

# Rethinking Religion



**RETHINKING SUFFERING UNDER THE CROSS**

*Second Sunday in Lent*

# **GRACE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH** | Seward, Nebraska

*February 25, 2024*

## **SERIES THEME: RETHINKING RELIGION**

Everyone has assumptions about God. Likewise, everyone has assumptions about religion. Increasingly, those assumptions are negative. Americans are walking away from Christianity in breathtaking numbers. It raises the question. How do those people know if their assumptions about religion are correct? Do they really understand Christianity at all? Do we? Do we truly understand this religion? In the season of Lent, as much as any other, Jesus teaches things that turns the world's assumptions about religion completely upside down. We call it "Christianity." So, in this holy season, let us go straight to Christ and let him replace assumptions with truth. Jesus, help us to rethink religion!

## **THEME OF THE DAY: RETHINKING SUFFERING UNDER THE CROSS**

We know that the cross was an instrument of torture and execution. However, Scripture also uses the term "cross" to refer to any suffering that one endures because he is believer: the painful denial of the desires of the flesh; ridicule and persecution from unbelievers; etc. This is one reason people reject religion. They see Christians struggling in life with these crosses, while non-Christians often seem perfectly happy. Even the prophet Jeremiah asked, "Why do all the faithless live at ease?" (12:1). Today, Jesus asks us to rethink suffering under the cross. It is not pointless pain. Our crosses are not how we pay for sin. Jesus already did that on his cross. Our crosses are not redemptive, but they are constructive. Any suffering unbelievers face is only bad, a foretaste of worse to come. But the suffering believers face under the cross is only good, a way Christ connects us tightly to himself with fire-tested faith.

**Worship Leader**  
**Organist/Pianist**

Pastor Justin Wilkens  
Cori Humann

## **Acknowledgments**

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## **The Service, Setting One (page 154 in Christian Worship 21)**

### **Hymn: 694 Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken**

*Stand*

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

### **Confession**

*CW 154*

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

**If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just  
and will forgive us our sins  
and purify us from all unrighteousness.**

Let us confess our sins to the Lord.

**Holy God, gracious Father,**

**I am sinful by nature**

**and have sinned against you in my thoughts, words, and actions.**

**I have not loved you with my whole heart;**

**I have not loved others as I should.**

**I deserve your punishment both now and forever.**

**But Jesus, my Savior, paid for my sins**

**with his innocent suffering and death.**

**Trusting in him, I pray: God, have mercy on me, a sinner.**

*Silence for meditation and reflection*

Our gracious Father in heaven has been merciful to us. He sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, who gave his life as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Therefore, as a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

Hear my voice when I call, O Lord; be merciful and answer me.

**Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.**

**THE WORD**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Prayer of the Day**

Let us pray.

Almighty God, you see that we have no power to defend ourselves. Guard and keep us both outwardly and inwardly from all adversities that may happen to the body and all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

*Be seated*

**First Reading**

*Job 1:13–22*

*Job is given a heavy cross, but it does not crush his faith. Instead, God uses Job's cross to move Job to worship and praise the Lord.*

<sup>13</sup> One day when Job's sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of their oldest brother, <sup>14</sup> a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the female donkeys were grazing nearby, <sup>15</sup> when the Sabeans swooped down and took them away. They put the servants to death with the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

<sup>16</sup> While he was still speaking, another servant came and said, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the flocks and the servants and consumed them, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

<sup>17</sup> While he was still speaking, another servant came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and plundered the camels and took them away. They put the servants to death with the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

<sup>18</sup> While he was still speaking, another servant came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and were drinking wine in the house of their oldest brother. <sup>19</sup> Suddenly a powerful wind

swept in from the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it collapsed on the young people, and they died, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

<sup>20</sup> Then Job stood up, tore his robe, and shaved his head. He fell to the ground and worshipped. <sup>21</sup> Then he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be blessed."

<sup>22</sup> In all this, Job did not sin or blame God.

The Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

## Second Reading

*Romans 5:1–11*

*St. Paul teaches that God works through our suffering to shape our Christian character and to lead us to cling to Christ's gracious promises.*

### Peace and Hope

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> Through him we also have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we rejoice confidently on the basis of our hope for the glory of God.

