

March 2022 – Pastoral Message

***“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.”*** – Psalm 51:10-12

Beloved Neighbors in Christ,

Grace and peace to you, my family and friends, from God our Creator, Jesus our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit, our Advocate and friend. Amen.

Welcome to March and to the season of Lent. We leave behind the time after Epiphany seeking the manifestation and revelation of Jesus Christ in our daily lives, and turn inward focusing on Christ’s suffering and death that leads us to his cross. As Lutheran Christians, Lent strengthens our focus on the gifts and promises that God has shared with us through the cross of Christ. We look inward on ourselves, our mortality, and the things in our lives that have turned us away from God, our relationships, and ultimately ourselves. We call this sin, and we name it in our spiritual and personal lives.

Sunday worship in our Neighbors in Christ Parish will continue with the normal rotating schedule that we have welcomed since September 2021. We will continue to worship as such welcoming and inviting members from the other congregations into our church homes if they are not scheduled that Sunday, and vice versa. We also welcome once again the congregational rotation for Lent, beginning on Wednesday, March 02, 2022, with Ash Wednesday. Lenten mid-week Wednesday worship services are some of my most favorite times of the church year to gather together in fellowship, meal, and around Christ’s cross of mercy and love.

This year we will “study” mercy on Wednesday evenings, together, in a low-key worship environment. Ash Wednesday begins the season with a reminder of our sins, and we too are reminded of the mercy of God who lifts us from our ashes to a new life in Christ. The next week invites us into a place in the midst of temptation. Our merciful God provides us a way out though, through Jesus Christ who was also tempted just as we are, yet without sin. Then we recognize that the lives we have cannot escape suffering; but this suffering cannot even be compared to the suffering revealed to us in Jesus by God’s great mercy. Next, we are shown that throughout our lives we turn away again and again from our loving and merciful God, but our Lord continues to call us back into his merciful arms. We then are reminded that wherever we are in life, we are given the grace to treat one another as Christ has cared for us in his love and mercy. And finally, the last Wednesday of Lent we distinguish the response to God’s kindness to us in Jesus, we serve in mercy to the needs of those around us by putting on Christ’s example that we are taught. (Creative Communications, 2022)

I invite you to this time as parish where we are joined together for the sake of Jesus Christ. Please come on out for the light supper, fellowship, and worship we share in together as family and

friend, but also as the body of Christ, just as God calls us to do. We are blessed in all that we have and in this time with one another we can also see that these blessing not only transcend in and throughout our lives, but also in and throughout the communities we love and serve. Come as you are and come as you have been called.

I continue to pray that you are well, remain healthy, and hope to see you again soon!

In Christ,

Rev. Erik Karlson

Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish