

Lenten Midweek 4 – 2026

The Crucifixion of Christ in the Life of Man

(The Crucifixion of Christ and the Essence of Grace)

Galatians 3:1-14

John 17:1-26

False religions are a dime a dozen. Man was created a spiritual being and a spiritual being is what man continues to be. The trouble is that man is idolatrous. Man is ungrateful. Man is self-centered and lazy and easily bored. Francis Pieper famously wrote that there are not a thousand different religions nor even four, but only two essentially different religions: “the religion of the Law, that is, the endeavor to reconcile God through man’s own works, and the religion of the Gospel, that is, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, belief wrought through the Gospel by the Holy Ghost that we have a gracious God through the reconciliation already effected by Christ, and not because of our own works (χωρίς έργων νομίου)” (Christian Dogmatics, Vol. I, pg. 10).

It is a stubborn reflex, man attempting to justify himself before God by virtue of something that man himself supplies, something that man himself presents, something that man himself can take credit for. St. Paul struggled against this reflex in the first century. Martin Luther struggled against this reflex in the 16th century. We struggle against this reflex today. Grace; the gift of God; a favorable disposition of holy God toward sinful man; grace is beautiful and intricate and bloody and loving and more extensive than any of us know. The reflex that prompted the pagan tribe to throw the virgin into the volcano to appease the angry volcano god is the same reflex that attempts to present our good works before God to justify ourselves. There are only two religions.

Grace is not a theological abstraction. Grace is a bloody corpse. That Man, crucified, dying, He is grace is action. Jesus saved you by dying in your place. That is grace. What God accomplished in time, He planned from eternity. From eternity, your name was written in the Book of Life. That is grace. On the Last Day, He will call you from your grave. That is grace. You will rise. The power of His voice will invade your being and you will rise. That is grace. You were dead in trespasses and sins, and God made you alive in Christ, by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:5). Some use God’s grace as a pretense for a feckless Christian life. How sad! How empty and loveless and sad for the beauty of biblical truth to be used as a prop for an indolent Christian life.

Do you know the joy of being loved? Do you know the power of forgiveness? How many of you realize that it’s only the supremely guilty who receive God’s grace (Romans 3:10-20)? There is no such thing as a “worthy recipient” of God’s grace. And *that* is wonderful. Grace inspires humility. Grace inspires action, a proactive spirit that desires to serve others. Grace inspires empathy for other sinners. There is a bible verse that is not quoted often enough. The verse tethers grace to the cross and then puts it everywhere else, highlighting the spectrum of gifts which God gives. It’s worth memorizing, worth contemplating. Why? Because it will strengthen you. The reality that lies within the Bible verse is cornucopia of grace. St. Paul writes: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give (χαρίσεται) us all things” (Romans 8:32). Do you know what that means?

God gave us His very best. Our Father gave us the most precious gift that He has. He's so thoroughly committed to you that He sent His Son into this broken world to live beneath the law, to enact a perfect life, and then to suffer. Sin must be paid for and you can't, you don't have the ability. None of us; we're diseased; sin has done its unholy work and we don't have the ability to pay. Only God's Son – true God and true Man – only He can pay. And He did. God's commitment to you is proven by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Love put Him there, on that cross. Grace put Him there. Our Father has given you the best that He has and every other gift is secondary. Every other gift is an expression of His love, but those gifts don't ascend to the apex, the fullest expression of His love. Because of grace, you can count on God for everything.

When troubles mount, when fear attacks, when your conscience barks, where do you flee? I suspect that each of you has dark watches of the night when you feel puny, when you feel the weight of your failures and the road before you is lined with naked trees whose limbs hang down like switches to render some kind of divine punishment, a punishment that you truly deserve. When the mirror of the law provides a shocking reflection of your sin, where do you flee? You sang these words a moment ago: "By grace I'm saved, grace free and boundless; My soul, believe and doubt it not." "For though I know my heart's condition, I also know my Savior's voice" (By Grace I'm Saved, st. 1, 6 – LSB 566). Your Savior's voice is in His Word. He prayed for you. Mere hours before He was crucified, He prayed for you. As His sweat became blood, the Lord Christ prayed for you, asking for you to be protected, defended from the adversary, united by the truth, and strengthened to stand regardless of the peril (John 17:12-23). That prayer is being realized in your life. Believe it. Grace is not a theological abstraction. It is anchored in the flesh of Christ and given to you in the Word and the Sacraments. When faith is under attack we flee to Christ and His Word, we flee to the objective reality of our baptism, we hunger and thirst for His righteousness, for His body and blood. And Christ delivers His grace. The Holy Spirit delivers God's grace. The Father grants us the abundance of His grace.

The Prodigal Son was a dealmaker. He had squandered his father's resources and then was destitute, but he thought that his father would be a dealmaker as well. Take me back. I'll work off my transgressions. Make me like one of your hired hands. The dealmaking son didn't count on grace. The father *runs* to his son. Seeing him on the horizon, the father runs to his son with a kiss, calls for the ring, the sandals, the robe, and celebrates with the fattened calf (Luke 15:11-32). Grace is better news than you think it is. Grace towers above our failures. God demonstrates His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). Grace is the morning dew of God's love and the Northern Star of our journey. You are welcome in God's holy house because you are saved by grace. You will be called from your grave because Christ is risen and death has no sting. Grace makes us one. We are united by the Savior's blood, united by God's love, united by God's grace. We are brothers and sisters because grace has forged us into one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. The essence of grace is Christ crucified. May its beauty grow in your heart and mind until you see the Savior face to face.