

Messiah Lutheran Church

GATHER, EMPOWER, SERVE

*"I am the resurrection
and the life.
He who believes
in me will live..."*



John 11:25, NIV

✠ Holy Communion ✠

Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 22, 2026

23



In today's gospel Jesus reveals his power over death by raising Lazarus from the dead. The prophet Ezekiel prophesies God breathing new life into dry bones. To those in exile or living in the shadows of death, these stories proclaim God's promise of resurrection. In baptism we die with Christ that we might also be raised with him to new life. At the Easter Vigil we will welcome the newly baptized as we remember God's unfulfilling promise in our baptism.

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

GATHERING

PRELUDE

***My Faith Looks Up to Thee* Karl Osterland**

Stand

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

P: Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
who forgives all our sin,
whose mercy endures forever.

C Amen

P Let us confess our sin before God, who removes our guilt and blots out all offenses.

Kneel

P Gracious God,

C have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

P: For seeking worldly delights that deceive us and dishonor you:
Gracious God,

C have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

P For desiring self-reliance instead of hungering for your word:
Gracious God,

C have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

P: For failing to recognize your coming reign, and for hindering the work of the Spirit: Gracious God,

C have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

P: For drawing from the well of self-serving ambition, and for disdain the living water Christ offers: Gracious God,

C have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

P For disregarding voices from the margin, and for distrusting signs of your healing and hope in the world: Gracious God,

C have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

P For dwelling in tombs of self-pity and discontent, and for disregarding Christ's call to come forth to life: Gracious God,

C have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

P: God's steadfast love, grace, and forgiveness abound.
 Through faith, the free gift of God,
 you have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ.
 In the name of † Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven.
 The Spirit of the One who raised Christ from the dead
 dwells in you, pours God's love into your hearts,
 and gives you life and peace.

C Amen

Stand

GATHERING HYMN

You Are the Way



1 You are the way; through you a - lone can we the Fa - ther find;
 2 You are the truth; your word a - lone true wis - dom can im - part;
 3 You are the life; the rend - ing tomb pro - claims your con - qu'ring arm;
 4 You are the way, the truth, the life; grant us that way to know,



in you, O Christ, has God re - vealed his heart, his will, his mind!
 you on - ly can in - form the mind and pu - ri - fy the heart.
 and those who put their trust in you not death nor hell shall harm.
 that truth to keep, that life to win, whose joys e - ter - nal flow.



Text: George W. Doane, 1799–1859, alt.
 Music: DUNDEE. *Psalter*; Edinburgh, 1615

APOSTOLIC GREETING

P: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
 and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C: And also with you.

KYRIE

A In peace, let us pray to the Lord. **C** Lord, have mer - cy.

A For the peace from a-bove, and for our sal-va-tion, let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mer - cy.

A For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God,

and for the u - ni - ty of all, let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mer - cy.

let us pray to the Lord. **C** Lord, have mer - cy.

A Help, save, comfort, and de - fend us, gra-cious Lord. **C** A - men

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P Let us pray.

Almighty God, your Son came into the world to free us all from sin and death. Breathe upon us the power of your Spirit, that we may be raised to new life in Christ and serve you in righteousness all our days, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen

Sit

WORD**FIRST READING: Ezekiel 37:1-14**

Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones is a promise that Israel as a nation, though dead in exile, will live again in their land through God's life-giving spirit. Three times Israel is assured that through this vision they will know that "I am the LORD."

A: A Reading from Ezekiel:

¹ The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ² He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³ He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵ Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ I will lay sinews on you and will cause flesh to come upon you and cover you with skin and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD."

⁷ So I prophesied as I had been commanded, and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them, but there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰ I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

¹¹ Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' ¹² Therefore prophesy and say to them: Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people, and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the LORD when I open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD."

A: The word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Psalm 130

The cantor sings the refrain; the congregation repeats it.



I wait for you, O LORD; in your word is my hope.

Sung responsively between the cantor and congregation.



