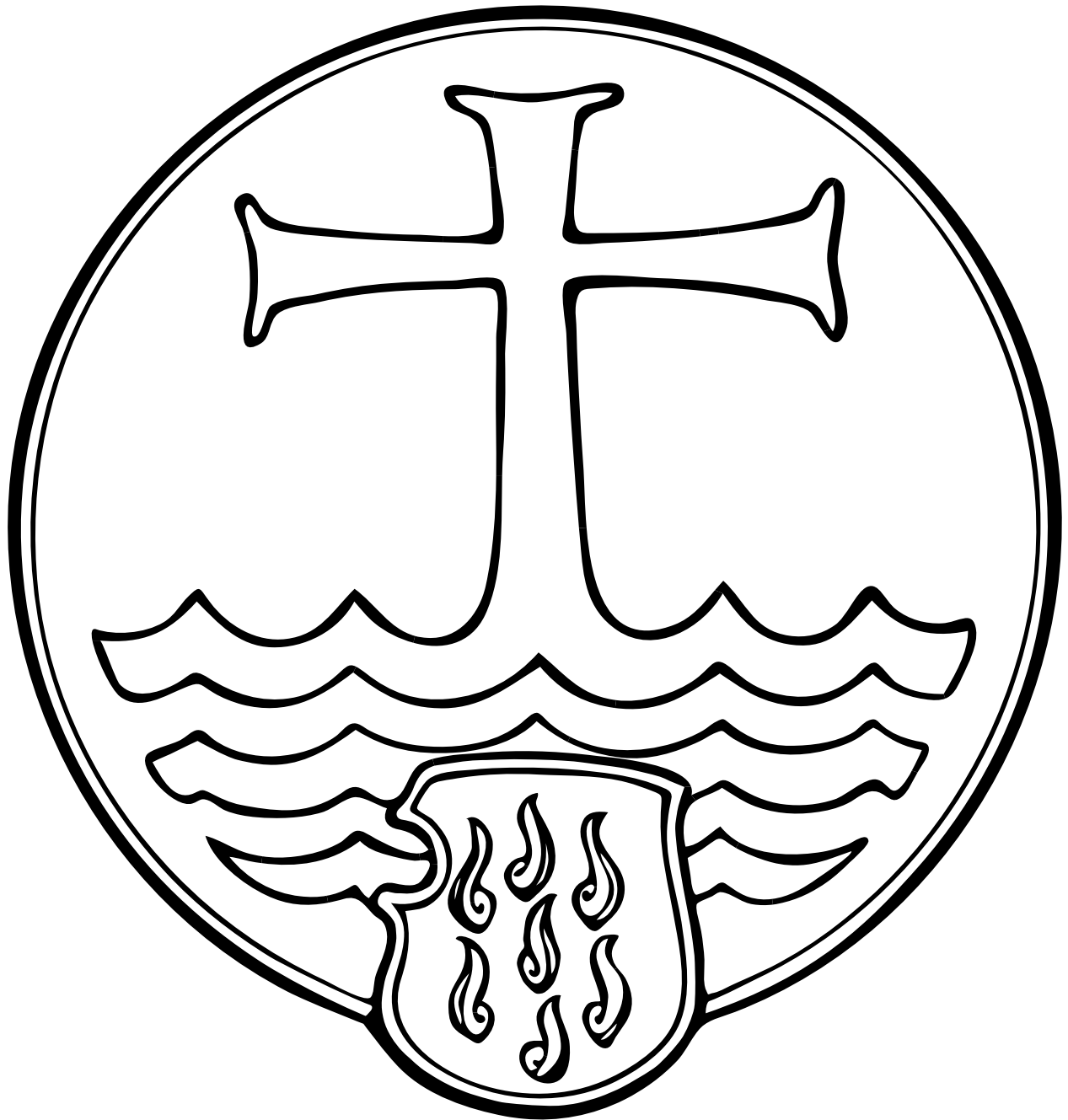


Higher Things®
REFLECTIONS



Pentecost - Trinity 4

MAY 31 - JULY 11, 2020

Pentecost - Trinity 4

2020 REFLECTIONS

The Reflections for this season were written by Rev. Alexander Lange, pastor of Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church in Albany, Oregon.

2020 Reflections Editorial Staff:

Sandra Madden (Media Executive)

Kay Maiwald (Reflections Editor)

Rev. René Castillero (Audio Editor)

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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.

Pentecost

MAY 31, 2020

Today's Reading: John 14:23-31

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 21:10-35; Luke 21:20-38

Jesus answered him, "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)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The one who loves Jesus is one who "keeps" His words. Kudos to the English Standard Version for not translating this particular Greek word as "obey." It can mean "obey" in some contexts, but here it means "keep" in the sense of "guard, cling to, treasure."

The one who loves Jesus isn't defined by obedience to His commandments. The one who loves Jesus is one who treasures the Gospel, clings to Christ's promises, and guards the true doctrine lest the devil take it from him.

The Church cannot exist apart from the words of Jesus. That's why God sent the Holy Spirit to earth. The Spirit comes to "teach you all things and bring to your remembrance" everything Jesus said (John 14:26). The Spirit teaches the Word to the Church.

First, the Spirit helped the apostles remember everything Jesus had taught them, so they could record His teachings, thereby forming the New Testament. Now, the Spirit helps us recall the teachings of Jesus by speaking to us through those apostolic scriptures.

Do you love Jesus? If you love Jesus, then you treasure His words and cling to His promises. Where do you hear His words? You will hear the voice of Jesus in the Divine Service. You will hear His voice when inspired Scripture is read aloud and when the Spirit leads your pastor to proclaim the Good News.

When you walk away from the Divine Service, you will, to quote the Nunc Dimittis, "depart in peace." Jesus gives you objective peace by satisfying the wrath of God as He hung on the Cross, and He gives you subjective peace by giving you confidence through the preached Gospel. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, on this day You once taught the hearts of Your faithful people by sending them the light of Your Holy Spirit. Grant us in our day by the same Spirit to have a right understanding in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy consolation; 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 Pentecost)

Pentecost Monday

JUNE 1, 2020

Today's Reading: John 3:16-21

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 22:1-20; Luke 22:1-23

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. God gave up His only Son because He loves the world. Yes, Jesus took away the sins of the world. He didn't merely die for the elect. Because of His death, God's vengeance has been stayed, and He forgives every sinner.

Yet not all the world will be saved. Many sinners will perish eternally. Many sinners will be condemned. Faith is necessary for salvation. People will only be saved if they depend on the Savior. Jesus gives eternal life to them, and trust in Jesus alone receives that eternal life as free gift from Him.

A king could pardon every criminal in his kingdom and the guards could open every prison cell at his command. Unfortunately, such grace will do the prisoner no good if he refuses to believe the good news, crosses his arms, and stays in his cell.

I can buy my entire Confirmation class bottles of soda. Unfortunately, some students might be too proud to accept this free gift or they might be skeptical. "Are we allowed to drink soda in class? Is he trying to trick us?" Their thirst won't be quenched unless they trust me and receive the gift.

In other words, justification is both objective and subjective at the same time. It is an objective fact: Jesus Christ died for you and His blood cleanses you from all your sins. The Word of Absolution objectively delivers that forgiveness right to you—into your ears and soul! Justification is also subjective. It is received by every individual believer through faith in Christ alone.

Thankfully, the same God who sent Jesus to die for your sins also sent the Spirit to you in the waters of Holy Baptism. Through parents, pastors, and other Christians, the Spirit delivers the Gospel to you. Through your pastor, parents, and other Christians, the Gospel and the Word of forgiveness come to you, and the Spirit continues to work on you to strengthen your faith. In fact, the faith that believes in Jesus and trusts what He done for us at Calvary and in His Gifts—that faith is a free gift of the Holy Spirit. Through His work you receive Jesus' salvation, trust Him, and are justified.

Through the means of the Spirit—Word, water, Body and Blood—You believe in the crucified and raised Jesus, and "whoever believes in him is not condemned" (John 3:18). In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, who gave Your Holy Spirit to the apostles, grant us that same Spirit that we may live in faith and abide in peace; 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 Pentecost Monday)

Pentecost Tuesday

JUNE 2, 2020

Today's Reading: John 10:1-10

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 22:21-23:3; Luke 22:24-46

So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep."

(John 10:7)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Jesus calls Himself the Door, the entrance into the sheepfold. If you want to belong to the flock, to God's family, you must enter through Jesus. Later, Jesus will say that He is the Way, because no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

This is the Scandal of Particularity. There is only one particular way a person can be saved—through faith in Jesus Christ. The Mormon won't come to the Father through his moral efforts, the Buddhist won't experience true peace through his meditations, and the secularist won't discover the truth through the probing of his reason. The world finds this biblical truth scandalous. Perhaps you are a bit scandalized by the condemnation of unbelievers as well.

Still, there is another biblical truth: God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). Therefore, He sent the Spirit to call all people through the Gospel and to gather all people into His Church. It is the Spirit who makes men into pastors, teachers, and missionaries. It is the Spirit who plants congregations in every town and city. It is the Spirit who puts the Gospel on the lips of Christians as they carry out their vocations.

Our sins merit condemnation. Jesus was crucified for the sins of the world. In Christ there is forgiveness. This is why He is the only Door and the only Way.

