



seeking:

How do we
begin again?

March 5, 2023 + Second Sunday in Lent

An asterisk * invites you to stand in body or in spirit, and you are invited to read aloud responses found in **bold**.

We welcome you to First Lutheran Church!

we GATHER here

*In this Susan Palo Cherwein text, reflected both in the **Prelude** and our **Gathering Hymn**, the first stanzas take us back to last week's text with temptations in the desert. In Stanza 4, we sing that "beyond our fear and clinging stands the threshold of new life," carrying us into today's themes of rebirth and new beginnings.*

Prelude — "As Your Spirit in the Desert"

Setting by Carol Lynn Mizell
Handbell Choir; Nancy Timm, Handchimes

***Welcome and Words of Gathering**

What is it like to begin again?

It is like flowers in the spring that push through frozen ground.

It is like babies learning to walk, one clumsy step at a time.

It is like Nicodemus in the night, asking Jesus for guidance.

It is like a Sunday morning, starting our week anew.

May we find God in our seeking.

May we learn as we go.

May we be brave enough to begin again.

Let us worship the God of new beginnings.

***Gathering Hymn** — no. 923, from *All Creation Sings* "As Your Spirit in the Desert"
See back page

***Confession and Forgiveness**

The time of confession and forgiveness offers us a new beginning. In the confession, we lay our cards on the table. We speak honestly with God about who we are and who we long to be. And in response, God wraps us in grace and lets us begin again. So together, with God's grace, let us wipe the slate clean. Together, with God's grace, let us pray:

God of new life, you call us into unknown places,

and we bury our heads in the sand.

You promise all the stars in the sky,

and we doubt it can be true.

You speak of new life in the Spirit,

and we tell ourselves we've missed our chance.

Over and over and over again, you invite us closer to you.
Show us the way. Forgive our mistakes. Give us the courage to begin again with you. Amen.

Family of faith, hear and believe this good news:
There is a grace to God's love that is bigger than we can imagine.
No matter what we did or didn't do yesterday, in Jesus' name ✝ we have been forgiven.
Today, the slate is wiped clean. Today, we are made new. Join me in saying:
We belong to God. We are held in God's love. We are made new. Amen.

***Prayer of the Day**

May God be with you. **And also with you.** Let us pray.

Holy God, **we come to you today with our biggest questions: Who are we called to be? What do you need from us? Where are you in our midst? How can we follow you more clearly? As we read the scriptures today, we ask that you would weave answers into the text. Speak to us through these ancient stories that we might find what we are seeking in you. With gratitude and open hearts we pray, amen.**

we LISTEN and RESPOND

A Reading from the book of Genesis — Genesis 12:1-4a

The Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him.

Hear these words of old **as we seek to know God today.**

Psalm 121

The psalm will begin with a simple tone being demonstrated, and the leader and congregation are invited to sing responsively by verse.

I lift up my eyes | to the hills;
from where is my | help to come?

**My help comes | from the Lord,
the maker of heav- | en and earth.**

The Lord will not let your | foot be moved
nor will the one who watches over you | fall asleep.

**Behold, the keep- | er of Israel
will neither slum- | ber nor sleep;**

the Lord watches | over you;
the Lord is your shade at | your right hand;

**the sun will not strike | you by day,
nor the | moon by night.**

The Lord will preserve you | from all evil
and will | keep your life.

**The Lord will watch over your going out and your | coming in,
from this time forth for- | evermore.**

A Reading from Paul's letter to the Romans — Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."

Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations")—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Hear these words of old **as we seek to know God today.**

***Gospel Acclamation** — no. 918 from *All Creation Sings*

Now is the time of grace, now is the day of sal - va - tion.

Turn now, and seek God's face, now be-hold God's in-vi - ta - tion.

***Gospel** — John 3:1-17

The Gospel of John, the 3rd chapter.

Glory to you, O God.

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

The Gospel of Jesus.

Praise to you, O Christ.

***Hymn** — *from A Sanctified Art*

“Begin Again”

This hymn reminds us that in any stage of life, even near the end, we have the choice of and the invitation to new beginnings.

In the deep night of the soul
In the sun - set of our life
Ev - ery mo - ment, ev - ery hour

Rich in ques - tions, yearn - ing for
Af - ter years of joy and strife
Spir - it gifts us with the power

Life that mat - ters far be - yond Pick - et fen - ces
As we pon - der le - ga - cy Won - der - ing what
To be - gin our life a - new What then will we

and front lawns When we tire of
we will leave When the lights are
choose to do? Close a chap - ter,

life mun - dane We can still be - gin a - gain
grow - ing dim We can still be - gin a - gain
lift the pen To once more be - gin a - gain

Reception of New Members — *pg. 234, Affirmation of Baptism*

***Prayers of Intercession**

A: Sustained by God’s abundant mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all of creation.

