

REFLECTIONS

EASTER

APRIL 4 - MAY 22, 2021

HIGHER
THINGS[®]

DARE TO BE LUTHERAN[®]

Easter

APRIL 4 - MAY 22, 2021

This season's Reflections were written by the Rev. Dr. Alfonso Espinosa, pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Irvine, CA. He is also the author of two books : Faith That Sees Through the Culture and Faith That Engages the Culture.

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A Short Form for Daily Reflection

ADAPTED FROM LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM

Make the sign of the Holy Cross and say:

In the Name of the Father, † Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Read the Psalm for the Day (A table of daily psalms can be found in Lutheran Service Book, page 304).

Read "Today's Reading" if there is one listed.

Read the Daily Lectionary selections.

Read the Reflection for the Day.

Say the Apostles' Creed.

Pray the Lord's Prayer.

Pray one of these little prayers:

(In the Morning)

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray Thee to keep me this day also from sin and all evil, that all my doings and life may please Thee. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

In the morning go to your work with joy, singing a hymn, as the Ten Commandments, or what your devotion may suggest.

(In the Evening)

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast graciously kept me this day, and I pray Thee to forgive me all my sins, where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

If it is evening, then go to sleep promptly and cheerfully.

The Resurrection of Our Lord

APRIL 4, 2021

Today's Reading: Mark 16:1-8

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 14:10-31; Hebrews 7:23-8:13

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene...

(Mark 16:1)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. According to Scripture, who is the first person to go to the tomb of the LORD Jesus after He was buried? Answer: Mary Magdalene. Jesus had once healed her, exorcizing seven demons from her (Luke 8:2). We can't begin to imagine what her life was like. She was lower than low and practically freaked people out. She must have been repulsive. "Total loser" would have been an understatement. But Jesus came for sinners--people dead in their trespasses and sins like you and me.

Jesus did not hesitate to love her and have mercy on her. He healed her and she became one of the Lord's most ardent believers. What happened from there was amazing. Not only does she have the distinction of going to Jesus' tomb first (while the apostles were hiding out), but after everyone else left, Jesus appears to her first (John 20:11). Mary Magdalene went on to be the first proclaimer of the resurrection of Christ (John 20:18). The one so lowly was the one lifted up so highly! Why? Because Jesus is for sinners, even the absolute worst of them!

But we must not forget that the Scriptural testimony about Mary is not random. Her lowest point was when she was possessed by demons (a seemingly hopeless situation), but her highest point is right here in Mark 16. This time she was with the *risen* Lord. She witnessed firsthand that Jesus even has power over death. No wonder the demons must obey His commands! While the raising of Christ is attributed to both the Father (Acts 2:24) and to the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:1), it is--in true Trinitarian fashion--credited also to Jesus Himself. Jesus said, "No one takes [my life] from me...I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again" (John 10:18).

This One is the Master of the wind and the waves, the Master of all disease and disability, the One with all authority over principalities and powers... and yes, even the Master over death. Mary had already experienced His power, and now the rest of the world would know for whom His power is especially made known: exceptional sinners like Mary Magdalene, and like you and me! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God the Father, through Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, You have overcome death and opened the gate of everlasting life to us. Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of our Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by Your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the Resurrection of Our Lord)

Monday of Easter Week

APRIL 5, 2021

Today's Reading: Luke 24:36-38

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 15:1-18; Hebrew 9:1-28

...Jesus...said to them, "Peace to you!"

(Luke 24:36)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When the LORD Jesus says, "Peace to you!" it's not like He's saying, "I wish you well," or "I hope you feel better," or "Even though I don't know how things are going to work out, here's hoping for the best." Ah...no! When God proclaims peace upon you, it is created upon you; it becomes a reality upon you, so that peace for you is as empirical and objective as the iPhone you're holding right now or the thing upon which you are sitting. Think of the opening of Genesis, "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). When God speaks, what He speaks becomes. The spoken thing is now an "is" reality.

Peace IS now yours because Jesus has spoken it to you! He speaks it every time you attend Divine Service, as the pastor in Christ's Office says, "Peace be with you." That's Jesus speaking to you and casting His peace upon you. Why is this so important? Because we--according to our core sin--are like those Emmaus disciples in Luke 24. We are "...troubled...[and have] doubts [arising] in our hearts" (Luke 24:38). That's what sinners do. In fact, the old man does nothing *but* doubt, fret, complain, and curse. But when Jesus sees you like this--like He saw the Emmaus disciples--He has compassion upon you as He had compassion upon them. So His response is not to condemn you, but in the greatest love and mercy impart to you His peace, which means that you are right with God through the life, death, and resurrection of the LORD Jesus Christ.

But how can we know this with absolute certainty? Well, if we sneak ahead a little bit to Luke 24:39 we see what Jesus did with the Emmaus disciples: He got REAL with them! He showed them His hands and His feet and told them that they could touch Him! Well, guess what? He gets REAL with you, too! You go to the Divine Service and receive Jesus' REAL Absolution through the REAL pastor; and then hear Jesus' REAL Word through Jesus' REAL preaching Office; and then--best of all--you receive the REAL Body and Blood of Jesus in the Holy Sacrament. You get to see exactly how and why the peace that Jesus gives to you is not theoretical, but absolutely the real deal. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, in the paschal feast You restore all creation. Continue to send Your heavenly gifts upon Your people that they may walk in perfect freedom and receive eternal life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Tuesday of Easter Week

APRIL 6, 2021

Today's Reading: Acts 10:34-43

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 15:19-16:12; Hebrews 10:1-18

*So Peter opened his mouth and said, "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality."
(Acts 10:34)*

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. There are at least two very different ways to take this revelation from Luke, who wrote these words by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. One way is to take the fact that God shows no partiality as really bad news. I mean, how fair is that?! So I can go to all this effort to be a good person, do the right thing, be honest, hard-working, etc., but then God is going to treat the rebel and the bad guy like He treats me? It does not seem right and let's face it: Such frustration can cause a person to stray from God altogether. After all, we want proper credit for what we do, especially when we think what we do makes us better than others.

On the other hand, we might understand that God's showing no partiality is a really good thing. He will still be the God of grace even for us. He is the God who sent His Son for sinners and mess-ups and is still impartial enough to consider me among the saints of God. That is, God's impartiality means that I have a chance to be with the "good guys." It's just important that we understand what makes the "good guys" good.

These are the ones who are "acceptable" to the LORD (Acts 10:35). But being acceptable to God is not because we accept Him...no, instead His acceptance of us happened a long time ago when His Son Jesus, our Savior, lived, died, and rose for us! Indeed, our salvation is not about our opening our hearts to accept Jesus; but about the Heavenly Father's opening His heart to us by sending His Son to be our Savior!

We are accepted and experience God's impartiality through the Good News of peace that has been preached to us (Acts 10:36). Jesus was anointed (Acts 10:38) and that means He has power and authority to heal ALL sinners.

Remember God shows no partiality, so "all" means "all"! Yes, it is true as Luke writes, "They put him to death by hanging him on a tree," and many thought it was game over for Jesus, but here's the rest of the story: "God raised him on the third day...[and] everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:40, 43). In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, through the resurrection of Your Son You have secured peace for our troubled consciences. Grant us this peace evermore that trusting in the merit of Your Son we may come at last to the perfect peace of heaven; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Wednesday of Easter Week

APRIL 7, 2021

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism*: The Tenth Commandment

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 16:13-35; Hebrews 10:19-39

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

(Text from Luther's Small Catechism drawn from Exodus 20:17)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. "What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not entice or force away our neighbor's wife, workers, or animals, or turn them against him, but urge them to stay and do their duty" (Luther's *Small Catechism*). Have you heard the old saying, "The grass always looks greener on the other side of the fence?" Well, for our sinful nature, this is a highly accurate statement. The flesh is never satisfied. Its cravings and desires are insatiable. Our sin is never satisfied.

King Solomon described this problem in respect to the love of money: "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money [or "will never have enough"]" (Ecclesiastes 5:10). Why is this true? God tells us why: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) These dark cravings easily turn toward our neighbor and what our neighbor has in his or her life, like their close relationships.

Have you ever been jealous of someone else? If so, then maybe it was because you envied their popularity, or even because they had or have a friend that you always wanted to be close to. When our sin zeros in on envy, coveting, and evil desire, then we don't want our neighbor to have what they have. Instead, we want what they have. This is how the Tenth Commandment is broken.

But your sin was put on Jesus! He took it out of obedient love to the Heavenly Father for you. He went to the Cross and covered your sin, including all your coveting, on the Cross; and He rose to prove that since you are baptized into His death and His resurrection you do indeed have a new life! That life realizes this: You have the Kingdom of God (Luke 12:32). You already have the best of the best of life; in Christ, you have all things good and holy and lasting and rich! You don't need anything else! Now, because God takes care of what you have, in Christ you can help your neighbor take care of what they have. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

"You shall not crave your neighbor's house Nor covet money, goods, or spouse. Pray God He would your neighbor bless As you yourself wish success." Have mercy, LORD! ("These Are the Holy Ten Commands" LSB 581, st.10)

Thursday of Easter Week

APRIL 8, 2021

Today's Reading: Job 19:23-37

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 17:1-16; Hebrews 11:1-29

*"And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh in my flesh I shall see God."
(Job 19:25)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. People say a lot of things that either criticize Scripture or reveal their lack of familiarity with Scripture. For example, many perpetuate the idea that the Old Testament does not teach the resurrection of the body. Job 19 disproves this assertion. In fact, Job in chapter 19 is adamant about what he is saying here. It is so important that he wants the truth of his words to be "with an iron pen and lead, engraved in the rock forever!" (Job 19:24) Nothing can contradict this truth. What truth? That after we die, our physical bodies will turn to dust. We will be reduced to practically nothing. The Greeks taught that our atoms would just dissipate into the rest of the universe. Job admits that yes, his body would be "destroyed"; reduced to ashes. Yes, this is true, but that is not everything.

Job then states the rest of the story: Something happens after death that will enable him to see God with his own eyes! (Job 19:26-27) How could Job possibly testify so strongly to this? It appears at first glance to be a contradiction, but it is not. Job was describing the effects of the resurrected body. The Gospel is not just that God put your sins on Jesus for Him to cover your sins with His blood, but the Gospel includes what God promises you on account of Jesus' rising from death. And this is no silly metaphor or "spiritual" resurrection, but it means that His body that died (the same one buried) came back to life.

Yes, bodies that die turn to dust, and the rest of the story is that God reassembles the body--in a miraculous way--so that not only will our bodies be restored, but they will be better than ever before (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). In other words, the Good News is that death is not your end, dear Christian, because after you die, you shall be raised and you will see Jesus with your very own eyes! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, through Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, You overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life. We humbly pray that we may live before You in righteousness and purity forever; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Friday of Easter Week

APRIL 9, 2021

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 18:5-27; Hebrews 12:1-24

Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump. (1Corinthians5:7)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. "Leaven" here is a metaphor, so Paul is not talking about yeast that makes dough rise. In 1 Corinthians 5:7, "leaven" stands for the old life, the old man, the sinful nature; the flesh. Before you were baptized (or if you were baptized later in life, before you came to saving faith through another means of grace), you were only "leaven," only unregenerate, only against God. The state of being "leaven" is described thoroughly in Romans 5:6-10: You were weak, ungodly, a sinner, and an enemy of God. This condition is so permeating that this leaven infiltrated your very core, or perhaps better said, your *heart*, so that nothing but more leaven could rise out of you (Matthew 15:18-20). Such leaven spreads to everything you do, and say, and think by nature, all of which is the old leaven of sin and death. In this condition, a person is spiritually dead.

