



## Go into the World

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

- Matthew 28:18-20

"Go Tell the World" is a Lenten Series provided by the ELCA Evangelism Working Group. It is based on a recent paper by Pastor Dave Daubert (Elgin, Ill.).

"Go into the World" is an adaptation of that series for Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in North Liberty, IA. For a copy of the original document and other resources, please contact Pastor Erika Uthe at [uthe@seiasynod.org](mailto:uthe@seiasynod.org).



**Southeastern Iowa Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

## Schedule

### Ash Wednesday (March 2)

8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Drive through Ashes  
10:30 a.m. Morning Prayer with Ashes and Holy Communion  
6:30 p.m. Family oriented worship with Ashes and Holy Communion

### Sunday Worship

8:30 a.m. Worship  
9:30 a.m. Family Sunday School  
9:30 a.m. Adult Forum  
10:30 a.m. Worship

### Wednesdays except March 2

10:30 a.m. Morning Prayer (Traditional)  
6:30 p.m. Family and youth-oriented worship followed by small groups and closing prayers (WYN schedule)

### Maundy Thursday, April 14

7:00 p.m. Worship with Holy Communion

### Good Friday, April 15

7:00 p.m. Worship and prayer time

### Holy Saturday, April 16

Decorate for Easter – time to be determined

### Easter Sunday, April 17

8:30 a.m. Festival Worship  
Special Event between services TBA  
10:30 a.m. Festival Worship



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**Sunday Worship**  
8:30 and 10:30 a.m.  
**Fellowship/Sunday School**  
9:30 a.m.



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# INTRODUCTION

We are our stories. The stories we tell, those we hear told, those we create, and those we weave into the narrative that gives us place, meaning, and purpose. Our stories are part of God's story: a story of salvation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a story of grace that calls us to be sent into the world and gathered together again in community. Our passions meeting the world's deep need is an evident part of mission in nearly every congregation.

In the United States, the ELCA Lutheran community has a deep and lasting legacy of love: hospitals, learning institutions, social service agencies, refugee resettlement, advocacy, hunger, and the list goes on. We have certainly lived well into our tagline, "God's Work. Our Hands." This year during Lent, we will take a journey on our own and as a faith community. Our congregation will be invited to consider how it is that we learn and share our story of faith. Through weekly worship, many resources, daily devotions, and small group conversation resources, we will listen learn, and practice sharing our own stories of faith so that we can "Go into the World" declaring the salvation God has given for all.

## ASH WEDNESDAY

The ritual of Ash Wednesday: confession and forgiveness, imposition of ashes, and nourishment at the table provides the perfect opportunity for this reflection. As those in the worship find themselves faced with looking at life the way it is versus the way it ought to be, we encounter a Jesus-sized gap. This gap is filled with sin, mortality, and the brokenness of humanity and the world around us. In his salvation we see the world becoming what it ought to be. Every time God's love is lived out, we glimpse the kingdom come, even as we wait for the fullness of God's salvation.

The smudged ashes remind us that no gap is too wide for Christ's body and blood. God has marked us, claimed us, loved us, forgiven us; marked with Christ's cross, we go to the world to be part of the story of this salvation that is beyond comprehension.

Our scripture reading comes from the Gospel of Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21. We learn in this passage that we are to be aware of being pious. The word "pious" means to act as if your religious behavior is greater than that of someone else. Specific to Ash Wednesday, we are cautioned not to wear our ashes on our forehead as a sign that we are better than other people or "more saved" than people who don't have ashes on their foreheads. We are to welcome the saving grace of Jesus wearing the ashes on our head, not to brag, but to come to God with a humbled heart. We "Go into the World" and through God's gift of grace, our acts of kindness and mercy give way to our own story of forgiveness and joy.

