



REFLECTIONS

TRINITY 17 - REFORMATION

OCTOBER 4 - 31, 2020

HIGHER
THINGS[®]

DARE TO BE LUTHERAN[®]

Trinity 17 - Reformation

OCTOBER 4 - 31, 2020

The Reflections for this season were written by:

*Rev. George Borghardt, pastor of
Immanuel Lutheran Church in Bossier City, LA. He is also the president
of Higher Things.*

*Rev. Mark Buetow, pastor of
Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church and School in McHenry, IL.*

*Rev. Jacob Ehrhard, pastor of
St. John's Lutheran Church and School in Chicago, IL.*

*Rev. Gaven Mize, pastor of
Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hickory, NC.*

2020 Reflections Editorial Staff:

Sandra Madden (Content Executive)

Kay Maiwald (Reflections Editor)

Rev. Duane Bamsch (Audio Editor)

©2020 Higher Things, Inc., Holt, MO

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 17th Sunday after Trinity

OCTOBER 4, 2020

Today's Reading: Luke 14:1-11

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 4:21-40; Matthew 8:1-17

"But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.'"

(Luke 14:10)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ask the disciples in Matthew 17. Christ answers that they will not even enter the kingdom of heaven unless they become like little children. Furthermore, Christ points out that disciples cannot become like little children unless they humble themselves and welcome the little children in Jesus' Name.

In Luke 14 we find Jesus being put to the test by the Pharisees' ruler as they were eating together on the Sabbath. Christ heals a man who has dropsy, which doesn't please the Pharisees because it is unlawful to work, or heal, in this case, on the Sabbath. Christ responds by asking who among them wouldn't save their brother or oxen if they had fallen on the Sabbath. None of them has an answer and then there is a shift in the tone of the text.

This seemingly abrupt change comes when Christ tells them the parable of the wedding feast, with its conclusion: Do not place yourself in the place of honor lest someone more important than you shows up, and you get demoted and shamed in front of everyone. It is better that to take the lowest seat and be asked to move up and your honor be shown before the feast. Christ warns them (and us) that it is not our place to exalt ourselves but to humble ourselves before men. "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

I have trouble finding my way around this text in any way other than straight through the waters of Holy Baptism. We are born with our Old Adam firmly intact and rooted in our hearts. We are infantile infants. We are helpless and yet active sinners. We are the lowest we can be. That is, until a good Lord comes by and washes us clean of sickness, be it dropsy or death itself, and renews us with a right spirit. We are reborn, and the new Adam emerges in us. We are exalted. We have been exalted. Christ has done the exultation for us and to us and through us. Brother, son, Christian, move up and take the place of honor. Your sins are forgiven. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Monday of the 17th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 5, 2020

Today's Reading: Proverbs 25:6-14

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 5:1-21; Matthew 8:18-34

Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great, for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of a noble. (Proverbs 25:6-7)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. It seems as if we just read about being exulted in our text yesterday. That's because we did. We were reminded of who we are outside of Baptism and who we are in our baptized lives. We, who were once dead to sin, in Baptism are made alive in Christ. In other words, you were once in the lowest place, claimed and bound by the devil, but then in the holy waters of Baptism you were made clean and brought out, bound to Christ and with the forgiveness of sins.

Here in Proverbs, we find the same thing placed into a different mouth and in a different testament. In these words we continue to carry with us the necessity not of holding ourselves higher than we ought, but of relying on Jesus to exalt us through the Sacraments. In those Sacraments, we have great hope within us. In order that people know of the hope within us, Christians are called to make a good, right, and salutary confession of faith. We are called to cut away the fat of heretical teachings and present the doctrine of true meat after milk. To this, the writer of Proverbs continues, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver. Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise reprover to a listening ear" (Proverbs 25:11-12).

Thus our words must be spoken precisely, confidently, and with a right confession of who Christ is, what He has done for us, how He grants us grace through His means, and the hope we have because of our Baptism. We look forward to Christ's coming again to judge the living and the dead. May the words of our mouths and our hearts' meditations be right, and may our words be fitly spoken to a world that needs to hear them. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Give us lips to sing Thy glory, Tongues Thy mercy to proclaim, Throats that shout the hope that fills us, Mouths to speak Thy holy name. Alleluia, Alleluia! May the light which Thou dost send Fill our songs with alleluias, Alleluias without end! ("Thy Strong Word" LSB 578, st.5)

Tuesday of the 17th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 6, 2020

Today's Reading: Ephesians 4:1-6

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 5:22-6:9; Matthew 9:1-17

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:5-7)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. As Christians we enter the Ark of the Church through the same means that kills, yet saves: water. Baptism seals us into the Ark like sanctified pitch, yet instead of tar residue we are blessed with a watermark that confesses our faith to the world! You are a baptized child of God! But what does that mean? To ask it another way: What is in a name? As Lutherans we believe the biblical truth that Baptism saves us. Likewise, we believe that when the pastor says, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," God has written our name in the Book of Life and placed His Name upon us. Thus, we are "little Christs."

With that lavish washing away of sins we are placed firmly in the Ark and separated from the multitudes of unbelievers. Baptism is the greatest blessing of regeneration, but what about living in a world that Jesus has told us will hate those who love Him? How should we interact with the world? What is our recourse? How do we approach a world that believes all things should be fair and/or equal? As Christians we simply continue in our vocation and let our faith speak for us. It might just bring a song to our lips.

Understanding that faith is given to Christians without any merit or work is one of the most important doctrinal truths that we have. Luther called this "justification by grace through faith" the chief article. It is the justification by God's own perfect grace that gives faith the weight to anchor down the most stubborn of souls. What a blessed state of affairs it is that God has not been fair to us and has instead been gracious with what is His to give. And what He has given from His abundance is the living faith within us. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

In a wat'ry grave are buried All our sins that Jesus carried; Christ, the Ark of Life, has ferried Us across death's raging flood.

