8).

SONGS: “The Advent of Our King” (LSB 331), “Soon and Very Soon” (AGPS 218)

APPETIZER

Show pieces of pottery. Do you know the process for taking potting clay and developing it into a piece of pottery? Research and explain the process or have the school art teacher share the process.

MAIN COURSE

Throughout the Old Testament, God called prophets who spoke His Word to His people. One of God’s spokesmen was the prophet Isaiah. In Isaiah 20:3, Isaiah is called “my servant.” Isaiah served God and served the people of Israel by speaking God’s Word of judgment and also sharing the Good News that the Messiah would come into the world to save God’s people. We will hear from the Advent prophet Isaiah in the next few weeks in our Advent worship.

Isaiah’s word picture of God shaping His people like a piece of pottery reminds us of God’s creation of Adam. God took dust from the ground and molded the first man, Adam. God took a rib from Adam and shaped the first woman, Eve. God had made a perfect creation.

God’s beautiful creation was cracked and broken in the fall. The effects of the fall and the reality of our sin is mentioned in today’s reading, “Behold, you were angry, and we sinned” (Is. 64:5). God could have taken His creation and thrown it away. He could have treated us as a broken piece of pottery that is thrown into the garbage.

Through Isaiah and the prophets, God shared His plan of salvation. This Advent season, we review God’s promise for a Savior and look forward to again celebrating the birth of Jesus. We celebrate Jesus as the saving work of His Father’s hands. Jesus came as a baby with tiny hands. The hands of Jesus played with Joseph’s carpenter tools. The hands of Jesus touched children and healed the paralyzed limbs and broken hearts of those who followed Him.

The hands of Jesus were wounded by the nails that held Him on the cross.

We receive the grace of God. The pastor’s hands splashed water on our heads in Baptism, God was reshaping us to be His re-creation.

As His redeemed and forgiven children, God sees us as the “work of His hands.” God created you to be His special creation. He has fixed our sinful nature that was broken. He continues to mold you to be His servants.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for the prophet Isaiah and Your message that He shared long ago. Help us to hear Isaiah’s message for us. As Isaiah prepared Your people for the coming of the Savior, prepare us to receive Him in our hearts this Advent season. Amen.

DESSERT

Find out more about the prophet Isaiah. When and to whom did Isaiah prophesy? Why is he called one of the “major prophets”? What are some favorite chapters and passages from the book? (We’ll be exploring more texts during the school year.)



WEEK 17: Second Week in Advent

THEME: Comforted to Serve

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 40:1–4

TEXT: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God” (Is. 40:1).

SONGS: “Comfort, Comfort Ye My People” (LSB 347), “Someone Special” (AGPS 217)

APPETIZER

Have you heard of a comfort dog? Lutheran Church Charities sponsors a ministry where specially trained dogs are brought into areas where “comfort” is needed. They have been brought to places where there has been a tornado, hurricane or other natural disaster. They have been brought into schools, churches and other places where children and adults are sad, scared or otherwise in need of emotional support.

MAIN COURSE

The people of Israel needed comfort that no animal or even any human source could provide. Israel would face challenges from foreign kings who would desolate the land and ultimately take some of the people as captives. In the previous chapter (Isaiah 39), King Hezekiah is warned, “The days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon” (Is. 39:6). As prisoners, they would be away from their families and friends in a foreign land. They would be very lonely. They would need comfort.

More challenging than their political position was their spiritual condition. Israel had given into the temptation to worship idols. There was no escaping the judgment of the just God. No comfort blankets, dogs or any other experiences could comfort them.

To those captive to sin, Isaiah speaks a word of comfort from God, “Comfort, comfort my people ... speak tenderly to Jerusalem ... that her iniquity is pardoned” (Is. 40:1).

Isaiah again shares the Advent promise that the Savior will come. Through His suffering and death, the Savior would take away the sin (iniquity) of Israel and the world. They would be comforted in believing that God was with them, and that He would rescue them. God would bring them back to their homeland again.

During the Advent season, we are blessed to hear God’s promises again. We are also blessed to know that God has fulfilled all His promises in Christ. We have the comfort that all our sins are forgiven. When we have a problem or tragedy, God’s Word comforts us. We have the comfort of knowing that we will be with Jesus forever.

PRAYER

Jesus, there are many times where our lives are uncomfortable because of the sin in our world and the sin in our lives. Comfort us in Your forgiveness. Make us instruments of comfort to others. Amen.

DESSERT

Find out more about Lutheran Church Charities and the Comfort Dog program. Consider supporting the ministry with prayer and funds.



WEEK 18: Third Week in Advent

THEME: Joy in Serving

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 61:8–11

TEXT: “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation” (Is. 61:10).

SONGS: “Hark the Glad Sound” (LSB 349), “Rejoice in the Lord Always” (AGPS 203)

APPETIZER

Hide the word “joy” (displayed on a Christmas decoration, plaque or poster) in the worship area. Begin the message by searching for “joy.” Have you ever lost joy?

Sometimes joy gets lost even as we prepare for Christmas. Some may look for joy in presents, but they don’t find it there. Some may look for joy in decorations, but they don’t find it there. Some may look for joy in family celebrations, but they don’t find it there.

MAIN COURSE

Advent is a season of repentance. We are sorry for the sins that caused Jesus to leave the glory of heaven to come to earth to be our Savior. However, in the time of sorrow for our sins, we also consider the joy that we have in Jesus as our Savior. The pink candle that we light this third week of the Advent season is a reminder of our joy.

The prophet Isaiah often shared God’s messages of judgment with the people of Israel. Because of their sins of unfaithfulness to God, God would allow their enemies to come and take away their earthly kingdom. Defeated, some of them would ultimately be taken prisoners. Some examples of God’s messages of judgment are found in the chapters previous to our text. Isaiah 59 shares, “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you” (v. 2). “For our transgressions are multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us; ... and we know our iniquities” (v. 12).

God would be faithful to His promise to send the Savior through His chosen people. The Savior would be faithful to all God’s promises and would pay the price for their and our sins. Throughout the Book of Isaiah, the prophet also shares the Good News. Isaiah is God’s prophet to share that “the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall

call his name Immanuel” (Is. 7:14). Isaiah also described the suffering of the Savior in great detail (Isaiah 53).

Isaiah speaks for himself and for God’s people, “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD.” We are blessed with Advent joy. Jesus, the Savior, has come. God’s Word will take us to find that joy in Bethlehem as we celebrate Jesus’ birth. God’s Word will bring that joy to us in all seasons.

We don’t have to look for joy. Joy has found us in Jesus!

PRAYER

Jesus, help us to see beyond the joy of decorations, gifts and other trimmings of the season. True joy is found in You as our Savior from sin. Give us joy in our lives and help us to bring Your joy to others. Amen.

DESSERT

Find the word “joy” in Advent and Christmas hymns.



WEEK 19: Fourth Week in Advent

THEME: God's Servant Mary

SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:26–38

TEXT: "And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus'" (Luke 1:30–31).

SONG: "My Soul Now Magnifies the Lord" (LSB 934, AGPS 177)

APPETIZER

Share a listing of fears: the dark, snakes, spiders, height, monsters, etc.

Can you guess what this is a listing of? (Things we might be afraid of.) What else would you add to your list? What are you afraid of?

We all have times when we are afraid and things we are afraid of. Today's Scripture reading tells us about a time when Mary might have been afraid.

MAIN COURSE

Our Bible reading for today tells us about the angel Gabriel's visit to Nazareth to share a special message with Mary.

The angel greeted Mary, "Do not be afraid, Mary." Mary may have been frightened by the appearance of an angel. (How do you think you would react?)

Mary could certainly have been frightened by the angel's message. Mary's plan to be married to Joseph was going to be interrupted. Mary was going to have a baby! The baby would not be the child of Joseph. The baby would be the Child of God. The Holy Spirit would bring human life in the womb of Mary. Mary could not understand God's working because she asks, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" Only God, in His miraculous power, could bring about this miracle. Jesus had to be one of us, true Man, to come into the world to be our Savior. God was going to make this miracle happen through Mary.

God's plan could have had other frightening consequences for Mary. How would she tell Joseph? What would she tell her friends? How was she going to raise the baby, who was the Son of God? There were lots of frightening details.

Although she was frightened, Mary trusted God's promises and plan. Mary responds to the angel, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (v. 38). Soon we will hear the Christmas story again. Joseph and Mary continue to trust God's plan, and soon they are part of God's miracle in Bethlehem.

Our fears go beyond the dark, spiders or the other things on our list. Sometimes we, too, wonder about God's plan for us. We, too, bring our fear questions to God: Will my family be OK? Will God be with me and others when we're sick? Whatever questions or fears we have, we, too, can trust in God's Word and God's promises. The God who kept and blessed His servant Mary will also keep and bless us.

