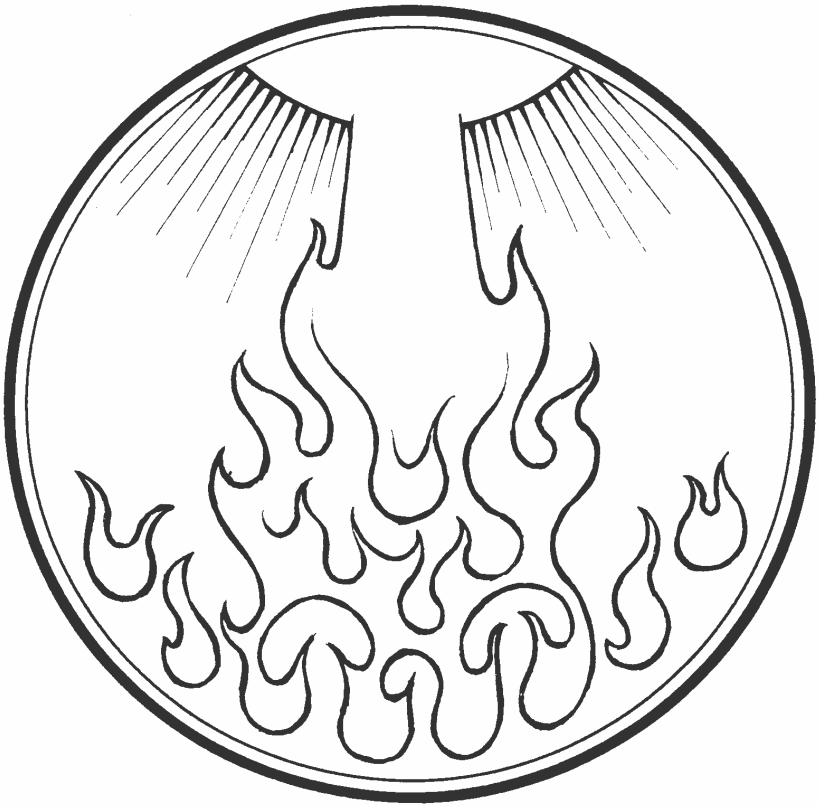


Higher Things
Reflections



Pentecost-Trinity 4
May 20-June 30, 2018

2018 Reflections Pentecost-Trinity 4

May 20-June 9 Reflections were written by Rev. Brandt Hoffman the pastor and administrator of Christ Lutheran Church and School in Coos Bay, Oregon.

June 10-June 30 Reflections were written by Rev. Aaron T. Fenker, the pastor of Bethlehem and Immanuel Lutheran churches in Bremen, Kansas. He is also the Media Executive for Higher Things.

2018 Reflections Editorial Staff:

*Rev. Aaron T. Fenker (Media Executive)
Mrs. Katie Hill (Executive Editor)
Mrs. Kay Maiwald (Junior Editor)
Rev. René Castellero (Audio Editor)*

©2018 Higher Things, Inc.

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 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.

In the morning go to your work with joy, singing a hymn, as the Ten Commandments, or what your devotion may suggest. If it is evening, then go to sleep promptly and cheerfully.

Festival of Pentecost

May 20, 2018

Today's Reading: John 14:23-31

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

"If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (John 14:23-26).

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Do you love Jesus? Ask yourself... "Do I love Jesus?" What does that even mean? So often people think, "If I love Jesus then I will do something for Him." Is that you? Are you always trying to show Jesus how much you love Him? Or perhaps, you hide away from Him because you *know* you don't live up to your own idea and standard that you set for yourself. The hardest part to accept is the fact that it's *your standard* and you can't live up to it. If you think your standard is hard to live up to, consider God's. His standard is perfection. There is no hope for you if you honestly answer the question "Do I love Jesus?"

In response, I have good news and bad news. The bad news is, no matter how difficult your standard is, God's is harder... impossible in fact. The good news is, as the Bible lesson shows, *Jesus knows*. In fact, what He said to the disciples was that He would be sending the Helper, AKA the Holy Spirit to complete what He has called you to do. Namely, the Holy Spirit gives you the faith that says, "I indeed believe in You and I love you," When Jesus speaks of love, He is speaking of faith and trust in Him. Do you love Jesus? Only by the grace and mercy of God do we joyfully say "Yes," In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O God our merciful Father, who taught the hearts of Your faithful people by sending to them the light of Your Holy Spirit, bring us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who with You and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and forever.

Monday of the Week of Pentecost

May 21, 2018

Today's Reading: Genesis 11:1-9

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

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."
(Genesis 11:1-4)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Surely, you've heard of Abraham Lincoln. What about Albert Einstein? Does the name Michael Jordan ring a bell? When I mention these names, some common responses might be, "A U.S. President" and "That scientist who came up with the theory of relativity," and "That famous basketball player."

In each case, these men did something or accomplished something that made them stand out. Literally, their names were more recognizable than other names. In the Bible lesson, we see something here that isn't much different. We hear of a time in our history where people spoke the same language and when they worked together they were able to accomplish many things. That, in and of itself wasn't the problem.

The problem was when they started to worry that they might lose what they had. Rather than trust in the Name of God, (the Name above all names) they took matters into their own hands and decided to build a tower to heaven. As God pointed out, they weren't failing. It was worse: they were close to succeeding. The problem is, a "success" would mean that their own name would be the only one they cared about. Their "success" would mean they would lose the Name who actually gave them all they had. Rather than let them "succeed" in losing the only Name that mattered, God took away that which they were trying so hard to protect. In the end God took away their temporary "success" in order to give them back His Name and eventually from His cross, give them victory. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lord God our heavenly Father. Help me to keep Your name as the name above all names. Amen.

Tuesday of the Week of Pentecost

May 22, 2018

Today's Reading: Acts 2:1-21

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

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? "What does this mean?" But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine." But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. (Acts 2:5-7, 14-15)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. When you go to church to hear a sermon, what are you expecting? Is your pastor witty and whimsical? Is he somewhat dry and long-winded? Does he tell stories or other anecdotes? Are his sermons informational? Are they lively?

Think about those listening to Peter in Jerusalem, shortly after the Holy Spirit came down with tongues of fire on the apostles. They heard a sermon but it was not quite what they expected. As in the case of Peter, as well as today, the task of the preacher is to give you all the good things of God, namely in Law and Gospel. Whether he is funny, clever or (ahem) kind of boring, we should be careful to make sure that regardless of delivery STYLE, is he giving you those good things.

When a sinner hears that Jesus was born for a particular reason, that He ministered for a particular reason, He suffered for a particular reason, He died on the cross for a particular reason, He rose again for a particular reason, you may rejoice in knowing that this was not done simply for other people, but FOR YOU. This is the wonderful message of the salvation promise of Christ! God bless you this week in your hearing of the Good News of God from the pulpit! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lord God our heavenly Father, thank You for the message of Good News for sinners like me. Let me be continually blessed by Your Good Word and promises from those whom You have sent to proclaim them. Amen.

Wednesday of the Week of Pentecost

May 23, 2018

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

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we may not deceitfully belie, betray, slander, or defame our neighbor, but defend him, think and speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything. (Small Catechism: Eighth Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. On one hand, we would like to think we wouldn't *deceitfully belie, betray, slander, or defame our neighbor*, but maybe that's only the ones we don't like. Well, let's be honest, sometimes it's even the neighbors we do like.

You see, this commandment is really a two-part commandment, in that we are not only supposed to not say ANY type of falsehood against our neighbor, we are actually supposed to speak kindly, and truthfully about them, always giving them the benefit of the doubt.

Why would God require that of us? I mean, we are only human... we can be THAT NICE all the time...can't we? Well, you see here God is not only protecting your neighbor by writing this commandment. He is also protecting YOU! I think we can all agree that anyone we speak about would appreciate it if we didn't smear their name all over town. Nobody wants that.

Remember that Jesus perfectly obeyed the Eighth Commandment. He never spoke poorly about anyone and always gave the benefit of the doubt. His perfect obedience has been reckoned to you, through faith. Now that we are free to love our neighbor, we find out that doing so is good for you as well. While God is calling you to speak well of people, He is also showing you that while you are protecting your neighbor's reputation, you are building your own reputation as His baptized child.. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lord God our heavenly Father, your Commands are good and wise. Your word is a better guide than my own. Help me to protect my neighbor's name and reputation and keep my lips far from slander. Amen.

Thursday of the Week of Pentecost

May 24, 2018

Today's Reading: Joel 3:1-15

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

"For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land, and have cast lots for my people, and have traded a boy for a prostitute, and have sold a girl for wine and have drunk it." (Joel 3:1–3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Do we want to be in the "Valley of Jehoshaphat?" Jehoshaphat meant "Yahweh judges." So I ask again, do we want to be there? Well, the truth is, we don't have a choice. God will indeed gather all of us, Jew and Gentile, together for judgment.