("Water, Blood, and Spirit Crying" LSB 597, st.2)

Wednesday of the 17th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 7, 2020

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism*: Table of Duties, To Bishops, Pastors, and Preachers

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 6:10-25; Matthew 9:18-38

Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

(Small Catechism: Table of Duties, To Bishops, Pastors, and Preachers)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. “Beyond reproach” is an essential attribute for bishops, pastors, and preachers. It is also the one you hear district presidents, circuit visitors, and congregation members throwing around more than any other. But Luther gives us a much bigger picture in his *Small Catechism*. He allows the pastor to understand his role better without having to be beaten with the reproach club quite as often. Here in Timothy we have the classic list. Pastors are also called to the teaching of true doctrine and are expected to hold a pure confession of the faith. The Table of Duties reminds us of Titus 1:9: “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”

In this epistle to Titus, the pastor is urged to trust in the word of the Lord for all that he has, and all he will suffer for the sake of the Christian faith. A pastor must not only preach winsome sermons and be completely likable but must proclaim the message of Christ crucified for sinners. This is no small task for a pastor who is also a sinner. Pastors would love to take the path of least resistance in times and situations of conflict, but that is not what they are called to do. All that is required of a pastor is best done when the forgiveness of sins is laid upon the people of God. Then the Gospel is no longer theoretical but tangible, and frees from sinful bonds. In this we find the resounding confession of the true faith. In this the pastor becomes and remains a servant who has done well and has been faithful with much. Thank God that he has put such a pastor in your life to deliver God's Gifts. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, help us ever to retain The Catechism's doctrine plain As Luther taught the Word of truth In simple style to tender youth.

(“Lord, Help Us Ever to Retain,” LSB 865, st.1)

Thursday of the 17th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 8, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 7:1-19; Matthew 10:1-23

These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of them Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" (Matthew 10:5-7)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. It seems that every Christian knows of the Great Commission in Matthew 28. We are given the command to "go." We are given the baptismal formula, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." However, there is an often-overlooked Greek word in that sentence. The word *ethni* is most often translated as "nations," yet in this context, the word "Gentiles" is a better option. Why? It simply puts a bookend on the first commission found in our text in verse 5.

It can sometimes be hard to wrap our minds around the idea that Christ became flesh to first go to the chosen people of Israel. It is from the house of Israel that the Law and prophets came. Even all the prophetic texts about Christ in the Old Testament came from the Jews. So it is good, right, and salutary that Christ would send out His disciples to go to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Perhaps our first reaction is to say, "Hey, that's not fair." Why would Jesus say, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans" (Matthew 10:5)? To be honest, that's what makes Matthew 28 and the translation of *ethni* so unique and important.

The beautiful thing about the Great Commission is that it is on the other side of the Cross and resurrection of Jesus. In His sacrifice, Christ was lifted up and has drawn all men unto Himself. We, who are Gentiles, are not separated from God, but have been ransomed at a price and that price is the blessed blood of Jesus Christ. Christ has washed us, feeds us, and teaches us through the mouths and hands of His pastors. We are the sheep who were not lost, but have been rescued from the sin, death, and the devil. Thanks be to God. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain, could give the guilty conscience peace, or wash away the stain.

But Christ, the heav'nly Lamb, takes all our sins away, a sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they.

("Not All the Blood of Beasts" LSB 431, st.1, 2)

Abraham

OCTOBER 9, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 8:1-20; Matthew 10:24-42

“What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”
(Matthew 10:27-28)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. In our text, Christ lovingly invites us not to fear. How strange this is to our ears since we tend to internalize fear and anxiety. It is almost as if we should say to Jesus, “Well, that’s easy for you to say, you’re Jesus.” Then again, maybe that’s the point. To claim that the body doesn’t matter as much as the soul is to detest the creation of each and thus the creator. However, very few people would look at it that way.

While we are alive, we are willing to go through anything to minimize the pain that the body feels. After we die, people gather around the casket and offer words that seem helpful, but often refer to the body as a “vessel” or “shell.” Yet Christ tells us that we should not fear the sword and pain. Nothing can destroy our relationship with our Father, who is in heaven. Thus, we do not need to worry those “who kill the body but cannot kill the soul” but “rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” The worst thing for a Christian to imagine is that God has abandoned them. Here, in these words, we find the opposite. Christ tells us not to fear the pain and death of the flesh but fear the one who can take your soul into death. With Christ, there is only life after His death. And for us, we have life for all eternity. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies
Heav’n’s morning breaks, and earth’s vain shadows flee
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me* (“Abide With Me” LSB 878, st.6)

Saturday of the 17th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 10, 2020

Today's Reading: Introit for the 18th Sunday after Trinity

(Psalm 122:1, 6, 8-9; antiphon: Liturgical Text)

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 9:1-22; Matthew 11:1-19

*I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord."
(From the Introit for the 18th Sunday after Trinity)*

In the Name of † Jesus. Amen. Sometimes Pastor's right on point with his sermon. Sometimes the organ lifts you up into the heavens. Sometimes you're surrounded by the full-throated voices of 2,000 youth singing the hardest hymns in the book in four-part harmony at a Higher Things conference, and you think that even heaven can't be this good.

But sometimes it can be a real drag going to church. Sometimes Pastor preaches boring sermons. Sometimes he chants like an alley cat. Sometimes the organist hits as many wrong notes as she hits right ones. And sometimes, you were just up late last night partying—er, studying. What's there to be glad about?!?

"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord'" (Psalm 122:1). The Lord's house gladdens us, not because of its outward beauty, its compelling speakers, or its other-worldly experiences. The Lord's house gladdens because of the message that is proclaimed there. "'Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!' For my brothers and companions' sake I will say, 'Peace be within you!'" (Psalm 122:7-8)

The peace that makes us glad in the Lord's house is a peace that the world cannot give. It's a peace that surpasses all understanding. It's the peace of being reconciled to God. It's the peace of sins forgiven.

"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord,'" because the house of the Lord is the only place in the whole world where the Gospel of peace is proclaimed. It's the only place where you are directed to the scars in Jesus' hands and side—scars that say, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19-20). It's the only place in the entire world where the Body and Blood of the One who died and rose are given for you. Indeed, "I was glad when they said to me 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'" In the Name of † Jesus. Amen.

