



THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT
SUNDAY, MARCH 8TH, 2026
ESTHER LUTHERAN CHURCH, ELCA

INTRODUCTION:

In today's gospel the Samaritan woman asks Jesus for water, an image of our thirst for God. Jesus offers living water, a sign of God's grace flowing from the waters of baptism. The early church used this gospel and those of the next two Sundays to deepen baptismal reflection during the final days of preparation before baptism at Easter. As we journey to the resurrection feast, Christ comes among us in word, bath, and meal—offering us the life-giving water of God's mercy and forgiveness.

PRELUDE

BELL

WELCOME

GATHERING

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God

Please stand as you are able

***CALL TO WORSHIP:**

P: As a deer longs for flowing streams,

C: So do our souls long for you, O God.

P: The hour is coming, and is now here.

C: It is the time to worship God in spirit and truth.

P: Blessed be the holy Trinity, ✚ one God, who forgives all our sin,
whose mercy endures forever.

C: Amen.

***CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS:**

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: We come before you with heavy hearts. We do not always follow our savior's lead. We insist on our own way, putting worldly things before you. We doubt, we discriminate; we scatter— preferring darkness to the brilliance of your truth. For all this we ask your mercy and forgiveness, that our hearts may be made clean again. Amen.

P: As a loving shepherd gathers his sheep, so God protects and cares for us. As patient as a parent to a wayward child, so is God's mercy for us. Let us rejoice that we have received forgiveness, and that every day God seeks to renew us in the image of our Creator. Amen.

***GATHERING HYMN: "Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty" (ELW 533)**

**1 Open now thy gates of beauty,
Zion, let me enter there,
where my soul in joyful duty
waits for God who answers prayer.
Oh, how blessed is this place,
filled with solace, light, and grace!**

**2 Gracious God, I come before thee;
come thou also unto me;
where we find thee and adore thee,
there a heav'n on earth must be.
To my heart, oh, enter thou,
let it be thy temple now!**

- 3 Here thy praise is gladly chanted,
here thy seed is duly sown;
let my soul, where it is planted,
bring forth precious sheaves alone,
so that all I hear may be
fruitful unto life in me.
- 4 Thou my faith increase and quicken,
let me keep thy gift divine;
howsoe'er temptations thicken,
may thy word still o'er me shine
as my guiding star through life,
as my comfort in all strife.
- 5 Speak, O God, and I will hear thee,
let thy will be done indeed;
may I undisturbed draw near thee
while thou dost thy people feed.
Here of life the fountain flows;
here is balm for all our woes.

Text: Benjamin Schmolck, 1672-1737; tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1827-1878, alt.

***GREETING**

- P: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.
- C: **And also with you.**

***KYRIE: ELW pg. 213**

Kyrie eleison: **Lord, have mercy.**
Christe eleison: **Christ, have mercy.**
Kyrie eleison: **Lord, have mercy.**

***CANTICLE OF PRAISE: "Glory to God" ELW pg. 213**

**Glory to God, glory to God,
glory to God in the highest;
glory to God, glory to God,**

and peace to God's people on earth.

**Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you,
we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.**

**Glory to God, glory to God,
glory to God in the highest;
glory to God, glory to God,
and peace to God's people on earth.**

**Lord Jesus Christ,
only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.**

**Glory to God, glory to God,
glory to God in the highest;
glory to God, glory to God,
and peace to God's people on earth.**

**For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.**

**Glory to God, glory to God,
glory to God in the highest;
glory to God, glory to God,
and peace to God's people on earth,
and peace to God's people on earth.**

***PRAYER OF THE DAY:**

P: Merciful God, the fountain of living water,

C: **You quench our thirst and wash away our sin. Give us this water always. Bring us to drink from the well that flows with the beauty of your truth through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

Please be seated

WORD

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song

FIRST READING: EXODUS 17:1-7

Because the thirsty Israelites quarreled with Moses and put God to the test, Moses cried out in desperation to God. God commanded Moses to strike the rock to provide water for the people. The doubt-filled question—“Is the Lord among us or not?”—received a very positive answer.

