

Welcome in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ!
St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Irvine (LCMS)

"Ash Wednesday"

Wednesday, March 5, 2025

7:00 P.M.

Senior Pastor: Rev. Dr. Alfonso O. Espinosa, Ph.D.

Assistant Pastor: Rev. Dr. Steven P. Mueller, Ph.D.

Organist: Gerald Dahlin

Choir Director: Mark Howard

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Concordia University Irvine – Spectrum Campus

16355 Laguna Canyon Rd

Irvine, CA 92618

Mission

To foster the freedom and love we share in Christ to the community by nurturing faith in Him through tangible expressions of God's grace.

Vision

To share the Truth and Love of Christ to all ages, cultures, and backgrounds.

Service Offerings

- Sunday Divine Service at 9:30 am
 - Fellowship in Café at 10:30 am and Adult Bible Study at 11:00 am
- Wednesday Lenten Midweek Services at 7:00 pm
- Holy Thursday, April 17th at 7:00 pm
- Good Friday, April 18th at 7:00 pm
- Easter Sunday Divine Services at 8:00 am and 10:30 am
 - Easter Fellowship Breakfast in between services at 9:30 am

Welcome to Saint Paul's

We praise and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ as He comes to serve and bless us through His Word and Sacraments. We follow the ancient liturgy which draws from the Word of God to order and guide our worship. Its biblical structure has been used in the Christian Church before any denominations within Christianity existed. Our worship emphasizes order, beauty, and reverence. We also celebrate the Holy Eucharist and receive

the body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. We are excited about what the Lord is doing at St. Paul's, and it is our great joy to serve you!

This is the Saving Gospel/The Good News:

God sent His Son Jesus Christ to take your sin upon Himself and Jesus gave to you His perfect righteousness and holiness. In Christ, it is a fact, and it is reality that your sins are forgiven, covered by His blood. And because Christ defeated death, you too – as you trust in Him alone – have eternal life. This is the Good News. It is so powerful because the Holy Spirit works through it to create and sustain faith in our hearts to hold to our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel costs Jesus everything but costs us nothing. It is yours. It is God's GIFT to you. Hold to it and know that you ARE (present tense) saved from sin, death, and the power of the devil; that you are saved TO (present tense) the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation! That's the Christian, a forgiven sinner who lives for God and loves their neighbor. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Prayer Before Worship

O Lord, my creator, redeemer, and comforter, as I come to worship You in spirit and in truth, I humbly pray that You would open my heart to the preaching of Your Word so that I may repent of my sins, believe in Jesus Christ as my only Savior, and grow in grace and holiness. Hear me for the sake of His name. Amen.

+ In the Name of Jesus +

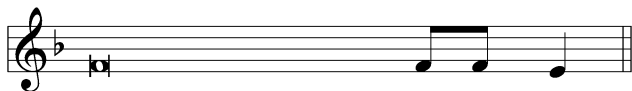
Imposition of ashes will begin at 6:30 pm

Prelude

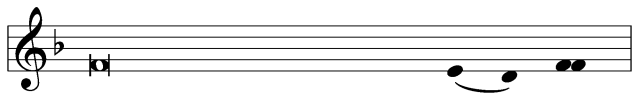
Service of Light

Stand

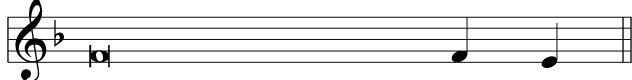




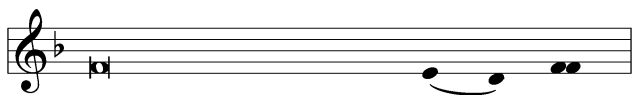
C the light no darkness can o - ver - come.



L Stay with us, Lord, for it is eve - ning,



C and the day is almost o - ver.



L Let Your light scatter the dark - ness



C and il - lu - mine Your Church.

Phos Hilaron

LSB 244



L Joy - ous light of glo - ry:



C of the im - mor - tal Fa - ther; heav - en - ly, ho - ly,



bless - ed Je - sus Christ. We have come to the



set - ting of the sun, and we look to the eve - ning light.