PRAYER

Jesus, we confess that we, too, have many fears. Because You came to be our Savior, we no longer have to fear Your judgment. As You gave Mary faith to face her fears, give us faith to always trust in Your plan. Amen.

DESSERT

How many "fear not" passages are there in the Bible. Find and list some of them.



Christmas

THEME: Significant Titles

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 9:2-7

TEXT: "And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6b).

SONG: "Away in a Manger" (LSB 364, 365; AGPS 68)

APPETIZER

Share a listing of titles: doctor, emperor, principal, king, president, pastor...

Titles may describe what a person does or who a person is. A doctor, the principal, a king, the pastor...

The Bible gives many names and titles for Jesus. We hear some Christmas message titles today.

MAIN COURSE

About 700 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah shares the Christmas Good News, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given." The Child and Son is Jesus. Isaiah shares the Good News that Jesus is born for us. Jesus was born for all the people of the Old Testament who had believed that God would keep His promise. Jesus was born for Mary and Joseph and the shepherds who greeted Him in Bethlehem. Jesus was born for us. The Gift wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger is God's gift to us.

God's Word names the Gift to us. Jesus is a Wonderful Counselor. Our parents, teachers, pastor, principal and professionals that God uses are our counselors. They give us good advice. Jesus is the most Wonderful Counselor who always listens to us. His Word gives perfect direction for our lives.

Jesus is also named Mighty God. The Baby in the manger looks lovingly and helplessly human. He is also the God who made everything. He is the God who rules the universe. He is the God who alone has the might to save us from our sins.

Jesus is the Everlasting Father. Coming to earth from His heavenly Father, he brings the Father's care and compassion into our world. Unlike other humans whose lives are always limited to days or decades, Jesus is from

everlasting to everlasting. Because of His birth, death and resurrection, He promises us everlasting life.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace. We are often saddened because there may not be peace in our homes or peace in our communities or peace in our world. Jesus brings us the peace of knowing that our sins are forgiven. He brings us the peace of knowing that He will be with us in times that are not peaceful.

Which title is most meaningful to you? The Good News is that Jesus is all the titles all the time.

PRAYER

Jesus, You are the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace for us. Bless us and our families as we gather to celebrate Your birth with the family of the church. Amen.

DESSERT

Explore Christmas customs in other countries and cultures. Jesus is the Savior of the whole world!



WEEK 20: Second Week after Christmas

THEME: Learning to Serve

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:40–52

TEXT: “After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions” (Luke 2:46).

SONGS: “Let All Together Praise Our God” (LSB 389), “This Is He” (AGPS 239)

APPETIZER

Gather a group of students “communicating” with one another by texting, messaging, talking on the phone, etc. How are these students communicating? Are there other ways in which we communicate with each other? How do you think people communicated in Jesus’ time?

MAIN COURSE

We gather in our church where God communicates with us as we worship Him. He shares His Word with us. We listen carefully to His messages.

The “church” for Jesus and His family was the temple in Jerusalem. Mary and Joseph knew it was important that they take their son to the temple. Today’s Bible lesson tells about their visit to the temple when Jesus was 12 years old.

Sometimes our families don’t communicate very well regarding where family members are at and how we are going to meet again. Mary and Joseph got separated from Jesus. The worried parents found Jesus in the temple “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions” (v. 46).

The temple teachers gather together to discuss God’s Word given to them from the prophets. Through their questions and answers, they were communicating with one another about God’s Word. What do you suppose Jesus asked them? The lesson tells us that the audience was “amazed at his understanding and his answers.” The temple teachers did not comprehend that it was the all-knowing Jesus who was with them.

Where and when do we talk about God’s Word? We ask questions and share answers in our classroom Bible lessons, in our family and school devotions, and in other times of study.

As the perfect Son of God, Jesus obviously had all the right answers. Jesus still has all the right answers. He is the answer to our questions and confessions about our sin. He answers all our needs with His grace and forgiveness.

While our texting, messaging and other forms of communication are interesting, the most helpful discussions are those about God’s Word. We are thankful for teachers, pastors and parents who communicate God’s Word to us. May we use all forms of communication to share Jesus’ love with others.

PRAYER

Jesus, You have blessed us with many means of communication. Most importantly, through Your Word You continue to communicate the message of salvation. Help us to hear and believe Your message to us, and help us communicate it to others. Amen.

DESSERT

Review the Third Commandment.



WEEK 21: Baptism of Our Lord

THEMES: God's Servant John the Baptist

SCRIPTURE: Mark 1:4–11

TEXT: "And he preached, saying, 'After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie'" (Mark 1:7).

SONGS: "To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord" (LSB 406, 407), "Father, I Adore You" (AGPS 94)

APPETIZER

Display a pair of sandals. Do you have any sandals? When do you wear them? What do you like about them?

We have many options for what to wear on our feet: slippers, athletic shoes, dance shoes, dress shoes, Crocs, etc. The choices were very few in Bible times. People wore simple sandals.

MAIN COURSE

In today's Bible lesson, Jesus is beginning His earthly ministry.

John the Baptist is chosen to welcome and introduce Jesus. John wore interesting clothes — a camel hair cloak held around him with a leather belt and most likely sandals. More important than John's clothes was his message. He was asking people to repent because the promised Messiah was coming.

John's description of Jesus included, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie." Servants took care of tying and untying sandals. John knew that Jesus was the One sent from God, and he knew he was a humble servant of Jesus.

Like John, we are not worthy to be in the presence of Jesus. The Epiphany season of the Church Year continues to reveal Jesus as the Son of God. The miracles and words of Jesus are those that could only be done by God. In the presence of our Epiphany Lord, we are reminded of our sinfulness. Nothing we wear or do makes us welcome in God's presence.

The One mightier than John asks to be baptized by John. At the Baptism of Jesus, the revelations continue. God, the Father, appears to celebrate the person and work of

His Son. God, the Holy Spirit, is present to complete the picture of the Trinity and to fill Jesus with His presence.

Even though we are not worthy to be in the presence of Jesus, He comes to us in our Baptism. He clothes us with more than sandals or any other human clothing. As the water is splashed on us "in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit," we are clothed with the righteousness of Jesus.

Whether wearing sandals, gym shoes or other kinds of shoes on our feet, we walk in His ways, serving Him.

PRAYER

Jesus, we thank You for the blessings of our Baptism. Through the water and the Word, You have forgiven our sins and welcomed us as Your children. Help us to live in the blessings of our Baptism every day. Amen.

DESSERT

Review the section on Baptism in Luther's Small Catechism.



WEEK 22: Second Week after the Epiphany

THEME: Child Servant Samuel

SCRIPTURE: 1 Samuel 3:1–10

TEXT: “And Samuel said, ‘Speak, for your servant hears.’” (1 Sam. 3:10b).

SONGS: “Speak, O Lord, Your Servant Listens” (LSB 589), “Let My Prayer Rise before You” (AGPS 157)

APPETIZER

Show pictures or perhaps a model of the human ear. (Ask an anatomy teacher, health clinic or other source for the model or picture.)

Every part of our body is a miraculous creation of God. Our body includes the five senses, one of which is our sense of hearing. Only a creating God could “assemble” all those parts of the ear and give you the miracle of hearing.

MAIN COURSE

Can children be God’s servants? For the next few weeks, we will hear about children that God used to serve Him. We will begin with the child Samuel.

Elkanah and Hannah prayed and prayed to be blessed with children. God heard and answered their prayer. They called their son “Samuel.” In thanks to God for their special blessing, the parents dedicated their son to serve the Lord. Samuel would be God’s servant for a special time in Israel’s history.

Our Bible lesson for today shares God’s call of Samuel. The boy Samuel was serving God’s priest Eli when he heard his name being called. Thinking that Eli was calling him, Samuel ran to the priest ready to serve him. Several times Samuel heard the call, and each time Eli shared that he had not called Samuel. Finally, Eli realized that the Lord was calling Samuel.

Samuel went back to his bed. When the call came again, Samuel responded, “Speak, for your servant hears.” God shared His plan for Samuel and for Israel. God would keep His promise and bring the Savior into the world through His chosen family.

God has shared His plan for us. In His Word, God tells us that He planned to save the whole world from sin and death. Jesus listened to His Father and went to the cross

to be our Savior. God’s plan has been completed, and God has shared His message with us.

Like Samuel, we are invited to listen to God. God’s voice doesn’t call our name like He did with Samuel. However, in our Baptism God has called our name and now invites us to continue to listen to Him as we hear His Word in worship, in our classroom Bible lessons, when we read the Bible, and when our family studies His Word together. May our ears continue to listen attentively!