But God in His mercy saw us in this old leavened state, and loved us so much that He gave His Son, Jesus, to come and do something about our old leavened lives. Jesus put on our humanity, became our brother, even while still being Almighty God, and did something about the old leaven. Through Himself, He has given us His perfect unleavened bread, His very body to make our lives holy and unleavened. We now have the new life of Christ that covers our old leaven of sin. His sinless and unleavened life has covered you ever since you were baptized into Him, so that now the Holy Spirit is busy daily doing something in and through you: leading you to confess the old leaven, to "clean it out" according to what Jesus has done for you.

We confess it to God, and through Christ, God takes it from us, and then reminds us where He put it all: on His Son when His Son was on the Cross with all our old leaven. In Christ, God sees you as unleavened. On account of Christ, all the old leaven is gone! You are now His new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You show those in error the light of Your truth so that they may return to the way of righteousness. Grant faithfulness to all who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's Church that they may avoid whatever is contrary to their confession and follow all such things as are pleasing to You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Saturday of Easter Week

APRIL 10, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for the Second Sunday of Easter

(Psalm 81:1, 7a, 10, 16b; antiphon: 1 Peter 2:2a)

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 19:1-25; Hebrews 13:1-21

*Like newborn infants, Alleluia, long for the pure spiritual milk of the Word.
Alleluia.* (From the Introit for the Second Sunday of Easter)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. The Introit for tomorrow, the “entrance” or “beginning” that tells us the theme of the service, is for the special Sunday known as *Quasimodo Geniti*, “like newborn babies.” That is, this Sunday’s theme teaches us that we should be like newborn babies. But in what way? So that we would “long for the pure spiritual milk of the Word.”

Have you ever observed a hungry baby? Getting fed is basically the only thing on their minds! Christians still have a sinful nature and because of that, one of our worst problems is being complacent and no longer feeling the need for God’s Word. In sin, we do not long for or thirst for the Word of Christ. Or course, this is exactly where our sin, the world, and the devil want us to be. In time, we might just turn away from God’s Word altogether (may it never be!).

When the Holy Spirit convicts us of this sinful way of no longer longing for the Word of Christ, we confess our sin, and receive Christ’s forgiveness and then we live not as unwise, but as wise. We train ourselves by the grace of God and through the Word and Sacraments (the Holy Spirit always working through these) to enter each day with a longing. The longing that says once again this day, “I need Jesus, and I know where to find Him! I receive Him through His pure spiritual milk, His Word. For this I long.” Luther taught this in respect to receiving Holy Absolution, through which the forgiveness of Christ is imputed to us. Luther wrote: “If you are a Christian, then you ought to be happy to run more than a hundred miles to Confession and not let yourself be urged to come.” This is what longing for the Word looks like. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Sing aloud to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob! In distress you called, and I delivered you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder. I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it; and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen. Like newborn infants, Alleluia, long for the pure spiritual milk [of the Word.] Alleluia.

(From the Introit for Quasimodo Geniti Sunday)

The Second Sunday of Easter

APRIL 11, 2021

Today's Reading: John 20:19-31

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 20:1-24; Luke 4:1-15

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them. (John 20:19)

In the Name ✝ of Jesus. Amen. This marvelous Easter text is one of the most important in leading us to worship our Risen LORD and Savior Jesus Christ. At the same time, it is teaching us something about our Risen LORD according to His Person as true God and true man. In our Lutheran Confessions, Solid Declaration, Article VII on The Holy Supper, we learn that there are three ways in which Jesus can be in a given place. One of those is the way He was present as recorded in John 20. Here, space cannot contain Him, so Jesus was able to leave “the closed grave and came through closed doors” [John 20:19]. So locked doors and hard walls can't keep Jesus from really and actually coming to you and being with you. At the same time here in John 20 the disciples were able to know Jesus' real presence. He was actually there with them in His body! In fact, Thomas got to touch Him! (John 20:27). In other words, Jesus can do both at the same time: have nothing touch Him as He passes through locked doors and walls, and yet be touched and touch at the same time! How does He do it? He's God! It is not too difficult for Him.

So, what is really important about this fancy schmancy theological overview? Just this: This is the same way that Jesus comes to you in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar! He does not need bread and wine to contain Him (they can't), and yet when you receive the sacramental bread and the sacramental wine, He really and truly and actually comes to you! In the Holy Sacrament, His Body and His Blood enters your mouth, enters your whole life, and this is one way that He is keeping His promise to be with you always (Matthew 28:20). In our sin, we doubt that Jesus can do this, but in this very Holy Sacrament and in His Word proclaimed, we poor sinners are given and increased in holy faith so that we may walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). In the Name ✝ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, grant that we who have celebrated the Lord's resurrection may by Your grace confess in our life and conversation that Jesus is Lord and God; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the Second Sunday of Easter)

Monday of the Second Week of Easter

APRIL 12, 2021

Today's Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 22:20-23:13; Luke 4:16-30

Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the LORD God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people.

(Ezekiel 37:12)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. While the Old Testament teaches the resurrection of the flesh as we see in Job 19, Ezekiel 37 is not about the resurrection of the body, but it is about the renewal and “resurrection” of hope and vitality for living in faith. The powerful scene of the valley of dry bones describes the people of Israel in exile in Babylon before their liberation by the powerful Persian emperor and conqueror Cyrus the Great (as history knows him). But before Cyrus, God’s people had lost their homeland, they were like slaves in a far-away land, and the confidence they once had as the people of God seemed like a distant memory. They had lost hope, so that they were full of dryness in spirit, and full of the feeling of death in their collective soul. That is why God describes His people here as a great valley of dry bones.

Have you ever felt dry? Have you ever lost hope? The psalmist proves to us that it is possible for a believer to feel this way. Psalm 32:3-4 says, “For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.” For us, though, we don’t need any mere man, even a powerful mere man like Cyrus the Great, but only Jesus Christ, who is not a mere man, but the very Son of God!

This is how Jesus rescues us from our sinful exiles; this is how Jesus raises our “dry bones.” “I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin’” (Psalm 32:5). As Jesus keeps us in our baptismal grace, we are lifted up and renewed day by day. We are no longer exiles and slaves to sin, but we are released from bondage to sin and we have a new Master, the LORD of life who showers upon us new hope, and this hope does not disappoint nor put us to shame (Romans 5:5). In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord God, heavenly Father, Your Son announced in the synagogue of His hometown of Nazareth that as the Messiah, His teaching and miracles demonstrated His presence in creation to release it from bondage and bring healing by making all things new. Give us faith to see that His teaching and miracles continue today in the healing medicine of Your Word and the Sacraments, which put to flight the diseases of our souls; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Tuesday of the Second Week of Easter

APRIL 13, 2021

Today's Reading: 1 John 5:4-10

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 23:14-33; Luke 4:31-44

Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:5)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. There is a real impact upon our lives when the Holy Spirit, through the Word and Sacraments of Jesus, creates in us the gift of faith. Luther in his preface to his Romans commentary wrote, "Faith is God's work in us, that changes us and gives new birth from God (John 1:23). It kills the Old Adam and makes us completely different people. It changes our hearts, our spirits, our thoughts, and all our powers. It brings the Holy Spirit with it." How can we be sure of this? "For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree" (1 John 5:7). John 19:34 records: "But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water."

After Jesus rose from the grave, He gave His Holy Spirit to His Church (breathing the Spirit upon the apostles and pouring His Spirit upon the Church) and guess what? The Holy Spirit still uses the water of Christ and the blood of Christ to flow upon and into Christians. You have received Christ's water in Holy Baptism and you receive Christ's Blood in Holy Communion. Through these, the Holy Spirit protects you! Christ for you means that you have the Victor over anything and everything in the world that threatens the forgiveness of your sins, your eternal life, and your great salvation in Christ.

This does not mean that sin, the world, and the devil will not still harass you and even cause you great pain (we get to taste some of His suffering for us), but it does mean that nothing in this world is stronger than the One your faith clings to! Nothing! "And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life" (1 John 5:11-12a). And who overcomes the world? "The one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John 5:5). Your Savior is so strong for you that your enemies cannot snatch you out of His hand (John 10:28). In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus, in Your ministry of teaching, casting out demons, and healing the sick, You proclaimed the Good News of the kingdom of God. Send us into all the world to announce that today, in You, Scripture has been fulfilled, the new creation has come, and the healing of the nations is here; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Wednesday of the Second Week of Easter

APRIL 14, 2021

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism:* The Close of the Commandments

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 24:1-18; Luke 5:1-16

What does God say about all these commandments? He says, "I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep my commandments." (Small Catechism: The Close of the Commandments)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Luther teaches on the meaning of the close of the commandments: "What does this mean? God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore, we should fear His wrath and not do anything against them. But He promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore, we should also love and trust in Him and gladly do what He commands."

Too often we hear a watered-down version of what it means for the Christian "to fear God." It is true that we don't walk around waiting for God to zap us with lightning. God wants us to know that on account of Christ He truly loves us. At the same time, we *should* be afraid to break God's commandments. We should hate the thought of doing so. Therefore, as Luther teaches, if we break God's commandments, we should fear God's wrath. Is this for Christians, too? Absolutely! So, our Lutheran confessions in many places teach us that Christians are familiar with the "terrors of conscience," because according to our sinful nature, we break God's Law.

What does God want us to do? Does He want us to run and hide from Him like Adam and Eve did in Genesis 3? No way! Does He want us to rebel against Him and act like we don't care? Ridiculous! Does He want us to pretend that we don't sin? Definitely not! Instead, He says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). This is what we do every day as we live in our Holy Baptism into Jesus! What should motivate us? The fact that God is "a jealous God." This doesn't mean that God is insecure (that's the sinful meaning), but that God loves us so much that He fights for us at all cost, even to the point of giving up His own Son to forgive us for our law-breaking. As we live as Christians now, we do not live fearing God, but we live fearing the prospect of rebellion, and when we do break His commandments, we run to Jesus, the friend of sinners. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*"You have this Law to see therein That you have not been free from sin But also that you clearly see How pure toward God life should be." Have mercy, LORD!
(*"These Are the Holy Ten Commands" LSB 581, st.11*)*

Thursday of the Second Week of Easter

APRIL 15, 2021

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 25:1-22; Luke 5:17-39

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” (Luke 5:31-32)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The evangelist Matthew was once very sick in his spirit, and he urgently needed a physician. Such was his condition when Jesus called him to follow, and everyone knew it. It is well-known that the two types of people considered to be the lowest of the low, during this place and time when Jesus walked the earth, were prostitutes and tax collectors. Matthew was a tax collector, and the people viewed tax collectors as robbers who took more than was owed, completely taking advantage of people for personal gain. Matthew was not ignorant. He knew what he had been doing. He knew that he was a sinner. He knew that his spirit was sick. What a remarkable text here from Luke 5:27-32 when Jesus called Matthew. Unlike Jesus' conversation in John 4 with the woman from Samaria, for example, there was no discussion about his past sin. Jesus did not moralize or lecture; the LORD did not accuse nor psychoanalyze. He saw Matthew, the sin-sick man, and just called him: “Follow me.” That's it. Done deal. Jesus just called him to follow, and the rest was history. Luke 5:28: “And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.”