For what will we be judged? Simply put, we will be judged for every thought (Matthew 5:22), word (Matthew 12:36) and deed (Matthew 5:21). So pretty much every time you have thought, said or done something wrong, you will stand before God's judgment.

What do you think that will look like? Can you even begin to think of everything wrong you have ever done? The Bible says you can't (Psalm 19:12). Let's face it: sin has got you in a tight spot. Rather than being out in the open freedom, sin has you crammed in a narrow valley. I know it, you know it and even the Psalmist who told us we can't possibly remember all our sins is the same one who also said, "Declare me innocent from hidden faults!" (v.19).

Thanks be to God, that is exactly what God has done! In sending His Son Jesus Christ to die for you on the cross, and to rise from the grave, you have been granted hope. In Baptism, we see all these things that Christ has done being declared for you, too! On account of this, we know on the last day, as we stand before God's judgment, we will stand as those who the Judge declares innocent on account of Christ! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus, I deserve nothing but wrath. By Your saving death and resurrection and the washing of regeneration, You have taken that upon Yourself and granted me hope and salvation. Thank You for rescuing me.

Friday of the Week of Pentecost

May 25, 2018

Today's Reading: Acts 10:34, 42-48

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

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. (Acts 10:44-45)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). This is one of the most popular texts that teach that the preaching of God's Holy Word is not just something that is stagnant or the opening monologue on a late night television show. The preaching and proclamation of God's word actually does something (is efficacious) to us in our hearing. Namely, it grows and strengthens the faith that has been placed upon us through the Word and Water in Holy Baptism.

But how many ways can we receive this blessed word of God? Dr. Martin Luther answers this for us. "First, through the spoken Word by which the forgiveness of sins is preached [He commands to be preached] in the whole world; which is the peculiar office of the Gospel. Secondly, through Baptism. Thirdly, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar." We receive the Word of God through the spoken and proclaimed word, through Holy Baptism, and through the Lord's Supper. Through the Word of God the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation is placed upon us that we would not perish but have eternal life. Those who have ears, let them hear. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

*Thy strong word did cleave the darkness; At Thy speaking it was done.
For created light we thank Thee While thine ordered seasons run
Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise to Thee who light dost send! Alleluia without end!
Alleluia, alleluia! (Thy Strong Word, LSB 578:1)*

Saturday of the Week of Pentecost

May 26, 2018

Today's Reading: Introit for Trinity

Daily Lectionary: Numbers 32:1-6,16-27; Luke 24:1-35

O Lord, Our Lord how excellent is your Name in all the earth (Psalm 8:1 from the Introit for Holy Trinity)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Sometimes it is rather difficult to believe that the earth is full of the Lord's goodness. You look around, even nearby, and there is violence, tragedy, disease and hunger. The list could go on. The manifestations of sin are all around us. The evidence seems quite clear.

The temptation for you, dear child of God, is to think that God doesn't care or worse yet, that He doesn't exist. Maybe He just sits back in the heavens with His excellent Name and watches things fall apart.

The Psalmist rejoices to confess elsewhere (Psalm 33) that "*The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.*" He points us not to some generic "goodness," but to the covenant love of God, the fact that God keeps His promises. That truth is made known today in the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The earth is indeed full of the goodness of the Lord, because the Gospel is being preached to the ends of the earth. The same Word that made the heavens is creating new people as the Good News that Jesus suffered, died and rose again is proclaimed to the world. The power of sin, death and the grave has been vanquished in Christ Jesus, crucified and resurrected.

The manifestation of the crucified and risen Savior is all around us as His Gospel is proclaimed, His Baptism is carried out in His Name, and His Supper is celebrated. The manifestation of the crucified and risen Savior is all around you. Your life is full of His goodness, His covenant love.

The evidence is clear. The Gospel of Jesus Christ has come to you with forgiveness and new life. Yours is the kingdom of God. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

The Gospel shows the Father's grace, Who sent His Son to save our race, Proclaims how Jesus lived and died That we might thus be justified. It is the pow'r of God to save From sin and Satan and the grave; it works the faith which firmly clings To all the treasures which it brings. (The Gospel Shows the Father's Grace, LSB 580:1,4)

Holy Trinity

May 27, 2018

Today's Reading: John 3:1-17

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

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:5-8)

In the Name + of Jesus. In the movie *Sky High* we see a group of teenagers who, because of their superpowers, go to a special school to teach them how to use those powers. It's actually a pretty funny movie that shows what it's like for superhero parents raising superhero kids. Like all superhero movies, this one has a villain. At first, they thought she was the daughter of an older villain, but it turns out, she was the older villain, zapped by a weapon that turned her into a baby! She complained that she had to grow up all over again! In a sense, she was born again!

But this is nothing compared to what Nicodemus thought when Jesus told him he must be born again. All he could look back to was physical birth, which is why he scoffed at the idea of a second birth possibly meaning going back into one's mother's womb only to be born again. In reality, Jesus was referring to Baptism! Rather than teething (again) learning to walk (again) learning to be potty-trained (again) and everything else that goes with being born the first time, Jesus promises something different. In the Baptism of Jesus—in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—Jesus gives you the washing of regeneration. Much like at your birth we witnessed your new life, in Baptism you are made new. You are claimed by Christ as His own. And that's no superhero movie—that's reality! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Gracious God, in the waters of Holy Baptism, You have given me faith, life and a home with You. Thank You for such a wonderful rebirth! Amen.

Monday of the Week of the Holy Trinity

May 28, 2018

Today's Reading: Isaiah 6:1-7

Daily Lectionary: Song of Solomon 1:1-2:7; John 5:1-18

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." (Isaiah 6:4–7)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The fiery messenger and burning coal must have been a scary sight for Isaiah! Yet they came from the place of sacrifice and spoke the language of atonement. The fiery coal symbolizes the total significance of the altar from which it came; that the penalty of sin was paid by a substitute offered in the sinner's place. The symbol, applied to Isaiah's lips (the place where he confessed to be unclean), assures him of personal forgiveness.

When Isaiah "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up," he cried out and confessed that he was "a man of unclean lips." If even the holy angels cover their faces in the presence of "the King, the Lord of hosts," how can sinful humans stand before Him? (Isaiah 6:1-5) Yet, the glory of the Lord is saving grace, and with "a burning coal" from the altar the angel touched Isaiah's lips, removing his guilt (Isaiah 6:6-7). Likewise, from the altar of Christ's Cross, by the ministry of the Gospel, "the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3). For He was crucified, died and was buried, "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God," and God "raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death" (Acts 2:23–24). He "received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:32) and He raises up the fallen world by pouring out His life-giving Spirit upon sinners through His earthly means of grace. When His Supper touches our lips, we, too, receive forgiveness of sins. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lord God our heavenly Father, Your ways are not my own. Thank You for Your awesome act of redemption! Amen!

Tuesday of the Week of the Holy Trinity

May 29, 2018

Today's Reading: Romans 11:33-36

Daily Lectionary: Song of Solomon 2:8-3:11; John 5:19-29

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33–36)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever had one of those moments where you just couldn't figure something out? When you looked at a problem for a what seems like an eternity and you just couldn't figure it out? Maybe it's math, maybe it's science, maybe it's a project you are working on or maybe it's a Bible passage you are struggling with. I think we've all been there and we will inevitably be there again throughout our lives.

The Roman Christians were in a very similar situation when it came to the mercy and wisdom of God. They were wondering how it was possible for God to save even Israel. They couldn't wrap their brains around it. To help them grapple with it, St. Paul told them that Israel was suffering with a hardening of their hearts, which is why they were doubting instead of rejoicing over the salvation from Christ. In the end, we find that even though we Christians are stubborn, hard-hearted and overall difficult sinners, these are exactly the people who need saving! These are the people who Christ came for! It seems backward to us, but then again, we are not God and His ways are not our ways. (Thank the Lord!)

It seems at times that God is so complex and mysterious. In some ways that may be true, but thanks be to God, we know Him through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Redeemer, who shows Himself in abundance through Word, water and the Supper! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lord God our Heavenly Father, I confess that I am often in awe of Your magnificence. I know that You work in ways other than my own. When I struggle with Your will, I am grateful that You have sent Your Son to give me forgiveness, hope and peace. Amen.