PRAYER

Jesus, we confess that many times we don’t listen to our teachers, parents and especially You. Open our ears so that we might listen more attentively as You share Your Word with us in church, school and home. Amen.

DESSERT

Share information of our church’s ministry to the deaf. Consider having an individual who “signs” visit the school and share some sign language.



WEEK 23: Third Week after the Epiphany

THEME: Child Servant Naaman's Servant Girl

SCRIPTURE: 2 Kings 5:1-14

TEXT: "She said to her mistress, 'Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy'" (2 Kings 5:3).

SONG: "In Thee Is Gladness" (LSB 818, AGPS 137)

APPETIZER

Consider sources of medical information and assistance. Where do you go or who do you talk to when you are not feeling well? Perhaps you go to your parents or the school nurse. They might take you to a doctor's office, Urgent Care or maybe even a hospital emergency room.

If you were not feeling well, would you first go to one of your classmates for medical advice? Would you go down to the first-grade classroom and ask them to help you? Probably not! While we respect the opinion of one another and other children, they wouldn't be our choice for health help.

MAIN COURSE

In today's Bible lesson, we have a little girl giving more than medical advice. The lesson doesn't give the name of the little girl. We are told that she had been taken as a hostage by the Syrians on one of their raids of Israel. She was forced to serve in the household of Naaman, an army commander. Naaman had a serious skin disease called leprosy. Lepers were forced to live in separate colonies because the disease was very contagious.

The little servant girl suggested that her master contact God's prophet living in Samaria. The little girl is confident, "He would cure him of his leprosy." The girl knew that the prophet could be God's instrument of healing.

Eventually, Naaman meets the prophet Elisha, who directs him to wash seven times in the Jordan River to be cured of leprosy. Eventually, Naaman follows that advice, and he is fully healed. "His flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean" (v. 14).

God used His prophet Elisha to work several miracles that showed that the God of Israel was the powerful and true God. Elisha was one of God's prophets who continued to bring Israel to repentance and to remind them of their

need for the Savior that God had promised through them. God used the little girl to introduce her master to the prophet.

Does God still use little children to bring people to Jesus? Of course, He does. Children may not be able to give medical advice or information on a lot of topics. However, having been cleaned from the leprosy of sin in our Baptism, we are now free to share how God has healed us. The Good News is that Jesus can heal people of all ages and all positions from their sin.

Unlike the little girl in our Bible lesson, we have not been taken away from our family and forced to be servants. However, God does put us in places where we can share the Good News that Jesus has healed us from our sins. Where has God placed you to serve Him as His witness?

PRAYER

Jesus, by Your suffering and death You bring healing from the disease of sin. We think of those who suffer from many different diseases. We pray for those who need Your miraculous healing today. Help us to be messengers of hope to those who suffer. Amen.

DESSERT

Celebrate and introduce those who are God's instruments of health and healing. Perhaps the school nurse could share information on her role, or a parent or member who is a doctor or nurse might visit the school and share information on children's health.



WEEK 24: Fourth Week after the Epiphany

THEME: Child Servant Josiah

SCRIPTURE: 2 Kings 22:1–2; 2 Kings 23:1–3

TEXT: “Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in all the way of David his father” (2 Kings 22:1–2).

SONGS: “O Jesus, King Most Wonderful” (LSB 554), “Oh, He’s King of Kings” (AGPS 188)

APPETIZER

Designate and dress a child as a king or queen. Set up a large chair as a throne. Put a crown on his/her head. Put on regal looking robes.

“Welcome to the kingdom of _____.” Typically, are children kings and queens? Why not? Would it be fun to be king or queen?

MAIN COURSE

The Bible tells us of several instances where children became kings. The royal position was often passed down from father to son. If the father died at a young age, his young child could become king. One such child king was Josiah. Our Bible lesson tells us that Josiah was only 8 years old when he became king. Josiah was king for 31 years.

Josiah became king at a time when there had been many ungodly kings. Many previous kings had worshiped idols. God was very displeased with the leaders and how they had led His people astray.

Second Kings 22–23 tell us about Josiah’s reign. Josiah made sure the temple became a place of faithful worship again. Josiah made sure that the people of Israel celebrated the Passover again. Josiah tore down some of the places where idols had been worshiped.

God’s Words to His people had been lost and ignored. When they were found again, Josiah made sure that they were read to the people. Hearing God’s Law, the people were led to repent for their unfaithfulness. The people heard again of God’s promise that He would never forsake them and that He would keep His promise to send the Savior through them.

Like the people of Josiah’s time, God’s Word is often forgotten and ignored by us. We are blessed that the Word has never been hidden from us. We hear God’s Word every day in school. We hear God’s Word every Sunday in worship. However, we may choose to ignore it and not live according to God’s commands.

We thank God for Josiah who was God’s instrument of bringing His truth to His people again. We thank God for pastors, teachers and Christian parents who are God’s messengers to us. Sometimes, even as children, we can be God’s messengers to our family and friends even today.

PRAYER

Jesus, You are the King of all creation. You are the King who hung on the cross. We pray that kings and rulers on earth may obey You and rule justly over Your people. Amen.

DESSERT

Review the Second Petition of the Lord’s Prayer.



WEEK 25: Fifth Week after the Epiphany

THEME: Child Servant Boy with the Lunch

SCRIPTURE: John 6:1–14

TEXT: “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish” (John 6:9a).

SONGS: “Feed Thy Children, God Most Holy” (LSB 774), “Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow” (AGPS 198)

APPETIZER

If the size of the assembly can facilitate the process, bring something to share with students. (If the group is large, a treat might be shared with a selected class or group.)

It’s fun to share! Perhaps you have shared a birthday treat with classmates or have shared something with a friend.

MAIN COURSE

Today’s Bible lesson is about a boy who shared his lunch. Jesus performed many miracles that showed that He was the all-powerful Son of God. Many people were excited about seeing and hearing Jesus. The lesson tells us, “a large crowd was coming toward him” (v. 5). Later we find out that there were 5,000 men, and we can add women and children to that number.

The compassionate Jesus asks His disciples about feeding the crowd. Obviously, they did not have enough money or food to feed such a huge number. Disciple Andrew finds a boy who brought a lunch of five loaves and two fish. The boy shares his lunch with Jesus. Jesus blesses the lunch and begins sharing it with the crowd. Soon 5,000 people are miraculously fed from the boy’s lunch. Not only did everyone eat, but there were 12 baskets of leftovers!

God shares with us every day. We are blessed with food and clothing that God has provided through farmers, factories, stores, our parent’s purchases and many other means that He uses. The things we have and need don’t miraculously appear. They are the result of God’s generously providing through many people. Jesus led the crowd in giving thanks for the food they were to receive. We give thanks for all that God continues to give us.

Jesus later explains to His disciples that He came to share something more important than physical food. Jesus tells the disciples that more important than a full stomach is a heart full of faith in Jesus. Jesus calls Himself the Bread

of Life. God the Father shares His Son with the world. God gives us a generous supply of His “bread” through His Word. In our church and school, we are fed well, and we give Him thanks!

We are blessed to receive and share. Perhaps we have food to share with the hungry people in our community. Perhaps we have clothing that we have outgrown that we could donate to a local shelter for the homeless. God can use our sharing to bless others.

PRAYER

Jesus, in Your power, You took a little boy’s lunch and shared food with thousands. Thank You for all that You so generously give us. Help us to share with others. Especially make us generous in sharing the Good News of Your love. Amen.

DESSERT

Review the Fourth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer. Identify local food pantries, and research the ministry of Orphan Grain Train.



WEEK 26:

Transfiguration of Our Lord

THEME: Glorified Servant

SCRIPTURE: Mark 9:2-9

TEXT: "And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them" (Mark 9:2b-3).

SONGS: "Alleluia, Song of Gladness" (LSB 417), "Alleluia! Sing to Jesus" (AGPS 60)

APPETIZER

Display laundry detergent, stain remover and/or bleach.

Have you ever seen these products? Where? What are they used for? Perhaps you've been out playing and your clothes got very dirty and your parents took your clothes to the laundry room for a special treatment. Perhaps your football or soccer uniform had sweat and stains and needed some extra attention.

MAIN COURSE

Today's Bible lesson is not a laundry lesson, but it does mention that "[Jesus] was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them."

The lesson describes the Transfiguration of Jesus. It is a special time in the Church Year. For the past weeks, we have been in the Epiphany season where we have seen the glory and power of Jesus. This event brings us to the glorious end of the season. Jesus is on a high mountain with disciples Peter, James and John. The disciples are blessed to see that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. In that setting, God the Father again speaks: "This is my beloved Son."

Words cannot describe what happened and what Jesus looked like. Mark's Gospel again shares that Jesus' appearance was brighter and cleaner than any bleach. Jesus was the perfect, holy Son of God. There was no mark of dirt or sin.

Many times, more than our clothes are dirty and are in need of cleaning. We are covered with the dirt and stains of our sin. Jesus, who was transfigured on the mountain, would go down from the mountain and proceed to the cross. This coming week, we begin to follow Jesus on His journey as we start the Lent season of the Church Year.

The Son of God, who was transfigured, would Himself be covered with bruises and scars in His Passion so that we might receive His brightness. Jesus' journey to the cross makes us clean from sin. As a child is baptized, the pastor often directs the family and congregation to a white cloth or clothing. While those items don't glow like Jesus' robes, they remind us that in Baptism we have been cleansed from sin and, by faith, we are wearing clean robes of righteousness.

PRAYER

Jesus, we can't imagine what it was like to see Your glory on the mountain. Because You went from the Mount of Transfiguration to the Mount of Calvary, all who believe in You will see Your glory in eternity. Thank You for covering us in the white robes of righteousness as we wait for Your coming. Amen.

DESSERT

Review the seasons of the Church Year. What was the emphasis of Epiphany? What is the significance of Lent (length, emphasis, etc.)? What follows Lent? What colors correspond to the church seasons?



WEEK 27: First Week in Lent

THEME: Suffering Servant — Disfigured

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 52:13–53:2; Matthew 26:65–68; Matthew 27:27–31

TEXT: “His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind” (Is. 52:14).

SONGS: “O Lord, throughout These Forty Days” (LSB 418), “Let Me Learn of Jesus” (AGPS 156)

APPETIZER

Products to cover skin blemishes.

Have you ever had a black eye or bruise on your face or body? Perhaps it was painful or uncomfortable. Perhaps you were embarrassed by it. We find ways to cover up our blemishes.

MAIN COURSE

We are now in the season of Lent. For the next six weeks, we will follow Jesus as He journeys to the cross. The Gospels give us many painful details of Jesus’ suffering. Six hundred years before Jesus’ Passion, the prophet Isaiah had described the suffering of the Savior. Isaiah’s description is sometimes called that of the “Suffering Servant.” Our chapel services the next few weeks will share Isaiah’s descriptions and Jesus’ fulfillment in the Gospels.

Isaiah has prophesied that Jesus would have more than bumps and bruises. Our Bible words say that “his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance.” The description of Jesus’ suffering tells about those who hated and accused Jesus, spitting in His face and slapping Him. Pilate had soldiers whip Jesus with instruments that tore the skin from His back. A crown of sharp thorns was pushed painfully and deeply onto His head. Imagine being in a really bad accident where your body is badly bruised and broken. Jesus was in no accident. His marks were the result of human hands.

We may not have experienced deep and painful cuts or bruises. However, we have “bruises” below our skin. Our sins are like deep wounds. Some of our “marks” are due to the sinful things we do to ourselves. Some of our “marks” are due to the sins of others. Our sins can’t be covered up with makeup or bandages or anything else that might hide them.

Jesus was beaten and bruised and finally crucified so that He might take away all the bruises of our sin. Jesus brings complete healing to all our hurts. Because of Jesus’ wounds, we are healed. We look forward to the time when we will see His glorified body. We will be with Jesus with all marks of sin removed from our bodies.

As we wait for Jesus’ return, we serve others by being aware of their wounds and sharing the perfect healing of Jesus.

PRAYER

Jesus, Your human body was bruised and bleeding for us. As we journey through the season of Lent, keep our eyes on You so that we might see the bruises that our sins brought on You. Help us to share Your healing words. Amen.

DESSERT

Share the difference between an athletic or accidental bruise and one from a hurtful relationship. Review with the children (depending on age levels) what to do and to whom they should go if someone is hurting them.



WEEK 28: Second Week in Lent

THEME: Suffering Servant — Despised and Rejected

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 53:3; Matthew 27:15–23

TEXT: “He was despised and rejected by men, ... he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Is. 53:3).

SONG: “Christ, the Life of All the Living” (LSB 420, AGPS 82)

APPETIZER

Rejected products: toys that are broken, electronics that no longer work, dishes that are chipped, food items that have expired, etc.

Are these items still usable or useful? Why or why not? We might say that they are “rejected.”

MAIN COURSE

We again consider Isaiah’s pictures of Jesus’ Passion that he was inspired to share with God’s people 600 years before Jesus came to earth. God’s Word is perfect. What God said would happen did happen. Every prophecy about Jesus is fulfilled. We read of the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy as we read the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ Passion during this Lenten season.

Isaiah wrote about Jesus, “He was despised and rejected by men.” Today’s reading from the Gospel of Matthew tells of Pilate’s effort to let the innocent Jesus go free. Pilate thought the crowd would decide to keep Barabbas, an evil criminal, in prison and then free Jesus. The crowd chose to free the criminal and to crucify Jesus. Jesus was rejected again. Many times during Jesus’ earthly ministry, people made their choice to reject Jesus. A rich man chose his wealth and rejected Jesus. Some followers chose their jobs or lifestyle over following Jesus.

Do we ever reject Jesus? Perhaps on a Sunday morning we choose to sleep in our bed rather than go to church, and we reject Jesus. We allow a friend to use Jesus’ name in a curse word, and we let it go and reject Jesus. There are many times and ways when we choose something more comfortable or less threatening than following Jesus.

Jesus could have chosen to reject us. Jesus could have chosen not to be verbally and physically abused. Jesus could have chosen not to go to the cross for us. However, Jesus followed through with God’s plan of salvation. God

chose to bring us into His family in our Baptism. All the blessings of Jesus’ suffering and death are ours now and forever. When we die, we know that God will not reject us but bring us into His glory.

We are thankful that Jesus forgives us for the times that our words and actions reject a classmate, a friend, or a brother or sister. Serving Jesus, we are careful not to reject others.

PRAYER

Jesus, we confess that sometimes our words and deeds reject others and You. Forgive us. We give thanks that through the rejection You experienced, You bring us forgiveness. Amen.

DESSERT

Read (and perhaps sing) of Jesus’ suffering in Lent and Holy Week hymns (LSB 449, 451, etc.).



WEEK 29: Third Week in Lent

THEME: Suffering Servant — Whipped and Wounded

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 53:5–6; Mark 15:12–24

TEXT: “But he was pierced for our transgressions” (Is. 53:5).

SONGS: “Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted” (LSB 451), “There Is a Green Hill Far Away” (AGPS 235)

APPETIZER

Have a box of bandages or similar items used to cover a small cut or wound. If the group is small, share a bandage with every student. Consider writing a message on each bandage: “Jesus covers my sins.”

When have you asked for a Band-Aid? Can a Band-Aid cover any and all wounds? Does a Band-Aid last forever?

MAIN COURSE

The prophet Isaiah had shared that Jesus would be wounded. As we listen to the Passion story, we picture Jesus’ wounds. We have already heard about the wounds from the whips and crown of thorns. Jesus was condemned by Pilate to be crucified. The Roman soldiers carried out their governor’s command. Crucifixion meant wounds in the hands and feet so that Jesus’ body would hang on the cross. These were wounds that no bandage or other covering could hide or heal.

Isaiah’s prophecy gives the reason for the wounds: “He was pierced [wounded] for our transgressions.” To “transgress” is to go off the path. Adam and Eve went off the path of God’s command for them. We have followed them on our selfish and sinful paths. Jesus’ body marks are sometimes described as “stripes.” The whips left stripe-like wounds. Isaiah shares, “with his wounds we are healed.” The striped and wounded Jesus hung on the cross and died on the cross. Jesus makes the payment for all of our “transgressions.”

Being baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus (**Romans 6**), we received our healing through Jesus. God’s forgiveness for us is described as a “healing.” We will not suffer eternally for our sins. We will be with Jesus with perfect bodies.

Sometimes we wound others with our words and actions. We are thankful that Jesus has covered all our wounds.

Serving Jesus, we choose our words carefully and share our actions lovingly so that we will not hurt others.

PRAYER

Jesus, the little wounds of our bodies remind us of Your big wounds. Your wounds on the journey to the cross and at Your crucifixion bring healing to us. Because You have healed the wounds of sin, we can help heal the wounded bodies and hearts of others. Amen.

DESSERT

Collect health kit supplies and assemble kits for local or mission organizations.



WEEK 30: Fourth Week in Lent

THEME: Suffering Servant — Silenced

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 53:7; Matthew 27:11–14

TEXT: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth” (Is. 53:7a).