It is the Spirit who leads us to the Door and who puts us on the Way. He brings the Word to all nations, so that we might hear the voice of our Shepherd, follow Him, and receive abundant life. 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.
(Collect for Pentecost Tuesday)

Wednesday of the Week of Pentecost

JUNE 3, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 23:4-28; Luke 22:47-71

How does God's kingdom come? God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity. (The Small Catechism: The Lord's Prayer, Second Petition)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. God is the rightful ruler of the world, but mankind rebelled against Him. Every human obeys his own desires, selfishly pursuing his own happiness. How can the Lord re-establish His Kingdom? How can He rule on earth, as He rules in heaven?

Most lords establish their kingdoms through the sword, but not our Lord. He became a man and He laid down His own life. He handed himself over to His rebellious creatures and He permitted them to execute Him. He stepped out of the grave, alive and immortal, proving that none can vanquish Him. And He spoke a word of pardon to those who abandoned Him and to those who crucified Him, proving His mercy. We murdered the rightful King...and He absolved us!

Now, heralds proclaim that message of pardon. They invite rebels to renounce their idols and acknowledge their sins. The promise is spoken: "Ask the Lord for mercy and it will be granted." The Spirit comes to us through that Good News, causing us to believe it, and thus making us citizens of heaven. The Kingdom of God doesn't spread through armies and coercion, but through a promise that can be believed. Truly, this Kingdom is not of this world!

When we pray, "Thy kingdom come," we are asking the Spirit to strengthen our faith, so that we might remain citizens of our Lord's Kingdom forever. Furthermore, we are asking the Spirit to transfer our neighbors out of the kingdom of darkness and reconcile them to God. Finally, we are praying that our risen Lord might return quickly, so that the rebellion might be brought to an end and we might live in his presence eternally. May it be so! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Your kingdom come. Guard Your domain And Your eternal righteous reign. The Holy Ghost enrich our day With gifts attendant on our way. Break Satan's pow'r, defeat his rage; Preserve Your Church from age to age.

("Our Father, Who from Heaven Above" LSB 766, st. 3)

Thursday of the Week of Pentecost

JUNE 4, 2020

Today's Reading: Acts 2:1-13

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 24:1-25; Luke 23:1-25

And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.

(Acts 2:3)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Originally Pentecost was simply the celebration of the beginning of the wheat harvest, but eventually the Jews used Pentecost to celebrate God's appearing on Mt. Sinai to give Israel the Law. When God came to Mt. Sinai, He was within a cloud, a cloud full of lightning and fire.

The presence of our God is often associated with fire. When the Holy Spirit was given to the Church on Pentecost, the disciples saw "divided tongues" that had the appearance of fire resting on each of them. The Holy Spirit is God, and the fire was a visual sign of His presence.

After God appeared on Sinai, the Israelites built the Tabernacle, which was the original Temple. God's glorious and fiery presence entered the Tabernacle. When the Spirit descended on Pentecost, He didn't descend upon a mountain or enter a building. He rested on the followers of Jesus! The Church—the assembly of believers gathered around Word and Sacrament—has become the new temple (1 Corinthians 3:16-17, Ephesians 2:19-22).

According to the Old Testament, God cannot dwell anywhere on earth unless that place has been sanctified. Sin and death are completely contrary to His nature, after all. The same Spirit who resides within your congregation sanctifies it and every individual member of it. He is called the Holy Spirit because He makes you holy. He washes away your guilt with the blood of the crucified Christ and He bestows to you the very life of the resurrected Christ.

This is why you are called a saint, a holy person. You have been sanctified. You can be sure of this, because the Holy Spirit resides in your midst, carrying out His work through Word and Sacrament. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Holy Spirit, the dove sent from heaven, Ever one with the One who is Three, From the Father You came, Words of peace to proclaim, Come and comfort us, speak tenderly. You, the fragrance of life, we are seeking; Fill Your temple, Your altar make clean. Joyous shelter of love, Gracious friend from above, In Your care we are resting, serene.

("Holy Spirit the Dove Sent from Heaven" LSB 502, st. 1)

Friday of the Week of Pentecost

JUNE 5, 2020

Today's Reading: Genesis 11:1-9

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 27:12-23; Luke 23:26-56

So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth. (Genesis 11:8)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. This is the ultimate story of rebellion. This isn't a story about one person's or one family's sins against God. This is a story about the whole world gathering together to form a city that stood in rebellion against God. You know it as the story of Babel, but actually the city is called Babylon.

Our pride and selfish desires put us at odds with each other, but a common enemy can unite otherwise incompatible people. In this case, the enemy is God. "Come," they said to each other, "we will build this city, so that God cannot force us to disperse. We can make a name for ourselves! We can make a high tower and storm heaven itself!"

Our Lord united the people of Jerusalem in His own day. The Pharisees, scribes, Sadducees, and priests hated each other, but they hated Jesus more. So they teamed up in order to crucify Him.

On Pentecost we celebrate that the Lord has united various races, tribes, and nations into a single family called the Christian Church. This time He didn't unite us through the power of hate, but through something more powerful—divine love. He didn't unite us by becoming our common enemy, but by sending us a Savior.

God reconciled us to each other by reconciling us to Himself. If we are joined to one Head, we are joined to each other. If God forgives our sins for the sake of Christ, then we will forgive each other as we follow our Lord.

Pentecost is the reversal of Genesis 11. Instead of dispersing us permanently, instead of dooming us to eternal isolation in hell, God raised up His Son in order to draw us back to Himself, and in doing so He brought us back to each other. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Merciful God, we humbly implore You to cast the bright beams of Your light upon Your Church that we, being instructed by the doctrine of the blessed apostles, may walk in the light of Your truth and finally attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.
(A Prayer for the Church)

Saturday of the Week of Pentecost

JUNE 6, 2020

Today's Reading: Introit for Trinity

(Psalm 8:1-2a, 3-5; antiphon: Liturgical Text)

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 32:1-6, 16-27; Luke 24:1-27

What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.
(From the Introit for Trinity Sunday)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Our Introit for Trinity Sunday quotes Psalm 8, which is a commentary on Genesis 1 and 2. The psalmist contemplates the glory of the stars and perhaps the angels, since angels were often associated with the stars. Compared to bright stars and glorious angels, humans seem insignificant.

The psalmist wonders, "Why does God care about man so much?" Indeed, why would God give mankind dominion over the earth, thereby making them a little lower than the angels?

Many people wonder if God truly cares about small, insignificant human beings. Is God really concerned about my needs, my problems, my choices, or my destiny? Doesn't the Creator have to attend to more important things?

Well, you don't have to wonder. We believe that there are three divine Persons who are perfectly joined together by the indivisible substance that they share. One of those Persons is a human being. Yes, one of your brothers sits beside the Father, participating in His rule.

This God who became flesh and blood has experienced human weakness and sorrow. He empathizes with you. He cares. Indeed, He cares enough to participate in your death, so that you can participate in His life!

You can be sure that Jesus is watching you from His throne and that He sends His angels to protect you. You can be sure that He brings your petitions to His Father. Most importantly, you can be sure that you will be glorified, so that you can sit in the presence of the Father alongside your brother, Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

He has raised our human nature On the clouds to God's right hand; There we sit in heav'nly places, There with Him in glory stand. Jesus reigns, adored by angels; Man with God is on the throne. By our mighty Lord's ascension We by faith behold our own.
(*"See, the Lord Ascends in Triumph" LSB 494, st. 5*)

Holy Trinity

JUNE 7, 2020

Today's Reading: John 3:1-17

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 35:9-30; Luke 24:28-53

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Our Gospel lesson for Trinity Sunday explicitly mentions all three divine Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The Father loves the world. He doesn't want to condemn sinners to eternal death, but wants to rescue every sinner and give to him everlasting life. So God sent His only Son.

If Jesus was sent, then He must have existed prior to His birth. He is God's unique Son. Thus we confess that He was begotten of His Father. This wasn't an act of creation. The Father is always the Father, because His Son always exists.

The Son shares the Father's very substance. He is One with the Father (John 10:30). He shares God's love for the world. He willingly goes to the Cross to suffer death and condemnation in our place. Through His obedience and death, Jesus purchased and won forgiveness and salvation for mankind.

How are the gifts won on the Cross delivered to you? How can you benefit from the Son's work? How can you get out of the kingdom of darkness and enter God's Kingdom? Just as the Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son, the Spirit is sent in time by the Father and the Spirit. Through earthly means the Spirit delivers forgiveness, life, and salvation. Through these means of grace the Spirit brings people into God's Kingdom.

Our text mentions one of those means: Holy Baptism. The Spirit came to you in the waters of Baptism. The Spirit applied the gifts won on the Cross to you personally. Now you are forgiven. Now you belong to the Kingdom of God. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, You have given us grace to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity by the confession of a true faith and to worship the Unity in the power of the Divine Majesty. Keep us steadfast in this faith and defend us from all adversities; for You, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live and reign, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(Collect for Trinity Sunday)

Monday of Trinity

JUNE 8, 2020

Today's Reading: Isaiah 6:1-7

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 5:1-23; John 12:20-36

*In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.
(Isaiah 6:1)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. According to John 1:18, nobody has ever seen God, but how can that be true? Isaiah said that he saw the Lord sitting on a throne. And what about Moses and the Israelites gathered at Sinai? What about Ezekiel and Daniel?

Before Jesus and His apostles came on the scene, the Jews studied the Old Testament and recognized a distinction. Yahweh is invisible and transcendent, dwelling in heaven. No human can see him. Nevertheless, there are visible manifestations of Yahweh—personal agents who are distinct from Yahweh, and yet are Yahweh at the same time. These visible manifestations are called the Angel of the LORD (Yahweh), the Glory of Yahweh, the Wisdom of Yahweh, and the Word of Yahweh.