We know that if a person is complacent, ok and satisfied in their sinning, we must rouse them and ask the Holy Spirit to convict them through the Law, but on other occasions people already know that there is something wrong with them. They are already full of shame before we utter a syllable to them. When we meet folks like this, we don't need to beat them down with Law, we just need to love them with Gospel and tell them that Jesus is loving them, too.

This is true for us as well. Sometimes we feel stuck in our shame, taking our sin to mean that we are just defective, rejected people. But Jesus won't stand for this. He calls us when our lives are all messy and full of shame, and in the greatest love and mercy the world has ever known. He calls us, “Follow me.” We don't have to jump through hoops, but get to leave our lives of serving sin, and then by God's grace, put one foot in front of the other as we follow Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O LORD, absolve Your people from their offenses that from the bonds of our sins, which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon ourselves, we may be delivered by Your bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our LORD, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Friday of the Second Week of Easter

APRIL 16, 2021

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 31:1-18; Luke 6:1-19

In those days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. (Luke 6:12)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Anything you can say about God, you can say about any of the Three Persons of The Holy Trinity with one big exception to the rule: only the Son--very God of very God--took on flesh, becoming a man. So, we may say that Jesus created the heavens and the earth, and we may say that the Father saves us, and we may say that the Holy Spirit knows all things, but we may not say that the Father prayed or that the Holy Spirit struggled. No, it was only Jesus who did these things.

Philippians 2 describes what Jesus did as the God-man: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant...he humbled himself" (Philippians 2:5, 7a & 8a). Our LORD always possessed the full power of God, but He voluntarily limited Himself ("made himself nothing") so that He was fully able to be like us in every way, except without sin. So Jesus, also as true man, truly prayed to the Heavenly Father. Jesus was always God, but we may correctly say, "He was a man praying to God."

And here is the big lesson for us about prayer: even Jesus who was a sinless person needed to pray. He felt the weight of sin in the world and the attacks of the devil. As a result, He yearned to pray. Lutheran Christians know how to pray: We engage in a two-way conversation. We hear God speaking to us through the Word of Christ and then we speak back to God in prayer, often just praying God's Word back to Him as we do in the psalms. If Jesus needed to pray, then we need to pray infinitely more. He heard the Father speak to Him as He had perfect communion with the Father, and He prayed to the Father. We emulate our Savior, take His Word into our hands and upon our lips and listen to God speak to us, and then we pray, since we are His baptized children. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus, our Sabbath rest, You called the twelve apostles to go out into all the world to carry on Your proclamation of the kingdom of God and Your miracles of release. May Your Church with its apostolic foundation continue to announce the Good News that in You there is healing and forgiveness; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Saturday of the Second Week of Easter

APRIL 17, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for the Third Sunday of Easter

(Psalm 33:1, 18-20; antiphon: v.5b, 6a)

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 32:1-14; Luke 6:20-38

The earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD. Alleluia. By the word of the LORD the heavens were made. Alleluia. Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright. Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine."

(From the Introit for the Third Sunday of Easter)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Tomorrow is the Third Sunday of Easter and is traditionally known as *Misericordias Domini*, which means "goodness of the LORD." The psalmist, in writing Psalm 33 by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is asserting the goodness of God. He says at the beginning of our Introit, "The earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD." Wait a minute. Was the psalmist looking upon the same earth that we are looking at?! We see all the things that Jesus warned us about, "wars and rumors of wars... famines and earthquakes in various places... And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:6a, 7b & 12). Is *this* the earth full of the steadfast love of the LORD?

Don't be distraught, Christian, and remember: Context is everything. Note that the psalmist also wrote, "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made." There is only one way for us to see the goodness of the LORD and that is through the WORD, the incarnate Jesus Christ, and His coming to us now through WORD and SACRAMENT. It is only when we find the WORD on earth that we are given eyes of faith, through which the WORD shows us God's working even through what is very, very bad.

This doesn't mean that bad stuff is good. No, bad stuff is bad, but it does mean that God works even through the bad stuff to find a way to bless us for our good! Want proof? Then ponder this: The most horrific thing that ever happened was that the innocent Son of God was crucified, but through it, God worked out His greatest goodness. On the Cross Jesus took our sins and covered them with His blood so that through Jesus, the earth might be full of the steadfast love of the LORD. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen. The earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD. Alleluia. By the word of the LORD the heavens were made. Alleluia."

(From the Introit for the Third Sunday of Easter)

The Third Sunday of Easter

APRIL 18, 2021

Today's Reading: John 10:11-16

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 32:15-35; Luke 6:39-49

*"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."
(John 10:11)*

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. We throw around the word "good" quite a bit. Ice cream is good, apps are good, your favorite [fill in the blank] is good... so many things are "good," but not like what God's Word means when Jesus is called "the Good Shepherd." This "good" describing Jesus is packed with meaning. It could also be translated as "beautiful" or even "virtuous."

You've heard of "superfoods" that are especially healthy. Well, the "good" pointing to Jesus is a "supergood." This is the kind of good that is beautiful in the sense that if you were lost or afraid or in lots of trouble, He would be "a sight for sore eyes," and not like ice cream or a good app that won't do you any good if you're dying. Or you would recognize Jesus as virtuous, full of the best things of human character: someone absolutely trustworthy, dependable, reliable. He will never let you down. In fact, this "Good" Shepherd is so beautiful and virtuous that He was willing to take your guilt, your trouble, your condemnation, your punishment, all of your bad, and put it all on Himself. That's the kind of "good" we're talking about.

Who is this good? Not a soul on planet earth, except for One whose Name is Jesus. But the word "good" here doesn't hang in the air. It is an adjective describing "shepherd." Shepherds guide helpless sheep with a rod and a staff. He is good in how He guides us through life. Protecting us against all that is harmful through His rod, and rescuing us from all of our trouble through His staff. His goodness is experienced through His leading.

Not in a million years should we ever want to follow anyone else, because no one else and nothing else is this good. But how can we be so certain? The proof has been made known: This Good Shepherd laid down His life for the sheep. But this Good Shepherd was not only good in the past, He is also the Good Shepherd today in this world, in our time! He still leads us with His good rod and staff. He still keeps us protected and provided for in His good sheepfold, the Holy Church. Here, we receive His good gifts, His good Word and His good Sacraments, and through these we know Jesus who is truly good. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

*O God, through the humiliation of Your Son You raised up the fallen world, Grant to Your faithful people, rescued from the peril of everlasting death, perpetual gladness and eternal joys; through Jesus Christ, our LORD, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(Collect for the Third Sunday of Easter)*

Monday of the Third Week of Easter

APRIL 19, 2021

Today's Reading: Ezekiel 34:11-16

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 33:1-23; Luke 7:1-17

*For thus says the LORD God: "Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out."
(Ezekiel 34:11)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The LORD spoke these words to Ezekiel the prophet because God's under-shepherds had neglected His people. They were unfaithful shepherds, unreliable, not feeding the sheep, but only feeding themselves (Ezekiel 34:2). The LORD would not stand for it and announced His solution: He Himself would be the shepherd of His sheep, His people (Ezekiel 34:15). God has stood by this resolution ever since.

But really?! The last time I checked, my pastor was just a man. Where is God as shepherd? The answer is that while it is true that your pastor is "just a man," he serves in a way that is not his own. The called and ordained pastor serves in the Office of Christ, by the authority of Christ, and through the Word and Sacraments of Christ. What the pastor speaks is Christ's Word, not his own.

Luke 10:16 records the words of Jesus when He spoke to the first under-shepherds who were genuine and true--that is, who would be as Christ to God's people: "The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me." Okay, but how do we recognize the true under-shepherds who bring the Chief Shepherd Christ? The answer is quite clear: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world." Always "test the spirits," that is, test whether what is being preached and taught is in accord with the Word of Christ. Be as the Bereans were. What did they do when they heard Paul preach? Acts 17:11b tells us, "They received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so."

So, at the end of the day, we know that Christ is shepherding us through His Word! The sheep of God follow the True Shepherd because "they know his voice" (John 10:4). "A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." But we do know the voice of Christ so that we recognize the true under-shepherds who give us Christ, the Chief Shepherd. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, by Your almighty Word You set in order all things in heaven and on earth. Put away from us all things hurtful, and give us those things that are beneficial for us; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our LORD, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Tuesday of the Third Week of Easter

APRIL 20, 2021

Today's Reading: 1 Peter 2:21-25

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 34:1-28; Luke 7:18-35

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (1Peter2:24)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Believing God and trusting God that your sin (your core condition) and sins (all the sinful things you've ever thought, said, and done) have been taken away can be hard for us. In fact, without the Holy Spirit's working through the Word of Christ to give us faith, it is impossible for us to believe! But thank God it is true and thank God that the Holy Spirit is powerful in creating saving faith so that we personally receive Christ for us.

Still, even after we receive the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, we are still in possession of a great mystery: Even though we still feel our sins, it is true that in Christ those sins we feel are also gone. Now that is a mystery, something too marvelous for us to comprehend. And yet, it is 100% true.

Why? Because God did something for us called imputation. God, with all power and authority imputed, or cast upon Himself, our sin. There was no sin in Christ, and yet, because He imputed our sin upon Himself, Jesus took the place of all sinners! Your sin was on Him. My sin was on Him. The sin of all people of all time was on Him. He was so sinful in fact, that the Heavenly Father looked away from His own Son as He was dying for us (Matthew 27:46). By doing this, God was confirming that He accepted what His Son was doing for us that day. He was our sin and He bore our punishment and He died our death with sin still on Him. So, yes, as Peter writes, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree."

Because Jesus did this, we live in God's gift of faith in Christ and in this faith, we get back to our Baptism into Jesus every day. We "die to sin and live to righteousness." And when tomorrow comes, we do it all over again! By grace we live this way, because by the wounds of Christ we have been healed. God no longer sees sins on you. Jesus took them. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus, prepare us to receive Your very body and blood by giving us repentance to weep over our sins and then rejoice that in You the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have Good News preached to them; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Wednesday of the Third Week of Easter

APRIL 21, 2021

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism: The Apostles Creed, First Article, pt.1*

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 34:29-35:21; Luke 7:36-50

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

(Small Catechism: The Apostles Creed, First Article)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When Dr. Luther taught the meaning of the First Article, he started by teaching what God gives or provides according to His almighty power. Luther wrote, "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life."

One of the greatest lies of our culture today is that what is "ours" is ours: "Our" bodies are ours, "our" lives are ours, "our" time is ours, etc. Wrong! Consider God's Word: "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19b and 20a). You were also created with a price, with a "price tag" that means you have infinite value because you belong to God. You are not your own. All that you have in accord with First Article gifts has come from God. To claim these things as our own is to ignore the Creator, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to pretend that what is the LORD's is only ours. This is not only an illusion. It is also a sin.