<sup>3</sup> Not only this, but we also rejoice confidently in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patient endurance, <sup>4</sup> and patient endurance produces tested character, and tested character produces hope. <sup>5</sup> And hope will not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us. <sup>6</sup> For at the appointed time, while we were still helpless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> It is rare indeed that someone will die for a righteous person. Perhaps someone might actually go so far as to die for a person who has been good to him. <sup>8</sup> But God shows his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore, since we have now been justified by his blood, it is even more certain that we will be saved from God's wrath through him. <sup>10</sup> For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, it is even more certain that, since we have been reconciled, we will be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup> And not only is this so, but we also go on rejoicing confidently in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received this reconciliation.

The Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*Stand*

## Gospel Acclamation

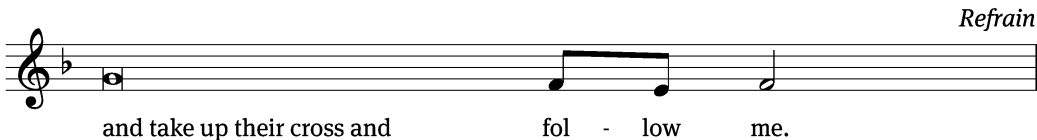
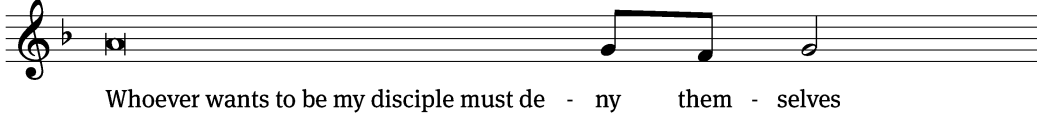
Mark 8:34



### Refrain



### Tone



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## Gospel

Mark 8:31–38

*Jesus teaches of the absolute necessity of the cross, both his and ours.*

<sup>31</sup> Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things; be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the experts in the law; be killed; and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He was speaking plainly to them. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But after turning around and looking at his disciples, Jesus rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! You do not have your mind set on the things of God, but the things of men." <sup>34</sup> He called the crowd and his disciples together and said to them, "If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. <sup>36</sup> After all, what good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? <sup>38</sup> In fact, whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise be to you, O Christ!**

*Be seated*

## **Hymn of the Day: 817 Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart**

**Sermon:** Romans 5:1-11

*Stand*

### **Nicene Creed**

**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,  
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,  
and became truly human.  
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,**

**who in unity with the Father and the Son  
is worshiped and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.  
We believe in one holy Christian 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.**

*Be seated*

## **Prayer of the Church**

*Brief intercessory prayers may be added in a fitting place.*

Heavenly Father, you loved the world and gave your Son to free us from sin and death by his obedient death on the cross.

**We confess that without your love we are lost.**

Lord of the Church, we thank you for the treasure of the gospel. By your Spirit, keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

**Strengthen our determination to do what pleases you, no matter what the danger or the cost.**

Guard and guide those who carry a cross in the name of Christ and face ridicule and persecution for the sake of the kingdom: missionaries and chaplains, young people who stand up for what is right in the face of pressure to do what is wrong, and all who pay a high price for their faith and values as Christians.

**By your Spirit, O Lord, grant them patience and endurance.**

Keep in your care those who carry heavy burdens in life: the sick and the chronically ill, the depressed and the lonely, those torn by conflict in personal relationships, and those victimized by war and injustice. [We pray especially for...*here name the person and the cause of the petition.*] Comfort all who face the terrors of life with a heavy heart.

**Grant them peace, O Lord, and in your mercy, be their guardian and friend, their comfort and hope.**



Watch over those who care for others: pastors and counselors; physicians and nurses; social workers and caring friends; all who feed the hungry, comfort the hurting, and stand beside the dying.

**Strengthen them in their work, O Lord, and do not let them become weary in doing good.**

Hear us as we pray in silence.