**Prayer:** Gracious God, out of your love and mercy you breathed into dust the breath of life, creating us to serve you and our neighbor. In a world that is full of brokenness, fear, and death, strengthen us to face our mortality with confidence in the mercy of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, on God, now and forever. Amen

## WEEK ONE (MARCH 2-8): SALVATION

Salvation begins with God's work in Jesus Christ and it is for the whole world – every human, every plant, animal, the cosmos itself. We testify to the fact that faith is a gift, as it says in Luther's Small Catechism, "I believe that, by my own understanding and strength, I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with [her] gifts, made me holy, and kept me in the true faith..."<sup>1</sup>

This calling through the gospel has a personal component – God's forgiveness and newness of life is for you. Your sins are forgiven, your chains are set free, you have been declared enough, you are transformed. Telling the story begins with a personal encounter with the living Lord Jesus Christ. Not all encounters are as flashy (literally) as Saul's encounter on the road to Damascus (Acts 9) but all encounters are life changing. For some, this transforming encounter may only come at the Communion Table while others' transformations may mirror that of Saul. Regardless of how the transformation takes place, in order to tell the world, a disciple needs to articulate for themselves the answer to this question: **Why does Jesus matter?**

On Ash Wednesday, we put ashes on our foreheads to say to ourselves and to others that we understand that "from dust we are made and to dust we will return." It can feel pretty "doom and gloom" unless we add this amazing promise that through Jesus Christ we are saved. We can say, sing, and even pray to Jesus without asking the question to ourselves: Does Jesus matter to me? This idea of being forgiven forever can feel freeing and maybe overwhelming. We "Go into the World" and share our story of new life because all of the sin we have and will ever cause in the world has and will be forgiven. However, we can also go along our everyday busyness as if that promise made by God doesn't deserve a response. Our response is to acknowledge all the times in our own story of faith, our life story, that Jesus mattered to us. To "Go into the World" and act with kindness, mercy, and compassion for the gift of forgiveness is meant to be shared. Thank you, Jesus!

**Questions:** *After checking in with one another, pause or reflect on the day/week's highs and lows. Then you may use the questions below to go a bit deeper.*

- **General:** Was there a time or situation in your life that you felt separated from God? Where or how was God's presence made known or God's love shown to you?
- **Children:** Have you ever broken a toy, smashed something, or made a huge mess out of something special and you didn't know or you were afraid to tell anyone? God wants to hear your story about when you really messed things up. God loves you. God forgives you. We remember on Ash Wednesday how God makes all of creation. God wants us to care for one another; but when we mess up big time, God will always forgive us!
- **Youth:** Can you imagine a time when you didn't have a cellphone, a TV, or a computer? Imagine a world when every time you lost something, made a mistake, or embarrassed yourself, someone told you to get out, to get away, or simply that your mistake is unforgivable. How would you feel? Jesus says, "You are forgiven forever." How? Through the saving grace of Jesus. It is not something we do or can do on our own, but it is God's love for us. How do we respond to Jesus' gift of taking all the burdens off our shoulders? Start by saying, "Thank you, Jesus." Then spend some quiet time with a thankful heart.

<sup>1</sup>Luther's Small Catechism, 500 Years of Reformation. Augsburg Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2016. p. 31

## WEEK TWO (MARCH 9-15): COMMUNITY

“How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” Jesus’ cry of frustration comes after yet more foretelling of Jesus’ death and resurrection. We hear in these few verses from Luke’s gospel Jesus’ frustration at the unwillingness to receive him as the savior God intends. He has been healing, casting out demons, and yearning to gather together God’s people – but these efforts were met by an empire fearful that their power was slipping away, an established ruling class unwilling to see beyond the comforts of their own privilege to the true gift of God’s kingdom.

In Philippians (selected for Lent 2), we hear more about what it means to be community in Christ, from joining together to imitate Paul and the disciples as citizens with the saints to seeking God in the temple, singing praises in the face of enemies and wars. Living in Christ’s salvation and holding fast to faith is not an easy feat, yet God has gifted us with a family as numerous as the stars in the skies (Genesis 15.5) and yearns to keep us safe from sin and death that can so easily ensnare and steal the joy of salvation.

