

# *Straight from the "Hart"*

March 27, 2022

**Fourth Sunday of Lent - Laetare**



**Welcome** Thank you for coming or tuning in to worship with us at Harland United Methodist Church. It is a great place to be on this bright Spring morning...

This is **Laetare Sunday**, Laetare means "rejoice", and is taken from the opening words of a traditional service -- words which come from Isaiah, spoken as an imperative (a command) -- "Rejoice Jerusalem, and come together all you who love her. Rejoice with joy, you who have been in sorrow." Isaiah is telling those exiled in Babylon to rejoice because the day is coming when they will be returning to live in Jerusalem.

Likewise, we who are observing Lenten practices are encouraged to take a break to celebrate even as we make our Lenten sacrifices; because we have reached the **halfway point** of the season and the day is soon coming when we will pass through the cross and experience the joy of resurrection. Therefore, on this Sunday, the **deep violet** of repentance and preparation is replaced, or in our case, is accented with a touch of the **less austere (lighter) rose**.

And this is why this Sunday is also known as "**Refreshment Sunday**", as do some call the third Sunday of the Advent season before Christmas, which is when we reach the halfway point of that season, and we use the pink candle called "joy".

An exuberant 2nd grader once asked his teacher, "How do you spell joy?" The teacher

suspected it was more than a spelling question, so replied, "Tell me, how do you spell joy?" He answered, J is for Jesus, Y is for you, and O is like a zero, which means nothing. So when there is nothing between Jesus and you, you have joy.

There may not be a lot to be joyful about in our world today, we may find many things to block joy out like clouds sometimes block the sun. But when we realize that joy is not found in stuff or in pleasant circumstances, but by being in good connection with our heavenly Father. So today, let's joy and re-joy-ce... rejoice.



## Opening Prayer

Gracious Father, accept our gifts of resources, time, talents, and witness, as we answer your call to be a blessing to others. For you have been good to us, and we have gathered because we want to express our gratitude, to celebrate your salvation, and to call on your name. You live with and within us, and we invite you again to feed our spirits as we worship you. In Jesus name, Amen.

## Call to Worship

Lay Reader: Come, rejoice, all who are drawn to follow God, whose days are spent in doing good -- and nights spent in praise and prayer. Come, be refreshed from the weariness of life to serve God and to know God. Find happy hours to join the heavenly powers in the new, everlasting song

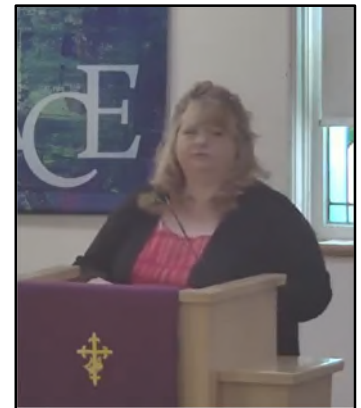
(Inspired by Charles Wesley's "How Happy, Gracious Lord, Are We")

Music Leader: Continuing in the spirit of "rejoicing refreshment", Let's sing

### Music (vv 1,2,4) Rejoice, the Lord is King

Music Leader: You may be seated. While our journey is nearing the joy of Easter, it is still Lent and we cannot arrive at resurrection until we go through the cross with all of its demands put upon Christ, and on us. Let's sing

### Music When I Survey the Wondrous Cross



**Theme** Once upon a time in a land far away, there was great poverty. Only the rich could manage without great problems. Three of those rich men, each with their own entourage, were traveling in a convoy when they came across a very poor village, which provoked strong reactions in these three rich men.

The first took all the gold and jewels from his wagons and shared them among the villagers and wished them the best of luck and continued his journey.

The second saw this but felt that the village was so isolated that money among themselves would not do them much good. He gathered all the food and drink among his group and distributed it fairly among all the people. The quantity he gathered and gave would last for quite some time. Then he continued his journey.

The third saw the poverty, but then continued through the village without stopping, and then raced on ahead of the groups of the first two rich men. As those two

watched him go, they condemned him for lacking decency and compassion, and they continued their casual journey through the country.

