



REFLECTIONS

TRINITY 10-15

AUGUST 8 -
SEPTEMBER 18, 2021

HIGHER
THINGS[®]

DARE TO BE LUTHERAN[®]

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AUGUST 8 - SEPTEMBER 18, 2021

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A Short Form for Daily Reflection

ADAPTED FROM LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM

Make the sign of the Holy Cross and say:

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

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

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

Read the Daily Lectionary selections.

Read the Reflection for the Day.

Say the Apostles' Creed.

Pray the Lord's Prayer.

Pray one of these little prayers:

(In the Morning)

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

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

(In the Evening)

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

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

The Tenth Sunday after Trinity

AUGUST 8, 2021

Today's Reading: Luke 19:41-48

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 24:1-22; 1 Corinthians 1:26-2:16

"And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it..." (Luke 19:41)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Jesus is filled with love for Jerusalem. That is why He weeps. Jesus knows that in a generation, the city and its temple will be destroyed. Jesus prophesies, and every painful detail comes to pass.

It came to a head in 70 AD. Romans were harsh occupiers and the Jews were rebellious; but when taxes were refused and Romans were killed, it was one rebellion too many. The Roman General Titus led several legions of troops against Jerusalem around the time of Passover. Consequently, Jews from all over Israel were in Jerusalem for the feast and would get caught in the siege. At first, the Jews fought valiantly, holding the city for months. It seemed the Lord would deliver Jerusalem from this vastly superior force. But resistance only infuriated the Romans. Eventually, they broke through the city walls and their bloodlust was unstoppable. The soldiers ruthlessly slaughtered and looted. Even Titus couldn't control the chaos. When it was over, the temple was burned to the ground, the golden items in it were pillaged, hundreds of thousands lay dead, and the city for which Jesus wept lay in utter ruins.

Jesus wept. He knew the same people who had rejected God's prophets, would soon be refusing the Son shouting, "Crucify Him!" Jesus knew their refusals would not be tolerated. Eventually, God curbs evil and punishes the wicked. Even so, knowing all this would play out, Jesus wept, but He did not turn back. He continued to His Cross to die for all, even the evil and ungrateful people for whom He would pray, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

God does not delight in the death of anyone. That is why He sent prophets to warn, to give people a chance to repent. God still sends messengers to warn His people, to preach and teach, and to draw us to Himself. God warns against the evil that comes about whenever we get caught up in sin. He wants to spare us from the awful fallout. He doesn't want us to suffer. Some heed His warnings, many do not.

Jesus wept but still headed to His Cross. He knows we are sinners. But His love and compassion outweigh His anger and frustration. Even when we have to suffer the consequences for some sin we have committed, God does not forsake us. He is still on our side, filled with love for us and wanting us to be blessed. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus, Thou art all compassion, Pure, unbounded love Thou art; Visit us with Thy salvation, Enter ev'ry trembling heart.

("Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" LSB 700, st.1b)

Monday of the Tenth Week after Trinity

AUGUST 9, 2021

Today's Reading: Jeremiah 8:4-12

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 25:1-22; 1 Corinthians 3:1-23

Why then has this people turned away in perpetual backsliding?

(Jeremiah 8:5)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Ever hear of backsliding? It's when someone tries to get right, but keeps messing up and failing again. Maybe you've heard the expression, "one step forward, two steps back"? That's backsliding.

Israel turned away in "perpetual backsliding," so the Lord tells the prophet to address this problem. What were Israel's failures this time? Jeremiah gives many examples in today's reading. The men who thought they were wise rejected the Word of the Lord. (v.9) leading the Lord to decry them: "From the least to the greatest everyone is greedy for unjust gain; from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely." The people of Israel were ignorant and corrupt and did not listen to God's Word. And so, they were backsliders.

But here's the thing: You are, too. Every believer has experienced backsliding. Our faith walk is never in a straight line. We all make missteps and sometimes slide back. When this happens, we need to repent, to turn and correct course. We need to hear God's Word again and, like wandering sheep who hear their shepherd, be led back to God through His Word. Listening to God helps us in our walk. He gives us strength to resist temptation. Still, we cannot conquer all sin in this life and so, backsliding and the sorrow and shame over sin that inevitably follows is the frustrating experience of all Christians. But that is far from our only experience. Christians also know love, joy, peace, hope, contentment, wisdom, and more, because in Christ we know our sins are taken away. He has removed our guilt and shame. One day, we will be fully restored and sin will be no more.

Only Jesus could walk a perfectly straight line. He is the only man who never needed to repent. And Jesus has already come and walked that perfectly straight line, pressing forward, never back, all the way to the Cross. He came to live a perfect life for us and to die an innocent death for us. His life and death, and victory over death, give life and salvation to all who believe in Him. So keep listening and following. When you backslide, repent and return to God's Word and rejoice again in the grace of our Lord. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Herald, sound the note of pardon Those repenting are forgiv'n; God receives His wayward children, And to them new life is giv'n. Sound the trumpet! Tell the message: Christ, the Savior-king, is come!

("Herald, Sound the Note of Judgment" LSB 511, st.3)

Tuesday of the Tenth Week after Trinity

AUGUST 10, 2021

Today's Reading: Romans 9:30-10:4

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 25:23-44; 1 Corinthians 4:1-21

For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. (Romans 10:3)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. I used to wait tables when I was in college. Every once in a while something strange would happen: I would bring the bill to the table and one guy would insist that he pay it, and then, just as insistently, the other guy says, "No way! I got this." Most of the time the issue resolved quickly, but sometimes it escalated into an argument, each one refusing to let the other pay for him.

Who wouldn't want a free meal? Why try so hard to refuse another's generosity? The apostle Paul knew something about why. He knew that some people are determined to earn things themselves and can't accept a gift.

In Romans 9, Paul is writing about salvation and why so many of his fellow Jews would not believe in Christ as God's perfect righteousness for us. Think of it! Christ gives Himself for us. He pays the debt of sin with His life. There is now no reason for anyone to be condemned. Trust Him! Look to Him for salvation and you will have it! All your sins are covered and He wants you to receive what He purchased for you with His own blood. Christians respond with faith that says, "Amen! Yes Lord! You covered me with Your robe of righteousness. Unworthy though I am, You have had mercy and greatly blessed me. For all You have done for me in Jesus, thank You, thank You, thank You!" This is the way faith responds to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

However, for some it is too much to admit they are sinners. Like two guys in a restaurant fighting over the bill, some just don't want to feel like they owe anyone anything. That's why so many Jews, after generations of legalism and ingrained works-righteousness, rejected the idea that they weren't good enough, that they needed righteousness to be given to them by another. Like so many, theirs is the way of pride, not humility, and that's why they refuse the meal. They don't want to receive a gift. Even if He is the Son of God.

By God's grace through the Holy Spirit, you have responded to the kind invitation in faith. God has brought you out of the ignorance and pride of unbelief and enlightened you with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The humble heart and lowly God raises up on high; Beneath His feet in terror the haughty soul shall lie. The heart sincere and right, That heeds God's invitation And makes true preparation It is the Lord's delight.

("Arise, O Christian People" LSB 354, st. 3)

Wednesday of the Tenth Week after Trinity

AUGUST 11, 2021

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism:* Lord's Prayer, Conclusion

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 26:1-25; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Amen, Amen means, "yes, yes it shall be so."

(Small Catechism: Lord's Prayer, Conclusion)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Christians are taught from a young age to conclude prayers with this word. That isn't required, you know. Sometimes, when the person leading the prayer has rambled on in different directions and you aren't even sure what was prayed for, you might not want to say, "Amen!" When you say, "Amen," to a person's prayer, it means you signify your agreement. It's as if you are saying, "That's right! God, please let it be so!"

When we pray on our own, we can also say Amen. But how can we be sure about our prayers? Sometimes, when we are desperate, hurting, or unsure, we sense the need for prayers, but the words escape us. Paul says that at such times, the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with "inexpressible groanings" (Romans 8:26). To be honest, I'm not sure what that is. I don't literally groan when I pray. (And I wouldn't admit it if I did!) We don't have to guess, though, because our Lord has given us a prayer that gives comfort and solace. It is the prayer our Lord Himself taught His disciples to pray.

Many of you could say these words before you even knew what they meant. Hopefully, you now say this prayer regularly. You can say it with confidence. As Luther explains, "I should be certain that these petitions are pleasing to our Father in heaven, and are heard by Him; for He Himself has commanded us to pray in this way and has promised to hear us."

Not every prayer deserves an "Amen" at the end, but the Lord's Prayer always does. It covers all the bases. We begin by calling on the Name Jesus gives us the right to call God: our Father. We pray for the things that tend to His glory: for His Name to be holy, His kingdom to come, His will to be done. Then we acknowledge that all we have is just a gift from Him. We express our need for forgiveness. We pray for help and protection to stand firm in the face of trials and to be delivered from evil.

Because of who taught it and what it says, this prayer is always the right prayer to pray, and in response to it we say with all confidence, "Amen! Amen! It shall be so!" In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Amen, that is, so shall it be. Make strong our faith in You, that we May doubt not but with trust believe that what we ask we shall receive. Thus in Your name and at Your Word we say, "Amen, O hear us, Lord!"

("Our Father, Who from Heaven Above" LSB 766, st.9)

Thursday of the Tenth Week after Trinity

AUGUST 12, 2021

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 28:3-25; 1 Corinthians 6:1-20

You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.
(1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. 1 Corinthians 6 is so on point for our current day, that the Holy Spirit could have inspired it to have been written last week! The writer begins by talking about Christians taking each other to court. Then, as today, some people would see any grievance (even with a fellow Christian!) as an opportunity to get a lawyer and make someone pay. Paul strongly condemns this as unrighteous and then goes on to cite more examples of unrighteousness, including many sexual sins in particular.

He goes there because Corinth was known for being a sexual sewer. Every kind of sexual sin going on today was happening then. There is nothing new under the sun. So, the apostle addresses the sins of his day and teaches. His words have much to say to people today. But these are not the only sins that condemn those who commit them.

Any sin a person clings to and refuses to repent of can separate him from God. It's not that God is unwilling to forgive certain sins, but rather, that the sinner who clings to his sin refuses God's forgiveness. And here is the proof that God forgives the sexually immoral and all other kinds of sinners: After listing these sins that lead to condemnation, Paul writes, "And such were some of you." (Note the past tense.)