We sing to God, the Fa - ther, Son, and Ho - ly Spir - it:

You are wor - thy of be - ing praised with pure voic - es for -
 ev - er. O Son of God, O Giv - er of life:
 the u - ni - verse pro - claims Your glo - ry.

Thanksgiving for Light

LSB 245

L Blessèd are You, O Lord our God, king of the u - ni - verse,
 who led Your people Israel by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of
 fire by night. Enlighten our darkness by the light of Your Christ;
 may His Word be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path;
 for You are mer - ci - ful, and You love Your whole cre - a - tion
 and we, Your creatures, glo - ri - fy You, Father, Son, and Ho - ly Spir - it.
C A - men.

Sit

Psalmody

Psalm 141

LSB 245



C Let my prayer rise be - fore You as in - cense,



the lift - ing up of my hands as the eve - ning sac - ri - fice.



I O Lord, I call to You; come to me quick - ly; hear my voice



when I cry to You. **C** Let my prayer rise be - fore You as in - cense,



the lift - ing up of my hands as the eve - ning sac - ri - fice.



II Set a watch be - fore my mouth, O Lord, and guard the door of my lips.



I Let not my heart in - cline to an - y e - vil thing;



let me not be oc - cu - pied in wick - ed - ness with e - vil - do - ers.



II But my eyes are turned to You, O God; in You I take ref - uge.



Strip me not of my life. **C** Glo - ry be to the Fa - ther and



to the Son and to the Ho-ly Spir-it; as it was in
the be-gin-ning, is now, and will be for-ev-er. A-men.
Let my prayer rise be-fore You as in-cense,
the lift-ing up of my hands as the eve-ning sac-ri-fice.

- L** Let us pray.
Let the incense of our repentant prayer ascend before You, O Lord, and let Your loving-kindness descend on us that, with purified minds, we may sing Your praises with the Church on earth and the whole heavenly host and may glorify You forever.
- G** Amen.

Office Hymn: 615 When in the Hour of Deepest Need

Readings

Hosea Reading

Hosea 6:1–3 and 12:6

- L** A reading from Hosea,
 - ¹“Come, let us return to the LORD;
for he has torn us, that he may heal us;
he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.
 - ²After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him.
 - ³Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD;
his going out is sure as the dawn;
he will come to us as the showers,
as the spring rains that water the earth.”
 - ⁶“So you, by the help of your God, return,
hold fast to love and justice,
and wait continually for your God.”

L O Lord, have mercy on us.

C **Thanks be to God.**

Joel Reading

Joel 2:12–13

L A reading from Joel, chapter 2.

¹²“Yet even now,” declares the LORD,
“return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
¹³and rend your hearts and not your garments.”

Return to the LORD, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
and he relents over disaster.

L O Lord, have mercy on us.

C **Thanks be to God.**

L In many and various ways, God spoke to His people of old by the prophets.

C **But now in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son.**

Sermon

“A Call to Return”

Sermon 1 of 6 “Hosea & Joel: A Call to Return”

Pastor Espinosa

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever felt that you have gone too far? So far did you go, that you exceeded the power of God’s forgiveness, healing, and restoration? After all, you knew better, and yet you sinned anyway. You grieved the Holy Spirit, and you were cut to the core, knowing that you sinned against God. And now, you wonder if there is any grace left for you? In the meantime, whenever we are in such a frame of mind and heart, there is the instantaneous attack of vultures that come upon us, as if we were dead bodies lying on the ground...they come to further accuse you and me to try to make certain that we lose all confidence.

Our losing hope can feel like we are already left for dead and condemnation, and then the vultures come just to kick us while we

are down, to do their best to finish us off: to finally convince us that – once again – we are too far gone.

The world says, “Are you kidding? *You*, a child of God?! You know that you love this passing world. You know you are of the world.” And then there is the devil. His specialty is accusation against us. He strives to keep all your sin, all your failure, all your contrary to God thoughts, words, and deeds at the forefront of your conscience and he accuses you 24/7 to doubt who you really are and to whom you really belong. He blasts you: “God does not love you. God does not forgive you. Not you, because you are a worthy piece of trash.” This, the devil revels in. He wants to destroy any confidence we have in Christ. Then, our consciences will assuredly condemn us. That is when all hope is lost.

