



**Knowing God's Truth
Living God's Love
Spreading God's Word**

Calvary Lutheran Church

March 2026

Dear Friends in Christ,

Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.” — Joel 2:13

As we journey into the month of March we find ourselves in the season of Lent — a penitential season to be sure – but also a season that is often misunderstood. Some imagine Lent as a time to prove our devotion to God through sacrifice or spiritual effort (i.e. giving up something for Lent, or depriving ourselves of desired things). But, Lent is not about earning God's mercy. It is about returning to the mercy of God that is already ours in Christ.

When the prophet Joel calls us to “return to the Lord,” he is not inviting us to climb our way back into God's favor. He is calling us to turn from sin and turn again to the Lord who is already gracious, already merciful, already abounding in steadfast love. This is the heart of repentance.

In the first of the Ninety-five Theses, Martin Luther wrote, “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said ‘Repent,’ He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” It is important to understand that repentance is not a one-time event. Just like the heart beats in regular rhythm to pump life-giving blood throughout the body, so repentance is the daily rhythm of the Christian life. Confessing our sins, we receive absolution, rising again in the forgiveness of Christ.

As we journey once again through this Lententide, bear a couple things in mind.

First, our sin is serious...deadly serious...for the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). We witness through the cross that sin is not small or harmless. It required nothing less than the suffering and death of the Son of God. We dare not minimize what nailed Jesus to the cross.

But second — and even more importantly — God's mercy is greater still...for the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23). The cross is our S.O.S. The cross does not merely Show Our Sin; it also Shows Our Savior. There, Jesus bears our guilt completely. There, He declares, “It is finished.” There, forgiveness is accomplished once for all.

If you go back to your Catechism days, you might recall that repentance includes two parts: contrition and faith. Contrition is sorrow over sin and then, faith is trust that for Christ's sake, our sins are forgiven. But take notice of the order. Our confidence is not in the strength of our sorrow, but in the strength of Christ's promise...a promise that we received personally when we were baptized into Christ, as St. Paul teaches in Romans 6, “Do you not know that all of us who

have been baptized in Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (vv. 3-4).

Which is why, while Lent is a season of penitence, we do not walk in despair. We walk in hope. That's because Lent is **NOT** about spiritual performance...it is about Christ for sinners.

So “Return to the Lord.” Not because we are strong, but because He is gracious. Not because we are worthy, but because Christ is merciful. And in returning to Him, we discover what was true all along: He never stopped holding on to us.

In Christian Love
Pastor Kessler



As we continue to journey through the season of Lent our theme is “Sacred Head, Now Wounded. ”We are considering the various wounds our Lord endured as He worked salvation for us by becoming man and taking our sin upon Himself. During March the Lent Midweek Services will focus on:

- March 4th “The wound of Apathy”
- March 11th “The Wound of Denial”
- March 18th “The Wound if Mockery
- March 25th “The Wound of Abandonment”

Please join us as we gather on Wednesday evenings at 6:00pm for a potluck and follow it with a Vespers service at 7:00pm. Won't you take time this Lenten season to prepare your heart in the hope that culminates in the Day of Resurrection? We hope to see you there.

Deadline for April newsletter articles
March 27

From the Elders

What Happened to Him?

“Whatever happened to Pastor Dusek? I do not see him anymore.”

Congregations of mainstream Christian religions across the United States face the same dilemma. According to Pew Research Center, congregations are aging with declining membership. There is a nationwide shortage of pastors, including within the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS). As of 2016, Pew Research Center reported members of the LCMS’ congregations as having a median age of 56, with 30 percent over the age 65 and 57 percent of our pastors over the age of 55. Nationwide, only 63 percent of Americans identified as Christian according to telephone surveys down from 78 percent during 2007 and 71 percent during 2014.

Pew Research Center switched to online and paper surveys starting during the CoVID year of 2020 and has continued this practice since that year. During 2023-24, the latest year for which data are available, its survey found that 62 percent of Americans identify as Christian. Has the trend leveled off? It is too early to say for sure, but congregational members at Calvary Lutheran Church can certainly identify with the characterization of aging and declining membership.

The LCMS reports annually through its various publications on the graduation of pastors and church workers from its seminaries and colleges. The number of pastoral graduates has not kept pace with the number of retirements by pastors. What has happened within the LCMS to satisfy the need for pastors?

The LCMS has always seen more congregations than pastors throughout its history. During the 1800s, pastors known as circuit riders rode across the U.S. territories visiting a different congregation each week. Congregations had a pastor visit perhaps as infrequently as only once per month. After establishing two seminaries, graduations increased and many congregations were able to call their own a pastor although the number of pastors has never equaled the number of congregations.

Today, the number of congregations seeking a pastor is increasing. Declining membership has even led to congregations having less than 10 attendees per week and unable to afford a pastor. What do these congregations do and how is the LCMS helping?

The LCMS and its district have resources to assist congregations in partnerships. There are four types currently seen across the LCMS. These are –

- Dual Parish. Two or more congregations of similar size partner in ministry and calling a single pastor to serve both.
- Helping Hand. A larger congregation assists a smaller one.
- Circuit Rider. One pastor serves multiple small congregations.
- Multi-Site. Congregations form one entity with more than one ministry site.

For any of the above options to work, all congregations involved must cooperate and support each other. Many congregations are blessed, like Calvary, to have their building(s) paid off, but a willingness for congregations to work together is still needed to avoid dying out as members age and move to their home in Heaven. So, what can you do? Pray for the small congregations to have a willingness to cooperate and avoid thinking only of themselves. Pray for today's youth to consider church work as a career and attend a school in the Concordia University System and, potentially, one of the two LCMS seminaries. Financially contribute to scholarships at the LCMS' universities and seminaries.

So where is Pastor Dusek? He is still very active through serving two congregations during services within our circuit by driving to California three out of four Sundays. You can also find him at Calvary's Thursday and Saturday Bible studies. Keep him in your prayers also. For more information on encouraging someone to become a church worker or pastor, supporting a LCMS university or seminary, or joining a Bible study at Calvary to see Pastor Dusek more often, contact one of your elders (Albert Claude, Bruce Fenske, Ron Hill, Ryan Pope) or Pastor Kessler.



Women In Mission

4Cs Crafters – Meet with crafters the first Monday of every month to work on your own creations or help with a group project. We have adopted the AZ Veteran's Home and this month we will be making Easter table decorations. All supplies are provided. Monday, March 2nd, from 10:00-2:00 in the Education building. Hope to see you there!

Women and the Word – Meets the 3rd Thursday at 3:00 in the Fellowship Hall. We are discussing the book "How to Talk Taboo" written by Pastor Mike Novotny. All women are welcome to attend. Bring a friend and join us!

Little Library

Unfortunately, we suspect that our Little Library has been misused and that books are being taken and not replaced. Please help us by keeping an eye out when you are around the church, for anything that looks odd or out of the norm.

A Brighter Day Ministry

This local organization offers Bible study, fellowship and lunch to 40-50 homeless every Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. It also assists with housing, clothing and personal items. There is a great need at this time, for volunteers to help with food preparation and men's clothing. A collection box is in the Fellowship Hall for your donations. THANK YOU!

"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the household of faith" Galatians 6;10