

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

Hosea 5:15-6:2

In the verses just prior to this, God has pronounced His judgment upon His own people, and it is not a light sentence. “For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear to pieces and go away, I will carry away, and there will be none to deliver.” The prophet pleads with his people, “Come, let us return to the Lord, for He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us.” How can he expect this of a people who are about to be so severely punished?

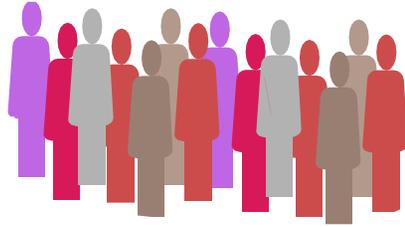
God’s punishment of His people was not out of vengeance. It was not even a punishment rooted in a particular justice system. God was, however, “out to get” them. He wanted them for eternity. His people were in full rebellion. The time of affliction that they were entering was to bring them to repentance. Many of them were defiant of God, sarcastically challenging Him with their words and works. Yet, He was not willing to let them go. He would not turn them over to Satan without a battle! It was only through great trial that the people could come to realize their sin and return to their Creator.

We like to think of God’s love as an easy love. Thanks be to God that it is not. Our love is fickle, but His is the same for eternity. Like children, we run away, but He pursues. We deny, but He persists. He would do anything to hold on to us forever. He even sent His Son to die in payment for our rebellion. The prophet found that he could not wonder or even consider that such a love could be anything but the best love for the world. Is it any wonder that he would continue to call for his people to return to their God?

*Did you know that Bible studies are available on the LCMS website?*

[www.lcms.org](http://www.lcms.org)

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee



## Fourth Sunday in Lent

Hosea 5:15-6:2

1. We cannot fully appreciate the verses of the text without the words of 5:1-14. What verses especially catch your attention? What is God’s response to Israel’s unfaithfulness?
2. What is God asking of his people in 5:15? How does this verse fit the theme of the Lenten season?
3. How do we hear the Gospel message in 6:1?
4. What is the significant of the “two days” and “third day” of vs. 2?
5. How does 5:15 speak to you? What guilt do you need to admit? What misery are you experiencing?
6. How does 6:1-2 speak to you? How has God already healed and restored you? What does it mean to live in His presence?



## Fourth Sunday in Lent

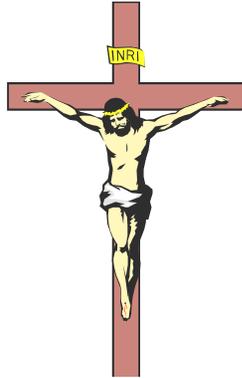
Text: Numbers 21:4-9

The people sinned against God and many of them died. God is just and He has declared that the punishment for sin is death. We saw it first in Eve. Satan tricked her into believing that she would not die just from disobeying God, but she did die and die immediately. Her immediate spiritual death was worse than physical death; it meant that the relationship with God that had been hers was gone. Think of the emptiness that she must have felt at that moment. The serpents in the wilderness thousands of years later carried physical punishment for sin as many people were bitten and died. God would not, could not, tolerate sin.

God also loved His people totally and out of that love, He sent a way of life in the midst of the snakes. Moses raised a bronze serpent on a standard and those who looked upon the figure were spared. God's mercy and grace worked wonders in the midst of the sinners.

In John 3:14-15 Jesus said that He was like the bronze serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness. Jesus came to us when we were in the middle of the wilderness of sin and death. Like the bronze serpent, Jesus was provided by God for the salvation of His people. Like the people with Moses in the wilderness we complain, protest, and rebel against God continually, yet if we will look to Christ on the cross, we will be rescued from sin and death.

In this fourth week of Lent consider the willingness of Christ to die on the cross for you and for me. He was sinless yet He was willing to be punished for the sin of a whole world. He died even for Moses and his followers in the wilderness. The punishment for our sin was suffered by the sinless One. This week consider the undeserved death and separation suffered for us by God's Son as He cried out "My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?"

