“All men are like grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.” Like a flower dropping its petals, we suffer the effects of reaching later seasons in life. Men start to lose their hair. Metabolism slows down. Extra pounds gather on the body. For men and women, grey hairs, more wrinkles. Celebrities may get plastic surgery but they can’t cover up the fade. Like flowers, we fade and wither. Are we just talking about age? You might think that, but no.

“All their glory is like the flowers of the field.” All their glory. This includes all the achievements of the human race. We want to take pride in what we do. We like to be satisfied with our personal goodness. But to get a taste of what your works and deeds really are, go outside after church and check out the Trinity Ladies Circle flower garden on the east side of church. I did so yesterday and I was shocked at what I saw. In one word. Desolation. A garden once colorful and bursting with life is now brown, dry, fallen, withered. The state of that garden is nothing our gardeners did wrong. It’s just the nature of flowers. They don’t last; they wither.

We want to think our accomplishments, our human glory is better than that. But if we’re going to meet God, we need to be told the truth. Here it is.

In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

John the Baptist was the fulfillment of that verse. He wasn’t out in the wilderness telling people how good they were. He preached repentance. That every valley be raised up. Every mountain and hill be made low. In other words, low sinners turn from your low sins. High proud people turn from your self-righteousness. The low raised up, the high brought low. That all of mankind be a level plain, fit for the LORD’s entrance.
We are no different from any other human. All our glory is like withered flowers. This is a hard message to accept. Easier to make comparisons. “Hey, at least I’m not completely evil like Hitler. At least, I’m not corrupt like some of these sleazy politicians. Another college athletic coach accused of molesting young boys. How could these people be so sick?” You know full well how they could be so sick, and so do I. Because we have the sickness, too. Even if we don’t commit gross sins like murder, theft, and homosexuality, we have the same sinful hearts that these gross sins spring out of. We want to be justified by comparing ourselves to other people. But that’s the wrong comparison. The one we have to compare ourselves to is God. And in that comparison we fall woefully short.

“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags, we all shrivel up like a leaf and like the wind our sins sweep us away.” Isaiah 64.

We can’t hide behind our religious affiliation, boast that we’re WELS Lutherans. We can’t boast of our talents, and the good we’ve done. The grand total of all that we’ve done and all that we are falls to the ground as a withered, brown, dead flower before the feet of the holy God.

So what does God do? Throws in the refuse heap to be burned, right? No, he picks up and makes us new.

I went to the law verses first in our text and then told you the gospel. But in our text God proclaims the gospel first, he just can’t wait to tell us the good news. And unlike our withered works, this is true glory. True glory is the breathtaking generosity of our God. Right away, in verse one, he tells us through Isaiah.
Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and
proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for,

My people. He calls us his people. Comfort, comfort is his message. Our hard service is
over. As much as this life feels like an endless battle where you can never get enough done, and
there’s always more to do, that’s just the outward side of things. The inner truth of life is that
you have nothing more to get done, there is nothing more to do. Our Maker tells us the good
news – our hard service is completed, our sin is paid for!

Still, the human heart is bent on taking credit for things instead of giving credit to God.
For instance, what do you think of that statement God makes? Proclaim to her that her sin has
been paid for, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.

Double for all her sins. Does that mean double punishment from God or double reward?
Many Bible commentaries I read said that God is referring to a double punishment he would
inflict on the Israelites first from the Babylonians, then from the Romans. But does that fit the
rest of the Bible? Martin Luther’s commentary pointed that out. Where does the Bible say that
God forgives his people because he has already punished his people twice? No where. But the
Bible does say that human sin is no match for God’s grace. Romans 5, “Where sin increased,
grace increased all the more.”

But no wonder Bible scholars say God is talking about double punishment here,
because it seems unreasonable that God would reward wickedness, instead of punishing it.
Even give us a double reward for our sin. But he does. Again friends, this is true glory, the glory
of the LORD that he is so good, *too good* to withered flowers like you and me. Call it excessive generosity. Call it kindness going overboard. That’s God’s love for us, even us.