*Silent prayer*

Help us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Keep us faithful even to the point of death, that we may receive the crown of life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

**Amen.**

## **Offering**

**Offering Hymn: 844 What God Ordains Is Always Good**

*sts. 1–2*

## **THE SACRAMENT**

*Stand*

### **Preface**

*CW 165*

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give him thanks and praise.**

It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who brought the gift of salvation to all people by his death on the tree of the cross so that the devil, who

overcame us by a tree, would in turn by a tree be overcome. Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:

## Holy, Holy, Holy

CW 167

Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord God of heav - en - ly hosts:

heav'n and earth are full of your glo - ry. Ho - san - na, ho -

san - na, ho - san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is he,

bless - ed is he, bless - ed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Ho - san - na, ho - san - na, ho - san - na in the high - est.

## Prayer of Thanksgiving

We give thanks to you, O God, through your dear Son, Jesus Christ, whom you sent to be our Savior, our Redeemer, and the messenger of your grace. Through him you made all things; in him you are well pleased. He is the incarnate Word, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. To fulfill your promises, he stretched out his hands on the cross and released from eternal death all who believe in you.

As we remember Jesus' death and resurrection, we thank you that you have gathered us together to receive your Son's body and blood. Send us your Spirit, unite us as one, and strengthen our faith so that we may praise you in your Son, Jesus Christ. Through him, we glorify and honor you, O God our Father, with the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.  
**Amen.**

### **Lord's Prayer**

**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.**

### **Words of Institution**

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my + body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my + blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The peace of the Lord be with you always.  
**Amen.**

## O Christ, Lamb of God

CW 169

O Christ, Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world;  
have mer-cy on us. O Christ, Lamb of God,  
you take a-way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on us.  
O Christ, Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world;  
grant us your peace. A - men.

*Be seated*

## Distribution

**Close Communion** We ask that only those who have previously spoken to our pastor or are members in good standing of this or another WELS or ELS congregation come to Holy Communion today. Our practice of Close Communion (which has been the practice of the Christian Church throughout the ages) is in no way trying to judge anyone's faith. What we are trying to do is follow the Bible's clear teaching (1 Corinthians 11) to first study God's Word together. As we do so, we can share with/review with you what the Lord's Supper is all about. You, then, also have an opportunity to examine what we believe and teach before you come to the Lord's Supper and make a public profession that you agree with what we teach.

## Distribution Hymn: 673 O Lord, We Praise You

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  
**his mercy endures forever.**

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup,  
**we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.**

We give thanks, almighty God, that you have refreshed us with this saving gift. We pray that through it you will strengthen our faith in you and increase our love for one another. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

### **Blessing**

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and + give you peace.

**Amen.**

### **Hymn: 867 Afflicted Saint, to Christ Draw Near**

*sts. 1–2, Ref, 3–4*

*The choir will sing verses 1-2 and the first refrain. The congregation is invited to join in on verses 3-4 and the following refrains.*



## **NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Today:** 8:00 AM Bible Study, 8:45 AM Worship and Communion, 9:45 AM Fellowship and Sunday School

**Sunday:** 8:00 AM Bible Study, 8:45 AM Worship, 9:45 AM Fellowship and Sunday School

**Thursday 2/29:** 6:30 PM Midweek Lent Worship Service

### **Food Drive**

Please drop off any food in the Southeast corner of the fellowship hall. Today is our final day for collecting items.

### **Midweek Lent Meals**

There is a signup sheet in the narthex for our midweek lent meals.

### **February 25th Tax Presentation for Trinity**

Following our service this morning, Mr. Owen will give a presentation on Nebraska's scholarship tax credit program. He will explain how Grace members can donate tax dollars to support Trinity. The presentation will take place in the fellowship hall.

**CONNECTION CARDS:** Visitors or members with changes in contact information, please fill out a connection card online at [www.graceseward.org](http://www.graceseward.org) on the member connect tab or scan this code.



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Personal assisted listening devices are available.

**Given to the Lord:** Attendance: Sunday Bible Class 14, Worship 53 in person, Facebook Reached 42, Audio/YouTube 9. Offerings: Home, WELS, NELHS, Trinity **To God be the glory!**

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