

Sunday, March 22, 2026

Fifth Sunday in Lent

The Good News is... rooted in justice, mercy, and faithfulness

PRELUDE

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL TO WORSHIP

Welcome to the weary and the worn.

Welcome to the wiggly and the eager.

Welcome to the skeptical and the seeking.

Welcome to the early risers and those still trying to wake up.

Welcome to the rule followers and the rule breakers.

Welcome to those hungry for justice and those desperate for mercy.

Welcome we who are both sinners and saints.

This is God's house.

You can make yourself at home here.

Let us worship our just, merciful, and faithful God!

KYRIE (Call Us Home, 3)

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Jesus once said to a crowd, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone."

Friends, none of us are without sin.

None of us get it right all the time.

None of us can get by without God's grace.

In the Prayer of Confession, we acknowledge this truth.

We put down our stones and we turn to God for forgiveness.

Join me in this act of transformation.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Friends, let us pray:

Holy God,

**we love to live our lives by the rules.
We love clear answers.
We love right and wrong.
We love swift justice.
We love to pick up stones,
but you show us another way.
You welcome shades of gray and nuanced conversation.
You prioritize mercy over legality.
You prioritize people over tradition.
You prioritize love over everything.
Forgive us for losing sight of what truly matters.
Forgive us for clinging tighter to laws than to each other or to you.
Forgive us. Soften our hearts.
Root us in mercy, justice, and love.
With hope for a better tomorrow, we pray. Amen.**

Church family,

Jesus saw a crowd ready to throw stones and invited them to choose another way.
Jesus offered them grace, mercy, and compassion,
and the same can be said for us.

So hear and believe the good news of the gospel:

Our God is a God of mercy.

Our God is a God of compassion.

Our God is a God of grace.

We are forgiven, loved, and invited to choose another way.

Thanks be to God for yet another second chance.

Amen.

GATHERING HYMN ACS 944 O Spirit All-Embracing vs 1 & 3

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray:

Holy One, when you speak, we don't want to miss it.

When you bend down and write in the dirt,

when you move through the trees,

**when you wake with the dawn,
when you tug on our heart,
or whisper into our dreams,
we don't want to miss it.**

So today we pray, clear out the cobwebs in our ears.

Quiet the steady stream of thoughts marching through our minds.

**Open up space in our hearts so that we can receive your word for us
today.**

With hope we pray. Amen.

KIDS SERMON

HOPE FOUND AROUND US: *Prayer for Holy Week* by Elizabeth Jennings

Let us listen for God's hope and grace as it comes to us from unexpected sources.

Our hearts and minds are open to the spirit.

Love me in my willingness to suffer
Love me in the gifts I wish to offer
Teach me how you love and have to die
And I will try

Somehow to forget myself and give
Life and joy so dead things start to live.
Let me show now an untrammelled joy,
Gold without alloy.

You know I have no cross but want to learn,
How to change and to the poor would turn.
I can almost worship stars and moon
And the sun at noon

But when I'm low I only beg you to
Ask me anything, I'll try to do
What you need. I trust your energy.
Share it then with me.

God, be in our understanding.

Let the Spirit be heard.

I invite you to stand in body or spirit as we prepare our hearts for the scriptures:

RETURN TO THE LORD (Call Us Home, 7)

HOPE FOUND IN THE SCRIPTURE

Let us listen for God's hope and grace as it comes to us in scripture.

Our hearts and minds are open to the spirit.

John 8:2-11

At daybreak, he reappeared in the Temple area, and when the people started coming to him, Jesus sat down and began to teach them. A couple had been caught in the act of adultery, though the scribes and Pharisees brought only the woman, and they made her stand there in front of everyone. "Teacher," they said, "this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. In the Law of Moses, the punishment for this act is stoning. What do you say about it?" They were posing this question to trap Jesus so that they could charge him with something. Jesus simply bent down and started tracing on the ground with his finger. When they persisted in their questioning, Jesus straightened up and said to them, "Let the person among you who is without sin throw the first stone at her." Then he bent down again and wrote on the ground. The audience drifted away one by one, beginning with the elder. This left Jesus alone with the woman, who continued to stand there. Jesus finally straightened up again and said, "Where did they go? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, Teacher," came the reply. "I don't condemn you either. Go on your way—but from now on, don't sin any more."

Matthew 23:23

(Jesus said) "Woe to you religious scholars and you Pharisees, you frauds! You pay your tithes on mint, dill and cumin while neglecting the weightier matters of the Law—justice, mercy and faithfulness! These you should have practiced, without neglecting the others."

The word of God for the people of God,

Thanks be to God.

SERMON

HYMN OF THE DAY Let Us Remember

We will now take a moment of reflection, to listen to the spirit. This is also a time to prepare our hearts for the offering. We all have so much to share: time, talent, tithe. In the bulletins, there is a piece called Joyful Giving to share what you will give the community this week. Those slips can be placed in the offering basket.