As we face the Jesus-sized gap in our lives and the world, God does not leave us alone. Gathered together with other faithful under God’s care is how we can make sense of the stories we live. Our regular gathering in worship to hear God’s Word proclaimed, to receive the gifts of God’s sacraments of water, bread, and wine, to hear the absolution of the sins of the world – this is an integral part of a life of faith. And, this begs the question, “If Jesus matters, why does this particular congregation matter?”

The ability to articulate why your congregation matters to you, beyond the simple, “I like the people who are there” is a key part of what it means to share your story of faith. Gathered at the table where there is enough for all – in the offering, the sharing of the peace, in the feast itself. Gathered at the font where all sins are washed away. Gathered at the Word – in Scripture and music to hear the promises repeated week after week – this is what it is to be a part of the beloved saints, citizens of heaven, protected under the maternal arms of a mothering God.

**Scripture:** Philippians 3:17-4.1 and Luke 13:31-35

**Prayer:** O God, thank you for giving us one another to create memories together. Help us to be a community that reflects your love and grace. Gather us in song, story, service, and around the table to share your transformative love with others. Help us always to find out strength in you, telling of your wondrous works who keep watch over all creation, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Question for Reflection/Conversation:** *After checking with one another or personal pause or reflection of the day/week’s highs and lows, you may want to go a bit deeper and ask the following*

- **General:** Take some time to journal or brainstorm YOUR OWN faith story. Why does Jesus matter to you? To the world? Why do you attend your church? Why does your congregation matter to your community?
- **Children:** Write, draw, or color a picture of the best part of your day (food, recess, reading a book, ...). Who is in your picture or why did you pick them? God is with you and everyone in your story each day. When you are tired, worried, happy, sad, frustrated, singing, or even sleeping, God is with you and the other people in your story.
- **Youth:** You are writing a story of your teenage years. What is the most important part of your day? Who is part of your schedule? God is in the midst of your busy, anxious, and full days. Have you had time with God today? Talk about all the joy in your day as well as the challenges. This is YOUR STORY, this is GOD’S STORY OF GRACE.

## WEEK THREE (MARCH 16-22): SUFFERING

In this third week of Lent, we are faced with scriptures wrestling with the reality of suffering in the world. In Isaiah, the community of God's people have been exiled and are looking ahead to a homecoming in God's holy presence, where new life and everlasting love are for everyone. The Psalmist talks of a soul that thirsts and flesh that faints "as in a dry and weary land where there is no water." The oft-misquoted verse from 1 Corinthians encourages believers that "God will not let you be tested beyond your strength."

Unless there are disciples to translate the story that is going on into the broader story of God's salvation in the here and now, our faith is merely a comfort of future promises of eternal life and risks missing the living, active God at work. At its worst, this faith becomes a list of pious actions for which individuals are responsible for securing their own place in God's glorious kingdom. Instead, however, the scriptures point us to the mysterious work of God made manifest in the cross, the greatest revelation of God's salvation exactly in the moment of suffering, in the descent into hell, in the darkness of a sealed tomb. Christ came precisely to redeem the moments of suffering and to ensure that in every moment, even death itself, God would be present with us.

Telling the world about God's salvation in Jesus Christ starts with a Jesus-sized gap in our own lives, drives us into a community of disciples gathered to worship, and equips us to translate the good news into our daily context, creating a "living, daring faith," as Martin Luther said. Having answered the questions, "Why does Jesus matter?" and, "Why does this congregation matter?" we can move on to answering, "How and where is Jesus at work in the world today?" Articulating the answer to this question provides hope in the face of the reality of the sin that threatens to overwhelm us, and allows us to cling solidly to the cross in the face of death – knowing that life is waiting on Easter morning.

