

This
SON *of*
mine
was dead
and is
alive
again!

LUKE 15:24

**St. Philip's Evangelical Lutheran Church
501 N. Caroline Street
Baltimore, MD 21205**

Church Phone: 410-732-8070

Church Website: www.stphilipslutheranch2.org (under construction)

Church Email: stphilipchurch@verizon.net

Pastor's Email: mbguy1@verizon.net

The Rev. Michael B. Guy Sr., S.T.S., Pastor

Mrs. Sheila Slade-Lee, Music Director/Organist

Mr. Keith Keel, Gospel, Youth and Men Choir Director

Mrs. Cherie Robinson, Church Secretary

(Office Hours: Monday-Friday 8a.m.-1p.m.)

The Lord is in his Holy Temple let all the earth keep **SILENT**

St. Philip's extends a warm welcome to all our visitors. Please sign our guest register with your name, address, and phone number. If you do not have a church home, please consider making St. Philip's your home church.

We invite all baptized Christians to receive the Blessed Sacrament.

The Holy Eucharist is celebrated every Sunday 10:00 A.M.

Sunday School Classes for all ages are held starting 9:00 A.M.

For emergencies, call the church office. Leave a message 410-732-8070 or call Fr. Guy 443-414-1582

Altar Greens are given to the Glory of God by Carolyn Mello in celebration of her son, Mark Kyle Mello's birthday 3-7.

Worship Folders are given to the Glory of God by Keith Keel in celebration of Joy & Justin's 25th Birthday 3-11.

Assisting with Today's Liturgy

Assisting Minister: Jackie Woodruff

Greeter: Roland Hunt

Lay Reader: William A. Spriggs

Prayer Leader: Carolyn Mello

Communion Presenters: Ann Cooper and Brianna Cooper

Communion Assistant: Yerley Fuller

Fourth Sunday in Lent
10 March 2013
LAETARE

Prelude

Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her all ye that love her: Rejoice for joy with her all that mourn her: That ye may suck and be satisfied with the breast of her consolation; that ye may milk out and be delighted with the abundance of her glory.

Confession

O Lord and Ruler of the hosts of heaven,
God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
and of all their righteous offspring:
You made the heavens and the earth,
with all their vast array.
All things quake with fear at your presence;
they tremble because of your power.
But your merciful promise is beyond all measure;
it surpasses all that our minds can fathom.
O Lord, you are full of compassion,
long-suffering, and abounding in mercy.
You hold back your hand; you do not punish as we deserve.
In your great goodness, Lord,
you have promised forgiveness to sinners,
that they may repent of their sin and be saved.
And now, O Lord, I bend the knee of my heart,
and make my appeal, sure of your gracious goodness.
I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned,
and I know my wickedness only too well.
Therefore I make this prayer to you.
Forgive me, Lord, forgive me.
Do not let me perish in my sin,
nor condemn me to the depths of the earth.
For you, O Lord, are the God of those who repent,
and in me you will show forth your goodness.
Unworthy as I am, you will save me,
in accordance with your great mercy,
and I will praise you without ceasing all the days of my life.
For all the powers of heaven sing your praises,
and yours is the glory to ages of ages. Amen

Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing



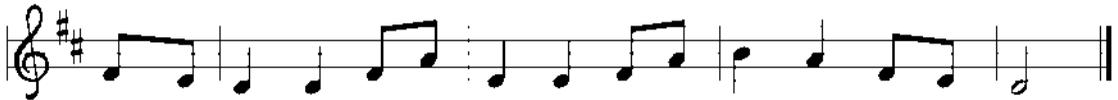
1 Come, thou Fount of ev - 'ry bless-ing, tune my heart to sing thy grace;
2 Here I raise my Eb - en - e - zer: "Hith-er by thy help I've come";
3 Oh, to grace how great a debt - or dai - ly I'm con-strained to be;



streams of mer - cy, nev - er ceas - ing, call for songs of loud-est praise,
and I hope, by thy good plea - sure, safe - ly to ar - rive at home.
let that grace now like a fet - ter bind my wan-d'ring heart to thee.