¹ From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² The people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?” ³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?” ⁴ So Moses cried out to the Lord, “What shall I do for this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” ⁵ The Lord said to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go. ⁶ I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.” Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?” Here ends the first reading.

PSALM 95 ~ Congregation reads the bold

Let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation. (Ps. 95:1)

¹ Come, let us sing to the Lord; let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation.

² Let us come before God's presence with thanksgiving and raise a loud shout to the Lord with psalms.

³ For you, Lord, are a great God, and a great ruler above all gods.

⁴ In your hand are the caverns of the earth; the heights of the hills are also yours.

⁵ The sea is yours, for you made it, and your hands have molded the dry land.

⁶ Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our maker.

⁷ For the Lord is our God, and we are the people of God's pasture and the sheep of God's hand. Oh, that today you would hear God's voice!

⁸ "Harden not your hearts, as at Meribah, as on that day at Massah in the desert.

⁹ There your ancestors tested me, they put me to the test, though they had seen my works.

¹⁰ Forty years I loathed that generation, saying, 'The heart of this people goes astray; they do not know my ways.'

¹¹ Indeed I swore in my anger, 'They shall never come to my rest.' "

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION: "Return to the Lord" (ELW pg. 216b)

**Return to the Lord, your God, return to the Lord, your God,
who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.**

GOSPEL READING: JOHN 4:5-42

Jesus defies convention to engage a Samaritan woman in conversation. Her testimony, in turn, leads many others to faith.

Narrator: So [Jesus] came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her,

Jesus: "Give me a drink."

Narrator: (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him,

Woman: “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?”

Narrator: (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her,

Jesus: “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”

Narrator: The woman said to him,

Woman: “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?”

Narrator: Jesus said to her,

Jesus: “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”

Narrator: The woman said to him,

Woman: “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”

Narrator: Jesus said to her,

Jesus: “Go, call your husband, and come back.”

Narrator: The woman answered him,

Woman: “I have no husband.”

Narrator: Jesus said to her,

Jesus: “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!”

Narrator: The woman said to him,

Woman: “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.”

Narrator: Jesus said to her,

Jesus: “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Narrator: The woman said to him,

Woman: “I know that Messiah is coming”

Narrator: (who is called Christ).

Woman: “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”

Narrator: Jesus said to her,

Jesus: “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

Narrator: Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,

Woman: “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”

Narrator: They left the city and were on their way to him. Meanwhile the disciples were urging him,

Disciples: “Rabbi, eat something.”

Narrator: But he said to them,

Jesus: “I have food to eat that you do not know about.”

Narrator: So the disciples said to one another,

Disciples: “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?”

Narrator: Jesus said to them,

Jesus: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

Narrator: Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony,

Woman: “He told me everything I have ever done.”

Narrator: So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman,

People: “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”

The word of the Lord... **Thanks be to God!**

CHILDREN’S TIME & SERMON

HYMN OF THE DAY: “O Jesus, Joy of Loving Hearts” (ELW 658)

- 1** O Jesus, joy of loving hearts,
the fount of life, the light of all:
from ev'ry bliss that earth imparts
we turn, unfilled, to hear your call.

- 2** We taste you, ever-living bread,
and long to feast upon you still;
we drink of you, the fountainhead;
our thirsting souls from you we fill.

**3 For you our restless spirits yearn,
where'er our changing lot is cast;
glad, when your smile on us you turn,
blest, when by faith we hold you fast.**

**4 O Jesus, ever with us stay!
Make all our moments fair and bright!
Oh, chase the night of sin away!
Shed o'er the world your holy light.**

Text: attr. Bernard of Clairvaux, 1091-1153; tr. Ray Palmer, 1808-1887, alt.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