To make the point further, the original Hebrew of this verse says, “*her sin has been accepted favorably.*” How could God accept our sin favorably, be pleased to accept it?

It makes more sense, if you think of George Bailey in the Christmas movie, “It’s a Wonderful Life”. After his visit with the angel Clarence, George returns to his old life full of joy. He greets mean Mr. Potter. He kindly greets the stern bank examiner waiting in his house. Going up the stairs, he kisses the broken banister knob that had so enraged him earlier. In the movie, it’s not that George Bailey loved those negative things, but he was so overjoyed that he overlooked them.

That’s how God is in dealing with us. He is so full of joy and pleasure at what his Son has done for us that he overlooks our sin, and heaps double blessings and rewards upon us instead.

*And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*” I think of the glory of the LORD, and what God’s Son has done. I have a unique perspective that I won’t be able to enjoy much longer. And that is, if you remember, Jesus’ ministry began when he was baptized, when he was thirty years old, Luke chapter 3 tells us. So we estimate Jesus went through his suffering and death when he was thirty-three years old. That’s how old I am right now.

In your early thirties, a person has had a chance to mature. And yet you’re still young. You feel capable at that age, easy to think you’re self-sufficient. How much more so when we’re
talking about the sinless Son of God in human flesh! But Jesus didn’t think he was self-
sufficient. He relied on his Father.

He came to earth to bring glory to his Father. Think of that Friday, a man so beaten
down by the whip and rod that he couldn’t even carry his own cross, but collapsed under its
weight like an old man. And he was only thirty-three years old. And he was God himself.

Our sin is paid for, our hard service is completed, the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
and the mouth of the LORD has spoken it. Isn’t that all tied together, in the Lord’s dying cry? “It
is finished.” (John 19:30)

Our good works are withered flowers if we think they will save us. But when we know
that Jesus is our salvation, our good works truly are good. We serve our neighbor out of thanks
to our King. And Jesus is pleased with our service. We bask in his glory as we proclaim what he
has done. A voice says, “Cry out.” And I said, “What shall I cry?” “The grass withers and the
flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them.”

The breath of the LORD. Breath and Spirit are the same word in the Old Test
ament. We can connect the Holy Spirit with this verse. He breathes upon mankind like a driving wind.

You hear people say, “How can there be a God with things like earthquakes, hurricanes,
death, diseases, and so on.” First of all, evil is from Satan. Secondly, people don’t realize it’s a
blessing when the LORD breathes affliction upon his people. For what could be worse than a
community where everything is calm, nothing bad ever happens, everyone is complacent and
self-satisfied, no one is thinking about God and sin and death and the crying need for salvation?
So like a wind blowing in a garden and blowing all the petals off the flowers, the Spirit breathes on us with afflictions, exposing our glory for what it is, a withered flower.

The LORD, the LORD is our glory! In Christ crucified and risen, God has brought to bloom a flower that can never fade. The petals on this flower are grace, peace, and victory over the grave. By faith, we have the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. “What shall I cry?” Preaching is tough work, for the Sunday preacher, and for you in your everyday conversations. Yeah, you have an audience, too. We’re tempted to be afraid, because our message is offensive to sinful man. We know in our flesh how offensive it is for people to hear that their works count as nothing before God. But we must call a spade a spade. Call a withered flower a withered flower. Speak the truth, even if it causes offense. The need to save a soul is worth the risk of hurt feelings.

Don’t be afraid of the person who is hostile to our message. Be afraid for the person. Anyone who will not repent of his sin is in grave danger. Anyone who dismisses and despises the Word of God will be despised by God on the last day.

Proclaim withered flowers and true glory. Withered flowers, we are so much more! Praise God for his ridiculous grace and his outrageous mercy. That he treats us sinners as kings, and has made us kings who will one day serve alongside the great King above. God’s glory is that we belong to Christ alone, and Christ alone has accomplished this. Amen.

And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.