**The Festival of Ash Wednesday (Observed),**

6 March 2022,

*Concordia Lutheran Mission,*

Terrebonne, Oregon.

**“Christians Store up Treasures in Heaven upon Earth by the Gospel through Faith.”**

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal ... .

**St. Matthew 6:20**.

**Introduction**.

How does one store up treasures in heaven while on earth? *Faith*. A man does so by the Gospel through faith.

Faith can accomplish this miraculous feat because faith operates where heaven on earth is found. Heaven on earth is found wherever the Gospel is. Wherever the Gospel is, there is heaven on earth.

The Gospel is heaven on earth because in the Gospel we have the Blessed Presence of God. The Blessed Presence of God is the Free Forgiveness of all sins for Christ’s Sake in God’s Word and Sacraments[[1]](#footnote-1)1, the Gospel[[2]](#footnote-2)2. Wherever one has the Blessed Presence of God, there he has heaven.

*When men live their lives by faith which comes through the Heavenly Gospel, there they are living and toiling in heaven and, therefore, are garnering treasures in heaven*. These treasures never perish because they are the treasures of heaven. Heaven never perishes and neither do these treasures stored upon in heaven on earth by the Gospel through faith.

Christians store up everlasting treasures in heaven on earth by the Gospel through faith.

**I. The Cross of Christ Establishes Heaven on Earth.**

**A.** **Lent is a penitential season that turns men to the Cross of Christ.**

Today is the Festival of Ash Wednesday (observed) and the beginning of the season of Lent, a penitential season, i.e, a season of repentance.

The application of ashes on the Festival of Ash Wednesday reminds us we are mortal because of sin. Sin ultimately reduces man to the permanent destitution and darkness of death, because sin reduces men to ashes and dust.[[3]](#footnote-3)3 Sin introduced death to mankind and reduced man to dust and ashes.[[4]](#footnote-4)4 Sin reduces all of men’s efforts and toils in this life to ruin and futility because all efforts end in death and everlasting damnation. Luther writes:

You see, that’s why Christ begins now to preach many words against the great idol Mammon, drawing a most ugly kind of picture of him to put people on their guard against him. The first thing He says: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust corrupt and where thieves break in and steal.” The treasures on earth He assigns to three trustees – rust, moths, and thieves. These are miserable watchmen to put in charge of treasures! But God has wisely ordained that wherever there is a treasure, there must be such fellows to watch it, just as there are usually sparrows or rats or mice near the grain. And that is just what we deserve; for we do not use our money and property rightly, and in our miserable greed we scrape up everything for ourselves, while no one gives or grants anything to anyone else.[[5]](#footnote-5)5

Indeed, man’s work apart from faith garners not just futility, but hell. Luther writes:

This must be applied to all the self-righteous, who toil and deprive themselves of food and drink and exhaust their strength in a matter that is of no consequence. They are the devil’s martyrs. They work harder to get to hell than we to heaven.[[6]](#footnote-6)6

Even though Lent is a penitential season and popularly misunderstood to be a season of misery in the Church calendar, *it is actually a delightful time because it returns us to God’s boundless Mercy and Grace in Christ and Him Crucified for the sins of all men.*  God’s Mercy and Grace in Christ refreshes men in this life with God now and unto life eternal, the resurrection of the body, and boundless joys and riches of God’s Everlasting Kingdom.

**B. Sin closes heaven on earth to men and creates hell on earth.**

In today’s Gospel Jesus is doing the work of preaching repentance. Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount is preaching repentance by correcting the false teachings of the scribes, Pharisees, and others, that had been falsely ascribed to Moses. This work Jesus was doing according to prophecy was purifying the sons of Levi, i.e., purifying the Public Ministry of the Gospel. The Prophet Malachi[[7]](#footnote-7)7 prophesied that Christ would Purify the Public Ministry of the Gospel at His First Advent:

But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?[[8]](#footnote-8)8 for he is like a refiners’ fire, and like a fullers’ soap: And he shall sit *as* a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years.[[9]](#footnote-9)9

Martin Chemnitz1[[10]](#footnote-10)0 writes:

