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

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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 Fourth Sunday after Trinity  JUNE 27, 2021

**Today’s Reading:** Luke 6:36-42  
**Daily Lectionary:** Joshua 21:1-24; Acts 8:26-40  

“Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:36)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. If you read it on its own it’s usually quoted, “Judge not lest ye be judged,” is the only command that gets easier the less you care. The less you care about your neighbor, the less you care what they do. The less you care about God’s Word, the less you care to talk about uncomfortable things like sin. It’s the religion of today, but it’s a lonely and bitter one. It can’t cope with tragedy. It can’t find the source of pain. It can’t fix it. It can only lift itself up above someone else who broke its chief commandment. Thou shalt not judge.

There is a second like it: Thou shalt not be a hypocrite. It’s catching, even among us. We bring God’s Word to bear whenever we notice something our neighbor can’t do, so we won’t get accused of judging them. We bring it to bear whenever there’s something we can’t do either, so we don’t get accused of being hypocrites. The only thing we’re showing is that we care more about what our neighbor thinks of us than what they’re going through. This leaves nothing to offer anyone in pain. It speaks only to sinners, but never to victims. It lacks mercy. And that’s the whole point of this.

It begins with a promise. Your Father in heaven is merciful. You are of mercy now. Be merciful. It ends with a speck in your neighbor’s eye. This is not a call not to ignore your neighbor in pain, but to help them, even if you have to confront your own sin and receive forgiveness for it first. Actually, that’s a good plan either way. There is a log in my eye even as there is a speck in yours. The question is, should we leave it there and go on ignoring each other in pain, or should we talk about mercy? Don’t worry about judging. Focus on mercy.

Mercy comes from only one place. Jesus gives real mercy. Not just empty words. He backs His by deeds and truth. He gives it only to hypocrites who hope in something greater than themselves. It’s bad to be a hypocrite, but Jesus saves sinners. He bears the damage sin does and names you forgiven. He calls your neighbor forgiven, too. The more you deal with your neighbor’s sins, the more you wear that victory in your Baptism, which isn’t a promise that nothing bad will happen to you. It’s a promise that nothing bad that can happen to you will keep you in the grave. No burden put on you can stop you from rising, and nothing you can ever do can stain the white robes of salvation you already wear. God has redeemed your soul in safety. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

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

(Collect for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity)

Saturday of the Ninth Week after Trinity  AUGUST 7, 2021

**Today’s Reading:** Introit for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity  
(Psalm 55: 1, 4-5, 16; antiphon: vs. 16a, 17b, 18a, 22a)  
**Daily Lectionary:** 1 Samuel 20:24-42; 1 Corinthians 1:1-25

I call to God, and he hears my voice; he redeems my soul in safety.  
(From the Introit for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. The psalmist says that God is near enough to you to hear your voice. He is close enough to carry your burdens and sustain you. It sounds great, but plenty of Christians still collapse under burdens too heavy to carry. Plenty cry out to God and don’t hear an answer. Fear and trembling come upon them, and horror overwhelms them. The Lord promises to save, but if you don’t know where to look, the promises seem empty.

His will is not to hide when we need mercy, but become all the more apparent. This was never meant to be a secret, a riddle, or some kind of inner peace that you have to achieve. Where you look for God in days of trouble matters. There is a place He has promised to be. You won’t find Him anywhere else. It is where He redeems your soul. In the darkest of times you’ll find God on the Cross for you.

To look elsewhere is usually to come up empty. Sometimes God works in great power. Sometimes He doesn’t. Sometimes your enemies fall. Sometimes they don’t. But God always works in great weakness. God becomes man, and He bears the Cross to save those who can’t save themselves. He conquers sin, death, and the power of the devil, not by strength, but by weakness, so that those who can’t find strength to go on can find God to carry them. It’s easy to find God in our trials. He’s right where He said He would be. He’s a God who can save even in weakness. Cast your burdens on the Lord. Then look to where He bears them upon the Cross. That way we can call our salvation finished even while we still feel fear and trembling.

The answer to the prayers of burdened Christians is “It is finished.” The path forward is through the grave and back out again. The hope that surpasses all understanding is that Jesus sustains you by a victory won in weakness. You wear that victory in your Baptism, which isn’t a promise that nothing bad will happen to you. It’s a promise that nothing bad that can happen to you will keep you in the grave. No burden put on you can stop you from rising, and nothing you can ever do can stain the white robes of salvation you already wear. God has redeemed your soul in safety. In the Name of Jesus. Amen. But God had seen my wretched state before the world’s foundation, and mindful of His mercies great, He planned for my salvation. He turned to me a father’s heart; He did not choose the easy part but gave His dearest treasure.  

("Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice" LSB 556, st 445

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It seems anticlimactic, but this is how God chooses to work. He speaks bit by bit, more and more, insisting that His Word be spoken, even when people will reject it, because He knows what they deserve. They beg Him for mercy, and He weeps. Maybe he’s remembering all he went through, or is still mourning his father. Maybe he’s just heartbroken that his brothers still don’t understand. That’s the problem with speechlessness. It leaves us wondering if God is actually working at all.

God doesn’t want us to fill in the silence on our own. Joseph, full of the Holy Spirit, answers his terrified brothers with a promise that comforts us all. “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”

He tells them the truth. They meant evil for him. He then He points to God, who has a power that nothing in all His creation has. God meant it for good. He took all of their evil and wove a web that would bring good out of it. That doesn’t make the evil acceptable or justify those who commit it. Only the Cross can do that. But it highlights the God who will not leave us to the damage we do to each other and ourselves. He works good from our evil. Only God can take something already ruined and bring about something perfect. Look to the passion of our Lord. Evil everywhere, yet God meant it for good, that many people would be justified, kept alive through death, as they are today. The evil that is evil, but it cannot derail God’s purpose: that many people would be kept alive, as they are today.

The greatest thing Joseph can tell his brothers is that they aren’t the main characters. God is. It means God did this to Joseph. But again, we can find Him nearby—in the silence, in the Name of Jesus. Amen. The evil isn’t over. It is still evil, but it cannot derail God’s purpose: that many people would be kept alive, as they are today.

May God bestow on us His grace, with blessings rich provide us; And may the brightness of His face To life eternal guide us, That we His saving health may know, His gracious will and pleasure, And also to the nations show Christ’s riches without measure And unto God convert them.

("May God Bestow on Us His Grace" LSB 823, st.1)
Today's Reading: Matthew 16:13-20

Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”  
(Matthew 16)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Who do you say that the Son of man is? We’re still asking the same question. We’re past the days when people haven’t heard the name Jesus, but if you listen, you will hear that we all seem to be talking about someone different.

Who do people say that the Son of man is? Some go for the high road and say He is just the example. He’s the guy you follow when you feel bad about being bad. He helps you behave better until you don’t want to be bad anymore. But most of the time He just ends up being the guy used to bash you over the head when you don’t do what someone else wants you to.

Some go for the low road and say He is a bigot. That He calls people sinners in a hate-filled book which does nothing but set the scene for hate crimes in the name of religion. Bigot-Jesus picks the sinners who sin differently than I do and says there’s no forgiveness for them until they change, never mind that I’ve been here confessing the same sins week after week for years.

Have you noticed a common theme yet? Grab hold of the Law, ignore the Gospel completely, then weaponize religion. It’s what the people wanted from Elijah. It’s what they wanted from John the Baptist and Jeremiah, who were ridiculed and hated by the world and the religious alike, not because they were wrong, but because they called everyone to seek mercy in the Lord, who not only calls sin wrong, but loves sinners enough to forgive them.

But who do you say the Son of man is? This is not a “What does Jesus mean to you?” essay. That’s where all of those other ideas went wrong. Not one is a confession of who God is, just speeches about how we’d use Him. You can try to use the Law, but you can only receive the Gospel. “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

It makes it look like everyone who hates Him was right all along. Yours is a God who bleeds. Yet He did it for them, and for you. He did it to forgive every standard you fell short of. Every demand of the Law. He died for every sinner who is sinking in despair and hate and pain. He did not wield a weapon, but took up a Cross. He did not come bearing only Law, but brought with it the Gospel. Yours is the God who gives mercy. Yours is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and you have life in His Name. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

O love, how deep, how broad, how high, Beyond all thought and fantasy, That God, the Son of God, should take Our mortal form for mortals’ sake!  
(“O Love, How Deep” LSB 544, st.1)

Thursday of the Ninth Week after Trinity
AUGUST 5, 2021

Today’s Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:6-13

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.  
(1 Corinthians 10:12)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. If you look at the sinners, the rebelling Israelites, the Pharisees in the Scriptures, and you don’t say, “Wow…that’s me,” then you are not a Christian. These are God’s own words. Christ says, “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). If you don’t see yourself as one of the sinners, one of the sexually immoral, or those who put Christ to the test, or those who grumble over the Word of God and His chosen leaders, Christ did not come to call you. If you are not one of these sinners, the Church isn’t for you. Christ isn’t for you.