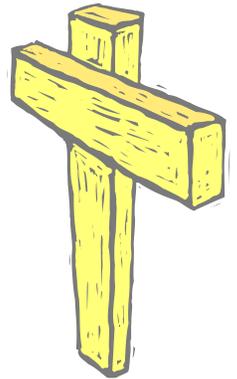


*This Lenten season, read God's Word daily!  
A message from your District Education Committee*

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

Text: Numbers 21:4-9

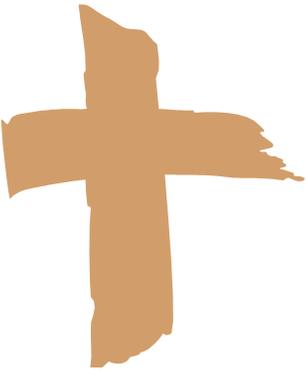
1. What was the complaint of the Israelites (vs. 4-5)? Was this their first complaint (Exodus 14:10-12)?
2. What judgment did God bring on the complainers? What do we learn about God from this just response?
3. How do we see God's grace in this incident?
4. Read today's Gospel lesson (John 3:14). What greater event did Moses' action foreshadow?
5. The bronze snake saved a few. How many does the cross of Jesus save? How is this good news for you?
6. What do we complain about? How does God respond to our complaints?



## Fourth Sunday In Lent

Isaiah 12:1-6

Today's passage is a praise song linked to the prophecy in chapter 11. By reading both we find out what "in that day" refers to. Chapter 12 could be prefaced with "Though you are about to be destroyed because of your sin..." Isaiah's listeners were about to be exiled to Babylon, but in these passages God assured them that the time of praise would come. Through the Messiah, God would offer His people forgiveness and mercy. Christ the Son came to save His people. He was and is the banner of salvation for all nations.



Unlike Isaiah's contemporaries we have seen the suffering that the Savior endured in order to bring peace between man and God. But this praise song carries us even beyond the death of Jesus and the glory of His resurrection. It gives us a glimpse of the joy we will feel at Jesus' return.

There aren't many people, even Christians, who have not occasionally felt uneasy about the Second Coming of Christ. For Christians the uneasiness is not because we fear His judgment. By His death we are His forgiven and loved people; we will spend eternity in His presence. No, the uneasiness is because we are uncomfortable with the unknown. God understands that in our humanness we can't comprehend the glory of what He has planned for the end of time, or what the return of the risen Lord will be like. To alleviate our apprehension He gives us this song of praise to assure us that the day will inspire great joy. We "control freaks" don't have to be uneasy because the suffering of Jesus was followed by the glory of Jesus. He really is the Lord of heaven and earth. When He returns there will be no bitterness, jealousy, or strife, and His people will never suffer evil again.

***Do you get together with friends to study God's Word?***  
(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

## Fourth Sunday In Lent

Isaiah 12:1-6

1. "That day" is noted by Isaiah several times (vs. 1, vs. 4; chapter 10:20, 27; 11:10). What day is he referring to?
2. God's anger is noted in vs. 1. What makes God angry? When and why is God's anger "turned away"?
3. According to vs. 2, God is my \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. What is the significance of each of the titles?
4. What phrases in vs. 4 and 5 emphasize that God's grace is to be shared with everyone?



5. Find the encouragements to "joy" in these verses? Where do we find our joy even in the more somber and meditative season of Lent?
6. God's people are invited to "sing." What are your favorite songs of praise? What is the significance of singing in your congregation's worship? In your family? In your personal worship?

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

Hosea 5:15-6:2

We may think of Israel and Judah as God's people who rebelliously worshiped idols. Since we would never worship a stone idol we cannot be as rebellious as they. But, the rebellion of these two nations was more complicated than simply idol worship. Idols were man made and this was the basis of the rebellion. Man has always wanted to depend upon Man, even to the point of designing his own gods. Whether we see it in the nation of Ephraim turning to Assyria for deliverance or in our own nation's persistent denial of God's right to be involved in human affairs, it is still a case of preferring Man's wisdom over God's.

Something that our rebellion cannot overcome, however, is God's love and His steadfast determination to prevent His children from running headlong into the arms of Satan and eternal damnation. Out of His love for Ephraim and Judah God withdrew His protective hand from them. God's desire was that they would realize that they could not succeed or survive without the Lord.

Hosea 6:1-2 indicates that indeed Man does recognize God as his strength when confronted with unconquerable evil. As we see in Scripture, however, this renewed loyalty did not last. This helps us understand what "repentance" is not.