The Christians at Corinth hadn't always been Christians. Some of them had left behind broken lives and very sinful behavior. What happened? Who changed them? Paul explains, "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." God brought them to trust in Jesus. They were baptized and united to Christ. They were now children of God and no longer slaves to sin. By paying for their sins with His innocent life, Christ set them free for all eternity. Therefore, their past sins no longer identify them. They are no longer idolaters, homosexuals, drunkards, and the rest; they are now baptized into Christ and find their identity in Him.

You also are a baptized child of God, a Christian who has been reborn. Your past repented-of sins no longer define you because Christ took your sins on Himself and paid for them with His life. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

My sins are washed away; For this I thank You, Lord. Now with my heart and soul All evil I abhor.
(*"How Can I Thank You, Lord"* LSB 703, st.2b)

Friday of the Tenth Week after Trinity

AUGUST 13, 2021

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 31:1-13; 1 Corinthians 7:1-24

It is better to marry than to burn with passion.

(1 Corinthians 7:9)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Because Christians are counter-cultural on sexual matters, you might be tempted to believe the lie so many people tell, namely, that Christians are uptight when it comes to sex. Maybe you've heard people suggest that we are a bunch of backward, sexually-repressed prudes? In yesterday's reading at the end of 1 Corinthians 6, we heard Paul's strong words: "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body." Given statements like this, no wonder some think Christians have a negative attitude toward sex.

But in chapter 7 it becomes clear that Paul has more to say on the subject. As chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians teaches, sex is not bad, but it belongs in the proper context and that context is marriage.

Then as now, people had all kinds of practical questions when it came to living out the Christian faith. Should I get married? Is divorce okay? Should I get remarried? So, Paul gives counsel in this chapter and it is measured and reasonable. Throughout, he honors marriage as a good gift from God that allows the only God-pleasing context for sex. He is not a prude but he knows how powerful the sex drive is and the kind of unintended and painful consequences that come about from unrestrained sex. That is what he is trying to save people from. And that is what we should always keep in mind when we consider God's laws.

God's goal is not to repress us and deprive us of pleasure, rather, His desire is for us to live good and faithful lives. To have loving and godly families that create safe homes for children to grow and thrive. In short, God's laws are meant to spare us the awful consequences of sin and instead bless us and the coming generations.

Of course, no matter how hard we try, as long as we are in this flesh, sin is always present along with its painful consequences. Only one man could live a life in the flesh without sin, and this He did to bless you forever so that when this life is over, you will live in a new resurrected flesh without any shame, sorrow, guilt, or tears. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord if You are not the builder, Then the house is built in vain, For a home without Your presence Shall without true love remain. Yet when You within a marriage Come and dwell with grace divine, There You will the empty vessels, Changing water into wine.

("Gracious Savior, Grant Your Blessing" LSB 860, st. 2)

Saturday of the Tenth Week after Trinity

AUGUST 14, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for St. Mary, Mother of Our Lord
(Psalm 34:2-5; antiphon: vs. 1)

Daily Lectionary: 2 Samuel 1:1-27; 1 Corinthians 7:25-40

*Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!
(From the Introit for St. Mary, Mother of Our Lord)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever shared a meme with a friend? Sent them a picture or a quote or forwarded a post or a tweet? Of course you have. We do this because some things are too good to keep to ourselves and we enjoy them more when we share them with others. That's the kind of thing David is talking about here in this psalm.

David is proclaiming what God has done for him, and he doesn't want to keep it to himself. He wants all to join in the praise. "Magnify" literally means to enlarge or make great, but figuratively it means to praise or extol, that is, to make God greater by telling others what He has done.

As a pastor, I have prayed with people in desperate times, when death was near, or some tragedy occurred. I have seen firsthand how fervent prayer to God brings peace and takes away fear. Most of us have been in such a situation (if you haven't already, trust me, you will.). At such a time, when God answers our prayer and delivers us from some evil, it is only natural that we feel grateful. We may even express that gratitude to another. But how often does our gratitude bubble over like David's? In other words, have you ever been so moved by what God has done for you, that you can't stop yourself from sharing with others what He has done? Why is it so easy to share a funny meme or post on Instagram, yet not so easy to magnify the Lord?

We know that we have plenty of reasons to magnify the Lord, the greatest of which is that He sent us His Son to redeem us from sin and defeat the devil. Jesus has opened the Kingdom of heaven to us, and the Holy Spirit has called us to faith and made us heirs of heaven. All Christians thank God for this tremendous and gracious gift. Today, make it your goal to magnify the Lord. Tell someone else how grateful you are to God for blessing you and filling you with hope and see if sharing this with someone else also increases your joy. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Tell how the Father sent His Son to save us. Tell of the Son, who life and freedom gave us. Tell how the Spirit call from every nation His new creation.
(“Rise, Shine, You People” LSB 825, st.4)*

St. Mary, Mother of Our Lord

AUGUST 15, 2021

Today's Reading: Luke 1:39-55

Daily Lectionary: 2 Samuel 5:1-25; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior"

(Luke 1:46)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Yesterday we considered what it means to magnify the Lord and today we see the best known example of it. When Mary, the Mother of our Lord, met with Elizabeth, her cousin, and they shared with each other what God was doing for them, Mary's praise erupted. In words we all know and have probably sung many times, she said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior..."

Today is the feast of St. Mary, Mother of our Lord. It may strike some as strange that Lutherans would acknowledge a festival to the Virgin Mother, Isn't devotion to Mary more of a Roman Catholic thing? They even address prayers to Mary using some of the words of this passage: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"

The fact is, Roman Catholics over-emphasize Mary. They have made too big a deal of her role in the salvation of man. Sadly, she has become for some a distraction and an idol. This has resulted in many Protestants going too far in the other direction, so that they would never want to recognize a festival for St. Mary.

When God sent His Son to take on human flesh and save mankind, He chose this woman to bear and raise Him. We also know that Mary was a devout follower of Jesus. Unlike so many disciples, she did not abandon Jesus when He was crucified, but she stayed until the end (John 19:26-27). She also was among the first believers after His resurrection (Acts 1:14).

For all Mary's faithfulness and the way God used her in His plan of salvation, we should remember her and honor her. And the way to do that best, is not by praying to her--God forbid! She herself would not want any such thing. However, we can join her in her praises of God and we often do whenever we sing her song.

In the Magnificat, we join with Mary in praising God, and rejoicing in "my Savior." It is not a song about Mary, but it is about our gracious God who lifts up the humble and has mercy on those who fear Him in every generation. It is about a God who keeps His promises and fulfills His Word. It is a song we can join in singing to make great the praise of our God. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Remember, Lord of life and grace, How once, to save our fallen race, You put our human vesture on And came to us as Mary's son. Alleluia!

("O Savior of Our Fallen Race" LSB 403, st. 3)

Monday of the 11th Week after Trinity

AUGUST 16, 2021

Today's Reading: Luke 18:9-14

Daily Lectionary: 2 Samuel 6:1-19; 1 Corinthians 9:1-23

*"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."
(Luke 18:14)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector illustrates the principle found throughout the Bible: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (Proverbs 29:23, Matthew 18:1-4, Luke 1:52, 14:11, James 4:6,10, 1 Peter 5:5-6).

Jesus presents two characters we easily recognize: the ultra-conservative, far right religious type and the extortionist. As Jesus begins the story, most people would assume He would hold up the religious Pharisee and condemn the greedy tax collector. But Jesus does the opposite. He describes a Pharisee who only wants to tell God how good he is and a publican who knows and feels his guilt. The contrite sinner is justified, while the arrogant prude is not.

As religiously serious people (you're reading a devotion after all!), we easily relate to the Pharisees. While their religious adherence was exemplary in many ways, they could be self-righteous and unloving. This particular Pharisee's problem was spiritual pride, thinking himself so good that he didn't need God's grace. The tax collector, on the other hand, knew his sin and knew he needed God's mercy.

The tax collector was an outcast of society. So imagine someone today who is like him. The drug user? That creepy guy who's really into porn? The girl who sleeps around? The kids struggling with their gender identity or sexual orientation? You get the picture. Substitute them for tax collector and you get the modern version of the story. The point is, even those who have made terrible choices and have a life full of obvious sins can humble themselves before God and receive His grace. But those who are spiritually proud will not receive the Savior, because they do not understand that they need saving.

Whether our lives more closely resemble the Pharisee or the tax collector, we get in trouble when we think too highly of ourselves. As Luke explains: We dare not trust in ourselves and treat others with contempt. The goal is to trust in Jesus (not in ourselves) and treat others with love and mercy, because in Jesus, God has so loved us. Sinners who look to Jesus are justified--and not just the really religious sinners, but even the really bad ones, too. God's grace really is that amazing. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen

*Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed His blood for me. Died that I might live on high, Lives that I might never die. As the branch is to the vine, I am His and He is mine.
(“Chief of Sinners Though I Be” LSB 611, st.1)*

Tuesday of the 11th Week after Trinity

AUGUST 17, 2021

Today's Reading: Genesis 4:1-15

Daily Lectionary: 2 Samuel 7:1-17; 1 Corinthians 9:24-10:22

So Cain was very angry.

(Genesis 4:5)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. We've all been angry and we know we will be again. But also know this: When you are angry, "sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you but you must rule over it" (Genesis 4:7).

Cain, the first murderer, killed his own brother in anger. The details are missing. Some suggest Cain did not know what he was doing, but simply let his anger go unchecked and before he knew it, his brother was dead.

In the emotional state of anger, we are vulnerable and easily tempted. But as God said to Cain: The anger is against you and you must rule over it. That is why it is important for us to know what is really worth getting upset about and what you should and should not do when you are angry. A lot of anger is completely unjustified. We let some things bother us way too much. Perhaps when you feel yourself getting angry you can stop and ask, "Why am I so upset? Is this really worth it?"

Cain's anger was brought on by envy. His brother brought a better sacrifice and the recognition Cain wanted went to his brother. We can relate whenever the thing we were hoping for went to someone else. These things are disappointing, but not worthy of rage. But without God's help, we cannot rule over sin. With the aid of the Holy Spirit, we can struggle against sin and rule over it. Not perfectly. Not every time. But, Lord willing, we can rule over it long before our actions lead to horrible and irreversible consequences.

Some things are worthy of anger. Even Jesus was angry, though it was tempered by compassion (Mark 3:5). The Bible tells us God's wrath is stirred up over sin. It has to be. Yet this is the glorious mystery of the Gospel: God punishes our sin by sending Jesus to pay our debt with the result that God's wrath does not remain on us sinners. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. *(Romans 5:8-9)*

Wednesday of the 11th Week after Trinity

AUGUST 18, 2021

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism: Baptism*, part 1

Daily Lectionary: 2 Samuel 7:18-20; 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:16

What is Baptism?