We are sure, after all, that He [Jesus] wanted to reveal in the debate of His twelfth year the initial service of His coming office about cleansing the sons of Lev, Mal. 3:3. This, then, was undoubtedly a token of the doctrine which He was going to teach later by explaining true statements and refuting corrupt ones as, for instance, about the person and office of the Messiah; the difference between Law and Gospel; the true worship of God in the New Testament; the abrogation of Levitical ceremonies; Pharisaic traditions, etc. There is no doubt but that, when the Child Jesus heard their usual rubbish decorated with this title: “It was said of old time,” Mat. 5, He showed by asking discretely that such things did not agree with the words and timeless meaning of Scripture. Because He was doing this with such great proof that the doctors were unable to contradict Him, He was given the opportunity to illustrate with His responses the meaning of prophetic doctrine. At the same time, His wisdom and grace were joined together so that everyone was amazed. Moreover, we can conclude that those who were “doctors” were of those groups whom we noted earlier: scribes, Pharisees, men skilled in the Law, and doctors of the Law. Therefore the Child Jesus is showing with this initial service that it would come to pass that, after He had refuted the corruptions of Pharisaic doctrine, abrogated Levitical worship and rejected the traditions of people, the sound doctrine and true worship of the New Testament was beginning with His ministry. ... Thus the Child Jesus showed the doctors in the temple rays of His divinity somewhat more clearly than before. The reputation of this Child was undoubtedly widespread at that time. However, because He published no further such token later but lived not among the doctors but at a carpenter’s house in the city of Nazareth, He vanished, as it were, from people’s memory.1[[11]](#footnote-11)1

For example, Jesus teaches us to love our enemies, not hate them as some of the errant teachers in Israel had done. Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.1[[12]](#footnote-12)2

*Jesus could not let stand this falsehood as the teaching of the Law of Moses because it contradicts Moses. This false doctrine drives a stake right through the heart of the Cross*.

The Cross opens heaven to men. Sin closes heaven to men. In the Garden of Eden, heaven was closed to men by Adam’s sin. Moses writes:

And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife said unto him, Where *art* thou? And he said, I hear thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I *was* naked, and I hid myself.1[[13]](#footnote-13)3

God is heaven. Yet Adam flees God and, therefore, heaven. Consequently, Adam is in hell on earth. Luther writes:

11. *The Lord said to him: But who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree about which I had commanded you that you should not eat?*

Here Adam’s conscience is roused by the real sting of the Law. It is as if God said: “You know that you are naked, and for this reason you hid. But your nakedness is My creation. You are not condemning it as something shameful, are you? Therefore it was not the nakedness that perplexed you, it was not My voice that frightened you; but your conscience convicted you of sin because you ate the fruit from the forbidden tree.” Here Adam, hard pressed in this manner, was in the midst of death and in the midst of hell. He was compelled to confess that nakedness was not evil, for it had been created by God. On the other hand, he realized that the evil was this: that now he had a bad conscience because of the nakedness in which he had previously gloried as in a unique adornment, and that he was now terrified by God’s voice, which previously he had heard with the utmost pleasure.1[[14]](#footnote-14)4

Sin closes heaven to men and creates hell on earth because sin deprives men of God’s Blessed Presence.

**B. The Cross opens heaven on earth to men**.

The Cross of Christ, however, opens heave to men. The Cross does so because on the Cross Christ Atoned for that which closes heaven to men, sin. As we’ve seen, sin creates hell on earth for men because it deprives men of God’s Blessed Presence. *On the Cross Christ suffered this hell on earth for men in order to forever swallow up hell and close hell to men and forever open heaven to men.* King David writes of Christ suffering the pangs of hell for men:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? *why art thou so* far from helping me, *and from* the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.1[[15]](#footnote-15)5

George Stoeckhardt writes:

The old Theologians assert that Christ actually endured the torments of hell, when He uttered those mysterious words: “Why has Thou forsaken Me?” ... By that outcry Christ asserts that He was really forsaken of God, forsaken, as only the damned in hell are forsaken. This marks the peak of His suffering. This indicates the height of His anguish. God had withdrawn from Him all help and protection and had delivered him up to darkness and death. At the same time, God had withdrawn from Him every token of grace and comfort. He was totally forsaken of God. Christ no longer saw or felt a ray of divine mercy. He was now actually and really suffering the pangs of hell, which otherwise only those experience who are banished to that place of eternal torment. As men live here in time, they may already feel the crushing burden of God’s wrath and curse resting upon them, yet there are always some evidences of God’s goodness at hand, such as the light they see and the air they breathe. However, in hell such evidences of God’s kindness have vanished altogether. They see and feel only God’s burning wrath and unabating fury. Such was the condition that Christ was in, when on the cross He cried: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” Christ felt Himself completely forsaken.1[[16]](#footnote-16)6

Not only did Christ close hell by the Cross but He also opened heaven on earth by the Cross. The Apostle St. John writes:

And he [Jesus] saith unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.1[[17]](#footnote-17)7

Jesus opens heaven on earth because He lived a holy human life in thought, word, and deed, waking and sleeping, from the womb to the tomb, and, thereby, fulfilled all righteousness for all men. The Apostle St. Matthew writes:

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said, unto him, Suffer *it to be so* now for thus it cometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.1[[18]](#footnote-18)8

**II. Men Enter Heaven on Earth by the Gospel through Faith** **and Garner Everlasting Treasures.**

**A. Men enter heaven on earth by the Gospel through faith**.

Just as the heavens opened in Jesus’ Baptism, so the heavens open to us in our Baptism because we are Baptized “in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”1[[19]](#footnote-19)9

In our Baptism God the Father is well-pleased with us because in our Baptism we put on the Gospel through faith. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.2[[20]](#footnote-20)0

By the Gospel through faith men enter heaven on earth and dwell once again with God.

