GLORIA DEI LUTHERAN CHURCH, **February 15, 2026**; Transfiguration of Our Lord
Lectionary / Selected: Psalm 2; Habakkuk 3; II Peter 1; Matthew 17
Sermon Hymn: *How Good, Lord, to Be Here!* LBW 89
Anthem:

Forgive Us Our Debts, As We Forgive Our Debtors

'A Frenchman is a specialist at stealing famous works of art from the Louvre. He is very skilled at getting paintings out. However, as he climbed into his van, he only drove two miles before it ran out of gas right in front of a policeman who was searching for him. The policeman scratched his head and said, "How did you make this mistake? Fancy not filling up the van with gas". The thief replied: "I had no Monet to buy Degas to make the Van Gogh".' Apparently that thief was in serious debt!! Too much debt to be able to buy enough gas to get away, sell his stolen loot, and pay his debts!! But this is exactly the quandary that we all find ourselves if we seriously and truthfully examine our lives. We're in so much debt to the Lord that we're so deep in it that to get our heads above water is quite frankly a pipe dream. But how often do people think of their relationship with God in such terms?

Having grown up in the Presbyterian Church, we always said the Lord's Prayer using "debts" instead of "trespasses". I always thought it strange that denominations used "trespasses" when the wording in the Bible itself uses "debts". Turns out, in the English language, from the earliest translations from the Greek New Testament, "debts" was always the word used. Other terms, such as sins, trespasses, etc., came to be used in later periods. All things

considered, “debts” is the best one-word translation of the concept that our Lord Jesus taught us. While the majority of Biblical scholars have, since the Middle Ages, thought the original language of the New Testament was Greek, I disagree. For Aramaic, the language our Lord and the disciples spoke natively, and a language which is still used among the Assyrian Christians to this day, was also the language in which the Old Testament had been translated, and was the version that our Lord read from, studied, and quoted from. It was the version He read in the synagogue in Nazareth of Isaiah’s prophecy and proclaimed that He Himself was the fulfillment of that very prophecy. Since the first Christians were all Jews, their mother tongue was Aramaic. As the faith spread, the Scriptures which became the New Testament, were, most likely all, first written in Aramaic, as that was the language all understood best. A few were rendered in Hebrew as well. As time passed, more and more Gentiles came into the church, whose native language was Greek, or Latin. Since Greek was the lingua franca of the governing classes, despite the Romans running everything, later translations of much of the New Testament were made in Greek. As the faith continued to spread far beyond the Holy Land, the Greek New Testament became the most widely published version throughout the then known world.

And it is the Greek version of the New Testament that Martin Luther first translated into German. With reference to much earlier Latin translations, he was the first to translate the entire Bible

into the German's common language. He was the first to render the entire Bible translated from the "original" Hebrew and Greek. Previously, short verses had been translated much earlier, but nearly all based on the Latin, not the Hebrew and Greek. All this is to say that the translation we've been using here in church for the last two years is the newest, based on an exhaustive comparison of various versions of the Scripture texts in their original languages, mainly the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. This provides the fullest meaning and intent of the originals, while not restricting itself to always trying to translate word for word when, as all translators, and speakers of multiple languages know, there is almost never an exact equivalent of any one concept in any two languages. This is why I encourage all of you to purchase the Passion Translation Bible when it is completed, in just another year or two. Only 14 books of the Old Testament are still in progress. As it is so different in some places than what many are used to, some find it off-putting. Try not to recall the previous ways verses were worded. Just read it as if it were new. As it's written in today's English, it's an easy read. I promise you, God's Words will speak to your heart in ways you've never previously experienced. Call this one of my final admonitions to you as I soon will retire.

