

The Lies of Lent – Lent 2019

"You Can Carry the Weight Yourself"

Text: Matthew 26:31-35

^{ESV}(**Psalm 40:16-17**) *May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, "Great is the LORD!"* ¹⁷ *As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God! Amen.*

Dear Fellow Christians: The wise, mature Christian is not one who knows God's Word, but who recognizes (no matter how well versed) that he hasn't even begun to plumb the depths of that Word of God. Consider just one example. When David by inspiration wrote in Psalm 139:13-14, ***"You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."*** it is certain that not even David had fully understood what he had just written. Not even close.

In fact, still today we continue to learn just how miraculously amazing is this human body that God gave us, even after the fall into sin that so degraded it. From first to last, the human "machine" is just incredible – truly astounding. Consider just a few facts. You put food and liquids into your mouth, and your body automatically knows what to do with it. Your stomach produces acid strong enough to dissolve steel (which it of course automatically self-manufactures from the food you eat) yet to keep from digesting itself, your stomach automatically not only protects itself with a special mucus, it manufactures a brand new lining every three days. To keep you warm, your body produces enough heat in 30 minutes to boil a half gallon of water. Your frame is made up of bones that, pound for pound, are stronger than steel and can support four times more weight than concrete. The human heart produces enough energy every day to drive a semi-truck 18 miles. It beats 115,000 times each day, or over 40 million times each year, pumping 2,000 gallons of blood each day through 60,000 miles of blood vessels. Your nose can detect over 1 trillion different scents, and your eye can detect about 10 million different colors. All of this is done automatically, controlled by a brain that sends electrical impulses across the 90,000 miles of the nervous system at speeds up to 330 feet per second. That means that if you touch a hot stove, your brain senses the problem, and automatically activates the appropriate muscles to remove your hand, in less than two hundredths of a second. All of this, and so much more, takes place automatically, without conscious thought.

Which brings us to another amazing characteristic of the human body: muscle memory – and it is here that we can get ourselves into trouble. Muscle memory, as you probably know, is the body's ability to do things without conscious thought, simply because we've done them so many times before – like typing, or playing an instrument. How could that ever be a problem? Because it can cause us to make faulty assumptions. Have you ever, for example, picked up a jug of milk that you thought was full, which was actually empty? Your brain incorrectly judges the weight and sends faulty signals to the muscles in your arms and shoulder.

The particular "Lie of Lent" that we identify this morning has to do with misjudging weights. That lie is that *"You Can Carry the Weight Yourself."*

The text that will guide and instruct us in this this morning is found in the 26th Chapter of Matthew's Gospel, verses 31-35:

^{ESV}(**Matthew 26:31-35**) *Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'* ³² *But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."* ³³ *Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away."* ³⁴ *Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times."* ³⁵ *Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same.*

This is God's Word. Asking our God to instruct us through these his very words this morning, so we pray: ***Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.*** Amen.

Some of you may recall our old riding snow blower. We needed some weight on the back end for traction, so I asked one of our members (who I knew had a pile of lead in back of his shop) if he could make a lead weight for a counterbalance. He wanted to know how big he should make it, to which I replied, *"Oh, I don't know. Maybe 12"x12"x12".*" He sort of chuckled (my first clue that I was clueless) did some quick calculations, and then informed me that a cubic foot of lead would weigh just a tad over 700 pounds. *"Okay, not that big."* He brought something roughly the size of an old ammo box and unloaded it in our driveway. Strapping boy that I figured myself to be, I grabbed hold and gave it a heave. It didn't budge.

That's the problem with muscle memory. My brain told me, from experience, how heavy that box should be, and I dramatically underestimated. In the physical realm, that sort of mistake usually just yields some short-term embarrassment. In the spiritual realm, it can be catastrophic. There too our brains send us faulty information. That faulty information is created when we buy into the Lie of Lent that we are examining this morning – the devil's lie that "you can carry the weight yourself."

The first mistake we tend to make in judging "weight" is in the area of temptation. Peter demonstrated the problem in our text for this morning. Despite the fact that the infallible Son of God told him otherwise, Peter's brain, and probably also his heart, told him that Jesus was wrong. That, right there, should have tipped Peter off that something was amiss. The moment he found himself contradicting Jesus – telling him that he was mistaken – he should have recognized that there was a problem.