Wednesday of the Week of the Holy Trinity

May 30, 2018

Daily Lectionary: Song of Solomon 4:1-5:1; John 5:30-47

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we may not craftily seek to get our neighbor's inheritance or house or obtain it by a show of justice and right, or any other means, but help and be of service to him in keeping it. (Small Catechism: Ninth Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. In this Commandment we see a real example of the sinful yearnings of the heart. When you want someone's "house" it is more than simply wanting that wooden box with doors and windows. In our catechism lesson, we see the use of "house" as being wrapped up in a person's identity. We'll remember when Esau was out hunting and when he returned home, he was so hungry he thought he was near death. When he saw his brother making stew, he was offered a trade of the stew for his birthright or "house". He gladly traded it for a bowl of stew—a decision he would later regret.

So what is your "house"? Thankfully, we know that those who believe and are baptized have been made a part of the house of God. We become heirs of His righteousness. The devil would like to trick you into thinking you have no home, no "house" but the world. We know that isn't true. In Baptism you have been made new and claimed by God as His own.

We are glad that this house is not one that can be taken away from God by theft or trickery, as Martin Luther writes in His famous hymn "A Mighty Fortress is our God." Rather than leaving us to fend off our own feeble homes God makes us a part of His house, one that is built on the sure foundation of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God and Father, You have given us Your Word as both a blessing and a caution. Please help me to remember that I am not alone, but in fact I am a member of Your house for all eternity. Amen.

Thursday of the Week of the Holy Trinity

May 31, 2018

Daily Lectionary: Song of Solomon 5:2-6:3; John 6:1-21

After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. (John 6:1-6)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Why that's not practical! Have you ever been told that? I remember my dad saying that to me when I told him I wanted to invite my entire elementary school to my birthday party. "That's just not practical, son. Although we have five acres, there is no way we could feed and care for 800 elementary school kids."

He was right, you know. My parents instead planned on including our family of eight as well as a couple of my friends. If we had more than that, the cake, the hamburgers, the ice cream, and the party favors would run out! It truly wasn't practical.

In the reading for today, we see something similar. But rather than 800 school kids, we have 5,000 men plus their wives and children! Seeing this, Jesus tells His disciples to feed them. Well, you can just imagine they had a response much like my dad's. Something like "Jesus, that's not a practical request. Even if we had 200 denari (a bunch of money) we wouldn't be able to afford it! There were just too many people!"

The difference between my birthday and the Gospel lesson is Jesus. He wasn't being impractical...He knew what He was doing. The problem wasn't money, the problem was the disciples weren't trusting Jesus. All they were doing was looking at themselves and saying, "I look at myself and I see that I am unable to do this." Of course, they were right about that! Good thing Jesus wasn't asking them to do it by their own strength and reason, He was telling them the truth that what He was asking of them wasn't impossible because it was Jesus who asked. Thanks be to God that what we call "impossible" God says "All things are possible with Me." In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Thank You, Lord, for Your grace and mercy on me, a sinner. Clarify and soothe my concerns when I worry. In Jesus name. Amen.

Friday of the Week of the Holy Trinity

June 1, 2018

Daily Lectionary: Song of Solomon 6:4-7:5; John 6:22-40

When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." (John 6:25-29)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. What are some of the things Jesus was famous for? Off the top of my head, I would say 1. Being born in a stable, 2. Teaching in the temple, 3. Turning water to wine, 4. Raising a few people from the, 5. Healing some lepers 6. Healing the blind man 7. Feeding thousands of people. I don't think anybody in his right mind would say that these things were anything short of amazing. Truly Jesus has done some incredible things! Sometimes, though, these miracles could, if they were all we sought after, might be a hindrance to our faith.

How many times have you watched "faith healers" do all these seemingly amazing things on TV yet never in a cancer ward? How many times have you ever seen a person who has been injured by the world languish in despair because they are asking God why He allowed it to happen? You see, when we see people being fooled by false prophets and false promises of continual joy—as if that were possible before the resurrection that we look forward to—we know that they are hoping for a different Jesus. It's just like Jesus in today's Bible passage, when He was rebuking those following after him for just being interested in filling their bellies with bread. After all, Jesus didn't come to be a social worker or a magician.

While all of Jesus' miracles were simply doing their job—pointing to Him as the Savior—the intention was never to obscure His message of coming to seek and save the lost, Jesus' provision of food for the crowd was indeed miraculous, but His Body and Blood, which that miracle pointed to, is what He uses to help sustain our faith. The promises He makes and keeps for you are eternal! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Thank you, Jesus, for keeping me in Your grace through Your Supper. Amen.

Saturday of the Week of the Holy Trinity

June 2, 2018

Daily Lectionary: Song of Solomon 7:6-8:14; John 6:41-59

“How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?” (Psalm 13:1 from the Introit for Trinity 1)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. “How long, O Lord?” How many of us have prayed this same prayer as the psalmist? When there is tragedy or hardship, sadness or depression, the Lord seems so far off. When we are surrounded by evil, having fallen once again to temptation, perhaps even by the same sins that have such a hold on us: “How long, O Lord?”

The psalmist is aware of his enemy. The enemy is always there, taunting you, rejoicing in your sorrows, rubbing in your misery. He shoots flaming arrows at you: “You are weak, O Christian. God doesn’t love you. God is absent, otherwise He would come to your aid.”

Just as easily as we succumb to temptation, we fall prey to the lies of the father of lies. That’s because our eyes see what is before us, the realities of this life: pain, suffering, weakness, defeat, even death. Has God forgotten me? Does he hear my prayer? If not, why bother?

This psalm is short, only six verses, but it speaks volumes. This psalm is real. It delivers us from the snares of the theology of glory and brings us back to the theology of the cross. It removes all misconceptions of what you and I think our lives should be like. Weakness, suffering, falling into sin, death ... this is our life. This is life under the Cross of your Lord Jesus.

As the Psalmist realizes this, there is a sudden change in confession. There is faith that overcomes doubt. There is strength beyond weakness. There is a truth that bursts through the lies of the enemy. There is the Lord’s salvation. There is the Lord’s steadfast love for His people.

In the cross of your Savior there is suffering, there is pain, there is weakness, there is defeat, there is death! But there is glory, hidden in His perfect blood shed there for you. There is life hidden in His body, given up for you. And when He gives that body and blood to you at His Table, there is no doubt that He remembers you. Though His glory is hidden, His face is not, for the face of God is the steadfast love with which He loves you in His Son. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

My heart with joy is springing; I am no longer sad. My soul is filled with singing; Your sunshine makes me glad. The sun that cheers my spirit Is Jesus Christ, my King; The heav’n I shall inherit Makes me rejoice and sing. (If God Himself Be for Me, LSB 724:10)

The First Sunday after Trinity

June 3, 2018

Today's Reading: Luke 16:19-31

Daily Lectionary: Ecclesiastes 1:1-18; John 6:60-71

And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"
(Luke 16:27-31)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. In this lesson, we see a selfish man who cared for no one but himself. He had a life of missed opportunities to show kindness and mercy to his neighbor but chose not to do so.

It was only in death he saw how foolish he had been, but then it was too late! He begged to have Lazarus sent back, as a spirit from the land of death, to warn his five brothers, lest they share his own terrible fate.

Where faith and belief have been thrown out, unbelief and superstition are rife and rampant. When the Word of God in Law and Gospel has been declared insufficient for the 21st century world, spiritualism, real and imitated, is hailed as a solution and salvation. Abraham gives the rich man the answer we should hear, believe, and cling to even now. The old sound doctrine, the written Word of God, is the one and only safe norm and rule of doctrine and life. Moses and the Prophets were accessible to the five brothers, they were read in all the synagogue on the Sabbath; let the brothers seek for the truth there.

We thank God that in Word and Sacrament His continual grace is there for us in God's house every Lord's Day to strengthen and nourish our faith! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O God, the Strength of all those who put their trust in You, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing, grant us the help of Your grace that in keeping Your commandments we may please You both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord (Collect for Trinity 1)

Monday of the First Week after Trinity

June 4, 2018

Today's Reading: Genesis 15:1-6

Daily Lectionary: Ecclesiastes 2:1-26; John 7:1-13

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:1-6)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. God says a lot of things.

Generally, He speaks to us in Law and Gospel. On one hand He is using His Law to curb us, to be a mirror for us and to guide us. In all things, when He speaks this way, He is showing us that we desperately need Him. He shows us that even though His Word is good and beneficial for us, we can't or won't always be obedient to it. In the Gospel we have the life-giving Word that God delivers to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as well as in the means of grace.

Regardless of whether God is speaking in Law or Gospel, it is important to always remember that it is God who is doing the speaking. He is faithful and just (1 John 1:9) and does not lie (Luke 4:25). These are the witnesses to His glory.