It is one thing to say "I'm sorry." but more is required for true "repentance." Repentance denotes regret *and* a change of heart—even a change of attitude and action. As an example: If I regret my hatred of my brother who has done me harm, but continue to hate him; or if I regret my terrible temper but do nothing to get it under control, I have missed the life-changing part of repentance. Even if we sincerely regret a sin, but we do not change our minds and hearts, we are doomed to continue in the very sin we regret.

That is a scary thought. We cannot change ourselves! The task is too great, but as God's children we can continually ask Him to help us. We can seek His wisdom, His strength, His forgiveness, His heart, His love. Then, by His blessing, we will grow in Him and begin to see changes in our hearts and minds that reflect the reality of true repentance in our lives.

**Learn more about repentance in a Bible study this Lenten season.**

*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee.*

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

Hosea 5:15-6:2

1. Skim the earlier verses of Hosea 5 (especially vs. 1, 3, 7). What is God's message to Israel? Why is He responding so harshly?
2. What is God's wish for Israel according to vs. 15? What does it mean to repent?
3. Read Hosea 5:14. How would the gracious and forgiving God respond to the repentant according to 6:1?
4. How might 6:2 be an Easter prophecy? What Good News awaits us at the end of the Lenten season?
5. One of the themes of Lent is repentance. How is our need for repentance like that of Israel in Hosea's time? How is repentance part of our worship life? Our family life? Our personal devotional life?
6. Find out more about the Lenten prophet Hosea. When did he live? To whom did God have him prophecy? What was unusual about his family?

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

Ephesians 2:4-10

Christians can be a little whiney at times. Imagine Paul's frustration as he, one who had talked with Jesus, tried to convey the excitement of knowing Christ—even to Christians.

All Christians understand the blessing of knowing Christ: His death on the cross brought us into God's eternal kingdom. But, do we always understand the *excitement* of knowing Christ?

"Do I have to?" is a phrase that we have all heard. If we have children, we have heard it many, many times. In fact, many Christians seem to employ the phrase when it comes to living out their faith. Lying in bed on a Sunday morning, we think, "Do I have to get up and go to worship?" Sometimes the phrase is a little different. "Why do I have to?" is a popular one. Why do I have to go to Bible study; Why do I have to be a servant of others? Why do I have to pray? Why do I have to ask God's will? Why do I have to love people?

Sometimes others ask the "Why" questions. "Why do you have to go to church tomorrow and miss the game?" "Why do you make your kids go to confirmation class?" "If you're saved by grace through faith, why do you have to do stuff?"

The answer, of course, is that we don't HAVE to do anything. We feel like we "have to" because that's our sinful nature. We generally want to do only those things that serve our own agendas or that we find exciting.

Paul reminds us that knowing Jesus IS exciting—and that excitement is why we do the things that we do as Christians. Paul reminds us that on our own we were on the freeway to hell with no rest stops, no hope. Even then God loved us totally. So totally that He sent His Son to die an agonizing death in our behalf. He picked us up from the no-off-ramps freeway to hell and adopted us as His own beloved children. How can we say, "Do I have to" to a God like ours?

Those things that we do we do in response to Him—to the truth that we "are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

Learn more about God's power in our lives in a Bible study this week.

*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

Ephesians 2:4-10

1. Read Ephesians 2:1-3 (the verses immediately preceding our text). What's the Law message in this section?
2. How is God rich (vs. 4)? How are we blessed by His riches?
3. What is the relationship between our works and God's working in us? (vs. 8-10)

### For Family Reflection

4. What makes you angry? What makes God angry? Is God angry with you now?
5. What do you like to brag about? Why can't you brag about your salvation? What can you brag about as a Christian?
6. Read vs. 8-9 again. Put the passage on a family bulletin board, the refrigerator or another prominent place. As a family memorize the verses.

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Here Paul urges his readers to become reconciled to God. This is possible because “*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*” (vs. 21) As good Lutherans we might say, “Huh?” or more probably “What does this mean?”

Perhaps Paul explains his meaning best in verse 14, “*He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.*” Jesus lived without sin, the only perfect offering for our sin, and rescued us from eternal separation from God. Jesus the Son bought us back from sin for His Father and made us righteous in God’s sight.