The LORD, however, is so good, so kind, so loving, and so merciful that not only did He heap our selfish, gobble-up-everything-claiming-it-as-our-own sin upon Himself to cover it with His atoning blood, but then He chose to actually GIVE TO US His Kingdom! How? By giving us Himself, the King! Christians are now in this amazing situation: They speak the truth when they say that what is theirs is really God's, but now in Christ, what is Christ's is also--really and truly--also theirs. How do we live in this Law/Gospel reality of what belongs to God and what belongs to us? We say that every good and perfect gift is from above (James 1:17), and that whatever we say is "ours" is only because our Savior Jesus has given it to us to care for and to also say, "To God alone be all the glory!" In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us Your gifts of faith, hope, and love that we may receive the forgiveness You have promised and love what You have commanded; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our LORD, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Thursday of the Third Week of Easter

APRIL 22, 2021

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 38:21-39:8; Luke 8:1-21

A sower went out to sow his seed... And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold. (Luke 8:5a & 8a)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. The parable of the sower is a golden source of teaching about the Christian life. It can also be a little scary, so understanding it is important. Let it be said up front that Lutherans believe our salvation is secure through faith in Christ. God does not mince words: “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). And “never” means never. At the same time, the parable helps us to learn about the gift of saving faith.

Saving faith holds on to the Word of Christ even in the face of what makes the path, the rock, and the thorns so dangerous. Jesus is giving us a big “heads up” here so that we would not be surprised at what we encounter throughout life. We know that the devil will try to take faith away from our hearts (Luke 8:12); we know that the time of testing tempts us to fall away (Luke 8:13); and we know that the thorns of life try to make us lose our faith through many different distractions (Luke 8:14). We know these things. We have been told these things because God loves us! He wants us in heaven. He has given us Jesus to make it happen! And as we live in faith, then we know eternal life is absolutely ours. Therefore, we prepare for what will come.

So how do we prepare? We are ready for anything when our faith abides in “the good soil,” but what is this? It is the Christian heart that lives in Holy Baptism and daily repentance, confessing sin constantly, knowing our great need for Jesus, but also knowing we are forgiven. And then what? Well, our Lutheran confessions permit one more item on this list: the fruits of repentance. That is, the Christian has a heart of “good soil” that by the Holy Spirit and the Word of Christ, is always doing good works--not because we have to, but because we get to. This is why it grows and yields a hundredfold (Luke 8:8). This is Jesus’ promise to work in and through you. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus, Sower of the Seed, the women supported You from their own means during Your ministry of releasing creation from its bondage. Give us strength to support the work of sowing the seed of Your forgiveness in the world through our almsgiving as we embody in our lives Your mercy and charity; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Friday of the Third Week of Easter

APRIL 23, 2021

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 39:32-40:16; Luke 8:22-39

[Jesus] rebuked the wind and the raging waves...[and] the demons came out of the man.
(Luke 8:24, 33)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. It is easy in life to feel overpowered and outgunned. I was pretty big in high school and during my third year on the varsity squad as a defensive end rushing quarterbacks, there were not many offensive linemen who could stop me. But one Friday night under the lights, the offensive lineman was 6'7" and weighed a lot more than I did, and he was lightning fast. I had the most humiliating game of my high school football career. There was nothing I could do against this guy. I tried to go high, I tried to go low, around, fake, twist...nothing. He was more powerful than me.

There are many things that can happen to us that make us feel totally weak, helpless, and unable to get through. This is what poor sinners experience. But thanks be to God, that our Heavenly Father sent Jesus! When our LORD conducted His public ministry He led disciples who were just people like us. They knew limitations and they were easily scared. For example, who wouldn't be upset in the face of a storm that you thought might kill you? Who wouldn't be afraid of someone possessed by many demons? Well, there was someone unafraid. You know who that was: Jesus. Why wasn't He afraid? Easy answer: Because He is the One and *only* One who has all power. He did not simply come to proclaim your salvation, but He had and has the power to accomplish it! He has power over the wind and raging waves; and He has power to command and control the strongest demons. So powerful is the LORD that even death was too weak for Him. Our sin, the world, and the devil cannot get by Him, not over, not under, not around...He is just too strong and that is why we are 100% safe in the arms of Savior Jesus.

Just one more thing. Sometimes atheists argue this way: "If God is all powerful and all good, then why hasn't He done anything about all the evil in the world?" Their question has a mistaken presupposition: They are assuming God has not done anything about the evil! Yes, He has! He sent Jesus! In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O God, You have prepared for those who love You such good things as surpass our understanding. Cast out all sins and evil desires from us, and pour into our hearts Your Holy Spirit to guide us into all blessedness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our LORD, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Saturday of the Third Week of Easter

APRIL 24, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for the Fourth Sunday of Easter

(Psalm 66:3, 5, 8-9; antiphon: v.1-2)

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 40:17-38; Luke 8:40-56

Shout for joy to God, all the earth. Alleluia. Sing the glory of His name; give to Him glorious praise! Alleluia.

(From the Introit for the Fourth Sunday of Easter)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Fourth Sunday of Easter tomorrow is known as *Jubilate Sunday*. *Jubilate* from the Latin means "Rejoice." Joy, real joy--isn't this something we all want in our lives? The psalmist is, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, revealing to us where genuine joy comes from. It is as if the psalmist had a bird's eye view of what would occur centuries later (from his standpoint), when Jesus would rise from the dead and conquer the grave. Psalm 66:3, which is part of this Introit, states, "Say to God, How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you." These words apply especially to our greatest enemies: our sin that leads to death, the world, and the devil (and his demons). These enemies were and are overcome by the LORD's awesome deeds, especially His most awesome deed which was conquering death.

Now these enemies must cringe before Him (that is, be bent in fear knowing that they are utterly conquered and defeated). The psalmist knew what to focus on, because he knew what sealed the deal, so, to speak, when it comes to knowing that God's deeds are awesome indeed. Psalm 66:8-9, also part of the Introit, says, "Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept our soul among the living, and has not let our feet slip." Could there be any greater reason to shout for joy? What do we desire more than life itself?!

On account of the LORD's awesome deeds, all who trust in Him will be kept among the living, through the might of the One risen and who raises the dead. Knowing these things, how can we not rejoice? Every possible reason to live in fear has been overcome by the joy of knowing that not even death can take our joy away. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

LORD Jesus, You took our illnesses and bore our diseases, bringing hope to the sick and the dying. In Your death on the cross, You completed Your work of bearing all our burdens and on the third day showed us in Your resurrected body the firstfruits of the new creation. Heal us now by Your Word and Sacraments, and raise us up on the Last Day that we might live with You forever; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Fourth Sunday of Easter

APRIL 25, 2021

Today's Reading: John 16:16-22

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 8:1-13, 30-36; Luke 9:1-17

"Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy." (John 16:20)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. At first glance, John 16:20 can seem like a pretty challenging verse. Why would other people in the world be rejoicing, while believers (specifically the first-century disciples living when Jesus was crucified) are weeping and lamenting? Think about that: While you are super sad about something, others are super happy for the same reason you are super sad. I know, this just seems wrong. There is a reaction called *schadenfreude* which means "pleasure derived by someone from another's misfortune." This seems really twisted.

But think about this: if some people hate God and hate His Word, then if His Church and God's people are sinking or seemingly failing, sure enough, the world will celebrate. They will say, "Finally, this annoying Christian faith is going down the tubes!" Make no mistake about it, there are many people in the world who would just be fine if the Christian faith just disappeared and who would be glad to rejoice in your despair.

Jesus was warning the disciples that the day was coming when the disciples would weep and lament, when Jesus was crucified on the Cross and executed by the Romans as a common criminal. When this happened, those against Jesus were glad and rejoiced. But the LORD went on to fill His disciples with hope, certain and true. Yes, they would be sorrowful, but then something was going to happen: They would suddenly have their sorrow turned to joy! What would cause that? You know: It would be when on the Third Day their Savior, who bled to death on the Cross, would come forth with power from the tomb. Their great sorrow would be turned to great joy.

There is an application here for us. There are many times when it feels like Christians are in the real minority and that the ways of the world are winning out, but remember, Christian, that Jesus is coming again in glory. When that day comes our sorrow will be turned to joy. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You show those in error the light of Your truth so that they may return to the way of righteousness. Grant faithfulness to all who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's Church that they may avoid whatever is contrary to their confession and follow all such things as are pleasing to You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our LORD, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Easter)

St. Mark, Evangelist

APRIL 26, 2021

Today's Reading: Mark 16:14-20

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 9:1-24; Luke 9:18-36

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”
(Mark 16:16)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. St. Mark, the Evangelist was not an apostle, but he ministered to and assisted Peter. It is probably accurate to say that Mark knew of the details of Jesus' public ministry directly from Peter. Mark had also worked with Paul and Barnabas, and was known as "John Mark." Though he was the subject of a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:37-40, we know that later in time by the grace of God, Paul was reconciled to Mark.

In 2 Timothy 4:11, Paul wrote to Timothy mentioning Mark: "Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry." Mark had become a powerful disciple of Jesus! In fact, history teaches us that he completed his service to the LORD as the bishop in one of the most important strategic locations of the earliest Church at Alexandria in Egypt. It was there that he died as a martyr for the sake of the Gospel.

Mark knew this saving Gospel well and he knew how one could be united to Jesus in Holy Baptism so that there would never be any doubt that the Gospel was personally received. There are several key passages on Holy Baptism in the New Testament, but Mark 16:16 might be among the most vivid in stating Baptism's indispensable nature for giving assurance of salvation. Jesus said, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Notice that Baptism is not associated with condemnation but is absolutely associated with salvation.

Peter, who most likely gave Mark important details for his Gospel, backs Mark regarding the importance of Holy Baptism: "Baptism, which corresponds to this [Noah's water], now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21). Baptism saves us because God uses it to unite us to the risen Jesus. And to be united to the risen Jesus is to be rescued from sin and death. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You have enriched Your Church with the proclamation of the Gospel through the evangelist Mark. Grant that we may firmly believe these glad tidings and daily walk according to Your Word; through Jesus Christ, our LORD, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Easter

APRIL 27, 2021

Today's Reading: Isaiah 40:25-31

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 10:1-20; Luke 9:37-60

He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.
(Isaiah 40:29-31)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. This Scripture from Isaiah is magnificent. First, it teaches us about our condition apart from God's help and grace: We are faint; we have no might, we are weary, and can easily feel exhausted. All of this is true because we are poor sinners. No doubt about it: On our own we can do nothing. Jesus once said as much: "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5b). These things are true on account of our core sin. It is a condition that is so serious that it leads to death. It causes us to moan as we must confess what cannot be denied: We are very tired sinners, weary from trying to make life work and be good from our own effort, our own imagined power.

All of this is what the LAW shows us. But then Isaiah reveals the wonderful and amazing GOSPEL: God, in the greatest love and mercy ever known, sent Jesus to be the One we "wait" for (another word for sure and certain hope). And what does the LORD do for us poor sinners who wait on Him? He gives us His power and He increases and renews our strength. And just as we are collapsing under the weight of our sin, He causes us to rise-up, by His grace, to run and yes, even to soar with life as if mounting up with wings like eagles!