Abram trusted in the promise of the Lord without even knowing all it implied. The Lord accepted him into the covenant of His grace. That has been the way of salvation for all sinners, the way of obtaining that true righteousness by which we are justified before God. Christ, through His perfect obedience unto death has earned blessing, salvation, righteousness for all men, and all who trust this promise in faith have these wonderful gifts. Today, rest in God's promises given to you in Jesus, as Abram did. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Dear Father, rescue us from our enemies by Your promise made sure in Your Son, who delivers our inheritance to us in the New Testament of His blood. In Jesus' name. Amen

Tuesday of the First Week after Trinity

June 5, 2018

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

Daily Lectionary: Ecclesiastes 3:1-22; John 7:14-31

So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 John 4:16–21)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. What is the message of Christianity? As Lutherans, we know that the two great teachings in the Christian Bible are Law and Gospel. Another way to look at Law and Gospel is as the Bible says: "The full counsel of God."

When God counsels us, He does so by first giving us a picture of the situation we live in. In our world, everybody is a fallen and broken sinner. Our bodies don't always work right. We aren't always very kind to one another. In fact, we treat our neighbor badly. We lie, cheat, steal, murder, and the list goes on. When God says this about the world, He says it about everybody, including you. When we hear this, God's Law that says this to us. The Law accuses us and rightly so. We are indeed guilty of everything the Law accuses us of.

Of course when the counsel of the Law condemns us, God also counsels us with His soothing, life-saving Gospel. His death and resurrection, in Baptism become ours. When we hear this good news, it is a call from God that says "You poor, dead thing. Don't be dead anymore. Be alive by my grace!" From there, you really are a new creation! The blessing of the "entire counsel of God" is it is so clear, so wonderful and it is for everybody! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Heavenly Father, You have shown me my sin, and by Your Son, you have taken it away. Thank you for Your complete counsel. Amen.

Wednesday of the First Week after Trinity

June 6, 2018

Daily Lectionary: Ecclesiastes 4:1-16; John 7:32-53

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his cattle, or anything that is his. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we may not turn, force, or entice away our neighbor's wife, servants, or cattle, but urge them to stay and <carefully> do their duty. (Small Catechism: The Tenth Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Does your brain ever get you in trouble? Seriously, when our minds start to wander, we often find ourselves thinking of the strangest things. Sometimes we imagine harmless things like being a superhero or a famous sports star... but then sometimes it changes. You start thinking about what other people have that you don't have, then you get a little jealous, and it's all downhill from there.

In this Commandment, God is very clear that it is a problem of desire. More importantly it has to do with desiring something that isn't yours to desire—coveting. Every time we look at other people's spouses, workers, possessions and wish they were ours, we are also saying that what God has gifted us with is not sufficient. We are questioning God's wisdom and using our own desires as a barometer of what is good for us. Yes, so often our hearts and minds betray us. They reveal that we are indeed sinners who do not measure up to the perfect Word of God.

From this we are indeed called to repent and turn away from the deceit bred by our own desires and the pain and suffering those desires can bring. Instead we are turned toward to Christ, where we find forgiveness and redemption and hope. When this happens, we also find that, as St. Paul says, "In all situations I have learned to be content" (Philippians 4:4). In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Thank You Jesus for turning me away from my sin and unto You and Your forgiveness. Amen.

Thursday of the First Week after Trinity

June 7, 2018

Daily Lectionary: Ecclesiastes 5:1-20; John 8:1-20

But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." (John 8:9–11)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. A common phrase you hear on TV is "It's a matter of life and death!" This is usually when something dramatic is happening. When a police officer commandeers a car to chase a bad guy, he will say "Sir/ Ma'am, I need to commandeer your car, IT'S A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH!" Of course, not all the uses of this phrase are as truly as urgent. Sometimes we let the drama take over and feel like something is a matter of life and death when in reality, if we stop and think for a minute, our urgent matter isn't such an emergency. This is hard since we live in a culture where if you want or need something you can usually get it rather quickly. We pride ourselves on that actually. That's why TV commercials work—because they convince you that you need whatever they are selling NOW.

In the Bible text for today, we see a woman who was caught in adultery. She sinned against God and apparently her husband. We found a group of people surrounding her, ready to kill her with large stones (as was the punishment back then). Perhaps these people were a little too anxious to do this... I don't know. This seemed like an urgent situation that needed remedied as the Law required. What we do know is Jesus said "You're all so angry about her sin and desire to punish her, He made a statement that shocked them. He said, "All those who are without sin, throw the first stone." Everybody left. Any urgency they felt to exact consequences on this woman was completely dissolved.

Often in our dealings with our neighbors, we might be quick to exact punishment without keeping in mind our own sin. In the end we, just like those prepared to stone the adulterous woman, find out that each of us is guilty of sin and Jesus is the Lord of all who gives us forgiveness of sins. He is the one who will both judge and forgive. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lord thank You for not making me judge of all. Grant me Your grace and mercy. Amen.

Friday of the First Week after Trinity

June 8, 2018

Daily Lectionary: Ecclesiastes 6:1-7:10; John 8:21-38

So Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him." As he was saying these things, many believed in him. (John 8:28–30)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Ever since the Garden of Eden, we see that sin, generally speaking, is man's desire to put himself on the same level with God.

Every time we sin, we are saying "I know better than You, God!" If we steal something, we say "I know God says this is wrong, but my I know best and I say it is ok for you to do this."

Jesus not only recognizes where His authority comes from (the Father). He does not "Lord it over" those around Him as one who has no authority. In fact, as we are reminded by St. Paul in Philippians 2, Jesus lowered Himself to live amongst us, die for us, and rise from the dead for us. If anyone could have waved His authority about proudly it could have been Jesus, but He did not do so. And thank the Lord He did not. He was perfectly obedient in how He submitted to the authority of the Father. That perfect obedience then becomes ours through Baptism! He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings

Believing you are equal to God is not only harmful, it's a lie. Such lies drag you away from our Lord. He wants you to know the truth of Jesus Christ who brought Himself down low, in order to raise you up with Him. Thanks be to Father that the Son always had done "what is pleasing to Him." In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lord God our Heavenly Father. I thank you for not turning away from me when I tried to be equal with You. You brought me down low to the foot of the cross, where I found true peace and salvation in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Saturday of the First Week after Trinity

June 9, 2018

Daily Lectionary: Ecclesiastes 7:11-29; John 8:39-59

“I will love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer. For You will save the humble people, but will bring down haughty looks. As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the Lord is proven; I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the Gentiles, and sing praises to Your name.” (Psalm 18:1-2, 27, 30, 49, from the Introit for Trinity 2)

In the name of Jesus. Amen. The introductory notes to Psalm 18 tell us that David sang this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of his enemies and from the hand of Saul. Those who think they're stronger and mightier than the Lord are sadly mistaken. In earthly appearance, the Lord's servants are often ordinary and weak. David was an ordinary shepherd boy, yet in the Lord he was mighty. The disciples were ordinary, yet in Christ, they stood strong for the Gospel, some of them even giving their lives.

God's way is not the way of glitz and glitter, but it's the perfect way, the proven way. We may not like the fact the church is different from the world. We may not like the fact that the Cross appears weak. We'd prefer to go only the way of the empty tomb and leave the Cross in the past. The empty tomb clearly means victory, so why not bask in it? We can, but not without the Cross in view. You can't have one without the other.

Sure, as Christians we sing the song of the victorious Lamb. We sing about the feast of victory for our God. But we walk the way of the Cross in the world. We go into the world humbled by God's grace and forgiveness in Christ. We go, our eyes having seen the Lord's salvation. We go with a song of thanksgiving in the midst of the world.

We don't pretend that the church is some great utopia. The church is a place of refuge where sinners are declared righteous, saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. The church is a mighty fortress from the wickedness of the evil one, but its might is hidden. The church doesn't pretend to be something it is not. It simply sings the song of salvation and the praises of Him who died and was raised again. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

*Restrain, O Lord, the human pride that seeks to thrust Your Truth aside
Or with some man-made thoughts or things Would dim the words Your
Spirit sings. (Lord Jesus Christ, with Us Abide, LSB 585:5)*

The Second Sunday after Trinity

June 10, 2018

Today's Reading: Luke 14:15-24

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

The master said to the servant, "Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled." (Luke 14:23)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Lord wants to give all things as gift. He wants to throw a gigantic party. He wants everyone there. He made everything for it. He planned it from before the foundation of the world. All gift for you. All gift for all.

But Adam took and ate what was not given him to eat. He and his wife feasted upon the fruit of the tree. In their eating and feasting there was no life, no party, no joy. There was only death. There was fighting between Adam and Eve and between mankind and God. There was only fear.

We're always resisting and rejecting the gift. I've got better things than the Lord and His feast. His party can wait—He's forgiving right? Certainly, He'll accept some excuses. He'll let you have your excuses, too. That's the scary part. You could go to your new field, your new cattle, your new wife, your sports team, your day off. The Lord will let you have that, but "none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet" (Luke 14:24).