Consider Genesis 15, where the Word of Yahweh came to Abram in a vision. The Word isn't treated as a mere voice from heaven, but a Person who comes to Abram and can be seen. Or consider Ezekiel 1, where the prophet sees the Glory of Yahweh appearing as a man on a throne.

John the Evangelist picks up on this. He states that the Word existed in the beginning (John 1:1). He is God, and yet He is distinct from God. He was the One who appeared to the patriarchs and prophets. When Isaiah saw the figure of a man sitting on a throne, he was looking at the Word—the very same Word who would actually become a man, in order to reveal the Father's love by dying in our place (John 12:41)!

The doctrine of the Trinity is rooted deeply in the Old Testament and in Jewish theology. It is also the foundation of our doctrine of salvation. We believe that God can be known, because we have a Mediator—One who is known because He is a man, and who can show us the Father, because He is One with Him. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty! All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea. Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty! God in three persons, blessed Trinity!
("Holy, Holy, Holy" LSB 507, st. 4)*

Tuesday of Trinity

JUNE 9, 2020

Today's Reading: Romans 11:33-36

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 8:1-21; John 12:36b-50

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! (Romans 11:33)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Paul includes a great deal of theology in his letter to the Romans. He talks a lot about God. He talks about how God will judge mankind, but acquit those sinners who believe in Jesus, for Jesus was condemned in their place. He talks about Baptism, the Law, and the work of the Spirit. He talks about how God is grafting Gentiles into Israel, creating a single family consisting of every tribe and nation.

After contemplating all this theology, Paul breaks into doxology—praise of God. After considering the Gospel for 11 chapters, Paul marvels at a plan to save mankind that no one could have guessed.

This is how Christians worship the Trinity. First, we contemplate the works of the Trinity, especially how the Father sent His Son to die for us, so that the Spirit can give us eternal life. We listen to the Gospel and receive the free blessing of God. Contemplating the Gospel will produce peace, joy, and confidence. Faith responds to God's work with prayers, praise, and thanksgiving.

The introduction to the Lutheran Service Book captures this balance well: "Our Lord serves us today through His holy Word and Sacraments. Through these means, He comes among us to deliver His forgiveness and salvation... The Lord's service calls forth our service—in sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to Him and in loving service to one another" (LSB p. viii).

Attend the Divine Service. Hear what the Trinity has done for you. Marvel at the grace of God and rejoice in your salvation. Praise the Lord, for "from him and through him and to him are all things" (Romans 11:36). In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Alleluia! Let praises ring! Unto our triune God we sing; Blest be His name forever! With angel hosts let us adore And sing His praises evermore For all His grace and favor! Singing, ringing: Holy, holy, God is holy; Spread the story Of our God, the Lord of glory!"
(*"Alleluia! Let Praises Ring" LSB 822, st. 4*)

Wednesday of Trinity

JUNE 10, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 8:22-36; John 13:1-20

How is God's will done? God's will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die. This is His good and gracious will."

(The Small Catechism: The Lord's Prayer, Third Petition)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When we pray, "May Your will be done," we are saying, "May my will not be done." From the moment of your conception, your will has been hostile toward God and opposed to His will.

Thankfully, Christ reconciled you to God by becoming sin and dying on the Cross (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). Then, after rising from the dead, Jesus sent His Spirit to ignite faith in your heart. When you received the Spirit in Baptism, God became your Father. You love God, treasure His Word, and desire to obey Him.

Still, your sinful nature remains. You feel two desires in your heart. You desire to live under your good and gracious Father, but you also have fleshly desires—desires that you want to satisfy, desires that contradict the will of God. These unholy desires will not disappear until we die or the Lord returns. So we pray, "Father, break and hinder the plans and purposes of my flesh."

He does. He kills your Old Adam with the Law and strengthens the new man with the Gospel. The Law produces contrition, which pushes the sinful nature back under the waters of Baptism, and the Gospel draws up from the water a son of God, full of the Spirit.

Our Lord doesn't merely save us from the devil and the world. He saves us from ourselves. Whatever would lead you away from God is crucified and buried with Christ, so that you—a new creation—can live with Him forever. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Your gracious will on earth be done As it is done before Your throne, That patiently we may obey Throughout our lives all that You say. Curb flesh and blood and ev'ry ill That sets itself against Your will.

("Our Father, Who from Heaven Above" LSB 766, st. 4)

St. Barnabas, Apostle

JUNE 11, 2020

Today's Reading: Mark 6:7-13

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 9:1-18; John 13:21-28

So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.

(Mark 6:12)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Who the heck is Barnabas? He was a Jew from the tribe of Levi, who had converted to Christianity. According to Acts 4:36-37, Barnabas sold his field and gave the money to the apostles, so that they could distribute the money to the poor.

Later, Barnabas was sent to Antioch to oversee the congregation that had been planted there (Acts 11:19-26). He worked with Paul in Antioch and then traveled with Paul during his first missionary journey. Barnabas also defended the freedom of the Gospel at the Council of Jerusalem.

God loves to achieve His goals through human beings. When Barnabas was a regular Christian, God used his generosity to help hungry Christians suffering in Jerusalem. Then, when Barnabas became a minister of the Church, God used his preaching to grow the congregation in Antioch and to plant other churches in other towns.

When you go to the Divine Service, God will use an ordinary man to absolve you, to teach you, to rebuke you, to encourage you, to give you the abundant life found in the Body and Blood of Christ, and to bless you with God's Name. Then you will leave the Divine Service. You will partake in the life of the congregation, interacting with your brothers and sisters. You will serve others in your vocations. God will use your generosity and kindness to bless those around you.

This is the life of the Christian: receiving from a man's hand the blessings of God, and then becoming that hand of God that distributes blessings to others. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, Your faithful servant Barnabas sought not his own renown but gave generously of his life and substance for the encouragement of the apostles and their ministry. Grant that we may follow his example in lives given to charity and the proclamation of the Gospel; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the Feast of St. Barnabas)

Friday of Trinity

JUNE 12, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 10:1-23; John 14:1-17

A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother. (Proverbs 10:1)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The book of Proverbs describes active righteousness in great detail. This verse tells us that the wise and the righteous will bring joy to their parents, but the foolish and the wicked will cause their parents great grief.

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). Those who fear the Lord listen to His voice. Indeed, the Lord's voice, His Word, creates godly fear—humility, contrition, and a desire for the Lord's favor. Wise parents will take the proverb to heart and bring their children to the Divine Service, where they can hear the voice of the Lord. Likewise, they will gather their family for daily devotions and teach the Small Catechism to their children while they are young.

Active righteousness is important, but there is another kind of righteousness. You see, we cannot hope to make our heavenly Father glad with our obedience and diligence. Our best works are stained with sin and grieve our Father.

Thankfully, God has imputed your sins to Jesus, who carried them to the cross. There He was punished in your place. Also, God has imputed the righteousness of Jesus to you. This is the righteousness of faith—passive righteousness. When God looks at you, He doesn't feel sorrow. He feels great gladness! He delights in you, because you have been clothed in the obedience of His Son!

You have no wisdom or righteousness that you can offer to God. Thankfully, you are in Christ, "who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption," (1 Corinthians 30). In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*O Word of God incarnate, O Wisdom from on high, O Truth unchanged, unchanging,
O Light of our dark sky: We praise You for the radiance That from the hallowed page, A
lantern to our footsteps, Shines from age to age.*

("O Word of God Incarnate" LSB 523, st. 1)

Saturday of Trinity

JUNE 13, 2020

Today's Reading: Introit for the First Sunday after Trinity

(Psalm 13:1-4; antiphon: vs. 5-6)

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 13:1-25; John 14:18-31

*O Lord, I have trusted in your steadfast love. How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
(From the Introit for the First Sunday after Trinity)*

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. There is a beautiful contrast here between the tone of the body of the Introit and the antiphon. In the antiphon, the verse that introduces and concludes the Introit, we say that we have trusted in God's steadfast love and that we will celebrate His salvation. In the Introit itself, we complain, "How long, O Lord? How long will you forget me and hide yourself from me? How long will my enemies prevail over me?"

We live by faith, not by sight. Often it doesn't appear that God is giving us His undivided attention. Often we feel like the world is winning and that the grave is the end. We must trust in God's steadfast love when we cannot easily see His love in our daily experiences.

Where we can see the love of God is on the Cross of Christ. A crucifix is offensive to the eyes. It is ugly—a naked, bleeding, dying man. A crucifix offends our pride. "You expect me to worship something so feeble? You expect me to find salvation in a man who couldn't save Himself?"

That's what the eyes see, but the eyes of faith see the salvation of our God. The Gospel pulls back the veil and we no longer see a feeble man being murdered by His enemies. Instead, we see our Creator laying down His life for us. We see our Savior entering the grave in order to make a way out of the grave for us.

Thus, whenever we pray, "How long, O Lord?" we are not speaking out of despair. We pray even such desperate words with confidence. We pray, knowing that God will consider and answer us. He will not abandon us to the grave or hand us over to our enemies. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Help then, O Lord, our unbelief; And may our faith abound To call on You when You are near And seek where You are found. For You, O resurrected Lord, Are found in means divine: Beneath the water and the Word, Beneath the bread and wine.