We’re supposed to identify with the side that God is mad at, not with Him and the righteous ones. He tells us that’s why these things were written down for us. “Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction.” These things are here as examples for us. We’re supposed to identify with them. We’re supposed to see the consequence of our sin. We’re not supposed to like it. There are parts of the Bible we won’t like. They’re supposed to upset us.

We’re upset because we’re starting to realize that we’re sinners. The things we have done, the things we do, and our sin inherited from Adam are all the exact opposite of God. In these examples, we see what happens to those people whose actions and words strike so close to home. Twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. They were destroyed by serpents. Destroyed by the Destroyer Himself. Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed, lest he fall.

Paul never promises that God won’t give you more than you can handle. God gives you His Law, which you clearly can’t handle. He does, however, provide the way of escape. It isn’t that we can just escape being sinners. It’s that we can escape the destruction such sin brings. We can escape and take refuge under a powerful promise. God is faithful. When we were still sinners, Christ died for the ungodly. When we repeated the sins of our forefathers, God bore the wrath Himself upon the Cross. God is faithful. He provides the way of escape. That way is Jesus, who bears the Cross for you. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, when we fall or go astray, Absolve and lift us up, we pray, And through the Sacrament increase Our faith till we depart in peace.  
(“Lord, Help Us Ever to Retain” LSB 865, st.1)
Today's Reading: Small Catechism: Lord's Prayer, Seventh Petition

But deliver us from evil. (Small Catechism: Lord's Prayer, Seventh Petition)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. It's dark down here. There's a lot of evil in the world. It's one of the rare places we can agree with the atheists. The difference is that we can find an evil one, the devil, stirring the pot. We can label the roots of so many of the evil things men do to each other in the Ten Commandments. Even if you don't know the name of it, though, the prayer stands. We want to be free from it. Deliver us from evil. Deliver us from everything that works for our harm under the kingdom of Satan.

We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.

If you make this a future event, Christianity becomes nothing more than a race to the end, which is why so many Christians talk about life in heaven more than life today. If you see God delivering you from evil everywhere His name is hallowed, everywhere His kingdom is manifest, and everywhere His will is done, there can be comfort today, too. You were delivered from evil where God brought you His Holy Name and given You His Holy Spirit.

You can find deliverance from evil in God's Church. Here, your sins are forgiven, and you are given an identity not rooted in shame and vice. Here, you are tied to the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting in a way that even the prince of this world cannot undo.

Here, you are kept safe and secure until at last you join the Church triumphant at rest. In all of it, the comfort lies in the source of deliverance, not the distance you happen to be from the evil. God remains the source of every good, even in the face of death. He has already worked a blessed end upon the Cross and rose from the grave, and as He feeds you with His Body and Blood to bring the same to you. The same God works where His Word is preached and His Sacrament is administered. You can see that the kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but so that we would see that the kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, and we pray in this petition that it may come to us also. Then we can look at how it does come.

God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity. The kingdom of God is where the King is working. And God is working here for you. This petition calls attention to the fact that God doesn't need things to look perfect in order for Him to dwell with us. It points to the Lord who brought heaven to earth as angelic choirs sang of His birth, as He healed the sick and forgave the sinners, as He conquered death upon the Cross and rose from the grave, and as He feeds you with His Body and Blood to bring the same to you. The same God works where His Word is preached and He calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies, and keeps the whole Christian Church on earth, daily and richly forgiving your sins, and the sins of all believers.

This petition is a gift because it points to the places where God is already doing these things. That turns the prayer from a burden into a gift. Now you don't have to hasten God's kingdom. He's bringing it by His Holy Spirit where His Word is preached and His Sacrament is administered. You can know where it is and pray that it is given to you, too. You can find comfort in receiving the gifts. Now you don't have to imagine the resurrection to finally be near God. You can find Him brought near to you. The kingdom of heaven is at hand where the Holy Spirit works repentance by God's Word, that by believing it, you would find comfort in praying to Your Father in heaven, and have life in His only Son. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

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

("Our Father, Who from Heaven Above" LSB 766, st.3)
Today's Reading: Romans 12:14-21

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. (Romans 12:14)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. I can tell you something is a sin because it’s in the Bible. Fine. If you want to know why, wait till it’s been done against you. It’s called wrong because it hurts. Sin breaks stuff. It’s easy to see why something is a sin when it’s done against you. It’s harder when you’re the one hurting others, accidentally or otherwise. We get so wrapped up in our passions that we lose sight of the damage we wreak, but when someone hurts us, things get cleared up real quick. It can leave you wanting a God who punishes others more than a God who forgives you, spending each day watching those who hurt you, waiting for them to get theirs. Sometimes they do, but more often than not it looks like they don’t. Even if they do, it doesn’t give you peace.

If all you can really hope for in life is to see someone else hurt, you don’t want peace for yourself, and you’ll never get it, either. There’s too much sin in this world to keep track of. Even more, it says something about the kind of God you expect. He says He treats all sinners the same. That includes you. Either He forgives you and those who sin against you or He doesn’t. They’re connected, even into the prayer we pray each day. “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

It’s not God dangling your forgiveness in front of you for you to earn by coming up with something of your own. It’s a reminder that all forgiveness, for you and for those who sin against you, comes from the same place: the Cross. Remember that Jesus died for your neighbor. “Vengeance is mine,” says the Lord. He doesn’t ignore what was done against you. He pays for it Himself on the Cross. There’s nothing left to repay because Jesus has already paid the price. You can even go look at it. See the crucifix. It’s God’s justice for every pain caused by someone else, for every pain you held onto, and for every pain you’ve caused, too.

Vengeance is the Lord’s. He paid it to His own Son. He overcame evil with good. Start there, and there is a place for kindness and love for your enemy to be sustained, and even to grow. Bless those who curse you. Call them sinners whom Jesus died for. Heap burning coals on their heads. Show them the source of all that’s pure. Show them the censer full of burning coal that touched Isaiah’s tongue and put away all his sin. Show them what forgiveness looks like. Show him where it comes from: not your heart, but the Cross. That’s forgiveness that overcomes evil with good. In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Amen.

Thursday of the Fourth Week after Trinity
JULY 1, 2021

Tuesday of the Ninth Week after Trinity
AUGUST 3, 2021

Daily Lectionary: 1 Samuel 17:48-18:9; Acts 27:9-26

Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. (1 Samuel 17:51)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. You are not David. Your challenges are not Goliath. This is not a promise that if you just believe enough, you’ll conquer anything you put your mind to, no matter how big it is. That’s called works-righteousness. We don’t do that here.

Be honest with yourself. Nobody prays that they would be weaker so that God’s strength would be magnified. We want to be superheroes. We want to be the one who conquers. We want to overcome challenges. We want to be Goliath. That desire has to die. This isn’t you vs. the world. This is true God against false gods. Christ against my idols, like power, wealth, and might. Only the true God can stand. The false gods will all turn to dust eventually.

You are not David. Jesus is. He kills Goliath, your sin, the death-bringer. He doesn’t do it as we expect, in an epic end game battle with cameos and powerful music. He doesn’t grab a mythical weapon used by mighty beings in an awe-inspiring moment. He doesn’t watch too many movies. He overcomes not by strength, but by weakness. Christ, the Son of David, conquers sin on the Cross. Goliath died. Old Adam died. Sin died. Jesus won by weakness. Death is swallowed up in victory.

Then He cuts off Goliath’s head with his own sword. Death is destroyed by death. Christ’s death undoes your own. Our hope becomes centered not in superhero movies and idolatrous might, but in a weakness that overcame the strength of the world. It scattered the forces of darkness. It undoes the accusations of the evil one. Point to the Cross, where your David, Christ, overcame your sin, Goliath. The evil warrior is fallen, and nobody can stand behind him and threaten you.

The head becomes the trophy, the mark that death was destroyed by death. It’s why we cling to the crucifix. We hang them on our walls and wear them on our necks. This is our trophy, because our sin was brought to nothing there. We are old Adam, slain Goliath, and we are the new man. United to Jesus in death. United to Him in resurrection. The Cross is our hope and trophy. Christ has conquered, and you get the spoils. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

O Morning Star, how fair and bright! You shine with God’s own truth and light, Aglow with grace and mercy! Of Jacob’s race, King David’s son, Our Lord and master, You have won Our hearts to serve You only! Lowly, holy! Great and glorious, All victorious, Rich in blessing! Rule and might o’er all possessing! ("O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright" LSB 395, st.1)
Today's Reading: 2 Samuel 22:26-34

With the purified you deal purely, and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous. (2 Samuel 22:27)

In the Name ✞ of Jesus. Amen. To know God by the Law alone is to know a tyrant. It’s a picture of a God who waits in heaven for the chance to send people to hell. He comes across as distant to those in need and only present to punish. Using the word “Father” only twists the knife. It isn’t just an adversarial relationship. It’s a hopeless one. That kind of bitter hopelessness only twists sinners even further in upon themselves. With the crooked you make yourself seem torturous.