¹ Out of the depths

I cry to you, O LORD;

² **O LORD, hear my voice!**

Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication.

³ If you were to keep watch over sins,

O LORD, who could stand?

⁴ **Yet with you is forgiveness,**

in order that you may be feared. R

⁵ I wait for you, O LORD; my soul waits;

in your word is my hope.

⁶ **My soul waits for the Lord more than those who keep watch for the morning,**

more than those who keep watch for the morning.

⁷ O Israel, wait for the LORD, for with the LORD there is steadfast love;

with the LORD there is plentiful redemption.

⁸ **For the LORD shall redeem Israel**

from all their sins. R

SECOND READING: Romans 8:6-11

For Paul, Christian spirituality entails living in the reality of the Holy Spirit. The driving force behind our actions and values is not our sinful desire for self-satisfaction but the very Spirit by which God raised Jesus from the dead and will also raise us from the dead.

[A]: A Reading from Romans:

⁶ To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed, it cannot, ⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him

who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

A: The word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Stand

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

R e - turn to the Lord, your God, for he is gra-cious and mer-ci-ful,
slow to an - ger, and a-bound-ing in stead-fast love.

GOSPEL: John 11:1-45

Jesus is moved to sorrow when his friend Lazarus falls ill and dies. Then, in a dramatic scene, he calls his friend out of the tomb and restores him to life.

P: The Holy Gospel according to St John, the eleventh chapter.

C: Glory to you, O Lord.

¹ Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴ But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather, it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶ after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸ The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰ But those who walk at night stumble because the light is not in them." ¹¹ After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." ¹² The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." ¹³ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶ Thomas, who

was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

²⁸ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴ He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus began to weep. ³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to

them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

⁴⁵ Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him.

P: The Gospel of the Lord.

C Praise to you, O Christ.

Sit

SERMON..... Ray Huff, ALWL

Stand

HYMN OF THE DAY

What Wondrous Love Is This.....LBW 385

1 What won-drous love is this, O my soul, O my soul! What
 2 When I was sink - ing down, sink - ing down, sink - ing down, when
 3 To God and to the Lamb I will sing, I will sing; to
 4 And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on; and

won - drous love is this, O my soul! What won-drous love is this
 I was sink - ing down, sink - ing down, when I was sink - ing down
 God and to the Lamb I will sing; to God and to the Lamb,
 when from death I'm free, I'll sing on; and when from death I'm free,

that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the dread-ful curse for my
 be - neath God's righ-teous frown, Christ laid a - side his crown for my
 who is the great I AM, while mil - lions join the theme, I will
 I'll sing God's love for me, and through e - ter - ni - ty I'll sing

soul, for my soul, to bear the dread-ful curse for my soul?
 soul, for my soul, Christ laid a - side his crown for my soul.
 sing, I will sing, while mil - lions join the theme, I will sing.
 on, I'll sing on; and through e - ter - ni - ty I'll sing on.

Text: North American folk hymn, 19th cent., alt.
 Music: WONDROUS LOVE, W. Walker, *Southern Harmony*, 1835; arr. Paul J. Christiansen, 1914-1997, alt.
 Arr. © 1955 Augsburg Publishing House, admin. Augsburg Fortress.

APOSTLES' CREED

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

**He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.**

**He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.**

He descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again.

**He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.**

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. Amen

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

A brief silence is held after the introduction.

P: Reconciled by God's mercy and sustained by God's presence, let us pray
for the world and its needs.

After each petition:

P: Hear us, O God.

C: **Your mercy is great.**

The prayers conclude:

P: Receive our prayers, O God, through Jesus Christ, our strength and
salvation.

C: **Amen**

PEACE

P: The peace of Christ be with you always.

C: **And also with you.**

The pastor and congregation greet one another in the name of the Lord.

Peace be with you. R: Peace be with you.

Sit

MEAL

OFFERING

The Offering is received as the Lord's table is prepared.

