

January 2024

Ministers Message

Mission Department Newsletter



Noteworthy

Upcoming Events

LLC 2024 Ministers Webinar #1
February 1, 2024
8:00 pm CST

LLC New Ministers Workshop
February 16–17, 2024

LLC Phoenix Winter Services
March 14–17, 2024

LLC Ministers Camp
April 5–7, 2024

LLC 2024 Ministers Webinar #2
May 30, 2024
8:00 pm CDT

LLC Longview Summer Services
July 4–7, 2024

LLC 2024 Ministers Webinar #3
August 29, 2024
8:00 pm CDT

LLC Ministers & Wives Camp,
West Coast
September 20–22, 2024

LLC 2024 Ministers Webinar #4
November 7, 2024
8:00 pm CST

We are now at the point that the church calendar transitions from the Christmas segment to the Easter segment. Easter is early this year, falling on the last weekend of March. That means that Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of Lent, is just a few weeks away. The themes during Lent include penitence and fasting, Jesus, the Victor over temptation, the handmaid of the Lord (Mary's Day). The theme for Shrove Sunday, which immediately precedes Ash Wednesday, is the sacrificial way of God's love. The theme directs our attention to a turning point in Jesus' work. He begins to work His way to Jerusalem and the suffering and death that awaited Him there as God's Passover lamb. In like manner, we turn our thoughts and minds toward Good Friday and Easter as well and prepare ourselves to appropriately celebrate those moments as we follow Jesus' travel to Jerusalem. It's not too early to begin reading the texts of Passion Week and refreshing our memories of the events and teachings of that busy week.

Other noteworthy events in the Mission Department calendar include the first minister's webinar of the year. It will be held on Thursday, February 1st at 8:00 p.m. CST. Keith Waaraniemi will take a look at the funeral planning materials on the Minister Resource page and provide guidance on how they can best be used and disseminated in our congregations. Another noteworthy event is the new ministers workshop scheduled for February 16th and 17th. It's intended for ministers who have been called since the last new ministers' workshop in January 2022. It has the potential to be our largest class to date. New ministers can look for a sign-up reminder and event schedule in the near future.

Our much-anticipated ministers camp is scheduled for April 5–7th. If you plan to attend, please sign up soon. The ministers camp falls during the period that the LLC-SFC-SRK Joint Work meetings are scheduled. That means that we will have a number of both SRK and SFC brothers in attendance. We expect that will enrich our weekend and increase our joy.

Jesus and Martha

Leo Väyrynen

John 11:21-45

Three unmarried siblings lived in a home in Bethany: Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. The serenity of the home was broken when Lazarus became seriously ill. The sisters sent news of this to Jesus clearly hoping that He would come and heal their brother. Jesus delayed in going there. When He finally came, Lazarus had already died and had been buried. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Like Martha, we also question and ponder when someone near and dear to us becomes ill and dies: Where were you God, why didn't You heal him? If my dear one had gone to the doctor in time, he would still be alive. If he had driven to the intersection five seconds later, he would have avoided the fatal car accident.

Past generations referred to unexpected death as untimely death. According to Scripture, untimely death does not exist. None of us were born into this world by chance, and no one dies by chance. Each day of our lives is recorded in God's book before our birth, including our birth date and our death date.

But wouldn't God's will have happened also in that case if Jesus had come in time to help Lazarus? Why did Jesus delay His coming? He had visited in the siblings' home when things had been good there. Was Jesus frightened to be among people on the other side of the Jordan because the high priests and Pharisees threatened his life, or was it difficult for Jesus to visit his seriously ill friend? We may be timid about visiting a terminally ill person. The feeling that we do not know how to help and comfort may become an obstacle. In Lazarus's situation, Jesus delayed in order to

JESUS CONVERSES

Jesus met many people during His life. Several of them wanted to converse with Him. Jesus' teaching gave birth to questions in some listeners. They wanted to hear more since His teachings deviated from the teachings of the scribes of that time. Several people approached Jesus because of their difficulties and problems. Jesus also used to talk on His own initiative with people He encountered in various situations.

