

## Order of Worship for March 10, 2024

### Prelude

P: The Lord be with you.

**C: And also with you.**

### Opening Hymn: “*My Faith Looks Up to Thee*”- Hymn #702

### Confession and Forgiveness:

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**C: Amen.**

P: Return to me with all your heart, says the Lord, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning, with broken and contrite hearts.

**C: For the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.**

P: You are saved by faith in God, who treats us much better than we deserve.

P: O God, in your kindness, have pity.

**C: O God, in your mercy, wash away our sins. Wash us clean of sin and guilt, the sins that we cannot forget and those we cannot remember. For we have disobeyed you and done wrong; we deserve your punishment. For the sake of Jesus Christ, turn your eyes from our iniquity, and cover our guilt, that we may know again the joy of your salvation.**

P: Jesus Christ never sinned. But God treated Him as a sinner, so that Christ could make us acceptable to God.

**C: All we, like sheep, have gone astray; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

P: You are saved by faith in God, who loves us so much He sent His only Son into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. By His name and command, your sins are forgiven.

**C: Thanks be to God. Amen.**

### Entrance Psalm

P: The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

**C: The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?**

P: Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear;

**C: though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.**

P: One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after:

**C: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,**

P: to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD

**C: and to inquire in His temple.**

P: For He will hide me in His shelter in the day of trouble;

**C: He will conceal me under the cover of His tent; He will lift me high upon a rock.**

**ALL: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;**

**as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

P: The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

**C: The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?**

P: The Lord be with you,

**C: and also with you.**

**Prayer of the Day:**

P: Let us pray... Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C: Amen.**

**First Lesson: Numbers 21:4-9**

R: From Mount Hor the children of Israel set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.” Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that He take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

R: O Lord, have mercy on us.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

**Second Lesson: Ephesians 2:1-10**

R: And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

R: O Lord, have mercy on us.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

**Hymn: “By Grace I’m Saved” - Hymn # 566 vs. 1-4**

### **Third Lesson: John 3:14-21**

P: [Jesus said] And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

P: O Lord, have mercy on us.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

### **Children’s Message:**

**Sermon Hymn:** *“In the Cross of Christ I Glory”* - Hymn #427

**Sermon:** *“The Great Switch”* - Numbers 21:4-9

The Ames Community School District needs a new superintendent. Hopefully the selection of candidates will not be like the national elections where a lot of people feel they are just picking the lesser of two evils. It is good to have good, clear, logical reasons for choosing someone for an important position.

But the way that God chose to save the Israelites in our text certainly doesn’t seem logical. We heard in our Old Testament Lesson one of the more bizarre stories in the Bible. A plague of snakes sounds like something from Indiana Jones. And what is really strange is what God told Moses to do. “Make a snake and put it on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” Why not send lightning to zap the snakes or suddenly make them disappear? Why not send the warriors with their weapons to kill them? Why put up a pole of all things a bronze snake? Why not use a candle or staff or some other symbol of God’s presence? Why a snake?

When else do we see in the Bible a snake on a pole? We know the old story of Adam and Eve and how the devil took on the form of a snake and spoke to them about a tree. A snake and a tree—the means by which people fell into sin becomes in the wilderness for the children of Israel a means to salvation. The symbol of death becomes a symbol of life. What a great switch!

The link between those two events is Jesus. In our Gospel lesson Jesus says, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted, that everyone who believes in His Name may have eternal life.” A snake and a tree—a reminder of how we first fell into sin becomes “sin” on a tree. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For our sake God made Jesus to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” A

snake and a tree—Jesus on the tree—the sin that separates us from God becomes Jesus who died on the cross so that we can be reunited with God. Who of us would want to be an Osama bin Laden or an Adolph Hitler or Joseph Stalin—the bad guy, the object of scorn? Yet that is exactly what Jesus became on the cross for you and me. The source of death—sin on a tree—becomes the source of life. What a great switch!

From death to life—do we see the implications of that great switch? God didn't save the children of Israel from those snakes with lightning or fire. Nor does He save us from sin that way. The symbol of our salvation is a cross—the means of death. God's great switch doesn't just mean that Jesus would rescue us, just as He did the children of Israel, in an unexpected way. It means that we live in that switch, trusting not in what we expect, but in what God gives to us.

The children of Israel didn't expect to do things God's way. After God had dramatically rescued them from the Egyptians through the waters of the Red Sea, they expected to waltz right into their promised homeland in Canaan. Instead, God had them wander in the desert—not what they expected. Maybe they were slaves in Egypt, but at least they could see in Egypt that they had a ready supply of food and water. God had performed a great switch by freeing them from slavery. But did they expect that switch?