And when this happens, when even our own conscience condemns us, when all we can see is our sin, then we are repelled from the Word and Sacraments of Christ. “Why even bother? I am too far gone. It is not going to work for me.” Then, we are tempted to be like Judas Iscariot and give up. This is always the goal of our sin, the world, and the devil.

During this battle for our mind, heart, and soul, we are given this word from St. John:

¹⁹By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; ²⁰for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. ²¹Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God;

What St. John, however, put in this extremely important New Testament Scripture for us to give us hope in the face of self-condemnation and real condemnation for our sin by God, the Minor Prophets in the Old Testament emphasize. They are a gold mine for the greatest hope and gospel for condemned sinners, for ostracized rebels, and for hopeless wanderers like you and me.

Anyone who says that the Old Testament is not rich in the Gospel, has not really read nor studied the Old Testament.

The minor prophets, the last 12 books of the Old Testament, were written during times of great tumult for God's people. The Kingdom of Israel had been divided on account of sin run amok and idolatry, the worship of false gods. And for tonight as we seek spiritual renewal during the 40 days of Lent, we have the powerful first two books of Hosea and Joel. Hosea was raised up by God to be a prophet for the northern kingdom of Israel which had been thoroughly led astray to worship false gods, and Joel raised up by God to be a prophet for the southern kingdom also warned by God against their slide towards compromise and the loss of their identity and confidence. Both these books are invaluable for us today.

One way that Hosea is so fantastic in treating our battered consciences is because it accepts the truth of the fact that we are indeed worthy of condemnation and total separation from God. Instead of trying to be a coaxing counselor that would try to gently back away from the ledge, the Holy Spirit through Hosea goes the other way: "You are right! You have gone so far that you are no longer the people of God!" You see, God never waters down our sin, but He permits us to see its devastation so that when we are made low, then we will get over the foolish and hard-headed thought that we can fix ourselves. We can't, but there is one who can.

So, with this devastating diagnosis in Hosea that our sin has absolutely alienated us from God, the LORD continues to speak through the prophet about a new work, a radical work, a bringing back to life work. And this is the last thing our sin, the world, and the devil want you and me to hear: God raises the dead. God restores those separated. God brings back adulterous idolators and makes them children of God. That is, we can say to the devil, "Yeah, you're right, I'm too far gone. In fact, you must go further than that devil. I'm already dead, because I have died in Christ. But Christ has done for me what I could never do for myself, He has raised me. He has given me a new life. He has made me a child of God after I was no longer a child of God."

Hosea records this prophecy in chapter 1:

1 The word of the LORD that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.

Hosea's Wife and Children

²When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." ³So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

⁴And the LORD said to him, "Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. ⁵And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."

⁶She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the LORD said to him, "Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. ⁷But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen."

⁸When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. ⁹And the LORD said, "Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God."

¹⁰ Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God." ¹¹And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

I want you to notice something here. There are three children mentioned in this prophecy at Hosea chapter 1: there is at verse 3 a son given to Hosea, and with this son judgment is announced upon Israel for their "whoredom" which is word describing their spiritual adultery, turning from their true Husband-God to false gods, false

lovers, and worshipping them instead of the true God. That is, the first son goes into what comes next. Then, comes the birth of the second children, a daughter, she is the one the first child to be claimed by rebellion, unbelief, and condemnation. Her name is "No Mercy!" How absolutely terrifying, the sin of Israel was so great that God's mercy was cut off. And then comes the third child, a second son – remember that the first child was also a son – and this third child, this second son is called "Not My People." Again, terrible judgment against sin, the sin of Israel. And yet...and yes, this is the big "and yet" piece which is the Gospel here, this first son is also associated with a restoration that will come through Judah. God is going to do a miraculous work and change lives, so that the second and third children will be given new lives. Hosea 1:10 says, "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbers. And in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' it shall be said to them, 'Children of the living God.'" Again, it is as if God raises the dead. And in fact, He does.

So we begin to see the Holy Spirit's ministry: He uses the Law to condemn. We are cut to the heart this Lenten season, so much so we doubt if we could ever have spiritual renewal, but then He gives us the Gospel to revive us: not to pretty up the old that has been drowned in Holy Baptism and crucified with Christ, but to raise up in us a new life, a brand new life that condemnation cannot touch, that sin cannot mar, and that death cannot hold down. We can therefore say to the Accuser, "Yes, you're right, I'm too far gone, so far gone in fact that God joined me to Jesus so that I have now already died with Him, and He has raised up a new child, the one wrapped in righteousness, and one who is now called a child of the living God.