To know God by the Law and the Gospel is to know a Father. With the purified He deals purely. With the blameless, He shows Himself to be not a tyrant, but blameless. It isn’t that God isn’t so bad if you happen to be so good. The Law which shows us our sins wasn’t given as an obstacle to overcome. It’s just reality. Sin breaks stuff. That’s not okay. You don’t have to like it, but as we are bent on ourselves, loving our sin more than our Lord, we can only see a game to be won or a tyrant to overthrow. That’s not a battle you’re going to win. God is bigger than you are.

His way is true. We just happen to be on the wrong side of that. But He does not sit in heaven waiting to damn. He descends into the pit to save. He is a shield for those who take refuge in Him. He makes you blameless by taking your sins upon Himself to bear the Cross for you. He makes you pure by the waters of your Baptism that give you an identity in His mercy, not in your works. The Law will either drive us to the grave or to the Gospel. God does not want us lost in the darkness of death. He is your lamp that lights up your darkness. He is the shield that protects you, even from yourself. God is the One who has made your way blameless. That way is the Cross. He bears the torture your sins warrant. He insists on being a refuge, not to the good, but to the sinners. To know God as good isn’t to know yourself to be good but to know whose fault it is. The “church answer” is that the world was broken by Adam’s sin. It’s true. It just doesn’t do much to address that hollow feeling in your stomach that comes from not being able to do anything about it. Or the anger from trying to believe in a God who says He can do something, but doesn’t seem to. For all the talk about His love, His forgiveness, His miracles, things still look pretty much the same.

This Christmas text doesn’t seem helpful. Today, we step back to a Mary who would have gotten pregnant around the end of March in order to give birth around the end of December. She’s pregnant and visiting Elizabeth, probably right around the beginning of June. The Visitation which we celebrate today is carried out by the same God who shaped creation with a Word. Even while being knit together in Mary’s womb, He is on a mission to right what has been wronged. Mary sings it in the Magnificat. It’s not about what’s fair. It’s about help for those wronged by sin. Mary sings hope for you.

Jesus, refuge of the weary, Blest Redeemer, whom we love, Fountain in life’s desert dreary, Savior from the world above: Often have Your eyes, offended, Gazed upon the sinner’s fall; Yet upon the cross extended, You have borne the pain of all.

("Jesus, Refuge of the Weary” LSB 423, st.1)
Saturday of the Fourth Week after Trinity

JULY 3, 2021

Today’s Reading: Introit for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity
(Psalm 27:1a, 11-12, 14; antiphon: vs. 7, 9b)

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

Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD! (From the Introit for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Only a prayer focused on the character and promises of God can pray the word “wait.” “Wait” is not in the vocabulary of fear. Or need. Or threat of violence. When the focus of our prayer is our fear and not our God, “wait” doesn’t work because we need help now. When our prayer can only be answered by our enemies disappearing and their plans coming undone, help isn’t actually measured in the presence of a good God, just in a lack of evil around us.

If your prayer can only be answered by a lack of evil, God will seem very silent. When God’s silence in the face of these prayers sounds like you are being forsaken, pray Psalm 27. Each verse is a reflection on His character and ability to combat the fears and enemies that surround us. You have a gracious God, a God who gives good gifts. How could He not hear and answer? Your Lord is light and salvation. Who can undo what Christ has declared finished? The way of the Lord is also the truth and the life. It is a level path that enemies cannot make treacherous. So even surrounded by adversaries, false witnesses, and violence, we can wait in strength and courage, because we wait for the Lord.

Even as we wait for Him, we start to see Him at work, not in the absence of evil, but working good in the midst of it. Prayer that focuses on God can find Him working where He promised to be, among and for sinners. He is with us in the valley of the shadow of death. He makes the rough places plain. He daily and richly forgives your sins. He richly and daily provides you with all you need to support this body and life. He defends you against all danger and guards and protects you from all evil. Start with His fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, especially if you’re having trouble seeing God’s goodness simply because there’s evil around. God’s divine goodness and mercy was what put Christ on the Cross to win you a salvation that no evil could take from you.

Prayer focuses on the character and promises of God. That means if we have to wait to be free of an evil, we can do so knowing with all certainty that we have already been given the victory over it, as surely as Christ is risen from the dead. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Be still, my soul, before the Lord; On God in patience wait. God’s love, unseen, surrounds your life; God’s help will not be late.

(“Be Still, My Soul, before the Lord” LSB 77)

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity

AUGUST 1, 2021


The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. (Luke 16:8)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. It’s easy to take a look at God’s Law and assume that we’re more loving than He is. We take a lot of pleasure in assuming we’re more loving than God Almighty, except then we get really upset that life’s not fair. We look around at who gets hurt. Punished. Who sits alone. Who loses everything. And who gets a freebie. It’s not just that it isn’t equal. If we were really concerned with that, we’d give what we have to the people who don’t. It’s more that it isn’t fair. Some of the ones getting way too much are sinners we don’t like.

But God commends the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. By shrewdness he means theft. The manager makes his retirement at the master’s expense. He trades on his name, his wealth. What’s the master going to do? Just ignore it and demand the original amount? He’ll look like a tyrant. He’ll be forced to be generous. But God seems pretty pleased, too. What if He actually wanted to be generous the whole time? What if God was even generous to sinners? Not by pretending they’re not sinners, but by loving them anyway. Ignoring sin is not the same as forgiving it.

I can ignore the sin of those I love. It’s harder to actually call it what it is and love them anyway. It’s easy to love your friend when he hurts other kids: Just don’t care about the other kids. God knows all the ways sin breaks stuff that we don’t want to see. He calls it horrible and loves you anyway.

God calls right “right,” and wrong wrong, “but then forgives sinners out of mercy, not by pretending there are no debts to pay, but by paying for their sins Himself. This is what kind of God we have. He’s not concerned with fair, just with love. Mercy. Forgiveness. He gives it to you. We trade in dishonest wealth here. Unfair mercy. We didn’t earn it. It’s harder to actually call it what it is and love them anyway. It’s easy to love your friend when he hurts other kids: Just don’t care about the other kids. God knows all the ways sin breaks stuff that we don’t want to see. He calls it horrible and loves you anyway.

God calls right “right,” and wrong wrong, “but then forgives sinners out of mercy, not by pretending there are no debts to pay, but by paying for their sins Himself. This is what kind of God we have. He’s not concerned with fair, just with love. Mercy. Forgiveness. He gives it to you. We trade in dishonest wealth here. Unfair mercy. We didn’t earn it. It’s not about what we deserve. It’s not about how sneaky the steward was, but how merciful and generous the master is. This is what the unrighteous manager trades in. He expects mercy and is commended for it. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Let Your merciful ears, O LORD, be open to the prayers of Your humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please You; through Jesus Christ, You Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity)
Today's Reading: Introt for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity
(Psalm 54:1-3, 7, antiphon: vs. 4-5)


For he has delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies. (From the Introt for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity)

In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen. The psalms are of little present worth if you can't pray them along with David. When you reduce Sunday school stories to history or trivia, your prayers will falter when you actually need them to do something more than thank God for stuff. These words given to David are shaped by the Holy Spirit, and that same Spirit passes them on to you. These are godly prayers, even if they aren't cheerful. They're full of desperation, fear, and a plea for vengeance: in short, all the stuff Bible trivia teaches us to pretend we don't feel. You have these feelings. The psalms give you a place to put them. God gives you the psalter so you can pray along with David.

The psalms are of little present worth if David can't pray them with Christ. David’s desperation and fear are met with the promises of the Lord to help, but the true comfort of the psalms is not a far-off answer to present enemies, but a present God who suffers even for these for us. Christ prays these words, too. He prays for those who plot against Him and who scourge Him. He prays upon the Cross for a victory over the last great enemy, death, and He is delivered through it for you. He is risen to look in triumph on sin, death, and the power of the devil. That Christ prays these psalms, too, means God isn't just Someone who answers prayer, but Someone who becomes the answer to our prayers. He connects His suffering to your redemption. He joins His death to your life. His all-atoning sacrifice gives us not only words to pray, but boldness with which to pray them. What can our enemies do to us when we are already joined to the resurrection?

David prays the psalms and the help is already there, even as ruthless men seek his life. These aren't merely the journal entries that correspond to David’s story. They’re inspired words that transcend time because God joins them to Himself. The names of the enemies might change, but all of them come undone when Jesus becomes both the helpless and the helper upon the Cross, upholding our life even as He loses His own. David’s answer is in the crucified and risen Lord. So is yours. They’re prayers Christ prayed for us all, so that David can find comfort in them, and so can you. In the Name ☩ of Jesus. Amen.

O Christ, You walked the road Our wand’ring feet must go. You faced with us temptation’s pow’r And fought our ancient foe.

