

The Gardener

Read John 20:15



“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (Gn 2:15). This was our original vocation. We were made to enjoy what God had made, taking a hand in unlocking creation’s potential.

We see glimpses of this in our vocations today. The wild rose is beautiful, yes. The cultivated rose finds even more beauty. Over generations we have bred roses into a bountiful bouquet of varying species. We set roses among other flowers and greenery to multiply the beauty as a symphony.

When Adam and Eve fell into sin, their experience of vocation changed dramatically. “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you” (Gn 3:17).

Our work rarely gets to be the flowering of beauty. We sweat and bleed and grow weary, and what do we accomplish? One feels cursed to do no more than further drudgery; another grows desperate, holding back a tide he cannot stop. “All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? All things are full of weariness” (Ec 1:3,8).

So the second Adam came and planted us all in this cursed earth. He raised us up a new vine, with roots that reach out and restore the soil. Mary Magdalene did not make a mistake in thinking Him a gardener. Her mistake was in thinking Him only a local keeper of grounds. He has watered every tomb, so that in Him all has become meaningful.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! He makes all things new! He not only raises us up on the last day. He breaks the ground to give fruitful vocations. He restores humanity; He restores creation. Alleluia! Christ is risen!

By Rev. A. Daniel Guagenti

We Pray

“Let all things their Creator bless / And worship God in humbleness. / Oh, praise Him! Alleluia! / Oh, praise the Father, praise the Son, / And praise the Spirit, Three in One, / Oh, praise Him! Oh, praise Him! / Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! Amen.” (LW 436:7)

On My Heart Imprint Your Image



Lenten Devotions

Holy Week 2018

On my heart imprint Your image,
Blessed Jesus, King of grace,
That life’s riches, cares and pleasures
Never may Your work erase;
Let the clear inscription be:
Jesus crucified for me,
Is my life, my hope’s foundation,
And my glory and salvation!

Lutheran Service Book 422

The Donkey by Rev. Matthew Brackman

The Stripes by Rev. A. Daniel Guagenti

Vinegar by Rev. Matthew Brackman

A Grain of Wheat by Rev. A. Daniel Guagenti

The Place of the Skull by Rev. Charles St-Onge

The Virgin Tomb by Rev. A. Daniel Guagenti

The Gardener by Rev. A. Daniel Guagenti

All Illustrations by Joni Skellie

March 26

The Donkey

Read Luke 19:28-40



Jesus enters into Jerusalem as the King of Peace on Palm Sunday. We call this the “Triumphal Entry.” That name conjures images of a king coming in triumph to vanquish his enemies and set the people free. Riding on a young donkey doesn’t exactly fit that picture. A king riding a white horse, with a mighty sword and eyes aflame, who would lay waste to any foolish enough to oppose Him, fits our image of a Triumphal Entry (Rv 19:11-16). The much cooler image of a conquering king in Revelation is brought about by the humbler image of Jesus riding on a donkey. Jesus came to bring peace to God’s people. He came to establish peace between God and man. Horses are images of war. Donkeys are images of peace. A king coming in glory might ride a beautiful white stallion. A king coming in humility will ride a donkey.

The more exciting image of Jesus coming on the Last Day riding a white horse is brought about by Him first entering the Holy City on a donkey. He did not vanquish His enemies with a sword. He vanquished His enemies by sheathing our sin and death in His body. He accepted sin and death in order to bring us His peace and life. Jesus conquered neither by physical might nor by great intellect. He conquered through His sacrifice. He overcame war with peace. He smothered the rebellion of sin and death with His own body and blood. Because of His humble entrance to triumph over sin and death, we will be on His side when He returns on the Last Day in glory—glory He earned by coming in peace and riding on a donkey.

By Rev. Matthew Brackman

We Pray

Lord Jesus Christ, enter into every aspect of our lives with Your peace. Let Your peace that passes all understanding strengthen and sustain us as we face the trials and tribulations of this life. Amen.

March 31

The Virgin Tomb

Read John 19:38-42



Infants in the womb often mirror their mother’s life patterns, waking when her body is still, being rocked to sleep as mother moves about her daily business.

When we take Sabbath, it is the same. Sabbath is not simply “a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands” as the sluggard fritters away the hours (Pr 6:9-11). Sabbath sets a sanctified space to give deep rest in attending to all our Heavenly Father is doing. We are cradled in His busyness, resting spiritually because He is working all to good.

Jesus’ full day in the tomb was a Sabbath, indeed, *the* Sabbath. His rest in the tomb is the fulfillment of all Sabbath intended. On the sixth day, “It is finished” (Jn 19:30). On the seventh day, there is rest; on the eighth day, waking to new creation. The Jesus who rested in Mary’s virgin womb rests in a virgin tomb. He opened what naturally could not yet give life to the quiverful blessing of God (Ps 127).

Jesus rested from His bloody labor and waited for His Father to raise Him up. The peace of faith waits for His new creation, like a child waiting for his mother to bring him forth.

When we come to God in prayer, there is so much anxiety weighing us down, so many things we think we need to be doing. Name them all and wait. Our Father takes it all into His arms, and He gives us rest.

By Rev. A. Daniel Guagenti

We Pray

“And you, most kind and gentle death, / Waiting to hush our final breath, / Oh, praise Him! / You lead to heav’n the child of God, / Where Christ our Lord the way has trod. / Oh praise Him! Amen.” (LW436:6)

The Place of the Skull

Read Mark 15:21-28



If there is one Good Friday Scripture passage that always gives me goosebumps, it is when we read that they took Jesus out to the Place of the Skull. We do our best these days, even for prisoners being executed, to ensure that someone's last hours are spent in a "hospitable" place. We even call the care provided for the terminally ill "hospice care." It's hard to imagine a place less warm and cozy than somewhere called the Place of the Skull.