**Scripture:** Psalm 63:1-8 and 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

**Prayer:** God, thank you that you see and care for those who are lost, those who are hungry and thirsty, and those who feel separated from you. Help us see the hurt and suffering of our neighbors. Guide us as we remember that Jesus suffered and died for each of us and our salvation. Let us be comforted by the love throughout the story of the cross, and that Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**Questions:** *After sharing your highs and lows, you are invited to go a bit deeper and ask the following:*

- **General:** Share a story of suffering that you see in the world today? How does it make you feel? Name one way you can respond to the hurt of others today.
- **Children:** How do you find food each day? When you are cold, where do you find a warmer sweatshirt, a blanket, or a coat? Sometimes when we feel all alone and we are hungry or cold, we just can't remember how to find help. Jesus says, "I am with you always." This helps us to feel hope. Think of the best food item in your house. Would you be willing to share with someone who is hungry?
- **Youth:** Have you really been so hungry you could eat your own shoe? How do you find food? At your school, have you ever noticed or heard from someone who has said, "If they don't go to school and eat lunch, they don't eat?" For some students, eating a free or reduced cost meal at school is their only meal for the day. That means when there isn't school because of a snow day or holiday, you have classmates who won't have food or will only have very little food for the weekend. The Food Pantry helps people to provide food for their families. You can always donate food to the Food Pantry AND you can always volunteer to serve at the Food Pantry. Talk with the adults in your home about helping others find food, warmth, and security.

## WEEK FOUR (MARCH 23-29): RECONCILIATION

In the scriptures for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent, we experience reconciliation in many forms. From the Prodigal Son to Paul's second letter to the Corinthians declaring that in Christ we have been made right with God, we see how the love of God is, at its heart, calling us back to God. More than these stories, though, the entirety of scripture points to God's reconciling love. From the moment of creation to the salvation of Israel from slavery in Egypt, to the faithful arrival of God's people in the Promised Land, to the promise of return after exile all the way through the prophets and the birth of Jesus, the Acts of the Apostles, the letters to the early church, and the Revelation of John, God's salvific work brings wholeness back to creation.

As disciples called to tell the world of God's saving love, it is important to know these stories of reconciliation. Having recognized the Jesus-sized gap in the world, experiencing God's saving love in a community of believers, and making sense of God's work in the world today, we begin to draw on the rich witness of reconciliation revealed in Scripture to tell and re-tell the story of divine forgiveness. Regardless of what life throws our way: joy, sorrow, anger, sadness, confusion, love, stubbornness, there is a scriptural witness that can center our story with that of God's story.

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 and Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

**Prayer:** O God, who promised abundance to Israelites in the wilderness, who fed the multitudes with loaves and fish, and feeds and cares for us today: let us remember your extravagant generous love that reconciles to world to yourself. Breathe on us the power of your Spirit, that we may read and tell of the reconciling stories in scripture, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

**Questions:** *Check in with one another to share the highs and lows of your day/week; then dig deeper with the following:*

- **General:** Think back to the time you first heard a story from the Bible. Who taught you that story? Why did they decide to share the stories from the Bible with you? What is your favorite story? What did you learn about God?
- **Children:** Imagine you are sitting in your favorite spot in the whole world listening to a great story! Can you imagine who is telling you the story? Is the story from a book or is someone else sharing a story from their memories? Is the story about adventure or maybe it is a story about learning a lesson? IN your story, is there someone who got in trouble and they were unexpectedly forgiven? Can you draw a picture of the story you remember the most and then tell someone all about what you have drawn?
- **Youth:** What is the big story you heard today? Did you hear it from a person or was it something you saw on your phone? Is this the kind of story you would tell a friend? Is this story helpful or is it gossip? If you were to tell someone else your story, would they be afraid or feel hope, joy or peace? Pause and ask yourself, "What's my story today?" On your phone or a piece of paper, jot down a few notes about your story. Is it a story to share? Are you still working out some of the hurts, frustrations, or challenges of your day? God' didn't cause you to have trouble today, but God knows you are hurting or celebrating. Challenge yourself today to stop and pause long enough to hear these words "by God's grace," meaning love and forgiveness. You are always and forever saved.