That problem was that Jesus had identified a weight, a temptation, that was too great for Peter and the other disciples to bear all on their own. That's not to say that they had no choice but to fail and fall. It meant that Jesus was telling them to seek outside help. He spelled this out even more clearly a few hours later in the Garden of Gethsemane. You will recall that there he told him to ***"Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."***^{ESV}(Matthew 26:41) Note that Jesus wasn't there telling him that the spiritual side of Peter was strong enough, and that only the body was too weak. He was telling him that even though the new man in him wanted to do the right thing, his old Adam (or sinful flesh) made him weak and vulnerable.

This despite the fact that Jesus had just offered a rather obvious object lesson that should have proved his point. Peter, after boasting that he would even willingly suffer death rather than fall away, could not even stay awake while Jesus prayed. ***"What,"*** said Jesus, ***"could you not even watch with me one single hour?"*** Peter had clearly eyed up the situation, and both heart and mind told him that he could handle the weight; he could bear up under the load of the temptation that was to come. Maybe this was a form of muscle memory. Maybe Peter had been hefting the weight of previous temptations and figured that he was strong enough. Clearly he wasn't.

Is there anyone among us that cannot relate? Anyone that hasn't badly misjudged his or her own strength to resist temptation? Our lives – one and all – are littered with miserable failures. So many times we were so

sure that we had the situation under control, that we were more than strong enough to stand up to the devil's worst. Just as clearly, *we* weren't.

Peter's foolish bravado is our own. We each have our own form of spiritual muscle memory. Overcome a temptation once, and we assume we will succeed against that – and even worse – the next time. It's all quite silly, really. Our countless failures should produce in us just the opposite of bravado. Our own personal muscle memory should teach us that we absolutely cannot stand up under the strain of temptation on our own. Though that's been proven in our lives time without number, still we assume, and still we fail. We fail to "watch and pray." We fail to run away from the temptations that have routinely proved too great for us. We fail to flee for refuge to the strength and power of God's Word, where we are prepared by God himself for the struggles that lie ahead. And yet, somehow, we are still surprised when we fail and fall.

While this sort of failure is bad enough, there is actually a spiritual miscalculation that is even worse: when sinful human beings imagine that they can carry the weight of their own sins.

To say that this misconception is not uncommon would be a colossal understatement. This is, in fact, exactly what is believed and taught in every single world religion *except* true Christianity. I say "true" Christianity because today even the *majority* of those who profess to be Christians have bought into this lie.

The first problem, the first part of the lie, is underestimating the weight of our own personal sin and guilt. The idea is that if I have not actually taken a human life, I have kept the 5th Commandment. If I have not groveled at the foot of a carved image, I have not committed idolatry. If I have not physically taken something that did not belong to be, I am not guilty of breaking the 7th Commandment.

Others are not nearly so subtle in their self-deception. They acknowledge that they have loads of sin, but they convince themselves that the "good" that they have done more than makes up for it. Every single non-Christian religion promotes the devil's lie that you both can and must carry the weight of your own sin, that each individual has the strength to earn his own salvation by his own personal actions.

Tragically, for all who buy into this lie, they will not learn the terrible truth until Judgment Day, when the true weight of a lifetime of sin will

finally be made known to them. And it will crush them, utterly. It will carry them down to the bottom of the eternal Lake of Fire. They will be absolutely appalled at the unimaginable weight of their own guilt, and their horror will only be compounded by their sudden realization that the help that they so desperately needed, the help that they refused during their time of grace, can no longer be provided.

You and I speak of these things for two reasons, neither of which is to gloat at the imminent destruction of the godless. We are reminded of these things first to be warned, and, second, to gain a greater appreciation for exactly what our Savior did for us.