(Small Catechism: *Baptism*)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. How do you answer this question? Luther's answer is a good start: "Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's word." But let's be a bit broader.

What is a baptism? Simply put, baptism is a ceremonial washing. Christian Baptism is the kind of washing Christians do as Jesus commanded us. Before Jesus instituted Christian Baptism, there were different kinds of religious washings, some commanded by God in the Old Testament. For example, someone with a skin disease needed to wash their clothes, shave their hair, and bathe before they could be clean and return to the community (Leviticus 14:8-9). John's baptizing in the Jordan River is another kind of ceremonial washing. This one was a baptism of repentance to prepare sinners to receive Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

What is Christian Baptism? Just before ascending into heaven, Jesus commanded His disciples to "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you and surely I will be with you always even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). To this day, we follow His command and baptize in this Name, trusting His promise to always be with us. We also keep baptizing and teaching together. A Christian is not only baptized, or only taught, but a true Christian disciple of Jesus is made through baptizing and teaching.

Let's offer another kind of answer to our question, "What is Baptism?" It is a precious gift, a great comfort, and a profound mystery as God works through it to make me His own. It assures me that for Jesus' sake, my sins are washed away and I have been united with Christ and made an heir of His kingdom. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

God's own child, I gladly say it: I am baptized into Christ! He, because I could not pay it, Gave my full redemption price. Do I need earth's treasures many? I have one worth more than any That brought me salvation free Lasting to eternity!
(*"God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It" LSB 594, st.1*)

Thursday of the 11th Week after Trinity

AUGUST 19, 2021

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1-10

Daily Lectionary: 2 Samuel 11:1-27; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved.

(1 Corinthians 15:1-2)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. I imagine that in Paul's day, if some pagan asked him, "Why are you still following that Jesus guy? Wasn't he killed as a common criminal?" his response would be, "Because He didn't stay dead!" The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of the Christian faith. Without it, there wouldn't be any Gospel to proclaim and there wouldn't be any Christians, as Paul himself says in 1 Corinthians 15:14.

Jesus paid for the sins of the world with His innocent death on the Cross and then in glorious victory, triumphed over death and the grave by rising from the dead. This is the very heart of the Christian Gospel and Paul says this Gospel which Christians receive, and in which they stand, is also saving them.

1 Corinthians 15 is Paul's great chapter on Jesus' resurrection from the dead. He starts off by stating he "delivered" what he "received." This means that when he learned what God had done for the world in Jesus, he couldn't keep it to himself. He had to make this news known. But it also means that he was passing on a tradition.

The opening words should sound similar to the Nicene Creed: "And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures." Scholars believe verses 3-7 are an early Christian creed that Paul may have received and passed on to the Corinthians when he was their pastor. The phrase "in accordance with the Scriptures" is repeated, meaning, "Jesus died and rose again, just as it was foretold by the prophets." He also goes on to provide a list of witnesses of the resurrection.

Jesus' resurrection was not something just a few people claimed to have seen. It was not something "done in a corner" (Acts 26:26). Such a miraculous and world-changing event needed witnesses and as Paul explains, hundreds of people had seen the resurrected Christ. You have also received this Gospel and by it you are saved. Hold fast to the Good News that according to the Scriptures, Christ died and rose for you and for your salvation and by His grace, He has brought you to believe and will give you eternal life in His kingdom. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Christ, the Alpha and Omega, Christ, the firstborn from the dead, Christ, the life and resurrection, Christ, the Church's glorious head: Praise and thanks and adoration And unending worship be To the Father and the Spirit And to You eternally.
("Christ, the Word of God Incarnate" LSB 540, st.6)

Friday of the 11th Week after Trinity

AUGUST 20, 2021

Daily Lectionary: 2 Samuel 12:1-25; 1 Corinthians 12:1-13

Now concerning spiritual gifts. . .

(1 Corinthians 12:1)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Miracles? Prophecy? Healing? Tongues? Really? Paul wrote about this subject a number of times. It seems he had to clear up a lot of confusion. His point in this passage is simple. He wants his readers to know that all Christians have gifts but not all have the same gifts. The Holy Spirit, “apportions to each one individually as he wills” (1 Corinthians 12:11). Like the parts of a body, each part has a different purpose, but all parts function together for the good of the body. So it is with spiritual gifts and the Church: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7).

In the earliest days of the Church, in order to help the spread of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit gave spectacular gifts to the apostles that are not often seen today. You can read all about this in the book of Acts. Some Christians today still claim to speak in tongues and perform miraculous healings. Maybe they can. After all, the Spirit gives as He will. Yet, it is also true that there are a number of frauds and deceivers out there who pretend to have spiritual gifts in order to make money. Jesus even warned against believing in false Christs and false prophets performing great signs and wonders (Matthew 24:24).

God has certainly given you your gifts and abilities; what are they for? How can you use them to serve your fellow Christians and your neighbors wherever you go? These are good questions for you to ask throughout your life and especially as you finish up school or head out of your childhood home for more school at a university. How can you take what God has given you and use it for good and in service to the Church, your family, and everyone you will interact with for the rest of your life?

I don’t know what unique gifts God has given you, but I do know that if you are a Christian, you already have the greatest gift of the Spirit. You confess Christ as Lord, which no one can do apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. You have been given faith in Jesus. Along with that faith comes the blessings of forgiveness, salvation, hope, and life without end. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*The gifts Christ freely gives He gives to you and me To be His Church, His bride,
His chosen, saved and free! Saints blest with these rich gifts Are children who
proclaim That they were won by Christ And cling to His strong name.
(“The Gifts Christ Freely Gives” LSB 602, st.1)*

Saturday of the 11th Week after Trinity

AUGUST 21, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for the 12th Sunday after Trinity

(Psalm 70:2b, 4a, 5b; antiphon: vs.1-2a)

Daily Lectionary: 1 Kings 1:1-4, 15-35; 1 Corinthians 12:14-31

You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay!

(From the Introit for the 12th Sunday after Trinity)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Psalm 70 expresses a prayer that sooner or later, every believer in God has prayed, namely: Help! It is the most basic and often the most sincere and heartfelt prayer.

David had his sworn enemies, both foreign and domestic. He had conquered rivals within Israel and many kings and armies from other nations as well. The number of men slain by him and the armies he led was easily in the tens of thousands. As a result, there were a lot of people out to get him. People who, as he put it, "delighted in my hurt" (Psalm 70:2).

Some might think that a man like King David wouldn't need any help taking care of his enemies. Remember how quickly he dispatched Goliath? But David seemed to understand that whatever success he had in battle was only a gift from God.

When people tried talking him out of fighting Goliath, he told them, "The Lord...will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:37). During the pre-battle trash-talking, David told Goliath, "This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down" (1 Samuel 17:45-46). David didn't trust in his own strength, but in all his battles, He relied on God, his help and deliverer.

You probably haven't had anyone actually plot to kill you, and hopefully, you never will! Yet, you can still relate to the need to be rescued from your enemies. Have you had kids put you down in order to build themselves up? Have they said unkind things against you and posted it online for all to see? Teenagers can be cruel and downright vicious. While going through these situations is no fun, take heart, and cry out to God for help.

In fact, the Lord God Almighty has already delivered you from your greatest enemies: sin and death. Jesus, the Son of David, fought Satan and defeated him. He gave Himself up for you on the Cross, and His victory over the grave in His resurrection is complete and final. Now all who are in Him are delivered and will be forever. Therefore rejoice and be glad in Him and say evermore, "God is great!" (Psalm 70:4) In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Seek Him alone Who did atone, Who did your souls deliver. O seek Him first, All you who thirst For grace that fails you never. In ev'ry need Seek Him indeed; To every heart He will impart His blessings without measure.

("Seek Where You May to Find a Way" LSB 557, st.3)

The 12th Sunday after Trinity

AUGUST 22, 2021

Today's Reading: Mark 7:31-37

Daily Lectionary: 1 Kings 2:1-27; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

"He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." (Mark 7:37)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. I had a friend who was born with severe hearing loss. He was totally deaf in one ear and had extremely limited hearing in the other. His first language was sign language. In his teenage years he received a powerful hearing aid that would allow him to barely hear. It was a miracle that opened up a new world for him, and yet, communication with him was still difficult.

I didn't realize how difficult it is for the deaf. I certainly didn't when I was a teen. So please understand, the deaf miss out on more than just hearing your favorite music. They miss out on a lot of communication with people, even in their own families. As a result, I think some deaf people feel cut off and alienated, and this is in a time when modern technology and sign language exists. No such language or technology existed in Jesus' day. I can only imagine that back then, the deaf felt like total outsiders, unable to communicate. But Jesus communicated with them.

Because of His great compassion and love for others, it was Jesus' joy to help those in need, including those who could not hear. In Mark 7, Jesus restored the gift of hearing and speech to someone who never heard a word before and would have been unable to speak on his own, but for the working of God. That is what this miracle showed, namely, that Jesus was the Son of God. He was the one the prophets had talked about, the one God promised to send who would restore sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. This is also why the people who witnessed this miracle were "astonished beyond measure." They knew they were in the presence of the Messiah.

Whether you are deaf or can hear quite well, since you are a Christian, God has given you the ability to hear Him. Like a shepherd who leads His flock with the sound of His voice, the Lord Jesus speaks to His Church through His holy Word. Whether you literally hear the Word or read it on the page, Christ guides and leads you. He leads you to Himself. To safety, eternally, in the Kingdom. One day, you, too, along with all His saints, will be astonished and amazed when you are perfectly restored and all your sins removed. You will not be cut off from God or from any other believer again, but you will unite in praise of the One who redeemed you and restored God's holy and perfect image in you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The gifts are there each day The holy Word is read; God's children listen, hear, receive, and they are fed. ("The Gifts Christ Freely Gives" LSB 602, st.4a)

Monday of the 12th Week after Trinity

AUGUST 23, 2021

Today's Reading: Isaiah 29:17-24

Daily Lectionary: 1 Kings 3:1-15; 2 Corinthians 1:1-22

"Is it not yet a very little while..."

(Isaiah 29:17)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. One of the great themes of the Bible is something called the Great Reversal. This idea is that one day a great transformation will take place: The low will be lifted up while the mighty and proud will be brought down. Mary's song, the Magnificat that we sing in church, is a great example of this. So is this passage at the end of Isaiah 29.