TIME OF REFLECTION

OFFERING The Bread of Life (Call Us Home, 12)

OFFERING PRAYER

Let us pray.

O God, maker of heaven and earth, your steadfast love embraces all creation. You send rain and sunshine to nourish the earth and bring forth its bounty. Through these gifts we offer today, let us share your hope and grace with all the world. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

**I believe in the good news of Jesus Christ.
It sounds like welcome and feels like home.
It sounds like laughter and feels like mercy.
It sounds like love and feels like a seat at the table,
so I believe in the good news of Jesus Christ.**

**I have seen it alive in the world.
And even when my heart aches, even when wars rage,
even when mercy feels out of reach,
I remember the one who welcomed the children
and led with nonviolence.
I remember the one who cared for the vulnerable**

and inspired those around him.

**I remember that the good news really is good news,
for I have seen it alive in the world.**

Thanks be to God! Amen.

PRAYER SONG ELW 752 Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Loving God, you know all of us. You know our fears and our dreams, our hopes and our longings, our grief and our joy.

You know the words that are on our tongue before we can even say them, so today we come to you unfiltered. Today, we bring you our full honesty, trusting that you meet us here with grace and love.

Holy God, we admit that mercy, justice, and faithfulness often get tangled up in our minds. We want to do the right thing, which feels like justice. However, sometimes we go about justice with a blunt sword, failing to practice mercy.

We want to be merciful, but our anger and hurt can get in the way. Too often, we find ourselves casting stones.

We want to be righteous, but we often forget that righteousness must impact our relationships, not only our words or our actions.

God, we admit that mercy, justice, and faithfulness often get tangled up in our minds. So like Jesus did with the crowds that day, help us to root ourselves in the best of these practices. Untangle these threads of our faith and show us how to hold them all.

Spark a fire in our hearts for justice—

justice for the oppressed, justice for the overlooked, justice for our neighbors,
justice for those not given a voice.

Spark a fire in our hearts for mercy—

mercy for the sinful, which is all of us, mercy for the hurt, mercy for the ones who are doing their best with what they have.

And spark a fire in our hearts for righteousness. Call us up to a higher moral ground. Remind us that our faith invites us to love as you love, and to forgive as you forgive. Show us how to put down our stones. Show us how to forgive

ourselves for our own wrong. Show us how to empathize with the other, putting ourselves in their shoes.

If we can do that, then maybe there will be a day when there is less stone throwing, less mob building, less violence toward our neighbor. Maybe there will be a day when all can gather at the table. Maybe there will be a day when we can all break bread together. Maybe there will be a day when justice, mercy, and righteousness feel like a mighty flowing stream.

Until that day, we will continue to look for your words in the dirt. We will continue to listen for your deep truth. Until that promised day, we will continue to bring you our unfiltered honesty. Until that promised day, we will continue to pray for our neighbor, including those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts, especially (PRAYER LIST)...

Loving God, set a fire in our hearts for justice, mercy, and righteousness.

Amen.

PRAYER SONG ELW 752 Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying

PASSING OF THE PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

GREAT THANKSGIVING (Call Us Home, 13)

PREFACE

Truly it is right and joyous to offer thanks and praise to our Gracious God in all places and in all circumstances of life. But especially so on this day as we prepare our hearts for the mystery of salvation in Jesus' great sacrifice. And so with all the saints and angels in heaven and on earth, we raise our voices with this never-ending hymn of praise:

Holy, Holy, Holy (Call Us Home, 14)

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

CALL US HOME (Call Us Home, 16)

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us, in the language or version of our hearts:

Heavenly God, giver of life, holy is your name. Your realm come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For you reign in power and glory, now and forever. Amen.

Distribution

Communion Hymns Lamb of God - Call Us Home
 ELW 480 O Bread of Life from Heaven

Prayer after Communion

Let us pray:

God of our salvation, we give you thanks for this meal that restores our souls, reconciles us to you, and strengthens us for the journey. Let us be strengthened to become Christ's body in the world, bearing witness to your love for all creation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. Amen.

Blessing

As you leave this place,
when you meet anger, speak with love.
When you meet fear, speak with hope.
When you meet pain, speak with gentleness.
But no matter what, speak this good news.
For if you won't, then who will?
Remember, the good news of the gospel is
love and justice for all.
It is joy that surprises,
and nonviolence that transforms.

The good news of the gospel is alive in the world,
so go forth speaking, knowing the Creator, + Redeemer
and Sustainer are with you always.

Amen.

Sending Song ELW 310 Songs of Thankfulness and Praise vs 1 & 3

Dismissal

Go in peace, share the good news!

Thanks be to God.