("O Christ, You Walked the Road" (LSB 424, st.1)
Monday of the Fifth Week after Trinity
JULY 5, 2021

**Today's Reading:** 1 Kings 19:11-12
**Daily Lectionary:** Joshua 23:1-16; Acts 12:1-25

And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.  
(1 Kings 19:12)

In the Name ♦ of Jesus. Amen. Elijah is hiding in a cave waiting to die. He forgot how to be disappointed, because he forgot how to hope. That’s bad. Hopelessness is not natural. We were created to hope. God made us to worship Him, to fear, love, and trust in Him. Children are born trusting in their parents’ voices. They look at the world in wonder and pretend to be the things we’ve long given up on. Hope only goes away painfully—by having it beaten and crushed and kicked until it’s ground down to nothing. One of the hardest things in the world is to see children who aren’t disappointed by their parents anymore. Elijah is hiding in a cave, not because he doesn’t believe God exists, but because he doesn’t think he can depend on God.

The reason so many of us have given up hope is that we look for God in places He isn’t. It’s a trick the devil uses to grind down hope. Even fallen man loves to put hope in the wrong thing. It’s called an idol. So Satan points us to where God isn’t and asks why He isn’t there. That makes more sense than we want to admit. God is not in the power of the fire or the earthquake. The small whispering word doesn’t seem too impressive. I cannot by my own reason or strength believe that God works in mercy and not in power. That has to come from somewhere else. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the low whispering Word of Christ.

And He still speaks. What are you doing here? Why are you hiding? Why are you afraid? You’re not as alone as you think. God would not limit Himself to your good days or your good attitude. He passes by Elijah, whispering words of peace and hope, and He passes by you, too. Not to rush past, but to dive into the valley of the shadow of death, that hope would live where there rightly should be none.

There were great earthquakes and sham trials by firelight that pierced the darkness where they accused our Lord of blasphemy and worse, as Peter hid in the courtyard. There was wind that blew as it wished, and the gale of the crowd who cried for His death. But the words worth hearing were whispered from a Cross: “It is finished.” He has died for you. The sun came back to the inheritance that cannot be taken from you. In the Name ♦ of Jesus. Amen.

To hope grown dim, to hearts turned cold Speak tongues of fire and make us bold To shine Your Word of saving grace Into each dark and loveless place.  
(“Lord Jesus Christ, with Us Abide” LSB 585, stanza 1)

Friday of the Eighth Week after Trinity
JULY 30, 2021

**Today's Reading:** Acts 20:27-38
**Daily Lectionary:** 1 Samuel 15:10-35; Acts 24:24-25:12

And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.  
(A Acts 20:32)

In the Name ♦ of Jesus. Amen. Paul writes to pastors, overseers of the flock, about the dark days to come. Wolves will come and will not spare the flock. Some pastors will speak twisted things. Paul was leaving and wouldn’t see them again on earth. Paul was martyred. Even to the faithful, he has to insist that he did not shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God to them. That’s because there are parts of it that folks didn’t want to hear. He may not speak with happiness, but he speaks with confidence.

The Church on earth wasn’t promised a cheery existence. Despite what people tell you about how much better things used to be, there were no glory days. There really never have been. The generations of Christians just had different dresses to put on the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. That’s the reason Paul’s so confident. Those three enemies that always seem like they’re on the verge of defeating us were already vanquished on the Cross.

This isn’t about Paul. This isn’t about those pastors. This isn’t about you. It isn’t our job to keep the Church going. This is about the Word, which is able to build up and give the inheritance of the holy ones. Confidence comes from the promise of Christ, not from today’s circumstances. Paul lists all sorts of things that will assault Christians. In the face of them, the Word is still able to give that inheritance to them. Nothing else can do that, so nothing else can stand. The Church has already been obtained by the blood of God. If She has the Word, She need not be afraid.

That’s why it’s so important to be steadfast in the Word. Paul insists that he declares the whole counsel of God, not just the parts people want to hear. The whole counsel, even the scary truths about the world, even the Law that condemns each sinner. The whole counsel calls us not to seek help and hope in that which cannot stand, but in that which gives the inheritance, and so gives true comfort.

Yes, you are a sinner. Yes, Christ died for you. You will be near the Cross. It will hurt, but it will save. It has already defeated the enemies who scare you. These might be dark and latter days, but the Word that still builds you up gives you the inheritance that cannot be taken from you. In the Name ♦ of Jesus. Amen.

May glorious truths that we have heard, The bright sword of Your mighty Word, Spurn Satan that Your Church be strong. Bold, unified in act and song.  
(“Lord Jesus Christ, With us Abide” LSB 585, stanza 4)
**Daily Lectionary:** 1 Samuel 14:47-15:9; Acts 24:1-23

"Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey." (1 Samuel 15:3)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Context matters, especially in the Old Testament. The Israelites weren’t meant to have a king. They insisted on having one anyway, to be like all the cool nations. God warned them. If all the other nations jumped off a bridge... Nevertheless, they persisted. God gave King Saul as punishment to Israel. It probably doesn’t feel great to be the human embodiment of punishment to an entire nation. He’s in over his head. He usually tries to do the right thing, but he does it the wrong way. It’s the same for us with the Law. We want good intentions to count, even though we make a mess of everything.

The Amalekites had a history with Israel. They picked off the weakest of the people as they left Egypt, nipping at their heels, taking the ones who couldn’t defend themselves. They were a plague upon the people of Israel that God promised Moses He would blot out.

And scene: Samuel speaks to Saul. “Thus says the Lord, kill them all.” And not just the men, but the women and the children, too. Also the animals. Devote everything of the Amalekites to destruction. Saul shows mercy to the Kenites. He doesn’t spare the women and children, but he keeps their stuff. He kept Agag their king alive, and kept all the best animals. He wanted to use those animals as a sacrifice to the Lord. While their king watched, humiliation style. The prophet Samuel is furious. This is not what was called for.

Because God doesn’t glory in destruction, even of the wicked. He will not take sacrifice from the blood we spill upon each other. He doesn’t want anyone devoted to destruction. He sends His Son for that, for you, for all. That is to be the sacrifice. There can be no salvation in any other place. As terrible as these things are, recognize the picture they paint. There is destruction apart from the Lord. The Amalekites insisted on not only being apart from God, but on preying upon His children. If they lived, wealthy, until age 100, what would still happen? We are given a physical picture of the spiritual condemnation apart from Jesus. He warns even as He protects His people. Don’t be apart from Jesus. No sacrifice but Jesus can cover your sin, but that sacrifice has already been made for you. It is enough to save and protect you. Recognize what happens here as horrible. Being apart from Christ is horrible, but being under Him is salvation. 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.

(“Not All the Blood of Beasts” LS)

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**Isaiah**

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

“...choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” (Joshua 24:15)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. God doesn’t play well with others. Put away foreign gods. He is a jealous God. It’s not that He can’t handle competition. He very clearly can. Look back at how He led Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Look at how He brought Moses and the Israelites out of Egypt. Look at what He did to their armies and the false hopes they had in themselves. He exposes the false gods for what they are. This isn’t just an “our God can beat up your god in a fight” boast. This is why: Those false gods can’t save the people who trusted in them. They couldn’t save Pharaoh or Balak. They couldn’t save Jericho or any of the various “ites,” either. They don’t have the power to save. As they stand against His people, it becomes clear. Those who would destroy the ones God calls blessed dash themselves to pieces. But that isn’t what God is concerned about.

Even this is about the forgiveness of sins. False gods only work in power, not mercy. The Lord works not only power that they can’t, but mercy that they won’t. The reason that He won’t share you, that He absolutely insists that you serve Him and Him alone, is that no other gods forgive sins. They are law gods. Ours is the God who promises not just to save us from the world, but from ourselves, from our sins. He is the God who works in mercy to those He loves, and to you.

We hear this, say Amen, and then try to mix the two. I want mercy from Jesus, but a little power from money, from fame, from popularity, from strength. “I love Jesus and.” But the “and” at the end can’t forgive your sins. When you mix the two together, you stop looking to God for mercy, because the “and” makes it all about power. The Lord becomes a means to an end. He very clearly can. Look back at how He led Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Look at how He led Moses and the Israelites out of Egypt through the Red Sea. He led them out of death through the forgiveness of sins. He died for us that we would live. As for us, we will serve the Lord. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

A righteous Helper comes to thee; His chariot is humility, His kingly crown is holiness, His scepter, pity in distress. The end of all our woe He brings; Therefore the earth is glad and sings. To Christ the Savior raise Your grateful hymns of praise.

(“Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates” LSB 341)
Wednesday of the Fifth Week after Trinity
JULY 7, 2021

**Today's Reading:** Small Catechism: Lord's Prayer, Third Petition

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

*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

(Small Catechism: Lord’s Prayer, Third Petition)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. On behalf of the almighty Lord, thanks for the permission, I guess. . Now the creator of heaven and earth who worked just fine without you can finally act. Who knows what would have happened without your help. Nobody actually believes that God is impotent to act without your permission. It’s just we’re weary of what we can’t control. God’s will is done even without our prayer. We pray in this petition that it be done among us also. We pray in this petition to remember that God’s will being done is a good thing.

God doesn’t need your permission to do His will because He’s stronger than you. This petition is a chance to remember that He’s smarter than you. He can even understand how to work the fancy settings on your washing machine. If you can’t do that, don’t presume to know better than God. Oh, also, He’s holier than you, too. He doesn’t have to start church by saying “I, a poor miserable sinner,” which means His will doesn’t get tainted by sin like yours does.