Isaiah the prophet knew, from His point in history, that Jesus was coming, and he taught what Jesus verified: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29). By grace, through faith in Jesus apart from anything you try to do, the LORD has renewed your strength. It's time to soar! In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

LORD of all power and might, author and giver of all good things, graft into our hearts the love of Your name and nourish us with all goodness that we may love and serve our neighbor; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our LORD, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Easter

APRIL 28, 2021

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism: The Apostles Creed, First Article, pt.2*

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 16:1-24; Luke 10:1-22

*He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil.”
(Small Catechism: The Apostles' Creed, First Article)*

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Life is dangerous. We do not really like to talk about it, but it feels like there is danger around every corner. The most insidious danger, however, is *evil*, or what Paul refers to as “unrighteousness” in Romans 1:18: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”

It is true that God's wrath will be revealed on the Last Day when the LORD judges all people, but the wrath of God is revealed now, too (this is a both-and). How do we see it? We see it in all the pain and trouble that is caused by the evil that is here and now. This evil in the world is both progressive (it gets worse) and contagious (it spreads like a virus).

But God in His mercy has done something about it. That is, there is something else that has been revealed for the here and now, namely, the power of the Gospel. It is the righteousness of faith as the gift of our faith holds to Jesus! This is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe! (Romans 1:16-17) You have Christ now, baptized Christian, and to have Christ is to have the One who has conquered and conquers all evil. When faith seizes Jesus (holds to Him like crazy), then Jesus' life becomes ours. He becomes our covering and shield, and He becomes our defender against all evil in this world. This is not a cosmic battle between equal forces, no! Jesus has already conquered! He is our champion and He is our warrior against evil. He has all power and authority and Satan in the face of Jesus has none. Yes, there is danger around every corner, but while holding to Christ and His righteousness for you through faith in Him, you have nothing to worry about. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

I walk in danger all the way. The thought shall never leave me That Satan who has marked his prey, Is plotting to deceive me. This foe with hidden snares May seize me unawares If I should fail to watch and prey. I walk in danger all the way. I walk with Jesus all the way, His guidance never fails me; Within His wounds I find a stay When Satan's pow'r assails me; And by His footsteps led, My path I safely tread. No evil leads my soul astray; I walk with Jesus all the way.”
(“I Walk in Danger All the Way” LSB 716, st.1, 5)

Thursday of the Fourth Week of Easter

APRIL 29, 2021

Today's Reading: 1 Peter 2:11-20

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 17:1-16; Luke 10:23-42

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. (1 Peter 2:11)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The forgiveness of sins is not permission to sin. The Holy Spirit teaches us through Peter that we are not to go along with sin. Christians easily get confused. "But if we are daily to return to our Baptisms by confessing our sin, how can we not sin?" In other words, it sounds like God's Word is saying, "Don't sin!" AND "Confess your sins every day because you do sin!"

God's Word is not contradicting itself. We sin out of the weakness of our sinful nature. No matter how hard you try, you will feel the weakness of your flesh, because sin is always there and that means that you sin every day.

This, however, is not the same as following sin and treating it as your master, because you have a new Master: Jesus! He has forgiven your sins. In other words, there is a vast difference between feeling, confessing, resisting, and battling sin on the one hand versus going along with sin, deliberately living in it, and permitting it to control your life. These two could not be more different.

If sin controls us, we excuse it and go along with it, saying, "That's just the way I am." If Christ controls us, then we hate sin, are in pain over it, and fight it, so that when we do sin, we never excuse it, but confess it. The difference is night and day. Thus, as Christians we listen to Peter and "abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul."

But how? Return to Christ who took your sin. Return to your Holy Baptism, when you died in Christ, so that when sin comes knocking on your door to tempt you, you can answer by saying, "That sinner doesn't live here anymore because He died with Jesus!" Then go forth following in Jesus, and when you do sin, don't laugh it off, but come running back to Jesus who on the Cross heaped it on Himself to cover it with His blood. Rejoice! You are a sojourner and exile as you travel through this world of sin. You don't belong to sin, you belong to Jesus and His Kingdom, so when you're tempted to sin, get back to your real Master! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

LORD Jesus Christ, in Your deep compassion You rescue us from whatever may hurt us. Teach us to love You above all things and to love our neighbors as ourselves; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Friday of the Fourth Week of Easter

APRIL 30, 2021

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 18:1-7, 20-19:8; Luke 11:1-13

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "LORD, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." And Jesus said to them, "When you pray, say:..." (Luke 11:1-2a)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Some people who criticize our beautiful and powerful liturgy say that it is not from the Word of God. Ah, wrong, because *all* of it is. The LORD's Prayer is a sublime example of this fact. It is, of course, presented in two places in the New Testament: Matthew 6 and Luke 11.

Matthew's version has seven petitions, just like we learn it in the catechism, and Luke's version has five. But don't despair about the shortened version. The missing third petition is incorporated into the first and second petitions in Luke's version; and the missing seventh petition is incorporated into the fifth. Luke retains the crux of this supreme prayer taught by our LORD.

It is a complete prayer. In the first two petitions we pray that we would live holy lives in faith, and in the third we pray for all our daily needs. The fourth petition regards sharing Christ's forgiveness with others, and in the fifth we pray for spiritual protection.

But Jesus teaches even more on prayer here in Luke 11. Jesus said, "And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Luke 11:9). Look at this: Ask, Seek, Knock. What is the LORD emphasizing about prayer? Ask, ask, ask! Ask in faith. Ask away according, of course, to His gracious will and then trust Him! The sainted Rev. Dr. Robert Preus taught that God always answers the prayers of His children, but rarely answers the way we think He should, and God always answers for our good. Pray for the two reasons we have been given: that God commands us to pray; and that God has promised to bless us according to His will when we do. That's all the motivation we need. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation. Amen. (Luke 11:2b-4)

St. Philip and St. James, Apostles

MAY 1, 2021

Today's Reading: John 14:1-14

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 9:9-18, 26-37; Luke 11:14-36

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. If I had to recommend ten Scripture verses to memorize, John 14:6 would be on that list. Jesus is more important than anybody or anything. We need Him. We are wise when we live for Him. By the grace of God, Philip and James, apostles, most certainly did. They gave their lives for and to Christ. They became martyrs and were killed for their faith in Jesus, so they were not only apostles, but also martyrs.

History teaches that Philip was crucified, so he is symbolized by a Latin cross. James the Lesser (not to be confused with James the brother of John or James the half-brother of Jesus and bishop of the church in Jerusalem) was beaten to death by a club that adorns his symbolic shield. Both were "strangers and exiles on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13) and "the world was not worthy [of them]" (Hebrews 11:38). There is quite a bit recorded about Philip in Holy Scripture. After the LORD called to him, "Follow me!" Philip found Nathanael and reported that the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament had been found (John 1). Later, Greeks who had heard about Christ came to Philip and asked, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" (John 12). Finally, right after Jesus spoke those powerful words at John 14:6, it was Philip who asked the bold question (that the others were probably also thinking): "LORD, show us the Father, and it is enough for us" (John 14:8). Jesus replied, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:9) Jesus was teaching that the Persons of The Holy Trinity are completely undivided. Do you want to know God? Then know Jesus! At the same time, Jesus maintained the distinction of Persons. For this Person Jesus, the Savior of the world, Philip and James gave their lives!

You may or may not be asked to give your life for the faith. But even for you, God has been shown in the Person of Jesus, bestowed on you through your Baptism, your hearing of the Word, and your partaking of the Sacrament of the Altar. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, Your Son revealed Himself to Philip and James and gave them the knowledge of everlasting life. Grant us perfectly to know Your Son, Jesus Christ, to be the way, the truth, and the life, and steadfastly to walk in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our LORD, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

MAY 2, 2021

Today's Reading: John 16:5-15

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 20:1-16, 22-27; Luke 11:37-54

Sing to the LORD a new song, Alleluia, for he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. Alleluia. (From the Introit for Cantate Sunday)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. This Sunday--*Cantate Sunday*--leads us to the theme of "Sing ye." Because of our sinful nature, we totally underestimate the importance of singing our faith and joy to the LORD. St. Augustine said, "He who chants (or sings the Word) prays twice." Why did he teach that? Because to sing aloud the Word of Christ is to enliven and rouse our entire being and spirit. The lungs, our diaphragm, and our vocal cords get in on the action of our prayer. Our body gets more in tune with our spirit and our spirit with our body as we dedicate ourselves to praying. Singing is more intense and focused on praising God. It also makes a greater impression upon our minds as we seek to "set [our] minds on things above" (Colossians 3:1).

But what of the content and focus of our singing and chanting? John 16:5-15 gives a great place to begin. This is another one of John's great "I Am" statements of Jesus. Jesus taught, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). We can take His Word and put it into singing and chanting, and when this Word of Christ becomes ingrained in our hearts, souls, and minds, it impacts our lives, enabling us to live in Christ and to walk with Christ.

What should inspire us Christians to live this way and to sing and chant? This should: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). You have the greatest love from your Best Friend Jesus. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our LORD, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the Fifth Sunday of Easter)

Monday of the Fifth Week of Easter

MAY 3, 2021

Today's Reading: Isaiah 12:1-6

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 21:1-24; Luke 12:1-12

You will say in that day; I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry at me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid.

(Isaiah 12:1-2a)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. The opposite of faith is not merely unbelief, but fear. How can we trust someone if we fear him? Fear gives every occasion for doubt and where there is doubt faith is always undermined. When we convince ourselves that God is angry at us we fear Him instead of trusting Him. Instead, we wonder when He is going to pull the rug out from under us.

There are two “fears” in Scripture: servile, which anticipates punishment, and filial, which expresses a love so strong that the Christian lives in honor and reverence toward God. Here we are of course speaking of the former, and not the latter. God wants us to live in the holy fear of faith that holds to Christ and bows down to worship Him.

Isaiah the prophet received God's revelation and truth: “For though you [God] were angry at me, your anger turned away.” Soak that in. Yes, God was angry. That's right, “was,” and as you know “was” is past tense. God is no longer angry at you. Think about it: There is only one reason God could be angry at you. That would be on account of your sin. But in the greatest love and mercy the world has ever known, the heavenly Father placed all your sin, all the reasons He could be angry at you, on His Son, Jesus Christ our LORD.

Thus Paul writes in Galatians 3:13: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written – ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.’” God only pours out anger, wrath, and punishment on cursed people, people guilty of sin and worthy of death, the death that sin brings. But Jesus took your sin; He became your curse. He died in your place under God's righteous anger and judgment against sinners. Jesus stood in for all the sinners, including you. Jesus took God's anger for you. As a result, God's anger is gone from you, and that is why you are now free to say with Isaiah, “Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid!” In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

LORD Jesus, by Your Spirit, You give us faith to cast out all fear of confessing the true faith; for we are helpless to save ourselves, and we must trust in You and You alone for our salvation. Keep us faithful to the end, that You will not be ashamed of us when You come in Your glory with Your Father and the holy angels; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Friedrich Wyneken, Pastor and Missionary

MAY 4, 2021

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 23:1-22; Luke 12:13-34

*And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on...Fear not, little flock, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."
(Luke 12:22, 32)*

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Rev. Friedrich Wyneken was driven to spread the saving Gospel of the LORD Jesus Christ. He is a tremendous example to us of someone who lived out the Great Commission of our LORD. He arrived in Baltimore, Maryland, from Germany in 1838 and then went westward to expand the Kingdom. He labored intensely and realized he needed help, so he returned to Germany to ask for it. He came back to America with more pastors to not only reach the many Germans coming to America, but also to reach Native Americans. As the need for pastors increased, he became a co-founder of a practical seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and later returned to the East Coast to serve as a congregational pastor. The LORD, however, increased his service as he became the second president of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.