L: We pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

L: Our souls thirst for you, O God. Satisfy our longing with true refreshment rather than fleeting pleasures. Teach us how to offer this life-giving water to others. Renewing God,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Our souls thirst for you, O God. Droughts parch one part of the earth, while melting oceans and flood waters drown another. Show us the folly of our greed and shortsightedness, and make us part of the solution to maintain our struggling planet. Renewing God,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Our souls thirst for you, O God. Show us the places where we have been blind to your vision, and give us the wisdom and courage to dismantle what divides us from others. Renewing God,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Our souls thirst for you, O God, and your life-giving water is exactly what a suffering world needs. Pour it out upon us and all those who need an extra measure of your grace, especially Jerry, Cheryl, Chris, Bruce, Jaxson, Kristy, Larry, Joan, Dennis, Lois, Dale, Doug, Gary, Shirley, Joyce, Bev, Reilly, Allison, Cadence, and Becky. Renewing God,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We are satisfied just being in your presence, O God. Accept our prayers and use us to relieve others of their searing burdens. For the sake of your son, Jesus Christ.

C: Amen.

Please stand as you are able

***APOSTLES' CREED: (ELW pg. 217)**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
on the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen**

***SHARING OF THE PEACE:**

P: The peace of Christ be with you always.

C: **And also with you.**

Please be seated

OFFERING

We thank you for your gifts of time, talent, and treasure that help this congregation, to continue our ministry together, and to make Christ known in our communities and the world.

OFFERING HYMN: "Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me" (ELW 623)

1 **Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee;
let the water and the blood,
from thy riven side which flowed,
be of sin the double cure;
cleanse me from its guilt and pow'r.**

2 **Not the labors of my hands
can fulfill thy law's demands;
could my zeal no respite know,
could my tears forever flow,
all for sin could not atone;
thou must save, and thou alone.**

3 **Nothing in my hand I bring;
simply to thy cross I cling.
Naked, come to thee for dress;
helpless, look to thee for grace;
foul, I to the fountain fly;
wash me, Savior, or I die.**

4 **While I draw this fleeting breath,
when mine eyelids close in death,
when I soar to worlds unknown,
see thee on thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee.**

Text: Augustus M. Toplady, 1740-1778

Please stand as you are able

***OFFERTORY PRAYER:**

P: Dear God,

C: **You desire worship in spirit and truth, and the honest offerings of open hearts. Accept these gifts we bring before you, that they may further your will in the world, and break down the barriers which we have imposed on one another. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

***LORD'S PRAYER: *sung* (CLH 632)**

Our Father, which art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name,

thy kingdom come, thy will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,

as we forgive our debtors;

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

SENDING

God blesses us and sends us in mission to our neighbor in need

***LITANY:**

P: Jesus meets us in the least likely places,

C: And invites us to know God more deeply.

P: Jesus crosses boundaries to reach us,

C: And calls us to do the same.

P: Jesus offers us living water,

C: And astonishes us with new ideas.

P: Jesus fills us with love, hope, and joy,

C: And we cannot help but run and share it with others.

P: May we always allow ourselves to be surprised by Jesus' working in our lives,

C: And may we always be inspired to action in response.

***BLESSING:**

Receive the blessing of the holy Trinity:

God, who calls all things into existence,

Jesus Christ, who redeems us,

and the Holy Spirit, whose breath sustains creation,

✠ bless you now and always.

THREE-FOLD AMEN

***SENDING HYMN: "Guide Me Ever, Great Redeemer" (ELW 618)**

**1 Guide me ever, great Redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land.**

I am weak, but you are mighty;

hold me with your pow'rful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore,
feed me now and evermore.

2 Open now the crystal fountain
where the healing waters flow;
let the fire and cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through.
Strong deliv'rer, strong deliv'rer,
shield me with your mighty arm,
shield me with your mighty arm.

3 When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs and praises, songs and praises,
I will raise forevermore,
I will raise forevermore.

Text: William Williams, 1717-1791; tr. William Williams and Peter Williams, 1722-1796, alt.