Thy will be done, because God’s will is to be merciful to sinners. To you. The world is still full of things we don’t understand. “Why?” isn’t a super helpful question when the answer is so complex that only the maker of heaven and earth would understand it. This petition is a focus on the “who.” Who is your God? The One who redeemed you by dying. The One who won’t stand back from your distress. There are some parts of His will that He hides from you because you wouldn’t understand, but even more so because you shouldn’t have to trouble yourself with having to solve those problems. I don’t make my kindergartener prepare dinner. I just tell her she’s loved and then I feed her.

So God points us to where His will is visible. Where He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh: on the Cross. Where He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die only to rise again: in the church. Here, God makes clear that His will is to save sinners like us. It’s done even without our asking. We get to pray and find comfort that it’s done among us also. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

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

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

Wednesday of the Eighth Week after Trinity
JULY 28, 2021

**Today's Reading:** Small Catechism: Lord’s Prayer, Sixth Petition

**Daily Lectionary:** 1 Samuel 13:1-18; Acts 23:12-35

*Lead us not into temptation.* (Small Catechism: Lord’s Prayer, Sixth Petition)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. After “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,” God teaches us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” I wonder if it’s to remind us that Christian life isn’t linear. You can take the Fifth Petition and run in a straight line one of two ways. The first is the idea of onward and upward. “I’m forgiven and now I build and that only goes one way. Constant improvement until perfection. Until I basically don’t sin. Christian life is only measured in progress.”

The second is continuing straight on in what we were doing in the first place. “Since I’m forgiven, might as well keep sinning. Shall we sin that grace may abound…” then quick, stop reading before it says, “BY NO MEANS.” Since I know I’m forgiven I’ll just do whatever I want. “Don’t worry about who your sins hurt, don’t worry about the God who calls you to strive against those desires. Christian life is measured only in freedom to do whatever I want while yelling stuff about grace.”

Both are wrong. You’re given this petition so you remember not just that you’re forgiven, but that you’re still in a bad spot. There’s temptation there. So we pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” It’s not onward and upward or right on in sin. It’s death and resurrection. Over and over. We are constantly in need of the Cross’ forgiveness, and constantly strive to live in the resurrection’s freedom from sin. We constantly beg to be free from temptation because we’re constantly falling into it. It’s war against old Adam, but it’s fought in Christ, not in you. So even while we pray, we find comfort that He already won the victory.

There is no comfort in beating the drum of the Law or in claiming that your actions should have no consequences while everything else falls apart because you keep doing dumb stuff. There is comfort in the Lord who tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory. We pray that we would see the victory we already have in Christ and cling to Him until we see it face to face. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Lead not into temptation, Lord, Where our grim foe and all his horde Would vex our souls on ev’ry hand. Help us resist, help us to stand Firm in the faith, a mighty host, Through comfort of the Holy Ghost.*

("Our Father, Who from Heaven Above" LSB 766, st.7)
In the Name of Jesus. Amen. There are preachers who aren’t sent by God. The word for them is “false.” Preachers who are sent don’t just tell you about God. Anyone can do that. Preachers speak for Him. They speak from the mouth of the Lord. He has words He wants you to hear. He doesn’t want them lost to people who claim to speak for Him. He doesn’t want to be known by words that aren’t His. He doesn’t want to be spoken for. He wants to speak. It’s no less ridiculous than the God who speaks out of the sky, but it might be harder to believe. There aren’t a lot of voices speaking from the sky claiming to be God. There are lots of preachers, though. Determining the real ones from the false ones seems important.

Jeremiah seems to leave us with a simple test. False preachers preach to itching ears. Itching ears want to be affirmed, not repented. If your preacher never says anything to make you feel like a sinner, he’s false, or you need to listen more closely. If you’re a preacher and can do this stu...
Friday of the Fifth Week after Trinity
JULY 9, 2021


He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well... (Acts 14:9)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Miracles aren’t the cause of faith. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ. It wasn’t the signs and wonders that made Jews and Greeks believe. It was what was spoken: the Gospel. Christ is risen from the dead. They did miracles, too, but that really only served to further the divide between those who believed and those who didn’t.

At Lystra Paul met a man who had faith to be made well. That doesn’t mean he believed enough to earn a miracle. It means he believed enough to see it done. Miracles aren’t a prize for believing enough. They’re a down payment on the resurrection. Miracles are the undoing of the damage sin does. The resurrection is a good example. Miracles are from the same God who rose. Miracles are something we who by faith believe in the resurrection finally see where all the world doesn’t. Only in faith will you ever see a miracle. Because a miracle is God working to undo sin. If you don’t believe in sin, the miracle will always have a different explanation. From Pharaoh and his magicians to YouTube atheists of today, apart from faith, everyone finds an excuse.

Some miracles are harder to explain. Some are just so common to us we’re not impressed anymore. If you put this man from Lystra in a modern hospital he’d call that a miracle, too, not because of the means God used to heal what sin broke, but because he received it from the Lord. All of it points to the same. God wants sinners to be forgiven. God wants you to rise from death like His Son. God even gives miracles to the people who refuse to see where all the world doesn’t. Only in faith will you ever see a miracle. Because a miracle is God working to undo sin. If you don’t believe in sin, the miracle will always have a different explanation. From Pharaoh and his magicians to YouTube atheists of today, apart from faith, everyone finds an excuse.

The miracle here is that the apostles preached and pointed only to Christ. They went from trying to kill them to trying to kill others for them. The people went from trying to kill them to trying to kill others for them.

That shapes authority, too. Authority is a burden to the Christian. It’s not about power, but mercy. It’s not to be served but to serve. Authority is a gift. These are the places God has prepared to serve you. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Thy strong Word bespeaks us righteous; Bright with Thine own holiness, Glorious now, we press toward glory, And our lives our hopes confess. Alleluia, alleluia! Praise to Thee who light dost send! Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia without end! (“Thy Strong Word” LSB 578, st. 3

St. James the Elder, Apostle
JULY 26, 2021

Today's Reading: Mark 10:35-45

“But to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” (Mark 10:40)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. The Sons of Thunder don’t know what they’re asking for. “Let us sit, one at your right hand, and one at your left, in your glory.” I guess their nickname makes sense. It sounds like they want to be tag team champions of the world. They want the glory to be revealed in terms of power, not mercy. But the Son of Man is glorified on a Cross for sinners. To be at His right hand and His left in His glory is to be crucified with Him. That was an honor bestowed to thieves. It was prepared for them.

Sounds terrible, until you consider what it means. It was prepared for them that they would hear mercy right from the Lord’s mouth. It was prepared that they would hear a sermon at the right hand of God. Paradise was prepared for at least one of them, too. They deserved to die because of their sins, but God prepared it so that they would receive mercy, even if He had to die between them to give it.

The Sons of Thunder would have hard lives that looked like Christ’s. That was prepared, too. Eventually, they would drink from the cup of suffering. But it was prepared that Jesus die for them first. That way they’re not alone in it. They were already brought through it. They were baptized, not just into Jesus’ pain, but His death, and so also His resurrection. You were, too. Do you not know that in Baptism, we are united with Him in His death? We will certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His, too. The Sons of Thunder went to death in boldness, not because they were the greatest tag team duo to grace the squared circle, but because they first received the gift of life. It was prepared for them. And it was prepared for you. You drank from it, too. In Baptism, you died with Jesus. In Baptism, you rise with Jesus. You might suffer more yet, but you are already raised with Him. Focus on the mercy, and know He’ll bring you through that, because He already died to accomplish it. It is prepared.

That shapes authority, too. Authority is a burden to the Christian. It’s not about power, but mercy. It’s not to be served but to serve. Authority is a gift. These are the places God has prepared to serve you. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

He brings me to the portal That leads to bliss untold, Whereon this rhyme immortal Is found in script of gold: “Who there My cross has shared Finds here a crown prepared; Who there with Me has died Shall here be glorified.”

 (“Awake, My Heart, with Gladness” LSB 467, st. 7)
Today's Reading: Matthew 7:15-23

**A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.**
(Matthew 7:17)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. So I know we’re the grumpy church. It’s what others say about us. It’s what our own members say about us. We’re too picky. Unloving. We can’t get along with anyone. We can’t even compromise. Why does it matter? Because it would be easier if we would just relax. Major in the majors, get along.

Believe it or not, I don’t have fun being the grumpy pastor. I’m not entertained by having folks mad at me. I’m not encouraged by my own members’ grumbling. I hate it. The thing is, if someone says 2+2 is 4 and someone else says 2+2 is 5, they can’t both be right. If someone speaks visions of their own minds and not of the Lord, they are wrong. Here’s the thing: They’re not harmless. Wolves are in sheep’s clothing, not other sheep. Wolves devour the sheep. “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but He who does the will of My Father in heaven.”