That's the fact of the matter. The only way to be unworthy of the feast is to reject it. Why would we do that? The feast that God sets up is one that leads to everlasting joy and peace. When you eat of the Lord's feast the result isn't death; it's life—eternal life! "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will resurrect Him on the Last Day." (John 6:54)

All things are gift. Your life. His life for yours. His feast. His forgiveness. His life from death. All delivered in His feast—His Body and Blood. He wants everyone there—He does! He wants you there. So, eat and drink, and then He will bring you to His eternal feast forever. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

*O Lord, who never fails to help and govern those whom You bring up in Your steadfast fear and love, make us to have a perpetual fear and love of Your holy name; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
(Collect for Trinity 2)*

St. Barnabas, Apostle

June 11, 2018

Today's Reading: Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-3

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

Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians. (Acts 11:25–26)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. There's only one message that's preached in the Lord's Church. There's only one thing He wants preached. It's why He's always had preachers. They might've gone by different names throughout the centuries. Whether they're called patriarchs, priests, prophets, apostles, pastors, their job is the same: preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified for you.

There's nothing else that saves. Nothing else that gives new life. It's all Jesus Christ dead on the cross, and raised from the dead three days later. Holy Baptism dies and rises you. Gospel preaching, the Holy Absolution, puts the cross of Jesus into your ears, mind, heart. The Holy Supper delivers Jesus' real Body and Blood into your mouth so that you would live in Him and He in you, and He would raise you from the dead on the Last Day. It is no longer you who live, but Christ who lives in you, and the life you now live in the flesh you live by faith in the Son of God who loved you and gave Himself for you (Galatians 2:20). It's why you're called a Christian, a little Christ. He saves you, lives with you, in you, and even through you for others.

This is the Good News that Barnabas preached. He preached it with Paul. They preached so often that Jesus was the Christ who saved all humanity, that the followers of Jesus were known as Christians—first in Antioch, but then all over the world.

You are a Christian—not because of anything you've done, but rather because of all that Jesus has done for you. It wasn't just His death and resurrection for you. It was His preachers (no matter what they're called), who deliver His Word and His Gifts, that we might bear His Name: splashed on our foreheads, planted in our ears, delivered into our mouths. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

For Barnabas we praise You, Who kept Your law of love And, leaving earthly treasures, Sought riches from above. O Christ, our Lord and Savior, Let gifts of grace descend, That Your true consolation May through the world extend. (By All Your Saints in Warfare, LSB 518:17)

Tuesday of the Second Week after Trinity

June 12, 2018

Today's Reading: Ephesians 2:13-22

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

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2:13)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Do you ever feel alone? Maybe it's deeper than just a feeling. Maybe more than just alone—abandoned. Maybe you are alone in this life. Maybe you aren't. Whatever your case may be, you really aren't alone.

You should be. That's the result of sin. "In Adam we have all been one, one huge rebellious man" (LSB 569). Sin separated us from God. It separated us from each other. It made us truly alone and dead. But take heart, dear Christian! You truly aren't alone.

"Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Jesus was alone and abandoned for you. His disciples all fled except one. Peter denied even knowing Jesus. Judas betrayed Him. He was left alone with just sin: your sin, my sin, the sin of every single person who's ever lived or will live. Even forsaken by the Father—"My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46)

But in and through His blood and death there is no more separation: "the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51). You have free access to the Father's throne. But more than that, Jesus is one with you and you with Him. You were brought near through His blood, sprinkled in His blood, baptized into His cross and empty grave, you are brought near. You are in Christ Jesus. You are a child of the Father. Nothing can ever, ever, ever change that.

You may be alone, maybe you're not; you may feel alone, maybe you don't. Doesn't matter. No matter what, you're not far from God, or rather He's not far from you. You're in Jesus, baptized into Him. You've been sprinkled with His blood at the font. You are a full child of the Father, just like Jesus. Nothing can change that—not your sin, not your life, not your loneliness. One thing never changes: you're baptized. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Wednesday of the Second Week after Trinity

June 13, 2018

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

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

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Do good and God will bless you. Do bad and God will punish you. If you really do good things, God will bless you with eternal life in heaven. If you really do bad things, God will punish you forever in hell. We struggle with this sort of thinking all our lives because this way of thinking comes naturally to us.

As Christians, we don't always struggle with eternal life: that's a free gift won by the death and resurrection of Jesus and delivered to us in His preaching, His Word, and His Gifts of Baptism, Absolution, and the Supper of His Body and Blood. What causes us to doubt is our sins, because we can't shake the idea that our bad deeds keep us out.

Just think about it: is there something that you could do that would be so bad that could keep you out of heaven? Murder someone? Have an abortion? Lie? Cheat? Steal? Be gay? Have sex outside of marriage? How much do you have to do that thing? One time? But lots of people think that someone could be so bad that they don't get heaven.

We need to repent of all that. That's a lie from the pit of hell, from the mouth of the devil himself. He's spread it through all the world, and our flesh just naturally believes it. There's nothing you do to either lose or get (earn) heaven. Your good works don't get you in, and your bad works, your sins, don't keep you out.

The Lord does things differently. He takes care of the salvation problem Himself. He becomes a human being. He claims all sins as His own. No matter how bad, how icky, how many times they've been done—each and every sin from each and every person (that includes you) was taken by Him. He bore them until He was left hanging dead on a cross. He loves you, His faithfulness, along with His good works, and His righteousness are all yours.

We love Him for what He's done (cross and empty tomb) and delivered (font, altar, pulpit). To hate Him is to look at you, your works, and forget His. To do that is to lose Him forever. But He won't lose you. You're His. Jesus loves you. You love Him, too. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Thursday of the Second Week after Trinity

June 14, 2018

Today's Reading: Proverbs 9:1-10
Daily Lectionary: Proverbs 14:1-27; John 15:1-11

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. (Proverbs 9:10)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Well, you'd better get on that. Fear the LORD. Be afraid of Him. That gets you on the path of wisdom. If you want insight, you'd better learn more. Well, that's what we think. We always gravitate towards that mindset. But that's not really wisdom, that's not knowledge of the Holy One at all.

"My thoughts aren't your thoughts; neither are your ways my ways," (Isaiah 55:8) He tells us. This passage from Proverbs isn't about what we need to do at all. Look at what Paul says: "Because of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord'" (1 Corinthians 1:30-31).

Jesus is the Wisdom of God. Jesus Himself is the LORD, the Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 12:6). He knows the Father, and He truly feared the LORD, His Father. He was filled with the LORD, the Holy Spirit. He lived a perfect life in your place. He feared the LORD—suffering much, the cross much, death much. He was raised from the dead.

All that He did He did for you. All the wisdom He has and is, is given to you. The font clothes you with the holiness of the Holy One. The Scriptures deliver the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, making you wise unto salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). The Supper delivers the LORD Himself to you, His Body and Blood, to bring you into Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Our wisdom and our knowledge are swapped out, repented, so that we receive true knowledge and wisdom, even Jesus Christ, the LORD, the Holy One so that we might be redeemed. And so we fear Him, that is, we love and trust in Him. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

It was grace in Christ that called me, Taught my darkened heart and mind; Else the world had yet enthralled me, To Thy heav'nly glories blind Now I worship none above Thee; For Thy grace alone I thirst, Knowing well that, if I love Thee, Thou, O Lord, didst love me first. (Lord, 'Tis Not That I Did Choose Thee, LSB 573:2)

Friday of the Second Week after Trinity

June 15, 2018

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

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

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. (1 John 3:14)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Love is life. To not love is death. Love produces life! Out of His love the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the One God, created everything. They gifted all that is to us. That's love. Hate produces death—murder, anger, rivalry, jealousy. Holding back love from someone means they die, spiritually or physically.

“God would not have the sinner die” (LSB 571:3). He wouldn't have you die. He would die for you. That's His love—to give you life. He poured out His blood for you. He received mocking, hatred, sin for you—your mocking, hating, and sinning! In His blood is forgiveness, in His death is life, and in His life again is eternal life. All for you.

He showers His love upon us again and again and again. You were baptized into His love. You hear His love in the Absolution: “I forgive you.” You eat and drink of His love—His Body and His Blood that He gave and shed for you.

God's love flows through you. His love flows out from you to all those around you. He would have them receive His love and care through you: forgiveness, kindness, love for whomever you meet, whatever their name, no matter what they've done. Maybe even food or clothes, or whatever they might need for this body and life. If you withhold Jesus' love from them they'll die, be hungry, be naked, be lost in sadness, sorrow, guilt, and loneliness.