Three days later, the two saw the third man who was now traveling quickly, but now in the opposite direction. His wagons, previously full of gold and valuables, were not full of farming implements, tools, and sacks of seeds and grain. He was returning to the poor village in hopes of giving them an opportunity to provide a longer-term solution to their poverty, and helping them do it for themselves.

(Adapted from "A Village on the Road" by Pedro Pablo Sacristán)

Recently, we heard that some give and serve only so others can see their generosity, and others serve and give to feel better about themselves, and some weren't concerned about what others thought, and they gave and served in whatever ways they are gifted and graced, and out of gratitude to God and compassion for others -- hoping to make a positive difference in their lives of others. Paul writes to the Philippians encouraging this kind of giving, this kind of investing of our time and vision and lives in each other. To inspire them, he quotes what was probably a hymn of the early church and then follows it an assurance that God makes it possible.

### **Responsive Reading (L: Lay Reader, C - Congregation)**

**L:** If our experience of following Christ encourages us, if his love comforts us and has made any difference in our lives, if being in a community of the Spirit, with its kindness and compassion, means anything to us; then complete our joy by making this hope come true:

**C: We will live together in harmony and love each other as deep-spirited friends.**

**L:** Don't act from motives of rivalry or personal vanity. Be humble toward one another, valuing others more than ourselves.

**C: We will not think only of our own interests. We will learn to see things from other people's points of view and look out for the good of others and their interests.**

**L:** In our relationships with each other, let Christ's attitude be our example as to how to think and act.

**C: We will think of ourselves the way Christ thought of himself.**

**L:** He always had the nature of God, but he did not cling to his prerogatives -- the exclusive rights and advantages of his status -- as God's equal.

**C: Instead, he willingly stripped himself of the privileges of deity.**

L: He made himself nothing. He took on the very nature of a servant and was born as a mortal man.

**C: He humbled himself by living a life of complete, selfless obedience.**

L: He did this even though it led to his crucifixion on the cross.... Therefore, dearest friends, let's be energetic in our life of salvation.

**C: We will live with reverent awe and sensitive responsibility before God.**

L: For it is God's energy working deep within you.

**C: He gives us the will and the power to act in order to achieve his good purpose.**

Inspired from Philippians 2:1-8,12-13  
(NIV, NLT, PHILLIPS, GNT, MSG)

**Special Music Intro** The seasonal singers are going to come at this time... The author of today's special music, F. Bland Tucker, was an Episcopal priest who had a keen interest in hymnody, served on joint commission that produced the Protestant Episcopal Hymnal, and served as a language consultant on its newer version. In addition to original hymns, Tucker contributed several translations of early Greek hymns from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, and the song we are singing is based on the hymn Paul quoted in our reading...



### **All Praise to Thee, for Thou, O King Divine**

All praise be yours, for you, O King divine, your rightful glory freely did resign  
that in our darkened hearts your grace might shine. Alleluia! Alleluia!

You came to us in lowliness of thought;  
by you the outcast and the poor were sought,  
And by your death was God's salvation wrought. Alleluia! Alleluia!

O Jesus, let your mind within us be, for you were servant that we might be free  
And humbly stooped to death on Calvary. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Let ev'ry tongue confess with one accord  
 in heav'n and earth that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
 And God the Father be by all adored. Alleluia! Alleluia!

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Music Leader: Jesus became a servant that we might become free -- free to know him in all of his glory, power, and love, so that we can love, trust and serve him with all our hearts. Let's prepare for prayer by singing

**Music (vv 1,3,4)**

**To Know You More**

To know you, in all of your glory, to love you with all that I am,  
 With all of my heart, Lord, this is my prayer: To know you more.

To know you, in all of your power, to trust you with all that I am,  
 With all of my heart, Lord, this is my prayer: To know you more

To know you, in all of your mercy, to serve you with all that I am,  
 With all of my heart, Lord, this is my prayer: To know you more.