("We Walk by Faith and Not by Sight" LSB 720, st. 3-4)

The First Sunday after Trinity

JUNE 14, 2020

Today's Reading: Luke 16:19-31

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 14:1-27; John 15:1-11

The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.
(Luke 16:22-23)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus tells a story about a rich man and a poor man. Which of these men was rich and which was poor? In a sense, the answer is obvious. The man who ate large meals, wore fine clothes, and lived in a house was the rich man. Lazarus was the poor man. He had no food, no clothes, and no home.

On the other hand, the rich man was not as rich as he first appeared. He owned nothing that lasts. He lost everything the moment he died. In hell he couldn't even find a drop of water to cool his tongue.

Lazarus appeared poor, but he was actually quite rich. He possessed treasure kept in heaven, an inheritance that is imperishable. He belonged to God's family. Thus, after Lazarus died, he enjoyed peace and joy in the presence of God. When the Day of Judgment comes, he will be given an immortal body.

If you have trusted your wealth to keep you secure, repent. If you have sought value and happiness in money and possessions, repent. Admit to yourself that money and possessions cannot give you value or lasting happiness. Admit to yourself that wealth cannot save you on the Day of Judgment.

Also rejoice, for you are like Lazarus! In Baptism you were brought into God's family. Even if you lose all your money, your possessions, your home, your family, and life itself, you are still wealthier than Bill Gates. You have an inheritance, purchased by the blood of Christ! And this inheritance is as imperishable as the body of your risen Savior. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O God, the strength of all who trust in You, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing, grant us Your grace to keep Your commandments that we may please You in both will and deed; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(Collect for the First Sunday after Trinity)

Monday of the First Week after Trinity

JUNE 15, 2020

Today's Reading: Genesis 15:1-6

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 15:1-29; John 15:12-27

And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. In our text from Genesis, we see Abram experiencing both doubt and faith. At first, Abram doubted God's promise, because he had no children. He assumes that Eliezer, his servant, will be his heir. Then, after God makes another promise, Abram believes.

Doubt is the opposite of faith, but the two often coexist in the same person. Although doubt and faith are in conflict with each other, they battle within the same person's heart. We see this in the Gospel of Mark, when a man says to Jesus, "I believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

Does your faith outweigh your doubt, or is it the other way around? Do you have a little, weak faith? In a sense, it doesn't matter. The size of your faith does not save you. The size of your Savior is far more important. Faith saves you because it clings to Christ. Faith doesn't save because it is a valuable virtue that impresses God. Faith saves because faith is dependence on Christ, who always saves those who rely on Him.

Still, we don't want our faith to whither completely. We don't want it to be submerged and drowned in despair. We don't want our faith in Christ to be replaced with a faith that clings to idols. So we go to the Divine Service, where we hear the promises of God. These promises elicit, nourish, and strengthen our faith. These promises point us to Jesus that we might cling to Him.

Whether in the Absolution, in the Scriptures, in the sermon, or at the Lord's Supper, you hear the same promise: "You are forgiven for the sake of Christ, who was crucified for you. You will live forever, because your Savior was raised from the dead." In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, because of Your tender love toward us sinners You have given us Your Son that, believing in Him, we might have everlasting life. Continue to grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may remain steadfast in this faith to the end and finally come to life everlasting; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Prayer for Steadfast Faith)

Tuesday of the First Week after Trinity

JUNE 16, 2020

Today's Reading: 1 John 4:16-21

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 16:1-24; John 16:1-16

There is no fear in love, because perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. (1 John 4:18)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. As a father, I am trying to teach my children to not fear policemen. "They are here to help you," I say. I want them to run to the police if they are in danger. Still, I must admit, even we as adults sometimes fear policemen, especially if we know that we are doing something illegal. We fear the police because they can punish us. And most police officers don't know me, and so they don't love me. If they were to arrest me or give me a ticket, they would lose no sleep over it. The same is true of judges. When you go to court, the judge is pretty intimidating. He doesn't know you or love you. And he has the authority to punish you.

Do you think of God as a policeman or a judge? Are you afraid of Him? Are you afraid that He is going to punish you? Then go and speak to your pastor privately and confess your sins to him. Be ready to hear some incredible good news. Your pastor will show you that "God is love" (1 John 4:16). He is going to tell you that God won't punish you, because Jesus took away the punishment that your sins have merited. He is going to absolve you, right then and there, as the official representative of God.

I think that you will find that the perfect love of God casts out fear. The idea that God is with you always won't cause you to shudder, but will provide you comfort. You will even find yourself praying that Jesus will come again quickly and bring Judgment Day. After all, you have no reason to fear His return.

You might even find that God's perfect love changes the way you live. Often we sin out of fear. However, when God removes your fear, then you are free in Christ to take a big risk and show your neighbor some love. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O love, how deep, how broad, how high, Beyond all thought and fantasy, That God, the Son of God, should take, Our mortal form for mortals' sake!

("O Love, How Deep" LSB 544, st. 1)

Wednesday of the First Week after Trinity

JUNE 17, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 17:1-28; John 16:17-33

"What does this mean? God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving."

(The Small Catechism: The Lord's Prayer, Fourth Petition)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Why do we pray for daily bread? Because God is the Creator. He makes all material things. Because food, drink, house, clothing, money, and other possessions are good. God said so Himself (Genesis 1). Because God loves us and wants to give us good things. Since you were baptized, you are God's child. If evil fathers give good gifts to their children, won't your good Father give you even more? (Matthew 7:11)

That being said, we should remember to ask for daily bread. Our Lord tells us to pray for what we need for today. God doesn't guarantee that we will have a super-abundance of wealth—and that's probably not a bad thing. Food, clothes, money, and possessions are good, but we abuse good gifts. We are tempted to turn such stuff into our gods. Instead of seeking our worth, our security, and our happiness in the Lord, we depend on our wealth.

Wealth is a nice gift, but a terrible god. It cannot give you worth, keep you safe, or guarantee happiness. Once you make it your god, you turn your back on the One who can give you worth, who can save you, and who can give you eternal bliss.

Yes, real poverty is a bad thing. It can cause real suffering and death. However, greed that leads to idolatry is even worse. It leads to eternal death. Thus, Proverbs gives us this prayer: "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God" (Proverbs 30:8-9).

May God give us our daily bread, and may He forgive us when we treat wealth as our god. May He bless us for the sake of the crucified and risen Christ. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Give us this day our daily bread, And let us all be clothed and fed. Save us from hardship, war, and strife; In plague and famine, spare our life, That we in honest peace may live, To care and greed no entrance give. ("Our Father, Who from Heaven Above" LSB 766, st. 5)

Thursday of the First Week after Trinity

JUNE 18, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 20:5-25; John 17:1-26

And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.
(John 17:3)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. We know what the Christian's hope and destiny is—eternal life! But what is eternal life? Naturally, we think that eternal life is life without end; it is living forever.

Some people think that eternal life means the body must die and then the soul can live forever in heaven. Others know about the resurrection of all flesh. They think that eternal life means that Jesus will resurrect the body and that our bodies will live forever.

Still, that definition is not quite satisfactory. Jesus tells us that eternal life is not merely living forever, but is the full knowledge of God and Jesus. In other words, we truly live only if we have a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

The psalmist says that his hope is to dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalm 23:6 and 27:4). Yes, that means living forever, but it also means living in the Lord's presence forever. Indeed, God cast Adam and Eve out of the Garden precisely because He didn't want them to eat from the Tree of Life and live forever apart from Him.

If eternal life is knowing God through His Son, then you are experiencing eternal life right now! Once you were dead in your transgressions, separated from God, but now God has made you alive together with Christ (Ephesians 2:1-7). Christ has reconciled you to God by dying for you. Christ has brought you, who were once far off, near to God (Ephesians 2:13).

Because of Jesus you have a relationship with God that will last forever. If your God and your Savior will live forever, then you will live forever, too. This life started at the baptismal font and it will never end. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty, everlasting God, Your Son has assured forgiveness of sins and deliverance from eternal death. Strengthen us by Your Holy Spirit that our faith in Christ may increase daily and that we may hold fast to the hope that on the Last Day we shall be raised in glory to eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

(Prayer for the Hope of Eternal Life in Christ)

Friday of the First Week after Trinity

JUNE 19, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 22:1-21; John 18:1-14

When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. (John 18:6)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When Judas, the band of soldiers, and officials sent by the priests and the Pharisees said that they were looking for Jesus, Jesus replied, "I am he." Perhaps this was merely an admission that He is Jesus, or perhaps Jesus is saying the divine name—I AM (Exodus 3:14).

Either way, what happens next is amusing. Immediately, the band of soldiers and the Jewish officials fell backwards, right to the ground. Jesus knocked over His enemies with a mere word. They did stand back up, probably shaking a bit. They did arrest Jesus. However, John recorded this amusing detail, so that you might know that Jesus went with these men willingly.

Jesus is the true God, the Almighty. Nobody can force Jesus to do anything against His will. Indeed, He really could have come off the Cross, if He wanted to.

That's the point. He wanted to go with these men. He chose to die on the Cross. Even though Jesus felt real human fear, He didn't wield His great power to protect Himself. His death was a genuine sacrifice.

Your God died for you. He died in your place. He died, so that you don't have to die. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends" (John 15:13-14).

As Paul wrote, "One will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:7-8). In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth, The guilt of sinners bearing And, laden with the sins of earth, None else the burden sharing; Goes patient on, grows weak and faint, To slaughter led without complaint, That spotless life to offer, He bears the stripes, the wounds, the lies, The mockery, and yet replies, "All this I gladly suffer."