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16). For you, for me, for everyone in our live, Jesus laid down His life. He took it back again. That's love, which is life for you, for me, for all now and forever. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Lord of all nations, grant me grace To love all people, ev'ry race; And in each person may I see My kindred, loved, redeemed by Thee. (LSB 844:1)

Saturday of the Second Week after Trinity

June 16, 2018

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

Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me, for I am desolate and afflicted. Look on my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins. (Psalm 25:16,18, from the Introit for Trinity 3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Forgiveness of sins is what we need the most. We'd like to think we need things like money, popularity, health, strength, and all sorts of other, well, stuff. But our primary need isn't any of those things. Yes, the Lord does give us what we need to support this body and life. Yes, He gives us our daily bread every single day. But our desire for such things, our worrying about them, our basing God's love for us on whether or not we have them flows out of our primary problem: we're sinners.

To be a sinner means that you're cut off from God. You are other. You are alone. You are selfish, worrying about number one. You put yourself before others, no matter how you justify it. All of that flows out of being a sinner, and so it all flows out of unbelief. But the Spirit works in us and enlivens us to the truth: "I am desolate." The Spirit gives us a proper confession, "Forgive all my sins."

The Son became desolate for us. He "made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7). He was afflicted. "He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). He felt the pain of forsakenness: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46)

All of it was for you, that you would receive the forgiveness of your sins. That you would receive it over and over and over again. That you would receive it in the many and various ways that He delivers it. That's what tomorrow is all about. Your receiving more and more of what Jesus has done for you, receiving more and more of the Spirit.

Apart from Jesus you are desolate, you have nothing, you are nothing. But He became all that for you, in your place. He gives you His place. He gives you all that is His. He does this over and over again, week in, week out, until you are face to face with Him in the resurrection at His marriage feast that has no end. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Oh, how great is Your compassion, Faithful Father, God of grace, That with all our fallen race In our depth of degradation You had mercy so that we Might be saved eternally. (Oh, How Great Is Your Compassion, LSB 559:1)

The Third Sunday after Trinity

June 17, 2018

Today's Reading: Luke 15:1-10

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

There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. (Luke 15:10)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Everything we have is a gift from the Lord. He gives everything richly and abundantly to us only out of His Father, divine goodness and mercy—all that we need to support this body and life. He delivers everything needed for your salvation, too. Jesus sheds His holy, precious blood and gives His life into death. He delivers His salvation to you in the Word and water of Holy Baptism, He delivers His forgiveness to you in the Absolution, He delivers the Body He gave and the Blood He shed to you in His Supper. The Spirit works and is given in those means, too, as a gift. Everything you have for body and soul, this life and the next is all a gift from the Lord.

We forget that. That's our sinfulness. The forgetting is a sin—a breaking of the 1st Commandment. But the very fact that we so easily forget is our sinfulness. We get distracted. We turn heart and mind, body and soul away from the Lord. We do it daily and much.

So, what's the Lord to do about that? He repents you. That's another gift. What does a lost sheep do to be found? Not much. What about a lost coin? Even less—nothing, at all! So the Lord finds you. How does He do that? He finds you through His Word and Gifts. He draws heart and mind, body and soul back to Himself. Your parents drag you to church, and who's there waiting for you? The Lord—not to wag His finger at you, but rather to once again deliver Himself to you: His Body and Blood. That's the Lord repenting you. And when that happens the angels rejoice, they sing out, they join us and we join them as we sing the liturgy: "Glory be to God on high! Holy, Holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth."

All things are a gift from the Lord. Yes, we forget that. But He never forgets us. He just delivers more and more gifts, more and more of Himself. He even repents us. He finds us, joins Himself to us and throws a party, too. It's "the feast of victory for our God" that He's throwing. It's His Body and blood now, which is an eternal wedding feast forever. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

O God, the Protector of all that trust in You, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us Your mercy that, You being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; 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 Trinity 3)

Monday of the Third Week after Trinity

June 18, 2018

Today's Reading: Micah 7:18-20

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

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. (Micah 7:18)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. There really is no God in the entire world like the true God. All other so-called gods can make sense to us. It's why people make them up in the first place. The god sets up rules and demands that they're followed. If they're followed he/she/it might bless you, might save you, might give you stuff in this life. It's all "maybe," and if you try really hard, at least you've got a shot. If you mess up, well, you'd better hope that the god is in a good mood. What if you think, "What's the point?" and then you don't follow the rules? Well, that outcome for you is even worse.

But there really is no other God like the God of the Bible. He's a God who goes about "pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance. He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in steadfast love." But it's not so much that He's merciful and forgiving. It's how He demonstrates that, how He wins those things, and how He delivers them that really sets Him apart.

Yes, there really isn't any God like Jesus. He doesn't just forgive your sins. He takes your sins as His own. He doesn't just rescue you from punishment, judgment, or death. He goes through your punishment, judgment, and death. He is crucified for you and He comes back to life. He gives you all that is His: purity, forgiveness, life. He even gives you resurrected eternal life.

What's the price? The catch? What you must do? That's the incredibly amazing part! What will it cost you? Nothing! It's free for you. No man-made god does that. But the true and living God, the God who died and rose for you does. He delivered it for you at the font. He continually delivers it in His Absolution, His preaching of the Gospel, and with His Body and His Blood.

Jesus isn't just one god choice among many. No, there really is no God like Him! He saves you Himself. Gives you new life through the Spirit. Presents you pure and holy to His Father. It's all free for you! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Not unto us, not unto us be glory, Lord; Not unto us but to Your name be praise; Not unto us but to Your name all honor be giv'n For matchless mercy, forgiveness, and grace. (Not unto Us, LSB 558:1)

Tuesday of the Third Week after Trinity

June 19, 2018

Today's Reading: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

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

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. (1 Timothy 1:15)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus saves sinners. He only saves sinners. He dies for their sins. He rises for their forgiveness, their justification. He doesn't just do it for little sinners. No, He does it for big sinners, too!

We think that though. We think that we've got to do something, that we have to try harder, get better, that we've lick our secret sins, our big sins, our little sins before we can come to Jesus and receive His forgiveness, His Supper, His mercy, His love.

But no, that's not how it works with Jesus. Jesus saves sinners. HE does it. Look at Paul. He was on the way to lock up Christians and have them killed, and what did he do? He collapsed on the ground and was struck physically blind. Jesus showed Paul that He was dead and blind spiritually, and so Jesus then sent Paul a preacher (Ananias) who forgave Paul, baptized him, and gave him his physical sight back.

This isn't an excuse to sin. That'd be like saying Paul could go back to persecuting and murdering Christians. No, Jesus saves us from our sins. He really does. Paul wasn't a murderer or persecutor. He was a baptized child of the Father. He received the Lord's Body and Blood for His forgiveness. Those things defined him, Jesus defined him, and not his sins.

You, too. You are a sinner. You have sins. That's self-evident. But even more evident is that you have a Savior because Jesus only saves sinners. He baptizes them. He continually absolves them. He delivers His Body and Blood to them. He does all this so they can be forgiven, be made holy and pure, be welcomed into eternal life with Him forever. He does all of this FOR YOU. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

My guilt, O Father, You have laid On Christ, Your Son, my Savior. Lord Jesus, You my debt have paid And gained for me God's favor. O Holy Spirit, Fount of Grace, the good in me to You I trace; In faith and hope preserve me. (If Your Beloved Son, O God, LSB 568:5)

Wednesday of the Third Week after Trinity

June 20, 2018

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

With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father. (Small Catechism: Introduction to the Lord's Prayer)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. You have a heavenly Father who loves you. He's done everything for you. He sent His true and only Son to die and rise for you. Besides that great gift, He made you His child and gave you the Holy Spirit. Those two great gifts came at your Holy Baptism.

Baptism is holy because God's at work there. There He made you holy. There He gave you "the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). There He gave you "the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 2:39). There He made you a disciple (Matthew 28:19). But more than a disciple, He declared of you "this is My beloved son," my beloved daughter, "in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

We were made alive in Jesus' resurrection by Baptism, but our flesh still leads us away from this life and into death. We end up not using our Baptisms. Since "baptism now saves you" (1 Peter 3:21), you can always use it "now."

Now, I'm sure you're wondering: "How do I use my Baptism?" Since it's made you a true child of the Father, you can then call upon Him "as dear children ask their dear Father." When you pray, that's using your Baptism. In fact, whenever you pray the Lord's Prayer, you're using your Baptism.

The devil would have us be runaways. On our own, we'd forsake our Father. The world would have us live on our own. But we are baptized. We are dear children of the heavenly Father. We are adopted as co-heirs with Jesus. We are set free to use our baptism daily and much. "Baptism now saves you" (1 Peter 3:21), and so you are always free to use that Baptism now. When you pray, especially the Lord's Prayer, that's using the Baptism the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit saved you with. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Children of the Heav'nly Father Safely in His bosom gather; Nestling bird nor star in heaven Such a refuge e'er was given. (Children of the Heavenly Father, LSB 725:1)

Thursday of the Third Week after Trinity

June 21, 2018

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

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

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. (1 Peter 5:10)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The devil wants to devour you. He wants you to suffer. He wants to destroy your faith in Jesus. He wants to separate you from you Savior. He wants you to choose things of this world and life rather than your Lord who gives you eternal life.