*Grant then, O God, Your will be done, That, when the church bells are ringing, Many in saving faith may come Where Christ His message is bringing:
"I know My own; My own know Me. You, not the world, My face shall see. My peace I leave with you. Amen."
(“Built on the Rock” LSB 645, st.5)*

The 18th Sunday after Trinity

OCTOBER 11, 2020

Today's Reading: Matthew 22:34-46

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 9:23-10:22; Matthew 11:20-30

"On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

(Matthew 22:40)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Love God. Love your neighbor. Every commandment teaches us to do one or the other. Our problem is that we do neither. Instead of loving God and others, we are turned inward, loving ourselves. God owes us a break. Other people should live to serve us. That's sin. Perhaps the man asks Jesus which is the greatest commandment so that he can try to keep it. That won't work, either. No, what has to happen is that all the Law and the Prophets hang on those two commandments.

What are the Law and the Prophets? That refers to the Old Testament. What is the Old Testament about? The promise of a Savior. It's about Jesus. So let's try that: "On these two commandments hangs Jesus." Now we're getting to the heart of the Law's fulfillment.

Jesus, as true God and man, loves both God the Father and His neighbor. On the Cross, He loves His Father above all things, because He is obedient and dies for sinners. On the Cross, He loves His neighbor as Himself—even more than Himself, because He dies for every person ever. There the Law is fulfilled. Its judgment is poured out. The commandments are kept and fulfilled. There, everything that was promised by God in the Old Testament happens and comes true: The Savior keeps the Law and commandments for you.

Now, baptized into Christ and filled with His Word and Body and Blood, you love God and love your neighbor. According to the commandments, you don't. In Jesus Christ you do. And both are true, but what counts is what Jesus has done. His obedience covers your disobedience; His being punished for sin sets you free. That's how the Law and the Prophets hang on these commandments when Jesus literally hangs upon the Cross of Calvary for you.

Greatest commandment? Love God. Also, love your neighbor. Jesus did. So therefore you do, too, in Him. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, forasmuch as without You we are not able to please You, mercifully grant that Your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; 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 18th Sunday after Trinity)

Monday of the 18th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 12, 2020

Today's Reading: Deuteronomy 10:12-21

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 11:1-25; Matthew 12:1-21

“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?”
(Deuteronomy 10:12-13)

In the Name † of Jesus. If only it were that easy! Yahweh says, “Do this!” and we should just do it, right? Some people say that God would not have given us the commandments if we could not keep them. Paul says otherwise. He says the Law was given to “increase sin” and to show us that we CANNOT do it.

There is only one person who walks in all of God's ways, loves Him, and serves Him with all His heart and soul and who keeps His commandments. That's Jesus.

So the obvious question might be, “Well then, why does God give us the commandments? Why do we even bother?” Because the commandments show us that we need Jesus. The catechism teaches us this, as you can see if you run through the meaning of each commandment. Are those things you don't do or do like you're supposed to? No? God's wrath awaits those who break His commandments.

So Jesus comes to say, “I will take your sin. Let your breaking the commandments be Mine. And let My keeping them be yours.” With that blessed exchange of His righteousness for our sin on Calvary, we are saved. His righteousness and obedience are given to you at the font and supplied by Absolution and the Word and His Supper. Those gifts always declare that in Jesus, your sin has become His and His perfection and obedience are yours.

So now reread the words above. Is that you? In and of yourself, no way! But in Jesus? Absolutely! For all that He has is yours. And it is His obedience which counts for you before your heavenly Father. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Mine is the sin, but Thine the righteousness; Mine is the guilt, but Thine the cleansing blood; Here is my robe, my refuge, and my peace: Thy blood, Thy righteousness, O Lord my God.

(“Here, O My Lord, I See Thee Face to Face” LSB 631, st.5)

Tuesday of the 18th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 13, 2020

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 11:26-12:12; Matthew 12:22-37

You come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:7-8)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Lots of people have this idea of Judgment Day as a time where you have to stand before God on the Last Day and face the record of your sins, unveiled for all to see. Sure, you might get a pass because of Jesus, but you've still got to face everything you've done.

But Paul tells the Corinthians they will be blameless on the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. Blameless. Nothing to show. Nothing to pin on them. No sins to recount. No "permanent record" to go over. No waiting in line for your turn to "face the music" about everything you've ever said and done.

The One who makes this true is Jesus. He has covered your sin and wiped it out by His blood, shed on the Cross. He has made sure by His resurrection that your resurrection is not an awakening to a long list of stuff you've done wrong, but to an eternity, where you stand holy and spotless before God.

You are baptized. You are clothed with Christ's righteousness. God cannot see your sin. It is covered by Jesus. You are bodied and blooded by Jesus. He lives in you and therefore your sin cannot be exposed for all to see. God does not see it. You are blameless.

No matter how good the news of salvation in Christ is, there is a part of us—our Old Adam—who figures that somehow, somewhere, someday, we're going to have to own up to our sins and see them displayed in front of everyone. But that's not true. That's not why Jesus came. He came to take your sin away and He has done that.

On the "day of our Lord Jesus Christ," you don't have in store some embarrassing exposure in front of the whole world. You have the welcome of your Father who, for Jesus' sake, has already prepared a kingdom for you from before the foundation of the world. No judgment for you. Only the blamelessness that comes from being in Jesus Christ. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

My Savior paid the debt I owe And for my sin was smitten; Within the Book of Life I know My name has now been written. I will not doubt, for I am free, And Satan cannot threaten me; There is no condemnation!

("The Day Is Surely Drawing Near" LSB 508, st.5)

Wednesday of the 18th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 14, 2020

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism*: Table of Duties, Hearers
Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 12:13-32; Matthew 12:38-50

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.

(1 Thessalonians 5:12–13)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Wow! What a great example of preaching and pastoral proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ we have in Matthew 12! It reads, “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, ‘Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.’ But he answered them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’”

This typological/Christological sermon should and must be preached at every sermon by a faithful pastor. Your pastor should preach the cross of Golgatha, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to his people. With a message of such importance, it is only necessary that we as hearers be instructed to respect and uphold the Office of the Holy Ministry.