("A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth" LSB 438, st. 1)

Saturday of the First Week after Trinity

JUNE 20, 2020

Today's Reading: Introit for Second Sunday after Trinity

(Psalm 18:1-2a, 27, 30a, 49; antiphon: v. 18b-19)

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 22:22-23:12; John 18:15-20

The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer.

(From the Introit for the Second Sunday after Trinity)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Much of the Bible is poetry, full of metaphors and images. Such language can often speak to the heart better than literal prose and dogmatic formulas.

The Lord is your rock. When I think of a rock, I think of something sturdy, strong, and stable. Recently, I smashed open geodes with my daughter. Even with our hammers, it took a lot of effort to crack them open. My brothers and sisters, you are built on Jesus. Thus, you are on firm ground. This Rock makes you secure and stable.

Your Lord isn't just a rock. He is a mighty fortress. You don't merely have rock beneath your feet. You have rock all around you—impenetrable walls protecting you. You have been baptized into Christ. Since you are in Christ, the devil, the world, and death itself cannot harm you. They have to get through Jesus first. They tried to tear down Jesus, but this Fortress was raised up again.

Rocks and fortresses are inanimate objects. You must go to such objects. You must enter a fortress to benefit from its protection. You must build your house on the rock to benefit from its stability. But a deliverer or a rescuer is a person—a person who seeks you out. Your Lord didn't wait for you to come to Him. He pursued you. He saw that you were in danger and He came to your aid. He entered this world as a man to save your life, even at the cost of His.

Then Jesus sent to you another Helper, the Holy Spirit. The Spirit comes to you in water, in Word, in bread and wine. He comes to enlighten your mind, to absolve you of your sins, and to bestow on you everlasting life. Who is better than a stable rock, a secure fortress, or a mighty deliverer? Your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus' blood and righteousness; No merit of my own I claim But wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand.

("My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less" LSB 575, st. 1)

The Second Sunday after Trinity

JUNE 21, 2020

Today's Reading: Luke 14:15-24

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 24:1-22; John 19:1-22

Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.

(Luke 14:23-24)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Our Lord is determined to throw a party—a party that will last forever. He paid for the whole thing: the food and the wine, the music, the games, etc. There will be no entrance fee. Jesus' blood covered the entire cost!

The Lord sends out heralds with an invitation: "Come, for everything is now ready!" Indeed, every Sunday, the appetizers are set out for the guests. The Body and Blood of Christ are laid out on the table, a foretaste of the Feast that can begin at any moment. Every Sunday the party favors are distributed: the forgiveness of sins, the presence of the Spirit, joy, peace, and life in abundance!

Some people will be party-poopers. They will offer all kinds of excuses to not come to the Divine Service. They are not even good excuses, but when you don't want to do something, any excuse will do. The Lord won't force those people to come. A guest who doesn't want to be there would ruin the party for everyone else.

Still, the party will go on. The Lord says to His heralds, "Go invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame. Bring in the outcasts, the shunned, and the unpopular. My house must be filled!" Those are precisely the people who receive the invitation with joy. A lifetime of failures, disappointments, and rejections has shattered their pride. Nobody deserves the Lord's invitation, but these people know how undeserving they are.

Don't be surprised when you come to church and find a bunch of broken sinners there. That's who the Lord invites to His party. If you are a poor, broken sinner, then you are welcome there, too! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, since You never fail to help and govern those whom You nurture in Your steadfast fear and love, work in us a perpetual fear and love of Your holy name; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the Second Sunday after Trinity)

Monday of the Second Week after Trinity

JUNE 22, 2020

Today's Reading: Proverbs 9:1-10

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 25:1-22; John 19:23-42

Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.

(Proverbs 9:5)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Lady Wisdom invites everyone to commune with her, to sit at her table and eat with her. She wants to correct and reprove us. She wants to give us instruction, the first lesson being the fear of the Lord. She promises blessing and life, warning us that the way of folly leads to death.

Many Jewish rabbis identified wisdom with the Law. Indeed, the Law is good and wise. The Law instructs us, teaching us what it means to fear the Lord. The Law promises blessing and life...to those who obey.

The apostles took the characteristics of Lady Wisdom and applied them to Jesus. For example, just as Proverbs claims that God created everything through wisdom (Proverbs 3:19), the apostles claim that God created everything through Jesus.

According to the Gospel, Jesus gives an unconditional blessing and He is the only way to life. He doesn't punish our sins, but He takes the punishment upon Himself. He dies for our folly. When people ask for something to do, Jesus replies, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (John 6:29).

Every Sunday you come to the table of Jesus, the true Wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24). He sets before you bread and wine. This bread isn't rules and this wine isn't advice. This bread is His Body, nailed to the Cross for you, and this wine is His Blood, shed on the Cross for you!

Every Sunday the Lord communes with you. He puts on your tongue a pledge that He will forgive your sins and give you everlasting life. He gives you a foretaste of the eternal feast—a feast that you cannot access by moral efforts, but only by grace. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, our God, in Holy Baptism You have called us to be Christians and granted us the remission of sins. Make us ready to receive the most holy body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of all our sins, and grant us grateful hearts that we may give thanks to You, O Father, to Your Son, and to the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Prayer for a right reception of the Lord's Supper)

Tuesday of the Second Week after Trinity

JUNE 23, 2020

Today's Reading: 1 John 3:13-18

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 27:1-24; John 20:1-18

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.
(1 John 3:14)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. We are saved by God's love and not by our love. We don't love God so that He might love us. We don't love our neighbor hoping to merit eternal life. Thank God, for whose love is perfect enough to save himself?

God has shown us His love through His Son, who laid down His life for us (1 John 3:16). This is a freely-given love. For the sake of Christ, God forgives our sins. "He is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:2). We will live forever, because we have faith in Him. Faith alone saves.

Love follows faith. Faith in Christ produces love. If you know the love of God found in Christ, you will love God in return. You will also love your fellow Christians. Love is not a cause of our salvation, but it is a sign of our salvation.

How do you know that your faith isn't fraudulent? How do you know that your faith isn't a sham? Look at how you treat your brothers and sisters. The unbelieving world hates the Church (1 John 3:13), but the Christian knows that he has passed out of death and into life because he loves his neighbor. His acts of love confirm his election and his calling (2 Peter 1:10).

Of course, the Christian's love will never be perfect in this life. The flesh will get the better of you: You will lose your temper with your brother, get annoyed by his habits, say harsh words. That's why we must abide in the love of God. We can never move beyond it. We must return to the Father's promise in Baptism, to the Son's life-giving Body and Blood, and to the Spirit's word of Absolution.

As we abide in God's love, His love will have its way with us. His love will deal with sin's guilt and sin's power. And on the Last Day, we will be perfected in His love. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Faith clings to Jesus' cross alone And rests in Him unceasing; And by its fruits true faith is known, With love and hope increasing. For faith alone can justify; Works serve our neighbor and supply The proof that faith is living. ("Salvation unto Us Has Come" LSB 555, st. 9)

The Nativity of St. John the Baptist

JUNE 24, 2020

Today's Reading: Luke 1:57-80

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 30:1-9, 18-33; John 20:1-18

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David. (Luke 1:68-69)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Most fathers probably feel like singing the moment their first child is born. Zechariah couldn't contain himself. I mean, who can blame him? He couldn't say a word for nine months, and the birth of your child is pretty exciting.

Interestingly, when he starts to sing, he doesn't begin his song by thanking God for his child or by marveling at his son. In fact, he doesn't mention the child until verse 76! Zechariah knows what's most important. He sings about how God has visited His people and redeemed them. He sings about a Horn of Salvation, a mighty King from the line of David.

Really, this song is all about Jesus. The whole Bible is about Jesus. Our worship and hymns should be all about Jesus.

John is significant because he prepared the way of the Lord by proclaiming God's Word (Luke 1:76). He told people about the coming salvation, the forgiveness of sins that would be achieved by the death of the Lamb (Luke 1:77). The Church celebrates the birth of John, because he was the forerunner of Christ.

Sorry, John. This was never about you. And he knew that. As John himself said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). And guess what? It isn't about your pastor, either. It isn't about the church musicians. It isn't even about you.

Every Divine Service is about Jesus. Every Divine Service is about His obedience, His crucifixion, and His resurrection for the salvation of mankind. Every Divine Service is about His forgiveness and salvation, given to you through water, Word, bread, and wine. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, through John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, You once proclaimed salvation. Now grant that we may know this salvation and serve You in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life; through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the Nativity of St. John the Baptist)

Thursday of the Second Week after Trinity

JUNE 25, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 31:10-31; John 21:1-25

We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.

(The Small Catechism: The Lord's Prayer, Sixth Petition)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. According to Luther, the Christian life consists of two parts: faith in the Lord and love toward the neighbor. Both parts are expressed by this petition of the Lord's Prayer.

Christians pray for forgiveness because they are sinners. They pray for forgiveness every day, even until their dying day, because they commit sins every single day.

Some people think that we are justified by the works we perform before our conversion and others think that we are justified by the works we perform after our conversion. This petition proves how wrong-headed such thinking is. We are justified by faith alone—from start to finish!

Of course, such grace does have implications for how we live. It isn't that we merit God's forgiveness by our willingness to forgive. No, God forgives us because Christ died for us. In turn we forgive others, because of God's willingness to forgive us.