There are many ways the devil makes us suffer as Christians in order to shipwreck our faith. The first is obvious. Just look around the world: there are many Christians who are persecuted and killed for their faith in Jesus. But it's not just stakes and stones, guns and knives that the devil uses to make Christians suffer. He's got far more subtle ways of sinking his teeth into you.

Sin and doubt. That's what all Christians suffer with even if no one is trying to kill them. The devil tempts you to sin, to live for yourself first, to be unkind and unloving toward the people in your day-to-day life. Then instead of repenting, he causes you to doubt the love in Christ Jesus. As if what you do daily and much means that your unworthy of the Father's love. He makes you doubt that Jesus died for you, that He baptized you, that He gives you to eat and drink of His Body and His Blood for the forgiveness of your sins.

But no matter what, Jesus did all those things for you. He died and rose. He baptized. He absolved. He preached. He Suppered. All for you and to you. Yes, we sin—daily and much. Yes, we suffer—whether it's the devil's lies or his persecutions, or death. "After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." (1 Peter 5:10). In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

*As true as God's own Word is true, Not earth nor hell's satanic crew
Against us shall prevail. Their might? A joke, a mere facade! God is with
us and we with god—Our vict'ry cannot fail. (O Little Flock, Fear Not the
Foe, LSB 666:3)*

Friday of the Third Week after Trinity

June 22, 2018

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

It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out. (Proverbs 25:2)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Kings like to be powerful and in control. It's not just kings. That's the way of the world. Whether its sports or work, politics or school, we all want power, influence, money, strength, riches, and the list goes on and on.

We search and strive for all such things. The glory of men, the glory of this life and world is to be top dog. You've got to work to get first place, the best grades, the promotion at work, the bonus check at the end of the year. There's certainly glory when you get those things, but there's also glory in putting forth the best effort, even if you come up short by the world's standards.

God is the opposite. He hides His glory. In fact, His glory is His hiddenness. The glory of God is Jesus Christ born in a barn, living as a poor man, hanging on a cross, buried dead in tomb. The glory of God is saving you from all the things we search out, strive after, and work for.

He still conceals Himself for you. He still does glory that way. He washes you in simple water, but with His word it's no longer "plain water," but "it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit" (Small Catechism, Baptism). He sends you a preacher to forgive your sins. He speaks His Word over bread and wine that according to His Word of promise really are His Body and Blood given for you to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of all your sins.

We must repent of our glory. Our glory won't save. (Neither will our repenting.) Now, our searching, striving, and working may get us all sorts of cool stuff in this life, but our kind of glory leads us away from God. His glory is to save you in ways that seem silly to our senses and smarts. But thanks be to God that He's God and we're not. He does it His way, and His way is to hide and save, to die and rise, to baptize, absolve, and feed. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

All that the mortal eye beholds Is water as we pour it. Before the eye of faith unfolds The pow'r of Jesus' merit. For here it sees the crimson flood To all our ills bring healing; The wonders of His precious blood The love of God revealing, Assuring His own pardon. (To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord, LSB 406:7)

Saturday of the Third Week after Trinity

June 23, 2018

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

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1, from the Introit for Trinity 4)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. What are you afraid of? We're afraid of all sorts of things. From spiders to war, public speaking to being alone, poverty to natural disasters. Whatever it is for you, there is something that we're all afraid of: death.

We're all going to die. You could die young. You could die at a really old age. You could die from cancer. You could die in a car accident. It doesn't matter. We're all going to die. One day your heart will stop, your eyes will close, and...then what? Think about that. One moment you're living and breathing, heart beating, and the next moment you're not. You're dead. We don't like to think about it or talk about it. We don't like it because we're afraid of it. The fear of death is universal.

But you don't need to be afraid. Jesus, your God, became a human being, and He died. On the cross He breathed His last, His heart stopped. He was dead, and then He was buried in a grave. But then He came back to life. He isn't dead anymore! He went through death and the grave and came out the other side very much alive.

He gives that to you. What's His is yours. He gives you His death and His life again at the font. The Body and Blood that was crucified and raised, that's now ascended and will come again in glory is given to you to eat and to drink. The LORD who went through death and the grave is your Light, your Salvation, and your Life.

Yes, you'll die. But you'll also rise from the dead. Just like Jesus left His tomb empty, one day your casket will be empty. Your body will come back to life and you'll see Jesus face to face. That's the promise of your Baptism. There you already died and rose with Jesus. The death you'll die someday is now just a nap—a nap Jesus will wake you from on the Last Day. You'll be very much alive that Day and forever. No more caskets and death, just life with Jesus. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

There is nothing worth comparing To this life-long comfort sure! Open-eyed my grave is staring: Even there I'll sleep secure. Though my flesh awaits its raising, Still my soul continues praising: I am baptized into Christ; I'm a child of paradise! (God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It, LSB 694:5)

The Nativity of St. John the Baptist

June 24, 2018

Today's Reading: Luke 1:57-80

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

...to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins." (Luke 1:77)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. When we think of John the Baptizer, sometimes we think of a fire and brimstone preacher. He preached repentance, that the tree is about to be cut down, that the fire is coming on all sinners, unbelievers, and wicked people. And John certainly preached those things. He did preach repentance, but that's not all that He preached. You see, John was a Gospel preacher.

Yes, John was really a Gospel preacher. That's what John's father Zechariah prophesied: that John would "give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins." That's what John did, "baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4).

Whenever the Lord sends a preacher, a prophet, a pastor—the Lord's men are always sent to do the same thing: preach the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ, to deliver that forgiveness in the Lord's Gifts (Baptism, preaching, the Supper). John did that before and when Jesus came. Your pastor does that now until Jesus comes again.

You see, the Lord is always about the forgiveness of sins. You're sins really do separate you from Him. Our trying to make up for our sins just drives us farther and farther from Him. So He comes to us. In a preacher He comes to us. Yes, that preacher preaches repentance, that our sins cut us off from God, that if we turn to our sins and ourselves we will be cut down and thrown into the fire. But the Lord doesn't send preachers to send us to hell, but rather they are sent to deliver Jesus, the Lamb of God. They are sent to deliver the forgiveness of sins. That was John. That's your pastor, too. Thanks be to God! In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

*O Lord God, heavenly Father, who through Your servant Saint John the Baptist did bear witness that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and that all who believe in Him shall inherit eternal life, we humbly implore You to enlighten us by Your Holy Spirit that we may at all times find comfort and joy in this witness, continue steadfast in the true faith, and at last with all believers attain unto eternal life; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(Collect for the Nativity of St. John the Baptist)*

Monday of the Fourth Week after Trinity

June 25, 2018

Today's Reading: Genesis 50:15-21

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

"Do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. (Genesis 50:21)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Lord is always about the forgiveness of sins. He's always about mercy and love. From the very first sin of Adam and Eve to the last sin committed before He comes back, from beginning to end, alpha to omega, the Lord is about forgiveness. We see that because from start to finish everything is united by this one event: the death and resurrection of the Alpha and the Omega, Jesus, for the sins of the whole world.

Joseph was dead. He'd been delivered into the pit by his brothers. They wanted him dead. Why? The Lord had promised deliverance and life through him. They didn't want that. They were tired of this promise. It probably didn't help that they heard this promise from Joseph himself, but as Jesus Himself said, "No prophet is acceptable in his hometown" (Luke 4:24).

So it was with Jesus. He was rejected. He'd promised not just deliverance in this life, but He promised eternal and everlasting life and deliverance through Him. They didn't want that, so they killed Him. Jesus was dead. Dead for all who want their own way, who want to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps.

But Jesus came back from the dead, and, in a sense, so did Joseph. But Jesus and Joseph didn't come back from slavery, death, prison to beat up on those whose sin, unbelief, and selfishness put them there. No, instead, in their dying and rising they wanted to deliver deliverance, life, and forgiveness.

That's what Joseph did for His brothers. Jesus does the same for you and for all. He forgives you daily and much, until He brings you to Himself in the eternal Promised Land.

