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

Unless otherwise noted, Biblical quotations are from the ESV.

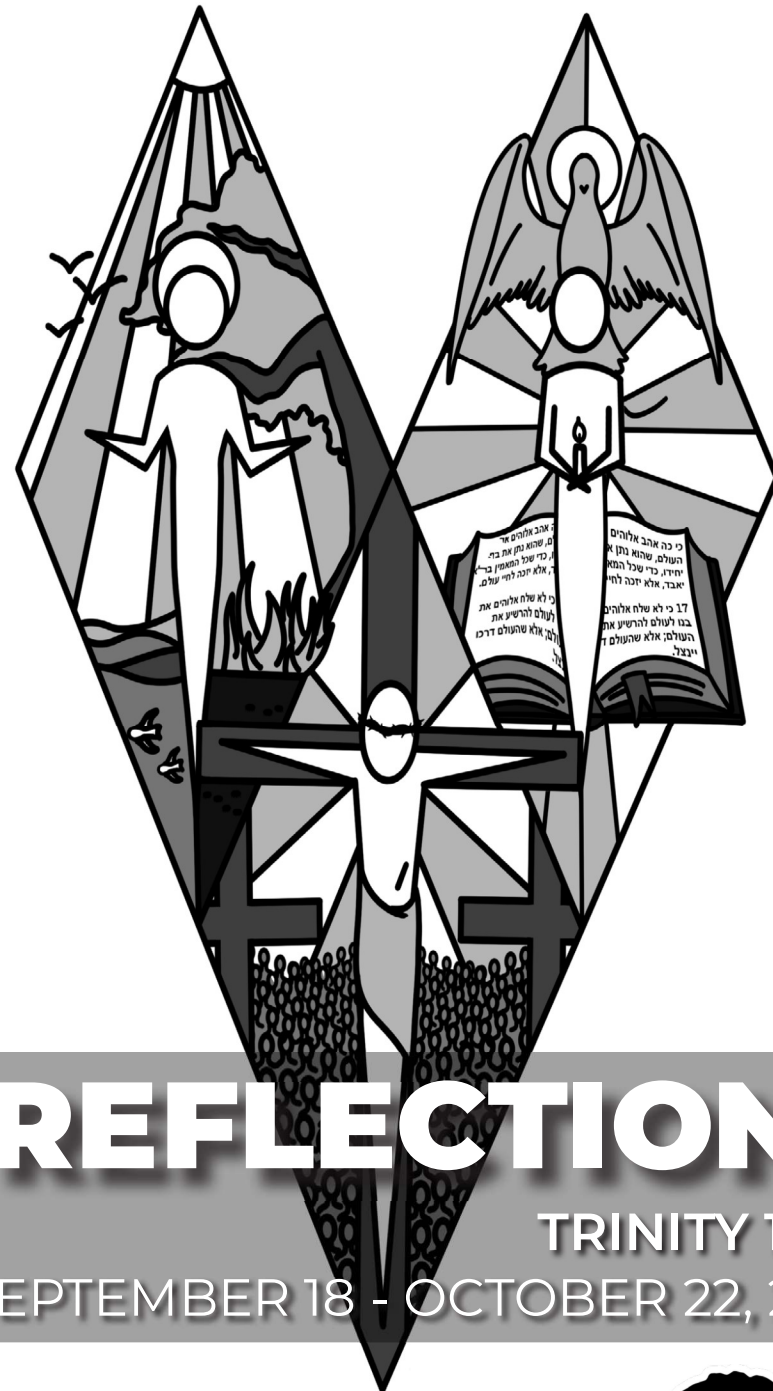
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REFLECTIONS

TRINITY 14-18

SEPTEMBER 18 - OCTOBER 22, 2022



Trinity 14-18

SEPTEMBER 18 - OCTOBER 22, 2022

This season's Reflections were written by

*Rev. Alexander Lange, pastor of
Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church in Albany, OR.*

2022 Reflections Staff:

Rev. Duane Bamsch (Audio Editor)
Benjamin Heinz (Cover Art)

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Saturday of the 18th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 22, 2022

Today's Reading: Introit for the 19th Sunday after Trinity
(Psalm 78:1-3, 4b; antiphon: Psalm 35:3b; 34:17a, 6b; 48:14a)
Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 21:1-23; Matthew 16:1-12

*Say to my soul, "I am your salvation!"
(From the Introit for the 19th Sunday after Trinity)*

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. The psalmist says to God, "Speak to my soul and say, 'I am your salvation.'" And indeed, God does speak these words to our souls! This is what happens every Lord's Day. The saints draw near to God and the Lord speaks to us. He speaks in the Absolution, in the lessons from Holy Scripture, in the sermon, in the Words of Institution, and in the Benediction. And He always says the same thing: "I am your salvation!"