Do we expect things to go God's way? In Christ God has freed us from sin. That sin has been nailed to the cross with Him. But do we want it there? Do we want to go on living in God's switch, or do we want to return to our old self? Jesus said in our Gospel, "This is the verdict. Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light." God doesn't call us out of sin into instant fame, instant luxury, and instant enjoyment. He calls us to a cross—a symbol of death. To live with him, to switch from death to life, we have to put to death the old. Compare the amount of time we spend watching TV with the time we think about God—or others. Compare what we give of our treasures to help others with our willingness to forgive and accept God's forgiveness. Do we want to live in God's great switch?

In a student bible class a student mentioned how often it is only in bad times that he turns to God for help. He can see the truth of what Paul said in Romans 5, "We rejoice in our suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us." Martin Luther put it this way, "We should pray to God for trouble, for it is in adversity that we grow closer to God." Now what a great switch that is! Think of the prayers we usually offer to God—for peace, for healing, for strength, for comfort. But do we want to pray for adversity? In Acts 4, after Peter and John were arrested and the early Church after Jesus' ascension first faced persecution, the people prayed not for deliverance from that persecution, but for the boldness to share their faith in the face of that trouble. A pastor from India that I knew at seminary shared about the persecution of Christians in his country. I asked if that worried him. He replied, "No, because then I know that we are really making a difference in the lives of people there." Now that's the great switch, God turning fear into opportunity, sorrow into joy, death into life!

But can that switch happen to us? Are we supposed to ask God for calamity and pray to Him, “Cause a great disaster to fall on our country so that we turn from our evil?” No, we don’t pray for that, but why do we pray to God for peace, for prosperity, for health? Is it because we want to do God’s will or because of what we stand to get out of those things? Do we want to go to heaven to be with God forever because we love Him, or so that we don’t have to go to hell (in other words, because I love me)? There is a big difference. Yes, the children of Israel looked on that bronze snake to save their necks. But did that really save them? Many of those same people in Number 24 still complained to God and were punished in a plague. Many who made it into the Promised Land forgot about God and worshiped idols. Only those who looked in trust, who loved God, not just to save their hides, but because He is God, were truly saved. So do we accept God’s great switch? Do we believe in Him only to save us or to truly be our God?

Jesus said in our Gospel, “Whoever lives in the truth comes into the light so that it may be seen plainly what he has done has been done through God.” The great switch is not only that God made Jesus to be sin for us, but that He switches our master from sin into Himself. It is not just that we are free from sin. We want to be free. None of us wants suffering, pain, loneliness, and death. But we want God most so that we can be willing to take on any of those rather than lose God.

A snake on a pole. Our Savior on a cross. That is not what we would expect. But neither do we expect life from death. Our God has done that great switch and continues to do it in us. Thus we can rejoice in Him not only despite, but because of suffering as we grow closer to Him. God grant that each day we be switched through Christ’s death and resurrection from death into life.

**Hymn: “God Loved the World So That He Gave” – Hymn #571**

### **Meditation on John 3:16:**

P: We meditate on Jesus’ great promise to us in John 3:16—“*For God so loved the world...*”

“The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.’” (Jeremiah 31:3)

**C: “But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** (Romans 5:8)

P: “But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”  
(Ephesians 1:4,5)

**C: “This is how God showed His love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him.”** (1 John 4:9)

P: “*That He gave...*”

“Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.’”  
(John 4:10)

**C “But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one**

**man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!"** (Romans 5:15)

P: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."  
(Romans 6:23)

**C: "He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?"** (Romans 8:32)

P: "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15)

**C: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God."** (Ephesians 2:8)

P: "*His only begotten Son...*"

"Here is My servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on Him and He will proclaim justice to the nations." (Matthew 12:18)

**C: "to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves."** (Ephesians 1:6)

P: "For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves." (Colossians 1:13)

**C: "In the same way, Christ did not take on Himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to Him, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'" (Hebrews 5:5)**

P: "*That whosoever believes in Him...*"

"Commit your way to the LORD; trust in Him and He will do this." (Psalm 37:5)

**C: "It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in humans."** (Psalm 118:8)

P: "Then Jesus said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'" (John 20:27)

**C: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of**

**God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."** (John 20:31)

P: "*Shall not perish...*"

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged, but has crossed over from death to life." (John 5:24)

**C "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** (Romans 8:1)

P: "Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us."  
(Romans 8:34)

**C: "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more."** (John 8:11)

P: "*But has everlasting life.*"

"Now this is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent." (John 17:3)

**C: "Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."** (Galatians 6:8)

P: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them." (John 3:36)

**C:** “No one who has left behind anything for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.” (Luke 18:30)

**Prayer of the Church**

P: Lord in Your mercy,

**C: hear our prayer.**

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Closing Prayer:**

P: Almighty God, our Redeemer, in our weakness we have failed to be Your messengers of forgiveness and hope in the world. Renew us by Your Holy Spirit, that we may follow Your commands and proclaim Your rule of love, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord.

**C: Amen.**

**Blessing:** (Pastor)

**C: Amen.**

**Closing Hymn: “Amazing Grace” - Hymn #744**

**Postlude**