

The Shepherd's Staff Newsletter

The Right Reverend D. M. Ashman

Passiontide and Easter 2026

Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM.

Baptism in Oklahoma City

Father Charles Newcomb, Rector of the Anglican Church of the Holy Cross officiated at the Baptism of Hezekiah Onimisi Benedict on Saturday, March 21, the Saturday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent, at the Church of the Holy Cross. Hezekiah is the son of Benedict and Ada Omeiza. His godparents are Henry Olayiwola and Oyindamola Okuwa.



Editor's note. What a great, historical and marvelous name is Hezekiah who (the Bible tells us) was the thirteenth king of the Kingdom of Judah. In both the *Second Book of Kings* and the *Second Book of Chronicles*, king Hezekiah was praised as a very righteous king who obeyed the Yahweh and did good in the sight of the Lord. Hezekiah was considered to be the greatest of the kings of Judah.



A Sermon for Passion Sunday

COMPETITION FOR MASTERY in any given pursuit is inevitable among us humans. As soon as a boy can throw a ball, he's trying to throw it as far as he can. He's out to beat his brother's longest throw. Swim the fastest lap. Climb the highest tree or mountain. Make the biggest sandcastle. Score the most touchdowns. Sporting events pit the best of these against one another, and we all attend or tune in to see who is the best. It excites us when someone breaks a world record. Some records stand a long time. Like the fastest 100-meter run that stands at 9.58 seconds. Or the heaviest dead weight barbell lift at 1124 lbs. The Seahawks showed their dominance at the NFL's Superbowl last month, while the Dodgers won the last two World Series with style. But there's always next year. The tallest man ever measured stood 8'-11" in height. The smallest man topped out at 21½". The smartest person is a little harder to judge, but one child prodigy had an IQ of somewhere between 250 and 300, mastered five languages by the age of 5 and entered Harvard at 11. The fattest human being weighed 1400 lbs. And so, the strongest man could not have lifted him.

I once knew a man who could pick up a full 55-gallon drum of diesel and throw it on a truck bed. We called him Big Steve Stevenson. He was a Baptist pastor. He's the strongest man I ever knew. But who is the best person I've ever known? How would you determine what 'best' means in a human life? Besides the fastest or strongest, what makes for the best in humanity? One dimension rather leads the rest: whoever loves the most and is loved the most: love is the factor that leads us to describe someone as best. What constitutes the greatest love? Jesus simplified this question in His teaching. Asked what the greatest commandment was meant an action that answers obediently to God's divine plan for us. Jesus quoted Moses, "*Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and strength and mind. And Love thy neighbor as thyself.*" Every other commandment comes back to this principle, for you can do good deeds for wicked or competitive purposes and not be good. But if done in love, the law is answered well.

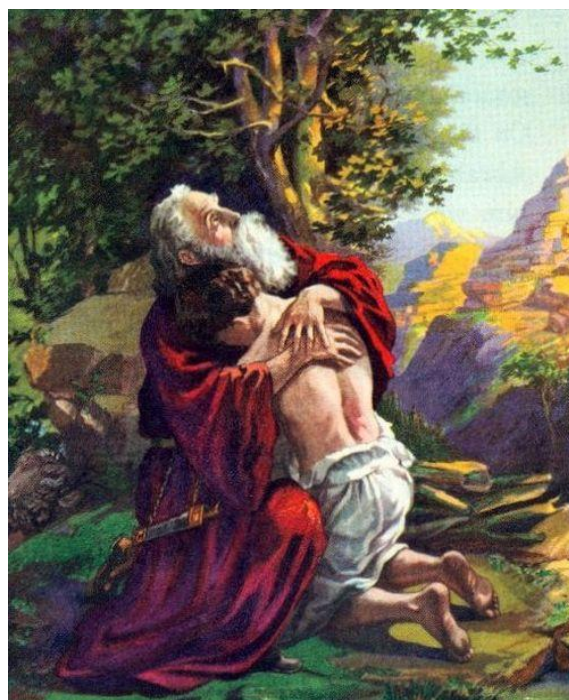
Love is a big topic. How do you measure love, to find out who has loved the most and loved the best and served love as God wants us to? Jesus helped us here too. "*Greater love hath no man but that he lay down his life for his friends.*" To lay down your life is to offer yourself up in pure sacrifice. There are special circumstances that would justify the death of one loving person for others. You know who we all think of when quoting this line. Jesus was Himself the greatest example of such a grand love, giving His life to be executed in place of every human soul, a ransom against the impossible debt we owe God for our sins. He became that priest of good things to come, superseding the blood of goats and calves required in Old Testament times. It's funny. The Old Testament laid out numerous animal sacrifices that answered to God's Law for daily, weekly and yearly ceremonies where animals by the hundreds had their life's blood shed to square things with God over matters of unintended sin. But there were no sacrifices that would stand for intended and serious sins. For these, death alone of the guilty was the requirement. A grim religion. No human back then offered himself up as a sacrifice for others. Think of it: Adam didn't die for Eve. Abraham lived long and died naturally. So did Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, Joseph and his brothers. David died in bed, Solomon in his palaces. Elijah didn't even die at all but rose up in a whirlwind and chariot of fire. For all the sacrificial blood of Judaism, no man or woman died to save others. Samson's death was a suicide to which he invited 3,000 Philistines by way of revenge.