We hold high the Office and the man who bears that Office. But why? Isn't he a man just like the rest of us? Martin Luther explains it to us perfectly in his explanation to the Third Commandment. He states: We should fear and love God that we may not despise preaching and His Word but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it. In the holding of the preached Word as sacred, we come to appreciate the pastor and the authority he has over us because of the Gospel that He speaks. Thanks be to God that His Word comes to us through holy, yet sinful men. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

*“You shall observe the worship day That peace may fill your home, and pray,
And put aside the work you do, So that God may work in you.” Have mercy,
Lord!* (*“These Are the Holy Ten Commands” LSB 581, st.4*)

Thursday of the 18th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 15, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 13:1-18; Matthew 13:1-23

...you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deuteronomy 13:3).

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. There are lots of self-styled “prophets” out there. They think they speak God’s Word. Some even sound like they do. Some might even predict things will happen that actually do! Though most are easily proven to be frauds and liars. So what do you do? How do you tell whether what they are teaching is true? You compare it with the Word of God which the Holy Spirit has given to us in the Scriptures.

The Old Testament points us to Christ. The New Testament testifies of and preaches Christ. The whole Bible is about Christ. And not just any Christ, but the Christ who is true God and true man, who died on the Cross and rose again on the Third Day to take away our sins. Just about every false prophet and preacher will contradict those things in some way.

Some might deny who Christ really is, and say that He was just a man, or God “in disguise.” Most will simply teach that you must grab hold of your salvation yourself in some way and that your changed life is evidence of your salvation. All of these deny that Christ is our Savior in that He is true God in the flesh and because He died for our sins wholly and completely.

If preaching points to you, it is false. If preaching doesn’t direct you to Christ and to your Baptism, Absolution and His Supper, it is false. We know this because the whole Bible points us to Jesus in some way (just as we saw in the Gospel lesson at the beginning of this week).

Even if some preaching sounds good and true, test it! Check it! Compare it with God’s Word to see whether it’s really giving you the Savior Jesus. If not, then have nothing to do with it. For the Lord gives us His Word, NOT to confuse us, but to comfort us beyond a shadow of a doubt that our sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Preserve Your Word and preaching, The truth that makes us whole, The mirror of Your glory, The pow’r that saves the soul. Oh, may this living water, This dew of heav’nly grace, Sustain us while here living Until we see Your face. (“Preserve Your Word, O Savior” LSB 658, st.4)

Friday of the 18th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 16, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 14:1-2, 22-23, 28-15:15;
Matthew 13:24-43

“At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called the LORD’s release.” (Deuteronomy 15:1-2)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Wouldn’t that be great if after seven years mortgages were cancelled? Car payments were no more? Student loan payments were forgiven? The money you owed your friend was forgotten about? In Old Testament Israel, this was a command of Yahweh: that they forget their debts to one another after seven years.

But God is not primarily concerned with financial debts. This forgiving of money debts was a picture of something bigger: the forgiveness of sins. Sin is like a debt. You’ve done something against someone. You owe them. Forgiveness means they don’t hold it against you and you don’t hold what they owe against them.

The New Testament declares that Christ cancelled our debt of sin before God. Whatever the Law said we owed and demanded that we pay is forgiven by Christ’s death on Calvary and His resurrection on Easter. Whatever the Law demands you pay God, even your own life for your sins, has been paid in full by Jesus. You owe God nothing. Not a penny.

Baptism, Absolution, Gospel, and Supper are all stamps of “paid in full” for you. They are promises and reminders and delivery methods to tell you that your debts before God are cancelled. Let them trouble you no more.

The Holy Spirit, having forgiven your debts, teaches you to love others and forgive their debts. How can you call in what is owed to you, when the Lord doesn’t call in what you owe to Him? This is why in one version of the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus actually uses that word: “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive those who are indebted to us.” We don’t owe. So they don’t owe us either.

This wonderful cancelling of debts is not an every seven years thing but a Jesus thing. Wherever Christ is, there debts are cancelled and forgiven. There payment has been made. There is freedom from sin and death because it’s all been taken care of by Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

“Forgive our sins as we forgive,” You taught us, Lord, to pray; But You alone can grant us grace To live the words we say.

(“Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive” LSB 843, st.1)

Saturday of the 18th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 17, 2020

Today's Reading: Introit for St. Luke, Evangelist

(Psalm 92:1-5; antiphon: Luke 24:46-47)

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 15:19-16:22; Matthew 13:44-58

..and repentance toward the forgiveness of sins would be preached in His Name to all nations."
(Luke 24.46-47)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. It was necessary for the Christ to suffer, die, and rise again on the Third Day. Jesus did Good Friday and Easter for you and me! That's the good news that saves! But that Gospelly good work of Jesus does no good unless it is put into your ears. What was achieved on the Cross needs to be delivered to you and me!

For the delivery of His saving work, Jesus sends His men like your pastor to preach in His Name. He doesn't just preach that you need to change and leave your sins through repentance. Nor does Jesus send His men to preach only the Gospel of forgiveness. No, Jesus sends His men to preach specifically "repentance towards the forgiveness of sins."

Jesus died. You need to die, too. That's repentance! Leave your old way of living, all the itches that you scratch, all the times you live for yourself over and against others, all the doubts. If you would be saved, that filth has to be buried in the tomb where Jesus was buried for you. Thus, your pastor is sent to repent you and to call you out of your sins.

Jesus rose again on the Third Day. You rose with Him in the water and the Word. Your sins can't chain you down to the prison of sin and death anymore! You've skipped out of the tomb alive with the risen Lord Jesus! You are right now as free from your sins as Jesus is free. He's not in that tomb of death and so you aren't either! That's the Gospel that your pastor has been called to preach into your ears.

God doesn't just want you to change for change's sake or to be a better person. Please change and be better for others! Jesus knows that those changes won't save you. He preaches the Law to you to kill you so that He can then preach the Good News to you. He puts into your ears repentance toward the forgiveness of sins in His Name. You need both repentance and faith!

It was necessary for Christ to suffer, to die, and to rise again on the Third Day, but your Lord didn't just stop in Jerusalem after winning your salvation! He makes sure that your pastor is sent to where you are to deliver that repentance and forgiveness to you in the Word. Be repented! Be forgiven! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

St. Luke, Evangelist

OCTOBER 18, 2020

Today's Reading: Luke 10:1-9

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 17:1-20; Matthew 14:1-21

After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go.
(Luke 10:1)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. What's in the Gospels? We call Luke an "evangelist" because he wrote one of the four Gospels. In that Gospel, he gives a careful account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and tells of many things Jesus said and did. When the apostles went to the ends of the earth preaching Christ, they were preaching what Luke would later put in his Gospel.

