



# WITTENBERG WAY

Feb. 2024

## LENTENTIDE



**Return to the Lord Your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.**

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Dear Grace Family,

As we begin the season of Lent, I want to express how grateful I am to serve as your pastor. Like any vocation, it has its ups and downs, good days and bad days, and from time to time, those days when you wonder why you didn't choose an easier path. Nevertheless, even on those days, I know it is a priceless privilege to proclaim Christ's Good News of salvation to anyone who will listen. I say this because ultimately the results are not up to me. On a recent Sunday, we heard this parable from our Lord:

“He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.” (Mark 4:26-28)

The Kingdom of God is at work. The man sleeps, gets up, gets on with his day, and then goes back to sleep. All the while the seed does its thing, and the man does not know how. God's Kingdom is hidden, for sure, beneath the dire headlines and gaudy excess of this world, not to mention your own difficult circumstances. But make no mistake, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ set in motion a force for good that cannot be turned away. All that is bad will be refashioned as good, and all that is evil will be as if it never existed. Thus, we are encouraged to simply sow the seed of God's powerful Word. It will accomplish what He desires (Isaiah 55:10). Robert Capon puts it this way.

“The life of grace is not an effort on our part to achieve a goal we set ourselves. It is a continually renewed attempt simply to believe that someone else has done all the achieving that is needed and to live in a relationship with that person, whether we achieve or not. If that doesn't seem like much to you, you're right: it isn't. And, as a matter of fact, the life of grace is even less than that. It's not even our life at all, but the life of that Someone Else rising like a tide in the ruins of our death.”

Thankfully, the Kingdom of God here at Grace Lutheran has experienced a lot of new life with recent conversions, baptisms, and spiritual maturity. I cannot take any credit; God's Word has done it all. But I am grateful to be a part of it with you. In the Lutheran tradition, baptism is not simply a past-tense event that has no ongoing significance for our lives. We are given everything we need by God as we are soaked in His loving Words that seal us as His children. The rest of our lives are simply drawing from the well of baptism, returning, again and again, to be reminded and refreshed with that same watery Word that declares us forgiven for Christ's sake.

In her children's book, *Out of the Woods*, Rebecca Bond tells the story of her grandfather Antonio who grew up in a hotel that his mother ran which was in a small Canadian town on the edge of a lake. Living in the hotel, he got to know all kinds of people, listening to their stories spoken in several languages. Outside of the hotel, he was able to experience signs of the elusive wildlife that lived nearby. One day, during a dry summer, a raging fire swept through the surrounding forest. The wind pushed the flames in every direction so fast that there wasn't any time to outrun the fire. There was only one place to go. She writes, "All the people - hotel guests, trappers, silver miners, cooks, Antonio's mother, and Antonio - went into the lake. There was even a baby, not half a year old, held in his mother's arms. They stood in the water up to their knees, their waists, their shoulders and stared as the fire came closer and closer."

As the forest burned around them, the group of people saw something astonishing. Out from the woods and into the lake came the elusive wildlife. "Wolves stood beside deer," she adds. "Foxes beside rabbits. And people and moose stood close enough to touch" as the smoke darkened the sky so much that no one could tell if it was day or night. When the flames finally died down and the sky began to clear, every creature returned from where they each had come.

That is what it looks like to be baptized into the name of our Triune God. As the fire of God's righteous judgment comes, there is only one place to hide. The water of your Baptism. In it, you are safe from judgment because you are buried with Christ. By it, you are saved from death by sharing in His resurrection life. Through it, you are reborn by the Holy Spirit and made clean.

I hope you will join us this Lenten season as we stand in our baptismal waters, "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (Heb 12:2), where we will recount the story of our Lord's heroic march to Jerusalem to redeem sinners like you and me.

Gratefully Yours,



Pastor Thomas



# CARING FOR MY NEIGHBOR

If any of the Ten Commandments might tempt us to think that keeping the Law is easy, it would be the Fifth Commandment. After all, how hard is it to get through life without murdering somebody? The vast majority of people can handle that!

But Jesus famously blows up this notion by pointing out that the command, “You shall not murder,” goes much deeper — down to the heart.

You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.” But I say to you that everyone angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, “You fool!” will be liable to the hell of fire.

(Matt. 5:21–22)

Hatred and disdain come from the same sort of crookedness of heart as murder. With both murder and hatred, you look down on another person and think them of little worth.

In the Small Catechism, Luther also points out that every “do not” in the commandments also includes a “do this:” “We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body but help and support him in every physical need” (SC, Fifth Commandment).