CCLI # 2561297

## Prayers

Almighty God, you are our hiding place – to whom we retreat, our protection in times of trouble. We have just read and sang how deep is your commitment to us. We praise you during this Lenten season, for we realize you emptied yourself, dashed your doubts, faced your fears, and was broken for us that we may find hope, peace, freedom and life as we trust in you. Inspired by that confidence, we faithfully pray to you while you are present, and you bless us with forgiveness and surround us with deliverance. You lovingly watch and teach us in the way we should go. Help us not to be stubbornly unwise and try to go our own way. We rejoice when we come to you, for even in the midst of overwhelming distress and sorrow, we are surrounded by your unfailing love. You are full of compassion, gracious and fair. You are good to us. You save us, rescue us, comfort us, renew and refresh us -- you keep us moving forward even as you give rest for our souls. You have freed us to serve you just as your servants who went before us. Therefore, we thank you and call on your name, here and everywhere we go, and we lift our requests before you. **Praises and Petitions** \* We continue to pray for Bert Honour's friend Dennis, with cancer, \* for the Ukraine, \* for Jan Martins' son Ray, who is hospitalized with stomach issues, \* and today we dedicate this quilt for Jan Martin's neighbor Pierre Koudelka, who will be having surgery for cancer next month.

**QUILT** Lord of Mercy and Father of Comfort, we humbly come and lift before you Pierre Koudelka. You are the one we turn to for help in moments of weakness and times of need. We ask that you be with Pierre today and in the weeks ahead as he faces uncertainty. We know that you are always present in our lives and that your love transcends all tragedy, illness and pain, but we also know that in difficult times, a physical reminder can bring hope, healing and peace to someone who is hurting. Therefore, we pray that you will use this quilt will bring comfort and confidence and strength to Pierre as he wraps it around him and feels its warmth, and is so doing, may he also sense the warmth of our prayers and your love. Lord, you sustain us and restore us, and so we ask that you turn weakness into strength, suffering into compassion, sorrow into joy, and pain into comfort. We pray this in the name of Jesus your Son, who taught us to pray... **LORD'S PRAYER**



**Series Review and Video**

Lay Reader: We continue the series on the foundational building blocks of establishing and maintaining a rock-solid relationship with God. We began by **seeing** Jesus and his mission on earth. We then learn to grow in **knowing** God personally. We do this by carefully **listening** to him, and by **speaking** to him as a loving Father. This week we add the brick of **servicing**. (See picture on page 1)

[Pause while pastor places a brick on the table] We humbly receive Jesus and what he offers us, and with that, we learn to serve others. **[Video here]**

**Words** – The words of the video say: What does it mean to serve God? It begins by allowing Jesus to serve you, allowing him to meet you right where you are, to cleanse you of the dirt and

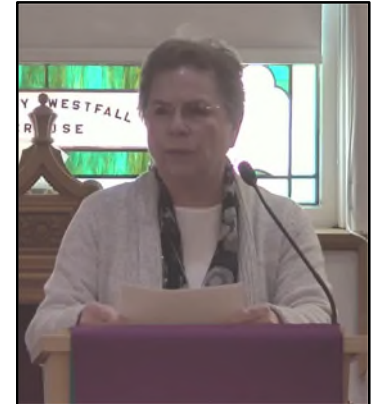


filth. The Christian life is learning to receive the grace, the love, the mercy of Jesus. The second part is learning to give it away to others. It is not just about knowing what to do, it's about actually putting that into practice. It is about humbling yourself

enough to serve somebody else. You were created to serve those around you. You are a child of God, adopted into his family, you are his masterpiece.

## Introduction to Bible Reading

We already heard in the responsive reading what Jesus gave up to serve humanity on earth, and how we are encouraged to follow his example. In his final days with his disciples, Jesus again sets a pattern of loving service for his followers.



**Bible Reading** Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and he continued to love them right to the very end. By supper-time, the devil had already put the thought of betraying Jesus in the mind of Judas Iscariot... Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. [Therefore], he rose from the table, took off and set aside his robe, picked up a towel and fastened it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.

When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday it will be clear to you."

"No," Peter protested, "you will never ever wash my feet!"

Jesus replied, "Unless you let me wash you, you won't belong to me."

Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!"