ANTHEM

***O Lamb of God*.....Mark Patterson**
Stand

OFFERTORY

As the gifts are presented, the Offertory is sung

Cre - ate in me a clean heart, O God, and re - new a right spir -
 it with - in me. Cast me not a - way from your pres - ence, and take
 not your Ho - ly Spir - it from me. Re - store to me the
 joy of your sal - va - tion, and up - hold me with your free Spir - it.

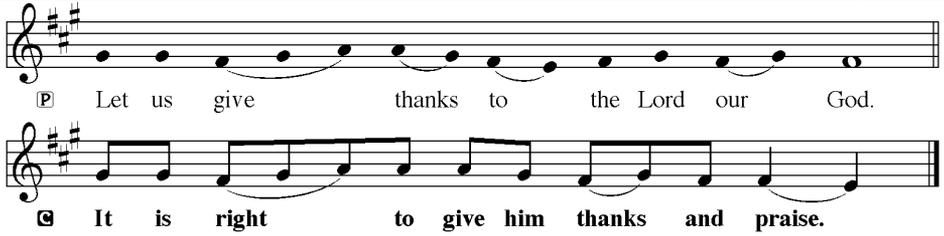
OFFERING PRAYER

A: Let us pray.

C: 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 of bread and wine,
 draw us into the death and life of your Son,
 who calls us to bear witness to his saving work.
 We ask this in Jesus' name.
 Amen

GREAT THANKSGIVING

P The Lord be with you. **C** And al - so with you.
P Lift up your hearts. **C** We lift them to the Lord.

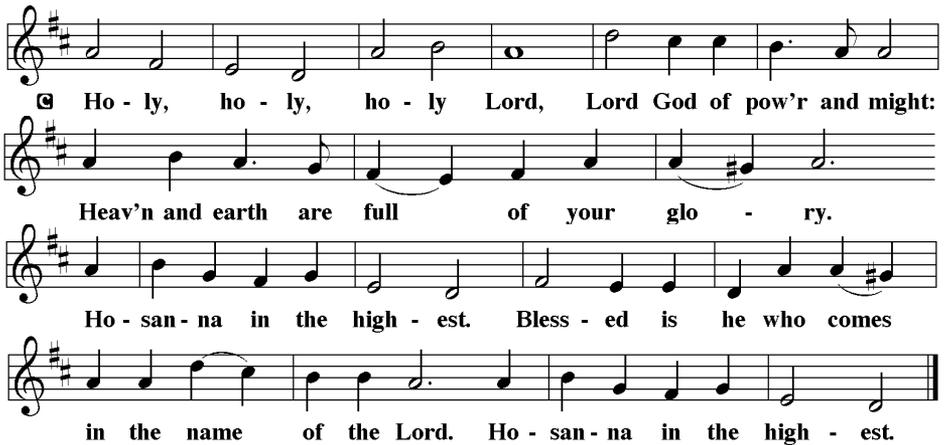


Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give him thanks and praise.

PREFACE

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ; You call your people to cleanse their hearts and prepare with joy for the paschal feast, that renewed in the gift of baptism, we may come to the fullness of your grace. And so, with all the choirs of angels, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, Lord God of pow'r and might:
Heav'n and earth are full of your glo - ry.
Ho - san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is he who comes
in the name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

P: Holy, mighty, and merciful Lord,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
In great love you sent to us Jesus, your Son,
who reached out to heal the sick and suffering,
who preached good news to the poor,
and who, on the cross, opened his arms to all.

In the night in which he was betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread,
and gave thanks; broke it,
and gave it to his disciples,
saying: Take and eat;
this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper,
he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink,
saying: This cup is
the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people
for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Remembering, therefore, his death, resurrection,
and ascension, we await his coming in glory.

Pour out upon us the Spirit of your love, O Lord,
and unite the wills of all who share this heavenly food,
the body and blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord;
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,
be all honor and glory, now and forever.

C: 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.**

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

P: Come to the table.

Feast on God’s goodness and mercy.

C: Thanks be to God.



C Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on us.



Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on us.



Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world;



grant us peace, grant us peace.

Sit

COMMUNION

All baptized believers are invited to this holy meal. Those not communing are invited for a blessing. Please follow the instructions of the ushers to gather at the altar table. As the ministers give the bread and wine, they say these words to each communicant:

The body of Christ, given for you. The blood of Christ, shed for you.

The communicant may say: Amen

COMMUNION HYMN

Precious Lord, Take My Hand



1 Pre-cious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand,

2 When my way grows . . drear, pre-cious Lord, lin-ger near,

3 When the dark-ness ap-pears and the night draws . . near,



I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.

when my life is . . al-most . . gone,

and the day is . . past and . . gone,



Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light.
 hear my cry, hear my call, hold my hand lest I fall.
 at the riv - er I stand, guide my feet, hold my hand.



Take my hand, pre-cious Lord, lead me home.

Text: Thomas A. Dorsey, 1899-1993

Music: George N. Allen, 1812-1877, adapt. Thomas A. Dorsey

Text and music © 1938, 1966 Unichappell Music Inc, admin. Hal Leonard Corp.

PRECIOUS LORD

Irregular

Stand

P: The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace.

C Amen

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

A: 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.
 Through the body and blood of your Son,
 may we become Christ's body in the world,
 bearing witness to your love for all creation,
 through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C: Amen

SENDING

SENDING OF THE EUCHARISTIC MINISTERS

P: Gracious God,
 loving all your family with a mother's tender care:
 As you sent the angel to feed Elijah with heavenly bread,
 assist us in this ministry on which we are sent forth.
 In your love and care, nourish and strengthen those to whom
 we bring this sacrament, that through the body and blood of
 your Son we may all know the comfort of your abiding
 presence.

C: Amen

BLESSING

P: Receive the blessing of the holy Trinity:

God, who calls all things into existence,
Jesus Christ, who redeems us,
and the Holy Spirit, whose breath sustains creation,
‡ bless you now and always.

C: Amen

SENDING HYMN *Oh, for a Thousand Tongues*

1 Oh, for a thou-sand tongues to sing my great re-deem-er's praise,
 2 My gra-cious Mas-ter and my God, as-sist me to pro-claim,
 3 The name of Je-sus charms our fears and bids our sor-rows cease,
 4 He breaks the pow'r of can-celed sin; he sets the pris-'ner free.
 5 To God all glor-y, praise, and love be now and ev-er giv'n

the glo-ries of my God and king, the tri-umphs of his grace!
 to spread through all the earth a-broad the hon-ors of your name.
 sings mu-sic in the sin-ner's ears, brings life and health and peace.
 His blood can make the foul-est clean; his blood a-vails for me.
 by saints be-low and saints a-bove, the church in earth and heav'n.

Text: Charles Wesley, 1707–1788, alt.
Music: AZMON, Carl G. Gläser, 1784–1829; arr. Lowell Mason, 1792–1872

DISMISSAL

A: Go in peace. Believe the good news.

C: Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

Fugue in G Major..... J.S. Bach

SERVICE ASSISTANTS

Ushers: Fred Harbaugh, Jean Nolan, Diana Rooker, Susan Christ, Greg Eckenrode; **Lay Asst:** Janet Stroble; **Comm. Asst.:** Mandy Feinberg; **Acolyte:** Weston Sherman **Altar Guild:** Susan Bryan, April Gardner; **Greeters/Presenters:** Mike and Dianne Larson; **Cantor:** Virginia Amme
Flower Delivery: Susan Bryan; **Guest Organist:** Carol Waltz

IN BLESSED MEMORY

The Altar Flowers are given to the Glory of God and in loving memory of loved ones from Sylvia.

The Basket of Flowers is given to the Glory of God and in loving memory of Marie Welter for her birthday March 25th, with love from her husband Bob and children Zach and Olivia.

The Sanctuary Lamp burns in memory of Marie Welter's birthday on March 25th with love from her husband Bob.