It is hard to imagine all the challenges that Pastor Wyneken faced during his lifetime, especially as the country was headed towards civil war, but today's lectionary from Luke's Gospel gives us a good indication of what energizes such servants. When we know Christ as our Savior, then we also know that He is almighty and all compassionate. We can trust Him when He bids us not to be anxious. He really will provide for all our needs as we walk faithfully in our God-given vocations. Furthermore, we can continually take stock that no matter the hardships, the LORD has told us why we never need fear: "for it is the Father's good pleasure to give [us, we who are baptized into Jesus] the kingdom." And with the kingdom of God granted to us, we will also have all that we need in order to accomplish what God has put before us to do. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

LORD Jesus Christ, You want all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. We give You thanks for sending Friedrich Wyneken as missionary and pastor in Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan to evangelize the Native Americans in these states, to be a founder of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, and to serve as second president of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. Protect and encourage all missionaries who confess the true faith among the nations by proclaiming Christ crucified; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Easter

MAY 5, 2021

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism: The Apostles Creed, First Article, pt.3*

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 23:23-44; Luke 12:35-53

All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

(Small Catechism: The Apostles' Creed, First Article)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Sometimes Lutheran Christians can get bashful when it comes to talking about the new life we have in our Risen Savior and the resultant good works which follow. Luther wasn't bashful as he discussed faith and what must come from faith: "Faith, however, is a divine work in us that changes us and makes us to be born anew of God... It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them." It is therefore not surprising that when Luther wrote the explanation to the Creed, he expressed what should come from us in response to the grace of God: "It is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him."

Did Luther actually say, "serve and obey [God]?" Yes, He did! The amazing free grace of God in Christ which is responsible for all our First Article gifts: iPhone, clothes, games, bed, the transportation that gets us from point A to point B, and the food we eat (we could go on all day) comes from our heavenly Father's good and merciful heart toward us in Christ. The Father's wonderful grace, by the Holy Spirit's urging and enabling us through the powerful Word and Sacraments of Christ, leads us to serve and obey God. It's that simple.

But don't we still battle the sinful nature? Of-course we do, but that battle does not cancel the new movements of the Holy Spirit in us responding to our Father's outpouring of His goodness and mercy. In fact, the new life is more prominent than the old precisely on account of God's goodness and mercy for us. So, the apostle John recorded, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). But why do we want to? We do so in response to God's "divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me." In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Merciful LORD, cleanse and defend Your Church by the sacrifice of Christ. United with Him in Holy Baptism, give us grace to receive with thanksgiving the fruits of His redeeming work and daily follow in His way; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our LORD, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Thursday of the Fifth Week of Easter

MAY 6, 2021

Today's Reading: James 1:16-21

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 24:1-23; Luke 12:54-13:17

Of [God's] own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. (James 1:18)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. The letter of James has gotten a bad rap because many feel that he contradicts Paul's statement that we are justified by faith apart from the works of the Law (Romans 3:28). Even Luther himself once thought less of James, but as Luther matured, his view changed. But first impressions can be confusing. After all, James does teach: "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone." But we must know that he is not contradictory to Paul, but complementary.

How so? Paul is teaching about our justification before God. This can only be by faith alone. James is teaching about our justification before people. How will anyone ever know you have genuine faith? Well, you can talk all day long, but if you have no good works, then people will consider you a hypocrite. How can we be sure that James was not confusing Law and Gospel? We know it from James 1:18. How is a Christian "brought...forth"? How is a Christian made a Christian? How does a Christian even get to the point of demonstrating (or giving evidence) of their faith through works? How does any of it even begin? Is James teaching that the answer is by what we do, or by what we are, or by what we try to be or try to do? No, not even close.

Read the verse again: "Of [God's] own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." James gives 100% credit and acknowledgment that our new lives ONLY and SOLELY come from being "brought...forth by the word of truth." The Word of Christ has created our new lives, justified by faith (before God) and proven by works (before people). Without the Word of Christ, we would have no faith, and we could do nothing that is good. James attributes our new lives solely to the work of God in Christ "by the word of truth." Rest assured that He is working in and through you to bring forth good fruits. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O Jesus, LORD of the Sabbath, rescue us from our hypocrisy, which keeps us from seeing You as the center of all of Scripture and acknowledging the present time as the time of salvation. Call us to repent of our self-righteousness so that we might look to You alone as the source of our life; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Friday of the Fifth Week of Easter

MAY 7, 2021

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 26:1-20; Luke 13:18-35

*"[The kingdom of God] is like a grain of mustard seed...Strive to enter through the narrow door."
(Luke 13:19, 24a)*

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. The things of God and our salvation (being rescued from sin, death, and devil) are presented in humble ways, unimpressive to the world. This is the way God operates in the world. He lets the world have its own standards of what important things should look like. The world presents these things as glitter and gold to make them look grand and impressive to the human eye. Why? Because the world values the things of human pride and accomplishment, and human pride always thinks bigger is better and that more is always better than less. My wife, however, reminds me that "less is more." She's right.

So God goes the opposite way of human pride. He chooses humility as the sign of His presence for salvation, that which is far greater than the greatest things in the world. The Kingdom of God itself begins with a "mustard seed" (Luke 13:19), seemingly insignificant. As insignificant as when a 30-something Jewish man, a carpenter's son, was nailed to a cold Roman cross outside the city gates of Jerusalem. No biggie, just another execution of a convicted criminal, not exactly a sold-out concert of world-famous musicians where fans are going nuts.

And the entrance into this Kingdom is not wide, grand, and surrounded with strobe lights. It, too, is humble. It is narrow. It is as inconspicuous as a few drops of water, or some ordinary bread and wine,, because God doesn't want His holy things to be seen in the superficial "big" things in the world. The things of God only catch the eye and the faith of the humble; but the proud don't care about the things of God, and would rather get the catchy things, the "awesome" things that will turn to dust. But you've been baptized, Christian. So embrace humility in Christ, grab the mustard seed, and rejoice that you have entered the narrow door: Jesus. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O LORD, You have called us to enter Your kingdom through the narrow door. Guide us by Your Word and Spirit, and lead us now and always into the feast of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Saturday of the Fifth Week of Easter

MAY 8, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for the Sixth Sunday of Easter

(Psalm 66:1-2a, 17, 19-20; antiphon: Isaiah 48:20b)

Daily Lectionary: Leviticus 26:21-33, 39-44; Luke 14:1-24

But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer.

(From the Introit for the Sixth Sunday of Easter)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Prayer is not magic nor is it designed and intended for the purpose of coaxing, convincing, or making deals with God. Prayer is rather the heartbeat of faith, the holy faith-generated language towards God. Prayer is also the work of the Holy Spirit in and through God's people who trust in the LORD. Sometimes He is the One interceding for us in prayers we can't even put into words (Romans 8:26). Again, it is not for changing God's mind, but it expresses the change we have received when God put us into the life, death, and resurrection of the LORD Jesus Christ through Holy Baptism.

Still, doesn't prayer, besides thanking and praising God, also ask God for things, whether they be for ourselves or others? Yes! Throughout Scripture prayer is asking. In fact, Jesus invites and commands us to do so! For example, "If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:14). Also, "And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Luke 11:9). Furthermore, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24).

So what's the catch? True prayer to God comes through faith in Christ, and faith in Christ always desires what Christ desires. Yet we still contend with our Old Adam, even when we earnestly pray. This means our motives are rarely pure. However, the key is to pray in the Name of Jesus for that which is according to His will (as we pray in The LORD's Prayer), and pray that God will turn your will to His. This is so because there really is no other kind of prayer than those prayers which spring from faith in Jesus, when we pray for what Jesus wants for us. Yes, these will be answered every time, for our good and for His glory. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O LORD of grace and mercy, teach us by Your Holy Spirit to follow the example of Your Son in true humility, that we may withstand the temptations of the devil and with pure hearts and minds avoid ungodly pride; through the same Jesus Christ, our LORD, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

MAY 9, 2021

Today's Reading: John 16:23-33

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 3:1-16, 39-48; Luke 14:25-15:10

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you."
(John 16:23b)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Today is *Rogate* Sunday, which is Latin for "Pray ye." As we continue to celebrate the resurrection of The LORD Jesus Christ, we gain important insight about prayer. Christians who are "in Christ" pray and pray and pray, so it makes sense that today's theme is "pray ye." It's what those who belong to the RISEN Savior do.

But what is the relationship between Christ's resurrection and prayer? In a very important sense, no one can call God "My Father" like Jesus can. Jesus is "begotten" of the Father, the only One in the universe with this distinction. That means that Jesus eternally progresses from the Father. He is One with the Father and extends from the Father with God's nature, power, and authority. This "extension" however does not make Christ subordinate; He is very God of very God. This is a theological progression, not a time-based one or a rank. In this sense, Jesus calls the Father "My Father" in a way that no one else can, and yet, Christ's resurrection even changed prayer for every child of God who is baptized into Jesus.

Jesus is our Mediator and will be forever, and yet at the same time, because our Mediator is so close to the Father, Jesus shares this closeness with you and me! You can now come to the heavenly Father directly in the Name of Jesus. Christ has won direct access to God for you! Jesus is our bridge to the Father (the WAY, John 14:6), and at the same time, Jesus wants you to know that His Father is yours, too. In John 14:26-27 He says, "In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God." Heaven is now open to you, Christian. You can now pray directly to the Father. God listens to you because He listens to His Son who covers you. God answers you because He answers His Son in whom you're wrapped; and God loves to receive your prayers. So, pray ye! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*O God, the giver of all that is good, by Your holy inspiration grant that we may think those things that are right and by Your merciful guiding accomplish them; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our LORD, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit. Amen.
(Collect for the Sixth Sunday of Easter)*

Monday of the Sixth Week of Easter

MAY 10, 2021

Today's Reading: Numbers 21:4-9

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 8:5-26; Luke 15:11-32

And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." (Numbers 21:8)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. God sent the fiery serpents to the rebellious people of Israel in the wilderness. They were sent to bite the complaining and unfaithful people, to kill them. This was the wrath of God poured out at that time and place. In response to this judgement against sin, the people cried out. They came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that He take away the serpents from us" (Numbers 21:7a).

The LORD had mercy on the people and responded in grace toward those who cried out to Him in distress while confessing their sins. But the LORD demonstrated His grace in a really fascinating way: He told Moses to make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, so that when the people looked up to it, they would be healed (Numbers 21:8-9). Let's get this right: The image of the thing that was killing the people was going to save them. Hmmm.