Lent dear Christians is about this renewal which is a new life that is given you not to rehabilitate the old life, but to trade it in for a new life. And this new life is what RETURNING is all about. God returns you to Himself. God returns you to Himself as a new creation.

So, Hosea also spoke these words at chapter 6:

Israel and Judah Are Unrepentant

6 “Come, let us return to the LORD;

for he has torn us, that he may heal us;

he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.

2 After two days he will revive us;

on the third day he will raise us up,

that we may live before him.

6 “So you, by the help of your God, return,

hold fast to love and justice,

and wait continually for your God.”

And Hosea prophesied at chapter 14:

A Plea to Return to the LORD

14 Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God,

for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.

2 Take with you words

and return to the LORD;

say to him,

“Take away all iniquity; ... [and God said to His people]

4 I will heal their apostasy;

I will love them freely,

for my anger has turned from them.

Judgment also came into the territory that the prophet Joel was assigned to the southern kingdom of Judah. They too would know judgment and would be invaded by Assyria and then Babylon. He wrote at Joel 2:1-2: **“Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,**

for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near,

2 a day of darkness and gloom,

a day of clouds and thick darkness!”

And yet, in the face of this horrifying judgment against sin, the LORD gives this message. What message? The theme of our proclamation tonight: “Return!” And here, the idea is given teeth...it describes the grace of God working upon us and giving

“return” practical expression. Here is Joel chapter 2 again, this time picking it up at verse 12 and following:

Return to the Lord

¹² **“Yet even now,” declares the Lord,
“return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
¹³ and rend your hearts and not your garments.”
Return to the Lord your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
and he relents over disaster.**

²¹ **“Fear not, O land;
be glad and rejoice,
for the Lord has done great things!**

²⁵ **I will restore to you the years
that the swarming locust has eaten,
the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,
my great army, which I sent among you.**

²⁷ **You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel,
and that I am the Lord your God and there is none else.
And my people shall never again be put to
shame.**

²⁸ **“And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.**

²⁹ **Even on the male and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit.**

As I said, here is the practical picture of returning according to this word from Joel the prophet:

FIRST: Our experience of returning is marked by fasting, weeping, and mourning. This sounds like what you might do at a funeral. And this what we do at our funeral. This is how we live in our

baptism. We mourn our sin and we weep that it has cost us so dearly, "for the wages of sin is death," but as we return to our baptism, which is not only a funeral, but a resurrection because not only were you joined to the death of Christ, but you were also joined to the life of Christ/His resurrection!

SECOND: We rend our hearts: no longer are we claimed by the old me, but confess it: "I am new creation, a forgiven and raised child of God!" ...and in this condition, in this new life, the LORD causes us to return to Him through faith in Jesus. And here God wants us to be sure how He receives us as we return to Him:

Joel 2:13: **Return to the Lord your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
and he relents over disaster.**

THIRD: The LORD desires that we "Fear not!" (Joel 2:21) and that we "be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things!" (Joel 2:21) He has given you dear Christians new lives!

FOURTH: He therefore teaches that you have been restored, though you were once destroyed.

FIFTH: Live knowing that He is in our midst. He is with us and because He is, we will not be put to shame. Again, when the devil accuses, you can, "You're right, but now I have Jesus!"

SIXTH: He has poured out His Spirit upon us. The Holy Spirit does His saving work by keeping Christ before our eyes of faith every, single day through the Word and Sacraments!

SEVENTH: Live in this "RETURNING" every, single day. He has caused you to be returned and He has received you back into His loving arms and He has indeed forgotten your sins. Let us now bask in our new lives and be spiritually renewed this Lenten season. By His grace, you have returned!

Stand

Hymn:

434 Lamb of God Most Holy

Sit

Offering

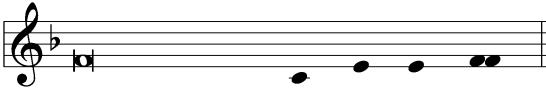
Prayer

Stand

Litany (Lent)

LSB 249

The congregation's response may begin just as the leader's petition ends so that the word "Lord" is sung simultaneously by both leader and congregation.