Jesus replied, "A person who has bathed only needs to wash his feet to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not every one of you." For Jesus knew who was betraying him. That is what he meant when he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and went back to his place at the table. He sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, because that is what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you must be ready to wash each other's feet. I have given you a pattern to follow. Do as I have done to you. I tell you the truth, a servant is not greater than his master. Nor is the messenger more important

than the one who sends the message. Once you understand these things, God will bless you (you will find your happiness) in doing them.

John 13:1b-17 (NLT, MSG, PHILLIPS)

Music Leader: Jesus showed them, and us -- through dramatic actions -- what it means to serve. Now let's stand before the sermon and sing that same imagery...

**Music (vv 1,3,5) Jesu, Jesu**

### **Sermon Established: By Serving**

Back in the 1920s, there was a Michigan teen-ager who was expected to grow up and carry on the noble profession of the family farm. But his true love was engineering and building things. In those days, furniture just sat there. It didn't move around much. He created a chair with a back and seat that simultaneously moved into a reclining position. He eventually developed a lever that kicked out a footrest from the front of the chair. He and his cousin went around to department stores and asked them to sell them. People fell in love with this fancy new technology. Whenever Ed Shoemaker was asked about his company, he said, "Well, I guess we did pretty good." About a decade ago, at the age of 90, he was still actively involved in running the company. One night he enjoyed an evening with friends, went home and peacefully left this world resting on his creation. The company continues. In 2020, his chairs were sold in 10 countries, there were 9,500 employees, held 200 patents on styles and mechanisms, and its revenue was 1.7 billion. Start with basically nothing, market what you love doing, climb the ladder of success, and leave an impact on the world. (He made us all "lazy" 😊 – No that wasn't part of the story.) It is the stereotypical American dream.

**Climb the Ladder**

In Jesus' day, the "Roman dream" wasn't all that different. Work hard and climb within or even from one grouping to the next. It was as normal a desire for them as it is for many of us. Servants longed to be free, freed servants longed to become citizens, citizens longed to move up into those groups who had land and wealth and power, who in turn longed to be a part of the Roman Senate, and some of them even desired the highest place of Caesar. Moving from one economic grouping to another. It is more natural and fluid here than it was in Rome where it was controlled by an oppressive hierarchy, a society that routinely squashed the dreams of most anyone who wasn't already born among the powerful (or seen as



a potential threat to the powerful – they were endangered as well).

So, when Jesus gathered his disciples for that final Passover meal together, they may well

**Jesus has absolute authority**

have expected they were also entering a war room. The expectation was that Rome was teaming up with the religious hierarchy to go head-to-head and toe-to-toe with the Son of God, and they were there to hear the final plans laid out for their glorious destiny. Of course, God was going to win. For them, that destiny was obvious, resonating with their personal desires and expectations and experiences: The disciples would have highlighted in their minds various Scriptures from their Bible, the Old Testament, and confirmed their excited conclusion -- that Jesus would bring certain victory, would assume his throne and all would bow and confess his kingship.

We readers are tipped off almost immediately that this event may not play out as they expected, that it may end differently. Jesus is going to leave the world, return to God, and that he loved his disciples to the end (which meant there was an end coming). We are told that there is a betrayer in the room. But then we are also reminded that Jesus knew the Father had put all things under his power -- everything from the lowliest servant to Caesar himself and beyond. Jesus is at the top of the ladder - the position of which others only dream... and there is this glimmer of hope -- maybe this is the way it will play out...

But then it says, BECAUSE he had all authority and knew it, he got up wrapped a towel around his waist and began to wash their feet. Unless we've heard a lot about this before, we have trouble relating to this event because our culture has not retained this common practice of hospitality. We just kick off our shoes (or don't) and just keep right on a walking. We need to understand their practice in their culture.

Generally, what happens is that when you enter into someone's home, or into a building, the host would have a basin of water available

**Washing Feet (Purpose of) WF(Po)  
Act of humility**

for you to pour over your own feet to remove the dust and dirt and manure and whatever else your sandaled feet may have picked up as you walked those fields and dirt paths and roads. Sometimes a servant was provided to do it for you. This act was so disgusting that a Jewish commentary on the Law forbade a Jews, even Jewish slaves, to be ordered to do it.

