

Holy Cross Lutheran Church

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

7901 Westview Dr.

Houston, TX 77055

Tel. 713-686-8253

Website: www.holycross.us

e-mail: hclc@holycross.us

713-686-8254

Rev. Jim Berggren

April 26, 2026

4th Sunday of Easter

WORSHIP SERVICE

PRELUDE

WELCOME / ANNOUNCEMENTS

GATHERING SONG

O Christ, Our Hope

ELW 604

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

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

C: *Amen.*

P: God of all mercy and consolation, come to the help of your people, turning us from our sin to live for you alone. Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that we may confess our sin, receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C: *Amen.*

P: Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Most merciful God,

C: *We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.*

P: God, who is rich in mercy, loved us even when we were dead in sin, and made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. In the name of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. Almighty God strengthens you with power through the Holy Spirit, that Christ may live in your hearts through faith.

C: *Amen.*

PASTORAL GREETING

THE KYRIE

CANTICLE OF PRAISE *This is the Feast*

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P: The Lord be with you.

C: **And also, with you.**

P: Let us pray, together.

C: **O God our shepherd, you know your sheep by name and lead us to safety through the valleys of death. Guide us by your voice, that we may walk in certainty and security to the joyous feast prepared in your house, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

SCRIPTURE LESSONS

April 26, 2026 – Fourth Sunday of Easter

FIRST READING: Acts 2:42-47

The Fellowship of the Believers

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The word of the Lord.

*Congregation response following the reading is: **Thanks be to God!***

THE PSALM Psalm 23

SECOND READING: 1 Peter 2:19-25

¹⁹ For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

²² “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” ²⁵ For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The word of the Lord.

*Congregation response following the reading is: **Thanks be to God!***

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

ELW Pg. 151

Alleluia.

Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life.

Alleluia.

THE HOLY GOSPEL: John 10:1-10

The Good Shepherd and His Sheep

“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

The Gospel of the Lord.

*Congregational response: **Praise to you, O Christ.***

PR. JIM'S SERMON:



EASTER 4A, 4-26-26, John 10.1-10

THE GATE

Gate? Jesus says that he is a gate? What I am hearing in our current culture of moral relativism, is that a gate is offensive. A gate is restrictive and xenophobic. A gate is exclusive. A gate is an evil limitation of freedom. All gates should be dismantled and removed from their hinges. Funny how those who say these things have doors on their homes to restrict the free flow of the community through their house. Let's all remove all the doors from our homes! Now we can be free!! And don't forget to set an appointment with the orthopedic surgeon to have your bones removed. Then you can be truly free!!

Oh. Wait a minute here. This little thought experiment has gone way too far. The person who believes that all morality is relative, that the ideal is anarchic libertarianism, that "it" is free from all limits.....will be the first person to say, that if you disagree, in your case, "it" has to draw the line somewhere. "I/it am free to be anything, but you are not. I am free to disagree with everything, but you can't disagree with anything." To claim to be an atheist for instance, is to confess that you believe in a God that you refuse to recognize. So, you are believing in, and invoking something, that you don't believe in. Congratulations! That's a great first step! God's still there, and he believes in you anyway. He'll wait until you make up your mind.

And what are we supposed to do with Jesus if he is The Gate of the sheep? Oh yes, I remember now. We already did it on Good Friday, the most evil, unhinged, blackest, darkest, unsafe, unhinged, gateless day of the universe. Really, I'd rather talk about Kum Bah Yah, and sway deliciously in front of the campfire entranced by the siren's song, and the hypnotic flames, and ignore the hungry wolves and evil sheep eaters, circumnavigating the darkness, just beyond the reach of the light, unhindered by the safety of a fold and a gate. If I am a "free" sheep there, I am low-hanging fruit.

As I was learning to talk, I was encouraged to call my maternal grandmother, Virginia Kirkendall Burwell, Grandma Ginnie. That was a mouthful for a one-year-old. I shortened it to G.G. right away. In my earliest school years, through junior high, my usual summer schedule included spending several weeks living with G.G., in her workplace, in Lansing, Kansas, beautiful countryside, in the flood plain of the great Missouri River: The Kansas State Industrial Farm for Women. She was the Superintendent. Nice euphemisms. In the parlance, G.G. was the head bull, the warden at the women's state penitentiary, the pen. She was The Gate. Every person that came into or went out of that property, The Pen, went through G.G.