Paul tells his readers in Corinth that he had one purpose in life—to spread the truth that God has reconciled Himself to His creation through the gift of His Son. Paul’s life was irrelevant, except in whatever way that it might promote the truth of salvation in Christ. We also have been made righteous in God’s eyes for that purpose. We who live because of Christ, “*no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.*”

We have all read books, or seen television shows or movies, in which one character is saved by another, and then professes that his life will from then on be owned by the one who saved him. “I owe you my life” is the line often heard. Later in the drama the one saved generally repays his savior and all are “even” again. Paul, however, recognized that while this scenario may work for two human beings, it does not represent what happens between God and the one for whom He has given His only Son as the purchase price for eternal life.

As those made righteous through no goodness of our own, we now belong to God and are under His command. We, like Paul, are sent out to be ambassadors for God in our world. Interestingly, in Paul’s time an ambassador was expected to be honored both in his country of origin and in the country to which he was sent. Like that ambassador, we are called to be a picture of God’s undeniable love, regardless of where we might find ourselves.

Learn more about serving God in a Bible study this week.  
*A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee*

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

1. How is the Lenten message summarized in vs. 21? Whose sin did the sinless Son of God take to the cross?
2. How many times is a form of the word “reconcile” used in these few verses? Use a dictionary to explore the meaning of this word? How does this word summarize our relationship to God?
3. What is the “old” that has passed away? (vs. 17) How are we part of a “new creation”? (vs. 17)
4. What does this message of reconciliation have to do with our relationships with others?

## For Family Reflection

5. Are you “reconciled to God”? (vs. 20) Why? When? What does this Good News have to do with the Lenten season that we are observing?
6. What is an ambassador? (vs. 20) Did you know that you are an ambassador? To whom and where can you be an “ambassador for Christ”?

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

John 9:1-41

In John's time the Jews thought that illness, injury, or blindness was punishment for a sin, either the victim's or a parent's. To the contrary, Jesus told them. The man's blindness was a blessing. In him God demonstrated His power, and the encounter with Jesus changed his life. The man did not ask Jesus for sight. He was just a beggar beside the road suddenly caught up in the confrontation between Jesus and religious tradition. How confusing it must have been for the beggar—sitting beside the dusty road on a hot day, listening to strangers argue about his disability.

No one really knows why Jesus applied mud to the man's eyes. It wasn't necessary. Perhaps Jesus intended to place the man in a position of great visibility so that the Pharisees would seek him out for interrogation. The beggar did not know that God had already prepared his heart for the task. Making mud for the man's eyes also demonstrated the true blindness of the Pharisees. Jesus had broken the law against working on the Sabbath by such an action. Ignoring the miraculous evidence that Jesus was truly the One sent by God, the religious leaders saw only a man breaking their traditions. Instead of amazement and awe, they felt anger.

John says that the man's parents feared the Jewish leaders because they were already excommunicating those who followed Jesus or claimed to believe in Him. Calling the formerly blind man to them, the Pharisees tried to dominate him and force him to denounce Jesus. He not only resisted the educated Pharisees, but made them look foolish, declaring the truth that Jesus revealed to those "who had eyes to see." For his faith the man was excommunicated from the synagogue, but blessed by God!

In verse 41 Jesus tells the Pharisees that if they were seeking to see forgiveness then they would have it in Him, but they see no sin in themselves and that false sight traps them in their sinfulness. Sadly, the Pharisees were trapped in their own ideas and traditions so tightly that they could not see the miracles that God was working before their very eyes. What blinds or entraps us?

Learn more about God's unexpected love in a Bible study this week.  
*A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee*

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

John 9:1-41

1. Reflect on the physical miracle. What was the man's problem? How long had he struggled? How did Jesus heal him?
2. How was the miracle received by the man, his parents, his neighbors, and the Pharisees? Why wasn't it received with rejoicing by some observers?
3. What question is raised by the disciples in vs. 2? Is sin the cause of our physical and emotional struggles? Can a specific physical or emotional condition be tied to a specific sin or sinner?
4. What other "blindness" did Jesus cure for the man? From what "blindness" has Jesus healed us? When were we healed?

### For Family Reflection

5. Read the first verse of "Amazing Grace" (LSB #744). How does this Bible story relate to the song? How does the song tell our story?
6. What "night" is Jesus referring to in vs. 4? What urgency did Jesus feel in His mission? What urgency is there in our mission?

