

March 21, 2021  
First Lutheran Church  
Pastor Joshua Graber

Grace and peace in the name of God our loving Creator and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We begin the Lenten Season with Ash Wednesday and a reading of Psalm 51. We studied this Psalm in our first Lenten Bible Study that was focused on the "Light of Truth" because this is a psalm attributed to David as he repents for his sins. In the Bible Study we tracked David's multitude of sins and in Confirmation last week we used the same text and realized that David had managed to break every one of the ten commandments in one chapter of the Bible. Here was God's chosen leader and even he lost track of the light and forgot to honor his God through how he treated others. The 10 Commandments are God's way of keeping the powerful in check so they don't hurt others and disrupt the loving community God envisions. But we know that we all sin and fall short of God's vision, and we like David are called into repentance.

When David asks God to "Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all wickedness. To Create in me a clean heart O God and renew a right Spirit within me." This names the desire for every sinner, but the next line names our fears. "Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me". This is a scary thought but one that humbles even the most powerful people in this world, to appreciate God's presence and not take it for granted. By naming our fears we are able to grasp the gratitude of a God who forgives and does not leave us on our own. David may have hoped God wouldn't see his sins, but also recognizes that they took place and that he does not want to hide from God, but to experience the "joy of God's

salvation". We too should not hide from God but seek God's presence. Sin often gets in the way and makes us think God does not want us nearby. That we don't belong. Here in Psalm 51 David demonstrates a return to God's presence through confession and trust in God's forgiveness. It's the same thing we do in our confession and forgiveness at the beginning of our services.

The fear of being away from God's presence is one of the ways we stay humble and grateful for the relationship we have, but we also believe in a God who is present with us, when we most need that presence and when we feel most separated through sin. In college, I went through a period where I could not sense God's presence the way I had always experienced it. I wondered how long it would last and prayed for God's presence to return. I think that experience though difficult did help me appreciate the relationship with God, and when I experienced God and knew God cared for me, I felt restore in the joy of God's grace that was good enough for me. I hope we can all experience God's presence in this way, with gratitude and joy, but I know we do not always sense God's presence that way. We spend time in deserts at times, but we always can return to God. And we know that the promise of God is that even when we feel we fail to live up to what we believe we should be doing and feeling, God is faithful. God is always there and we can trust God's presence, even if we don't "feel" it all the time.

Our gospel lesson is also about God's presence. When Jesus comes back to Jerusalem, people gather around him instead of the Temple. This is scandalous especially because it is in the middle of a festival where people are supposed to go to the Temple to seek God's presence. Instead, or maybe before they do, they seek out Jesus. In a way the people vote with their feet. They see and sense God's presence in Jesus and seek him out. Jesus at the beginning says that his "hour has come" when Gentiles also seek

him out and he sees people coming to him, rather than the Temple. This is a moment where Jesus knows he has accomplished in his ministry what has told people to wait for, saying up to this point, "my hour has not yet come". Here in this text he transitions from his ministry traveling through the villages and cities of the area, to the time when he completes his mission on earth. Jesus shows up in Jerusalem as an easy target. Jesus knows that people choosing him over the Temple is blasphemy to the authorities and he will die for it. He knows what this means and says "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." And says that he will now become like a grain of wheat, and die in order to bear the fruit of the kingdom. He explains, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He knew he was going to die. He would be lifted up on the cross and be buried in a tomb, but that would not be the end of the story. And that would not be the end of God's presence in the world.

Jeremiah generations earlier in our Old Testament lesson, when speaking to people that feared losing everything, being if not killed, separated from their families, removed from their homes, and taken to a foreign land.. tells these people that fear this fate and fear especially the loss of the Temple where they have been told they may seek God's presence, that God's presence, God's covenant will not run through a building or any specific place but will be put in their hearts. Jeremiah speaks with the voice of God saying "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they will be my people....They shall all know me from the least of these to the greatest...for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more." The presence of God will be within the people and with the people. Sin will not separate them from God. All will have access. This is the hope of David in his prayer of repentance. This is the promise of Jesus who invites all people to meet in the forgiveness He offers in his death and resurrection, in his

body and blood. This is not meant to be contained in any one system or building, it is meant to be opened up to all people. God wants to invite all people to meet in forgiveness. Jesus is with us, and the Holy Spirit guides us. In John's gospel a voice from heaven speaks to affirm that Jesus' glory and presence is God's glory and presence, and some say that it is thunder, well others think it is an angel. When we know God is active in the world. When we know that we can return to God's presence and God does not wish to be separated from us. We are asking Jesus to heal our blindness and allow us to hear. We are able to seek the Lord in those around us and out in the world, and God wants to be found.

May the love and peace of Christ be in your hearts and minds and lead you into the light of Christ! Amen.