SONG: “The Lamb” (LSB 547, AGPS 229)

APPETIZER

Display a sign or verbally share the words, “Quiet please!” Have you ever heard that request? Where? When is it hard to be quiet? Why is it necessary to be quiet?

MAIN COURSE

Jesus had spoken often of the kingdom of God; Jesus had talked to little children; Jesus had commanded the storm to “be still!”; Jesus had commanded Lazarus to come out of the tomb. Jesus, who had spoken many words, is perfectly quiet.

The prophet Isaiah had written about the promised Savior, “He opened not his mouth.” When Jesus’ accusers told lies about Him, He remained silent. When Pilate quizzed Jesus about who He was, Jesus remained silent.

Jesus would go quietly to the cross. The scene on Calvary’s hill was most likely noisy and chaotic. There was the noise of hammer blows; soldiers were shouting directions; some of those watching continued to shout insults at Jesus; the two thieves crucified with Jesus argued with each other; there were tears and cries of sorrow from those who loved Jesus.

Jesus patiently and silently hung on the cross, submitting as the Father’s sacrifice for the sins of the world. When Jesus spoke (seven times), His words were carefully, divinely chosen. Jesus broke the silence with the announcement, “It is finished.” Then Jesus was silent again. He was silent in death. The sacrifice was completed once and forever.

The Lenten season is a time for some silence. We silently think about and confess our sins, which put Jesus on the cross. We meditate quietly on all that Jesus experienced for us. We pray silently, giving thanks to Jesus for His death for us.

We have lots of time to talk with our friends, to listen to music, to cheer for the team and to experience the noise and activity in our lives. The Lenten season and the reflection on Jesus’ Passion is also a time to be respectfully and reverently quiet.

PRAYER

Jesus, too often we speak when we should be quiet. You went quietly to the cross. You kept quiet in the agony of Your Passion. Now, open our mouths to give You thanks and praise. Open our mouths to share the blessings of Your Passion with others. Amen.

DESSERT

What quiet times do we have in our room, as a family, as a classroom? Plan some quiet times together.



WEEK 31: Fifth Week in Lent

THEME: Suffering Servant — Prayerful

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 53:10–12; Luke 23:32–38

TEXT: “Because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors” (Is. 53:12b).

SONG: “Go to Dark Gethsemane” (LSB 436, AGPS 105)

APPETIZER

Explore personal and group prayer life. Where and when do we pray? (Classroom, church, family table, bedroom, etc.)

For whom do we pray? (Family, friends, people who are ill, etc.)

How do you pray? (Hands folded, bowed heads, etc.)

MAIN COURSE

Jesus prayed often. Jesus prayed before blessing the loaves and fish and feeding the 5,000. As Jesus’ last hours before His death approached, Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus even prayed on the cross.

As we have learned the past weeks, many of the details of Jesus’ Passion were prophesied by Isaiah hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth. Isaiah had written, “He bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.” “Intercession” means to ask or to pray.

How do we react if someone hurts us with words or actions? Our typical response is to try to hurt them back. We may say unkind or hurtful things. We may even take some type of physical reaction. We tend to repay sin with more sin.

From a human perspective, Jesus had every right to “get even” with those who falsely accused Him, with the Roman soldiers who physically hurt Him. What is the response of Jesus? Jesus prays for them, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Experiencing unbelievable pain and suffering, Jesus doesn’t think about Himself or pray for Himself. He prays for others. He prays for His enemies.

Through His suffering and death, Jesus makes possible the forgiveness that He prays for on the cross. The Father

forgives the sins of others because Jesus has paid the price for sin and opened the means of communication again. The Father hears and answers prayers for Jesus’ sake.

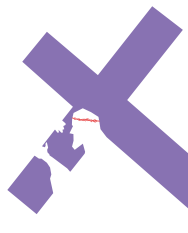
When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we pray, “And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Believing that God has given us complete forgiveness for all of our sins, we are free to forgive those who have sinned against us. We forgive not only those who we might more easily forgive (family members and friends), but also those who may be more difficult to forgive. Jesus says to also pray for our enemies. Jesus did. In His name, we will also. We serve others through prayer.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for teaching us to pray. Thank You for Your prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane and from the cross. Thank You for hearing our prayers now. We pray that we might be forgiving of others as You have forgiven us. Amen.

DESSERT

Review the Fifth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer. Learn about the prayer ministry in your congregation.



WEEK 32: Palm/Passion Week

THEME: The Form of a Servant

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 2:5–11

TEXT: “[Jesus] emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:7).

SONGS: “Hosanna, Loud Hosanna” (LSB 443), “Hosanna, Hallelujah” (AGPS 121)

APPETIZER

Display a sign with the statement: “We’re #1.”

Have you ever seen this message? Where? Have you ever said or shared this message? When?

We want to strive to be the best. We like to celebrate our team or ourselves as being important.

MAIN COURSE

Could Jesus have displayed a sign that said, “I’m #1”? Jesus is true God. Jesus has all power and glory. Certainly, Jesus was and is #1 in many ways.

This is an important week in the Church Year. Last Sunday was Palm Sunday. This week is Holy Week and we remember Jesus’ suffering and death.

Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The palm-waving people on the streets are shouting their “hosannas” to Jesus. They were treating Jesus as if He were king. In our culture and time, the response could be, “You’re #1, Jesus.”

As the week goes on, the shouts of praise turn into shouts of condemnation, “Crucify Him!” Jesus is treated worse than a criminal. As a matter of fact, the crowd chose a criminal, Barabbas, over Jesus. Jesus humbly accepts the treatment He receives. Jesus willingly gives up all honor and glory to die for the sins of the world.

Jesus’ journey is described by the apostle Paul in today’s reading from Philippians 2. Jesus did not come to show that He was #1. Jesus did not come as an earthly king. Jesus came as true man, and He came as a servant. Jesus came to serve us and to serve the world by being the Savior. Jesus’ humble service and sacrifice saves us.

We are often prideful. We want others to notice us. We want to be #1 in lots of different ways — athlete, honor student, etc. It’s important to always do our best. It’s OK

to want to win and excel in what we do. However, we do well not for our own glory, but to give thanks to God for what He has done for us. We are loved, forgiven, precious children of God. We are blessed to humbly serve others in His name.

In Jesus’ name, we now serve others not to receive recognition, but to humbly bless others and to give glory to God. Holy Week is a special week as we follow Jesus. We look for opportunities to serve our family, our friends and others quietly and humbly, giving all glory to God.

PRAYER

Jesus, we are blessed to follow You this week through the streets of Jerusalem and eventually on the path that leads to the hill on which You were crucified. Help us to follow You in faith and to see that You made the entire journey for us. Amen.

DESSERT

Consider having different classrooms set up “stations of the cross.” Students could travel through the school and review Jesus’ serving all the way to the cross.



WEEK 33: Easter

THEME: Surprised Servants!

SCRIPTURE: Mark 16:1–8

TEXT: “And he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him’” (Mark 16:6).

SONG: “I Know That My Redeemer Lives” (LSB 461, AGPS 127)

APPETIZER

Set up a small (or large) “surprise” party atmosphere (balloons, colorful streamers, noisemakers, etc.).

Have you ever been part of a surprise party? Maybe someone surprised you on your birthday. Maybe you were part of surprising someone else. Surprises are fun!

MAIN COURSE

Today’s Bible lesson shares a surprise event. Jesus had died on Friday afternoon. The Sabbath laws made it necessary for Jesus’ body to be quickly taken from the cross and buried. Jesus was buried in a tomb borrowed from Joseph of Arimathea. (Note the details shared in Mark 15:42–47.) Some loving women planned to visit the tomb and complete the burial process after the Sabbath Day (Saturday).

We can imagine the sad Sunday morning walk to Jesus’ tomb. The women experienced several surprises when they came to Jesus’ tomb. The large stone in front of the tomb was already rolled away. Instead of finding the body of Jesus in the tomb, the women see a “young man ... dressed in a white robe.” So far the surprises were certainly unusual and perhaps even frightening.

The greatest surprise was the angel’s announcement, “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here” (v. 6). The announcement to the women is the biggest and greatest surprise in the history of the world. Jesus has risen!

The surprises continued to come. Disciples Peter and John saw the empty tomb and heard the news that Jesus was alive. Jesus came to frightened disciples hiding on Sunday evening and surprised them by suddenly being in the room with them. Again and again, Jesus surprised people showing them that He was indeed alive.

One of those surprised by a visit from Jesus was the apostle Paul. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul shares again the reality of Jesus’ resurrection. Paul shares that all of us who believe in Jesus’ resurrection will be surprised. Because of sin, we will die, but we will rise too. Paul shares (v. 52) that on the Last Day we will be surprised by a trumpet sound. We will be surprised by Jesus’ coming, but we know that we will be with Jesus with imperishable and immortal bodies.