Jesus stood out, therefore, in offering Himself up on the cross. It was voluntary. He'd predicted His death several times to the disciples and they had nowhere to put that information. We enter these two weeks of Passiontide to contemplate this staggering feat of His, submitting to evil men with wicked intentions, but saying He could call on His Father for legions of holy angels to defend Him, and He refrained from doing so. It was His call. He let it happen.

Ever since that cross, there have been many others. Christians were told to pick up their own crosses and to follow Jesus. This didn't usually mean to die as sacrifices, but to be willing to die for this truth if called upon. Peter was told specifically that he would die on a Roman cross, as indeed he was. Others died by sword, spear, fire, or animal jaws. This was quite new, then. A love that overcomes the fear of death, and confronting evil, rips its mask away to expose the coward.

So, we repeat our steps to the foot of that cross, where the author of our lives laid His own down to create a pathway for us to where He is. The event of three days later will await our Easter Day celebrations while we stop and contemplate a new and holy sacrifice, the soul and power of all sacrifice, where the Son of Man cries out, "*It is finished!*" and gives up the ghost. His great heart bursts in His chest. His spirit and soul depart into deep places for yet more ministry. No one had on earth gone to this depth of loving you and me. No one could love more than this. Greater love hath no man. No greater love.

Jesus loved the most, for His love was for every soul ever made. He wins. There is no greater. For this cause, He is the mediator and to all who are called out of the human race, if they believe, an eternal inheritance is promised. Abraham did see His day and he rejoiced. When was that? He was on Mount Moriah with his true son, Isaac, and was about to try a human sacrifice in obedience to God's command. So far, so good. The altar of firewood was laid. The boy was tied up and ready. The knife was in his hand. But it was all wrong. Isaac wasn't perfect, so his death would save no one. God sent His angel to stop the proceeding, in the strangest day either of them had ever had. "*Now I know that you believe and would obey. Stop and untie your son. But know this: you pass the test. You would not withhold your son's life for me. Someday on this very mountain, I will give my son's life for you, and your seed, and the entire world, for my son, your future seed, will die in their places. By this seed will all races, families, nations and peoples be blessed beyond words.*"



Abraham and Isaac

"*Abraham saw my day, and was glad,*" spoke Jesus. You're not even 50, Abraham? "*Truthfully I tell you now. Before Abraham ever was, I AM.*" Said Jesus, the Lamb of God. God's true son. The seed of Abraham finally come to fulfill His mission. He would stretch Himself out on that wood and be pierced and lifted up to scorn. He would suffer and be mocked and spit on. And in dying He would cleanse the world of sin, and in rising again, He would defeat death and the very fear of death.

The greatest human life ever lived displayed the greatest love ever known to us. God's Son was not withheld from us, and His love only grows, the more we love, the more we come to be like Him.

The Right Reverend Peter F. Hansen

Confirmations in Omaha

On March twenty first Bishop Ashman visited Saint John the Baptist, preaching and confirming with Father Andrews celebrating the Eucharist and Deacon Ron Reno assisting.



Father Richard Andrews, Caedmon Garrett, Bishop Ashman, August Gibbons Deacon Ronald Reno, Katelynn Goldsmith



*Above: Father Andrews with the parish family; Below Deacon Reno with the parish family.
Editor's Note, St. John the Baptist has doubled its membership under the care of these two wonderful ministers;
and at Mass on Saturday there were fifty parishioners and visitors in attendance*

Mending Vestments at Saint Joseph's Chapel



Left to Right: Jennifer Longsworth, Leigh Seggerman, Lucinda Smith

*Passion Sunday Mass
at Saint Martin of Tours, Concord, CA*



Father Tom Kelnhofer and John Den Dulk
[by the way, Note the use of unbleached candles]

ACW-DWS Notes, April 2026

Wishing you all a happy, holy Easter! Please remember to collect the Lenten Mite Boxes at Easter and have the Parish Treasurer count the money and make out a check for the total, payable to Provincial ACW, with a notation Lenten Mite Boxes and send it to: Gillian Golden, Provincial ACW Lenten Chairman, P.O. Box 558, Selma, OR 97538-0558. This is a wonderful, easy way to contribute to student support at Saint Joseph of Arimathea Seminary, and you may be helping a student from your parish!