The pastoral Office and the Scriptures go hand in hand. Preachers preach what is in the Bible. The Bible is what the preachers preach. And that's repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' Name, the Jesus who suffered and rose again for sinners (Luke 24:46-47).

Jesus sent preachers to all the places He was about to go. So your preacher also goes where Jesus is about to go. You hear the sermon and then Jesus arrives, there on the altar in His Body and Blood. Your pastor absolves and preaches Christ to you, and that same Christ will arrive on the Last Day to raise you from the dead. Your pastor, like the apostles and the seventy sent by Jesus, is a herald, proclaiming the arrival of the King of Kings to bestow forgiveness and mercy upon His people.

Luke's Gospel (written to a man named Theophilus) was written, as Luke himself explains, in order that there would be a record of the things that were being preached in the Church. One of the great themes that runs throughout Luke's Gospel is that of the Savior of sinners. Luke records the parable of the lost sheep and coin and the prodigal son. He tells of the Pharisee and the tax collector and the unjust steward. Luke's Gospel is full of stories in which Jesus demonstrates that He came, not for the righteous people, but for sinners.

We give thanks to God for Luke, who checked the facts and wrote them down in his Gospel so that we could hear it preached and read it and know the sort of God we have: One who saves sinners. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

For that belov'd physician All praise, whose Gospel shows The Healer of the nations, The one who shares our woes. Your wine and oil, O Savior, Upon our spirits pour, And with true balm of Gilead Anoint us evermore.
(*"By All Your Saints in Warfare" LSB 518, st.26*)

Monday of the 19th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 19, 2020

Today's Reading: Genesis 28:10-17

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 18:1-22; Matthew 14:22-36

Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you. (Genesis 28:15)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Most people operate with the idea that God is full of demands. Do this. Don't do that. Rules. Regulations. Watch your behavior. But if you read the Bible, you'll see that God is all about making promises to people who haven't really earned or deserved what He has to give them.

Jacob was a liar and deceiver. He stole his brother's birthright and blessing. But Yahweh came to him, showed him Jesus (the ladder between heaven and earth) and promised to bless him with land and descendants and the future Savior from his family line.

Jesus does the same thing. He makes promises, one after the other. "Come to me, you who are weary." "My Father will give you whatever you ask in my Name." "I will give my life for many." "I am with you always." Promises. Jesus gives us His Word, and His Word is full of forgiveness, life and salvation.

His death on the Cross is a promise. It's a promise that thieves and sinners will be with Him in paradise. His resurrection is a promise that He has overcome sin and death.

Baptism is a promise that your sins are forgiven and you are a child of God. Absolution is a promise that your sins are forgiven and there is a "not guilty" judgment entered for you. The preaching of Jesus is a promise that all that He has done is done for you. The Lord's Supper is a promise that Jesus will live in you and you in Him and He will raise you on the Last Day.

We make and break promises, and experience promises made and broken by others. But God is all about making promises and keeping them, and not horrible, deadly, bad promises, but good, loving, merciful, and forgiving promises of putting away your sins and giving you life beyond this life—an everlasting life with Him. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Who trusts in God A strong abode In heav'n and earth possesses; Who looks in love To Christ above, No fear that heart oppresses. In You alone, Dear Lord, we own Sweet hope and consolation, Our shield from foes, Our balm for woes, Our great and sure salvation.

("Who Trusts in God a Strong Abode" LSB 714, st.1)

Tuesday of the 19th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 20, 2020

Today's Reading: Ephesians 4:22-28

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 19:1-20; Matthew 15:1-20

...that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

(Ephesians 4:22-24)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Okay, the Old Man has got to go. Your Old man's conduct and behavior are terrible. Your ignoring God's Word, treating His Name like a cuss word, dishonoring your parents, killing others with your words and thoughts, your lust and desires for what isn't holy marriage, your taking what doesn't belong to you, your trash-talking others, your discontent with all that God has given you: It all. Must. Go.

Then the New Man will get busy! The New Man lives in true righteousness and holiness. The New Man has not even a speck of sin in him and wants to do nothing but glorify God and serve others. The New Man wants to live joyfully as a member of the Body of Christ and happily carries out his vocations and callings, whatever they may be.

So how do you get from one to the other? The truth is, as long as you're in this life, you are both. And so this work of putting off the Old Man and putting on the New Man is not for you to do in an epic display of self-discipline and willpower. It's the Spirit's work to do in you by delivering to you exactly what you need.

To the Old Man, the Spirit delivers the death-dealing, crucifying, killing Law to crush the Old Adam, to drown and put him to death. And to the New Man He delivers the Good News of forgiveness for the sake of Jesus, who was crucified and risen for you. To the New Man is given the promises over and over of Baptism, Absolution, and Jesus' Body and Blood. It is by this daily putting down of the Old Man and the daily renewing of the promises to the New Man that the Holy Spirit is actually working in you to put off that old conduct and live in righteousness and holiness.

In Jesus, you can't be anything other than a dead Old Man and an active and alive New Man. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Fruitful trees, the Spirit's sowing, May we ripen and increase, Fruit to life eternal growing, Rich in love and joy and peace.

("Fruitful Trees, the Spirit's Sowing" LSB 691, st.1)

Wednesday of the 19th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 21, 2020

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism:* Table of Duties,
Civil Government

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 20:1-20; Matthew 15:21-39

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrong-doer. (Romans 13:1-4)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Christians are duty-bound to submit to the authorities placed over us. In the civil realm and the Church, our authorities are a protection and guide for us. Yes, we may look around today and wonder what in the world is going on with our political system and what is happening to our countries. "I mean, can't we all just get along?"