The prophet here speaks to what God has in mind to do for His people in a "very little while." The deaf shall hear. The blind shall see. "The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel." If all of this sounds familiar, it is because Jesus defined His own ministry in these terms (Matthew 11:5).

What's more, the enemies of God's people will come to nothing and there will be no more scoffers among His faithful. No more jaded and sarcastic "believers" who roll their eyes and doubt God's promises. Only sincere and devout followers of God. In addition, the usual failings of those who make false claims about their enemies and deny justice to the righteous will be cut off. Their power will be taken away.

But what about the lifting up of God's people? How will they be changed? They will not be ashamed, but because of God's working among them, the children of God will rightly praise Him. "They will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob [Jesus] and will stand in the awe of the God of Israel." Even those who have wandered off from the fold will repent and listen again to God. All of this sounds amazing! We can't wait for this transformation to take place. But when will it finally happen? How long, O Lord?

This great transformation began in the ministry of Jesus. His work of healing and restoring and encouraging showed what God has in mind to do. The removal of sickness and sorrow was a foreshadowing of what is to come. Even now, the Holy Spirit continues His work of changing hearts and leading people to a right faith in God. In this fallen world we catch glimpses of wrongs being righted and God's people rightly praising. But ultimately, the Great Reversal will not be fully realized until the old has passed away and Christ comes again and makes all things new. Jesus' work has already ensured that this will happen. His sacrificial death for our sins and His mighty resurrection from the dead assures us of the victory. The conclusion is certain. It's going to happen. Just a little while. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Come, Lord Jesus, quickly! Many of us are waiting. Not one of us will be disappointed. Amen.

St. Bartholomew, Apostle

AUGUST 24, 2021

Today's Reading: Luke 22: 24-30

Daily Lectionary: 1 Kings 5:1-16; 2 Corinthians 1:23-2:17

*"Let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves."
(Luke 22:26)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Today the Church remembers St. Bartholomew, one of the twelve apostles. Legends abound about him, but little is known for certain, even his name! Matthew, Mark, and Luke's Gospels all mention Bartholomew, often in connection with Philip. But no Bartholomew is mentioned among the apostles in John's Gospel. There, we encounter Nathaniel in connection with Philip (John 1:43-51). The thinking goes that Nathaniel, which means "gift of God," was this man's first name, while Bartholomew, which means "Son of Tolmai," was his title or family name.

When we move beyond Bartholomew's name and into his life, the information is even more difficult to sort out. Some stories have been written about this saint, saying that he traveled as far as India and took the Gospel to a group in Bombay. Another tradition has it that he and Thaddeus brought the Gospel to the kingdom of Armenia. These two are recognized as the patron saints of Armenia. That legend also makes the well-known claim that Bartholomew was skinned alive and beheaded, something which has been portrayed by many artists over the centuries. Yet another legend states that Bartholomew went to Ethiopia. We just don't know.

What is the reason for all these legends surrounding St. Bartholomew and the rest of the Lord's apostles? It is likely because people have wanted to invent an association between their group and someone famous. They wanted to believe that someone who knew Jesus personally and was one of His insiders, also had some kind of connection with them. People still do this today. If you have a friend who has ever met a celebrity or a famous or powerful person of some kind, they have likely told you (and everyone else they know) all about it! Jesus wanted His chosen twelve to know that power and glory were not what they were to be looking for. Instead, He taught that the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven are those who appear to be least on earth, for they are servants.

We may feel like the least important person on earth, but through our Baptism into Christ, we are exalted and made perfect before God. That makes us free to be a servant to others as we rejoice in this truth that remains. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Lord, help us walk Your servant way wherever love may lead
And, bending low, forgetting self, Each serve the other's need.*

("Lord, Help Us Walk Your Servant Way" LSB 857, st.1)

Wednesday of the 12th Week after Trinity

AUGUST 25, 2021

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism*: Baptism, pt. 2

Daily Lectionary: 1 Kings 7:51-8:21; 2 Corinthians 3:1-18

What benefits does Baptism give?

(Small Catechism: *Baptism*)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Lutherans understand just how important Holy Baptism is. As Luther explains in the catechism, “[Baptism] works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this...” Baptism is no symbol or representation of something else, it is itself a means of grace. That is, Holy Baptism channels the blessings of Christ’s work--forgiveness, liberation from death and hell, even eternal life--to the person being baptized. What benefits does Baptism give? It gives to sinners what none of us deserve but all of us need!

But notice to whom this is given: “. . . to all who believe this.” This is important to note, because there are some who think of Baptism as a spell that is cast or ritual that is performed which guarantees that you will go to heaven. That’s not how it works. If it worked this way, we might as well open the fire hydrant on the street corner, spray everyone who passes by with water, and shout the Trinity at them!

Baptism doesn’t work this way because the gifts it bestows are only received by faith, the faith that God gives and sustains through His Word and Sacraments. For example: A child is baptized, but is raised in an anti-religious home. He doesn’t believe in Jesus or look to Him for salvation. In fact, he scoffs at the fact that he was baptized, because he thinks it is nothing but a silly superstition, or something his grandparents thought was important, but that he never cared about. This man’s Baptism won’t benefit him. It’s not because Baptism doesn’t work and deliver that man salvation in Christ, but because that man hasn’t only rejected Baptism, he has rejected Jesus Christ. On the other hand, if he trusted in Jesus and looked to Him for salvation, he wouldn’t despise his own Baptism and all the blessings offered therein would be his.

There is no automatic guarantee that if a person is baptized, that person will be saved. Unbelief negates the blessings offered in Baptism. This works the other way, too. People wonder about the unbaptized. Since Baptism works salvation, can the unbaptized be saved? Just as rejecting Christ can negate a person’s Baptism because of a lack of faith, so also a person who has faith in Jesus, yet never has the opportunity to be baptized, will not be condemned. An example is the thief on the cross. Put simply: Lack of Baptism does not condemn, but despising Baptism does. Because you have been given the gift of faith and were baptized, you are marked as one of His own. All the blessings Jesus won for sinners--forgiveness, salvation, and life--are truly yours. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Thursday of the 12th Week after Trinity

AUGUST 26, 2021

Daily Lectionary: 1 Kings 8:22-30, 46-63; 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

“So we do not lose heart.”

(2 Corinthians 4:16)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Proclaiming the Good News of Christ in the first century AD wasn't easy. Teaching God's Word meant facing resistance, hostility, and persecution. Paul says that he and his companions were afflicted in every way.

In such an environment, it would be tempting to change the message to make the Gospel more appealing. If you made it fit in with the popular culture, then no one would take offense and you wouldn't have to suffer. But Paul called this “disgraceful underhanded ways,” and he refused to “practice cunning or to tamper with God's Word.” Paul would not compromise truth for his own convenience.

But wouldn't compromising result in more people knowing Jesus? Not really. Giving people a watered-down, false version of Jesus isn't going to put them on the path to salvation. Further, Paul explains that if the Gospel is veiled, “It is veiled to those who are perishing,” that is, to those who are lost in sin and deluded by Satan, for “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:3).

How similar things are today! While most Christians are spared physical persecution, we who by God's grace have been called to believe in Jesus still face a lot of hostility and mockery. We, too, encounter unbelievers blinded by the god of this world. In such an environment it would be easy to give up on evangelism and say, “Why bother?”

Paul tells us the answer: Just as God the Father raised Jesus from the dead, so He will raise His Christians and bring us into His presence, “so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God” (2 Corinthians 4:15). Why proclaim the Good News if you may have to suffer? Because the end result is worth it! Grace will extend to more people, thanksgiving will increase, and all of this will bring more glory to God.

So, no matter how bad things get, Christians don't lose heart. “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18). In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Christ, our true and only light, Enlighten those who sit in night; Let those afar now hear Your voice And in your fold with us rejoice.

(“O Christ, Our True and Only Light” LSB 839, st.1)

Friday of the 12th Week after Trinity

AUGUST 27, 2021

Daily Lectionary: 1 Kings 9:1-9; 10:1-13; 2 Corinthians 5:1-21

“God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:19)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. 2 Corinthians 5 overflows with spiritual treasures! Paul begins by comparing our human bodies to tents. Tents are fun for a little while, but they aren't a permanent home. They aren't built to last. That is what happens to our bodies and that is why Christians “groan,” longing to be in our true heavenly home. As our bodies break down we are ever more mindful that real life awaits us as God intended it from the beginning. Life without pain and suffering, sorrow and tears. Life in heaven that never ends!

With this perspective, a Christian does not have to fear death. With Paul (and so many Christians through the ages) we can say, “I would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” Of course, that choice is not ours to make. The Lord decides when our time is accomplished on this earth. Until that day, each of us is to make it our goal to be about the Lord's business. For Paul, that meant being a missionary. For you it may mean something else entirely. Whatever callings you have, as son or daughter, sibling, friend, neighbor, classmate, employee, coworker, student, church member, citizen, God gives you opportunities to love and serve those He has placed around you. That is the best way to make use of the time God gives you before He calls you home.

In the final section of chapter 5 we find some of the most beautiful and clear Gospel words in all of the New Testament: “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them.” And, “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Commit these words to memory. Recall them often! These words tell us how God saves us. The action is all from Him to us. The Father sends His Son; the Son gladly goes and takes our place as sinners. Though He is God, He becomes a man. In His suffering and death, He gets what we deserve so He can give us what we could never deserve: forgiveness of sins and life everlasting in heaven. It is a glorious exchange. Christ takes what is ours (sin and death) and gives us what is His (righteousness and life). And the result is perfect reconciliation with God that will never end. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

He undertakes a great exchange, Puts on our human frame, And in return gives us His realm, His glory and His name, His glory and His name.

(“Let All Together Praise Our God” LSB 389, st.4)

Saturday of the 12th Week after Trinity

AUGUST 28, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for the Martyrdom of St. John the Baptist
(Psalm 31:1, 3, 5; antiphon: Rev. 7:14b)

Daily Lectionary: 1 Kings 11:1-26; 2 Corinthians 6:1-18

We appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. (2 Corinthians 6:1)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. 2 Corinthians 5 ends with beautiful Gospel words explaining how the Father has graciously reconciled us to Himself through Christ Jesus. Chapter 6 picks up with a warning not to receive that grace in vain. The Gospel is a precious gift from God, assuring us we are reconciled to God apart from anything we can do. It is all an unearned gift. But there is a right way to receive a gift and a wrong way.