But sometimes out of loving devotion, a student may choose to wash the feet of their rabbi. Or a woman who was engaged to be married may offer to wash her man's feet when he came home, for his feet belonged to her and no other (even a servant) should be allowed to touch them. So they did it as an act of love and connection.

**WF (Po) Act of love**

As the disciples entered this night, they had just recently had arguments trying to maneuver themselves up the pecking order to be the most important of the disciples. No one was about to stoop to wash their own or anyone else's feet.

The meal began, which for Passover, was typically done by laying on couches on your left side with feet up, supporting your head with your left hand and using your right to reach the dishes of food set on the low tables beside the couches. You've probably seen that imagery in pictures or movies. When you eat like that, it meant you were free (which is what the Passover was all about – the Jewish people finding their freedom, so this was one more symbolic way of expressing that freedom).

Now Jesus, the one with all the authority, gets up from his place at the table, walks around the outside of those couches and washes their feet and dries them with a towel he has tied around his waist. He has flipped the culture's, even the typical religious hierarchy, on its head; so that he can teach us what the dream life is truly about.

Those who look at the deeper symbolic meanings also see the foot washing as a symbol of baptism, and a baptism into his impending death (See Romans 6:1ff). We are covered in the ickiness of sin. But Jesus humbles himself, comes to us just as we are, and just as the dirt of our feet is transferred to his towel, so the dirtiness of our sin transfers to him and he takes it with him to the cross where he and our sins are nailed and put to death, so that we can be cleansed from our sin and enjoy a right relationship with God.

**WF(Po) Act of salvation**

As an extension, that relationship must be maintained. As we continue to "walk on this earth", we are confronted with potential contaminants -- temptations, greed, sinful values, oppression, injustice, and the list goes on and on. Our spirits need God's Spirit to keep washing us clean so we can keep moving forward faithfully.

**WF(Po) Act of maturing**

Jesus begins moving around the room, revealing the humbling, loving, saving, maturing nature of the God who comes to serve, who offers us to reorient our lives

in a way we can find a full life, and he offers it to one who is on the verge of betraying him, to one who would doubt him, the rest who would scatter, and the one who would deny him before morning – three times. When he came to this disciple, Peter, Peter refused, “You’ll never wash my feet.” Peter’s refusal could be for one of at least three reasons:

Peter may be saying, “I am a tough, ex-fisherman... I don’t need to be served. I can handle this myself; I am not in need of you doing this for me. This is least likely in this scenario, but I mention it because it is common among humanity – this virtue of self-sufficiency (we can take care of our own sins, we don’t need God to do that for us) makes it a challenge for some to recognize and admit their need and are therefore reluctant to receive help, even from God.

**Peter’s Response**  
\* I don’t need you

Another reason might be “I am not worthy”. He might be saying, much like he said when he began following Jesus when

\* I am not worthy

Jesus gave him that great catch of fish. Peter said in response to that, “Go away from me, I am a sinful creature, not worthy of your attention, your service, your sacrifice, your grace.” But Jesus did not go away from him, and Peter began to follow him. (See Luke 5:4-11, esp. verse 8) I am not worthy of you doing this.

And perhaps connected with this, “You are not supposed to be a servant” Peter may be saying. “You’ll never wash

\* You are not to serve

my feet because you are supposed to be the ruler. It is not your place to be the servant. You wouldn’t, couldn’t, shouldn’t, lower yourself to do this kind of a service.” Peter – and all of us -- should recognize how backwards this is. That God should stoop to the manger, stoop to his feet, and though he doesn’t know it yet -- stoop to the cruel cross of execution at human hands -- it makes no logical sense.

To one or some combination of these reasons, Jesus replies, “If you do not allow me to do this for you - you can’t be part of me -- or all that I am bringing. If you reject God because you think you don’t need his grace and help to navigate through life, or you reject his love because you think you are not worthy of him, or you reject him because you think he is too royal and/or you are too dirty... If you reject his salvation -- then you cannot be in relationship with him.