O God, you so love your creation. Breathe new life into our planetary home. Guide the work of researchers, scientists, and activists who love your earth and who inspire us to care for the natural world. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

O God, you so love the world. Uphold leaders who resist tyranny and oppression. Strengthen organizations that promote peace and harmony. Direct work to alleviate human suffering and to address its root causes. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

O God, you so love your people. Draw near to all who live with mental illness, depression, or addiction, and accompany them in healing and recovery. Hear the cries of those who look to you in their distress. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

O God, you so love your children. Bless the young in our midst, and delight us with their joy, wonder, and curiosity. Revive our ministries with children and youth and equip us all for faithful discipleship. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

O God, you so love your saints. As our ancestors in the faith have been a blessing to us, so inspire us by their example of holy living to be a blessing to those who come after us. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We lift our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your steadfast love and your promise to renew your whole creation; through Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

*Listen closely to
this Swedish folk
tune in
preparation to
sing it as our
Sending Hymn
this morning.*

Offering

Music During Offering
"O Living Breath of God"

Setting by Patricia Hurlbutt
Handbell Choir

***Offering Prayer**

A: God of goodness and growth, all creation is yours, and your faithfulness is sure.
Receive the gifts we bring, and nourish us to proclaim your abiding love in our
communities and in the world, through Jesus Christ, our strength and our song. Amen.

we SHARE the meal

***The Great Thanksgiving** — pg. 161, *front of hymnal*

***Sanctus** — pg. 162, *front of hymnal*

***Words of Institution and Prayers**

P: God of the lost and the found, surely it is right for us to give our thanks and praise;
for day after day we look for you, and day after day we find you:
in the laughter of children, in the sun rising over the horizon, in the flowers of spring.

Our seeking does not go unanswered, and for that we are grateful.
So first and foremost, we come to you in prayer to say thank you, for when we're seeking
beauty, you give us mountains and freckles, green eyes and brown eyes.
When we're looking for reason to hope, you give us rainbows after the storm, and candles
flickering in the window. When we're seeking peace, you give us three part harmony and
the sound of the rain.
And when we're seeking justice, your life reminds us that everyone is welcome at your
Table, and none shall be turned away.

For all these reminders we are deeply grateful.
And yet, gracious God, our seeking does not stop.
For even though your fingerprints are all over this world,
we are not yet at your promised day.

So in addition to our gratitude, we also pray today for conviction.
Do not let us get comfortable with half-hearted seeking.
Do not let us grow numb to the suffering of this world.
Make us relentless in our pursuit of justice—
relentless in our consoling of the grieving,
in our welcoming of the stranger, and in the feeding of the hungry.
Like a dog with a scent, may we walk toward your kingdom,
never giving up, never wandering off the path.

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.

And as we see and as we seek, pour out your Spirit on this ordinary bread and cup.
May this meal be the nourishment we need to continue seeking you in the world.

Until your promised day, we will pray. Until your promised day, we will seek, saying: **Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom 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 the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.**

***Invitation to the Table**

P: Friends, if your seeking has led you here,
if your weary heart followed breadcrumbs all the way to this sanctuary,
then I have good news: you do not have to seek anymore.

This table is God's Table.
So if you came here looking for justice,
then rest in the comfort that all will be fed here.
If you came seeking beauty,
then let your spirit marvel at the beauty of a community coming together.
If you came seeking a brush with the Divine,
then know that God is present in this ordinary meal.
So kick off your walking shoes. Let your weary heart stop the search.
We are standing on holy ground. This is God's Table.
All are invited. Come.

Communion will be distributed at the rail this morning. We first sing a Trinitarian hymn of birth and growth, reflecting on today's themes. Next, we sing a beloved Lenten hymn; its opening stanza paraphrases a well-known verse from today's gospel lesson.

*This **Sending Hymn** is found in the Pentecost section of the hymnal and gives many definitions of the Spirit of God, who is with us in our baptism. How might this prayer accompany you this week as we remember our baptismal promises?*

Distribution of Communion

Lamb of God — pg. 164, *front of hymnal*

Hymn — no. 735

“Mothering God, You Gave Me Birth”

Hymn — no. 323

“God Loved the World”

Prayer After Communion

P: God of manna and mustard seeds, we came to this Table hungry and we leave feeling full—full of hope, full of promise, full of what could be. For we not only found glimpses of you at this Table, but we caught a glimpse of the way things could be: in a meal where all are welcomed and all are fed. Is there anything holier than that? Thank you for nourishing our curiosity alongside our spirit and our conviction. May we always seek you the way you seek after us. With grateful hearts we pray, amen.

we DEPART to serve the world

Announcements

***Sending Hymn** — no. 407

“O Living Breath of God”

***Blessing & Dismissal**

P: As you leave this place, may God bless you with seeking.
Seek out the hungry. Seek the weary. Seek the good in every person you pass.