Did you have any Easter surprises? The best surprise is that Jesus is alive for you!

PRAYER

Jesus, You surprised the women at the tomb and Your disciples with Your resurrection. Thank You for the greatest surprise of all time. Every day we are blessed to live in that surprise as the blessings of Your resurrection come to us in our Baptism. Amen.

DESSERT

Share an Easter “surprise” with a homebound person, nursing home patient or someone else who will be blessed with a surprising note or visit. Be sure to share the greatest surprise ever — Jesus is alive!



WEEK 34: Second Week of Easter

THEME: My Servant Abraham

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 12:1–9

TEXT: “For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham, his servant” (Ps. 105:42).

SONGS: “The God of Abraham Praise” (LSB 798), “Life Is a Journey” (AGPS 160)

APPETIZER

Our worship messages the next few weeks will focus on some “mystery” servants of the Old Testament. See if you can guess the servant.

- God invited me to take a “mystery” trip to a new land.
- My wife, Sarai, went with me.
- God changed my name and that of my wife.
- God gave me the promise that from my family the Messiah would be born.
- I had a son and named him Isaac, and I was willing to sacrifice my son.

I am servant ABRAHAM!

MAIN COURSE

From many earthly perspectives, Abraham was not a servant. Abraham would have been one who was served by others. In Genesis 12–25, we learn that Abraham was wealthy and owned livestock and land. Abraham was a rescuer — rescuing nephew Lot.

Abraham was also a liar — lying that his wife was his sister in order to protect himself. Abraham was also doubtful — doubting that God would keep the promise to give him an heir, so Abraham devises his own plan. Like every descendant of Adam and Eve, including you and me, Abram was a sinner.

In Psalm 105:42, Abraham is called “his servant.” Abraham was God’s servant. Abraham was God’s chosen servant. God chose Abraham and his family to be the family through which the Savior would come. The family history of Jesus in Matthew 1 traces His heritage back to Abraham.

Abraham was God’s trusting servant. When God told Abraham to travel to a new land, Abraham trusted God’s

plan and left. When God told Abraham that Sarai and he would have a son in their old age, they believed in God’s plan and God was faithful to His promise. When God told Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, Abraham trusted God’s plan and provided a substitute sacrifice for Isaac. Abraham trusted God’s plan to send his Savior.

Like Abraham, we are chosen servants. God chose us to be His children in our Baptism. God brought us into His family. God chose to be with us and bless us. The Savior who came from Abraham’s family is our Savior, Jesus. Jesus came to be the perfect servant, fulfilling His Father’s plan to save us.

We, too, are trusting servants. Like Abraham, we receive God’s promises. God may not ask us to travel to a new land, but God has promised to bless all our journeys as He goes with us.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for Your servant Abraham. Like Abraham, may we faithfully believe Your promises to us and may we faithfully follow You. Amen.

DESSERT

God gave His promise to Abraham who then shared the promise with his son. Explore the family tree of Abraham. Invite children to explore how God’s promises have been passed on to them through their family.



WEEK 35: Third Week of Easter

THEME: My Servant Moses

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 3:1–12

TEXT: “Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house” (Num. 12:7).

SONG: “Earth and All Stars” (LSB 817, AGPS 90)

APPETIZER

Who is this week’s “mystery” servant?

- He was placed in a basket in the Nile River shortly after his birth.
- He was raised by a princess to become royalty.
- He lived in a desert serving as a shepherd.
- God called him from a burning bush.
- He was chosen to lead God’s people to the Promised Land.

I am servant MOSES!

MAIN COURSE

Do you ever make excuses? “I didn’t get my homework done because...” “I would have cleaned my room, but...” As excuse makers, we can identify with servant Moses. It took a long time for Moses to become God’s leader to bring His people out of slavery. Moses spent 40 years living as royalty with the family of Pharaoh. Moses spent another 40 years working as a shepherd and living with his family in the desert.

When God finally calls Moses to be His servant and rescuer (**Exodus 3**), Moses offers excuses. Moses had just seen a dramatic revelation of God in a burning bush. Moses heard the personal call of God, “Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt” (**Ex. 3:10**). Moses responds with a series of excuses, “Who am I to go before Pharaoh?” “Who do I say sent me?” “What if they don’t believe me?” “I’m not a good speaker.”

God answered each of Moses’ excuses. The call was from the Lord. Moses was God’s choice. God would be with Moses and would give miraculous power. Moses’ brother Aaron would be the spokesman.

Often times we give excuses for our sins: someone else is guiltier than we are, we didn’t know or remember the rules, etc. God does not accept excuses for our sins.

Jesus, the perfect servant leader, offered no excuses to His Father as He came to be our Savior. Jesus might have responded, “But I am the Son of God and shouldn’t have to take on the human nature,” or “Isn’t there another time or another way to take care of the world’s sin?” Instead, Jesus willingly and obediently went to the cross. Jesus prayed, “Not my will, but yours, be done.” Jesus’ sacrifice takes away all our sins and all our excuses.

Following Jesus’ example, we, too, are blessed to serve. Instead of making excuses for obeying God’s law and doing His will at home, school and everywhere else, we become His obedient servants.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for Your servant Moses. Like Moses, we, too, give our excuses for not obeying Your commandments. Thank You for forgiving our excuses. Help us to listen and follow obediently. Amen.

DESSERT

Review the Ten Commandments given to Moses and us at Mount Sinai.



WEEK 36: Fourth Week of Easter

THEME: My Servant Caleb

SCRIPTURE: Numbers 13:25–30; Joshua 15:13–15

TEXT: “But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me fully, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it” (Num. 14:24).

SONG: “Onward, Christian Soldiers” (LSB 662, AGPS 194)

APPETIZER

Guess the servant:

- I made the Exodus out of Egypt with the children of Israel.
- I was selected to be one of the spies sent to explore the land across the Jordan River.
- With Joshua, I was allowed to go to the Promised Land while others died in the wilderness.
- I was a warrior in the Promised Land, helping to claim the land for the Lord and His people.

I am servant CALEB!

MAIN COURSE

Do you know any family members, church members or neighbors who have served their country in the armed forces? We are thankful for those who have served our country and for those who protect us today. They are special servants.

Today’s lesson introduces us to a servant-soldier named Caleb. Caleb had journeyed with Moses and the children of Israel out of Egypt. Along with Joshua, Caleb was a trusted and godly leader among Israel. Caleb was selected to be among the spies to explore the land of Canaan. While most of the spies shared the frightening reality of the enemies in the Promised Land, Caleb spoke of God’s presence and power that would save His people. God blessed the faith of Caleb with the promise that he would be allowed to go into the land that God had promised.

Once in the land of Canaan, the Israelites faced many enemies. The land was filled with people who had false gods. The enemies did not understand God’s plan to give this land to His chosen people. There were many battles. Joshua and Caleb were blessed to be God’s

servant-soldiers to defeat the enemies. Caleb believed in the promises of God. Caleb knew that God had a plan for him and his people.

Caleb and the Israelites battled the enemies who would tempt them from the freedom to worship the true God. Soldiers today continue to protect us from enemies that would take away our freedom. There are also enemies who want to take away our freedom in Christ. The Bible describes the devil as an enemy (1 Peter 5:8) who seeks to trick and defeat us. Jesus battled the devil as He was tempted for 40 days. Throughout Jesus’ ministry, the devil was working through the religious leaders, Judas and others. Jesus faced every battle and won the victory for us.

Like Caleb, we have been equipped for battle against the devil and his temptations. We are armored with the Word of God. Like Caleb, we will be victorious servants.

PRAYER

Jesus, the battles against enemy Satan go on every day. You have armed us with the truth and power of Your Word. Continue to equip us for the battle. As we continue this Easter season, we celebrate Your victory over death and the grave for us. Amen.

DESSERT

Invite a veteran to share his/her story and service in school classrooms or an assembly. Organize an event to thank veterans. Explore how the church ministers to those serving our country.



WEEK 37: Fifth Week of Easter

THEME: My Servant Job

SCRIPTURE: Job 1:13–22

TEXT: “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” (Job 1:8).

SONG: “Children of the Heavenly Father” (LSB 725, AGPS 80)

APPETIZER

Guess the servant:

- I was a very rich and respected man.
- I suffered the loss of all my possessions and children.
- I had three friends who were always giving me bad advice.
- I remained faithful to God through all my suffering.
- God blessed me by giving me back all my possessions and more.

I am servant JOB!

MAIN COURSE

Are you a patient person? What does it mean to be patient?

We confess that many times we are impatient. Our parents and teachers ask us to wait, and we may pout. We often want our own way right away. We may want something and others tell us to wait. If it’s hard to be patient in good times, it’s even harder to be patient in bad times.