While the hope of end-less glo - ry fills my heart with joy and love,
Je - sus sought me when a strang-er, wan-d'ring from the fold of God;
Prone to wan - der, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love.



teach me ev - er to a - dore thee; may I still thy good-ness prove,
he, to res - cue me from dan-ger, in - ter - posed his pre-cious blood.
Here's my heart, oh, take and seal it; seal it for thy courts a - bove.

Text: Robert Robinson, 1735-1790, alt.

Music: NETTLETON, J. Wyeth, *Repository of Sacred Music*, Part II, 1813

Apostolic Greeting

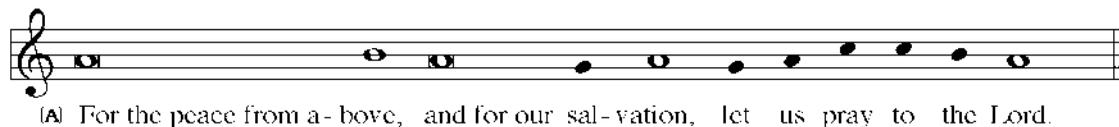
P The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C **And also with you.**

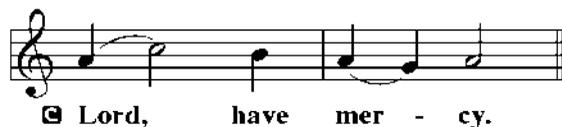
Kyrie



(A) In peace, let us pray to the Lord. **☐** Lord, have mer - cy.



(A) For the peace from a - bove, and for our sal - vation, let us pray to the Lord.



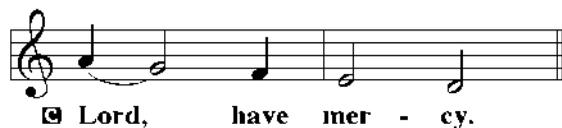
☐ Lord, have mer - cy.



(A) For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God,



and for the u - ni - ty of all, let us pray to the Lord.



☐ Lord, have mer - cy.



(A) For this holy house, and for all who offer here their wor - ship and praise,



let us pray to the Lord. **☐** Lord, have mer - cy.



(A) Help, save, comfort, and de - fend us, gra - cious Lord. **☐** A - men

Prayer of the Day

P God of all mercy, by your power to heal and to forgive, graciously cleanse us from all sin and make us strong; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen

Gospel Choir

FIRST LESSON: Joshua 5:9-12

⁹The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt." And so that place is called Gilgal to this day.

¹⁰While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the Passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. ¹¹On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. ¹²The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

L This is the Word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 32

Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven,
and whose sin is put away!

**²Happy are they to whom the LORD imputes no guilt,
and in whose spirit there is no guile!**

³While I held my tongue, my bones withered away,
because of my groaning all day long.

**⁴For your hand was heavy upon me day and night;
my moisture was dried up as in the heat of summer.**

⁵Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and did not conceal my guilt.

**⁶I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD."
Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.**

⁷Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers to you in time of trouble;
when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them.

**⁸You are my hiding-place; you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance.**

⁹"I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go;
I will guide you with my eye.

**¹⁰Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding;
who must be fitted with bit and bridle, or else they will not stay near you."**

¹¹Great are the tribulations of the wicked;
but mercy embraces those who trust in the LORD.

¹²**Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the LORD;
shout for joy, all who are true of heart.**

SECOND LESSON: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

L This is the Word of the Lord

C Thanks be to God



Re - turn to the Lord, your God, for he is gra-cious and mer-ci-ful,
slow to an - ger, and a-bound-ing in stead-fast love.

The Holy Gospel

⌘ St. Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32⌘



Glo - ry to you, O Lord.