We are not called merely to avoid evil; we must also do positive good.

So when Jesus drew near to us and became our neighbor by taking up our humanity, He came not only to avoid harming us, but He came to positively help us, bless us and serve us.

We are now called to show the love to our neighbors that Christ showed to us. Your neighbor is yet another gift that God has given you that requires your stewardship. We are called to show mercy, to be kind, to love and serve our neighbor. One aspect of this stewardship is financial: our neighbors need us to support the church’s work so that they can hear the Gospel and come to faith. Our neighbors need the church’s alms and mercy work. Our neighbors need our faithful service in all we do in the name of Christ.

--LCMS Stewardship Ministry

*Lord Jesus, You are our King and Lord. As the Magi worshiped You with extravagant gifts, grant us Your grace that we might be willing to give the very best of us in service to You and to our neighbor. Amen.*

## HOW TO GIVE

- Your offering envelopes or those in the pews
- Online from your bank website
- Scan the QR code here
- Text the amount to 84321
- The Giving Page at [grace sandiego.com](http://grace sandiego.com)
- Time and Talents



## 2023 YEARLY GIVING

2023 Actual Annual Offerings	\$ 294,507
2023 Annual Budget	<u>\$ 269,450</u>
Overage	\$ 25,057

## JANUARY 2024 GIVING

January Actual Offerings	\$ 15,862
January Budget	<u>\$ 19,760</u>
Shortage	\$ 3,898

# Accusing God: Why the Problem of Evil Means Justification Still Matters

by Rev. Bob Hiller

On *White Horse Inn*, we talk often about the fear of God. That's somewhat of an archaic thought. Should we still fear God? It was a big deal in the Reformation for sure. People were terrified of how they would be found righteous before a holy God. This led them to be frightened of God! How could they justify themselves before him?

The fear of God and the doctrine of justification go hand in hand. But does the doctrine of justification really matter anymore? This is a worthy question. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther initiated the Reformation. What began as an academic debate over the abusive doctrine of indulgences soon became a call for the church to return to God's word as the sole authority for the Christian's doctrine and life. These were the Scriptures that taught in no uncertain terms that a sinner's only hope in life or death is that Jesus's perfect life, death, and resurrection are enough to save them. Solely by virtue of his dying and rising in their place are sinners declared righteous, or justified, before their holy God. Luther and the Reformers had to fight, some to the death, to preach this gospel to Christ's church.

Luther's road to the Reformation—a monk in despair for his eternal salvation who found a gracious Savior on the pages of the Scriptures—is a story we have heard repeatedly. However, the Reformation didn't take hold simply because there was one verbose monk with a weighty conscience. Luther preached Christ to an entire era burdened by the guilt of their sin and the fear of God's judgment. As Oswald Bayer notes, "Many thousands joined his song and found in the turning point of Luther's life the watershed of their own lives" (*Living by Faith*, 56.) It was this world of sinners—haunted by their sin and terrified of God's judgment—that longed for the comfort and certainty found only in the preaching of Christ crucified.

## ARE WE STILL HAUNTED BY GOD?

But what about today? Are we still haunted by God? Do our sins bother us to the point that we worry about God's righteous wrath? Does the concept of justification—how one can be right in the eyes of God—even cross our minds?

I would argue that, in the modern world, many are still haunted by God, but instead of fleeing from his wrath, they have turned the tables and are standing up to fight. With all the suffering and pain we see around us, we demand answers! Justification still weighs heavy on us.

However, we have attempted to switch seats with God. We believe we are on the judge's bench now and God needs to justify himself to us! No longer are we concerned if we have not done enough to earn a right standing before God. No, we have eaten the fruit of the tree and bought the devil's lie that we can be gods. As such, we have decided to put God on trial and judge him! Robert Kolb writes, "Luther's theology of the cross evolved from a concern that human creatures do not have (they cannot produce!) what God in his justice demands from them. Modern people complain because

*Fear of wrath and fear of indifference or absence weighs heavily on the consciences of people who take God seriously. Either way, people are frightened and in search of a gracious God.*

God does not produce what they demand as their rights from him" (*Luther on the Theology of the Cross*, 35). Many of us are haunted by God. Many are terrified by him, either because they fear God's righteous wrath coming to condemn them or because they fear God is absent from their suffering and they demand answers. God is feared as an implacable monster of wrath and judgment or as a ghost of someone who once gave people hope but has been gone for a long time.

Fear of wrath and fear of indifference or absence weighs heavily on the consciences of people who take God seriously. Either way, people are frightened and in search of a gracious God.