This is where the Christian is to be wise and discerning. With our eyes we see a world that seems upside down, but that doesn't mean it has stopped being God's world. God still rules this fallen world, and we are to obey those placed over us. However, we also need to pay attention to our consciences and trust the Lord when the authorities ask us to do something contrary to God's Word. There are times we must let Scripture bind us regardless of the outcome to our bodies and freedoms. As Christ says, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17). Still we are assured that regardless of what happens to us in this world, our Baptism has sealed us to God through Christ, and He will be with us. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down, Now scornfully surrounded with thorns, Thine only crown; O sacred Head, what glory, what bliss till now was Thine! Yet, though despised and gory, I joy to call Thee mine.
(*"O Sacred Head, Now Wounded"* LSB 449, st.1)

Thursday of the 19th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 22, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 21:1-23; Matthew 16:1-12

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the Sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the Earth. (Matthew 12:39-40)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. "Sign. Sign. Everywhere a sign" (Five Man Electrical Band). The old song remains true except in the opposite way for the scribes and Pharisees. They wanted to see a sign from Jesus, but the time for signs as signals that Jesus is the Messiah had come to an end and it was time for the Messiah to do what He came to earth to do: die and be raised again. Christ looks to the people asking for a sign and says, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." One more. The ultimate sign. Three days in the belly of the Earth. This is no mere sign, but is the final showing. It is the redemption of all mankind. It is also our future.

We often wish for signs of God's presence and work in our lives. We sometimes challenge God to prove His existence to us through a sign or to give us something tangible to indicate which way we should go on a major decision. Ultimately, we can rely on His promises as revealed in His Word and in His Gifts to us, no matter what the future may hold.

In Holy Baptism, with actual water, we are baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ. We are taken with Him into the belly of the earth and are raised again with Him to new life. In His Supper we can touch and taste the bread and wine that are His Body and Blood, given and shed for us. This is no mere sign or symbol; this is our very eternal life given to us and shed on the Cross for us so that we could be washed clean and be called children of God. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

There is nothing worth comparing To this lifelong comfort sure! Open-eyed my grave is staring: Even there I'll sleep secure. Though my flesh awaits its raising, Still my soul continues praising: I am baptized into Christ; I'm a child of paradise! ("God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It" LSB 594, st.4)

St. James of Jerusalem, Brother of Jesus and Martyr

OCTOBER 23, 2020

Today's Reading: Acts 15:12-22

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 24:10-25:10; Matthew 16:13-28

*But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house."
(Matthew 13:57)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. James, called the "brother" of Jesus, is the author of the epistle that bears his name. He was, as church tradition holds, stoned by the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem.

James was not hated because he was misunderstood. He was hated and put to death because he preached Christ. As long as there are people in the world who think they are good enough NOT to need a Savior, they will prove to God how pious they are by getting rid of the people who teach the true Word of God.

We shouldn't be surprised. Jesus said this would happen. Rather than some easy life full of material comforts, Jesus actually promises that His disciples will have persecution and suffering.

It's no different than what happened to Jesus. James died for the same reason Jesus did. Those who think they were "righteous" got rid of Jesus because He ruined their religion by calling them to repent of trying to save themselves and to trust in Him.

In Holy Baptism you were united to Jesus Christ who was crucified and raised for you. His resurrection is your certain hope that even if the world were to kill you, like it did James, it is not the end. On the Last Day, the Lord will raise you from the dead and give you everlasting life.

The enemies of Jesus figure that killing Jesus' followers will rid the world of them. But the Gospel continues to be preached, the Spirit continues to call and convert sinners, and Christians continue to die in the hope and assurance that they will be raised from the dead.

Persecution and evil can't defeat Jesus and His Church. The world can take the lives of His beloved sheep, but that's not the end of them. In the end, on the Last Day, the Lord will return and we shall have everlasting life. James knew this. And it is Jesus' promise for all those He has made His own through faith in His blood. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

We sing of James, Christ's brother, Who at Jerusalem Told how God loved the Gentiles And, in Christ, welcomed them. Rejoicing in salvation May we too, by God's grace, Extend Christ's invitation To all the human race.

("By All Your Saints in Warfare" LSB 518, st.27)

Saturday of the 19th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 24, 2020

Today's Reading: Introit for the 20th Sunday after Trinity
(Psalm 48:1, 9-11; antiphon: Liturgical Text)

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 25:17-26:19; Matthew 17:1-13

We have thought, O God, on Your lovingkindness, In the midst of Your temple.
(From the Introit for the 20th Sunday after Trinity)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. In the Lord's house, we think of lots of things besides His lovingkindness. In church, while we are singing and hearing the Word of God read and proclaimed, we often think about where we are going to eat after church. We think of the homework we have to do later. We think about that fight we had with someone. We think about that noisy kid a few pews up. We think about nothing at all. It seems that as soon as we're ready to hear God's Word, our sinful flesh tries to think about almost anything else.

And while your mind is wandering? The promises of Jesus are declared. Proclaimed. They are preached into your ears. It is by those promises that the Holy Spirit grabs hold of you and keeps you in the one, true faith, in His Christian Church.

The lovingkindness of God is that He doesn't kick us out when we aren't paying attention. Rather, He continues to deliver His mercy through His Word and gifts. He continues to proclaim Christ crucified for sinners. For you. He continues to absolve and feed sinners even when they haven't heard every word of the sermon.

Repent! Repent of not paying attention. Repent of letting your mind wander. Repent of finding things to think about and pay attention to other than the Word of God you are hearing. Repent and believe the Good News that the Word Christ is speaking to you is really Good News—a Word that saves sinners. For there, in the Divine Service of Jesus' Gifts, His lovingkindness is at work drawing your ears, heart, and mind back to His good gifts—always back to His gifts and your standing as a dear child of God for Jesus' sake. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

I thank Thee, Jesus, Sun from heaven, Whose radiance hath brought light to me; I thank Thee, who has richly given All that could make me glad and free; I thank Thee that my soul is healed By what Thy lips revealed.
(“Thee Will I Love, My Strength, My Tower” LSB 693, st.3)

The 20th Sunday after Trinity

OCTOBER 25, 2020

Today's Reading: Matthew 22:1-14

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 27:1-26; Matthew 17:14-27

So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.
(Matthew 22:10)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Being good doesn't get you into the Kingdom of God. Being bad doesn't keep you out. Jesus is teaching us that being brought to His wedding feast, being dragged in, is God's work, through His servants—His pastors who preach the Gospel.