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

³So he told them this parable: ^{11b}"There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" ²⁰So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²²But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe — the best one — and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

²⁵Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' ²⁸Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' ³¹Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"



Sermon

Silence for reflection

Fr. Michael B. Guy, Sr. S.T.S.

Gospel Choir



Nicene Creed

**C We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead, ☩
and the life of the world to come. Amen**

Prayers of Intercession

A Returning to the Lord with all our heart, let us pray for the whole people of God, the earth, and all who cry out for healing.

A brief silence.

L For the church, that it may be a community of reconciliation, and welcome those lost, estranged, or alienated from their homes or communities. Hear us, O God.

C Your mercy is great.

L For those preparing for baptism at Easter, that you clothe them in the garments of salvation and welcome them to your table of celebration. Hear us, O God.

C Your mercy is great.

L For the governments of the world, that they not squander the resources of the earth, but use them for the good of creation and all its inhabitants. Hear us, O God.

C Your mercy is great.

L For all who run away from home or hang on to resentment or guilt; and for those broken in mind, body, or spirit (*especially*) that you embrace them with your compassion. Hear us, O God.

C Your mercy is great.

L For the families and homes of this congregation, that they may be places of forgiveness, acceptance, and nurture. Hear us, O God.

C Your mercy is great.

For what else would this congregation pray?

L We give thanks for the saints (*especially Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, whom we commemorate today*). Bring us to your eternal home, that we may rejoice in the inheritance of your grace. Hear us, O God.

C Your mercy is great.

P Hear us according to your steadfast love, O God, and in your great compassion bring us to resurrection and rebirth in Jesus Christ our Lord.

C Amen.

Youth Choir

The Stewardship Prayer

O God, I resolve to put You first in my life. I recognize that You have blessed me with all that I have and all that I am. As your steward, I resolve to sacrifice when necessary but always to do so out of a spirit of sincere love, just as your Son, Jesus, did for me. I humbly accept the challenge to share from my means rather than from my excess. I recognize that being a good steward is nothing more than being truly Christian. Dear God, I resolve, to be generous with my time, talent, and treasure, giving in proportion to the gifts I have been given. I commit myself to taking care of my body and all of creation. I know there will be times when I will fail to be a good steward. I will confidently live each day with a spirit of true peace and joy in knowing that I am doing your will. Amen.

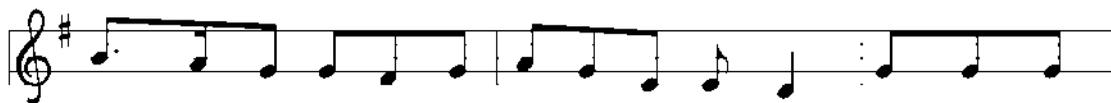


The Offertory Sentence

The table is prepared as the offering is received

Offertory Hymn

Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling



- 1 Soft - ly and ten - der - ly Je - sus is call - ing, call - ing for
- 2 Why should we tar - ry when Je - sus is plead - ing, plead - ing for
- 3 Oh, for the won - der - ful love he has prom - ised, prom - ised for



you and for me. See, on the por - tals he's wait - ing and watch - ing,
you and for me? Why should we lin - ger and heed not his mer - cies,
you and for me! Though we have sinned, he has mer - cy and par - don,

Refrain



watch - ing for you and for me,
mer - cies for you and for me? "Come home, come home!"
par - don for you and for me.



You who are wea - ry, come home." Ear - nest - ly, ten - der - ly,



Je - sus is call - ing, call - ing, "O sin - ner, come home!"

