The gospel today reminds us that our sins have been forgiven and forgotten forever.

Because we have a gracious and loving Father who sent Jesus to pay the price so we that don’t have to.

The cost of sin is death, and instead we are given new life -

As Lutherans, we believe this - we know this and we know it is not of our own doing.

Thank God we don’t have to work our way in to His good graces. We’d never make it.

Just as the Israelites were healed by looking at the serpent on a pole so are we healed as we gaze upon the cross.

We are healed from all brokenness, given a new lease of life... purely because God loves us beyond measure.

Martin Luther believed, however, that we should look at the cross **not** as a symbol of our sin but rather “in the image of grace.”

“**The image** of grace **is nothing other than Christ crucified.”**

We know this word grace, but we might gloss over it and sometimes grace is not always in the forefront our minds.

 We don’t carry GRACE joyfully in our hearts.

It’s not that we have forgotten about grace but I think we may take grace for granted from time to time.

–we become so use to this incredible gift that we lose sight of what grace looks like on a cross.

We don’t forgive ourselves. We hash over and over again past mistakes, beating ourselves up for what hindsight tells us we should have done or not done.

And we find it hard to forgive **others**.

But God’s not like that. By the grace of God we are free from the repercussions of sin.

Luther said, “Christ on the cross **carries** our sin for us and **destroys** it.

*That* is Grace and Mercy.

He said Believe firmly in it, have it before your eyes, and do not doubt it.

Sin is no longer sin. It is **bound** and **consumed** in Christ.

Christ is the image of life and of grace in contrast to the picture of death.” (Day by Day, p145)

Fixing our eyes on Jesus brings us a kind of peace we cannot find anywhere else.

From the cross, rays of love shine in our lives filling us with hope and joy... but that doesn’t mean we won’t have problems.

Sundays & Seasons commentary for the fourth Sunday in Lent points out that “God does not remove the snakes, but rather “provides a way for the people to live amidst danger”

...God does the same for us...he does not take away the perils of life but he gives us a way to live in it, beside it and through it.

Always, always, God sheds light, even and especially, in our darkest days...

God heals our broken hearts.

 No matter the trouble–whether it’s ours or someone else’s – whether it is physical wellbeing, or the turmoil of violence and hatred toward one another...anything that threatens our livelihood ...

God does not punish, but rather God loves.

And the cross reminds us just how much.

John 3:16 is the message of the cross, and is perhaps the most well known verse in the Bible.

Maybe John 3:17 should be the second best known verse in the Bible, because it is the second half of the message.

The nails drive home the reality of hope and restoration when we hear the rest of the story.

God loved us so much he found a way to settle the debt for all sins...though it cost Him dearly.

And He doesn’t even want retribution or compensation.

Jesus did not come to condemn us or **convict** us, but rather Jesus came to **save** us!

 Dominican John Gerlach, (O.P., in *Homilies for the Christian People*” ) once said

“The love of God is **persistent**,

and the **Word** of God always finds a new voice

 in the most hopeless circumstances.” (ed. Gail Ramshaw, New Proclamation 2012 New York: Pueblo, 1989, 244).

When we are overcome with fear and doubt, when we let the headlines for the day wear us down, make us afraid, and keep us wondering the state of today’s society, simply look to the cross for all your answers.

I believe there is more joy and optimism in this world than there is sadness and negativism.

I believe we miss out on a lot of God’s beautiful gifts because we are too busy living our lives in a demanding, but exciting and exhausting, world that often depletes us.

It consumes us in the same way Christ consumed our debt and we don’t see God’s grace settling in upon us and all around us each and every day.

I was outside yesterday picking up sticks left over from the havoc of falling trees, some intentional others not.

As I carried a pile of branches toward the woods, I noticed all the crocus and snow drops blooming beneath my feet. They were everywhere.

I knew they’d popped their little heads through the dormant winter ground after the warm weather we had a couple of weeks ago.

I had enjoyed the tons of little flowers blooming just outside our kitchen window ...but these -

these I would not have seen had I not been walking to the far edges of our yard yesterday.

These little temporary beauties reminded me of the many truly delightful things God gives us on a daily basis...things that go unnoticed.

A smile, a small gesture, a kind deed

...and I’m sure we have all seen people and nature at their finest.

We take pictures and videos to capture the moment.

We post the best on FB, Instagram or SnapChat.

We print out pictures, enlarge them and frame them to hang on our walls or set on our desks, or use as background on our electronic devices.

We want to remember and to share these amazing moments...

But think about it, these are not Kodak moments they are simply a sample of the ongoing presence of God.

Who Joyfully and gracefully fills our lives with his great love

How many times does God reach down and touch our lives every single day and we don’t see it?

How many blessings -small or great- do we miss because we are preoccupied?

Take those unassuming simple purple and white flowers growing wild in the sleepy grass.

There are many more wonders we will never witness.

And Though we can appreciate some of these gifts when we travel to the more quiet corners of this earth...the less habited places

like the woods and forests, mountain tops, or one of the vast lakes of the great north where you could swear heaven touches the earth.

That’s not to say there aren’t plenty of miracles and wonders right in our own backyard... right before our very eyes.

Look to the cross and see the awesomeness of God’s love.

Don’t let it slip by unnoticed.

Last night....as I was moving the clocks forward I took the one down in the bathroom and the little hook in the back was broken so I couldn’t hang it back on the wall. So I put it in the corner on the shelf and replaced it with a cross that has the words BELIEVE on it.

This morning while brushing my teeth I looked to see what time it was and when I looked up at the wall I saw the cross....I had to smile in light of God’s message for us today. Many times the word comes right back at me.

... have faith...look up to the cross and believe; Jesus loves you. Jesus forgives you. Jesus died for you. Amen