At the foot of the Cross we see how great our debt to God was, and we see how small our neighbor's debt to us is in comparison. If God's anger toward me lasts only a moment, then what right do I have to stay angry with my brother? So we acknowledge in this petition that we will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.

If you are struggling to forgive someone, go to your pastor. Confess that you are slow to forgive, so your pastor can absolve you. Then you can pray for a change of heart and discuss how you can do good to those who hurt you, in spite of your hurt and mixed feelings. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Forgive our sins, Lord, we implore, That they may trouble us no more; We, too, will gladly those forgiven Who hurt us by the way they live. Help us in our community To serve each other willingly.
("Our Father, Who from Heaven Above" LSB 766, st. 6)

Friday of the Second Week after Trinity

JUNE 26, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 1:1-18; Acts 8:1-25

"Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you."

(Joshua 1:5)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Moses was so important to the Israelites. He was their prophet, speaking the Word of the Lord to them. He was God's agent of redemption, who confronted Pharaoh and led them out of Egypt. He was their intercessor, praying for the people of Israel after they had broken the covenant. He ruled over them and guided them to the Promised Land. Then Moses died. Who would replace him?

Moses knew that he would need a replacement. In Deuteronomy he said, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from among your brothers—it is to him you shall listen" (Deuteronomy 18:15). At first Joshua replaced Moses. God told him, "Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you." Just as Moses sent spies into the Promised Land, so did Joshua. Just as God split the Red Sea for Moses, He split the Jordan River for Joshua. The Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses and told Moses to take off his sandals. He did the same to Joshua.

Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land, because Moses had died. Years later, Joshua died, too. Other people will try to fill the shoes of Moses, but they will fail often and they will all die.

Thankfully, God has given to us a new and greater Moses. This Moses is named Jesus. He will never fail His people. He once died, but then was raised from the dead and He will never die again.

This Jesus spoke the Word of the Lord and He still speaks to God's people through His called and ordained servants. He is God's Agent of Redemption, redeeming us from the slavery of sin. He intercedes for us as He sits at the Father's right hand. He rules and guides His Church, until His people enter what the Promised Land prefigured: perfect rest inside the New Creation. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

At last the march shall end; The wearied ones shall rest; The pilgrims find their home at last, Jerusalem the blest. Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice, give thanks, and sing!

("Rejoice, O Pilgrim Throng" LSB 813, st. 6)

Saturday of the Second Week after Trinity

JUNE 27, 2020

Today's Reading: Introit for the Third Sunday after Trinity

(Psalm 25:1-2a, 5b, 15, 20; antiphon: v. 16, 18)

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 2:1-24; Acts 8:26-40

My eyes are ever toward the LORD, for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

(From the Introit for the Third Sunday after Trinity)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever seen a wild animal trapped, perhaps in a net or a cage? Or maybe you've seen an animal that was wrapped up in some litter? I've watched several videos of wild animals that were caught and of some compassionate humans attempting to release them. The wild animal never takes his eyes off the humans. The animal is afraid and he fears the humans. He thinks that they are dangerous. So the animal snarls, barks, and bites.

Have you seen a domesticated animal that was trapped? They've learned to trust humans, especially their masters. They trust the one who feeds them and cuddles them. When they are trapped, they look toward humans, but for a different reason. Their eyes are filled with fear, but also faith. They look to humans for help.

In a sense, unbelievers are like wild animals. They look at God and feel only terror. They expect God to be a harsh judge or a cruel dictator. Some might want to believe that God is kind, but they can never trust Him. Unbelievers are always trying to hide from God, or flee from Him, or fight Him.

You are not like that. Once you were, but then the Lord adopted you and brought you into His family. The Lord saw you wrapped up in sin and trapped behind the bars of death. So He released you by wrapping your sins around Himself and willingly stepping into the grave.

Whenever you find yourself in trouble, whenever you find yourself caught in a net, you turn your eyes to Jesus and pray to Him. You believe that He will save you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and most merciful God, in this earthly life we endure sufferings and death before we enter into eternal glory. Grant us grace at all times to subject ourselves to Your holy will and to continue steadfast in the true faith to the end of our lives that we may know the peace and joy of the blessed hope of the resurrection of the dead and the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

(Prayer for Times of Affliction and Distress)

The Third Sunday after Trinity

JUNE 28, 2020

Today's Reading: Luke 15:1-10

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 3:1-17; Acts 9:1-22

*And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."
(Luke 15:2)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Pharisees and scribes resented Jesus for treating everyone the same way. Jesus ate with the righteous Pharisees and scribes, and then He ate with sinners. He made no distinctions between them.

Jesus is only imitating His Father. God is like a shepherd who pursues his lost sheep, or like a woman who searches for her lost coin. If a shepherd celebrates when he finds his lost sheep, and if a woman celebrates when she finds her money, then won't God celebrate when a sinner repents? Certainly people are more important than sheep and coins.

Jesus describes God as a father who celebrates when His younger, rebellious son returns to Him. This story is similar to the previous two stories, but there is a significant difference. In this story, there is an elder son, who never left his father and resents his father for celebrating the younger brother's return. Obviously, the elder brother represents the Pharisees and the scribes. They don't merely resent Jesus. They resent His Father, too.

Perhaps you were a lost lamb, or a lost coin, or prodigal son. Maybe you left the Church, renounced the faith, and committed really atrocious sins. You may have experienced the Father's love when you returned, were re-clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and were brought to the table.

Most likely, that didn't happen to you. So are you like the elder brother? Of course not! You join the prodigals at the Father's table, don't you? You recognize that you were brought into the Father's family when you were baptized, not because of your works, but because of His grace, right? You know that God gives every good thing to all of His children, including you, because Jesus died for everyone. So with the Father, you can rejoice when another sinner repents. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*O God, the protector of all who trust in You, without whom nothing is strong and nothing is holy, multiply Your mercy on us that, with You as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we lose not the things eternal; 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 after Trinity)*

St. Peter and St. Paul, Apostles

JUNE 29, 2020

Today's Reading: Matthew 16:13-20

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 4:1-24; Acts 9:23-43

"And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

(Matthew 16:18-19)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Rome thinks that Peter is superior to the other apostles—that he is the head of the Church and representative of Christ. Rome thinks that Jesus gave a special office to Peter with special authority. The Pope stands in that office, and some believe there can be no Church without a pope.

They use our text from Matthew 16 to prove their assertions. "Jesus said that He will build the Church on Peter and that Church—the one built on Peter—shall stand forever.

In our text, Peter is speaking on behalf of the apostles. His confession is their confession. Thus, whatever Jesus says to Peter He says to the Twelve. As Paul says in Ephesians 2:19-20, God is building His Church, not on Peter, but on the confession of the apostles and prophets with Christ as the cornerstone.

Did Jesus give the Keys of the kingdom to Peter? Yes, but He explicitly gives the Keys to the rest of the apostles as well in Matthew 18:18. Jesus didn't create a special office called the Papacy. He created one Office—the Pastoral Office. Jesus gave pastors to His Church, commanding them to use the Keys on Her behalf—to forgive the repentant sinners and to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant.

That's why the Church will stand forever. It has nothing to do with the Pope. It has everything to do with the forgiveness of sins. As long as the forgiveness that was won on the Cross is being distributed, the Church shall endure.

Hell still rages against you, so go to where the Keys are found. Go to your pastor, confess your sins to him, and let him loose them. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Merciful and eternal God, Your holy apostles Peter and Paul received grace and strength to lay down their lives for the sake of Your Son. Strengthen us by Your Holy Spirit that we may confess Your truth and at all times be ready to lay down our lives for Him who laid down His life for us, even Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul)

Tuesday of the Third Week after Trinity

JUNE 30, 2020

Today's Reading: Micah 7:18-20

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 5:1-6:5; Acts 10:1-17

You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

(Micah 7:19)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When things get lost at sea, they tend to stay lost. The sea is big and it is deep. The water is full of currents, moving things around. There are great chasms and canyons in the ocean that are pitch black—so dark, in fact, that God gave some fish their own little lights to navigate in the dark!

Sometimes the Bible pictures God's keeping a record in a book—a record of every person and every deed committed by each person. The Bible describes God's opening the books on the Day of Judgment. This is some heavy Law. God noticed your sins. He will remember them. He recorded them, after all.

What would happen if God took that book and tossed it into the sea? What would happen if your sins were not recorded forever, but were thrown into the deepest, darkest part of the ocean? There can be no condemnation if there are no sins. There can be no punishment without a record of wrongdoing.

You were born into sin. You inherited the sin of Adam. You were guilty the moment you took your first breath. So God provided an ocean. He plunged you and your sins into water—the same kind of water found in the sea. He plunged you into the baptismal font and when you emerged you were sinless. Your sins were left behind in the water sanctified by the blood of Jesus.

This Baptism wasn't a one-time event covering the sins you had previously committed. You live in your Baptism. Whenever you add to your record of sins, you return to that font. You drown your sins through contrition and emerge cleansed by the blood of Christ, believing that Jesus died for you.

Whenever the Law is preached and causes you to repent, and whenever the Gospel is pronounced and you believe, you are being dipped into the water again. Any sin plunged into these waters can never be found again. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus, once with sinners numbered, Full obedience was Your path; You, by death, have consecrated Water in this saving bath: Dying to the sin of Adam, Rising to a life of grace; We are counted with the righteous, Over us the cross You trace.