Text: Will L. Thompson, 1847-1909

Music: THOMPSON, Will L. Thompson

The Offertory

Stand as the offering and the gifts are brought forward



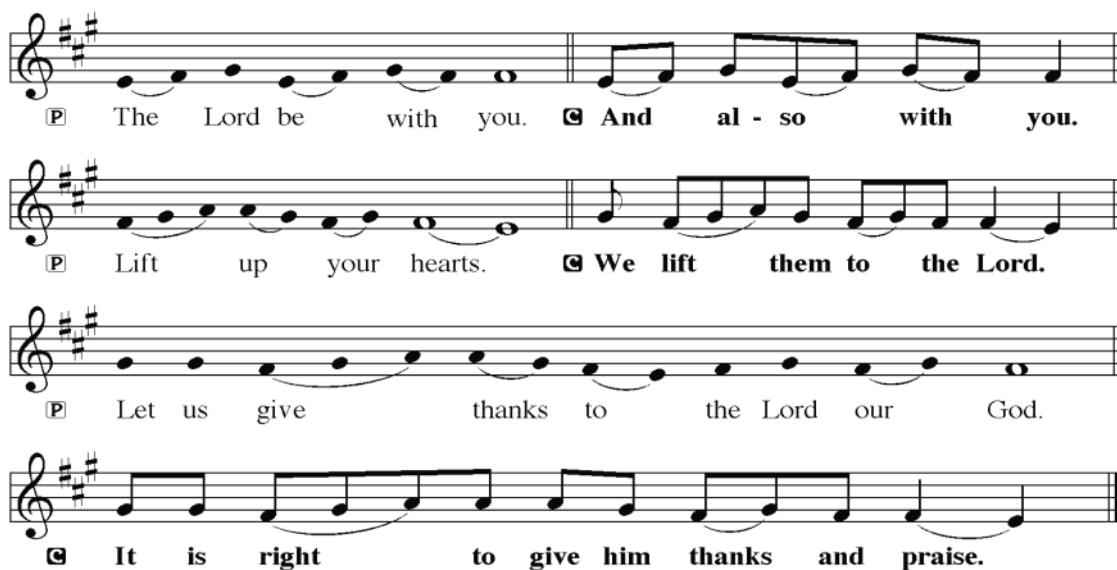
C Let the vine-yards be fruit-ful, Lord, and fill to the brim our cup of
bless-ing. Gath-er a har-vest from the seeds that were sown, that we may be
fed with the bread of life. Gath-er the hopes and dreams of all; u -
nite them with the prayers we of - fer. Grace our ta - ble with your
pres - ence, and give us a fore - taste of the feast to come.

Offertory Prayer

A God of all creation,

C all you have made is good,
and your love endures forever.
You bring forth bread from the earth
and fruit from the vine.
Nourish us with these gifts,
that we might be for the world
signs of your gracious presence
in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

The Great Thanksgiving



♩ The Lord be with you. ♪ And al - so with you.

♩ Lift up your hearts. ♪ We lift them to the Lord.

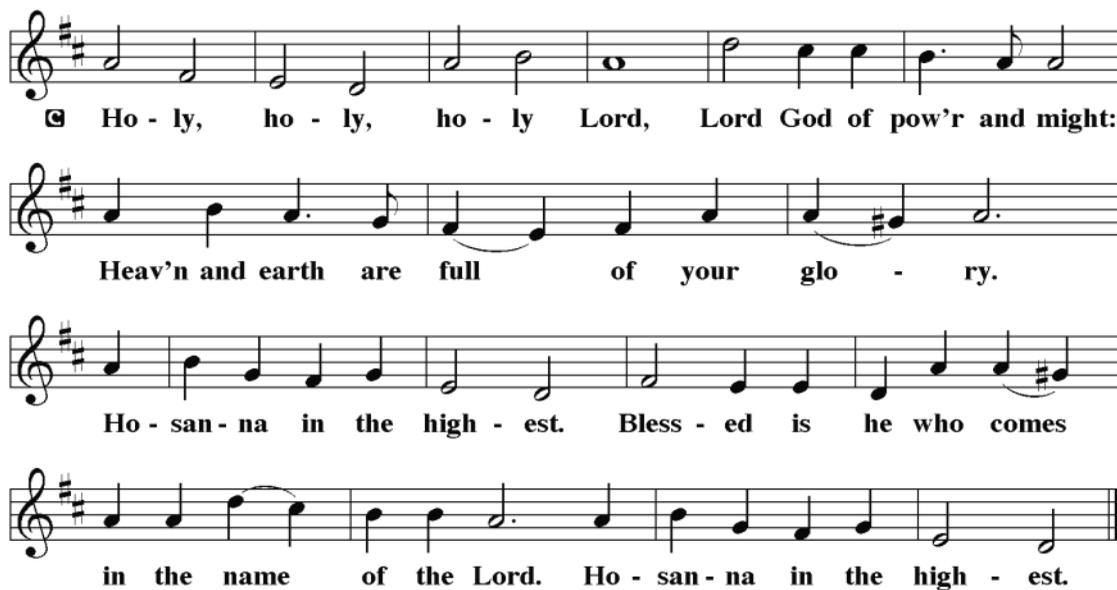
♩ Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