“I am the
resurrection
and the
life.”

John 11:25

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Welcome to Messiah Church! It is our joy to have you worship with us. If you are visiting, please make yourself known and leave your name & information to a congregation member. *We hope to see you again.*

This morning we welcome Ray Huff, an Authorized Lay Worship Leader (ALWL) of the Upper Susquehanna Synod. Ray has received extensive training so as to provide worship leadership and preaching.

The Eucharistic Ministers will be sent out this morning.

Calling all pie makers!! If you like to bake, especially pies, please share your favorite pie with us at our **pie social**. The fellowship committee will be hosting a pie social on next Sunday, **March 29th**, immediately following worship and would love to see how many pies we can get. If you would be willing to make a pie for our social, please sign-up on the sheet in the Narthex. The fellowship committee will provide the beverages and cool whip; we just need the pies.

Lutheran World Relief School Kits are well underway!

Monday and Tuesday, women and men alike worked together at our third annual Sew-A-Sack sew-a-thon to start making backpacks. At the time of this printing, we will not yet have a total for you, but there are still opportunities to help make backpacks for those who like to participate in this way!

Those who were unable to attend the Sew-A-Sack but would still like to make backpacks at home may pick up pre-surged fabric pieces and instructions in the narthex on Sunday mornings or from the church office during the week. Because these pieces have been prepared in advance with this special stitching around the edges, it greatly simplifies the process and makes sewing the backpacks a breeze! **Questions?? Call Sally Congdon at 570-547-6193 or Kathy Wither at 570-651-2802.**

Are you intrigued by antique cars? Well, on SUNDAY, APRIL 26, members of the Williamsport Model T Club are also going to tour the THOMAS T. TABER MUSEUM just as we are leaving. You'll see "history" inside and out! So we need to car-pool after our sandwich/salad lunch to leave space for their cars to park. If you plan to be a "Museum Tourist" the tickets will be available--\$6.50 per person—on April 12 and 19.

EASTER FLOWER ORDERS DUE next Sunday, March 29th. Order forms are in the Narthex. Four varieties available. Each cost \$8.00. Please make checks out to Messiah Lutheran Church with Easter Flowers in the memo line. *Thank you.*

We are looking for volunteers to deliver Easter flowers to our homebound members. If you are able please sign up on the sheet in the Narthex. Thank you!

MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH

JARED GIST, ORGANIST

324 South Howard Street | South Williamsport, PA 17702

(570) 326-9171 | www.messiahsouth.org

Roll the Stone Away

You can understand why they don't want to roll the stone away. "Already there is a stench," Martha says (John 11:39). Why open the grave? Why let out that smell? There could be no purpose. After all, Lazarus is dead.

This is not unbelief. "I believe that you are the Messiah," Martha says (v. 27), confident that her brother would one day rise again. But it is a faith that desperately wants God to provide an escape from suffering and struggle: "If you had been here," both sisters say, "my brother would not have died" (vv. 21, 32). The presence of Jesus, they think, should protect them from pain and death.

What they don't understand, though, is that the places of pain and suffering are exactly where Jesus goes. He enters dead places to bring hope to life. He transforms the stench of decay into an aroma of thriving. He summons Lazarus out of the tomb to walk into freedom.

This is why Jesus tells them to take away the stone. He wants to open the place that they are convinced holds only grief, and to expose what they believe to be a shameful smell. Yes, it is difficult to face. However, only when the grave is opened can Lazarus respond to Jesus' call. Martha and Mary must remove the stone that hides what they do not want to bear, so that new life can emerge from the tomb.

What are the stone-covered places in your life? What are the places in your heart that you are convinced hold only pain, decay, and fear? In the tender love of Jesus, you do not need to hide them. Jesus is calling you to open them. He will enter these places with resurrection power, transforming death into life and shame into glory. Facing these tombs takes courage. But you can trust that Jesus will bring healing to your brokenness. He is in the business of calling the dead back to life. Let the stones be rolled away.

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