The Lord is always about the forgiveness of sins: yours and your neighbor's, too. Jesus used Joseph to love, forgive, and deliver his brothers (specifically Judah) so that He would be born. So also you, that He would be born in your neighbor's life and heart even as He was born into your life and heart, now and forever, through Holy Baptism. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Where charity and love prevail There God is every found; Brought here together by Christ's love By love are we thus bound. (Where Charity and Love Prevail, LSB 845:1)

Tuesday of the Fourth Week after Trinity

June 26, 2018

Today's Reading: Romans 12:14-21

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

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Get even. Fight back. They hit you, so you hit them harder. Nasty comment online. Nasty video. Nasty texts. Nasty rumors. Nasty. Mean. Harsh.

That's the way of the world. If someone is evil, you have to crush that quickly. That's what war is all about: violence against someone who's violent against you. But that's not what the Lord's about, at all.

The Lord isn't evil and nasty. Rather the Lord is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exodus 35:6-7). He receives evil, your evil, your being unkind, your being unloving, your being unforgiving. God Himself overcomes evil by going through it, by suffering, by being crucified, by dying. He wins all good, all forgiveness for you. And He would use you to overcome the evil around you. He would have His love have its way with you so that His forgiveness and love would flow through you to those around you.

Yet, the Lord "will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation" (Exodus 34:7). For those who want the life of judgment, of comparing, of nastiness, of unforgiveness, that's what He gives. Repent.

Yet, His mercy endures for you. "His anger is but for a moment" (only "to the third and fourth generation"), "and His favor is for a lifetime" (Psalm 30:5), even forever: "Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!" (Psalm 107:1)

The Lord always works to overcome evil with good—His good. By His dying and rising He undoes all evil. He undoes evil within you with His font, His Absolution, His Body and His Blood. He does it through you, too. He overcomes evil around us with His forgiveness through us. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

"Forgive our sins as we forgive," You taught us, Lord, to pray; But You alone can give us grace To live the words we say. ("Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive," LSB 843:1)

Wednesday of the Fourth Week after Trinity

June 27, 2018

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

God's name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to it. Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven! But anyone who teaches or lives contrary to God's Word profanes the name of God among us. Protect us from this, heavenly Father! (Small Catechism: The Lord's Prayer, 1st Petition)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Lord gives you His Name: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." He makes you holy by that Name, which alone is holy. He doesn't just want to make you holy with His Name, which is awesome enough, but He wants His Name to be "kept holy among us also."

What does this mean? Well, God wants His Name to be kept holy around us in our daily lives. How does He do that? Well, with the same thing that made you holy: His Word.

His Word tied to water made you holy. His Word tied to bread and wine gives you the means of holiness: the holy, precious Body and Blood of Jesus. His Word rightly taught and preached makes holy.

Whenever you receive His Word it makes you holy, and whenever we receive that Word together it makes us all holy. To sin is to be unholy. To think that we've got to work out our own holiness is to be unholy.

When we use our Baptism and pray the First Petition, we're asking our Father to help us lead holy lives by receiving His Word, and we're asking Him to protect us from sin, false teaching, and from not receiving His Word.

He hears your prayer. Not because of you, but because of Jesus. Your Father hears you because He's made you holy. You have the Holy Spirit who's made you holy.

The Lord keeps His Name holy for you. That's His life-long gift to you. It has to be, He gave you His Name. In the Name + of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Your name be hallowed. Help us, Lord, In purity to keep Your Word, That to the glory of Your name We walk before You free from blame. Let no false teaching us pervert; All poor deluded souls convert. (Our Father, Who From Heaven Above, LSB 766:2)

Thursday of the Fourth Week after Trinity

June 28, 2018

Today's Reading: Luke 6:36-42

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

Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful... You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye. (Luke 6:36, 42)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. There's only one way that sins are gotten rid of. It's forgiveness. Jesus continually teaches and preaches this. True forgiveness and mercy is what Jesus and His Father are all about. The new life of the Spirit is one of "love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness," and a bunch of other stuff, too! (Galatians 5:22-23)

We hear Jesus saying that as long as we know our own sins, we can judge others for their sins. That we can take the log out of our own eye and beat others with it! The problem is: that's not what Jesus is saying, at all. Repent.

Your sins and your neighbor's sins are removed the same way. It doesn't matter if they're your big sins ("log") or your neighbor's small sins (speck). Mercy, love, and forgiveness is what removes sins. Not yours but God's.

Jesus hung upon the cross for every single log, speck, and splinter. His blood covers all sins. His Baptism washes out your eye. There He gives you a clean conscience, a pure heart, and a mind set upon heavenly things: God's mercy, love, and forgiveness.

Once we believe and trust that our sins have been removed by Jesus, we then know how to forgive others. This is something only the Spirit can do for us. Jesus has forgiven your sins for free. He expects no payback. "So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us" (Small Catechism, 5th Petition).

The mercy of the Father was washed over us in Baptism. He was completely and eternally merciful to you in Jesus. To forgive others in that Jesus way, is to use your Baptism. Jesus' cross-won, font-and-you-delivered forgiveness is the only way to remove sin, after all—yours and your neighbor's, too. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

So use it well! You are made new— In Christ a new creation! As faithful Christians, live and do Within your own vocation, Until that day when you possess His glorious robe of righteousness Bestowed on you forever! (All Christians Who Have Been Baptized, LSB 596:6)

St. Peter and St. Paul, Apostles

June 29, 2018

Today's Reading: Galatians 2:1-10

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

Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. (Galatians 2:4-5)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. You are free. Completely, 100%, eternally free in Jesus Christ. Your slavery to sin is over. You're not subject to death and the grave. The devil and world are no longer your lords and masters. You're set free: Jesus-risen-from-the-dead free, baptized free, absolved free, body-and-blood free.

Sinning. That's not free. That's slavery. That's being a slave to yourself, your passions, your desires, your lusts, your wants. To think that Jesus sets you free so you can do what you want, is to not only abuse your freedom, but it's to cast off your cross-won, empty-tomb freedom. It's to, once again, put yourself under sin, death, and the devil.

Lawing. That's not free either. As if you need to reign in our freedom. There need to be laws and rules. You don't want to be too free. We do that all the time. Oh, we might make ourselves free, but we'll quickly try and yoke and burden others with what we think they should be doing, must be doing to make God happy. But really we just want them to be doing like us, but just not as good as us so that we can be doing better. Here we are put under the yoke of law, slavery, and death.

Jesus really did set you free. He bore your sins; He was born under God's holy and perfect Law. He washed you and brought you into His kingdom. In Jesus' kingdom there is only freedom. Freedom from the Law. Freedom from sin. Freedom to love. Freedom to live selflessly, just as Jesus lived, died, and lived again for you.

You are free. Completely, 100%, eternally free in Jesus Christ. Your slavery to sin is over. You're not subject to death and the grave. The devil and world are no longer your lords and masters. You're set free: Jesus-risen-from-the-dead free, baptized free, absolved free, body and blood free. That's the truth of the Gospel now and forever. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

We praise You for Saint Peter; We praise You for Saint Paul; They taught both Jew and Gentile That Christ is all in all. To cross and sword they yielded And saw Your kingdom come; O God, these two apostles Reached life through martyrdom. (By All Your Saints in Warfare, LSB 518:19)

Saturday of the Fourth Week after Trinity

June 30, 2018

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

Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice! Have mercy also upon me, and answer me. (Psalm 27:7, from the Introit for Trinity 5)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The Lord hears you. He doesn't just know your thoughts. He actually hears you. The very moment you say something, He hears it. Just like when you're talking with your friends, your parents, your siblings, or whomever else you're talking to.

That's maybe more than a little less than comforting. He hears everything. Everything! No matter what. He's God, after all. Every gossip, every lie, every taking His name in vain, every false teaching spoken in His Name. He hears every last bit of it.

The Father didn't hear His Son for you. The Son was forsaken on the cross. Yet, the Father did hear His Son for you. The Son was raised on the third day. You are baptized into that Jesus, the eternal Son of the Father. You are baptized into His death, His resurrection. You are baptized into His never speaking evil but His always speaking good. All of that counts for you, because all of your speaking counted for Jesus.

Now you don't have to wonder about if the Father hears you. You're in His Son, and Jesus hears you, too. The Spirit opens your mouth to praise, and the Spirit speaks through you.

That's tomorrow. When you sing the hymns and liturgy, God hears you. He's really there. He hears when you speak, sing, and pray, just as those standing around you hear you speak, sing, and pray. All gift. All delivering the Lord's Word into the ears of the people, and into His ears, too!

He has mercy upon you. He won't leave you nor forsake you. He's your salvation. He gives that again tomorrow: Body and Blood for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

You have been my help; do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation. (Psalm 27:9, from the Introit for Trinity 5)

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

Unless otherwise noted, Biblical quotations are from the NKJV.

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

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

*Higher Things, Inc.
P.O. Box 155
Holt, MO 64048*

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

Visit our website at www.higherthings.org to read Reflections online each day.

Higher Things

DARE TO BE LUTHERAN