It’s not about how much you can accomplish. Prophesying, casting out demons, even doing great wonders is not enough. The will of our Father in heaven is that we believe. That’s it. Hear the true Word and cling to it. It really saves.

If it’s going to be good, virtuous, if it’s going to have any chance of helping us in this mess of a world with the mess of our problems, it has to be true. We can’t expect to be saved based on a lie, not even a soothing one. And there are false prophets out there, dressed in sheep’s clothing, telling soothing lies, who inwardly are ravenous wolves. Their lies do not save. Good trees make good fruit, and bad trees make bad fruit. even if it’s done in the Name of Jesus.

You don’t expect grapes from thorn bushes. You don’t expect good fruit from a bad tree. You don’t expect salvation from a false preacher. The bad trees are cut down and burned. The only tree that matters is the Cross. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” (Galatians 3:13).

The good fruit of the Cross is forgiveness. All other trees will be cut down and thrown into the fire. There is no other Name by which men will be saved. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

*O Holy Spirit, our delight And source of consolation, Protect us from the devil’s might Through Jesus, our salvation, Who by His death upon a tree Has rescued us from misery: To this we hold forever.*

(“All Glory Be to God on High” LSB 947, st.4)
Today’s Reading: Matthew 5:17-26

“In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. But the Pharisees weren’t villains who twisted fancy mustaches. They were men who thought family mattered. They stood for morality and the good of their people. They supported their church. They were the upright people you’d expect to see standing against the darkness of the day. They were the ones building something that would last another generation. But that wasn’t enough. Their temple was torn down. Not one stone stood upon the other. Everything they fought for wasn’t enough, not for this world, and not for the next. If doing better is the goal, they didn’t do enough.

It cuts deeper than the outward actions. It’s about the heart. Hate is murder. Lust is adultery. If your identity is found in the Law, you’re lost. If this is about what you do or feel, it’s not enough. That’s why Jesus starts by saying, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” The Law still stands, but the Law is fulfilled in Him. Your identity isn’t from the Law, but is found in the Gospel. You are righteous.

This identity lets you face the fullness of the Law without fear. You don’t need to downplay it or excuse it. You don’t need to justify yourself by abolishing the parts that would make you look like a sinner. Your sins are forgiven. You are in Christ. When the Son of God calls you holy and forgiven, He kills it for you. The more you relax the Law to see Jesus. To teach the Law fully is to teach Jesus. To call on you to actually strive to do the same is to hope in Jesus. Be not afraid of your failure or your sin. Christ has fulfilled the Law. Christ has won your forgiveness. This is just who you are now. Righteous. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Lord of all power and might, author and giver of all good things, graft into our hearts the love of Your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Your great mercy keep us in the same; 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 Sixth Sunday after Trinity)

Saturday of the Seventh Week after Trinity

Today’s Reading: Introt for the Eighth Sunday after Trinity
(Psalm 48:1, 3, 11, 14; antiphon: vs.9-10)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. We recall at a God who sits in judgment of our actions. It’s so hard to reflect on those vulnerable moments of our past without explanations to go along with our mistakes. Those excuses are called self-justification. We want to add something to our actions to make them seem less wrong. An excuse. A blame directed at someone else. A reason why. We try so hard to justify ourselves that the idea of being judged skips right over terrifying and leaves us either despairing or furious. But it’s not a question of if we will be judged. We confess it in the creed. On the Last Day, the Son will come again to judge the living and the dead. I didn’t read anything about Jesus’ taking into account our excuses, either.

Still, we can’t help it. We self-justify like we breathe. We dive into every awful day and insist that our explanations for what happened change what actually did happen. We’re chasing after a favorable judgment. We’re trying to find a way to hear the word “judgment” without cringing. That won’t come from excuses. That will only come from the Gospel.

Only within Mount Zion, within God’s temple, do God’s judgments become something other than a need to justify your sins. They become a source of joy. Within Mount Zion, we hear that the Lord’s judgments were rendered against the Son upon the Cross. He has judged Him guilty of all your sin. He has judged you innocent, righteous, and holy. Your self-justifications are laid down, and your cross is taken up. Your excuses are cast aside for forgiveness. Let Mount Zion be glad!

This is why we preach and sing in the temple. It isn’t a chance to earn points with God that we can cash in for heaven. It’s to tell, over and over, of the Cross that we effect on those vulnerable moments of our past...
**Daily Lectionary:** 1 Samuel 6:19-7:17; Acts 19:1-22

And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”
And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

(Acts 19:2)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. In the Name of Jesus. Amen. The Church needs constant teaching. Woe to those who think they’ve learned it all in confirmation! Imagine if the disciples who Paul met by Ephesus responded as we do today: “What do you mean Holy Spirit? I’ve been in this synagogue all my life and never heard of that.” Also, woe to those who think theology is about winning arguments rather than teaching. Imagine if Paul replied the way stubborn clergy do: “I went to seminary. You didn’t. I know better than you. We’re doing it this way now.”

Instead, Paul taught. He catechized. For months. Then years. Miracles happened. Not just the healings from afflictions. Even greater. People believed. They were baptized in the name of the Triune God. They taught others. Even unbelievers were given hope.

The doctrine of the apostolic faith is unchanging, but the visible Church on earth is always in the process of learning it. If you look around and see nothing but ignorance, rejoice, because that is daily being overcome by the patient teaching of God’s Word. Also, relax, because this teaching is done by the Holy Spirit, whose job it is to create and strengthen faith. It’s His to accomplish this work, and that none given to Him will be lost. This is the Body of Christ is always being built up. Rejoice that God has promised it, and year after year, God’s Word will correct, reprove, and give hope. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Help us Your holy Law to learn, To mourn our sin and from it turn In faith to You and to Your Son And Holy Spirit, Three in One.

(“Lord, Help Us Ever to Retain” LSB 865, st.2)

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**Monday of the Sixth Week after Trinity**  
**JULY 12, 2021**

**Today’s Reading:** Exodus 20:1-7

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

(Exodus 20:2)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. This is who your God is. Not just the first couple verses, but the whole thing. The Law is a reflection of the Law maker. In my car, there are 11 commandments. God gets His 10. I add one more. Thou shalt not listen to country music. It’s a reflection of who I am: someone with taste.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me. This is who your God is. The Lord who absolutely insists on being your God. There’s no room for any others. He wants to be the One to care for you.

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Your God has a name so powerful it has to be used with care, and He wants you to have it, to call upon Him, pray, praise, and give thanks.

Your God wants to spend time with you, so He rest with you and gives you gifts on the Sabbath. Your God wants to work through sinners to love you, so He gives you parents worthy of the same honor due to Him. They sometimes fail to earn it. That never stops God from working through them for your good. He loves you so much that He wants you to have people to represent that love. Honor your father and your mother as gifts from Him. Life goes better that way. Sin breaks stuff.

Your God loves life, and insists that you live. Nobody’s allowed to kill you.

Your God wants you to have a healthy marriage. He wall up and demands it be defended. He wants you to have and keep your stuff. He values your name and gives it all the protection He gives His own. He even cares about your heart, and knows what will pollute it. He calls us out of sin because sin breaks stuff. He calls us toward that which builds up because He loves us.

We don’t listen. The Law shows us our sin. It shows us we’re not God. We don’t need to be. He is, and He brought Israel out slavery to Egypt and us out of slavery to sin and death. The Law paints a picture of God. The Gospel paints a picture of you. You are the one He saves. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

The Law of God is good and wise And sets His will before our eyes, Shows us the way of righteousness, And dooms to death when we transgress.

(“The Law of God is Good and Wise” LSB 571, st.1)
Tuesday of the Sixth Week after Trinity  
JULY 13, 2021

Today's Reading: Romans 6:3-11  

We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. (Romans 6:6)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Guilt is potent stuff. We drag it around behind us. We attach it to others. We let a singular event define us. The accident, the mistake, the divorce, the incident. The sin. Everywhere we go it follows us. It's on our minds. It's on everyone else's. We can't seem to go anywhere without being known as that guy. Or we might be her...you know the one.

It's like that one little moment owns us. More people understand what it's like to be a slave to sin than you'd think. As hard as you struggle against it, as much as you want to put it behind you, it owns you, it holds you captive.

It's like we come to church to set it down. Hear about the love of God, about forgiveness. Lay that sin on Jesus. Hear Absolution. Then, when church is over, pick it up again on our way out the door. How many times does someone have to confess the same sin over and over before they're finally forgiven? How many times before you can look at yourself in the mirror? How many times before you can look at your neighbor as anything other than undeserving of any good thing for their sin?