G.G. assigned Ernestine to watch over me. She was probably, the most dangerous woman there; a convicted murderer, violent felon, large and strong, deeply dark, and covered with keloidal scars acquired in knife fights, and violent domestic abuse. The inmate population feared and respected her. G.G. trusted her, and that trust humanized her. Ernestine watched me like a hawk. If Ernestine thought that anyone was out of line in their behavior around me..... well, the room would go quiet, and she would level her dead black eyes at the offender. The point was made without a word being said. I thought she was beautiful, because she protected me fiercely. I was safe in the Pen. Inside the Gate. Protected by a Huge Mean Nanny Goat, who I had no doubt, would die for me.

There were no other children there to play with. It was an all-adult world. I visited prisoners in the hospital wing, some detoxing, some pregnant with complications, some horribly disfigured, with devastating injuries from failed suicide attempts. Elderly Lillian was deaf and mute from repeated assaults. In self-defense she finally struck back fatally. So, she was sentenced to life without parole, in the Lansing Pen. Ernestine would read or sew while Lillian and I wrote notes to each other. We were all safe together. We were all sheep in G.G.'s fold. I believe that the love shown in that place was part of G.G.'s gift to the world. She was a gatekeeper who delivered SAFETY, growing skills with CONFIDENCE, and a future of ABUNDANCE for her shattered and wounded sheep.

Christ the Gate is the door that gives SAFETY. The sheepfold protected against the night hazards of weather, wild beasts and thieves. Jesus is there between us and the world to provide safety and modify our relationships to people, places, and things. Jesus stands as a gate of mercy between enemies and friends, between wives and husbands, and between bosses and workers, giving us the option of forgiveness and cooperation in human relationships. Only Jesus can do that which no human power can provide.

I asked G.G., "Why is the hurricane fence around the prison only 6 feet tall? I climb over it every day to cross the road to the machine shop and the barn." She said, "I'd be ashamed of the girl who couldn't climb that fence. The only reason I post guards is to make sure that nobody breaks in. The girls are safe and confident in here. They are treated with respect. Outside, on the street, they are victims. There they will get hurt and maybe die. They have no safety so they have no confidence. If they run, they always manage to get caught and come back to me." Wow! What a testimony!!

One girl escaped and made it from northeast corner of Kansas, to Dallas, before she was apprehended. The state paid Dad to drive 200 miles to pick up G.G. and drive her to Dallas, to transport the prisoner back. At the Dallas County jail, G.G. instructed the deputies to remove her handcuffs. The girl worried the deputies, by rushing at G.G., wrapping her arms around her neck and sobbing, "Thank God you are here, Ms. Burwell!"

The deputies asked to inspect G.G.'s pistol. She told them "I don't have one. I don't need one! They said it was required by law to have a weapon if you are transporting a prisoner, so they gave Dad a pistol. He put it in the trunk and turned it in to authorities back in Kansas.

Jesus, the Gate, gives us CONFIDENCE. We have encouragement and assurance as we go in and out, over the threshold, about our lives' paths. We are assured of liberty and freedom as children of God and that gives us confidence in living. Sometimes we are victims of bad events, but Christ the door helps us to be survivors. He is the gatekeeper who watches the threshold and the comings and goings of all who go through the door.

The other side of the door is unknown. It can be deadly dangerous, merely challenging or luckily opportune. It depends. With Christ the Door as our assurance in our daily travels, our attitude need not be one of fear, but of confidence. The past is approved, over and done with, and the future is open. We know with confidence, that in coming home, the gate to safety is open. All things work for the good for those who love the Good Shepherd, the Door of the sheep, the Gate. Our perceived problem is the foundation upon which God, at this very moment, is building a miracle.

And over the threshold of Jesus, the Gate is another thing just for us. ABUNDANCE. All that we need to keep us fit and happy with an abundant and full life. Don't fear a future that includes green pastures, still waters, and soul-restoring living.

