



## From the Bishop:

April 2026

*Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. John 20:1*

When I ask people how they are, so often they say, “Well, I’m doing ok considering ...” Sometimes they confess to me that the world just feels so dark right now.

And I get it – I can feel this way, too. Sometimes it does seem the shadows are gathering around us and just getting scarier and more menacing and it is hard to see a path forward.

But then I am reminded of the gift of darkness.

Recently I read Conor Knighton’s book *Leave Only Footprints* where he talks about visiting all the national parks in a year. One of the most captivating chapters was about national parks that have been certified as Dark Sky Places. He describes areas where light pollution is carefully limited so people can experience the night sky as humans did for most of history. Standing in one of these places, the sky can be overwhelming. Stars multiply as your eyes adjust. Constellations sharpen. The universe stretches above you in breathtaking clarity. Conor says that what surprises many visitors is this: the darkness does not feel frightening. It feels beautiful. Everyone is standing shoulder to shoulder – strangers to one another in the daylight – but at night, all eyes are lifted to the heavens in wonder experiencing something extraordinary.

In these particular times that we are living in, this brings me hope. For in the light of day war is happening and people are dying and there is shouting on all sides and beliefs seem intransigent and we experience and participate in the hatred and greed and selfishness and bigotry that is everywhere around us. We see our enemy. We identify our enemy. We classify our enemy. The light shines harshly.

But in the darkness of night, we gather together. In the darkness of night, we huddle close. In the darkness of night, we sigh with wonder at the beauty and majesty of the heavens. In the darkness of night, we no longer can tell who our enemy is. And, while this could be scary, this is also liberating. For we remember the beginning of the story of God and creation – that for God darkness is not chaos beyond God’s reach – it is the very place where God begins midwifing new hope, new promise, new life – in spite of what happens in the light of day.

We experience this promise in the Easter story. (Let me remind you, the resurrection did not occur at sunrise even though many of us have attended a lot of sunrise services!). For even as Mary Magdalene started hurrying towards the tomb before dawn, the resurrection had miraculously already happened. The tomb was already empty. Jesus Christ was alive! For as we read in scripture, life was rising before the dawn. This is the strange and beautiful truth at the heart of our faith - and truly at the heart of the gospel. The power of death was broken even before the sun began to shine.

This is the hope of Easter. Even when the world feels uncertain, even when grief and fear weigh heavily on our hearts, even when the shadows fall, God is at work beneath the surface of things. Life is stirring. Hope is rising.

Go find a place of darkness. And there you will see God.

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## From the VEEP:

“To love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength and to love one’s neighbor as oneself—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” (Mark 12:33)

I love my children. I really, really, really love my children. And here is the miraculous part: they didn’t have to do anything but exist for me to love them. I loved them from the time I felt them move inside me. I loved them more when I held them for the first time. I have loved them through all the ups and downs of childhood, adolescence, and now adulthood. Now, I happen to think they are pretty nice people, and they have each done many commendable things in their lives, but I do not love them because of those actions. I love them because they are. This is grace. This is what it means for us to be loved by God. God doesn’t need our works to love us. We don’t have to be valedictorians; we don’t have to be rich; we don’t have to be athletic champions; we don’t have to be inventors or legislators or judges or doctors. We just have to *be*.

This is the best way I know to explain the Lutheran notion of being saved by grace through faith. We claim that nothing we can do can separate us from God’s love. We do not come to God through our efforts, but God comes to us in God’s infinite love. God loves us because we are. That doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t also do good works that God wants us to do. My children were pretty good about doing their chores. They did their homework. They treated each other well. They behaved in such a way as to let me know they loved me back. That is what we do with God. Because God loves us so much, we love God back by loving kindness and doing justice in the world. Because God loves us, we show that we love our siblings by treating them well. We do our chores not to earn God’s love, but to return it.

But, some might say, what if your children weren’t nice people? What if they didn’t do their chores or treat each other kindly? What if they hurt others? What if they hurt you? Would you still love them? I would like to believe that I would. I might not *like* their actions very much and I might even fear them, but I think I would still love them. Likewise, I know there are some parents who do not love their children. Some people just don’t have that emotional capacity. Humans are fallible. We don’t always love perfectly, nor do we act purely. My analogy is imperfect because humans are. That is why we fall back on some kind of transactional relationship with God - we expect God to act like us. God, however, is not fallible. God’s love is perfect and abundant and therefore we CAN be saved by grace through faith and not through our good works. We CAN do good works as a way of loving God back. Grace is Amazing that way.

So, as we enter this Easter season we let us give thanks for a God who loves us so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Here’s what I or the synod council have been up to in March:

- I continue to work with the Synod Equity Team doing one-with-one listening sessions.
- I participated in the LiVE Project class: Mystics and Mysticism
- The Synod Policy Review Team continues to meet and work on updating key policies.
- The Synod Council met on March 21.
- I met with the Association of Synod Vice Presidents’ planning team on March 6 and facilitated our monthly Zoom on March 28.
- I attended a synod coaching training event on March 19.

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