In fact, both fears are answered by preaching justification. Romans 3 could not serve as a better text for this. Saint Paul has just spent two and a half chapters of this majestic letter laying out the real problem we have with God: namely, our sin and his law. After Paul finishes with us here, no one is left standing. All are exposed as sinners who can do nothing to earn a righteous standing before God. "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). God is the judge and before his righteous Law we have no hope. The law God gives is not a plan we can follow to placate his wrath. The law does the opposite to us. It reveals our sins. Under the law, our fears of God's wrath are justified.

But, for those who fear this deserved wrath, Jesus comes

# Accusing God: Why the Problem of Evil Means Justification Still Matters

to remove our fears. “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (Rom. 3:21–22). Our right standing before the holy God comes in a manner wholly different from God’s commands, in a way which is not according to law. It comes as a pure gift to be received by faith, not as a reward to be earned. “[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith” (Rom. 3:23–25).

In other words, Christ has removed God’s wrath by taking it on our behalf. He is our “propitiation.” He is the one who stands between us and God’s wrath, so we receive none of it. We are justified because our sins lay on Jesus. God’s wrath is attracted to sin like a magnet. Jesus has taken our sins, so the wrath comes for him instead of us. In this way, we are freed from that wrath and redeemed through his blood. All of this is given to you as a gift! It’s free, by grace alone. The monster of God’s wrath is gone, for Christ has paid the righteous price for your sin, “so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26).

Further, this work of Christ shows God is no ghost who is absent from the sufferings of this world. No, he takes the greatest suffering onto himself as he hangs on the cross to die for sinners. The whole creation is burdened under sin, but the Creator who puts on flesh takes that burden upon his shoulders. His work of justification not only declares the sinner righteous, but it also sets the creation to rights as well. You will need to go beyond Romans 3 to make this point, but Romans 4:25 is not far away. Paul writes, “[Christ] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” Christ’s dying and rising justifies the sinner. Additionally, in Romans 8:21 we learn that this justifying work of Christ is setting creation free. “The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” Christ, in other words, takes the suffering of the world on his shoulders and is making all things new. He is not a ghost who does nothing about our suffering, but the risen Lord who scorned the shame of the cross for the joy set before him (Heb. 12:2). That is your salvation, by the way. Your justification and resurrection—when he will turn our sorrow into laughter.

Whether our fears look like those haunting the church in the 16th century or like those haunting us in the 21st century, Christ Jesus removes our fears. Because he has shed his blood for sinners— and make no mistake, that includes you!— you stand righteous before God on account of Christ. Since judgment has been put to death in Christ, the curse is removed and soon we will see all things made righteous! Justification not only still matters, it is still the gospel. And, it is for you.

*Rev. Bob Hiller is the Senior Pastor of Community Lutheran Church in Escondido, California. He is the author of *Finding Christ in the Straw* and the content editor for *The Craft of Preaching* for [1517.org](http://1517.org) and co-host of *The White Horse Inn* radio program.*

SERMON SERIES ON THE “I AM” SAYINGS OF JESUS

I AM

JOIN US FOR THE LENTEN SEASON  
**WEDNESDAY EVENINGS**

**Soup Suppers 5:30 p.m. | Evening Prayer 6:30 p.m.**

## LOST AND FOUNDLING. Safe Haven Laws Save Lives.

Foundling is an old-fashioned word used in novels like *Oliver Twist* to describe an infant left on a doorstep by its desperate mother in the hopes it would be taken in by kindly strangers. History's most famous foundling was Moses, left where Pharaoh's daughter could find him as part of God's plan. But there was nothing Dickensian or biblical about the alarming number of newborns being left in dumpsters, restrooms and other public places in the 1990s. Health and Human Services reported 65 abandoned babies (eight deceased) in 1991. By 1998, the HHS count had increased to 105 (33 dead). Yet, in the providential way things happen, those abandoned babies gave birth to a movement.

Texas enacted the first statewide Safe Haven law in 1999. It gave anonymity and legal protection to mothers who voluntarily surrendered their infants at designated places within 60 days of birth, as long as there was no sign of abuse. Other states followed suit with their own versions, sometimes called Baby Moses or Safe Surrender laws. In 2000, the federal government passed the Infant Adoption Awareness Act. This provided funding for states that passed Safe Haven-type legislation and agreed to provide education and public service campaigns.

Today, all 50 states, Washington DC, Guam and Puerto Rico have some form of Safe Haven law. Some are better than others, but they all share the same basic elements:

- A legal guardian can surrender a baby who is a specified number of days' old.
- The baby must be delivered to a designated location.
- Varying levels of conditional immunity are assured.
- Most states' laws also streamline placing an infant into foster care.