G.G. abolished the chow line, and instituted a dress code for meals. Until then, meals were often a time of conflict and bad behavior, cursing and an occasional fight. G.G. refurbished a large storage area, one floor away from the kitchen. She had a dumb waiter installed in the wall, to transport food from the kitchen to the dining room. It was a big box which raised and lowered with ropes and pulleys. The repurposed dining area was furnished with round tables and chairs, table cloths and linens, dishes and silverware. The girls were taught etiquette. They took turns cooking, serving, setting and bussing the tables, KP duty, and being served as honored guests at the tables. An assigned *Maitre d'hotel*, would escort each group of girls to their tables. Serving or being served, everyone would learn how to do every job. Matrons and staff ate with the inmates. Grace was said before each meal. And a song was sung after the meal. "How Great Thou Art" was a favorite. The girls were treated as valuable and responsible people, and prepared for a better life on the outside. Employable. They were taught sewing, reading, cooking, waiting tables, gardening, hairdressing and salon skills. G.G. the Gate, anticipated their future value in the world.

It is hard to imagine how valued we are by God. We are privileged, important and necessary components of God's Kingdom, just as the sheep are the life and livelihood of the shepherd.

For Christ to call us his sheep and to stand in place as our shepherd is to say that we are the best and most important thing that the Creator of the Universe has going. We are the chief wealth of the Kingdom of God. We are abundance and we enjoy abundance! Our lives are the food, milk, cheese, clothing, shelter and medium of exchange of the blessings of God. We are God's economy, self-sustaining, that will never shut down.

This is what Christ the Door, Jesus the Gate, came to give us. Those green pastures and still waters tell me that God is the author of life. He approves of life and living, and he tries to lead us into it in every way possible. Jesus, the Gate of the Sheep, is the passageway to the best

of everything. SAFETY, CONFIDENCE AND ABUNDANCE.

Step right through. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY

The Lord's My Shepherd

ELW 778

APOSTLES' CREED

P: God has made us His people through our Baptism into Christ. Living together in trust and hope, we confess our faith:

**C: I believe in God the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
He ascended into heaven,
He is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.**



PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

THE LORD'S PEACE (Please share the Peace with a neighbor)

THE OFFERING

"Jesus Rose"

C. McClure

THE OFFERTORY RESPONSE *Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful*

ELW Hymn 142

THE OFFERING PRAYER

All pray together:

Merciful God, accept the fruits of our labor, gathered to give you glory. You have set a table before us, a glimpse of that great day when we will hunger and thirst no more. Nourish us with the body and blood of Jesus, that goodness and mercy may follow us and bless the world you love. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

AGNUS DEI

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
have, mercy upon us.

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
grant us thy peace.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

P: In the night in which he was betrayed, Our Lord Jesus took bread and gave thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples saying: Take and eat, this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks and gave it for all to drink saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this in remembrance of me.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

COMMUNION DISTRIBUTION

POST COMMUNION BLESSING

The Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and preserve you in Eternal Life.

POST COMMUNION SONG *Thankful Hearts and Voices Raise*

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Presider:

Holy One, through this meal you have made your home among us and are making all things new. Send us now to speak peace to anxious hearts, to love our enemies, and to bring your healing to the nations. In the name of Jesus.

Congregation: Amen.

THE BLESSING

SENDING SONG

What a Fellowship, What a Joy Divine

ELW 774

GO IN PEACE, IN SERVICE

C: Thanks be to God!

PSALM 19:14

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*



- ♣ Pat Boessling
- ♣ Jim Fritze
- ♣ Paul Houghton
- ♣ Joyce Huey
- ♣ Bryan Kile
- ♣ Nancy Lancaster
- ♣ David Magrill
- ♣ Geraine Moore
- ♣ Ed Peterman
- ♣ Dorothy Preuss
- ♣ Tillie Remmert
- ♣ Lupe Romero
- ♣ Wayne Schaper
- ♣ Scott Spates

- ♣ **Jaime Urbanski**
 - ♣ **Bennie Valites**
 - ♣ **Susan Wiles**
 - ♣ **Michael Williams**
-

COUNCIL MEETING

Council meeting will be today, **May 17**, at 11:00 a.m. in the Annex.