The man gets thrown out because he refuses to wear the customary wedding garment that was freely provided by the host. He doesn't want to live as one who is baptized. Maybe he thinks he's good enough to be there without a wedding garment. Maybe he just doesn't want to be there at all and doesn't care. Either way, it's not the host's fault the man has to be kicked out, it's the man's own fault. He is "speechless." He has no confession. He can't say, "I'm here because of your grace in inviting me and dragging me in."

Jesus brought you into the wedding feast. He didn't bring you because you are good. He won't throw you out because you are bad. His death on Calvary assures your place. His resurrection means it's a wedding bash and not a funeral supper. He has washed and clothed you for the party in the waters of Baptism. He's the main course in the feast of His Body and Blood.

There are two kinds of people who will be thrown out to the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. First, there are those who didn't want to come in the first place. They are the ones who hear the Good News that Jesus is their Savior and say, "No thanks. Don't need Him. I've got better things to do." Second, there are those who are brought in but throw off their wedding garments, despise their Baptism and then have nothing to say when asked. That's on them. They've thrown it away by unbelief.

But you have been brought in. You have been clothed. You are ready to enjoy the feast because the Lord has made you a part of His party. Jesus has brought you to an everlasting celebration of life and salvation. Party on in the Name ✠ of Jesus! Amen.

Grant, we implore You, merciful Lord, to Your faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve You with a quiet mind; 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 20th Sunday after Trinity)

Monday of the 20th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 26, 2020

Today's Reading: Isaiah 55:1-9

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 28:1-22; Matthew 18:1-20

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,”
says the LORD. (Isaiah 55:8)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. These words of Isaiah are often quoted when something disastrous happens that we were not expecting. As if We would never cause an earthquake or a baby to die, but things like this happen, so we often think God has something else up His sleeve.

But these words of the prophet mean much more than just “God does stuff we don’t understand.” They mean that His whole way of dealing with us is just unthinkable and unfathomable because He doesn’t give us what we deserve.

When bad things happen, the Old Adam can only conclude that God is out to get us. Pay us back. Punish us. What the Old Adam doesn’t understand is that everything that happens is given by God to drive us to Christ, who saves us without any of our own effort or merit or worthiness.

God’s ways are not our ways because He brings us into His kingdom without our deserving it or working for it. God’s ways are not our ways because He gives up His own Son into suffering and death to save us while we are still sinners. God’s ways are not our ways because He gives us what is Christ’s and gives Jesus what is ours. God’s ways are not our ways because He raised Jesus from the dead. His ways are not our ways because He gives us life when we think we only have death in store for us. His ways are not our ways because He uses water and words and bread and wine to save and forgive us.

Indeed, the Lord’s ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts. Our ways and thoughts turn to how we can impress God or avoid Him. But His ways and thoughts are all about saving you and giving you everlasting life. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Jesus Christ, my Lord, So meek in deed and word, You suffered death to save us Because Your love would have us Be heirs of heav’nly gladness When ends this life of sadness. (“In God, my Faithful God” LSB 745, st.4)

Tuesday of the 20th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 27, 2020

Today's Reading: Ephesians 5:15-21

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 29:1-29; Matthew 18:21-35

*Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.
(Ephesians 5:15)*

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever heard someone say, “Do you know what the Lord’s will is for your life?” Maybe that comes up in discussions about what job to get or what classes to take or what college to attend. Should I date this person? What career do I want to shoot for? Well, what is the Lord’s will in all of those things?

The Lord’s will is this: that you be saved from your sins through faith in Christ Jesus, be raised from the dead and have eternal life. That’s the Lord’s will. He’s accomplished that will for you in Jesus, who died for you and rose for you. He’s brought that will to bear in your life by baptizing you and making you a part of His Church, feeding you with the Lord’s Supper and putting His Word into your ears. His will is done when you hear and believe His Word.

The “unwise” part that Paul warns us about is living as if that will of God is something other than what it is. Maybe it’s living as if God’s will is that you “be happy” and therefore you should just do whatever you want, whatever makes you feel good. Maybe it’s that God’s will is to micromanage your every single decision, making you wonder and worry about whether or not you are doing the “right” thing by picking one choice of college or classes over another. Watch out! That sort of talk about God’s will isn’t really about Him. It’s about you!

Christ has set you free! His will is that you live freely in Him. You might choose one college or another, drive a new or a used car, have an iPhone or an Android phone. But either way, you’re a forgiven sinner in Christ. He didn’t save you so that you are burdened by the guilt of trying to “discern God’s will for your life.” He is loud and clear about what His will is: that you be saved. And more than that, He is dedicated to making that will happen for you, so that you are indeed saved, forgiven, and have everlasting life. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

The will of God is always best And shall be done forever; And they who trust in Him are blest; He will forsake them never. He helps indeed In time of need; He chastens with forbearing. They who depend On God, their friend, Shall not be left despairing. (“The Will of God is Always Best” LSB 758, st.1)

St. Simon and St. Jude, Apostles

OCTOBER 28, 2020

Today's Reading: John 15:12-21

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 30:1-20; Matthew 19:1-15

“Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”
(John 15:20)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Why do we have a special day to remember St. Simon and St. Jude? Why do we set aside days to remember any of the apostles? Weren't they just men? Are they any better than any other Christian?

The apostles do hold a special place in the Church. They are the men who were eyewitnesses of Jesus' words and deeds and saw Him alive again after His resurrection. He called and ordained them to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins to the ends of the earth. And that's what they did, not even shrinking in the face of persecution and death. They gladly gave up their lives because they knew that if Jesus rose, they would rise, too.

We don't commemorate apostles for their own sake but to be reminded that Jesus called real men into the holy ministry to carry out the task of being His voice on the earth. Jesus is one man, but the apostles were twelve. After His Ascension there were twelve mouths to preach Jesus. And the apostles ordained pastors wherever they went, so the number of mouths grew.