The correct way is to show gratitude and appreciation, to thank and praise God for what He has done. The wrong way is to take the gift for granted or disregard it as nothing special. Paul warns the Corinthians, "Don't receive the precious gifts of God that way, instead, cherish what you have been given. Show gratitude and honor for the One who has blessed you"

Paul goes on to talk about how he honors God for the grace he has received by faithfully carrying out the mission of the Church. He takes seriously the notion that the time is limited and the time is now to proclaim the Gospel. He also makes sure he is not a stumbling block or obstacle for anyone coming to Christ. Paul knows that he cannot cause anyone's salvation (that is the Holy Spirit's work) but he also knows that a scandalous life on his part will hinder the Spirit's work.

In the last section, Paul warns the Corinthians: "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14). Note that Paul is not saying, "Have nothing to do with unbelievers." Christians are to be salt and light to the world. We are to interact with unbelievers, especially as we share the Good News of Jesus. Yet, he is cautioning Christians against collaborating with unbelievers in a way that will cause Christians to be influenced toward unbelief.

Being ungrateful and letting ourselves be influenced by those who don't believe in Christ are ways we often receive God's gifts in vain. Thanks be to God that He renews our faith with the gifts of His pulpit and altar, and keeps us in our baptismal grace unto eternity. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Christ the eternal Lord. Whose promise hear we claim, Whose gifts of grace are freely poured
On all who name Your name; With thankfulness and praise We stand before Your throne,
Intent to serve You all our days And make Your glory known.*
("Christ the Eternal Lord" LSB 829, st.1)

The Martyrdom of St. John the Baptist

AUGUST 29, 2021

Today's Reading: Mark 6:14-29

Daily Lectionary: 1 Kings 11:42-12:19; 2 Corinthians 7:1-16

The king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. (Mark 6:27-28)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Poor John the Baptist was trying to do God's work of preparing the way for the Lord. Yet we see that it lands him in jail and gets him killed. Look at evil King Herod Antipas behind it all, getting away with it as he is free to do whatever his heart desires.

This is one of the many ways that sin and Satan work on us, drawing our attention to what works in this world so that we think doing the right thing will hurt us and temptations will have no consequences.

But that is an illusion. Appearances can be deceiving. Herod is not free. He is a captive slave to his lusts. After getting half-brother Philip's wife Herodias to be his own, he refuses to leave his adulterous marriage behind when John calls him to repent. His sexual urges control him so that he cannot even say no when Herodias and Salome make their grisly demand for John's head on a platter. Mark reports that then Herod's guilty conscience had him terrified that Jesus was actually John the Baptist come back from the dead to get revenge. In the end, Herod Antipas loved his life and lost it all.

John, however, is completely free in the place where all tears are wiped away. Sin can no longer hurt him as he rests from his labors in heaven with the Lord. And even before his execution, John was free because the Holy Spirit filled him. Neither his own sin nor other people's opinions controlled him. He preached so people would receive God's freedom from the sins that were controlling them through the forgiveness of their sin.

Now John lives, even though he died (and even though he sinned before he died), all because Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world by His death. And so He took John's sin away. And Jesus takes your sin away, too. You are free. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You gave Your servant John the Baptist to be the forerunner of Your Son, Jesus Christ, in both his preaching of repentance and his innocent death. Grant that we, who have died and risen with Christ in Holy Baptism, may daily repent of our sins, patiently suffer for the sake of the truth, and fearlessly bear witness to His victory over death; 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 the Martyrdom of John the Baptist)

Monday of the 13th Week after Trinity

AUGUST 30, 2021

Today's Reading: Luke 10:21-37

Daily Lectionary: 1 Kings 12:20-13:5, 33-34; 2 Corinthians 8:1-24

*Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."
(Luke 10:28)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Context is pretty important. What are the facts surrounding the situation?

"Mom, can I use the car this weekend?"

"What needs to happen before I let you drive?"

"My room needs to be clean."

"You got it--do this and you get the keys."

If this conversation happened when I was a teen, the condition of my room meant I would not get the car until long after the weekend was over! I probably would have tried asking, "Exactly how clean does it need to be?"

Jesus sounds like He is saying that a person can do good works to get themselves into eternal life. "Do this and you will live." Context helps us to understand why Jesus says this. The lawyer asked Him a Law question, so Jesus gave the man a Law answer. And the Law starts to do its work on the man like a mirror, showing him that he had not lived a life that is clean enough to inherit eternity. He tried to justify himself by limiting the neighbors he needed to love, and that was when Jesus described a perfect standard of love in the good Samaritan--a standard the lawyer knew he could not live up to.

Neither can you. Nor can I. However, the Gospel message is that Someone completely different and foreign from us has. While keeping His life perfectly clean, Christ found us after sin and death had beaten the life out of us. He showed us mercy by taking up our burdens and paying for our healing not with silver or gold, but with His precious blood and innocent suffering and death. By His death, you inherit His eternal life for free.

Now you and I go and do likewise in having compassion on those around us, not because we can save ourselves, but because this is the way we start over and live again in the life of Christ after He has saved us by His mercy. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The Law reveals the guilt of sin And makes us conscience-stricken; But then the Gospel enters in The sinful soul to quicken. Come to the cross, trust Christ, and live; The Law no peace can ever give, No comfort and no blessing.

("Salvation unto Us has Come" LSB 555, st. 8)

Tuesday of the 13th Week after Trinity

AUGUST 31, 2021

Today's Reading: 2 Chronicles 28:8-15

Daily Lectionary: 1 Kings 16:29-17:24; 2 Corinthians 9:1-15

But a prophet of the Lord was there, whose name was Obed, and he went out to meet the army that came to Samaria and said to them, "Now hear me, and send back the captives from your relatives whom you have taken, for the fierce wrath of the Lord is upon you." (2 Chronicles 28:9, 11)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. About three centuries after David had united the kingdom of Israel, we turn to 2 Chronicles to find it is split into two. The Northern Kingdom of Israel has just won a civil war as brutal and bitter as the worst sibling rivalry. The writer of 2 Chronicles pulls back the curtains of heaven to let us know that God is directing history. The Northern Kingdom's army is His tool to discipline King Ahaz and the kingdom of Judah. The Lord wants them to repent of their false worship, which even goes so far as to include child sacrifice to pagan gods in 28:3. Yikes!

The victorious warriors are all excited about the wealth of slaves they are bringing back home. But then Obed, the prophet of the Lord, gets in the way of their victory parade. And the situation completely changes as these soldiers suddenly have compassion for their captives. Not only do they free them from slavery, but they actually give us a great example of living out the Fifth Commandment (and Seventh as well), helping and supporting their neighbors in every physical need before bringing them back to their families in Judah!

How on earth is such a change of heart possible? It's not. Not with man. But with God all things are possible. As the Lord sent His Word down from heaven through the mouth of His servant Obed, it worked repentance into the soldiers' hearts. Just like when Jonah preached repentance to Nineveh. Just like when your pastor or a fellow Christian speaks God's Word to you and it works to create and strengthen your faith in Christ, the mighty warrior of the Lord, who has freed you from your captivity to sin and clothes you with His righteousness. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

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

Wednesday of the 13th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 1, 2021

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism:* Baptism, part 3

Daily Lectionary: 1 Kings 18:1-19; Ephesians 1:1-23

Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself. (Acts 2:38-39)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When I was 11 years old, I went with my best friend to his Baptist Bible camp. I had a good time most of the week. (I mean, it was not as good as an HT Conference, but nothing is!) The last night there, one of the counselors told me that since I was baptized as a baby, I should decide to be baptized again so that it would be more meaningful rather than something my parents chose for me.

I came home with a brain swamped by questions. Had my parents made a mistake and done things wrong? Did my Baptism mean anything since I didn't choose it? The worst question of all was wondering what would happen if my parents or pastor found out that I was questioning my Baptism! I (WRONGLY) imagined it would go badly for me, so I kept my questions to myself, which only made things worse.

Thankfully God knew how to rescue me from these doubts without my asking Him to. During confirmation classes about two years later, Pastor Rauschek and Mrs. MacLain used the Scriptures and the Small Catechism to teach us the answers to all the questions I was too afraid to talk about. I learned that Baptism means what God says it means. It is a life-giving water, rich in grace no matter when it happens in a person's life.

My parents had made no mistake getting me baptized about a week after I was born. Again and again the Scriptures rejoice over all the things that God does in Baptism and really does not say much about what you and I do there! He unites us to Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6), gives us a new birth from above (John 3), washes away our sins and pours the Holy Spirit into our hearts (Titus 3). Best of all, God's promises in Baptism are for adults and for children (Acts 2). And there is nothing I could do to make it more meaningful than that! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Sin, disturb my soul no longer: I am baptized into Christ! I have comfort even stronger: Jesus' cleansing sacrifice. Should a guilty conscience seize me since my Baptism did release me In a dear forgiving flood, Sprinkling me with Jesus' blood? ("God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It" LSB 594, st. 2)

Thursday of the 13th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 2, 2021

Today's Reading: Galatians 3:15-22

Daily Lectionary: 1 Kings 18:20-40; Ephesians 2:1-22

But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. (Galatians 3:22)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Paul is super frustrated with the Christians in Galatia. The Holy Spirit had worked through Paul to bring these young Gentile Christians to faith in Jesus, so he cared for them personally.

However, soon after the apostle left town, false teachers known as Judaizers distorted the Bible's teachings. "That Paul guy did a great job getting your belief in God started. But if you really want to be on the Lord's good side, you must learn to practice your Christianity in Jewish ways. You will never unlock all the blessings that God has for you unless you follow all the commands that God gave to Moses. We will teach you what to eat and when. (By the way, no bacon for you!) Then we will get you circumcised so that you can become a great 'son of Abraham' like we are and unlock all the blessings that God is holding back from you until you do these things."

Paul writes to prove that their false gospel is wrong. In Galatians 3 and 4, he starts throwing Old Testament passages at his enemies. They made a big mistake in bringing up Abraham to try and trick his friends into believing their lies, because the Lord blessed him long before he was circumcised or did any other works for God! In fact, God's Law was not given to Moses until four centuries later. God simply promised freely that Abraham had God's blessing. "Abraham 'believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness'" (Galatians 3:6, quoting Genesis 15:6). And since that is how God put Abraham on His good side, that is how you are there, too! You are a "son of Abraham" only because God has given you faith (Galatians 3:7), not because of anything you do.