**B. Men garner everlasting treasures in heaven on earth by the Gospel through faith**.

Because now we live our lives by the Gospel through faith, we are living and toiling on earth in this life in heaven. Toiling in heaven in this life by the Gospel through faith means everything we do, whether awake or sleeping, at work or at play, pleases are heavenly Father and garner, thereby, everlasting treasures in heaven. The Apostle St. John writes:

And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed *are* the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours and their works do follow them.

Luther writes:

Our steps should be firm and certain, in order that we may say with confidence: “I sleep in the name of the Lord, and I know that my sleep is pleasing to God. But if I am awake and discharge the usual duties of my calling by writing, reading, meditating, and praying, I do not doubt that they are acceptable to God. ... I am certain that I am pleasing God with all my actions, not because of myself, who am doing this, but because of God, who pities, pardons, loves, and lead my by the Holy Spirit.”2[[21]](#footnote-21)1

**Conclusion**.

Treasures are stored up forever in heaven on earth by the Gospel through faith because the Gospel is heaven on earth. The Gospel is heaven on earth because in the Gospel we have the Blessed Presence of God Himself.2[[22]](#footnote-22)2

By the Gospel through faith we live and toil in heaven on earth, garnering, thereby, everlasting treasures in heaven.

***Amen.***

1. 1Because God’s Word and Sacraments are God’s Testimony to sinners, we know we have God’s Blessed Presence.

   “That we may obtain this faith, *the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted*. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ’s sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ’s sake.” *The Augsburg Confession*, **Article V: Of the Ministry**.1-3, *Triglotta*, p. 45, underscore added.

   “*Of the Use of the Sacraments* they teach that the Sacraments were ordained, not only to be marks of profession among men, but rather to be signs and testimonies of the will of God toward us, instituted to awaken and confirm faith in those who use them.” *The Augsburg Confession*, **Article XIII: Of the Use of the Sacraments**.1, 2, *Triglotta*, p. 49, underscore added.

   “Although *the Church* properly is the congregation of saints and true believers, nevertheless, since in this life many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled therewith, it is lawful to use Sacraments administered by evil men, according to the saying of Christ: *The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat*, etc. Matt. 23, 2. Both the Sacraments and Word are*, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in God’s stead, be ye reconciled to God*. Thus the term *leitourgia* agrees aptly with the ministry.” The Apology of the Augsburg Confession*,* **Article XXIV. (XII.): Of the Mass**, *Of the Term Mass*.80, 81, *Triglotta*, p. 411. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2The Gospel is God’s Word and Sacraments. “But let us speak of the word *liturgy*. This word does not properly signify a sacrifice, but rather the public ministry, and agrees aptly with our belief, namely, that one minister who consecrates tenders the body and blood of the Lord to the rest of the people, just as one minister who preaches tenders the Gospel to the people, as Paul says, I Cor. 4, 1: *Let a man so account of us as the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, i.e.* of the Gospel and the Sacraments. And 2 Cor. 5, 20: *We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in God’s stead, be ye reconciled to God*. Thus the term *leitourgia* agrees aptly with the ministry.” The Apology of the Augsburg Confession*,* **Article XXIV. (XII.): Of the Mass**, *Of the Term Mass*.80, 81, *Triglotta*, p. 411. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 3“The ancient act [of the imposition of ashes] is a gesture of repentance and a powerful reminder about the meaning of the day. Ashes can symbolize dust-to-dustness ... .” The Rev. James L. Brauer, *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, editor, the Rev. Dr. Fred L. Precht, Authorized by The Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, p. 166.