There is within each Christian the same calamitous foolishness that succeeds in destroying the godless. We too can find it frighteningly easy to imagine that we can bear up under any part of the weight of our sins on our own. Our offerings, for example, don't help to carry our sins, but we can come to believe that they do. Not all of our "good works" combined can support the weight of even a single sin, but that's the lie the devil would have us believe. God doesn't weigh our goodness against our sin. We would be crushed if he did. The entire terrible, appalling weight of the world's sin was placed upon Jesus. Only Jesus, and Jesus alone. Only our Savior possessed such unfathomable strength and endurance. This is the crushing weight that caused him such anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane. It is why he asked his Father if there might be another way. His answer was that there was none. No one else could carry what Jesus did. This is the incomprehensible weight that crushed the life from our Savior's body on the cross. Yet he carried it to the bitter end, and the result is that he forever lifted it from our shoulders. We are forgiven. The terrible weight of our sins has been forever removed. Full and complete forgiveness is ours through faith alone in him. Jesus did that. Only Jesus.

"Ye who think of sin but lightly, nor suppose the evil great, here may view its nature right here its guilt may estimate. Mark the Sacrifice appointed; see who bears the awful load; 'tis the WORD, the Lord's Anointed, Son of Man and Son of God." (TLH 153 v3)

Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Philippians 3:8-14** Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith-- ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹² ¶ Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

^{ESV} **Luke 20:9-20** And he began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. ¹⁰ When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹ And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. ¹² And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. ¹³ Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' ¹⁴ But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' ¹⁵ And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶ He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "Surely not!" ¹⁷ But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'?" ¹⁸ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him." ¹⁹ ¶ The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people. ²⁰ So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mark Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

The Fifth Sunday in Lent – April 7, 2019

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 18 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord, We Come Before Thee Now"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Philippians 3:8-14) Our first reading is another of those clear, precise explanations of the gospel – and how that good news makes Christianity different from every other religion in the world. No other religion proclaims salvation on the basis of what someone else has done, rather than through what the individual himself must do. When Paul was given this truth, he regarded every other idea as worthless trash.

Psalm 38 (Supplement page 39) (Brown Hymnal)

The Second Lesson: (Luke 20:9-20) Jesus here tells a parable to illustrate how the Jews had continually rejected the prophets, and would also reject Him as God's Son. We are not immune from the temptation to reject God's Words and His representatives when they tell us what our sinful flesh does not want to hear. We are supposed to learn from the dishonorable actions of others, not copy them.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 35 (Red Hymnal)

"Songs of Praise the Angels Sang"

The Sermon – Text: Matthew 26:31-35 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The Lies of Lent: You Can Carry the Weight Yourself"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post Sermon Hymn -764 (Brown Hymnal)

"God of Grace and God of Glory"

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 798 (Stanzas 1 & 4) (Brown Hymnal)

"Almighty Father, Bless the Word"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (34) Average (35) Wednesday (21)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Palm Sunday Worship Service w/comm
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour

CLC News – Teacher Paul Tiefel has returned the call to St. John's of Clarkston, WA. Pastor George Dummann has returned the call to Bethel of Morris, MN. Faith of Markesan has called Teacher Quinn Sprengeler. Teacher Seth Schaller is considering the call to Trinity of West Columbia. Pastor David Schaller is considering the call to Prince of Peace of Loveland. Teacher Johanna (Ohlmann) Michalek has accepted the call to the preschool of Grace of Valentine. Prof. Paul Sullivan has announced his retirement following the 2019-20 school year.

Time Out – Our third monthly outing was this Friday, and demonstrated not only the value but the flexibility of the program in that it can accommodate few or many. The next outing is scheduled for May 3.

Church Council Notes – Five Council members, plus the Pastor, were present for the meeting on April 4th. Treasurer Mantz reported that offerings for March exceeded budgeted needs by \$1,813, which leaves us with a positive balance YTD. Expenses are in line with budgeted expectations. The Council resolved to retrofit the florescent bulbs in the church steeple with LED lights. The financial data for 2018 has been delivered to this year's Audit Committee. The Council decided not to pursue purchase of a snow bucket for the loader but to modify what we currently have. Policy statements for both weddings and the New Benevolent Fund have been completed and will be presented to the Voters. The next Council meeting is 6/16 and the Quarterly Voters meeting is scheduled for 6/23. No May Council meeting was scheduled.