The hill where Jesus was crucified may have been called that because of its shape. There are hillocks near the old walls of Jerusalem that have domed tops like someone's bald head. The Latin translation of Golgotha was Calvariae, which means "cap of the skull bone." Or the word could come from the Aramaic Gol Goatha, which means "place of execution."

But a more ancient tradition links Golgotha not to a unique piece of geography but rather to one unique skull, the skull of Adam. Eastern Orthodox crucifixes often show that skull and accompanying bones at the foot of Jesus' cross. The implication is that Golgotha ties the death of the second Adam to the death of the first. Just as Adam brought sin into the world and death along with it, so now does Jesus take Adam's sin on His own shoulders and die the same death Adam earned for us all.

But the story doesn't end there, of course. Because near the Place of the Skull, in a freshly dug grave, Jesus' skull and muscles and bones would return to a resurrected life. Because of that resurrection, we too shall live. We need no longer fear any "Place of the Skull" thanks to Christ. Our heads can rest easy, and in His care.

By Rev. Charles St-Onge

We Pray

Blessed Lord, Your head crowned with thorns saved Adam and his descendants. You have made it possible for our skulls to rise from death, and for this we give You thanks and praise. Amen.

The Stripes

Read Isaiah 53:3-10



One of the marvels of being a parent is seeing what your children can do with their little bodies. There's a reason parents are infamous for getting over excited for the goals scored by their own flesh and blood. Parents' attentive eyes not only flash with pride, but furrow as they bandage scraped knees, help wash between toes, and monitor the need for haircuts. Parents know their children's bodies better than the children themselves.

When you read back the Old Testament after knowing Jesus' crucifixion, the details about Jesus' crucified body that the Father revealed are astounding.

Psalms 22 saw the wounds in His hands and feet (v. 16) and the ravages that crucifixion places on the heart (v. 14). Zechariah 12:10 gazed on the piercing of His side. Despite the battering of His body, the Scriptures knew not one bone would be broken (Ex 12:46; Ps 34:20). The suffering servant whom Isaiah foresaw was carved with the stripes of the scourger (53:5). Even the bitterness on His dried tongue was inscribed by the Spirit in His book of love (Ps 69:21).

The Lord Almighty knew this body. He cherished this body. This was the offering to make peace and to restore all bodies.

On the cross, Jesus felt forsaken. This alienation was a true cost of paying for our sins. Nevertheless, the Father did not turn away His eyes. The Father boasts, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased" (Mt 17:5).

So we turn not away from our brother Jesus. In His stripes we see our healing. We see the restoration of all the bodies we cherish.

By Rev. A. Daniel Guagenti

We Pray

Thus might I hide my blushing face / While His dear cross appears, / Dissolve my heart in thankfulness, / And melt mine eyes to tears. / But drops of grief can ne'er repay / The debt of love I owe; / Here, Lord, I give myself away; / 'Tis all that I can do. Amen. (LSB 437:4-5)

March 28

Vinegar

Read John 19:28-30



Some believe apple cider vinegar is an elixir of the gods to cure every disease. Others would rather die of every disease than drink that nasty stuff. The vinegar or sour wine offered to Jesus in our text is not quite the same thing. It's possible soldiers drank it to get drunk on the cheap. Jesus' reason for having a taste is to fulfill all that had been foretold about Him. He said, "I thirst," in order to fulfill what was said in Psalm 69:21 "They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink."

The soldiers lifted a sponge soaked in the sour wine on a hyssop branch to Jesus' lips. The hyssop branch was used to sprinkle the blood of sacrifices on the Jewish people to cleanse them. At the cross, not only is the hyssop branch used to fulfill Scripture, but it is also touching the sacrificed body and blood which cleanse us of sin.

Jesus paid attention to details. Just as He takes on every sin from the least to the greatest, so too He fulfills every point of Scripture. He is obedient even to the point of drinking sour wine while dying on the cross. He fulfilled all in order to forgive all.

Our Lord is still involved in the details of our lives. He forgives our sins. He calls us to serve. He leads us in the way He would have us go. He fulfills His promise to never leave us nor forsake us. He will fulfill His promise to take us to be where He is.

By Rev. Matthew Brackman

March 29

A Grain of Wheat

Read John 12:23-26



One of the earliest Christian prayers before Holy Communion is found in the *Didache*. ("Didache" means "the teaching"; this writing offers itself as a manual for churches from the twelve apostles.) The prayer says, "Just as this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and then was gathered together and became one, so may your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom, for yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever."

The image of the lonely grain of wheat, buried in the earth, is just the beginning. It must be buried alone to grow. But grown, its strength comes from being brought together, milled with its brothers, combined with water and made one loaf.

There is an element of Christian faith that must be personal. You cannot believe for me. The church cannot repent for me.

But part of rising again, being made new again, living again, is being gathered together and unified.

Jesus was buried, then He rose and regathered His flock. The flipside of "hating" your own life is loving your neighbors' lives. Jesus gathers us to love one another, to be one as He and the Father are one (Jn 17:22).

And so we die to ourselves but find the waters of baptism combine us with the other dying and rising grains. We become one loaf in Christ Jesus.

We find our life in Holy Communion. We find each other. We find Him hidden in the brother. We find Him planted in us.

By Rev. A. Daniel Guagenti

We Pray

Lord Jesus Christ, fill my heart with your living waters that I never thirst again. Amen.

We Pray

One in faith, in love united, / All one body, You the head, / When we meet, by You invited, / You are with us as You said. / One with You and one another / In a unity sublime, / See in us Your sister, brother, / One in every place and time. Amen. (LSB 445:4).