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

John 3:14-21

Many people in the world claim that Christians serve a God who is cruel and unloving. They claim that God doesn't involve Himself with the world—perhaps that He set the world spinning and just sits back to watch—and that we have only ourselves to lean on for knowledge, wisdom, and love. Today's passage clearly tells us how silly those claims are, because today's verses describe the nature of God and the nature of man.

God did not choose to be aloof from the world, but to become a man in the midst of His worlds. His love and concern for His people is so great that he sent His only Son to show us Himself and His Father and to die for us so that, "*...whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life*" (vs. 15).

Paul once expressed the idea that one might be willing to die for a righteous man (Romans 5:7), but John, like Paul, says that far from being righteous, men "loved the darkness rather than the light." As it had been in Noah's time, there were, and are, still men of whom, "...every intent and thought of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5).

Jesus came as the Light who made the darkness of evil obvious, but instead of coming to the Light for healing, the people whom He came to save rejected Jesus and crucified Him, the only sinless being in all of the world.

The nature of God described by John is His complete love for us, and our complete inability to comprehend that love. Far from being a God who is uninvolved, cruel, or uncaring, our God is the Lord of love and salvation. His Son came to us of His own will, in order to restore us to Himself. Lent is the season when we take the time to consider this gift that He has given to us—salvation by His love and grace, not by our merit or wisdom.

***During this season of Lent, make time for God's Word.***

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

John 3:14-21

1. What incident in Israel's wilderness journey is referred to in vs. 14? (See Numbers 21). What happened when Moses lifted up the snake? What happened when Jesus was lifted up on the cross?
2. John 3:16 is sometimes called "the Gospel in a nutshell." Why is the verse a good summary of the Gospel?
3. Why did Jesus come into the world? What blessings come to us as we simply believe in Him? What happens to those who don't believe?

### For Family Reflection

4. Where do you see "darkness" (vs. 19) in your life? Where do you see darkness in the world?
5. Who do you know that doesn't believe? What do you need to tell them? Why?
6. John 3:16 is sometimes put on signs at athletic events and displayed in other ways. Is it a good idea to share this passage in this way? Are there other ways to get the Gospel message to others?

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Today's reading includes the story of the prodigal son. This devotion is based largely on a new book, "The Prodigal God" by Timothy Keller, that is being studied in many Lutheran churches across the country this year.

The Pharisees were angry that Jesus was associating with "sinners." As you may remember from last week, their attitude related closely to their assumption that man can save himself by obedience. Jesus replied to their disgust with three parables about God's love for the lost.

In the parable of the prodigal son, have you ever considered that both brothers sinned against their father? Let's concentrate on the older brother, since he is a picture of the Pharisees to whom Jesus was speaking.

The older son was angry because he perceived that he had perfectly obeyed his father. He doesn't mention loving his father, just that he had done all that his father asked. He had been faithful, and now this worthless little brother had returned and good ol' Dad was throwing a very expensive party for him. "What about my party?" was his complaint.

The Pharisees were the older brother. They did not love the Father. They were using Him. It was the Jews' attitude throughout the Old Testament and continued in Jesus' time.

The Pharisees were angry that the worthless "little brothers" were being accepted and loved by Jesus. They had done all the work and now this popular rabbi was concentrating on the worthless instead of the "worthy." To paraphrase their thoughts, the Pharisees were asking, "If you are the Son of God, where is the reward that You owe us for being faithful and good?"

Are we sometimes the Pharisaic older brother? Do we expect the "good life" because we are good Christians? Are we offended that we have been slammed by the recession? Do we forget that we have no right to demand of God; that we "deserve" nothing special? We have not earned our salvation--it is a free gift. A gift for which we are grateful in any circumstance.

***Invite a friend to Bible study!***

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

1. What objection of the Pharisees (vs. 2) caused Jesus to teach these parables? What parables (vs. 4-7; vs. 8-10) precede the Parable of the Prodigal Son?
2. Summarize the journey of the younger son. What made him come back to the father? With what message did he return? How are we like the younger son?
3. How did the father receive his son? How is our Heavenly Father like the father in the story?
4. How did the older son respond to the grace of the father? Was he justified in his reaction? How are we like the older son?

### For Family Reflection

5. Are we glad that Jesus receives sinners? Who is the church for?
6. What are times of celebration in your family? In your church? What do you think the celebration of saved sinners will be like in heaven?