   “And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which *am but* dust and ashes ... .” **Genesis 18:27**. “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it was thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return.” **Genesis 3:19**. Hence, we read in **The Order for the Burial of the Dead**, “FORASMUCH as it hath pleased Almighty God, in His wise providence, to take out of this world the soul of our departed *brother*, we therefore commit his body to the ground (to God’s acre); earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in the hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.” *The Lutheran Agenda*, p. 95, underscore added. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 4“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned ... .” **Romans 5:12**. “... till thou return unto the ground; for out of it was thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return.” **Genesis 3:19**. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 5Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 21, p. 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 6Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 17, pp. 110, 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 7“Christology [of Malachi]: ... comes back to idea of Haggai. ... 3:1-4 -- Chief Messianic prophecy. -- send My messenger (John the Baptist) -- clear My way before Me. -- Lord whom you such (Desire of All Nations) -- will suddenly come to His temple -- Messenger of the {berith (covenant)} -- He is the one who announces the New Testament -- He would refine the nation of Israel. v. 3 -- talks about the priests (purify sons of Levi) ... purification of the clergy -- found ministry of the New Testament -- preaching of the pure doctrine. 4 -- offering of Judah and Jerusalem -- ‘the whole church.’ ... 4:5 -- another prophecy of John the Baptist. -- comes with [the] same authority as Elijah and same vigor as Elijah.” The Rev. Dr. Douglas Judisch from notes by Willis Jenson from his *Old Testament Studies II* class at Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, IN, c. 1988, amplification in brackets and transliteration and translation of the Hebrew in braces added.

   “Christology [of Haggai]. ... 2:6-9 -- central part of the book. ... :6 -- shake all nations -- political commotion which would precede the Messiah; destruction of Perisan & Hellenistic [empires] before Rome. ... :7 {*chamdah* (desire)} -- object of desire or delight -- speaking [of] the Messiah ... they shall come to The Desire of All Nations. people from every nation will come to faith through the preaching of the Gospel. ... v. 9. glory [of] this latter house -- ‘the literal second temple.’ -- this temple will be given for more glory, because here the Messiah will come.” The Rev. Dr. Douglas Judisch from notes by Willis Jenson from his *Old Testament Studies II* class at Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, IN, c. 1988, amplification in brackets and transliteration and translation of the Hebrew in braces added. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 8At times people could not even withstand Jesus physically when He let show some of His Deity. “**WHY DID THE SELLERS YIELD TO THE CLEANSING BY CHRIST?** ANSWER: That the merchants in the temple, without any resistance yielded to the command of Jesus was not because they wanted to avoid the scourge. The majesty of the person of Christ, His holy earnestness, which shone from His face, moved them, and drove them out.” The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Wisdom for Today,* Vols. II & III, tr. the Rev. Arthur E. Beck, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, no date, p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 9**Malachi 3:2-4**. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 10“Chemnitz, Martin, Lutheran theologian. B. 1522 ... He took the leading part in getting out the Formula of Concord, and the Catalog of Testimonies, which is appended to the Symbolical Books, is essentially his work.... Together with Selnecker and Kirchner, Chemnitz, in 1582, published an Apology of the Book of Concord. ... The most learned theologian of his time was mourned by the whole Lutheran Church; his importance is seen in the Catholic saying that if Chemnitz had not come, Luther had not stood.” *Concordia Cyclopedia*, pp. 127, 128, **s.v. Chemnitz, Martin**. “‘If the Second Martin had not come, the first would not have prevailed. – 17th Century Adage.’” *The Second Martin: The Life and Theology of Martin Chemnitz*, The Rev. Dr. J. A. O. Preus, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, back cover. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 11Martin Chemnitz, *The Harmony of the Four Evangelists*, Vol. I, Book I, tr. Richard J. dinda, Malone, TX: The Center for the Study of Lutheran Orthodoxy, 2009, pp. 250, 251. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 12**St. Matthew 5:43-44**. “So far He ... has denounced their false interpretation of the Decalog, purifying and cleaning their confused and obscured teaching. Then He went on to teach about genuine good works, in opposition to the glitter of their false good works. Thus He has taught the right understanding of the Decalog [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 13**Genesis 3:8-10**. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. 14Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 1, p. 176, amplification in brackets and underscore added. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. 15**Psalm 22:1-2**. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. 16The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Lectures on Select Psalms*, tr. the Rev. Dr. H. W. Degner, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, pp. 68, 67.

    “For even Christ suffered damnation and desertion more than all the saints. And it was not easy for Him to suffer, as some imagine. For He really and truly offered Himself to God the Father for the condemnation for us. And in His human nature He acted in no way different than a man to be eternally damned to hell. And on account of this love of His toward God, God immediately raised Him from death and hell and thus devoured hell. This all His saints should imitate, some to a less and some to a greater degree, for the more perfect they have been in their love, the more readily and easily they can do this. But Christ underwent this with the greatest difficulty of all. Hence in many passages He complains about the agonies of hell.” *Luther’s Works*, 25:382. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. 17**St. John 1:51**. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. 18**St. Matthew 3:13-16**. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. 19**St. Matthew 28:19**. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. 20**Galatians 3:26-27**. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. 21Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 7, p. 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. 22“When God makes a promise, there He Himself is dealing with us and is giving and offering us something.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 3, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)