***DISMISSAL**

P: Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

C: **Thanks be to God!**

IN OUR PRAYERS

Jerry Anderson	Chris & Bruce Carter
Jaxson Bosl	Kristy Fyhrie
Larry Sather	Joan Burquest
Dennis Rosenquist	Lois Rosenquist
Cheryl Farber – mother of Melissa Schlosser	
Rev. Bruce Miller- father of Karin Wagner	
Dale Flemming – father of Laurie Ratajesak	
Doug Tvedt – brother of Joan Burquest	
Jerry Pogose – father of Chuck Pogose	
Gary Borst – friend of the Andersons	
Shirley Nesges – friend of the Thoms	
Joyce Muyres – friend of the Thoms	

Bev Guse-Ohlrech – friend of the Pedersons
Reilly McCormick – friend of Esther congregation
Allison Dotzler – friend of Kathy Mittag
Cadence Smith – friend of Mandy Arvidson
Becky Yttrie – friend of the Townsends
Family and Friends of: Sarah Pomeranz, David Anderson, Ron Myren, Katie Jahnke, Dave Bendix, Megan Sheen, Colleen Burquest, and Chad Way

THIS WEEK AT ESTHER

Sunday, March 8th – Third Sunday of Lent

Sunday fellowship before and after worship
8:30 am - WELCA
9 am – Sunday School
10 am – Worship led by SAM Jewel Townsend
2 pm – Worship at St. William's

Wednesday, March 11th

6 pm – Lent Soup & Sandwich Supper
7 pm – Worship

Thursday, March 12th

9 am – Quilting Group – Bring a sack lunch

Sunday, March 15th – Fourth Sunday of Lent

8:30 am – First Communion Class
9 am – Sunday School
10 am – Worship led by Pr. Birgitte – Noisy offering to go towards People's Church in Bemidji
2 pm – Worship at St. William's

SERVING IN MARCH

Pastor: March 8- SAM Jewel Townsend, March 15- Pr. Brigitte, March 22-SAM Jewel Townsend, March 29-Pr. Greg Billberg

Organists: Marcia Guenther & Brad Lambrecht

Altar Care: Bev Arvidson

Usher: Rodney Peterson

Acolyte: Chase & Avery Stueve

Lay Reader: Chris Carter

Communion Assistant: Steph Stueve

Birthday Card Sender: Confirmation Class

NEWS AND NOTES

Sign-up sheets for 2026 Worship Tasks are on the Narthex table.

Pastor Birgitte Simpson from People's Church in Bemidji will lead worship with us on Sunday, March 15th. Noisy offering that day will go towards their congregation. People's Church is a multicultural and indigenous ministry of the ELCA in the NWMN Synod. They live out their faith by showing Creator God's love for all people by offering shelter, hot meals, and community. For more information go to: peopleschurch-elca.org.

First Communion Class will be held on March 15th at 8:30 am. The suggested minimum age for this class is 5th grade. If you, a family member, or friend would be interested in attending this class, please contact Karin Wagner or Jewel Townsend.

VBS Planning Meeting is Sunday, March 22nd following worship at Rose City Bar & Grill. All are welcome!

Caring Ministry will meet March 23rd at 6:30 pm at Luella Thom's home. All are welcome!

Easter Garden Flower orders are due March 11th. Order forms are in the Narthex.

Lilles:

1 stem 6-8 blooms	\$15
2 stem 10-12 blooms	\$30
3 stems 15-18 blooms	\$45

Others:

Begonias	\$18
Cyclamen*	\$18
Daffodils*	\$15
Hyacinths*	\$15
Tulips*	\$15

*Potted spring bulbs are not guaranteed to bloom on Easter, but are guaranteed to be beautiful.

Note from the Council: Looking for donations of flowers for the graves. Also, if anyone is interested, please make up some wooden cross stakes for the flowers.

We need to replace many of the ones we have. Any questions, please ask any member of the Council.

Check out our new Esther Calendar on our website to keep up to date! Go to estherlutheran.com and click on "Esther Calendar."

We believe everyone has a unique and valuable place in God's family and we welcome all to share in the community of faith here at Esther. If you would like to become a member please contact Mandy in the church office at 218-338-2171 or secretary@estherlutheran.net or Jewel Townsend at 320-760-2503 or jewellht17@gmail.com

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