

MARCH 1, 2020 – LENT 1

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

“I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.” And you forgave the guilt of my sin.” –Psalm 32:5

God wants us to come to Him humbly and openly, confessing our sins without making attempts to minimize, excuse, or cover up our wrongdoings. That’s not always easy to do. It’s uncomfortable to admit our mistakes, to look at things honestly and own our sins. Luther says that confession must be made with the heart and not only with the voice. When we come to God honestly and openly confessing our sins and showing true contrition, we seek God’s mercy because He has promised to forgive all our sins through the saving work of our Lord, Jesus Christ.



Thoughts to Ponder: *Do you ever find yourself confessing a sin to God and, at the same time, trying to justify or explain it? As you pray to God this week, be conscious of the conversation you’re having with our Holy Father. Are you laying yourself completely open, confessing your sins with no justifications or excuses? Remember, you can be totally open with the sure knowledge that God loves you unconditionally and will forgive you.*

Resource: Lutheran Study Bible

MARCH 8, 2020 – LENT 2

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” –Genesis 12:1-2

Here we see God singles out one person from the city of Ur, way out in the country of Chaldea and blesses him. Why did God choose Abraham?



Was it because He liked him more, or he was better than everyone else, or he was in ‘the club’? No, it isn’t. The nation couldn’t wrap their minds around Him, so he picked one physical thing, Abraham, for the nation to know Him. He was working with Abraham so that He could work through others. God worked with and through Abraham’s descendants – the nation of Israel – as the physical symbol of God’s blessing for the world. And then Jesus came, a Jewish man, from the family of Abraham, as God in the flesh, to be the ultimate physical symbol of God’s love and blessing for the whole world.

Thoughts to ponder: *And we, as followers of Jesus, are called, like Abraham, to be a blessing to the nations. We are blessed to be a blessing. Will you think about where God may be trying to lead you to better serve Him to be a blessing to others.*

–Sources : NIV Bible, Through the Bible Devotional

MARCH 15, 2020 – LENT 3

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.”

Romans 5: 1-7

"Peace...the state of reconciliation with God, with all that blissful sense of composure and harmony which flows from such a condition."* A blessed change takes place in a sinner's state when he becomes a true believer, regardless of his prior sinful nature. Being justified by faith, he has peace with God. Justification takes away guilt, so this makes way for peace. The price for this peace with God was made possible through the sacrifice and death of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Thoughts to ponder: *Justification by faith is a gift that should be treasured. Do we earnestly work to grow our faith through the word of God and sacrament? Do we share our faith through fellowship so that others may know this peace?*

Source: biblehub.com

MARCH 22, 2020 – LENT 4

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

– Ephesians 5:14b

The Scripture readings today present stark contrasts – darkness and light, deaf and hearing, blind and sight, dead and alive. The former is our state as sinners apart from Christ, the latter our state as saints in Christ.



We are uncomfortable with radical alternatives, especially in relationship to our Lord. We rationalize and place ourselves somewhere in between the stark contrasts. “There may be some darkness in my life, but there is light too. I might not hear everything God speaks, but I hear some of His words. I’m not completely blind. I can see something.”

God’s Word doesn’t give room for such middle or neutral ground. As Jesus says to the Pharisees in the Gospel today, if we say we see, we are blind and our guilt remains. Either we are in the light of Jesus or we are not. If we are in darkness, then we are in the sound sleep of the dead. Hence Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesians to wake up and be raised from the dead.

Thoughts to ponder: *In your daily devotions confess you are blind, deaf, in darkness and dead. Our Lord loves to give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, shine His light on us and raise us from the dead.*

MARCH 29, 2020 – LENT 5

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than the watchmen for the morning.”

Psalm 130:5-6

In these verses one sees a Hebrew expression of earnest observation and waiting. The repeated word “wait” indicates sincere distress, impatience for relief and comfort. The writer fervently waits for the first rays of morning light, for the darkness to be past. Again, note the repetition; “more than” which is not a lukewarm or indifferent expression; it’s pronounced. It’s waiting for the Lord’s grace, His mercy, the working of His power and the hope of waiting for His promises. In the Word, hope comes alive, continually illuminating our lives with His grace and peace; we pass from darkness into His light. Through Christ darkness and discouragement disappear.



Do you wait for the Lord? Do you have anxiety that brings darkness and distress to your soul? Or, are you refreshed daily by God’s Word that brings His light into your life? Do you routinely watch for beams of morning light, His Word, that refreshes one’s soul?