♪ It is right to give him thanks and praise.

The Proper Preface

... we praise your name and join their unending hymn...

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus



♪ Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, Lord God of pow'r and might:

Heav'n and earth are full of your glo - ry.

Ho - san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is he who comes

in the name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

Eucharistic Prayer

THE LORD'S PRAYER

C Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen

THE FRACTION

P Christ our Passover is Sacrificed for us!
C Therefore let us keep the feast.
P When we eat this bread, we share the Body of Christ
When we drink this cup, we share the Blood of Christ
C Reveal yourself to us, O Lord, in the breaking of
the bread as once you revealed yourself to your
disciples.
P The gifts of God for the people of God...

Prayer of Humble Access

C Most merciful Lord,
Your love compels us to come in, our hands were unclean, our hearts were unpre-
pared; we were not fit even to eat the crumbs from under your table. But you,
Lord, are the God of our salvation, and share your bread with sinners. So cleanse
and feed us with the precious Body and Blood of your Son, that he may live in us
and we in him; and that we, with the whole company of Christ, may sit and eat in
your kingdom.
Amen

Agnus Dei



Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on us.



Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on us.



Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world;



grant us peace, grant us peace.

Invitation to Communion

All baptized Christians who believe that Jesus Christ is present in the bread and wine of Holy communion are welcome to receive at the Lord's Table. If health or medical concerns give you reason to avoid the wine or bread, please remember that the Christian Church has always taught that Christ is fully present in either element alone, bread or wine. As the minister gives the bread and wine: **The body of Christ, given for you. The blood of Christ, shed for you.** The communicate may say: **Amen.**