In Matthew 9:2, Jesus spoke to the soul of the paralyzed man. He said, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." In other words, "I am your salvation!" He demonstrated His power to save this man from sin by reversing one effect of the curse—his paralysis. Sin brought death into the world, along with disease and disability. This man lay still like a dead man, but when Jesus told him to rise he got up and walked.

Jesus demonstrated the extent of His power when He laid down His life and then took it up again. He stepped into the jaws of death, allowing the grave to swallow Him. Then, the grave was opened up and the body was not there. Death was reversed in this Man. And if the curse of death is reversed, then sin has been dealt with once and for all.

Thus, the risen Lord comes to us, saying, "I am your salvation!" He comes proclaiming that He suffered the full effects of the curse, so that we might be spared. Your sin was punished in the body of Jesus. Then, His body was resurrected, proving that the curse has been reversed!

Therefore, take heart! Your sins are forgiven! And everyone will know that your sins are forgiven, when your body leaves behind its grave and is granted the very immortality and glory of the risen Lord. The paralytic lay still, until he heard the voice of Jesus. Likewise, your dead body will get up at the Lord's command. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

*Speak, O Lord, Your servant listens, Let Your Word to me come near;
Newborn life and spirit give me, Let each promise still my fear. Death's
dread pow'r, its inward strife, Wars against Your Word of life; Fill me,
Lord, with love's strong fervor That I cling to You forever!
(*"Speak, O Lord, Your Servant Listens"* LSB 589, st.1)*

Friday of the 18th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 21, 2022

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

“When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them, for the Lord your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.”
(Deuteronomy 20:1)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. The Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land. Moses knew that the Canaanites would raise armies to meet them. He told the Israelites to fear no army, because the almighty Lord would be with them.

The Church faces far greater foes. The whole world hates Jesus, and thus hates the Church (John 15:18-19). Entire governments and institutions seek to destroy the Church. And we have greater enemies still! The devil and his legions of demons oppose the Church (Ephesians 6:12). If that wasn't bad enough, every Christian has an enemy within himself. The sinful flesh resists the Spirit constantly (Galatians 5:17).

Do not be afraid, dear Christians. Do not be afraid of the devil, the world, and the flesh, although they are great. God is greater and He is on your side! “If God is for us,” Paul asks (Romans 8:31), “who can be against us?” Indeed, your Lord is with you at all times.

And the devil, the world, and the flesh are scared spitless of your Lord. The world tried to destroy Jesus on a cross, but failed. He was crucified and killed, but then was raised from the dead. The devil wields sin and death against mankind. He tried to wield them against Jesus and found Himself disarmed. Your sinful flesh might be a nuisance, but when Christ was nailed to the Cross your sin found itself pinned to that wood, too.

Jesus is an impenetrable fortress. Those of us baptized into Him never need to fear our evil foes. He is our mighty champion, who won the battle that we could never win. So, no matter how much they rage, we can sing the victor's song. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Cast afar this world's vain pleasure And boldly strive for heav'nly treasure. Be steadfast in the Savior's might. Trust the Lord, who stands beside you, For Jesus from all harm will hide you. By faith you conquer in the fight. Take courage, weary soul! Look forward to the goal! Joy awaits you. The race well run, Your long war won, Your crown shines splendid as the sun.
(“Rise! To Arms! With Prayer Employ You” LSB 668, st.2)

A Short Form for Daily Reflection

ADAPTED FROM LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM

Make the sign of the Holy Cross and say:

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

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

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

Read the Daily Lectionary selections.

Read the Reflection for the Day.

Say the Apostles' Creed.

Pray the Lord's Prayer.

Pray one of these little prayers:

(In the Morning)

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

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

(In the Evening)

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

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

Thursday of the 18th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 20, 2022

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

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

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus,... who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:4, 8)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. I think that Paul might have written these words for himself as much as he wrote them for the Christians in Corinth. You see, Paul wrote a series of letters to the Corinthians, in order to correct and rebuke them. They were terribly divided, full of pride, confused about basic Christian teachings, and were committing very gross sins. Paul was probably worried that he had labored over them in vain—that they were forsaking God and returning to the world, and that they would forsake his teachings and lose their salvation.

So, as he begins this letter, he reminds them (and perhaps himself) that the grace of God had really been given to them. God actually received these messed up sinners into His Kingdom. And not only that, but Jesus will sustain them to the end. God won't begin something, only to give up halfway. God is intent on finishing what He started. God will continue to give them grace; He will continue to forgive their divisions, pride, false doctrine, and vices. Therefore, when the Day of the Lord arrives, they will stand guiltless before their Lord.

In our American context, Lutherans frequently address the issue of conversion. We remind our Protestant neighbors that we cannot come to God on our own, but the Holy Spirit must convert us. Paul is talking about the other side of that coin—perseverance. He's reminding us that the Holy Spirit doesn't merely give us faith only to leave us alone. No, the Spirit constantly nourishes and defends our faith. He doesn't give us grace once, but He gives us grace daily, so that we remain in Christ and are found safe in Him on Judgment Day.

