

**ST. LUKE EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH-WELS
SERMON DELIVERED BY PASTOR ANTHONY E. SCHULTZ
ASCENSION DAY, MAY 21, 2009 PSALM 103:1-8**



“Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s. The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.”

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

Blue zones – are places in this world where people live to be very old. Blue zones – are geographical places where clumps and bunches of people live – to be not just 90 years old – but 100 years old – and even older! There are people hard at work studying the common characteristics of people who live very long and very healthy lifestyles. They say people who live very long lives – are very committed to family – putting their family ahead of other concerns. The Bible talks about that. Scriptures like, **“Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her.”** Ephesians 5:25 People who live a long time – work hard – are almost always on the move. The Bible talks about working. Scriptures like, **“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.”** Colossians 3:23 People in blue zones are people who at all ages are socially engaged. That’s a fancy way of saying loving and serving one another. Jesus said on the night he was betrayed, **“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”** John 13:34,35 To love and to forgive one another makes all the difference in the world! To take every one’s words and actions in the kindest possible light. People who live in blue zones – don’t smoke. They eat mostly fruits and vegetables – and apparently lots of legumes. Legumes – like alfalfa – do you eat alfalfa sprouts at a salad bar? Clover, peas, beans, lentils – like split pea soup – peanuts and soy beans! Is that in the Bible? I think the Scriptures that say, **“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”** 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Your body belongs to Jesus – not you! That means show respect for Jesus by showing respect for your body! As many days as Jesus gives us – are our time of grace – our time to live our faith and share our faith. This Ascension Day we

Praise Our Ascended Lord!

- 1. Why we thank him***
- 2. How we thank him***

The part of God’s Word we are concentrating on tonight – is part of the Old Testament hymn book – of 150 songs – Hebrew poetry. Psalm 103 was written by the shepherd King David. David was king over Israel for 40 years. Again, imagine if we had the same President of the United States for 40 years. We have our Presidents for 4 years – maybe even 8 years at the most. David was King for 40 years. David knew times of great triumph. David – the young shepherd boy – who did battle with a lion and with a bear. David – armed not with a .306 rifle

with a high powered scope – nor a Glock 9mm hand gun with a clip full of bullets. But armed with a small sling – hand made leather straps – with a little wider place in which to place a small smooth stone. The young shepherd boy David – too small to wear Saul’s armor – but armed with the Spirit of the LORD – he brought down the mighty warrior giant Goliath. David did battle against the enemies of God’s people – and again and again – the LORD won crushing victories for him! David also knew the horrible pain and sadness of sin. David committed actual physical adultery with Bathsheba – the wife of Uriah the Hittite. And then David committed contract murder – intentionally causing the death of Uriah – to try and cover up his sin. David spent many months trying to deny his sin – and how painful was that? When the prophet Nathan confronted David with his sin – the Holy Spirit worked repentance! You know the words David used in Psalm 51 – right after that part – **Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me...** David wrote, **“Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean.”** That was the Old Testament custom that sounds so strange to us. The priest would take a branch of a hyssop plant – a shrub – a leafy shrub – and he would dip it in the blood of a sacrificial lamb – and then he would shake that branch – and the blood would literally spatter and spray on the people – on your head and on your heart and on your hands. You think that sounds gross? I’ll tell you what’s gross! My sins are gross! My sins are a horrible disgusting damnable sin and offense in the sight of my Heavenly Father. Jesus’ blood – the blood of the Lamb of God – covers my sins – all my failures and all your sins, too! It cost a life – to forgive sin. It cost Jesus his innocent life to take away my sins and yours!

David wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit: **“Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being praise his holy name.”** Praise is worship – thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is so much more than turkey and stuffing – sweet potatoes with melted marshmallows – pumpkin and venison mincemeat pie! Thanksgiving is giving thanks to God for all his blessings. Thanksgiving is the opposite of complaining. There is no lack of complaining. People complain about the weather all the time! It’s too cold. It’s too rainy. It’s too windy lately. It’s too bright! And if – one day – it’s about what--74° and it’s partly cloudy – and there’s a gentle breeze carrying the sweet smell of lilacs – you will hear people wail – well it’s about time – it won’t last – or the very popular – we’ll pay for this next January! How sad is that? Do children grumble and complain about homework and school – and within a day or two of summer vacation complain – I’m bored? I don’t have anything to do! People who eat at restaurants – all the time – grumble and complain – why don’t we have an Outback in Watertown – or a TGI Friday’s – or a Red Lobster? We complain – I hate this restaurant or that fast food place – we go there *all the time!* We can have fresh fruits and vegetables from around the world – all year round – and complain there’s nothing to eat. We have TVs with literally hundreds of channels and complain there’s nothing to watch! We have high efficiency heating and air conditioning – and complain it’s still too hot – still too cold – or drafty or stuffy or something! Thanksgiving – worked by the Holy Spirit can make us strong the way the Apostle Paul encouraged the Philippians. **Be joyful always. Pray continually. Give thanks under all circumstances for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus!** Think about what that means. **Give thanks under all circumstances.** That’s to praise the LORD all the time – no matter what!

“Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins... The Great I AM – the Holy One of Israel is the one true God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. About 2,000 years ago – a Virgin named Mary – had a baby in her tummy – as small as a grain of sand – conceived by the Holy Spirit. In the little town of Bethlehem – in a stable – probably not so much a barn or shed as a stone cave – a hollowed out place of safety and sanctuary from the

wind and the rain—a little baby boy was born. Wrapped in strips of cloth—and placed in a feed box—was the Son of God. They named him Jesus—for he would save his people from their sins. Angels—heavenly messengers—told shepherds, **“Fear not! For behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord!”** At just 12 years old—Jesus was in the Temple courts—his Father’s House—about his Father’s work and concerns. At 12 years old—Jesus was talking about law and gospel. When you are 12 and 13 and 14 years old—you can be like Jesus—showing respect for God’s Word. Reading the Study Bible that you got for Confirmation—reading your Bible—using a high-lighter—to mark passages of special meaning. You can be an 8th grader—already determined to dedicate--to spend your life in your Father’s House of prayer—preaching law and gospel—teaching Word of God—to young people—preparing them for works of service which God planned ahead of time for us to do to glorify him! Remember God’s exceedingly high expectations for young people. It is not by accident that of all the accounts of Jesus as a young person—it’s not 16 or 18 or 20 or 25--when Jesus was 12 years old. How have we—12 years old—been busy newly confirmed—serving Jesus?

Who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s. Jesus—who has gone back into Heaven—accomplished everything that needed to be done to save us from sin. When Jesus said from the cross, **“It is finished!”**—everything that needed to be done to buy us back from sin and dead was finished—totally and completely! That doesn’t mean Jesus isn’t still busy doing wonderful things for our eternal benefit! One thing Jesus is doing is—ruling over the whole wide world—ruling over everything for our eternal good. This has exceedingly practical implications. Jesus **satisfies your mouth with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagles!** Do you remember about eagles—how they build their nests? They build their nests—with very sharp thorns just a little bit below the soft layer of softest grasses and feathers from their tummy. These thorns—buried within the nest don’t bother the eggs while they are being incubated—until the baby eagles are born. And these thorns don’t bother the baby eagles at first either. Baby eagles sit in their nest enjoying the wondrous view from their sanctuary—so high above the world. They sit in this wondrous perch—enjoying the view and enjoying all the fresh food—fresh fish that their mommy and daddy deliver. All they have to do is open wide—and they have fine meals. The thing with the thorns is—as the baby eaglets get bigger and bigger—and heavier and heavier—eventually—these thorns start to poke them—ouch! And the baby eagles move from the middle of the nest to the edges. And that’s when the mommy and daddy eagles push them out of the nest. And for a moment it must be a little bit scary—until they realize—hey—what are these big flappy things? Wings! Hey, wow! Look at me! I can fly! How cool is this?!

He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. This is the time of year—when people give speeches at graduations. I always find this very fascinating. If you were given 20 minutes to tell a whole bunch of people anything you want—what would you tell them? It often seems in this world—where people spend many years studying the things of this world—from a worldly perspective—they choose people for commencement speakers who have been very successful in worldly ways. But does earthly success mean you are wise? Ask the second richest man in the world—Mr. Warren Buffett—what is the secret of his investing success? He will tell you what? Buy low—sell high? Did you know that? Reinvest your profits—when you make money—use that money to make more? Don’t borrow lots of money so you go way into debt? Don’t spend money you don’t have? That’s it? Everybody knows that! So why isn’t everybody a Wall Street success? Maybe—just maybe success is a gift from God. Maybe—just maybe what

really matters is not earthly success – becoming rich and famous and powerful in all sorts of earthly ways. What really matters is not what people do – but what God did to save us from our sins. The LORD showed himself to Moses and the people of Israel in many ways to set them free from sore bondage and slavery in Egypt – to bring them into the Promised Land. The Lord Jesus showed his disciples his Heavenly Father’s plan to save us from all our sins – so we can spend eternity in the peace and rest of Heaven! This message of forgiveness and a home in heaven is a message for us to share. We need to ask our self – when was the last time we told someone about Jesus? When was the last time we brought Jesus into every day conversation? When was the last time we saw someone sad or worried or angry or confused – and we told them about Jesus’ forgiving love? The opportunities for us to share Jesus are everywhere around us. We need to ask Jesus to open our eyes and ears to recognize these opportunities. And then trust the Holy Spirit to give us the words we need to share Christ crucified and risen and ascended – now – before it’s too late.

The LORD is compassionate and gracious; slow to anger, abounding in love. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is **compassionate and gracious – slow to anger, abounding in love.** There are just a hand full of blue zones – places where lots of people live to be very very old. The Island of Sardinia in Italy. I would like to live in Italy. My first name would work. I would love to eat spaghetti and Italian bread dipped in garlic and olive oil – with a little red wine. I would like to live on Okinawa, Japan. My dad was there during the war. I like their noodles and I like raw fish. The Island of Ikaria, Greece. I would like to live there, too. They have pita bread and lamb chops roasted over the fire – they have olives and baklava and Ouzo! I would like to live in all those places – but I live here – in Watertown! This is where you live, too! Watertown is kind of like a little island – here – between Ixonia and Clyman and so? Let this place be an island – not just where people put family first – and are careful about what they eat and drink – where we don’t abuse drugs and alcohol and tobacco – where we are always doing the work Jesus has blessed us to do. But let this be an island where we are Jesus’ students and followers and imitators – where we have a priceless reputation for being people who love and forgive one another for Jesus’ sake. A place where we preach and where live Christ crucified and risen! Nothing less and nothing more. Amen!

To God alone all glory!

Rev. Anthony E. Schultz