L In peace let us pray to the Lord:



C Lord, have mer - cy.

L For the peace from above and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

L For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

L For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

L For [*names of synodical and district presidents*], for all pastors in Christ, for all servants of the Church, and for all the people, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

L For [*name of president or monarch*], for all public servants, for the government and those who protect us, that they may be upheld and strengthened in every good deed, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

L For those who work to bring peace, justice, health, and protection in this and every place, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

L For those who bring offerings, those who do good works in this congregation, those who toil, those who sing, and all the people here

present who await from the Lord great and abundant mercy, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

L For favorable weather, for an abundance of the fruits of the earth, and for peaceful times, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

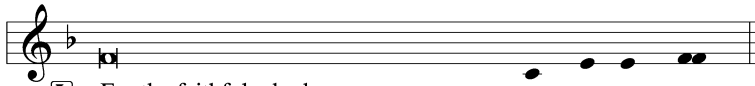
L For our deliverance from all affliction, wrath, danger, and need, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

L For . . . [additional bids for prayer may be inserted here] . . . let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

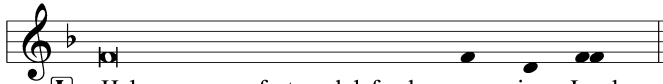
The prayers then continue:



L For the faithful who have gone before us and are with Christ, let us give thanks to the Lord:

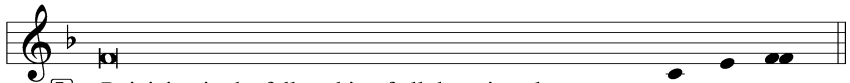


C Thanks be to God.



L Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gra - cious Lord.

Silence for individual prayer may follow.



L Rejoicing in the fellowship of all the saints, let us commend ourselves, one another, and our whole life to Christ, our Lord:



C To You, O Lord.

Collect for Peace

L O God, from whom come all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works, give to us, Your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey Your commandments and also that we, being defended from the fear of our enemies, may live in peace and

quietness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.



C A - men.

Lord's Prayer

LSB 251

L Taught by our Lord and trusting His promises, we are bold to pray:

C **Our Father who 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 trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.

Stand

Benedicamus

LSB 252



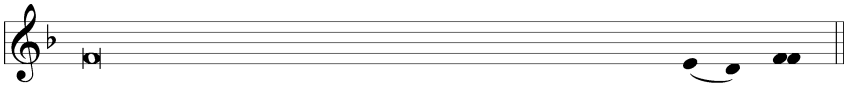
L Let us bless the Lord.



C Thanks be to God.

Benediction

LSB 252



P The almighty and merciful Lord,
the Father, the ✠ Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and pre - serve you.



C A - men.

Postlude

Acknowledgments

Evening Prayer from Lutheran Service Book

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Coming Up:

**Spiritual Renewal According to the 12 Minor Prophets
Wednesdays at 7:00 PM | March 5 – April 9**

Join us for a six-week sermon series exploring the timeless messages of the 12 Minor Prophets. Each week, we will uncover how these prophetic voices call us to deeper faith and spiritual renewal.

Series Schedule:

Date	Prophets & Theme	Date	Prophets & Theme
March 5	Hosea & Joel: A Call to Return	March 26	Nahum & Habakkuk: Trusting God’s Plan
March 12	Amos & Obadiah: Justice & Humility	April 2	Zephaniah & Haggai: Renewing Our Devotion
March 19	Jonah & Micah: Mercy & Obedience	April 9	Zechariah & Malachi: Hope & Restoration

Come and be refreshed through the Word as we seek renewal in our walk with God.

Mercy: Love Throughout Life Conference

Join the LCMS National Mission for this special conference on **March 14–15, 2025!** Attend in person at one of three locations or watch online. A **Spanish track** will also be available online.

Registration Details:

- **Standard & Online Registration:** ends on March 7th
- **Students at Concordia universities/seminaries:** Free with valid email

Space is limited! Register at bit.ly/MercyLovePSD. For more info, email lifeministry@lcms.org.