Today’s servant, Job, is an example of patience. The Book of Job begins with a description of Job’s comfortable and abundant life. Job had a wife, 10 children, thousands of animals, servants and many friends. Job’s life changes drastically when he loses all his possessions, his family and even his health. Job knew that he did not deserve to suffer. How do you think most of us would react in that situation?

Job patiently trusted God through his suffering. Job knew that suffering was a result of sin. The hard work, heartache, disease and, ultimately, death that Adam and Eve experienced as a result of their sin would also be the experience of all their descendants, including Job. Job also

knew that his suffering was not the result of a specific sin. God was not trying to get even with Job.

Job’s faith was centered in a Redeemer (Job 19:25) whom he knew would live again. Job’s suffering would not be eternal. Because Job’s Redeemer would live again, Job’s body would be new again at the Last Day.

We all suffer. Sometimes, like Job, we experience suffering that is really hard to understand and experience, such as cancer or the death of a loved one. As we suffer, we, too, have a Redeemer who died for us and rose again. As we wait for Jesus’ return, He sends us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us, like Job, the patience (Gal. 5:22) we need to remain faithful.

PRAYER

Jesus, we confess that many times we aren’t very patient in situations in our lives. We especially aren’t patient in suffering. Give us the patience of Job that trusts in Your presence and Your plan. Amen.

DESSERT

Identify those who are God’s instruments to relieve suffering: doctors, nurses, counselors, etc. Give thanks to God for them.



WEEK 38: Sixth Week of Easter

THEME: My Servant David

SCRIPTURE: 2 Samuel 7:18–29

TEXT: “And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord God! Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have brought about all this greatness, to make your servant know it” (2 Sam. 7:20–21).

SONGS: “I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus” (LSB 729), “The Lord’s My Shepherd, I’ll Not Want” (AGPS 233)

APPETIZER

Guess the servant:

- I am the youngest of the sons of Jesse.
- I was a shepherd boy chosen to be king of Israel.
- I once killed a giant.
- I was a servant to King Saul.
- I wrote many of the psalms.

I am servant DAVID!

MAIN COURSE

David was many things. He was a son and brother. David was a husband and father. David was a warrior and king. Perhaps David is best known as a shepherd.

God sent Samuel to the family of Jesse to anoint the next king of Israel. God’s choice was not one of the older, more experienced sons of Jesse. When Samuel asked Jesse if there were any more sons, he responded, “There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep” (1 Sam. 16:11).

David’s experience as a shepherd served him well. David had learned to defend the sheep from wild animals with his sling. David used a sling to kill the giant Goliath. Perhaps it was out in the fields with the sheep that David learned to play the harp and compose poetry.

Years later, the Holy Spirit would inspire David to write the words of Psalm 23, “The Lord is my shepherd.” David’s words become a prophecy for Jesus who announced, “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11).

David, the shepherd, knew his sheep. King David, the servant of God, knew his Shepherd. Jesus is the Shepherd who was willing to die for His flock. Through His suffering, death and resurrection, the Shepherd brought

forgiveness to King David. King David didn’t always follow his Shepherd faithfully, but he believed in the Shepherd who would give His life for him.

King David was inspired by the Spirit to share His faith in the Good Shepherd in Psalm 23. We rejoice that our Good Shepherd leads us every day and will eventually take us to be with Him forever.

PRAYER

Jesus, we rejoice that You were the Shepherd of King David and that You are our Shepherd. Lead us in the ways of Your righteousness, even when we walk in the valley of the shadow of death. Amen.

DESSERT

Read Psalm 23. Why is this psalm often used in times of trouble? Why is this psalm often used at the funeral of Christians? Note also the hymns that are paraphrases of Psalm 23.



WEEK 39:

Seventh Week of Easter

THEME: My Servant Daniel

SCRIPTURE: Daniel 6:16–28

TEXT: “O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?” (Dan. 6:20b).

SONGS: “O God, My Faithful God” (LSB 696), “The Lord Is My Light” (AGPS 231)

APPETIZER

Guess the servant:

- I was a prisoner in Babylon, and my name was changed to Belteshazzar.
- I kept my body and spirit healthy through fasting and prayer.
- I kept praying to the true God even though my life was threatened.
- God protected my friends from dying in a fiery furnace.
- God protected me from being the lions’ lunch.

I am servant DANIEL!

MAIN COURSE

Have any of you moved from one community to another or from one school to another? Is it hard to move to a new place? What’s hard about moving to a new place?

As a youth, Daniel moved. It wasn’t Daniel’s choice to move. Daniel moved as a prisoner from the land of Israel to the country of Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar had mandated the move of some of the best and brightest of Israel’s youth.

There can be challenges and temptations in a move. Who will my friends be? What will I have to do to fit in? The challenges were difficult for Daniel and his friends because the people of Babylon did not believe in the true God of Israel. Daniel stayed faithful to his God. Daniel continued to pray faithfully to his God three times a day. Daniel continued to pray even when there was law against such prayer and his life was threatened.

Daniel believed in the promise of the Savior. Even through Daniel and others from Israel were captives in Babylon and serving under an unbelieving king, they remembered

God’s promise that through this people all nations would be blessed.

God fulfilled His promise in Jesus. Jesus was willing to move from heaven to earth. During His life, Jesus moved from Bethlehem to Egypt to Nazareth and finally to a hill outside of Jerusalem where He was crucified to rescue all of us from captivity to sin and Satan.

Wherever and whenever God moves us, He calls us to be faithful to Him. Daniel’s response of faithfulness included prayer. Daniel’s routine included praying three times a day. Our response to God’s faithfulness also includes prayer. The Small Catechism includes Martin Luther’s Morning and Evening Prayers. The Morning Prayer notes God’s faithful protection during the night and His faithful protection during the day. The Evening Prayer requests God’s faithful forgiveness for sins of the day and commends ourselves to His faithful keeping through the night.

God’s servant Daniel is a wonderful example for us. We serve others by praying for them.

PRAYER

Jesus, You brought Daniel to a foreign land to show Your power and faithfulness to others. You put us in various places so that we, too, might share Your faithfulness. Give us the Spirit and faithfulness of Daniel to always be true to You. Amen.

DESSERT

Read Luther’s Evening and Morning Prayers. The messages of recent weeks have focused on Old Testament servants. Who are others in the Old Testament who waited for the Savior and served Him?



WEEK 40: Pentecost

THEME: The Spirit of Service

SCRIPTURE: Ezekiel 37:1–14

TEXT: “And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord” (Ezek. 37:14).

SONG: “Holy Spirit, Light Divine” (LSB 496, AGPS 120)

APPETIZER

Bring an assortment of puzzles fitting the age level and interest of the children.

How many of you like to put puzzles together? It’s interesting and challenging to see how all the pieces come together to make a picture.

MAIN COURSE

Imagine assembling a puzzle of the skeleton of the human body. All the pieces/bones are laying before you, and piece by piece you put the puzzle together.

The prophet Ezekiel wasn’t putting together a puzzle, but God gave Ezekiel a vision (using bones) of how He would bring His people together again, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel” (v. 11). The idolatry and sins of Israel had left them “dried up” and scattered like bones in a field. God would not leave them lifeless, dried up and scattered. The “word of the LORD” (v. 4) brought life to the bones, and they were connected again. Life was given to the body of Israel.

Sin dries up our life and hope in the Lord. But again, the Word of the Lord comes and brings life. Through the water of Baptism and the message of God’s Word, we are given new life. God’s Word, spoken to us in worship and in our classrooms, breathes the grace of God to us. We have life because Jesus is alive. Jesus’ bones were not left on the cross or in the tomb. Life came into Jesus’ body so that we, too, might have life.

The power and life of the Word comes to us through the Holy Spirit. Ezekiel’s experience is the Old Testament lesson for Pentecost. Ezekiel had prophesied, “I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live” (v. 14). On Pentecost Day, the people that had been scattered were brought together in Jerusalem and the Spirit came to them. The

many experiences and lessons that the disciples had heard and seen about Jesus came together through the power of the Holy Spirit, and the church became alive. Through the Spirit, God was putting together all the pieces that would become the picture of His church.

The Holy Spirit that we received in our Baptism continues to work in us and through us. The Holy Spirit directs our believing and serving. We are pieces in the Spirit’s puzzle.

PRAYER

Jesus, You sent the Spirit to Ezekiel and again sent that same Spirit to Jerusalem on Pentecost Day. You continue to send Your Spirit through our Baptism and through Your Word. May Your Spirit fill us and direct us. Amen.

DESSERT

Read the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed.



WEEK 41: Holy Trinity

THEME: Commissioned to Serve

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 6:1–8

TEXT: “And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory’” (Is. 6:3).