### The Downsides

The funding provided by the federal government specifies that Safe Havens cannot be touted as alternatives to abortion.

The anonymity provided by these laws prevents gathering the social, demographic and economic data that could provide invaluable insights as to who these women are and their motivations.

We do have disturbing data about the risk of failing to offer an accessible alternative to desperate parents. A CDC study claims infant homicide is the thirteenth leading cause of death among children under one year of age. Another study found that the probability of infant homicide in the first 24 hours of life is 10 times greater than at any other age, and the mother is most often the perpetrator.

### Make Good Laws Better

Since 1999, Safe Haven law have resulted in an estimated 4,100 to 4,709 infants safely surrendered. Proponents suggest some improvements to the laws might encourage greater participation:

- Expand the surrender period. California only allows 72 hours. North Dakota allows up to a year.
- Increase surrender sites to include more locations such as adoption agency offices, college campus police stations, staffed churches, etc.
- Modify the definition of "unharmful" to exclude parental substance abuse/drug addiction.
- Extend the timeline to reestablish parental rights. California allows 14 days, Alaska terminates all parental rights at time of surrender.
- Expand public education of Safe Haven laws and locations.
- Implement provisions for state databases to collect and share data.

Most of the information in this article was taken from Ohio Wesleyan University honors student Kolby Brock's paper, "A Study of Safe Haven Baby Laws in the United States: One Life Saved or Too Many Unknowns to Evaluate?" (2023)

SAFELY SURRENDER YOUR BABY



[www.babysafe.ca.gov](http://www.babysafe.ca.gov)

# FACES OF GRACE



Led by Robin Segarra, the children sang during the Christmas Eve service.



We have been blessed to celebrate new life in Christ Jesus recently: The Holy Baptism of Sheldon Lee (above) and Varun Pillai takes his First Communion (below).



Andrew Gertz performed "Of the Father's Love Begotten" with Dale for a recent Sunday anthem.



The boys and girls are starting to fill the steps during the Children's Homily time in the liturgy .



Amélie Marie Lehman was baptized into the faith on Dec 31st with parents Carl and Elsy. Her godparents are Jeremy and Alma Fullam.



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Director of Parish Music  
Dale Sorenson  
dalesorenson2@gmail.com

Church Secretary  
Gretchen Jordan  
gjordan@gracesandiego.com

Sunday Divine Service  
8:00 am & 10:30 am  
Sunday School on Recess  
9:30 to 10:15 am  
Nursery available

SHANNON CARREIRO  
Council President

RICHARD SEGARRA  
Treasurer

DANIEL PAYLOR  
Secretary

HEATH RUSSERT  
Trustee

KELLEY SCHMIDT  
Fellowship/Activities

JOHN BARBER  
Members-at-Large

CARL LEHMAN  
Education

TED NILSEN  
Head Elder

JEREMY FULLAM  
STEVE HOLLMAN  
JASON HUNTLEY  
DARYL NEWTON  
Elders

## PRAYERS

### PRAYERS FOR STRENGTH AND HEALING

Dave, Bill, Phil, Mike, John, Heidi, Edward, Daniel, Nancy,  
Jan, Kathy, and Joe

### PRAYERS FOR OUR MISSIONARIES & SEMINARIANS

Rev. Dr. John Bombaro, Rev. Dr. Tardelli Voss,  
and Vicar Rowan Turner

### PRAYERS FOR OUR MILITARY MEMBERS

Rev. Mario Ancira, Micah Burge, Tajy George, Daniel Fohey,  
Nathan Farish, Matthew Morgan, Jeff & Jordan Gruetzmacher

### PRAYERS FOR THOSE UNABLE TO ATTEND

Joyce Rochester

## BIRTHDAYS

### FEBRUARY

12- Nathan Russert  
15- Gloria Berge  
17- Gretchen Jordan  
27- Laura Latham  
27- Randy Houts  
27- Georgia Thompson

### MARCH

4 - Ted Nilsen  
19- Kirschten Huntley  
30- Bong Hwan Lee

If we missed your birthday, please  
contact the church office.

## SHROVE TUESDAY DINNER

February 13 | 6:00 p.m.

NEW ORLEANS POTLUCK  
LIVE JAZZ BAND

THE FEAST BEFORE THE FAST

February 14, 2023

ASH  
WEDNESDAY

Noon & 6:30pm



CONNECT WITH US