Church Council

USHERS

Month: April

Team # 06

Leader: John Wenger

LAY READERS & ASSISTANTS

APRIL

5 Reader — Scott Wegner
P/E — Nancy Beamesderfer

12 Reader — Jay Fort
P/E — Wendy Lambeth

19 Reader — Russell Richter
P/E — Julie Kilkenny

26 Reader — Alice Braun
P/E — Linda Cuzzort

P/E stands for Prayers and Eucharist

Nancy Beamesderfer

ATTENTION HOLY CROSS MEMBERS

Following the Church Safety Protocol, if you would like to make a reservation to use the church facilities for church or private events, please contact Sussy. You must to fill out a Calendar Request Form or send an email. Thank you!

WOMEN'S MORNING STUDY GROUP

Ladies, join us for a new monthly study starting **Saturday, April 18!**

We will meet on the **3rd Saturday** of each month from **9:00 am to 10:00 am** in the **Annex**. Our first series will focus on the *Women of the Bible* examining the lives of biblical women to discover spiritual lessons, focusing on their faith, struggles, and roles in God's story.

Come enjoy coffee and a bite during our time of fellowship and growth as we dive into God's Word together. We hope to see you there! Invite a friend.

This is open to all women.

Contact Alma Byerly 713-870-1297 with questions.

Kindly reminder:

SUNDAY SCHOOL AND NURSERY

We are looking for volunteers to support our Sunday School and Nursery!

To give our weekly teachers the opportunity to attend services, we are building a rotation.

Whether you can help **once a month or even once a quarter**, we need you.

The role is simple: supervise 2–4 children, bring them in for Bible Time, and lead a small activity. It's a low-pressure way to serve our church family.

Please reach out to Wendy Lambeth or Julie Richter if you can help!

Julie Richter

FELLOWSHIP CLUB

The Fellowship Club will be meeting Saturday, **May 16**,
at Hunan Chef (8404 Katy Fwy Ste 100) at **4:00 p.m.**

Be sure to come hungry as they have a huge buffet stocked with Chinese and
American foods! If you prefer, you can order from a menu.

If you plan to attend, please contact Linda Cuzzort (513-477-1002).

Nancy Beamesderfer

SUNDAY'S SCHEDULE

9:30 a.m. *Traditional Worship service with Rev. Jim Berggren —WC*

*Sunday School / Nursery is available for small children during the service
— Crib Room*

10:30 a.m. *Coffee fellowship following the service —Gym*

THIS WEEK AT HOLY CROSS

27 Mon	28 Tues	29 Wed	30 Thurs	1 Fri	2 Sat
---------------	----------------	---------------	-----------------	--------------	--------------

<p>East Spring ISD <u>Early Voting</u> Youth Room</p> <p>11—12 pm ELC Chapel -WC</p> <p>11—12 pm ELC Spring party cooking -Gym kitchen</p>	<p>East Spring ISD <u>Early Voting</u> Youth Room</p> <p>11—12 pm ELC Chapel -WC</p> <p>11—12 pm ELC Spring party cooking -Gym kitchen</p>	<p>10—12 pm ELC Spring party rehearsal -WC</p> <p>10 am Roundtable Group -FLCA</p> <p>11 am Choir practice -CL</p> <p>12 pm Bible Study -VR</p>	<p>10—12 pm ELC Spring party rehearsal -WC</p> <p>8 pm AA Women mtg. -FLCA</p>	<p>9—12 pm ELC Spring Party Program -WC</p> <p>9—12:30 pm ELC Spring Party -FLC kitchen</p>	<p>6 pm Saturday Informal service -AT</p>
<p>AT =Atrium, CL=Choir Loft, CR=Choir Room, ELC=Early Learning Center, FLC= Family Life Center = GYM, FLCA=Annex, KiM= Kids in Motion, MR=Media Room, VR=Volunteer Room, WC=Worship Center, YR=Youth Room, SST=Safeguards Safety Training (CPR classes)</p>					