Speaking of final words, note what we just read from II Peter. He knows that he will soon be martyred, executed for being a follower of Christ, as the fiery persecution under the Roman emperor Nero began. Nero had purposefully set fire to Rome, partially

in order to provide a pretext for launching a genocide against the Christians, and in the year 64, just 3 months after the devastating fire that destroyed much of Rome, Peter was crucified, upside down at his own request. So II Peter, was written only months, perhaps even just weeks before his death. And we know for certain that Peter had no regrets whatsoever. His letter is a last will and testament, as it were, to encourage Christians of all times and places, to consider it all joy to suffer for the Lord and His precious, priceless Gospel.

Peter was Lord Jesus' right-hand man. He was the leader of the disciples, famous for foot-in-mouth disease. But after the birth of the Church on the Day of Pentecost, he, along with John, were the two primary leaders. Of them, he was the first among equals. Such that the Roman Catholics consider him to be the very first pope, Bishop of Rome. Truly, Peter had a unique relationship with the Lord. Indeed, our Lord poured into Peter more than any other of the apostles. As today we commemorate the Transfiguration of the Lord, we read that Peter, along with John and Jacob ("Jacob", mangled to become "James" in English), the two brothers, sons of Zebedee, were the three inner circle disciples privileged to witness the glory of the Lord as His divine nature was revealed on the mountaintop. And in II Peter, he reiterates that glorious memory for the benefit of all of us. But in another encounter, recorded only in Matthew, a fish brings up a heavy silver coin. Now Matthew was a tax collector, employed by the Romans

to collect tax revenues. In other words, he was one who had money, numbers and assessments on his mind. It was his career, until Lord Jesus called him to something far better! So, of course, he would be the one who would recall and relate this incident of Peter and the fish with the coin in its mouth.

Recall also that Peter was a fisherman. Never once had he ever come across a fish that had a coin in its mouth, let alone a big solid silver coin, enough to pay the annual tax for Temple support, not just for one person, but for two! Even though, as Lord Jesus explained in His teaching to Peter, that taxes are not paid by a king or the king's family, for it is the king who levies the taxes in the first place. And right here, was the veritable King of the Universe, Whose Temple was dedicated to. As King, how could He be taxed to support the very building designed and built to worship Him? But, so as to avoid any offense, because the local tax authorities had no understanding of Who He was, Lord Jesus condescended for the tax to be paid, for His Own assessment and Peter's as well. Note also that Peter was only to throw in his line. The fish rose to the surface all by itself, opened its mouth, and Peter took out the coin. He returned from the lakeshore the few blocks to Capernaum and paid the tax forthwith.

The Lord had just declared that the king's children, the king's family members, were all exempt from paying taxes. Which meant that naturally the Lord, as well as Peter, and all who are the Lord's disciples, are exempt from the tax, because we are all

members of God's family. Father God is the Father of us all. If we believe. So, while this world is filled with injustice, and troubles and pains, our Father will provide for all that we need in this world, to "pay" it what it deems we owe it. Yet, this is all backwards. For in truth, we don't owe the world anything. Vice versa, the world doesn't owe us anything either. We came into the world with nothing, and we go out from this world just as empty handed. We can't take anything with us! But why would we even want to?

While we don't owe the world anything, except when we buy things, borrow things from others, we do owe an impossible-to-repay debt to Father God. Our sin, our rebellion, our childish naughtiness against the parenting rules of our heavenly Father, are an unending source of "deficit spending" for our earthly, carnal lives. Yet, our Lord paid the price for all of it. The cost was the shedding of His priceless blood on the Cross to death and burial and hell. There is no way we can even begin to repay that debt. All we need do is just accept that free gift. Though we may think we're "good" people, our absolute best deeds are so tainted with mixed motives that they're no better than used tampons. While millions of idiots, foolish people with the gall to think that God actually owes them something, like pleasant lives, good times, like fraudulent welfare payments, reparations(!), etc. Nothing could be further from the truth. He owes us nothing. Our debt in sin to Him is incalculable. But Lord Jesus paid it all! He forgave it all! And so we also must forgive those in debt to us. It's God's Word.