The singular event that defines you is not your sin. It is your Baptism. You are baptized. Tied to a real Cross where Jesus suffered and died to forgive the sins that have such power over you. Tied to a real resurrection where you are free from those sins. Today, you are baptized. You have this identity today. That means there is actual salvation, not IF you manage to accomplish something yourself, but BECAUSE Christ has given you this gift. Your identity is not "sinner." You are a child of God. Be free from your past. That past was crucified with Christ. You really are forgiven. He bled and died for you. You're baptized and united to forgiveness. He is risen from the dead, and you are united to that freedom from the sin that's really gone. You are baptized. Reckon yourselves forgiven. Dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. When you can't forget your sin, remember your Baptism. Remember who you really are. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

In Baptism we now put on Christ—Our shame is fully covered With all that He once sacrificed And freely for us suffered. For here the flood of His own blood Now makes us holy, right, and good Before our heavenly Father.  
("All Christians Who Have Been Baptized" LSB 596, st.4)

St. Mary Magdalene  
JULY 22, 2021

Today's Reading: John 20:1-2, 10-18  

Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" (John 20:17)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Part of me wants to focus on Mary's announcement. She gets to tell the disciples the good news. Christ is risen! It feels like a redemption story. From the often-assumed belief that she was the prostitute who worshipped at Jesus' feet (that woman isn't named in the Bible), to fiction about her marital status (not in the Bible at all), to her confusion of the risen Lord with a gardener (that one's in there), Mary Magdalene gets a lot of the focus, but rarely in a good way. We want her to turn her life around, and then share the good news.

The truth is, we don't know the name of the prostitute who worshipped at Jesus' feet. A pope named Gregory the Great decided that it was this Mary. We know Jesus wasn't married. Fiction writers have decided otherwise. So much of what we want to believe about Mary Magdalene has to do with what people assume she did. Most of it is wrong. All of it misses the point. Jesus doesn't know her by her deeds or her past, but by her faith. He says something to her, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." She has the same Father as the Son of God does.

If you want to know who Mary Magdalene was, set aside myth and hold to the Word of God. She is a daughter of the Father. She is a saint by faith in Christ. It's true for you, too. You are not known by what people say about you, true or not. You are not known by your past. You are known by the same Christ. It's true for you, too. You are not known by what people say about you, true or not. You are not known by your past. You are known by the same Christ as Jesus and Mary. You are baptized. In this water, you are united with Christ just like Mary. You are an heir to the kingdom of heaven. You are so precious to the Son that He who redeemed you from sin and death only talks about you as His brother or sister. People talk. Most of them get it wrong. Christ is still risen. You are still baptized. You have a Father in heaven. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

We sing Your praise for Mary, Who came at Easter daw. You look for Jesus' body And found her Lord was gone. But, as with joy she saw Him In resurrection light, May we by faith behold Him, The Day who ends our night!  
("For All the Faithful Women" LSB 855,
Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

(Small Catechism: Lord’s Prayer, Fifth Petition)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. This is one sentence we wish could be divided into two separate things. Having my forgiveness and my willingness to forgive others linked together is a damming thing. Still, Jesus is clear. In Matthew 6:14–15 He says, “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” It sounds like my grudge from the sixth grade is enough to undo my Baptism. It sounds like my heart is enough to undo the Cross.

That’s because looking in my heart for forgiveness never goes particularly well. Ask the kid I still don’t like from middle school even though I can’t remember his last name anymore. Forgiveness doesn’t come from your heart. It comes from the Cross. Always. The forgiveness for your sins comes from the Cross, not from your asking for it. Jesus died 2,000 years before you could ask Him to forgive you. Faith clings to this forgiveness and finds comfort there. Forgiveness from the Cross addresses your heart.

It works that way for your neighbor, too. Forgiveness for their sins comes from the Cross to address your heart. When we stop looking at the Cross, forgiveness is a problem. We pray in this petition that we would see our enemies the same way Jesus sees them. Died for. Either there’s forgiveness for sinners or there’s not. Saying there’s no forgiveness for sinners isn’t going to work well for you. Taking your grudges to the Cross and seeing that your neighbor’s sins against you were so vile that He had to bleed to cover them is a gift. That is where your neighbor’s sins are punished. That is where wrath is abated. Seeing that justice was done lets you see your neighbor as someone who doesn’t owe you anything anymore. Jesus paid it.

Forgiveness isn’t about what we deserve. It’s about what was given. You don’t earn your forgiveness by forgiving others. Instead, you get to see the God who forgives whether you’re angry or not and you can say, “Amen.” This is true. I’m angry, but they’re still forgiven. Lord, address my heart with comfort so that I can find peace in your Cross, forgiveness for my sins, and forgiveness for my neighbors’, too. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Forgive our sins, Lord, we implore, That they may trouble us no more; We, too, will gladly those forgive Who hurt us by the way they live. Help us in our community To serve each other willingly.

(“Our Father, Who from Heaven Above” 766, st.)

Give us this day our daily bread, And let us all be clothed and fed. Save us from hardship, war, and strife; In plague and famine, spare our life, That we in honest peace may live, To care and greed no entrance give.

(“Our Father, Who From Heaven Above” LSB 76)
### Thursday of the Sixth Week after Trinity

**JULY 15, 2021**

**Daily Lectionary:** Judges 15:1-16:3; Galatians 3:23-4:11

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.  

(Ex 32:34–40; Mt 1:18–25; Gal 4:4–5)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. The Law was our guardian. The Law's job is not to love you, but to hold you captive. The Law can't make you hate sin, just punishment. The heart is still full of lust and evil and envy and hate. The Law can't make you love what God commands, only fear what happens if you don't. The Law can't give you a good conscience. The Law can't give you righteousness. The Law can't give you freedom. The Law can't give you anything. It can only demand. The Law is one thing. The Gospel is another.

The Gospel cannot demand. It can only give. Christ gives you His righteousness, His holiness, even His identity. Now, you are no longer under a guardian, but sons of God, through faith, and heirs according to the promise. You are baptized. The Law doesn't own you or hold you anymore. It cannot speak to your conscience. That is the job of the Gospel. You have put on Christ, who is your righteousness.

The Law doesn't cease to exist. It is still a reflection of the Law giver. The Law reflects the character of God. It shows how things are supposed to be. So for you, it shows what you are not. Christ was not born into the world to eliminate how things are supposed to be, but to set aright what sin broke. So He was not born apart from the Law, but under the Law. He allows the Law to hold Him captive. He suffers the wages of sin. He dies to forgive you all your sins. He redeems you from the Law that held you captive, and adopts you into His own family. This isn't so that you would hate the Law, but so that you would be free from it. We love the Law because we wear Jesus in our Baptism. He fulfills all the Law demands. Where the Lord is, there is freedom from the captivity of the Law. You are free from the curses of the Law. You are free from sin, free from death, free from terror. You are in Christ. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

In Baptism we now put on Christ—Our shame is fully covered With all that He once sacrificed And freely for us suffered. For here the flood of His own blood Now makes us holy, right, and good Before our heav'nly Father.  

(“All Christians Who Have Been Baptized” LSB 596, st.4)

#### REFLECTIONS

Wednesday: 

If you are free from sin, you should also be free to rise above them and build something that's more than comfortably numb, or we're owned by the God who purchased us with His own life so that He can keep us and shelter us now and to eternal life. One leads to death. The other to life.

The free gift of God, eternal life, is given only to sinners. It's given to you. You don't have to earn it. You're free from sin. Free from death. Allowed to ask, “What do I do now?” It's answered by the God who simply says, “Live.” Live in the things that produce hope. Live in the Law of God, free from its curse, because you were made alive in the Gospel, which promises that hope is a gift, not an escape. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

No son of man could conquer death, such ruin sin had wrought us. No innocence was found on earth. And therefore death had brought us into bondage from of old and ever grew more strong and bold And held us as its captive. Alleluia!  

(“Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bonds” LSB 458, st.2)

### Tuesday of the Seventh Week after Trinity

**JULY 20, 2021**

**Today’s Reading:** Romans 6:19-23  
**Daily Lectionary:** 1 Samuel 31:1-21; Acts 16:1-22

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.  

(Ex 14:26–31; Mt 1:18–25; Gal 4:4–5)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Only someone who has spent all their life under slavery can be set free and ask, “What do I do now?” If you don't know what freedom really looks like, how would you know what to do when you're free? Only someone born under the threats and coercion of the Law can imagine that “freedom” looks like Netflix and a whole tub of ice cream just because serving your neighbor can be hard sometimes. What do you really gain from the bottom of the ice cream tub? What hope is found in ignoring your problems to binge-watch junk? I am speaking to you in human terms, because of your natural limitations.

You are free from the Law's demands. It cannot condemn you in Christ Jesus your Lord. You have the free gift of God, eternal life, purchased by His death upon the Cross. When you return to pet sins, Jesus still died for you, your sins are still bled for and forgiven. That's not the question. The question is “Do those things actually help?” When we get stressed or angry, scared or just bored, we go looking for hope in something familiar, and we return to the things that held us captive. Real hope is never found there, though. Christianity is not asking the question, “Can you do whatever you want?” Instead, the question is “Where is hope which endures?” Christ endured death and rose again. Hope in something that leads to holiness and eternal life. Hope in something that isn't just numb. Everyone's owned by something. Either we're owned by our passions and our sins and we're not free to rise above them and build something that's more than comfortably numb, or we're owned by the God who purchased us with His own life so that He can keep us and shelter us now and to eternal life. One leads to death. The other to life.