Perhaps you have friends or family who you are worried about, concerned that they might forsake the Lord in the future. If so, take refuge in these words of Paul, who was a father to the Corinthians. Remember that the crucified and risen Lord is committed to His people. He intends to see them through to the end. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, because of Your tender love toward us sinners You have given us Your Son that, believing in Him, we might have everlasting life. Continue to grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may remain steadfast in the faith to the end and finally come to life everlasting; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Prayer for Steadfast Faith, LSB p.311)

Wednesday of the 18th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 19, 2022

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism:* Office of the Keys
Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 18:1-22; Matthew 14:22-36

What is the Office of the Keys? The Office of the Keys is that special authority which Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent.

(Small Catechism: Office of the Keys)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Keys represent power—the ability to go places and to do things. You cannot go into the locked house unless you have the key. You cannot drive the car unless you have the key. The prisoner cannot go free unless he is given the key to his bonds.

Jesus came to die on a cross, thereby taking away the sins of the world. He entered our prison, so that we can enter His Father's home. He went to the gallows, so that we can go free. Jesus died, so that there is now forgiveness—enough to cover every sin!

Jesus gave the Keys to His Church and He also gave pastors to use the Keys whenever the Church gathers together. What are the Keys? They are power—the power to distribute or withhold the forgiveness of sins.

The first time the Keys are mentioned is in Matthew 16:18-19. First, Jesus blesses Peter and promises that the gates of Hades will not prevail against the Church. Then, He gives the Keys of the Kingdom to Peter and the other apostles. What do these Keys do?

On the one hand, these Keys bind and loose. Sins are like iron chains that bind us and weigh us down. The Law tightens the chains, but the Absolution loosens them, so that they fall off the repentant sinner!

On the other hand, we might say that these Keys open doors. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus speaks of the gates of Hades. Then, in verse 19, He mentions the kingdom of heaven. How do sinners get into the kingdom? The gates must be opened with a key. You get into the kingdom by receiving the forgiveness of sins! Jesus speaks similarly about Baptism in John 3:5. He says that you enter the kingdom of God by being born of water and Spirit. Baptism brings you into the kingdom, because Baptism is an Absolution!

Are you feeling weighed down by sins and outside the kingdom? It is time to go to your pastor. He's got the Key! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

When ministers lay on their hands, Absolved by Christ the sinner stands; He who by grace the Word believes The purchase of His blood receives.
("As Surely as I Live," God Said" LSB 614, st.6)

The 14th Sunday after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 18, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 17:11-19
Daily Lectionary: Nehemiah 1:1-2:10; 1 Timothy 1:1-20

And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."
(Luke 17:19)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Our English translations have to make a couple of interpretive choices when they translate Luke 17:19. Jesus literally says, "Arise! Journey! Your faith has saved you!" First, how do you translate "saved"? Obviously, Jesus saved this man from his skin disease. The ESV translates it this way: "Your faith had made you well." However, Jesus did more than just heal his disease. He saved him from the state of exile caused by his impurity. An incurable skin disease would prevent anyone from entering a holy space, such as the temple. Also, in extreme cases you would be excluded from society, lest you pass your impurity to them. Jesus healed this man's disease, but He also healed both the rift between this man and God and the rift between him and his fellow men. Jesus saved him!

Second, when Jesus tells this man to get up and journey, what does He mean? The ESV assumes that Jesus is telling this man to move along—to go back home and to normal life. This is possible, but it is also possible that Jesus is inviting this man to journey with Him—to follow Him as a disciple and travel with Him to Jerusalem.

That second interpretation certainly fits the theme of this Sunday. The Propers for this Sunday emphasize that after Jesus purifies you of your sins, you must follow Jesus and remain with Him. Thus, Proverbs 4:10-23 invites us to stay on the way of wisdom and the path of righteousness. In Galatians, Paul encourages us to walk by the Spirit, which means to crucify your flesh and to produce the fruit of the Spirit. The Introit speaks of dwelling with the Lord in His house.

You are pure in the eyes of God as long as you are in Christ. He is your righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30). In Christ you find the grace of God. To leave Christ is to leave God's grace. Salvation is not a one-time event that occurred in the past. It is a reality that you live in. You were baptized into Christ. In Him you must stay. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

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

(collect for the 14th Sunday after Trinity)

Monday of the 14th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 19, 2022

Today's Reading: Proverbs 4:10-23

Daily Lectionary: Nehemiah 2:11-20; 4:1-6; 1 Timothy 2:1-15

*Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life.
(Proverbs 4:13)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. There are two roads: the way of wisdom and the way of folly. The way of folly is the road of unbelief and sin. It is the path that leads to death. This is the path that Jesus walked for you. He bore your sins and went to the Cross to die in your place.