Jesus told Nicodemus, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14). We have our "fiery serpent," too, and it is just as deadly: our sin. So God did not change His method. He took the thing responsible for our death, our sin, and put it on the Cross. Jesus became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). He was our sin on the Cross. The thing killing us was now up high on a "pole," so that whoever would look at Jesus on the Cross would know what God had done with their deadly sin. It isn't on you anymore. Look up to Jesus, trust in Him, and rejoice. 5/10/2021 In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

LORD God, our heavenly Father, You stood afar off, waiting to see Your prodigals appear at the gate. Then, running to us, You overwhelmed us with grace and invited us to sit at table, to rejoice at our homecoming. Help us to repent of our sins and strip us of every thought that we might merit Your salvation. Then bring us home to be with You at the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our LORD. Amen.

Tuesday of the Sixth Week of Easter

MAY 11, 2021

Today's Reading: James 1:22-27

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 9:1-23; Luke 16:1-18

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

(James 1:22)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Our LORD Jesus Christ did not come into the world to save ideas and beliefs. He did not come into the world to save audio presentations and visual images. "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost" (1 Timothy 1:15). I always recommend inserting ourselves at the end of this verse.

We can't reduce Christ's saving work to the saving of ideas, thoughts, and words, but of sinners, and sinners are real people with real lives--they live and move and have their being (Acts 17:28). They do things, they act, they impact the lives of others and the world. Jesus came to save these real people with real lives who do real things. So what happens when such people are saved? Their real lives are impacted, not just their beliefs. James is warning us, "For if anyone is a hearer of the word [only] and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like" (James 1:24-25).

When the Christian faith is only a "belief" for someone, it is only a passing thought. But this faith that God creates in us through the Word holds to a strong and mighty Christ, and Christ is so strong and mighty that He affects our very lives. How does Christ do this in us? It isn't by looking into a dumb mirror, but by looking into what James calls "the perfect law, the law of liberty" (James 1:25).

This is a place in the Holy Bible where "law" does not mean strict convicting law, as in "Law" vs. Gospel. Here the word "law" refers to the WORD, and especially the Gospel! What is the only thing that gives you liberation from the bonds of your sin? The powerful Gospel of Christ! When the Gospel is yours, and your sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus, then watch out: Your faith isn't just thoughts and words, but real actions. You live for Jesus and you love those around you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O LORD, keep Your Church in Your perpetual mercy; and because without You we cannot but fall, preserve us from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our LORD, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Wednesday of the Sixth Week of Easter

MAY 12, 2021

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism: The Apostles Creed, Second Article, pt.1*

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 10:11-36; Luke 16:19-31

And [I believe] in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our LORD, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.

(Small Catechism: The Apostles' Creed, Second Article)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. What does this mean? "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my LORD," the explanation says. It is properly said that justification, God's declaring us righteous in His sight on account of Christ, is the central article or teaching of the Christian faith. It's true. It is incredibly important, but if someone does not know the person of Christ, WHO He is, then even the teaching on justification will be off.

This first part of the Second Article of the Creed is super-duper important. We must believe, teach, and confess, and trust and rely upon in our hearts and souls, the fact that Jesus is true 100% God and true 100% man. Everything of the Christian faith rests on this truth. Fourth-century Church father Gregory of Nazianzus wonderfully and accurately taught: "Whatever Christ did not become [or take onto Himself], He did not redeem." In other words, Jesus had to be as human as you are, taking your place, in order to save you. He had to wrap Himself in real human flesh with a real human brain and a real human soul. And because He was really human like you He was able to be your substitute in the eyes of God.

There is no negotiating here. Jesus is either completely a human being like us or He is not. Thank God that He was, and still is, but there's more. If He is merely fully human, and not fully God then our justification would still be in trouble. Thank God that He is also 100% God. As a result, He had the divine right and authority not only to take our place so that His life, suffering, death, and resurrection could be counted as ours, but also to forgive the sins of all people of all time. He can because He is truly God. Our Christology confesses that Jesus is true God and true man! Praise Him! In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O God, You are the strength of all who trust in You, and without Your aid we can do no good thing. Grant us the help of Your grace that we may please You in both will and deed; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our LORD, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Ascension of Our Lord

MAY 13, 2021

Today's Reading: Luke 24:44-53

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 11:1-23, 31-35; Luke 17:1-19

While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him. (Luke 24:51-52a)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. People easily get the wrong idea about the ascension of our LORD, which occurred 40 days after the resurrection and 10 days before Pentecost. The popular and wrong understanding is that Jesus was putting distance between Himself and us. With this false idea, then, Pentecost becomes a kind of “replacement theology” in which the Holy Spirit replaces Jesus on earth. In fact, just the opposite is the case. The ascension was a glorious event demonstrating Jesus’ unlimited power. The ascension showed that nothing could ever interfere with Jesus’ ability to be closer to us than ever before.

But the disciples did see Him ascend, right? Yes, they did, but Jesus did not permit this to imply that He would be limited, but rather to demonstrate power and authority, to show that the One ascending to heaven is unlimited. In other words, Jesus “sitting at the right hand of God the Father” in heaven is not a restricted physical location. Rather, it means that Jesus reigns everywhere, fully present with His people at all times and in all places.

The ascension proves the LORD has power to be closer to you than ever. Jesus knew the amazing gift that would result after the ascension. He once said to His disciples, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:23). The ascension means that Jesus has kept this promise, and has the ability to make His home with those baptized into His life, death, and resurrection.

One more thing: Notice what the disciples did when Jesus ascended. The Word says, “And they worshipped him” (Luke 24:52a). To say that Christ is with us isn’t just something we tell ourselves to feel religious. The disciples experienced the ascended LORD’s reign as they worshipped Him. As we worship Him we, too, receive His Word and Sacrament. In this way we also experience His ascension power: He’s right there with us, putting His Word into our ears, and putting His Body and Blood into our mouths. Ascension means that Christ has kept His Word to never leave us. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, as Your only-begotten Son, our LORD Jesus Christ, ascended into the heavens, so may we also ascend in heart and mind and continually dwell there with Him, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for the Ascension of Our Lord)

Friday of the Sixth Week of Easter

MAY 14, 2021

Today's Reading: Acts 1:1-11

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 11:24-29; 12:1-16; Luke 17:20-37

[Jesus] said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority." (Acts 1:7)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. No one knows when Jesus will come again in glory on the Last Day. Only God knows. Over the centuries many so-called "Christian" teachers have claimed to know when the Last Day would be. But the LORD Jesus said, "It is not for you to know times or seasons [regarding the Last Day]." So whenever we hear someone going on about knowing when the Last Day will be, we must instantly conclude that they are a false teacher and not listen to their teaching.

This is consistent with other things our LORD taught. For example, "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Matthew 6:34). If any wisdom will keep us safe about Last Day predictions, then Matthew 6:34 is it. We have enough to focus on for today, especially since today is all we know we have on this earth! Luke in Acts 1 continues to teach us. The LORD Jesus before He ascended, led His disciples to anticipate the coming and pouring out of the Holy Spirit which happened at Pentecost for them and at your Baptism for you.

Once we have received the Holy Spirit and His gift of faith worked in us through Holy Baptism, then what? Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8b). So get back to when you were given the Holy Spirit at your Holy Baptism. Return to your Baptism every day. You have died with Christ and now you live with Him. And do whatever He has put in front of you to do. Befriend those around you. Get to know them and love them, and don't worry about when the Last Day will be. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

LORD Jesus, Your kingdom continues to be in our midst as You come to us now through holy water, holy words, and holy food. Help us to see that Your kingdom is a kingdom of suffering, but that through suffering, we will be prepared to enter into glory when You return on that final day; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Saturday of the Sixth Week of Easter

MAY 15, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for the Seventh Sunday of Easter

(Psalm 27:1, 11a, 12; antiphon: v.7a, 8b, 9a)

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 13:1-3, 17-33; Luke 18:1-17

Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud. Alleluia. Your face, LORD, do I seek; hide not your face from me. Alleluia. Your face, LORD, do I seek; hide not your face from me. Alleluia. (From the Introit for the Seventh Sunday of Easter)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. One of the mysteries of the faith is that the LORD is a God who hides Himself. Isaiah 45:15 teaches, "Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior." He does it because people seek Him out of selfish motives.

Jesus told people not to tell others that He was the Messiah. After Peter correctly confessed that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus "strictly charged [the disciples] to tell no one about him" (Mark 8:30). Jesus said this because so many people wanted to turn Him into an earthly king. So once again: God hides Himself when people seek Him for all the wrong reasons.

The psalmist in Psalm 27 is not seeking God for the wrong reasons, but for the right reasons. He is in distress, so He cries aloud (vs.7a). He does not come to God in pride, but in humility; He does not come to tell God what to do, but comes seeking God's help (vs.8b). He seeks God's face for salvation (vs.1), and He seeks God's way to be his way (vs.11a). Again, he sought God out for all the right reasons. For these reasons, the psalmist is bold and right to pray to God to break out of His way of hiding Himself. The psalmist has strong faith in God's love and mercy in Christ to pray, "Your face, LORD, do I seek; hide not your face from me" (vs.8b-9a).

We should have the same faith and attitude towards God. Why? Because Jesus has made it plain to us that He came for sinners who know they need Him, for people who seek Him for all the right reasons. For those given faith, like YOU, Jesus reveals God as the merciful God, as the God of love. For you, God does not hide Himself, but has sent His Son so that you will know how to find Him every time--through His Son! In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Teach me your way, O LORD... Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen. (From the Introit for the Seventh Sunday after Easter)

The Seventh Sunday of Easter

MAY 16, 2021

Today's Reading: John 15:26-16:4

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 14:1-25; Luke 18:18-34

*"[The Holy Spirit] will bear witness about me...I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away."
(John 15:26c,16:1)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Today is *Exaudi* Sunday. It means "hear." God gives us complete assurance that He hears us. And when He hears us, He assures us that He will never let us go (John 10:28-29). We therefore teach that our election is certain in our justification and our justification is certain through faith in Jesus.

Do you want to be sure that faith is still alive? Do not consult your feelings! Instead, confess your sins and receive Holy Absolution. Hear God's Word, always return to your Holy Baptism, and run to get the Holy Sacrament of the Altar. Through these, faith is safe. Thus, Jesus comforted His disciples by promising them that the Holy Spirit was coming to bear witness about Jesus.

Someone has called the Holy Spirit the "unselfish" person of the Holy Trinity (not that the other persons are selfish). The Holy Spirit doesn't call any attention to Himself, but only to Jesus. And true to form, Jesus isn't selfish, either, as He is always giving glory to the Father. Oh yes, the Father isn't selfish, either, since He delights in His Son.

The point here is that the Holy Spirit is always putting Jesus before your eyes of faith and this is what keeps your faith living and secure. Why did Jesus teach that the Holy Spirit would come to do this? In John 16:1 Jesus said, "I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away." Our eternal security comes from the Holy Spirit's constantly keeping Jesus in front of us. As long as that is going on, then we are 100% safe. Jesus taught this precisely so that we would not fall away from the faith.