## WEEK FIVE (MARCH 30-APRIL 5): HOPE

It matters not if someone arrives at a life of discipleship by a direct encounter with the divine or by invitation, the end is the same: a new reality. Once someone has been called by God, chosen, forgiven, and sent forth with gifts to change the world, nothing is the same. Martin Luther talked about this reality in his explanation of the sacrament of baptism, “the old person in us with all sins and evil desires it to be drowned and die through daily sorrow for sin and through repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”<sup>1</sup>

The Scriptures for the 5th Sunday of Lent all point to glimpses of how this newness is manifesting. In Isaiah, we see that, though the salvation story had been exclusively told of God’s bringing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt through the wilderness to life in the promised land, God was doing new things – a word of hope and promise for those who once again found themselves captive in Babylon. In Philippians, Paul writes, “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.”

The lavishness with which God provides new life, transformation, and hope for a world where not all is as it should be is stunning. It invites the hearer to consider the question, “how does God’s love create a new reality for me?” When God’s people embrace this newness, in revolutionary ways, the world begins to turn. Systems of injustice are swallowed up in the desert as streams of justice flow forth. Hatred and violence are transformed in each heart and home by God’s extravagant love poured out providing a new way of being. This is the life to which we invite others when we tell the world of God’s revolutionary love.

**Scripture:** Isaiah 43:16-21 and Philippians 3:4b-14

**Prayer:** Bend your ear to our prayers, Lord Christ, and come among us. By your gracious life and death for us, help us forget what lies behind, and anoint us with your Spirit, to see and tell of the new reality of the life and transformation for all the world through your life, death, and resurrection. Amen.

**Questions:** *Check in with one another to share highs and lows of your day/week; then dig deeper with the following:*

- **General:** In the Scripture readings, we read and hear the message “God is with us.” How do we know? Why does it seem so hard to trust that God loves us? We are invited to hear God’s message of hope and respond with shouts of joy. How does trusting God’s love create a new reality for you? Trusting in God’s gift of abundant grace, does that change the ending of your story?
- **Children:** Imagine a town made up of all your favorite things. Is your town made up of your favorite snacks or maybe is it filled with puppies and kittens? Please share your story! Once you are all done, imagine that in every space in creation, there is God. Not an angry God who tricks or harms people, but our God, who loves us first and loves us always. Now imagine that Jesus, God’s own son, is teaching you to care for the sick, the lonely, and the hungry. What is the first thing you could do? Maybe introduce yourself, listen to the other person first, or maybe sit quietly as they rest. How does your story include other people?
- **Youth:** You are members of the Church! So, how does the Church look or sound like you? Can you imagine one way that you can help someone out and they wouldn’t even know it? Like at home doing the dishes without being asked or sitting with someone who is all alone in the cafeteria? God loves you now and always. How does that change the way we treat each other?

<sup>1</sup>Luther’s Small Catechism, p. 44

## WEEK SIX (APRIL 6-13): GRACE

On this final week of Lent, we find ourselves ending where it all began: grace. Grace is the root and ground of everything that we are about as people of faith. It is the arc that runs through scripture from the moment God creates to the end of the age. It is the thread that weaves all of God's beloved children into the grand tapestry that is the kingdom of God. It is the lifeline through which salvation flows into the veins and marrow of those who, by the Spirit's doing, come to believe. In a consumer society, an individual's worth has everything to do with what they have, how they look, and the pursuit of fulfillment through accumulation, wealth, and status. Essentially worth is earned and it is up to the individual to prove to the rest of society that they are, indeed, valuable and worthy of esteem, love, and maybe even envy.

The Scriptures this week bring the world back to what it is to be people who are centered and defined by God's grace: freely and abundantly given, unmerited though it may be. As people enter into the great story of Holy Week, it is good to invite people to consider what grace means: for them, for their neighbor, for the world. The question, the starting point for anyone who tells the story, is simply this, "How have you experienced God's grace?" The stories that flow from this question address everything that has come before: the Jesus-sized gap, the presence of God's grace in worship and community, the movement of the Holy Spirit in the world and in Scriptures, the way grace brings about new realities and transformation – it is all here. In this week. In this story, which we are invited to "Go into the World" and share the Good News of God's abundant love for all of us.