SONG: “Holy, Holy, Holy” (LSB 507, AGPS 119)

APPETIZER

Display and discuss some symbols for the Holy Trinity (triangle, three intersecting circles, etc.). Why do symbols for the Trinity have three circles or three sides? Confessing the Trinity, we name the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the three persons in one God.

MAIN COURSE

Today’s Scripture lesson describes God calling Isaiah to be His prophet and spokesman to Israel. It was a dramatic scene where the prophet sees the Lord on His throne with angels worshiping Him. The angel’s words of praise are “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts.” We note that there are three “holies.” They worship the Holy Father, Holy Son and Holy Spirit.

Isaiah is overwhelmed by the experience. He responds, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips” (v. 5). Isaiah knew that he did not deserve to be in the presence of God. God was holy and Isaiah was sinful.

We, too, are in the presence of the Holy Father, Holy Son and Holy Spirit when we worship. We begin in His holy name. Like Isaiah, we confess our sinful and lost condition, and we join in confession. We are then assured that our sin has been taken away. Isaiah’s guilt is taken away as a burning coal touches his lips. Our guilt was taken away when the waters of Baptism touched our head. Our guilt is taken away as the word of forgiveness touches our ears.

Isaiah’s vision included seeing and hearing angels praising God, “Holy, holy, holy.” Many years later, another servant of God, the apostle John (Rev. 4:8), heard the same song. We will be blessed to hear the angel choir and to join them in singing “holy, holy, holy” when Jesus returns.

As we wait for Jesus’ return, we respond to God’s holiness and the forgiveness we have received through the holy God with our songs of praise. Isaiah also responded to

God’s call by saying, “Here am I! Send me.” Isaiah went to serve his holy God. We, too, are sent to serve.

PRAYER

Holy Father, Holy Son and Holy Spirit, we rejoice in You. You are the One and Only God. May our response be that of the angels seen by Isaiah, “Holy, holy, holy.” Amen.

DESSERT

Read and discuss the Athanasian Creed.



WEEK 42: Proper 5

THEME: Serving in the Family of God

SCRIPTURE: Mark 3:31–35

TEXT: “Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:35).

SONGS: “Blest Be the Tie That Binds” (LSB 649), “Brothers and Sisters in Christ” (AGPS 78)

APPETIZER

Share a family picture.

Who’s in your family picture? We thank God for the gift of family.

While our family is unique and special, we are part of another family. Sometimes we refer to the members of the church as “family.”

MAIN COURSE

Jesus had an earthly family. Jesus was raised by his mother, Mary, and her husband, Joseph. Most likely Mary and Joseph had children who would have been Jesus’ step-brothers and sisters. Jesus loved His family. When Jesus was on the cross, He lovingly arranged for the disciple John to take care of Mary.

In today’s Bible reading, Jesus emphasizes that He has another family. “Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother” (v. 35). We have been born or adopted into our family. We are brought into God’s family through our Baptism. In God’s family, Jesus is more than a “brother.” Jesus is the means to our family membership. The blessings of Christ’s death and resurrection are brought to us through Baptism. As sinners, we don’t deserve to be part of God’s family. We can’t earn our place into the family. God, in His grace, says, “Welcome.”

Those who have been adopted into God’s family are also part of the family of the church. After the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, many churches have the custom of sharing a word of welcome, “We receive you in Jesus’ name as our brother/sister in Christ, that together we might hear His Word, receive His gifts, and proclaim the praise of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light” (*Lutheran Service Book: Agenda*, p. 80). The members of the church are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Our families are not perfect as we are all sinners. The church family is not perfect. Just like brothers and sisters in a family might disagree, at times the brothers and sisters in a church have disagreements, say hurtful things or in other ways show their sinful nature. However, the family of the church also knows the Savior who forgives and who, through His Word, directs us to live together in love.

We are thankful for our church family. We are thankful for the church family that worships with us. We are thankful for the church family that prays for and supports our school. Together we love and serve in the name of our Savior and Brother, Jesus.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for the gift of family. Thank You especially today for the family of the church. Thank You for our brothers and sisters in Christ who worship today. Bless our family in worship and service. Amen.

DESSERT

Does your church have a directory with photos of the church “family”? What’s special about our church family? What things does your church family do together?



WEEK 43: Proper 6

THEME: Growing to Serve

SCRIPTURE: Mark 4:26–34

TEXT: “It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade” (Mark 4:31–32).

SONG: “Almighty God, Your Word Is Cast” (LSB 577, AGPS 62)

APPETIZER

Items needed: Packages of seeds

Have you ever planted seeds? What seeds did you plant? Did the plants grow?

God’s creation is so amazing. Through God’s power, the seed is planted in the soil. The seed is watered. The sun shines on the plants, and soon they sprout through the ground and grow. From those seeds, we may get vegetables or fruit, or we may enjoy the beauty of plants and flowers.

MAIN COURSE

Jesus often used creation to teach lessons about the kingdom of God. Jesus used birds and lilies to teach us not to worry (**Matthew 6**). Jesus taught how seeds falling on soil were like planting and growing in His Word (**Mark 4**). Jesus shares a lesson from the mustard seed and its plant. Jesus’ lessons share the importance of “growing” in Christ.

The mustard seed was a small seed. From the small seed, a plant could grow up to 10 feet high. How did that growth take place? God gave the seed soil, nutrients in the soil, water, sunshine and everything it needed to grow. Even more amazing than the growth of a plant is the growth of the kingdom of God. God plants His Word in the “soil” of the church. God sends the water of Baptism. God sends His Spirit to work through the water and Word so that faith grows in the heart of the believer.

Just like we can’t see a plant growing from one hour to the next, or even from one day to the next, often times we can’t see the church growing. However, it does grow!

Just as the mustard plant grew “so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade” (v. 32), the church grows to

hold many different kinds of people. Perhaps as we look at our church and school we not only see different ages, but are also blessed to see different cultures and colors of skin. Certainly as we look at the church around the world, we see many different kinds of people who share in the joy of Jesus as their Savior.

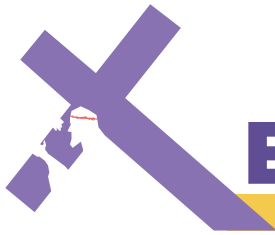
The growing of God’s “mustard seed” church is amazing.

PRAYER

Jesus, in the springtime of the year we give thanks for the plants that You created and the plants that bring beauty to Your creation. Bless the growing season. Thank You for the seed of Your Word, and grant that it may grow in us so that we might sow the seed so others grow in Your grace. Amen.

DESSERT

Visit a greenhouse or have a local gardener share how God grows things in His creation. If there is a local public garden area, children may want to plant some seeds. Show an actual mustard seed.



End of School Year

THEME: Sent to Serve

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 20:20–28

TEXT: “Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28).

SONGS: “Son of God, Eternal Savior” (LSB 842), “A Time to Serve” (AGPS 53)

APPETIZER

Gather pictures of students and staff serving during the school year.

This year, we have been thinking about and learning about serving. We served! Review the places and contexts of serving in school, church and community

MAIN COURSE

Our theme passage tells us that Jesus came to serve. Jesus served His disciples by washing their feet. Jesus served 5,000 hungry followers a meal of bread and fish. Through His miracles, Jesus served those who had broken bodies and broken hearts. While Jesus came for those acts of service, He came to serve the whole world and each of us by His sacrifice on the cross. As we learned this year, Jesus was the “Suffering Servant.” Jesus serves us the blessings of that cross in our Baptism, in His Word and at Holy Communion.

This year, we also heard about Jesus’ followers who served. Some served as Old Testament kings and prophets. Some served as disciples following Jesus to the cross and then sharing the Good News of His salvation. We learned how some children served Jesus.

We just reviewed some of the ways in which we were blessed to serve. We served as worship leaders and assistants each week. We served our classmates with a kind word or helpful deed. We served our teachers with our respect and doing our classroom duties. We served our congregation in prayers and by supporting other partners. We served beyond the school walls in our community.

Does our serving stop as we walk out the school doors on the last day of school? Where and how is God inviting you to serve this summer? Can we serve with our vacation Bible school and Sunday school teachers this summer? Can we serve as ushers or acolytes in the worship service?

Can we serve our parents and family at home? Is there something we can do to help our neighbors (not for money, but just to help)? God gives us many opportunities to serve Him.

We serve because Jesus served us! May God bless our service this summer!

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for the examples of Your service, especially Your service from the cross. Thank You for the opportunities to serve You in our church and school this year. Send Your Spirit so that we might see the opportunities You give us this summer. Amen.

DESSERT

Develop a “service menu” of opportunities to serve in family, church and community.



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