Several discussions which Jesus had with various people are recorded in the Bible. This year we will publish a series of writings in this paper by Leo Väyrynen on some of these discussions. Although around two thousand years have passed since these discussions, their topics and issues are still timely. We notice this in this series of writings.

reveal God's glory and the glory of God's Son. He said to sorrowing Martha: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

Jesus also met Mary and the Jews who were weeping with her in Bethany. Jesus was so touched by the mournful lamentation of her escorts that he himself was overcome with emotion; He trembled and wept. The suffering and death brought by the Fall was such a compelling issue that even Jesus, when faced with it, was distressed. He was also touched by the despair expressed by the mourners' inconsolable cries. A feeling of despair had also overwhelmed Martha. When Jesus asked them to take the stone

Jesus Converses

away from the opening of the tomb, Martha was horrified, "Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days." This gave Jesus reason to rebuke Martha for her lack of faith, "if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God."

Then Jesus prayed to His Father and cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." Lazarus came from his grave bound in his grave clothes. Jesus said, "Loose him, and let him go." A miracle that shook the people had occurred. Earlier Jesus had healed the sick and brought to life people who had recently died but waking Lazarus from the grave was greater than other miracles.

We can imagine the joy and rejoicing that resulted in that home in Bethany. A dear brother was revived from death to life. But the core message of our text isn't in this. It is in these words which Jesus spoke to Martha: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." These words are often recited in the worship service when the names of those who have died are announced to the congregation. They tell how Jesus overcame the power of death through His death. On this foundation, one who in God's congregation in the time of grace believes his sins forgiven in is transferred from death to life and through faith becomes an owner of eternal life already here. For him temporal death is not the end of everything, neither a misfortune nor transition into a great frightening unknown, over which those left behind should weep disconsolately, rather it is a gate from this life into eternal life.

Lazarus and all of the people who Jesus healed have died from this life. But those people are eternally fortunate who receive unbelief and all of its associated sins forgiven

in the time of grace. They here live eternal life through faith. For them the state of death in the grave is like a momentary peaceful sleep, which ends with the resurrection of the righteous. With glorified bodies they can open their eyes to the day which continues without end in heaven with God and the Savior.

They, in turn, who do not believe upon Christ in the time of grace, remain in the state of spiritual death. If they die naturally in this state, they end up in the suffering of perdition, in eternal separation from God. So that no one yet alive here would have to die eternally, repentance and the forgiveness of all sins is proclaimed through Christ's command in God's congregation. Those who accept this gospel can rise from the state of spiritual death to live the life of resurrection in God's congregation.

Jesus was not timid about going into homes of mourning to proclaim the life-giving gospel. His example encourages us, His grace children, to fearlessly take the greetings of the resurrection to those who are ill, fear death and weep over their dead loved ones.

The waking of Lazarus from the dead was a significant matter. It was a prelude to the crushing of the power of death and a foreshadowing of the general resurrection on the last day. Then all will rise from their graves to judgement before Christ. Jesus' shout, "Lazarus, come forth!" was a beginning for that shout, which at the end of the world will rush even to the depths of the oceans, so that even the seas give up the dead which they contain. That day will be a day of joy for God's children for "who as His own is called from here, lives although he died, to never die again."

Second Sunday After Epiphany

Markku Seppänen

JESUS REVEALS HIS DIVINE POWER

The Sunday's theme takes us from the events of Christmas to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry and the attributes of the work of God's kingdom. The day's gospel texts relate how Jesus reveals His divine power at the wedding in Cana, awakens faith in the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar, and reveals the work of God's kingdom and His presence when preaching in His home city, Nazareth.

The day's epistle texts reveal how God works living and true in His congregation, in which He left His Holy Spirit. All necessary grace gifts and the duty to preach the approach of God's kingdom, repentance, and the message of salvation have been given to God's congregation.