So then, why did God give the Law? Well, it is kind of like when a friend of mine did not know he had a deadly skin cancer on his back. During a regular checkup his doctor saw it and got him treated. He would have had no clue how close he was to dying if the doctor had not said something. Galatians 3:22 teaches us that God's Law reveals our sin to us, telling us that we are all dying because of it and heading to hell. Then we know how much we need Christ Jesus. And we rejoice that it is by faith in Christ's work to death on the Cross, and not by our works, that we receive the blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to Thy cross I cling; Naked, come to Thee for dress; Helpless look to Thee for grace; Foul, I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die. ("Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me" LSB 761, st. 3)

Friday of the 13th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 3, 2021

Daily Lectionary: 1 Kings 19:1-21; Ephesians 3:1-21

[Elijah] said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." (1 Kings 19:10)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. One Sunday during college I went with my friend to her church. I never imagined that I would both hear a sermon that has stuck with me and meet a pastor who would become a dear friend about 20 years later.

"There are no soloists in the symphony of God, Elijah," preached Rev. William Cwirla. The great prophet was at the end of his rope, convinced that the whole world was going to hell. He had tried fighting the idolatry of King Ahab and the prophets of Baal. He showed decisively that the LORD is the only God and Baal was a fake. But that only made the king and queen mad. Elijah gave up on even taking one more step forward. He complained to God, "I'm the only one left" who believes in You.

Pastor Cwirla's sermon put God's response into different words as he taught us that we are in this Christianity thing together, comparing us to musicians in a great symphony lifting songs of praise to our God, rather than isolated individual soloists trying to go it alone. My own life has proven that sermon to be true. When I have tried to live out my faith without help, like Elijah thought he was doing, it has gone badly. I've even thought of quitting like Elijah did. But I am not alone. God has blessed me with brother pastors and countless other Christians, both Lutherans and not, who encourage me in my faith and work.

You are not alone, either. Now, your family might be the only Lutherans in your town. You might be the only Lutheran at your school--and that gets really lonely and awkward. However, Christ is with you, the One who went alone to His Cross so that you could be with Him in Paradise. Never will He leave you, never will He forsake you (Hebrews 13:5).

More than that, you will never imagine the children of our Heavenly Father that He is preparing you to meet and befriend in the future: brothers and sisters in Christ for you to encourage and to be encouraged by on your journey through this world. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Merciful Father, by Word and Sacrament You have created Your Church in our world to be a caring family. Grant Your comfort to those who live in loneliness. Help them to find a place of healing and pleasant fellowship among people faithful to You. Amen.

Saturday of the 13th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 4, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for the 14th Sunday after Trinity

(Psalm 84:1-2a, 4, 10b, 11b; antiphon: vs.9-10a)

Daily Lectionary: 2 Kings 2:1-18; Ephesians 4:1-24

*How lovely is Your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the Lord.* (Psalm 84:1-2)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. This Introit coming during Labor Day weekend is a great reminder to love a specific neighbor of yours: those who really want to attend church with you (Psalm 84:2), but cannot because their job requires them to be busy during Divine services. Even though it is Sunday morning, groceries still need to be purchased, fires need to be fought, the injured need doctors and nurses in the hospital or nursing homes, criminals need to be arrested, and prisoners need to be guarded in jails. These are just a few of the jobs that people at my churches have had which kept them away from the services of God's house. They wanted to be there, but they needed to care for God's world at the same time.

So what does that have to do with you? Rev. John Kleinig talks about "piggy-backing" people into church with you when they are not physically there. He mostly means those family members who have stopped coming to church because their weak or dead faith does not want to be there, but "piggy-backing" the workers who want to be in church but can't is good, too. What he means is that in your prayers at church, you bring those people to God's throne of mercy. For those who have lost their faith, the most important thing they need is a restored faith, of course. But for the people who want to be at church and cannot, you can pray that Christ would keep their faith in Him strong. You help leave their cares and concerns and thanksgivings at the altar. For all people, you can pray verse 9 from the Introit: "Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of Your anointed!" In other words, God, shield them from the danger of their sins as You look at our Savior Jesus! (Remember, "Christ" means "the Anointed One.")

With more congregations broadcasting their services on the internet, pray that these workers can take time to listen to the Scriptures and sermon. While such people will miss out on being together with your congregational family, the blessings of God's Word will produce fruits of faith in their lives. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, as once You shared in our human toil and thus hallowed the work of our hands, bless and prosper those who labor in our land. Grant them a just reward for their work. Make them see their service as being done to You, and give them time to be served by You in Your Word and Sacrament. Amen.

The 14th Sunday after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 5, 2021

Today's Reading: Luke 17:11-19

Daily Lectionary: 2 Kings 2:19-25; 4:1-7; Ephesians 4:25-5:14

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan.
(Luke 17:15-16)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. A friend once told me about nearly dying during a fierce rainstorm. Just as he saw a concrete divider in front of him at a sharp bend in the road, a semi truck driving the opposite way splashed water that covered his windshield. In that split second of blindness, he was convinced it was all over and that there was no way he could avoid crashing into the concrete! But when the wipers helped him to see again, he discovered that somehow he made it safely through the curve.

Once he got to his destination, he phoned his wife to tell her what happened. She responded, "The Lord was really with you!" And that embarrassed him, because until that moment he had not thought about God's hand in rescuing him. Then it was my turn to feel ashamed as I wondered how many times I had forgotten to thank the Lord, like when a loose tire on the freeway barely missed me, flying safely behind my car.

Time after time we get reminded of how we fail to be grateful to God for His large and small gifts. Our unbelief only wants to be saved from some problems but not others. It is not interested in all the goodness that God wants to give us. The nine were happy that Jesus healed their leprosy, but they were not interested in more from Him. The Samaritan, on the other hand, wanted more! He returned to fall at the feet of Jesus and spend more time with this Person who saved him.

Notice that Luke tells us in verse 11 that Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. And you know what He is going to do there: suffer betrayal and unjust trials, endure mockery, spit, and beatings, until He finally dies on the Cross to cleanse you and me of all unrighteousness and all our thankless moments and thoughtless unbelief. This is the Jesus whom we return to Sunday after Sunday, bowing before His feet as we confess our sins, and receiving His healing as He feeds us with the bread that is His Body and the wine that is His Blood. As in today's Gospel, Jesus stands and waits. He is not stingy in His gift-giving, but blesses us with riches beyond what we could imagine or ever deserve. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, keep Your Church with Your perpetual mercy; and because of our frailty we cannot but fall, keep us ever by Your help from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(Collect for the 14th Sunday after Trinity)

Monday of the 14th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 6, 2021

Today's Reading: Proverbs 4:10-23

Daily Lectionary: 2 Kings 4:8-22, 32-37; Ephesians 5:15-33

I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness. When you walk, your step will not be hampered, and if you run, you will not stumble.
(Proverbs 4:11-12)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Having a holiday today (for most of us) is nice, but tomorrow we have to go back to the routine. Both church and school are starting to be busy again. Some of you have already been in classes for a few weeks while others have your first day tomorrow. Sunday School, confirmation classes, and church meetings are resuming after a summer break. At some point this month or next, I will be already dreaming about what I want to do next summer. Maybe you are happier being busy, or maybe you are like me and will miss the slower pace of life.

Speaking as a father to a son, God tells us through the author of Proverbs that He guides us in the way of wisdom, describing it as a roadway of righteousness. Proverbs 4:12 reminds us that as we travel with the Lord, no matter whether the days are easy or packed full of work, He watches over us and keeps us from stumbling.

Note that the wicked have it as their goal to make other people stumble (verse 16). Unfortunately for them, because they are outside of Christ's light, they cannot understand that their own sin causes them to stumble (verse 19) until they finally fall into hell.

Even after you have received salvation from Christ, you still could choose to go back to the path of the wicked, but you must not do it (verse 14)! Why would you want to get tangled up in sin again? The way Proverbs 4 describes the wicked person who is obsessed with and controlled by their evil sounds like what Jesus says in John 8:34: "Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin."

However, you are free because the Son of God this very moment releases you from your guilt by the forgiveness He won for you on the Cross. He is the light of the world (John 8:12) who shines upon you to shatter your darkness, brighter and brighter until you get to the Last Day (Proverbs 4:18), when the busy schedules of this world will be done. And you know the way to get to that Day of rest and gladness in the Resurrection, when there will be no more darkness. Jesus is the Way. And the Truth. And the Life. Even though you die, you shall live forever in Him. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord of all creation, give us wisdom in all things, that we may rejoice in all that is good and be defended against all that is evil; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Tuesday of the 14th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 7, 2021

Today's Reading: Galatians 5:16-24

Daily Lectionary: 2 Kings 4:48-5:8; Ephesians 6:1-24

For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.
(Galatians 5:17)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When God commands us not to do things, it is not that He is just giving us hoops to jump through to see if we will do what He says, like a dog doing tricks. The works of the old sinful nature are poisonous and destructive to the fruit of the spirit. They get in the way of godly love, joy, peace, and all other good things! You can easily see that just from the last week of our Reflections Scripture passages. King Herod Antipas could not do the right thing for John the Baptist because his sensuality and sexual immorality controlled him. The envy of the robbers on the road to Jericho led them to beat up the poor traveler. The strife and anger between the Northern Kingdom and Southern Kingdom led to a war that nearly resulted in people treating their own distant family members as slaves if God had not stepped in. The Judaizers divided the congregation at Galatia against Paul.

The old sinful nature is a bully who gets in your face about doing what it wants you to do. But the Holy Spirit, who was poured into you at Baptism, is not intimidated. He refuses to back down, staring right back into your sinful nature's cold deadly eyes. He teaches you that God loves you sacrificially, even giving up His own Son on the Cross to have you. And that results in the fruit of a love that is sacrificial as well, not sacrificing other people for the sake of your deadly desires, but sacrificing your own comforts for the needs of your neighbor. This looks like John the Baptist's being willing to sit in prison because King Herod Antipas needed to repent. This looks like Northern Kingdom soldiers not only freeing their captives, but giving them clothing and other treasure. This looks like one leper sacrificing time on the road back to his family so that he can return to Jesus. This looks like a traveler through a foreign land that hates him rescuing a dead man and paying for his healing.

This looks like you as well, for you belong to Jesus and "have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24) when you were baptized into His death that sets you free from sin. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, grant us a sincere love for you and one another, a joyful hope in Your mercy, and the peace of Christ that passes all understanding. Amen.

Wednesday of the 14th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism*: Baptism, part 4

Daily Lectionary: 2 Kings 5:9-27; Philippians 1:1-20

What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

*Where is this written? St. Paul writes in Romans chapter six: "We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."
(Small Catechism: Baptism)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. "Return to your Baptism!" Before I was a pastor, I heard my Lutheran professors say this in class, my pastor preach it, and I read it in Lutheran magazines and books. I knew it was right to do, but what does it mean? Obviously they were not telling me to time-travel back to when the water went across my head and watch it happen, though that could be kind of cool to be able to do. But I was not entirely sure what they meant by it.