Distribution of the Blessed Sacrament

Hymns during the distribution of the Blessed Sacrament

LMGM #122, #156, #157, and #162

Stand

P The Body and the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace

C **Amen**

Nunc Dimittis



Lord, now you let your ser- vant go in peace; your word has been ful -



filled. My own eyes have seen the sal - va - tion which you have pre -



pared in the sight of ev - 'ry peo - ple: A light to re - veal you to the



na - tions and the glo - ry of your peo - ple Is - ra - el



Glo - ry to the Fa - ther, and to the Son, and to the Ho - ly Spir - it,



as it was in the be - gin - ning, is now,

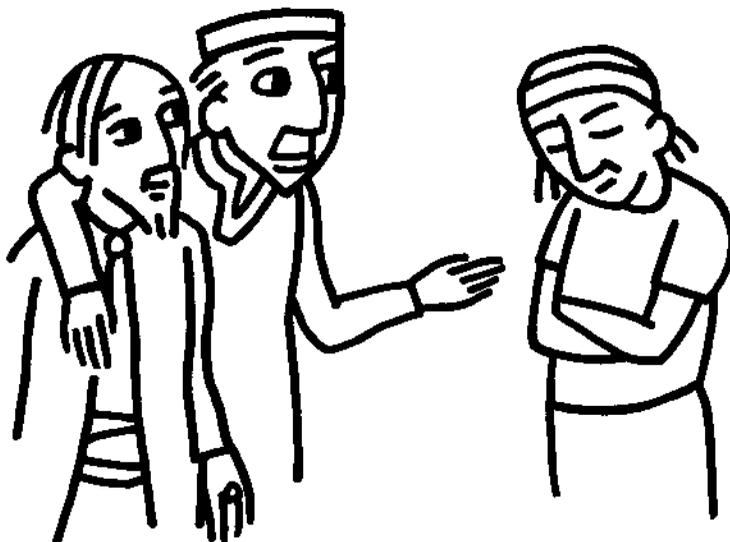


and will be for - ev - er. A - - men

The Post Eucharistic Prayer

A Merciful God,
Accompany our journey through these forty days. Renew us in the gift of baptism, that we may provide for those who are poor, pray for those in need, fast from self-indulgence, and above all that we may find our treasure in the life of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen**

The Blessing



Recessional Hymn

Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound



1 A - maz - ing grace!— how sweet the sound— that
2 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and
3 Through man - y dan - gers, toils, and snares I
4 The Lord has prom - ised good to me; his
5 When we've been there ten thou - sand years, bright



saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but
grace my fears re - lieved; how pre - cious did that
have al - read - y come; 'tis grace has brought me
word my hope se - cures; he will my shield and
shin - ing as the sun, we've no less days to



now am found; was blind, but now I see.
grace ap - pear the hour I first be - lieved!
safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.
por - tion be as long as life en - dures.
sing God's praise than when we'd first be - gun.

Text: John Newton, 1725–1807, alt., sts. 1–4; anonymous, st. 5
Music: NEW BRITAIN, W. Walker, *Southern Harmony*, 1835

Dismissal

- A Marked with the cross of Christ, go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
C **Thanks be to God!**



Happy Birthday
Merle Stanley 3-10,
Joy & Justin Keel 3-11,
LaShon Hall 3-13,
Angela Perry and Quincy Wayman 3-14,
and Ke'Shaun Thomas 3-15

Keep in our Prayers:

The Rt. Reverend Wolfgang Herz-Lane, The Rt. Reverend H. Gerard Knoche,
The Rt. Reverend George P. Mocko, Rev. Dr. James Echols, Rev. Dr. Leroy Fitts,
Reverend John Miller, Deacon Ernie Lehr, Allen and Gladys Baugh, Blanche Bellamy,
Preston Boone, Sr., Lula Brooks, Quintin Brown, Joey Campbell, Alyssa Cobb,
Angela Cobb, Isora Cook, Randy Coppage, Barbara Mitchell-Corley, Clarence Cox,
Clifton Cox, Deanna Cunningham, Daryl Dickerson, Scotty and Betty Diggs,
Sonya Elliott, LaVerne Fowlkes, Yerley Fuller, Calvin Gladden, Denise Graham,
Derrick Gray, Richard Gray, Fred Harvey, Dorothy Hinds, Mary Howard, Jean Hunt,
Jean Jacobs, Sunnie & LaCurtis Johnson, Beatrice Jones, Margaret Jones, Walter Jones,
Edward Keene, Virginia Lindsay, Allen Meacham, Delores Mocko,
Mr. & Mrs. William Morant, (Mrs. Morant is our former member), Cynthia Patterson,
Georgine Patterson, Mildred Perry, Warren Pertee, Ida Pettaway, Louis Pindell,
Thomas & Nannie Pinder, Dorothy Rich, Barnett and Cherie Robinson,
Darryl (Zeke) Robinson, Charles L. Ross, Jr., Fontessa Sherrod,
Donald & Sandra Shields, Crystal Slade, Sylvia Smith, Charles Stallings,
Violet Stanley, Irma Stewart, Thelma Tanner, Irma Tyson, Darnell Wilson,
Helen Wilson, and Iona Williams.