God will never break His promise to be for us in Christ. At the same time, we are taught NEVER to desert Christ and His Word. The Word is that vehicle through which the mighty and comforting Holy Spirit works. We must therefore hold to the Word. Even when we are weak, completely aware of our sins, and discouraged, when we hold to the Word, then we are safe in the arms of Jesus. Then we know He has not abandoned us as we continue to hear the Word! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O King of glory, LORD of hosts, uplifted in triumph far above all heavens, leave us not without consolation but send us the Spirit of truth whom You promised from the Father; for You live and reign with Him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(Collect for the Seventh Sunday of Easter)

Monday of the Seventh Week of Easter

MAY 17, 2021

Today's Reading: Ezekiel 36:22-28

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 14:25-45; Luke 18:35-19:10

"[God says] I will...I will...I will...I will...I will...I will...I will...I will..."

(Ezekiel 36:24-28)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Eight times...EIGHT times God describes in just five verses what HE will do for His people, and you know what? What God does covers EVERYTHING! He does the work not only for our justification, but He also does the work for our sanctification. He is 100% responsible for our ENTIRE lives in Christ.

Every aspect of our Christian faith--our new lives, our love, our ability to pray, to serve, to worship, to engage in witness, our certain hope, our ability to forgive, heart-felt endurance, compassion, the fruit of the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, our ability to confess our sins, to hold to Christ, to remember our Holy Baptism, to thirst for the Holy Supper--EVERYTHING is from God's "I will." We are so blessed in our biblical Lutheran confession to know this and to constantly confess this.

Many people who identify themselves as Christians miss this crucial teaching. Even many Christians think that our new lives are a 50/50 co-working with God. They wrongly believe that God does His part, and we must do ours. God reaches down to us, and we must raise our hand to reach Him. He invites and we must accept. He comes and we must open our hearts, etc., etc., etc.

No! We can't reach up because on our own we are dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). We can't accept without the Holy Spirit's instigating faith in us. We cannot open our hearts because without Christ our hearts are hard and sick. If not for God's "I will," we would be lost, completely lost.

God says, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness" (Ezekiel 36:25). Think Holy Baptism. God does the cleaning. God does the saving. "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules" (Ezekiel 36:27). This is sanctification, the new life. Who makes it happen? God does.

On account of His gracious "I will," you are now counted among His people: "You shall be my people, and I will be your God" (Ezekiel 36:28b). The One who says to you, "I will" makes it happen! In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O LORD, stir up the hearts of Your faithful people to welcome and joyfully receive Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, that He may find in us a fit dwelling place; who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Tuesday of the Seventh Week of Easter

MAY 18, 2021

Today's Reading: 1 Peter 4:7-14

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 16:1-22; Luke 19:11-28

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. A long time ago in the 20th century, a rock band called The Beatles wrote a very famous song called, "All You Need Is Love." People have fun analyzing this idea. The bottom line is that it is absolutely not true, and absolutely true at the same time.

How do we sort this out? By defining what kind of love we are talking about. If we mean romantic love, desire, or affection, then the statement falls flat and can't be backed up. People need more than these loves, as important as they might be. However, if what you mean is "agape" love, the sacrificial and committed love of God for you in Christ, now you're cooking.

Why is this verse true? Because this love was and is the love of God the Father that drove Him to send His Son Jesus to save us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. In other words, this love is responsible for our lives. Without this love, we would not know life. Take away this love, life doesn't exist. This love was what moved God to create the heavens and the earth, and this love is what moved God to give Jesus to restore the heavens and the earth. This love is GIFT love. And here's the rest that God wants us to know: Once we receive this love of Christ, we aren't supposed to keep it to ourselves. We are to share it with others. God calls us to love others and when we do we cover, with this love, "a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8).

True love covers sin and that means true love covers death, like the death of hostility. People can offend us and hurt us, and this can cause terrible rifts in relationships, but love can restore. Love can forgive, cover, and bring life back even into broken relationships. When this happens, a multitude of sins get covered, like all of yours are covered through the love of Christ for you. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

LORD God, heavenly Father, as we struggle here below with divisions among us, searching for peace among men, remind us daily of the peace of heaven purchased through the bloody death and triumphant resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our LORD, who with You and the Holy Spirit is one God, now and forever. Amen.

Wednesday of the Seventh Week of Easter

MAY 19, 2021

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism:* The Apostles Creed,
Second Article, pt.2

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 16:23-40; Luke 19:29-48

[Christ] has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and earth.
(Small Catechism: The Apostles Creed, Second Article)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Luther wrote the above explanation for the part of the Creed describing what Jesus did to save us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Luther was just being Luther, relying on Scripture as his guide. Luther knew, for example, 1 Peter 1:18-19: "...knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." A wonderful and very biblical way of teaching how Christ saved us is expressed in this idea of redemption.

We lost and condemned ones were "purchased and won" by Jesus. Jesus paid for us to be forgiven and saved. So, okay, but what currency did Jesus use to purchase us from death to life? He didn't pay with gold or silver. That would not do. Not good enough. Instead, He paid with what is more valuable than anything in the universe: His blood, God's blood (Acts 20:28). Alright, but who did He pay? Did He pay the devil? No, that would have been giving the devil far too much credit! Only God has the power to release from death to life, so God paid God. Jesus paid His blood to the Father, and our heavenly Father accepted His Son's payment. It was enough. It was more than enough to purchase us back to life. It was the payment that was necessary to get us out of the clutches of death. It was that strong and powerful a payment.

We learn from Leviticus 17:11 that life is in the blood. Well, the life of God was in Jesus' blood, so yes, that blood has the greatest purchasing power in the universe! It's true: You have been "purchased and won" from "all sins, death, and from the power of the devil; not with silver or gold, but with [Christ's] holy, precious blood!" In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O King who comes in the name of the LORD, through Your birth and death, earth and heaven were joined together in peace. May your coming as King into Jerusalem in humility on the donkey help us to see that You continue to come to us as our King hidden in humble water, humble words, humble food; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Thursday of the Seventh Week of Easter

MAY 20, 2021

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 16:41-17:13; Luke 20:1-18

“When then is this that is written, ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.” (Luke 20:17-18)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. It starts to mess with our prideful sinful nature when other people receive praise and honor while we do not. Well, no one gets more praise than Jesus. The Father has given Him the position of all power and authority. People are therefore easily offended by Him. In fact, Jesus is so important that He is described as the “cornerstone.” This is a fascinating word and usually refers to a foundation stone. In fact, whenever we sing the hymn, “The Church’s One Foundation” we are reminded that Jesus is indeed our foundation and we build upon Him, our Rock (Matthew 7:24-25).

However, there is another sense of “cornerstone,” and that is a keystone that is not below us on the ground, but above us in the ceiling. It is a stone towards which all other stones are aligned. This stone determines the integrity of the building. So the cornerstone might be below you, by your feet, or above you, over your head.

In this light, God warns against pride and rebellion, especially when people reject the Word of Christ. Depending on the extent of our rebellion against Jesus, we might either stumble and fall over our Savior, or even worse, be crushed by Him in judgment. Christ is Savior and He is also Judge. If we reject Him, we reject God’s building, God’s holy place, God’s house. Thank God that He in His great love and mercy, has led you through His Word and Sacrament not to reject His Word, not to be like those in the vineyard who rejected God’s prophets and Jesus. Instead you embrace Christ who has made you one of His living stones (1 Peter 2:5), built up with your brothers and sisters into His spiritual house, a royal priesthood. Through faith in Jesus, you do not stumble over Him, but you bow before Him. You are not crushed by Him, but you are raised up by Him. Jesus gives you a firm foundation and a perfectly aligned shelter. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

LORD Jesus, You are the stone that the builders rejected. But on the third day, You became the cornerstone. By Your Word and Spirit, open our hearts to receive You as the beloved Son sent from the Father so that we might always embrace suffering as the means by which we enter into Your glory; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Friday of the Seventh Week of Easter

MAY 21, 2021

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 20:1-21; Luke 20:19-44

[Jesus] said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." (Luke 20:25)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Living as Christians in the world means that we live in the two kingdoms God has made for us. One kingdom is called the "Kingdom of the Right," otherwise known as the Church, and the other kingdom is called the "Kingdom of the Left" and refers to the state. The Church is also known as the kingdom of grace, while society (or whatever word we choose) is where earthly power lies. The Church emphasizes the Gospel, whereas the civil government must use laws to properly function. Both kingdoms are of God. God leads both kingdoms. We just need to remember that they serve entirely different functions and purposes.

But wait a minute. How can we say that God is in charge of both kingdoms when Jesus in Luke 20 says, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's"? It sounds like Jesus was saying that when it came to the Left, that Caesar was in charge. Well, the answer is that we have a classic "both-and" situation here. Caesar was indeed in charge of the state at the time, but only because Jesus let him be. In other words, Jesus has ultimate authority even in the realm of earthly power, but He has chosen to permit the governing authorities that He has established (Romans 13) to run the government. He's okay with that and doesn't worry about it, because God is the One who is always in control of the big picture. That's why Jesus said what He did when Pontius Pilate was interrogating Him. Pilate said to Jesus, "Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" Pilate spoke truth, but then Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:10b, 11a). And Jesus spoke truth.

So when you honor the governor or the president, and you should regardless of their shortcomings, you are really honoring Christ, the King of kings, the One who guards and keeps you in this world and into life everlasting. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Living God, Your almighty power is made known chiefly in showing mercy and pity. Grant us the fullness of Your grace to lay hold of Your promises and live forever in Your presence; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our LORD, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Eve of Pentecost

MAY 22, 2021

Today's Reading: John 14:15-21

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 20:22-21:9; Luke 20:45-21:19

*"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth."
(John 14:16-17a)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. We are on the verge of moving from the season of Easter to the season of Pentecost, which begins on the 50th day after the resurrection of our LORD! What an exciting day! It is the day when the LORD kept His promise recorded by the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-29). On that great day our heavenly Father and our LORD Jesus Christ poured out upon the Church the Holy Spirit who leads Her to fulfill the Great Commission of The LORD Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-20).

Sometimes people get confused about this. They ask, "But didn't God's people have the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament?" Yes, they did, but in a different way. The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament was especially connected to God's house in the form of the tabernacle and later to the temple, run by specially appointed priests who conducted holy sacrifices for the people of God. But do you recall what happened to that temple when Jesus died on the Cross of Calvary? The curtain of the temple was torn in two (Matthew 27:51). This meant that the holy sacrifices performed in the temple were no longer necessary because the final sacrifice for sin had just been rendered by Jesus on the Cross.

The Holy Spirit was now "moving out of" the Old Testament houses, so to speak. It was time for the Holy Spirit to "move into" the house called the Church. And what is that? The Church is not a building made with physical materials, but consists of all Christians--new priests, "royal priests" (1 Peter 2:9)--who confess Jesus and who gather around His Word and Sacraments. Upon this Church the Holy Spirit has been poured out.

But how do you know that YOU share in the great gift of The Holy Spirit? You know because in the Church you were baptized into Jesus! Titus writes, "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:5-6). In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and ever-living God, You fulfilled Your promise by sending the gift of the Holy Spirit to unite disciples of all nations in the cross and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ. By the preaching of the Gospel spread this gift to the ends of the earth; through the same Jesus Christ, our LORD, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Notes

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*Martin Luther's Morning and Evening Prayers taken from
the Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther.*

Unless otherwise noted, Biblical quotations are from the ESV.

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