("Jesus, Once with Sinners Numbered" LSB 404, st. 4)

Wednesday of the Third Week after Trinity

JULY 1, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 6:6-27; Acts 10:18-33

What does this mean? God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.
(The Small Catechism: The Lord's Prayer, Sixth Petition)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. God tempts no one. God is not tempted by evil. God doesn't create unbelief or cause sin. That doesn't mean that God won't permit you to experience spiritual conflict with the powers of evil. Indeed, by transferring you into His Kingdom, God makes you the enemy of the kingdom of darkness.

As soon as you renounce the devil at the baptismal font, you become his target. As soon as you confess that Jesus is Lord, the world will hate you, just as it hates Jesus. As soon as the Spirit enters your heart, causing you to trust Jesus and love Him, your sinful nature fights back.

When we pray this petition, we are asking our Father to guard us, so that these forces of evil cannot deceive or mislead us. We know how foolish and weak we can be. We know that the battle will be hard. If God doesn't help us, then we will fall into false belief, despair, and countless other shames and vices.

Thankfully, Jesus has pledged Himself to you. The same Lord that overcame the devil in the wilderness resisted the temptation to sin during His ministry, and conquered the world at the Cross is on your side! He sits at God's right hand, interceding for you. He speaks well of you, insisting that God act on your behalf.

We have some mighty enemies. They will attack us. Let them. They don't stand a chance. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lead not into temptation, Lord, Where our grim foe and all his horde Would vex our souls on ev'ry hand. Help us resist, help us to stand Firm in the faith, a mighty host, Through comfort of the Holy Ghost. ("Our Father, Who from Heaven Above" LSB 766, st. 7)

The Visitation

JULY 2, 2020

Today's Reading: Luke 1:39-56

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 7:1-26; Acts 10:34-48

"For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy."
(Luke 1:44)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Annunciation (March 25) is the day that the Christian Church celebrates Gabriel's visit to the Virgin Mary and the conception of Jesus in Mary's womb. The Visitation is the day on which the Church remembers when Mary visited her old and pregnant relative, Elizabeth, hence the name "Visitation."

This is a unique event, in that this is the first time that John the Baptist and Jesus meet (albeit within the wombs of their respective mothers). Also, this is the first time John confesses that Jesus is the Messiah. He leaps with joy in Elizabeth's womb, having been filled with the Spirit.

This is no clump of cells inside Elizabeth's womb. It is a baby, capable of leaping and feeling joy. It is a baby, capable of receiving God's Spirit. And in Mary's womb there is another baby—the Lord, who experienced a full human life to save every human, regardless of what stage of life they are in.

This text is especially comforting for any Christian woman who has suffered a miscarriage. Our Lutheran fathers were confident that God would save such children. If God could give the Spirit and faith to the unborn Baptist, then He can do the same for our children.

We know that Jesus was conceived and born in order to die for our stillborn children. Our Lord has also promised that God will answer the prayers of His people (Matthew 21:22, John 14:13-14). Therefore, we will offer our stillborn children to our Father through prayer and ask Him to rescue them from eternal death, confident that He will be faithful to His promises. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You chose the virgin Mary to be the mother of Your Son and made known through her Your gracious regard for the poor and lowly and despised. Grant that we may receive Your Word in humility and faith, and so be made one with 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 Visitation)

Friday of the Third Week after Trinity

JULY 3, 2020

Today's Reading: 1 Peter 5:6-11

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 8:1-28; Acts 11:1-18

Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. (1 Peter 5:9)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Christians should expect suffering in this life. The devil is prowling, seeking to devour God's people. He tries to destroy the faith of Christians by means of persecution. He increases the world's hostility against the Church.

The world will punish Christians for their allegiance to Jesus. The Christian might lose respect and status, family and friends, money and possessions, his rights and freedom, and, in some cases, his life. The only way to escape this cross is to renounce Jesus and leave the Church. That's what the devil wants you to do.

Peter encourages us to remain firm in the faith. He reminds us that we are not suffering alone. We are suffering along with the entire Body of Christ. Indeed, there are plenty of Christians around the world suffering more than you are.

However, Peter gives us more than just the example and the camaraderie of the saints. He gives us a promise—the Gospel Promise. Be humbled by the devil and the world, and the mighty hand of God will exalt you (1 Peter 5:6). Suffer for a little while, and your gracious God will set things right, will strengthen you, will empower you, and will secure you (1 Peter 5:10).

After all, Jesus humbled Himself for a time, choosing to endure the shame of the Cross, and God exalted Him on the Third Day. Jesus suffered for a little while and then God set things right by raising Him from the dead.

You are baptized into Christ. What happens to Jesus must happen to you. That means a painful cross, but everlasting life and glory, too! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

In the very midst of life Snares of death surround us; Who shall help us in the strife Lest the foe confound us? Thou only, Lord, Thou only! We mourn that we have greatly erred, That our sins Thy wrath have stirred, Holy and righteous God! Holy and mighty God! Holy and all-merciful Savior! Eternal Lord God! Save us lest we perish In the bitter pangs of death. Have mercy, O Lord! ("In the Very Midst of Life" LSB 755, st. 1)

Saturday of the Third Week after Trinity

JULY 4, 2020

Today's Reading: Introit for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity

(Psalm 27:3-4a, 5; antiphon: v. 1-2)

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 10:1-25; Acts 11:19-30

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

(From the Introit for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. In a sense, our problems are manifold. The devil tempts and accuses us. The world threatens us. We try to avoid pain, suffering, and death, but trouble has a way of finding us and death cannot be avoided forever. We are our own worst enemy. We have to struggle with our own depression, fears, anxieties, and guilt.

All of that is true, but there is one problem that outweighs them all—the judgment of God. Think about it. If God is on your side and delights in you, then you have nothing to fear. The devil and the world are no match for the Almighty. God can resurrect the dead. He can forgive your sins and give you worth.

On the other hand, if God is opposed to you, then you are doomed. God is a far greater enemy than the devil or the world. God can kill the body and the soul as well. You might be mighty pleased with yourself, but that won't prevent God from condemning you.

At the end of the day, God's attitude toward you is what matters. Thankfully, you know that God favors you. God delights in you. God loves you. He is on your side. Whatever wrath your sins have stirred up has been poured onto Jesus. God handed Him over to the evil one and to the world. God abandoned Him to the grave. God allowed Him to suffer shame and despair. God permitted this to happen to His Son for your sake!

Since Jesus died for you, God is free to adopt you in Baptism, pardon you in Absolution, and grant you life in the Lord's Supper. Through these means of grace, your God assures you that Jesus has achieved full reconciliation.

The Lord is your light and salvation. So, whom shall you fear? Nobody! You don't have to fear anything! God is on your side. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

If God Himself be for me, I may a host defy; For when I pray, before me My foes, confounded, fly. If Christ, my head and master, Befriend me from above, What foe or what disaster Can drive me from His love?
("If God Himself Be for Me" LSB 724, st. 1)

The Fourth Sunday after Trinity

JULY 5, 2020

Today's Reading: Luke 6:36-42

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 23:1-16; Acts 12:1-25

Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

(Luke 6:36)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The motto, "Deeds, not creeds," is not only utter nonsense (the motto itself is a creed, after all), but it is also utterly unchristian. The Christian faith is all about creeds. In Luke 9:20 Jesus asks His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" The world might admire Jesus and speak highly of Him, but true disciples confess the truth about Jesus.

Indeed, the entire Bible is about what Jesus does: He became man for you, He obeyed the Law, He was crucified for your sins, and He was raised for your justification. That creed is the heart of Christianity.

What makes the motto really silly is that it fails to see that creeds create deeds. What you believe affects what you do. Hence, Jesus tells His disciples to be merciful, but not simply to practice any kind of mercy. They are to practice the mercy of their heavenly Father! This presumes, of course, that they know in what way God is merciful.

The blind cannot lead the blind (Luke 6:39). The spiritually blind—those who don't know God's mercy in Christ—cannot understand mercy and cannot teach it to others. Unbelievers tend to think that mercy looks like ignoring someone's failures and giving people permission to do whatever they want.

Christians understand mercy because they have received true mercy from God. God didn't ignore your failures or give you permission to sin. Instead, He punished your sins in the body of Christ and He accepted Christ's blood as a ransom payment. God forgave your sins, and that's very different than ignoring or permitting sins.

Since you understand mercy, you can practice it. You can imitate your Father, precisely because He is your Father. Instead of ignoring or permitting sin, you can address it with empathy, patience, and kindness. Instead of judging and condemning, you can forgive and give an unearned blessing. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, grant that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Your governance that Your Church may joyfully serve You in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity)

Monday of the Fourth Week after Trinity

JULY 6, 2020

Today's Reading: Genesis 50:15-21

Daily Lectionary: Joshua 24:1-31; Acts 13:1-12

"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." (Genesis 50:20)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The book of Genesis records a lot of sins: Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, Abraham tried to create an heir through his slave girl, Jacob stole a blessing from his blind and dying father...the list goes on.

None of these sins is excusable. Still, you could argue that while some of these people did the wrong things, it was with good intentions or worthy goals. You cannot say that about the sin of Jacob's sons, however. They sold Joseph into slavery and, as Joseph said, they intended evil.

God took their evil and brought good out of it. Indeed, God took all the sins recorded in Genesis and brought about good. Human evil cannot prevent God from achieving His gracious plans. He will bless these sinners in spite of their sins.