Hearing this, Peter jumps to the other extreme, “Then not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” Give me

\* Then be my servant

a full bath. Bathe me in Your presence and power ... Peter was probably focusing on the closeness and completeness of the relationship, but I’m going to use it as

a reflection of our cultural inclinations – about that ladder they we talked about. When some people discover someone is willing to care for them, they are tempted not to simply receive the help offered, or to even make it mutual, but to take advantage of it --- especially when we have a servant as powerful as Jesus. It isn't without precedent. They asked Jesus to serve them the best positions in the kingdom, not that long before this event happened – and even against one another, they argued. They had been going together as a group for three years, and still fighting about who is most important in the group. Sometimes we clamor for God -- not to meet our needs (which is very legitimate), but to be a resource to make us – what we want – and beyond that. Make us comfortable, make us powerful, make us rich; to make God be at our beck and call for selfish and even greedy desires. God doesn't become our serf, our servant, just because he is willing to serve us in grace and love. The foot washing is not intended to be a role reversal, but a representation of the kind of role we are to fulfill as his people.

“No”, Jesus tells Peter. “You are already clean, you are already forgiven, you are already in covenant relationship with me and that is never going to end. We only need to maintain those contaminants and temptations that keep coming into our lives and keep washing those away. So (symbolically), only the feet need to be washed.

Jesus then asks them if they understand. He's higher than Caesar and look what he's done for us. Though he was God **Follow Jesus' model** in the flesh, he didn't even consider his equality with God. He moved from the top of the ladder and emptied himself until he was below the lowest enslaved -- publicly crucified on a cross -- only to be lifted -- and then to declare that we will find our truest joy when we follow him and empty ourselves and invest our time and talent and treasure in the service of others in his name. We serve God when we serve others.

26-year-old Martha needed help. She didn't understand how a loving God could give her ALS. A group of ladies heard about her and sixteen of them organized and gave her around the clock care. They bathed her, they fed her, they prayed for her. She couldn't understand an abstract love of an invisible God until she saw his love embodied in those faithful ladies.

We've been talking about some of the different ways we establish our relationship with God. Today, we establish it by serving God by serving others. We all need to do all the things we've been talking about. Some avenues may be stronger than

others for each of us. It depends upon how God has gifted and graced each of us. Some of us tend to learn best and establish our relationships best through study, some through times of speaking and listening, others by picking up a hammer or picking up cooking bowl, picking up a phone, or a pen and writing a note, doing different kinds of things, those hands-on actions of service for others, the kind of things we are talking about today.

Jesus says, “Now that you know this, [now that you are free from the need to conquer

**It is in the doing that we are blessed**

and climb over others to get to the top, and therefore now you are free to humbly serve as I did for you] you will be blessed, you’ll be blessed if you do them...” “Blessed” has many different connotations. We use it for health, for wealth, for comfort and ease of circumstances; we often describe this as “blessed”. And it certainly can include those kinds of things. We use it for those things that God has given to us. But the original Greek of this particular beatitude means it is a state of being, (not something you get as payment because you’ve done it) it is a state of happiness that comes from being a part of the kingdom of God and experiencing it even now -- by understanding what God wants us to be -- and do -- and by doing it we experience that joy. Someone described it as the deepest level of soul satisfaction. Let’s serve each other.

**Closing Prayer** Let’s pray. Lord, true soul satisfaction is totally upside down to the stereotypical Roman and American dreams. Not that we should avoid striving for accomplishment, you call us to do our very best in everything we pursue. But in our pursuit, teach us to fair and kind without compromising your ethics, help us not to damage others for our own gain – kicking people off the ladder so we can gain one more rung.

There are few things that gratify the soul more than knowing we have made a truly positive and timely impact on someone else who needed it. So guide us to those who are weary of trudging through the muck and mire of difficult circumstances, and show us how we may wash their feet, show us how we might bring them true refreshment and hope in your name. Teach us to gratefully receive the grace, mercy, and love of Jesus, which continues to the end of time, but then we too promise to freely embody it and give it away in service to others who need to find refreshment and joy. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

**Music (vv 1,3,4) O Jesus I Have Promised**

**Blessing** Now go - established in the rock solid love of God by seeing, knowing, listening, speaking, and serving; nurturing a growing relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who leads our old lives to the cross, and through it delivers us to new and eternal life. Amen.