Luther gives us answers. In the Small Catechism, he says that you return to your Baptism by daily contrition and repentance. In the Large Catechism, he writes, "Even though someone falls from [Baptism] and sins, we always have access to it so that we may again subdue the old creature. Repentance, therefore, is nothing else than a return and approach to Baptism, to resume and practice what has earlier been begun but abandoned."

Ok, so to return to your Baptism is to repent, but what does that mean? It is not simply regret or a frustration with facing consequences. 2 Corinthians 7:10 refers to that as a "worldly grief [that] produces death." Godly repentance that leads to life is a whole different mindset. It is both sorrow over your sin AND it is faith in Christ's forgiveness. The word "repent" is from a Latin word that literally means "to re-think." You are now thinking in a different way about the sin you did AND about Jesus who died to take away that sin of yours. The Hebrew word for repentance means "to be turned." So it is not that you are turning yourself around, but your Savior God is turning you away from your sin and toward Him again. As long as you live in this old world with your sinful nature, each time you return to your Baptism the Lord will have an abundant amount of forgiveness there for you! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Merciful Lord, cleanse and defend Your people united to You in Baptism by Your sacrifice. Give us grace to receive the fruits of Your cross and daily follow in Your way; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Thursday of the 14th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 9, 2021

Daily Lectionary: 2 Kings 6:1-23; Philippians 1:21-2:11

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.
(Philippians 2:4)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Martin Luther said, “The world is like a drunken peasant. If you lift him into the saddle on one side, he will fall off the other side.” As Christians, we know that by nature we are selfish little monsters who do not want to help others unless we get something good out of it. Repeatedly we have heard the Bible command us to fight those impulses and care for other people without thought of reward. The sinful nature pushes us to “fall out of the saddle” one way by lying to us that we have loved the right people enough and God does not expect more from us. Or, or it uses an evil conscience to pound us until we fall the other way because we have not cared for others every moment of every day. Despair overwhelms us in this case over how much of a failure we think we are.

Philippians 2:4 defends that well-meaning Christian from this false belief. It does not say that you must only take care of the interests of other people. Rather, Paul specifically says you need to deal with your own needs, and also the needs of others. It is like when the airplane flight attendants tell parents that in case of emergency, they should put the oxygen mask on themselves first and then help their children.

An even better example is that of Christ, who humbled Himself to become a servant to us in His life and death on earth. Even when He became obedient to death on the Cross, Jesus looked after the worldly concerns of His mother Mary as He told John to take care of her (John 19:27). And yet, there were times when Jesus looked after His own interests, like when crowds wanted Him to heal their diseases, but He purposely went off by Himself to pray, rest, or eat.

The unbelieving world thinks, “If I do not look out for myself, nobody else is going to do it.” Christ was able to die for our salvation because He trusted that God the Father was looking out for Him.

As sinners, you and I will not balance helping ourselves with helping other people correctly. But the same God who highly exalted Jesus in the resurrection now looks out for your interests by grace for the sake of Christ. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord of glory, You have bought us With Your life-blood as the price, Never grudging for the lost ones That tremendous sacrifice. Give us faith to trust You boldly, Hope, to stay our souls on You; But, oh, best of all Your graces, With Your love our love renew.
(“Lord of Glory, You Have Bought Us” LSB 851, st.4)

Friday of the 14th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 10, 2021

Daily Lectionary: 2 Kings 9:1-13; 10:18-29; Philippians 2:12-30

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Wait. What??? Did the same Paul who said eternal life is the free gift of God in Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23) and not a result of works we have done (Ephesians 2:9) really just say that we must work to earn our salvation???

When a passage like this one confuses us, the verses before and after often help to clear up the problem. Yesterday we read what came before: the praise of Christ Jesus who did the hard work of laying aside His divine privileges, humbling Himself to death on the Cross until God the Father raised Him from the dead for our justification (Romans 4:25). So our Triune God does all the work of earning and announcing our salvation there. And Philippians 2:13 says again that it is God doing the work, this time changing your will and giving you strength so that you not only can do what He wants, but also want to do these things. One of those things God wants is for you to have faith in His Son. John 6:29 says, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

However, while you do not work to earn our salvation, you do become a target when you receive the gift of salvation, which will make things difficult. For "the devil, the world, and our sinful nature... do not want us to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come" (Small Catechism, Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer). Paul was imprisoned because of the Gospel. Epaphroditus "nearly died for the work of Christ" (Philippians 2:30). And Paul's beloved friends in Philippi had unbelievers trying to scare them out of faith in Christ (Philippians 1:28-29).

It takes effort not to let go of our salvation. As we take up our crosses and follow Christ, it might mean suffering the loss of friends and privileges in this crooked and twisted generation. We will be tempted to respond to our opponents powerfully, the way the world does, by grumbling and disputing and seeking our own interests. We need to learn humility from Christ, who shed His blood to make us blameless and innocent in the sight of God forever. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen

Thy will be done, Heavenly Father. Break and hinder every evil plan of Your enemies, including my own sinful nature. Strengthen and keep me and all Your children firm in Your Word and faith until we die; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Saturday of the 14th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 11, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for the 15th Sunday after Trinity

(Psalm 86:4, 6, 15a, 16; antiphon: vs.1a, 2b, 3)

Daily Lectionary: 2 Chronicles 29:1-24; Philippians 3:1-21

Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; listen to my plea for grace. (Psalm 86:6)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. As the internet or TV might have already reminded you, today is the 20th anniversary of 9/11. When these horrific events happened, I had only been a pastor for 2 months. I clearly remember waking up to the terrible news and thinking, "The seminary never prepared me for this!" Not that I was angry with my professors--no one expected that attack. (The military never thought an airstrike could come from inside US borders, so the fighter jets went unarmed to intercept the terrorist-controlled planes. They had no time for weapons to be loaded.)

Thankfully, God granted comfort for my anxious thoughts. Eventually I realized that though He had never used my professors to address the specifics of the unimaginable terror of 9/11, the Lord had worked through them so I would be ready to serve as pastor in the days and weeks that followed. Just as they had taught me, I prayed while I searched the Scriptures to find words of comfort for God's people who were overwhelmed by grief.

Psalm 86 could certainly have been one of those passages. Here in our time of trouble David leads us in prayer to our God who is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (verse 15)--a loyal love that is no mere feeling that runs hot and cold, but a love that gives up His own Son for us. We ask the Lord to help us not because we deserve Him to rescue us (because we don't), but we ask Him on account of His grace in Christ Jesus (verse 6).

You might be overwhelmed by some personal problem or one that affects a lot of people. You might be troubled by something you are responsible for, or by something you have no control over. Or maybe you know someone else who is facing these situations. Instead of obsessing over the obstacles that confront you, fix your eyes on the Lord. Because of His steadfast love for you in Christ, He will not ignore your prayers nor fail to act for you. He is the God who took the terrible tragedy of the crucifixion of His Son and made it to be a blessed salvation for you. Trust that now He will work good from the troubles you need to pray about. In His time, He will gladden your soul (verse 4). In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, this I ask, O hear my plea, Deny me not this favor: When Satan sorely troubles me, Then do not let me waver. O guard me well, My fear dispel, Fulfill Your faithful saying: All who believe By grace receive An answer to their praying.
("The Will of God is Always Best" LSB 758, st. 3)

The 15th Sunday after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 12, 2021

Today's Reading: Matthew 6:24-34

Daily Lectionary: 2 Chronicles 31:1-21; Philippians 4:1-23

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life. (Matthew 6:25)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Right from the start, Jesus gets to the heart of our problems. It is a First Commandment issue: "You cannot serve God and money!" When greedy hearts try to prove Jesus wrong, they only deceive themselves. Their devotion to money and possessions stops them from fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things. The worship of money is often an uncertain anxiousness that acts as though life is only good when I have what I consider enough stuff. The Large Catechism says, "Those who have nothing doubt and despair as if they knew of no god at all. The desire for wealth clings and sticks to our nature all the way to the grave."

The highest worship of God is faith, to look to Him in our time of need, to trust in Him with the confidence that He is a loving Father who knows what we need (6:32) in both body and soul. "The Lord will provide" (Genesis 22:14). Consider the lilies of the field. They do not have bank accounts nor insurance policies. They have to compete with weeds and rocks, drought and floods. And even when they do survive it all, their beauty lasts only a few days before their flowers fall. Despite their temporary and delicate nature, God clothes them with glory. You, however, He has created not to be temporary, but to live forever with Him. If He provides in such wondrous ways for the lilies, don't you think He will put even more effort into providing for you so that you arrive there? For you are worth more to Him than the lilies or the birds, so much so He gave up His own Son to have you.

Your worry over money is a waste. It does not produce anything good. It cannot even add one single second to the length of your life. But what you cannot do, God has done. He adds eternity to your short life through the death of Jesus. He baptismally clothes you with the robe of Christ's righteousness so that He doesn't see the ugliness of your doubts underneath. He gives you to eat of His Body and drink of His Blood shed for the forgiveness of your false beliefs. In His Son, you seek and find God's Kingdom and righteousness for you forever. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, we implore You, let Your continual pity cleanse and defend Your Church; and because she cannot continue in safety without Your aid, preserve her evermore by Your help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(Collect for the 15th Sunday after Trinity)

Monday of the 15th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 13, 2021

Today's Reading: Galatians 5:25-6:10

Daily Lectionary: 2 Chronicles 32:1-22; Colossians 1:1-23

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:10)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Whenever the Scriptures have a “therefore” (or, in this translation, a “so then”), you need to ask, “What is the ‘therefore’ there for?” This verse has built its argument on the words of the previous verses to bring you to its conclusion.

Verse 6 started this section by urging us to provide for the earthly needs of our pastor. As he relieves your ignorance of the love of God in Christ Jesus, let that love flow work to relieve him of poverty. Paul warns us in verses 7-8 not to let our fallen nature use forgiveness as permission to sin. If you put out seeds of greediness and selfishness, you will harvest destruction. Then in verse 9, Paul tenderly encourages us not to give up. Our little faith gets discouraged when we imagine that we have wasted our time following Jesus and that God is ignoring us. Paul reassures us that the Lord will come through for us. As Romans 8:18 says, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

Therefore, we are to take care of our pastors, because doing evil will result in destruction, but as we use our Holy Spirit-provided faith to show Christ's love toward others in anticipation of the resurrection to come, we must not let opportunities to help others pass us by.