Pericopes for The Fifth Sunday in Lent 17 March 2013

Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalm 126

Philippians 3:4b-14

St. John 12:1-8

Daily Readings 11 March - 16 March 2013

M	Psalm 53 Leviticus 23:26-41 Revelation 19:1-8
Tu	Psalm 53 Leviticus 25:1-19 Revelation 19:9-10
W	Psalm 53 2 Kings 4:1-7 Luke 9:10-17
Th	Psalm 126 Isaiah 43:1-7 Philippians 2:19-24
F	Psalm 126 Isaiah 43:8-15 Philippians 2:25—3:1
Sa	Psalm 126 Exodus 12:21-27 John 11:45-57

Third Sunday in Lent 3 March, 2013

Operations \$ 4969.00

Mission \$ 482.00

S.S. \$ 101.00

Attendance 92

Upcoming Services, Meetings and Events -

This Afternoon ~ The election of a Council Member and a Audit Committee Member will be held immediately after the Holy Eucharist. This is a Special Congregational Meeting therefore only this business will be conducted.

In February, the Evangelism and Social Ministry Committee transmitted Valentine's Day cards to our sick and shut-in members. Many thanks for all the wonderful service you provide.

A few tickets are still available for the Ladies Aid sponsored event

- **Annual Shopping Trip to Leesburg Corner Premium Outlets, Saturday, May 4. Bus will depart from the church at 8:30 am and return at 7:30 pm. Tickets: \$25. Limited tickets still available. Payment due by March 24.**

For more information please see Angela Cobb and Jane Johnson.

Wednesday, March 13 ~ Lenten Soup & Sandwich Fellowship 6-7pm with Vespers to follow from 7-8pm.

The Evangelism and Social Ministry meeting scheduled for March 10th has been rescheduled for March 17 due to a special congregational meeting.

Attention All Members: If you failed to provide a corrected membership questionnaire form when requested several months ago, you did not receive a letter concerning the above mentioned meeting . You are asked to provide your updated information to the Church Secretary by filling out a form on the back table. As members you are obligated to inform the Church office of any changes to your contact information. This information is important to ensure you receive church updates/correspondence in a timely manner. Thank you in advance for your cooperation as we work to update the Church Database.

Saturday, March 23 ~ Sunday School will sponsor a Easter Egg Hunt from 12pm-2pm. Please sign your children up on the sheet on the table in the back of the sanctuary.

DE-MD Women's Synodical Organization Spring Cluster Meeting will be held on Saturday, April 6 (Augsburg Lutheran Village, 6825 Campfield Road, 21207). Registration/Continental Breakfast will begin at 9am. A fee of \$4.00 will be accepted at the door. For more information contact Yerley Fuller at 410-235-2160.

Unearned Grace

Reading the parable of the prodigal son is like looking at one of those pictures whose image changes depending on the angle at which we stand. From one angle, we are the resentful elder brother, from the other, the grateful younger.

Human nature often sets us tallying up our neighbors' faults and wishing to see them suitably punished. These are the times when we say, "you made your bed, now lie in it" or "he got what was coming to him." When the guilty prosper or get off scot-free, we grumble. At such times, the idea of a merciful God offends us.

Yet at other moments, we are like the younger son, realizing that we have spent everything. Like this young man, who suddenly "came to himself" (Luke 15:17), we become painfully aware that we are squandering the precious gifts God has given us. At such times, if we're fortunate, we decide like the prodigal: "I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you'" (v. 18). When we admit our faults and our recklessness and acknowledge our need, unbelievably, God always welcomes us back!

When we set ourselves up as judge, we say of Jesus dismissively, "This fellow welcomes sinners," and we wonder if we should hang out with him at all. Yet when we are the prodigal returned, we thrill to the words: "this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found" (v. 32). Then, we count ourselves blessed that our God is a God of forgiveness and unearned grace.

So do not worry if your image wavers. Judge or penitent, through this parable God reminds us: "you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours" (v. 31).