Because of those preachers, the Good News that the sins of the world and death have been overcome by Jesus' death and resurrection is carried everywhere. The washing of regeneration takes place in Baptism; sinners are absolved; the Lord's Supper is given out. The apostolic ministry (the apostles and those after them who preach what they preached) ensures that Jesus will always be giving His Good News to the world and saving sinners just like you—even two thousand years later! In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Praise, Lord, for Your apostles, Saint Simon and Saint Jude. One love, one hope impelled them To tread the way, renewed. May we with zeal as earnest The faith of Christ maintain, Be bound in love together, And life eternal gain.
(“By All Your Saints in Warfare” LSB 518, st.28)

Thursday of the 20th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 29, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 31:1-29; Matthew 19:16-30

Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 19:16-19)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The beginning of our text in Matthew has always boggled my mind. I've never been sure why the rich young man would say that he had kept all of the commandments since his youth. On top of that, when Christ answers his question, "What good deed must I do to have eternal life?" Christ points His finger to the pulse of the most important thing to the rich young man: his riches. As the rich young man walks away, he doesn't realize that he has broken each of the commandments, including loving his neighbor as himself.

Christ's death and resurrection definitively answer the question of "doing" good deeds to enter heaven" once and for all. We cannot "do" enough "good deeds" in order to receive salvation. Salvation is through Christ alone. Of course the commandments from God are good and wise and we are to keep them. But we don't. The treasures we hold in our hearts are more valuable to us on earth than the treasure awaiting us in Jesus. So, what shall we do? Trust Jesus. He kept the commandments for you, living a perfect life in your place. Be subject to Him in all things. Love one another, and when you sin, repent, for in the Absolution is the kingdom of God. Rejoice in your Baptism, for through it you belong to God forever. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

To Jesus we for refuge flee, Who from the curse has set us free, And humbly worship at His throne, Saved by His grace through faith alone.
("The Law of God is Good and Wise" LSB 579, st.6)

Friday of the 20th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 30, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 31:30-32:27; Matthew 20:1-16

For I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you. And evil will befall you in the latter days, because you will do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands.

(Deuteronomy 31:29)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. You almost have to laugh out loud at what Moses says about the people of God, the Children of Israel. “I’ve told you all this stuff God has done for you; I’ve told you everything God wants you to do and how He wants you to live. But you’re just going to go off and do whatever you want after I’m gone anyway.” Then Moses goes on to sing an epic song about how Yahweh has loved and put up with these sinners and made them His own people!

There is a great hope among Christians that once we are Christians we will act better. That we will improve. That we will get better and better. We should certainly strive to love God and serve our neighbor. But what happens when we don’t? A pastor might be accused of not preaching God’s Word enough if he just assumes people are going to sin. Sinners don’t change much, though. The Children of Israel aren’t different from God’s people in the New Testament. God saves us. We still sin. That’s the simul life you live as saint and sinner in one body in this life.

Our hope is not in our improvement. Our hope is in Christ. Our comfort is not in how much less we sin from one day to the next. Our comfort is in the declaration by God Himself that we are His beloved people and that He does not count our sins against us. Our peace is that when we forget His Word, He forgets our sins. Our joy and hope and certainty are in the fact that Jesus died and rose to save sinners. Our faith is that by Baptism and Absolution and Supper, God has forgiven us and overlooked the very sins for which He should condemn us forever.

What do those who wander off and do their own thing need to hear? What do you need to hear? Christ came into this world to save sinners—to save you. And He has done exactly that. He will deliver you safely to the Promised Land of Paradise and eternal life. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O keep me watchful, then, and humble; Permit never more to stray. Uphold me when my feet would stumble, And keep me on the narrow way. Fill all my nature with Thy light, O Radiance strong and bright!

(“Thee Will I Love, My Strength, My Tower” LSB 694, st.4)

Reformation Day

OCTOBER 31, 2020

Today's Reading: Romans 3:19-29

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 32:28-52; Matthew 20:17-34

Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. (John 8:36)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Pharisees of Jesus' day thought they were free, but they were actually slaves of sin. That's because they thought they could overcome their sins on their own by living a good life. In the Middle Ages the Church got sidetracked and taught much of that as well: that we have to save ourselves by being good enough. The Lutheran Reformation reminded the Church and the world that we are indeed free from sin but only because of Christ. That's true freedom from sin!

It's not just about particular times and places. Under the curse of sin, we always think that we can just work our way out of our sins by being good. We can always try to please God and He will accept our works as at least a good faith effort that He should reward. But the Gospel rescues us from that false religion!

The Good News that delivers Jesus declares that Jesus saves sinners by His death on the Cross and His resurrection on Easter. The true religion is that we don't deny or shy away from just how sinful we are: We are doomed! But that just means we have an even greater Savior: Jesus!

The Lutheran Reformation (and the Lutherans who were named for what Luther taught) was always about cutting the strings and removing the conditions men had placed upon God's grace and mercy. Jesus saves us with no strings attached. No conditions. No requirements. Everything God has for you is a gift. Jesus? Gift! Your Baptism? Gift! Absolution? Gift! Lord's Supper? Gift! Gifts are free. Gifts are given without your deserving them and without God's expecting anything in return. They are just given because, well, they're gifts.

We are always in danger of slipping back into the way of thinking which says, "I can earn God's forgiveness and love." The Reformation preaching is the Lord's way of rescuing us from that by saying, "You already have my forgiveness and love. It's my gift to you in Jesus Christ. No strings attached." In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Preserve Your Word and preaching, The truth that makes us whole, The mirror of Your glory, The pow'r that saves the soul. Oh, may this living water, This dew of heav'nly grace, Sustain us while here living Until we see Your face.
(*"Preserve Your Word, O Savior" LSB 658, st.4*)

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

Unless otherwise noted, Biblical quotations are from the ESV.

Higher Things Reflections are free, like the Gospel! They may be reproduced for congregational, personal, and other non-commercial use. Please use the following attribution: "Daily Reflections are provided by Higher Things. www.higherthings.org. Used with permission."

Higher Things exists and grows on the basis of donations and free-will offerings from congregations and individuals. All donations are tax-deductible. If you wish to contribute to the work of Higher Things, please send your donation to:

Higher Things, Inc.

P.O. Box 155

Holt, MO 64048

(Donations are also accepted at www.higherthings.org via credit card or PayPal.)

Visit our website at www.higherthings.org to read, listen to, subscribe to, or view the ASL video of Reflections each day.