Thoughts to ponder: *If burdens bring about darkness, start each morning by spending a few minutes in His Word to bring His light to your soul. If you are in His Word daily look at how His light is reflected through you. In both cases, ask God’s help to seek His light.*

Sources: biblehub.com commentaries, Bible Study Fellowship notes

APRIL 5, 2020 – PALM SUNDAY

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”
— *Philippians 2:5-7*

Make sure to read the verse a couple of times. What do you think Paul wants the readers to know? What do you think this means: “Jesus emptied himself”?



Scholars have had different ideas about this concept. Some even thought that Jesus emptied himself of his divinity. However, there is no change in Christ's divine nature. N.T. Wright states: “the real humiliation of the incarnation and the cross is that the one who was himself God, and who never during the whole process stopped being God, could embrace such a vocation.” Jesus took the form of a servant. He emptied himself by becoming human and entirely accepting God's will, being obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Isn't God's love for us so unique and beautiful?

Thoughts to ponder: *What does being humble mean to you? Where do you find barriers that keep you from adopting a humble attitude? What will help you nurture the humility of Jesus? Pray for the Lord to help you grow in humility and pray for our church that we can humbly continue to share God's love.*

Resources: Lutheran Study Bible ESV, Jesus Calling, and biblehub.com

APRIL 12, 2020 – EASTER SUNDAY

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

“But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, He has risen, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples that He has risen from the dead, and behold, He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see Him. See, I have told you.”

—Matthew 28:5-7

The women brought spices to the tomb to honor Jesus by anointing His body. The situation was one causing feelings of fear. An angel met with the women at the tomb telling them not to be afraid because the resurrection brings joy, not fear. The angel also told them that though Jesus was not in the tomb He was not dead. He was alive with His people. The angel told the women to look in the tomb to see for themselves. They found the tomb empty. They were then encouraged by the angel to go quickly and spread the joy of the resurrection.



Thoughts to ponder: *When the women received the message from the angel, they hurried away from the tomb with feelings of joy. We should remember that because of Jesus' resurrection, death is not the end of life; there is a future life for all who believe in the Good News of Jesus Christ.*

Sources: *The Living Bible Encyclopedia, the Life Application Bible*

APRIL 19, 2020 – EASTER 2

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” So they took his advice.

—Acts 5:38-39

These words were spoken by Gamaliel, who was a Pharisee and also the teacher of Paul when he was still called Saul. Although Gamaliel was not a follower of Jesus, his words paved the way for apostles to continue teaching about Jesus in the temple. Gamaliel was hoping to avoid calling attention to the Romans who ruled Jerusalem at the time. If the Sanhedrin kept arresting, imprisoning and flogging the apostles, it would not escape the attention of the Romans. He did not know that the Gospel is of God and he was right that, as it was from God, they nor the Romans would be able to overthrow it. We see this same promise happening in the Muslim and Communist countries in our day. The Holy Spirit is at work in the midst of some of the most powerful prosecution of Christians the world has ever known.



Thoughts to ponder: *Pray for the persecuted Christians around the world who readily forgive their persecutors. And pray for the persecutors that they may come to accept Jesus as their Savior.*

—Sources: *Lutheran Study Bible, Biblehub.com*

APRIL 26, 2020 – EASTER 3

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

“When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.” –Luke 24:30-31a

Today’s Gospel tells the story of two disciples sorrowfully walking seven miles from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus on the first Easter. A “stranger” joined them. Amazingly, he seemed to know nothing about the past three days concerning Jesus who was arrested, condemned and crucified. That was on Friday and now, three days later, some of the women they knew had visited the tomb, found it empty, and been told by angels he was alive.



The “stranger” explained to the disciples that scripture said it was necessary for these things to have happened. Then as they reached Emmaus, they invited the “stranger” to stay with them. It was at dinner, as he broke bread, that their eyes were opened and they suddenly realized the “stranger” was Jesus.

What joy they had as they rushed back to Jerusalem to tell all of Jesus’ followers what they saw and experienced!

