

MARBURG PARISH OF THE AELC
TRINITY MARBURG, ST JOHN'S MINDEN, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD

14 March 2021

The 4th Sunday in Lent

HYMNS: 756 852 271 148 292 368

INTROIT:

Give thanks to the LORD! For He is good. For His mercy endures for ever. Let the people whom the LORD has redeemed proclaim that He has redeemed them from the hand of the oppressor, and has gathered them from the other lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south!

They wandered around the desolate wilderness without finding a city where they could live.

They were hungry and thirsty. Their souls grew faint inside them.

When they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, He used to deliver them from their afflictions.

He led them on a straight road that they might go to a city where they could live.

Let them give thanks to the LORD for His mercy and for His wonderful deeds to the descendants of Adam!

For He satisfied their withered souls and filled their hungry souls with good things.

Psalm 107:1-9

COLLECT: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning; and although we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS: Numbers 21:4-9 The snake of bronze in the desert.
Ephesians 2:1-10 We are justified by grace through faith.
John 3:14-21 Jesus brings life and light to the world.

SERMON: John 3:14-15 LIFTED ON A POLE FOR OUR SALVATION

The Lord's Supper has always been seen as a sign of unity between those who commune together at the Lord's table (1 Cor. 10:17). When Christians partake of the Lord's Supper in a church body that has a confession of faith, they thereby declare that they believe that they are one in faith with those who commune with them. Since people cannot honestly hold two differing confessions at the same time, they cannot honestly commune with those whose confession is in conflict with their own. If any do this nevertheless, they deny their own confession, and so deny Christ Himself (2 Cor. 6:14-18). **We ask visitors who are communicant members in a church not in fellowship with the AELC, or are not familiar with the *AELC Statement of Faith*, to refrain from communing today. If you have questions, please speak with the pastor after service.**

In Ephesians 1 and 2, Paul extols the grace of God most beautifully, especially in a magnificent summary statement of the matter in 2:8-9: "*For by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, that no one may boast.*" The phrase "*this is not of yourselves*" refers to the whole matter of salvation, including faith. It is all caused by grace; it is all the gift of God. Grace, then, is not something that we cause *either* by anything in us by nature or by anything that we have done or might do at some future time.

Grace then is an *attitude* as well as an attribute in God, not a quantity that he doles out gradually. It is important to note carefully the definition of the term *grace* precisely because some end up denying the essence of the term by thinking of it as a quantity of something that God has, rather than as well and at least as importantly an attitude of undeserved love in God's own essence. Roman Catholicism, for example, treats God's grace in our redemption more as a quantity to be doled out than as an attitude in God. It teaches that through the sacraments correctly administered by a priest, God gives a certain amount of grace; the purpose of that donation of grace poured into us in the sacraments is to enable the receiver to do works that will advance him towards the goal of salvation.

In Roman Catholic theology each sacrament gives another deposit of grace to advance one closer to that goal of salvation in heaven, a goal that will not be reached until the believer is holy enough to enter heaven. Even after death the believer will need to suffer in purgatory for the failure in this life to gain enough grace and works to merit entry into heaven. With this false understanding of grace, a Roman Catholic theologian may say that we are saved by grace alone, but he does not mean what St. Paul means. He means

that grace has made salvation possible. Such a definition of grace is a denial of grace. Such a definition makes the cause of Christ's redemptive work a mixture of God's grace and our own efforts. The tragedy of that mixture is that it takes hearts and minds off of Christ and the Gospel and fixes them on oneself or on the saints or on the institution of the church itself in the effort to finish what Christ and grace have only started. In sum, such an attitude *robs God of His glory as the sole source of our salvation*.

Indeed, to the extent that one focuses on self, or even on the saints and on the church for the hope of salvation, that salvation will be unsure and uncertain. For any hope not given by the Word of God or depending on works other than Christ's work must forever be not only uncertain but an illusion. But grace, as Paul defines it, has nothing unsure about it. It is perfect. It is complete. It is sure and certain. For it is founded on the promise of God in His Word. Thus, grace depends solely on God. If it depended on us in the least part, then it would be forever unsure, uncertain. For we would never know if we had done our part sufficiently to deserve forgiveness, peace with God, and eternal life. But the Bible's definition of grace as the sole prompting cause of our redemption moves us to joy and thanksgiving to God alone that we do not have to cause our redemption. His grace alone, His undeserved love, was the prompting cause of Christ's redeeming work.

Thus, grace, understood as the *undeserved love of God*, is the sufficient prompting cause for Christ's work of redemption. No other cause is needed; none other is possible. When it comes to the work of redemption, it is vitally important that we understand this definition of grace. For again St. Paul reminds us, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, 9 not of works, that no one may boast*" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

We cannot repeat it too often or emphasise it too emphatically: The whole of our salvation, including faith, has grace as its all-sufficient and sole-prompting cause, a cause that is in God alone. Grace, the undeserved love of God, is a theme that St. Paul too never tires of repeating and emphasising in the epistle to the Romans, especially in Romans 3-5, and elsewhere. Again and again he emphasises this meaning of grace as undeserved love, love whose only and sufficient cause is in God alone.

Welcome to all worshipping with us today! Pastor Peter Ziebell, Phone 46333604 or 0407583922.

Email him at paziebell@gmail.com or to the church office at ddaelc@gmail.com.

Weekly sermons and bulletins are available at www.aelc.org.au

Please notify pastor of anyone who is unwell or in need of a visit.

COMING SERVICES

Mid-Week Lenten Services	Sunday, 21 March 5 Lent	Mid-Week Lenten Services
Wednesday, 17 March, 10.30am Marburg.	8.30am OAK HC 8.30am TMBA LR 9.30am AUB LR	Wednesday, 24 March, 10.30am Lowood.
Thursday, 18 March, 7.30pm Oakey.	10.00am GRN HC 9.00am LOWOOD LR	Thursday, 25 March, 7.30pm Greenwood.
WEDNESDAY/THURSDAY, 17/18 March		
HYMNS: 49 66 177 48 v.3		
Sunday, 21 March		
READINGS: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 5:1-10; Mark 10:32-45		
HYMNS: 71 62 173 (771 840) 178		

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Monday, 5 April, 10.00am. Parish Picnic at Aubigny. Everyone is invited. Could each family please provide something for a shared lunch? Children, please take a colouring-in picture home with you today and enter it in the colouring-in competition at the Parish Picnic. You can bring it along on the day.