This God who can bring good out of evil decided to use sin to overcome sin. He sent Jesus into the world and the world crucified Him. The world intended evil, but God took the Cross and brought good out of it. Indeed, if the Cross is the greatest example of human evil, it is also the greatest blessing! Jesus suffered for sins that He didn't commit, so that all sinners can be kept alive.

This story of Joseph and the story of Jesus show God's bringing good out of evil. This gives us hope. God will do the same for us. If we are afflicted or persecuted, then the God who raised Jesus from the dead can use it for our good. Indeed, God might use temporal afflictions to secure an eternal bliss. No matter how bad things get, these afflictions can never compare to the glory that is ahead. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and most merciful God, in this earthly life we endure sufferings and death before we enter into eternal glory. Grant us grace at all times to subject ourselves to Your holy will and to continue steadfast in the true faith to the end of our lives that we may know the peace and joy of the blessed hope of the resurrection of the dead and the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

(Prayer in Times of Affliction and Distress)

Tuesday of the Fourth Week after Trinity

JULY 7, 2020

Today's Reading: Romans 8:18-23

Daily Lectionary: Judges 2:6-23; Acts 13:13-41

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (Romans 8:20-21)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Our God isn't merely interested in rescuing disembodied souls. God is determined to rescue bodies. Jesus was raised from the dead, in order to rescue you from death. That means that God will raise you from the dead on the Last Day.

Disembodied souls can live in a non-material place, but bodies cannot. Bodies need earth beneath their feet. Your body is connected to this earth. Your body is made from earth and your purpose is to care for the earth. Reread the first chapters of Genesis.

Where will God's people live after Judgment Day? Heaven is not your home, but the earth is. The Garden of Eden was a preview of God's original intention—merging heaven and earth, so that the earth itself becomes God's Temple and humans serve in God's presence as His priests. That's what we see at the end of Revelation—the New Jerusalem descending to earth, so that God can abide with man.

Your sins have tainted this earth. Your sins brought death to this world. The earth is subject to futility and to decay. However, Jesus atoned for your sins on the Cross and on Easter morning He emptied death of its power. Yes, He did this for you, but not only for you. Jesus conquered sin and death to liberate all of creation. The Lord made this world and called it good. He isn't interested in letting sin and death keep it.

When you serve in your vocations and show good stewardship in the care of this planet, you are not merely doing what needs to be done until Christ returns. No, you are doing what humans were made to do. In a sense, you are beginning your service that will continue into the New Creation. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Glorified, I shall anew With this flesh then be enshrouded; In this body I shall view God, my Lord, with eyes unclouded; In this flesh I then shall see Jesus Christ eternally.
(“Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense” LSB 741, st. 5)

Wednesday of the Fourth Week after Trinity

JULY 8, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Judges 3:7-31; Acts 13:42-52

What does this mean? We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, gives us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven. (The Small Catechism: The Lord's Prayer, Seventh Petition)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Whenever I pray the Lord's Prayer and I come to this final petition, I always make the sign of the cross upon myself. I cross myself to remind myself and to confess to others how I can pray these words with such confidence.

The Cross was the place where evil was depleted of its power. Sin lost its power over us. Yes, we sin and deserve punishment, but Jesus has already been punished in our place. Death has lost its power. Jesus died, but then He reversed it. The devil is bound and imprisoned. He can bark, but he has no teeth. He cannot accuse the forgiven and he cannot frighten the heirs of immortality.

When was this great victory applied to me? I was given forgiveness, eternal life, and deliverance from the devil when I was baptized, when the pastor first traced the cross upon my forehead and my heart. God delivered me from evil at the font!

Now that I have this divine pledge consisting of water and the Word, I can be certain that my Father will answer this petition. I can be certain that He will rescue me from any bodily or spiritual danger. When my last hour comes, God will give me a blessed death. My body will rest in the grave, while my soul is kept safe by my Lord, until the Day of Resurrection.

There is a popular hymn that expresses this confidence well (LSB 594). The hymn taunts sin, death, and the devil. They cannot do any lasting harm, because our Father will deliver us. Yes, God's own child I gladly say it: I am baptized into Christ! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

From evil, Lord, deliver us; The times and days are perilous. Redeem us from eternal death, And, when we yield our dying breath, Console us, grant us calm release, And take our souls to You in peace. ("Our Father, Who from Heaven Above" LSB 766, st. 8)

Thursday of the Fourth Week after Trinity

JULY 9, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Judges 4:1-24; Acts 14:1-18

Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness. (Acts 14:17)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Bible tells us that God reveals Himself to all humans through nature. For example, God testifies to His existence and power through the existence of the universe and the complexity of all things. God testifies to His goodness by giving people rain and good harvests.

This natural revelation is good, but sinful hearts are not. Natural revelation makes us inclined to acknowledge something transcendent and to worship. What do sinners do with such revelation? They worship idols.

God testifies to His goodness through His temporal gifts, but Adam's sin brought sickness, natural disasters, and death into the world. Sinful hearts are always skeptical about God. Sinners conclude that God is good to some people, but cruel to others. You'd better get on God's good side. Natural revelation doesn't only produce idolatry, but works-righteousness as well.

Paul freely appealed to God's revelation in nature, but his main message was the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Only God's self-disclosure in His incarnate Son can produce true fear of God and trust in His grace.

In the crucified Christ we see the Father's face and come to know Him. All who honor the Son honor the Father. At the Cross we come to know the height, depth, and breadth of God's love. Since we know that our Lord laid down His life for us that we might live, we can give up all attempts to get on God's good side.

When you talk to your unbelieving friends, feel free to appeal to God's revelation in nature. That can be helpful. However, don't forget to share the Good News about Jesus. Only the Gospel can reconcile sinners to God. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation! O my soul, praise Him, for He is your health and salvation! Let all who hear Now to His temple draw near, Joining in glad adoration!
(*"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" LSB 790, st. 1*)

Friday of the Fourth Week after Trinity

JULY 10, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Judges 6:1-24; Acts 14:19-15:4

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23)

In the Name ✙ of Jesus. Amen. Many today think that having a pastor is optional. Some even think that it isn't even a very good option. I mean, I can pray and read my Bible without someone fresh out of seminary poking his nose into my business, and those pastors are such a strain on the budget anyway.

The apostles didn't think pastors were optional or that they were a burden. After Paul and his fellow missionaries established a congregation, they appointed elders or presbyters. That's what they called pastors back then, and this wasn't just an idea the apostles came up with. According to Paul, Jesus gave pastors to His Church (Ephesians 4:11). Jesus trained the very first pastors—the Twelve.

Your pastor is a gift. Yes, you have a Bible, but your pastor can help you interpret it. He can warn you about false and dangerous interpretations of the Bible. More importantly, he can apply it to you. He can preach Law and Gospel.

Let's talk about that Gospel. Jesus died for the sins of the world, but not everyone will be saved. How do you receive forgiveness? Well, your Lord gave you a pastor to make sure that you get that forgiveness. Your pastor is there to immerse you in forgiveness at the baptismal font, to speak that Absolution into your ears, and to place Christ's Body and Blood, which communicates God's "not guilty" for you, right into your mouth.

Yes, your pastor is a gift. Cherish him. Show him kindness, pray for him, and make sure he is well paid. Cherish your pastor, so that he is always there to proclaim the Gospel. In the Name ✙ of Jesus. Amen.

Send, O Lord, Your Holy Spirit On Your servant now, we pray; Let him prove a faithful shepherd That no lamb be led astray. Your pure teaching to proclaim, To extol Your holy name, And to feed Your lambs, dear Savior, Make his aim and sole endeavor.

("Send, O Lord, Your Holy Spirit" LSB 681, st. 1)

Saturday of the Fourth Week after Trinity

JULY 11, 2020

Today's Reading: Introit for Fifth Sunday after Trinity

Psalm 27:1a, 11-12, 14; antiphon: v. 7, 9b)

Daily Lectionary: Judges 6:25-40; Acts 15:6-21

Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

(From the Introit for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. This Introit encourages us to wait for the Lord. When the wicked are causing mischief, don't punish them yourself. Wait for the Lord. When you see sickness and suffering, and when you feel death looming near, don't despair. Wait for the Lord. Whatever the problem is, wait for the Lord.

Waiting can be difficult. The wait is not fun. One of the reasons we struggle with waiting is that we lack faith. When the Introit tells us to wait on the Lord, it is inviting us to trust God, to believe that He will show up and help us. But that's just the problem. I find myself doubting God's promises—I doubt that He will answer my prayers, that He will provide for me, and that He will rescue me.

Jesus had to wait for His Father. He had to endure the scorn of men, the pain of the Cross, and even death itself. He suffered much, but He never despaired. With His last breath He put His life into His Father's hands. His waiting was not in vain, for the Father raised Jesus from the dead and vindicated Him.

Jesus gives you His Body and Blood in the Sacrament as a reminder that God will do the same for you. This Sacrament will give you the strength to wait and to endure. It is God's promise that, even if you must bear a most awful cross, God will rescue you in His own time and in His own way.

This Body of God's Son was crucified and this Blood was shed. Likewise, all of God's children might bear an awful cross. However, just as the Body of Christ which you ingest was raised and glorified, so, too, your body will be raised and glorified. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Be patient and await His leisure In cheerful hope, with heart content To take whate'er thy Father's pleasure And His discerning love hath sent, Nor doubt our inmost wants are known To Him who chose us for His own.

("If Thou But Trust in God to Guide Thee" LSB 750, st. 3)

Notes

*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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