Sometimes we get so obsessed over what we cannot do that we miss the things that we can do! For example, we might dream about winning the lottery so we could give a million dollars to our church. But God is not calling you to give a million dollars to the church. He is calling you to help in other ways. Through your prayers, your lending a hand to get jobs done, and giving offerings proportionate to your wealth, you are planting the seeds through which the Holy Spirit works.

You can do these things. You cannot build the Church any more than you can save your soul. But what is impossible for you is possible for Christ Jesus. He has done it by His dying and rising again. From His Cross, He has harvested your eternal life. And He does not grow weary of doing His good work so that there are many more members of the household of faith. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Teach us the lesson Thou hast taught: To feel for those Thy blood hath bought, That ev'ry word and deed and thought May work a work for Thee.

(“O God of Mercy, God of Might” LSB 852, st. 3)

Holy Cross Day

SEPTEMBER 14, 2021

Today's Reading: John 12:20-33

Daily Lectionary: 2 Chronicles 33:1-25; Colossians 1:24-2:7

*"I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."
(John 12:32)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Why celebrate the Cross on September 14? The story goes that after Roman Emperor Constantine the Great confessed faith in Jesus, he sent his mother, Helena, on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to look for Christ's tomb. Believing they found both it and Christ's Cross nearby, the emperor ordered a church built at the site. It was dedicated on September 13, 335. The next day, they brought what they believed was Christ's Cross outside for people to see. Was that really the wood that the body of Jesus was attached to? Even if Helena was wrong, we have to give her this: He truly believed that a cross really lifted Jesus up from the earth so that He could draw all people to Himself.

Poking around in what might be wrong with the people of history is the way the world works. It comfortably distracts us from what is wrong with our own false beliefs, words, and deeds that we should be examining first. This is another way of loving our own self-gratifying life, which Jesus warns will result in us losing it (John 12:25).

Then our Savior says, "Whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." This is not the emotion of hatred, but it is the Semitic way of talking about a secondary preference. God certainly blesses us with a life in this world that is better than we deserve. But He wants us to prefer the life Christ prepares for us in the new heaven and earth at the resurrection! So while we do give thanks to God for the good things of this world, we must not get obsessed over the world the way the unbelievers do. Be ready to turn away from or let go of the stuff of this world if that is required, knowing that God has promised you the restoration of Paradise.

This is all because Jesus willingly let go of His life to rescue us from our sin. No other human being has ever produced much by dying. Some deaths might inspire others for a while, but then the impact is lost. However, the dead body of Jesus being planted in His tomb has produced much fruit. Over 2000 years His mustard seed-sized Church has grown to spread across so many nations, tribes, peoples, and languages. Even to yours. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Merciful God, Your Son, Jesus Christ, was lifted high upon the cross that He might bear the sins of the world and draw all people to Himself. Grant that we who glory in His death for our redemption may faithfully heed His call to bear the cross and follow Him, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(Collect for Holy Cross Day)

Wednesday of the 15th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 15, 2021

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism:* Confession

Daily Lectionary: 2 Chronicles 34:1-4, 8-11, 14-33; Colossians 2:8-23

***What is Confession?** Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven. (Small Catechism: Confession)*

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Before there was Baptism or the Lord's Supper, there was Confession and Absolution at the time of the very first sin. As awkward as you might feel telling your sins to your pastor, you can see that Adam and Eve felt even more embarrassed. (Actually, her name was not Eve yet, but we will get to that in a moment.) Our saving God taught them to confess by gently inviting them out of their hiding places: both the bushes that hid their bodies, and the words they used to hide their sin. "I heard the sound of You in the garden and I was afraid, because I was naked." Yeah, right, Adam. You tried to talk as if you had no sin, but you only deceived yourself.

In fairness to Adam, this was a whole new thing. He never had confessed a sin before. Nobody had. So he did not know how God was going to respond. God on this day would teach Adam that He "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" and will cleanse him and his children of all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9) through the blood of the offspring of Eve (Genesis 3:15) who would be born to crush the devil's head when His foot was pierced by the nails of the Cross.

Adam did not doubt God's Absolution, but firmly believed that God had mercy on him and his wife. When he named her just after this, he could have referred to her as "the one who got us into this mess." Instead he expressed the hope for the future that God promised by honoring her with the name of Eve, which is related to the Hebrew word for "life-giver," as she would become the mother of all the living by the grace of God.

God gave physical life to Adam and Eve immediately, and likewise spoke directly to them His promise of life by the forgiveness of sins. For you, the same God does things mediately, working through your parents to give you physical life, and working through the mouth of your pastor to cover your embarrassing sin and death with His forgiveness earned by the perfect life of Jesus Christ. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

The words which absolution give Are His who died that we might live; The minister whom Christ has sent Is but His humble instrument.

("As Surely as I Live,' God Said" LSB 614, st. 6)

Thursday of the 15th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 16, 2021

Daily Lectionary: 2 Chronicles 35:1-7, 16-25; Colossians 3:1-25

Josiah died and was buried in the tombs of his fathers. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. (2 Chronicles 35:24)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. O King Josiah, what have you done? You just displayed wonderful devotion to the God of Israel by reforming the religion of your people. But now you are like all the other sons of David as you fell into great sin. You died because you did not listen to God. In many and various ways He commanded you not to go to battle Neco. The Lord warned all the kings of His people not to join foreign wars and alliances. The prophetess Huldah foretold that after your death, the curses of disaster would fall upon your kingdom (2 Chronicles 34:22-28). And God commanded you through Neco himself to let his troops travel from Egypt to fight the Assyrian king. But Josiah, you would not listen! You do not get to disobey God's Word just because it comes from a person you do not like. Why did you leave us to lament your death? Why did you need to prove your Descendant will be correct when He says, "All who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52)?

Josiah was a great and faithful king who served God's people. Most of the time. Just like his ancestor David, he was not perfect as He broke God's commandments. Yet there will be a Son of David who comes to be our perfect King. He will never sin as He reforms and restores His people to God by forgiving all the commandments that they break.

The people of His kingdom will also grieve at the death of this Son of Josiah. On the night of the greatest Passover, unlike any other Passover ever held before or after it, when the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world gets ready to be slaughtered on the altar of the Cross, just before He is betrayed, He will say to His disciples, "You will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy" (John 16:20). He could promise what Josiah could not because Jesus knew the resurrection was coming after His death. For Him, and for you. And so what our Lord promised the disciples is now a promise Your Savior gives to you: "You have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (John 16:22). In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O come, Desire of nations, bind In one the hearts of all mankind; Bid Thou our sad divisions cease, and be Thyself our King of Peace. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel. ("O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" LSB 357, st. 7)

Friday of the 15th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 17, 2021

Daily Lectionary: 2 Chronicles 36:1-23; Colossians 4:1-18

That the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia. (2 Chronicles 36:22)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Jerusalem is no more. God had tried to get through to His people. "But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising His words and scoffing at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against His people" (verse 16). God knew that the only thing that would work was to bring the Chaldean King and his army to Jerusalem for war and destroy it in 586 BC. When other kingdoms suffered a defeat like this, they were gone. Game over.

However, God still had plans for His people. He promised that the Savior of all nations would be born from this nation. And so, by grace, He raised this nation from death back to life again after their Babylonian captivity, just as He promised in Jeremiah 29:10: "I will fulfill to you My promise and bring you back to this place."

The prophecy from Isaiah 45:1-7 about this time is very amazing. Not only does the Lord name Cyrus specifically as the restorer of His people over a century before the Persian King was born, He also refers to Cyrus as being God's anointed, despite the fact that the man was a foreign pagan. Remember, God commanded His priests to anoint prophets, priests, and kings. And there are also the prophecies of the Anointed One, which in Greek is Christos, or Christ.

Just as 2 Chronicles 36:22 reports to us, God fulfilled His promises in Isaiah 45 to give military success and political power to King Cyrus for the sake of God's chosen people Israel--and for your sake! As God says prophetically to Cyrus in Isaiah 45:5-6, "I equip you, though you do not know Me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides Me; I am the LORD, and there is no other." For among those who returned to the Promised Land with the help of Cyrus were ancestors of Jesus, to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given. While guiding world history, Christ directed the servants of His Church to go out into all the world and find you, teaching you to know Him as the only God, so that by the forgiveness of your sins, you could live in His kingdom in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, the protector of all who trust in You, have 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. Amen.

Saturday of the 15th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 18, 2021

Today's Reading: Introit for the 16th Sunday after Trinity

(Psalm 86:1, 7, 12-13; antiphon: vs.3, 5)

Daily Lectionary: Nehemiah 1:1-2:10; 1 Timothy 1:1-20

I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever. (Psalm 86:12)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When you imagine that the words of the psalms come out of Christ's mouth, you might hear the words in a different way. For instance, Psalm 86:1 becomes a reminder that our God in the flesh identifies with all who are poor and needy in this world, even as in Luke 7 He will sympathize with the grieving widow at Nain and His compassion will restore her son to life. (But more about that tomorrow.) The King of the universe and Son of David could have chosen to be born in a palace. Instead He was born to a poor newlywed couple in a lowly manger. As an adult, He would say, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head," (Luke 9:58).

Why did He suffer through being poor and needy? For you. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Yet He knew His suffering would be only temporary. Even though insolent men rose up against Jesus to end His life, as David wrote prophetically of Christ in Psalm 86:14, the Son was confident that He will glorify God the Father's name forever. And because the dead cannot praise the Lord (so it would be impossible for Him to do that forever if death ended Him), the Son of God went into Good Friday trusting that God would deliver His "soul from the depths of Sheol" (Psalm 86:13), raising Him from the dead on the Third Day.

God has baptismally put you into Christ, and so He puts these same words into your mouth. He who gave David the confidence to know that he would glorify God forever in the resurrection even after David died now puts that confidence into you. On that great Day, you will no longer suffer the weakness of divided loyalties as you do now when your sin messes up your faith. The Lord will raise you, body and soul, to be perfect and whole. And then you shall mean it when you say, "I give thanks to you, O Lord, my God, with my whole heart." In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Thou hast died for my transgression, All my sins on Thee were laid; Thou hast won for me salvation, On the cross my debt was paid. From the grave I shall arise And shall meet Thee in the skies. Death itself is transitory; I shall lift my head in glory. ("Thanks to Thee, O Christ, Victorious" LSB 548, st. 2)

Notes

Notes

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

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