**Scripture:** Philippians 2:5-11

**Prayer:** God of grace, guide us to be people not defined by human standards but to know the hope, peace, and joy of your transformative love. Christ Jesus, by your gracious life and death for us, tell the story into the depths of our souls, and anoint us with your Spirit, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**Questions:** *After sharing your highs and lows for the day/week, go deeper and think about the following:*

- **General:** What does the word "grace" mean to you? How does the reading about grace above fit into your understanding of God? God forgives us not because we have earned it or deserved it, but because God promised to love us always. Accepting God's love and forgiveness begins with listening to our stories and see how God has always been in the midst of our hurts and our joys. We are to go into the world sharing this Good News: "God loves and forgives all people."
- **Children:** Find a piece of paper and write out the word GRACE. Share what you think this word means? God's meaning for the word is love and forgiveness forever! Do you remember a story when you did something wrong and you thought no one would ever forgive you? God always forgives. God wants us to stop doing the things that hurt others. What is something you can do today to HELP someone? When we help and forgive someone and we don't expect anything in return, it is called GRACE!
- **Youth:** Imagine someone has lied about you and everyone at school knows about it. Imagine you can't get them to hear the truth that you are innocent. How do you feel? What will you do? Will you get even or can you turn this into something that is crazy different – like forgiveness. It is really hard to imagine that something that is such a big deal today will be forgotten tomorrow. God's gift of love isn't for one day. God's gift of forgiveness is 24/7! Grace is love and forgiveness that isn't earned, deserved, or expected. But it is, oh, so abundant that it fills the spaces in your story where there is only hurt, worry, or sadness. God is dancing with you as you dance with joy.

## **Week Seven (April 14-17): Holy Week**

Perhaps this year, we can join in the invitation to share the divine conspiracy story and through Jesus that is our salvation. We can enter the story in a new way, telling the old, old, story with new names, faces, and lives transformed as we together think about how this story continues to live in each of us, shape our daily lives, and moves us into the world that God so loves.

### **Maundy Thursday**

On Maundy Thursday the story we tell is that of servant love, of friends gathering around the table, of betrayal, loss, and confusion. How we tell this story year after year shapes how our communities of faith live out the commandment, "Love others as I have loved you." We tell and retell the story of Christ's act of washing his disciples' feet. Yet how do we bring this story to life in new ways, year after year? Perhaps for Maundy Thursday this year, we practice telling stories of how love has been lived out in your local community this Lent. Or a story of confusion or bewilderment and the community that navigated it together. Whatever shape the story takes, it is clear that Christ's selfless love and revolutionary service is gift for the world.

### **Good Friday**

Good Friday is the epitome of the story that all is not as it should be. It is the story of sin, death, and the devil, and the power they still wield in this world. It is the radical story of the powerful submitting to powerlessness, the hopes for a savior dashed so hard against the rocks that the earth shakes. It is precisely the moment when everything seems to be falling apart that God's salvation comes to the world. This salvation does not take the easy way, but instead makes a way where there seems to be none. Even when all hope seems lost and the tomb is dark and sealed, we know that salvation is coming.

### **Holy Saturday**

On this day in some congregations, we hear the retelling of the whole story from creation through the Red Sea, winding through the valley of dry bones, the fiery furnace, and the tomb. Through all these stories, the hearer ends up with salvation, new life, and comes to know a God who does not let death stop love from winning. At the font on this day, the story is that of new life. New eyes to see the world, new Spirit to live in love, new light to guide the way. This is the story of new beginnings, which often come in surprising ways.

### **Easter**

He is risen! He is risen indeed! Victory! Salvation! Today we celebrate God's steadfast love shown forth in deliverance from crisis – Christ's triumph over the grave and the bursting open of the tomb on Easter morning gives all Christians cause to celebrate and rejoice! This is the fulfillment of the story but not the end. This is the story that continues in each of us as we live into the realities of resurrection and tell of God's transformation and love for each one of us.