*This arrangement of our **Gathering Hymn** starts small and builds, a metaphor for a planted seed that is nourished into new life.*

Seek out the hopeful. Seek the faithful. Seek God in each of us.

As you seek and as you wonder, may you find what you are looking for.

A: In the name of our loving God, who is always seeking us, go now in peace. **Amen.**

***Postlude — “PICARDY”**

Setting by Al Roberts

Worship Assistants

Pastor: Chris Culuris

Director of Music: Emily Bruflat

Assisting Minister: John Bipes

Audio/Video: Cole Buffington, Brett Peterson

Greeters: Lewis Nowell, Jacob Little

Reader: Isabel Avant

Ushers:

Musicians: Handbell Choir

Communion Preparers: Banks Family

Communion Servers: Annalise Rivas, Sharon Domeier

Bread Bakers:

Acolytes: Dylan Greenig, Natalie Twait

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Announcements

- Today we welcome our new members! Judith Bjorling, Alexander Davig, Bonnie Davig, Martin Davig, Sophia Davig, Kelley Harrell, Helen Ihrig, Kristy Larson, David Olson, Joan Olson, Hans Peterson, Lana Peterson, Jean Ribar and Stephen Sayre. Welcome to our family of faith!
- Fellowship treats will be served by Confirmation Families, the Olsons and Nowells.
- Following worship we will have a First Forum on “Aging in Place” led by representatives from Habitat for Humanity. Please join us to learn about how to make your homes safer and more universally accessible.
- First Holy Communion classes continue tonight at 6:30pm in the Dining Hall.
- Join us for Lenten Soup Supper on March 8 from 5:30-6:30pm in the Dining Hall. Worship service will follow at 7pm.
- At the Saint Peter Community Center next week, FLC member Aaron Banks will be presenting “The Importance of Sport & Leisure Practices in Scandinavia.” Aaron, a Professor of Health and Exercise Science at Gustavus Adolphus College, and some of his students will be presenting on their recent January term trip to Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. They will discuss similarities and differences of sporting and leisure practices from societal, historical, and cultural perspectives. Tue., Mar. 7, 11 a.m., SPCC Rm. 219, Free.
- Deadline to order flowers for Easter will be March 12. Special pink forms are available in the Gathering Space.
- Next Sunday, our First Forum will meet in the chapel at 9:00am to learn about “Visio Divina,” the practice of praying with art. Nancy Nelson will be leading this discussion.
- You are invited to join us following worship next Sunday as we continue our series on *Making Sense of Luther*. We will meet in the Dining Hall.
- Also on March 12th, we will have our “Painting with Bob Ross” challenge from 4:30-5:30pm in the Dining Hall. Please register in advance. To register you may use the form in *The Heartbeat*, call the church office or, email Calleigh Carlson at: cc.flcstp@gmail.com

Prayers

- Sandra Brovold died on February 19th. We pray for her family and friends who mourn the loss of Sandra.
- We pray for the family of Harriet Bunge who passed away February 19.

- Margie Nelsen, Pr. Bill's wife died on Feb. 22nd. A memorial service will be held at Trinity Lutheran Church, St. Peter, on Saturday, March 25 at 11:00 a.m.; visitation at the church will be on Friday, March 24 from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m.
- We lift up prayers for those on our long-term list: Elgene Lund, Chuck Petry, Bob Cady, Joan Williams, Betty Gustafson, Myrene Bunge, Glenn Stryker, Erika Schuldt, Ursula McRostie, Karen Wendroth, Allen Storkson, Gene Roemhildt, Karen Smithers, Paul Aasen, Shirley Storkson, Rita Ogren and Dorothy Lutz.

***Gathering Hymn** — no. 923, from *All Creation Sings*

“As Your Spirit in the Desert”
Sung to the tune PICARDY

1 All:

**As your Spirit in the desert
led the Christ to dust and stone,
so instill our hearts with courage
now to cross where Christ has gone.
Let us cross into the wilderness
so to walk where Christ has gone.**

2 High Voices:

**As your fire and cloudy pillar
Israel's tribes to Canaan led,
may your presence be our comfort,
may your manna be our bread.**

**All: Let us cross into the wilderness
with God's manna as our bread.**

3 All:

**Though wild beasts may lurk in shadow,
and dire thirst may sear and sting,
you have promised living waters
waiting for us at the spring.
Let us cross out of the wilderness
to the waters of the spring.**

4 Low voices:

**Through the narrow gate now draw us,
past all empire's pull and strife,
where beyond our fear and clinging
stands the threshold of new life.**

**All: Let us cross out of the wilderness
to the threshold of new life.**

5 All:

**God of Desert, God of Promise,
you have bid us journey on
through the days of dust and darkness
to the rising of the dawn.
Let us cross out of the wilderness
to the rising of the dawn.**