Thoughts to ponder: *Can you imagine yourself being there? Has your “heart burned within you” when you received communion and felt the presence of Jesus? Take time today to meditate on the meaning of the presence of Christ, not only during communion, but throughout your life as He continually makes his presence known to us.*

MAY 3, 2020 – EASTER 4

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. *Psalm 23:1-2*

The power of this psalm is in the active participant. It is not you or me, but it is God Himself. The almighty God of creation, the eternal judge, the provider of all that is good. For this reason, this psalm is most comforting at our weakest moments. As the sheep, we tend to seek out our inner desires, our perceived necessities, our selfish wants. We can be comforted that through the one true Shepherd, the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, prayer and meditation on the Word, He leads us, protects us, and comforts us.



Thoughts to ponder: *When things become difficult, will you seek the Good Shepherd, first? The Lord, our Shepherd truly does satisfy our every need and want!*

MAY 10, 2020 – EASTER 5

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

John 14:6

John 14 is one of the Gospel readings read at many funerals. Jesus’ words in the beginning of that chapter are very comforting to those who have lost a loved one who believed in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. However, the verse quoted above from that same chapter can be a stumbling block for many as universal salvation has crept into the beliefs of many people and also into some Church bodies. **Jesus is very clear here** – the only way we can reach our Father in heaven is through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the one who died for our sins so that we can be baptized into His death, be washed clean of our sins and be presented to God glowing in Christ’s righteousness.



Thoughts to ponder: *Do you hold on daily to the promise that Jesus is the way, the Truth and the Life? Do you spend time in His word so that you can get to know Him better? Are you willing to share your relationship with Jesus with others who may not know Him?*

Source: Lutheran Study Bible

MAY 17, 2020 – EASTER 6

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,”

John 14: 15-16

Earlier in Chapter 13, Jesus gave us a new commandment that we love one another just as he has loved us. Now Jesus is telling us that if we love him, we must keep his commandments. This commandment is not optional if we truly love Him. Professing our love means keeping His commandments. This statement includes all of his teaching and not just those we feel are easier to follow or those with which we agree. Jesus relates love to obedience to Him. If we love Him, we will keep His commandments.



Fortunately for us, Jesus asks the Father to send us a “Helper” who is with us forever to guide and nurture us. The gift of the Holy Spirit is for those who believe and follow Jesus. He is for those people who live in the Word that reveals God’s grace. Neglecting or marginalizing Jesus will isolate us from the Father.

Thoughts to Ponder: *How have you kept Jesus’ commandments? Will you pray asking the Holy Spirit to enlighten your heart and help you on this journey?*

Resource: The Lutheran Study Bible

MAY 24, 2020 – EASTER 7

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you. Casting all your anxieties on Him, because he cares for you.”

1 Peter 5: 6-7

To be humble, and exalted by our God brings greater comfort to our soul than momentary gratification stemming from our ambitions and pride. Being exalted does not come in one’s own time, but God’s appointed time; “in due time,” “the proper time,” be it in this present life or in the world to come. The New Living Translation reads: *“So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor.*



Humility preserves peace and order when we cast our cares on Him and are willing to take a low place leaving our pride behind. Then under His mighty hand, meaning under and in submission to His power and His omnipotence, we can cast all our cares on God—our personal and family cares for ourselves, others and the church, now and the future. Cares are often burdensome stemming from sin and distrust. They torture and distract our mind. The remedy? Be humble casting your cares upon God leaving everything under His mighty hand.

Thoughts to Ponder: *The Lord promises His help will come at the right time. As you go through the week and you are facing difficult situations will you cast all your anxieties on Him?*

Resource: biblehub.com commentaries

MAY 31, 2020 – DAY OF PENTECOST

BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”

—John 7:37-38

In these verses one observes extreme passion exhibited by Jesus. The time of crucifixion is near. Here, the last day of the Feast of Booths, and after teaching throughout the festival, Jesus loudly makes a bold statement that He will quench the thirst of those who come to Him. Can you picture Jesus apprehension of what’s to come as He shouts this exclamation? After all that Jesus did and said that pointed to the fact that He Himself was the true Messiah, He loudly cried out with all His heart⁸ telling all of the gift given to those who believed in Him.



Read the verse again. Jesus is passionately affirming what the Scripture says as He connects the metaphor of living water to one’s heart, not just trickles but “streams” of life flowing from the heart. Believing Christ is our Messiah means from within every believer heart flows His living water.

Thoughts to ponder: *Do you truly believe Jesus is Messiah? Is your relationship with Him such that living water streams from your heart that others can know who He is? Will you pray for Jesus to quench your thirst that you too can share that stream of living water?*

-Resource: biblehub.com commentaries.