The free gift of God, eternal life, is given only to sinners. It's given to you. You don't have to earn it. You're free from sin. Free from death. Allowed to ask, “What do I do now?” It’s answered by the God who simply says, “Live.” Live in the things that produce hope. Live in the Law of God, free from its curse, because you were made alive in the Gospel, which promises that hope is a gift, not an escape. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

No son of man could conquer death, such ruin sin had wrought us. No innocence was found on earth. And therefore death had brought us into bondage from of old and ever grew more strong and bold And held us as its captive. Alleluia!  

(“Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands” LSB 458, st.2)
**Monday of the Seventh Week after Trinity**

**JULY 19, 2021**

**Today's Reading:** Genesis 2:7-17

**Daily Lectionary:** 1 Samuel 2:18-36; Acts 15:22-41

"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:17)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. God made everything and it was good. He made Adam of the dust of the ground. Eve would be there soon. Very good. He put them in the Garden, full of every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. Awesome. The Tree of Life was there. Dope! Also the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil: If you ate from it you died. Good? God calls it good. The issue is we’re pretty sure it’s not. We consider the tree, at best, a test from the all-knowing God who would have seen this coming.

When we don’t like something God is doing, we figure He either messed up or is trying to test us. Because we know good and evil now, we just get the two mixed up, so our motives seem purer than the God we call holy. The tree was never a test. It was where God instituted His Church. This was for worship. It was the one place Adam could see God as bigger, and could worship the mystery of God. It wasn’t there to hurt him and Eve, but to help them. To ward off the idea that they know more than God. To remind them to fear, love, and trust, and to give them a chance to practice it. The tree was good. The problem started when we decided it wasn’t. Because if the tree isn’t good, what do you think of the God who put it there?

God knows more than we do...but what if we can’t trust Him? Eve grew afraid of the tree and wouldn’t even touch it. She explains it to the devil. Not "Don’t eat it," but "Don’t touch it. Don’t even go near it." Except "it" is church.

God knew it would happen. Adam’s sins. Eve’s. Yours, too. The Tree of Knowledge showed the problem, but not how to fix it and live. But that was never the job of that tree. Salvation was never a test. We fell by the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, but God saved us by the tree of the Cross. His intent was always to save and to love. This was never His backup plan. The Tree of Life was always a Cross. It just took a few thousand years to see the Son hanging on it. But it was always intended for Adam, Eve, and you. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Now from that tree of Jesus’ shame Flows life eternal in His name; For all who trust and will believe, Salvation’s living fruit receive. And of this fruit so pure and sweet The Lord invites the world to eat, To find within this cross of wood The tree of life with ev’ry good. (“The Tree of Life” LSB 561, st

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**Friday of the Sixth Week after Trinity**

**JULY 16, 2021**

**Daily Lectionary:** Judges 16:4-30; Galatians 4:12-31

*So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.* (Galatians 4:31)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. Abraham had two sons: Ishmael of the flesh, by Hagar, his wife Sarah’s slave, and Isaac of the promise, by Sarah. Full stop. Think about how humiliated Sarah had to feel giving her husband to her servant. She trusted God. He promised Abraham a child. She believed Him. She just figured she had to help. Ishmael, born of people trying their best. Your little league trophy lied to you. Trying your best isn’t good enough. The flesh is humiliating.

To stand before God based on what you can do is to live according to the Law. It is to live in slavery to what you cannot do, what you cannot be, what you cannot achieve. It is to exist in slavery to sin and death. Sinai is not a mountain of hope. It is not a promise of salvation. It is a bargain over earthly trinkets, and the inability to hope for something that outlasts them.

But Jerusalem above is free. She is our mother. You are free from the Law. You are free from slavery to the best you can do, to the strings attached. You are not a child of God based on what you can do or how you can help. You are a child according to the promise. You are a child of the Gospel. God has promised you adoption. A place of honor. A place not earned but given. A place for you. After all, you are baptized. This isn’t about your contributing, but about God’s delivering a promise. The forgiveness of sins. Rescue from death. Salvation. The hope of something that endures where everything else in this world fails. An identity apart from the humiliation of the Law, but in the glory God gives His beloved.

This isn’t a someday promise to finally receive when you leave this world. It’s a now promise. It’s a here promise. It’s a for you promise. It’s a Baptism. It isn’t just heaven that’s clothed in white robes. The Church militant wears them, too. The saints on earth are children of God. You have already been purchased from slavery, not with gold or silver, but with the holy and precious blood, the innocent suffering and death of Christ. Do not submit again to the yoke of slavery under the Law. Do not submit to the yoke of doing your best and the humiliation and death it brings. Live in the promise of freedom, given through your Mother Jerusalem, the Church, where God sustains you according to the promise. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

In the water, in the Word, In His promise, be assured: Those who are baptized and believe Shall be born again. Father welcomes all His children To His family through His Son. Father giving His salvation, Life forever has been won. (“Father Welcomes” LSB 605, st.2)
Saturday of the Sixth Week after Trinity
JULY 17, 2021

**Today's Reading:** Introit for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity
(Psalm 47:3, 6-8; antiphon: vs.1-2)

**Daily Lectionary:** 1 Samuel 1:1-20; Galatians 5:1-26

*He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet.*
*(From the Introit for the Seventh Sunday after Trinity)*

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. It’s hard to sing praises to our King who puts all nations under our feet when we’re not even happy with our own country. It would be a gift to the Church if we cared about false doctrine the way we care about the faults of the other political party. It would be a gift to your conscience, if you considered what it looked like when all things were put under Christ’s feet, especially if you’ve been unhappy with the leaders God has given you at one time or another.

“He worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all” *(Ephesians 1:20-23).*

Christ rose from the dead and Pilate still ruled Jerusalem. Christ was risen when the Church hid in catacombs. Christ is risen when the president you’d never vote for is in office. All things are under His feet. If you can only imagine God being able to reign over nations you approve of, you’ll have to discount most of Scripture, where even evil kings are used for God’s purposes, not to build a utopia on earth, but to save sinners from the last great enemy, death.

His kingdom is not of this world. Please. Stop responding with, “But what if we build it” and start saying, “Amen.” If you want to see your God upon His throne, look to the ascension, not the 24-hour news. You can’t find a country on earth where God isn’t capable of forgiving sins. You can’t find a leader on earth who can keep you in the tomb when God says “rise.” Even where the Church faces persecution, the Word cannot be bound. Our prayers are not just for peaceful times, but for comfort in the knowledge that even if we’ve been unhappy with politics in the last few years, our God is still working forgiveness, life, and salvation. Christ is risen from the dead. All things were put under His feet. You are united with Him in this resurrection, so in the same way, all the nations are put under yours. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

*And when in pow’r He comes, Oh, may our native land From all its rending toms Send forth a glorious band, A countless throng, With joy to sing To heav’n’s high King*  
*(“Before You, Lord, We Bow” LSB 966, st.5)*

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The Seventh Sunday after Trinity
JULY 18, 2021

**Today’s Reading:** Mark 8:1-9

**Daily Lectionary:** 1 Samuel 1:21-17; Galatians 6:1-18

“I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat.” *(Mark 8:2)*

In the Name of Jesus, Amen. There’s a difference between a father who spends time with his kids and one who avoids them by being at work. There’s a difference between kids who get As and kids who get detention. There’s a difference between the doctor saying there’s a cure or telling you that you have only weeks left to live. All the world measures. It’s how things work. Literally everywhere. And it’s exhausting. It’s depressing. Because I know which father I am…maybe better than a few, but still not great. You know which kid you are. We know because there are standards. We call it the Law. A picture of good. Anything less…just isn’t. Everywhere else in the world we live and die by laws. Do enough. Be enough. Have enough. We see the shortcomings here just fine. Laws measure. They point out where things aren’t enough, and so we do, too. So any miracle that defies the word “enough” catches our attention, like when Jesus feeds 4,000.

It’s so easy to miss the greatest part of it. Get lost in the details. In the numbers. In the crowd. In the miracle. It all flows from one thing. He had compassion on them. For all we measure here, we miss the point. We want to measure. How much do we need? Is there enough? You measure it on the Cross, where the word “enough” sounded like “It is finished.” He shed His blood for the forgiveness of all your sins. Not portioned, but poured out for forgiveness. For you. The Law measures. The Gospel just gives. All your sins.

You can interject that you don’t need it because you just got that in Absolution. You’re already baptized. Shut up. Here’s more mercy for you. The Law says, “Do this.” The Gospel says, “It is finished.” Over and over again. It covers all sin. All shortcomings. All failure. There is no measuring here.

We will be a Gospel church. Without His compassion we will faint along the way, but know that it is yours, it is boundless, and it accomplishes all that is needed. Gather up all your failure and sin and dump it at the Cross. For everywhere that you don’t measure up, for every place you’re insecure, for every place you compensate or bargain or cheat, there is mercy for you. Your sins are forgiven. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

O God, whose never-failing providence orders all things both in heaven and earth, we humbly implore You to put away from us all hurtful things and to give us those things that are profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*(Collect for the Seventh Sunday after Trinity)*