The day's word encourages believers to endeavor humbly and obediently on the foundation of God's powerful and secure Word. It also guides us into brotherly love and Christian life. Love for neighbor, which comes from faith, gives the heart's desire to be sympathetic in joys and sorrows. The work of the gospel is to comfort the sorrowful and encourage the depressed to hope and joy: the gift of the gospel can be owned entirely through grace. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all that believe.

The greatest miracle and manifestation of divine power is in this that a sinner without hope can believe all of his sins forgiven and own God's peace in his heart. "Who desires it, receives living water as a gift."

YEAR 3

Titus 1: 1-3

THE RIGHT TIME

Titus had received the gift of faith when Paul preached the gospel to him. Titus became his close co-worker. This close spiritual connection is shown in this that Paul called him his own son. Paul greeted Titus, "mine own son after the common faith," with God's peace. This kind of brotherly union of Spirit and greeting have always been a characteristic of God's children.

Paul wrote precious instructions and words of encouragement in his letter to Titus, when Titus was arranging matters of the congregation of Crete. The letter's content reveals that Titus's work was not easy. He had to organize congregation activity and battle against the worldliness and false teachings appearing in the congregation.

Our text brings out how God reveals the gospel that heals through believing people. The joyful message of Christmas belongs to all. People are called to see God's great works. Finding a merciful God always means finding God's kingdom at the same time (Luther).

THE MISSION IS TO HELP TO BELIEVE

Already in his initial greeting the apostle reveals his most important duty. He is called to help people to believe and know the truth. With this greeting Paul wants to remind Titus also of the same duty. The Holy Spirit gives a mind of love to reveal God's mercy and truth in the same way as one has himself received it. One in unbelief and false righteousness must humble himself to repentance, come in through the narrow gate and by faith own the simple

gospel for the atonement of sins. A person who has lost his childhood faith needs complete renewal and a change of heart. This happens through true and correct repentance. God gives strength through the gospel word to become His child to the person who believes it. Faith opens understanding, and God's Spirit teaches one to recognize the truth. The one who has received the forgiveness of sins is able to feel the same joy and thankfulness as David did when he had received the grace of repentance (Psalm 40).

GOD'S TIME

In his initial greeting, Paul also brings out God's promise of Christ given already at the beginning of time. When God's time had come, Christ was victorious over death and the power of the enemy of souls. On the basis of his deeds, man would have deserved condemnation, but through the merits of Jesus' sacrificial death, a child of God received eternal life and immortality as a gift. Living faith is a great mystery.

The gospel travels according to God's plan and gathers together those who accept it into the same kingdom and into like faith. God's time is a time of visitation. People should obey the call to God's kingdom. It should be taken seriously, for it could be the last invitation. The prophet urges men to seek the Lord then when He can be found, and to pray to Him then when He is near (Isaiah 55:6).

THE WORD OF TRUTH

A child of God's duty is to make God's call known. Our important duty is to proclaim that God is love. Our duty also is to explain that God stands behind His Word. God's truth often is not what people want to hear. The apostle teaches that we should endeavor to be acceptable to God in our speech, and that we should not with our speech attempt to seek human acceptance and honor (1 Thess. 2:4). That's why we have to rely without compromise on the safe foundation of God's Word. We pray that God's will would come forth and that the gospel would be proclaimed in accord with the Bible in the spirit of love. It promises mercy and forgiveness to all who believe and are penitent. The gospel always encourages the weak traveler on the way to heaven.

The office of the gospel is every believer's God-given duty. The apostle states that God has ordained the word of reconciliation and has given us the office of reconciliation. We are Christ's ambassadors, and God speaks through us. According to the Bible our duty is to invite on Christ's behalf: Allow yourself to be reconciled with God. Our duty, as God's co-workers, is to appeal: Accept God's mercy. He does say: I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (1 Cor. 6:2).