A list of items available for the annual ACW Drawings at the Synod Banquet on Friday, April 24 th 2026 has been sent to each church in the diocese, together with tickets. Please sell as many tickets as you can (\$2.00 each), collect the tickets and the money and give them to someone who will be attending Synod. Tickets should include name, item #, church and phone number. Any church that does not have an attendee at Synod can mail the tickets to me, Gillian Golden, P.O. Box 558, Selma, OR 97538-0558, but they need to arrive at my Post Office by Friday, April 17 th , 2026 to be included. The Drawings will benefit the Bishop Morse Youth Camp.

Looking forward to seeing many of you at the Synod., Gillian Golden, ACW-DWS President

He Wants You Back

THE great thing about Jesus is that His Incarnation, miracles, words of life, His death for the salvation of the world, and astounding Resurrection include us: you and me and everyone. We are in the story. We're important characters in the drama we call "Gospel." It's the story of your life. This dying world would have been your tomb, your only moment, and all your fault. But Christ is Risen. And we are risen with Him.

We know some of the other characters in this story: impetuous Peter, faithful John, eternally grateful Mary Magdalene, doubtful Thomas, and others. It's been told to us for so many years it seems long ago and far from here, in a different world—people in robes, dusty tracks, ancient tongues: it seems removed from you and me. But it isn't. It happens now. It happens here. It's for all mankind, all time, every race, every land, everyone, everywhere. It's your story.

You once hoped for a better life, but you never escaped your world. Because you saw others doing those things, you argued that your misdeeds were common, excusable, ought to be overlooked. But you felt the disappointment of heaven, and your own shame, convinced that you are not the hero in any tale, just another person doing somewhat badly. You compensate by working harder, but something still aches. Somebody mentions Easter Day and you remember the Easters of childhood, your family dressing up, colored eggs, ladies' hats, white lace, and talk about Jesus risen again. You cajole the wife and admonish the kids, tying a tie for your junior namesake. You join others who, like you, are finding the church door. Sit in the back as the happy strains of Easter hymns wash over you. The Person of Jesus reaches you, and His Name, somehow, gives you hope again. He wants you back. He hasn't given up on you. You rise to answer the altar call of Communion and you make your peace with God again. He wants you back. That was all you needed to know.

Jesus had once chastised her for being too much about chores while His truth was being shared. Later He gave Martha a wonderful revelation. He told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." John 11:25-26

He gives His Spirit to live in us, inspire us, bring our spirits to life, purify us from inside. This isn't only about getting ready for heaven. We aren't ready for life on earth without the One who made this earth. If you are risen with Christ, it's about this life as much as it is about the next. You aren't going to see heaven without bringing some of heaven down here first.

Jesus made this rather simple. You give your life to Him, He gives His life to you. Because He already died, you needn't die. This body wears out, but give Him yourself, then all He is and all He has is yours. You've been called by name. He wants you back. He promises you what He promised the thief: "You shall be with me in Paradise."

This is your dream come true, what you hoped and wished for. This is your life, given to you, brand new again, to live and rejoice that He finds pleasure in you. If you are Risen with Christ, rejoice this day. This is His, and it's your, Resurrection Day.

The Right Reverend Peter F. Hansen

Maundy Thursday at St. Peter's Oakland



Above, the High Altar; Below the Altar of Repose

Easter: Holy Cross, Oklahoma City



Western States ACW needs your help - please

Due to a frustrating oversight, tickets for the much admired embroidered picture 'Peonies' were not sent out. Tickets are \$5.00 each, and if you want your name in for the drawing, please let someone from your church who is going to Synod know, and give them the money, and we will make sure that your name is entered for the drawing. Alternatively, if your church does not have anyone going to Synod, you can mail a check to Gillian Golden, P.O. Box 558, Selma, OR 97538. If you are going to mail a check, it would need to reach us by April 18. I would suggest that you email gillian.golden@yahoo.com to let me know that a check is on the way, so that if it doesn't arrive in time, you will still be included in the drawing.

Many apologies for this irregular way of doing things, but this is such a beautiful piece I know that you will not want to miss the chance to win it! To those bringing tickets and money for your congregations to Synod, please remember that regular tickets are \$2.00, and Peonies are \$5.00. If you have questions, please email me. Thank you all for your support!

Easter Altar at Saint Patrick's Westcliffe, CO



Easter Dove Release at Our Saviour, Los Angeles CA



After a Sung Mass celebrated by Father Greene and Bishop Ashman, everyone went out into the church garden for the annual Dove Release before enjoying a sumptuous potluck luncheon in William Jackson Hall.