According to Proverbs, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Proverbs 9:10). The fear of the Lord is contrition over your sin and confidence that the Lord will save you from those sins. Simply put, those who repent and believe are on the way of wisdom—a path that leads to life.

How do you remain on that path? Proverbs tells us to keep hold of the instruction and to guard it. The instruction is your life! Likewise, we read these words: “My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh” (Proverbs 9:20-22).

The Word of the Lord creates faith. The Word also nourishes, sustains, and strengthens faith. The Word delivers Jesus to you. The life won on the Cross is delivered through the Good News: “You are absolved for the sake of Jesus!” When you doubt, return to the Word. When you have sinned, cling to the Word. This is how you stay on the way of wisdom.

And those who remain attentive to the gracious Word and guard it in their hearts will receive eternal life on the Last Day, when their decaying flesh will be healed by the risen Lord. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, giver and perfecter of our faith, we thank and praise You for continuing among us the preaching of Your Gospel for our instruction and edification. Send Your blessing upon the Word, which has been spoken to us, and by Your Holy Spirit increase our saving knowledge of You, that day by day we may be strengthened in the divine truth and remain steadfast in Your grace. Give us strength to fight the good fight and by faith to overcome all the temptations of Satan, the flesh, and the world, so that we may finally receive the salvation of our souls; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

St. Luke, Evangelist

OCTOBER 18, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 10:1-9

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

*“Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’”
(Luke 10:9)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Before Luke became a missionary and an evangelist, he was a doctor. He bandaged wounds, set broken bones, and prescribed medicines. He did his best to make bodies whole and to extend temporal lives.

When Jesus preached, He also healed the sick, not with bandages and medicine, but with a word or a touch. He gave that power to the Twelve, and then to the 72, and after Pentecost to many other Christians, especially to those who held some office in the Church. Since Luke was a companion of Paul and an evangelist, he probably received that same spiritual gift.

And what a gift, especially for a physician! I am sure Luke had dreamed of having such power, so that he could cure any patient that came to him. What fame and what fortune! A doctor who can heal you with a touch would go down in history as the greatest doctor of mankind!

Of course, Luke was not given such a gift so that he could continue his practice, nor was he to use it for fame and fortune. The miraculous healings of the New Testament served a specific purpose: They advertised that Jesus possesses and distributes the final cure for death.

We see this in Luke 5:30-32, where Jesus compared Himself to a physician: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.” Then, He explains that He is talking about sinners. Jesus comes to heal the soul by taking away our sins. After making us right with God on the Cross, Jesus steps out of the grave to grant us eternal life. “With his wounds we are healed,” (Isaiah 53:5).

Ministers are not given the gift of healing today. Your pastor cannot take away your cancer with a touch, but he can take away your sins with a word! Like Luke, he is a physician of the soul, for he carries on his lips the Good News about Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, our Father, Your blessed Son called Luke the physician to be an evangelist and physician of the soul. Grant that the healing medicine of the Gospel and the Sacraments may put to flight the diseases of our souls that with willing hearts we may ever love and serve You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the Feast of St. Luke)

Monday of the 18th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 17, 2022

Today's Reading: Deuteronomy 10:12-21

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

*"Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn."
(Deuteronomy 10:16)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. God commanded the sons of Abraham to get circumcised. Circumcision was a sign attached to the covenant promise that God would bless the offspring of Abraham and also bless the nations through Abraham's offspring.

The Law told Israel, "If you, the offspring of Abraham, wish to receive God's blessing and pass it along to the nations, you must obey my statutes." Of course, genuine obedience is not merely external. Genuine obedience begins in the heart. It includes fearing God and loving Him (Deuteronomy 10:12), as well as loving your neighbor (Deuteronomy 10:19). So, Moses calls the Israelites to deal with their sinful hearts. "Don't merely cut off your foreskin. Cut off the stubborn attitude that clings to your heart!" Here circumcision is a metaphor for repentance. Cut off the Old Adam and let him die! Moses admits that they won't circumcise their hearts, and so the Law must curse them (Deuteronomy 28:15-29:29). Then, Moses predicts that God would have compassion on them. He will circumcise the hearts of His people, so that they truly love Him and obey Him gladly (Deuteronomy 30:1-6).

In His mercy, God sent Jesus, the true Offspring of Abraham (Galatians 3:16). He obeyed the Law with a pure heart. He had no need to cut away sin from His heart, because there was no sin found there. Nevertheless, He was cut off and left to die on the cross. Why? He suffered the curse of the Law in our place, so that we disobedient sinners can live forever.

Then, the risen Christ sent His Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to us through the Gospel and He enters our hearts. He circumcises our hearts. He causes us to repent of our sins and love the One who loved us first. Indeed, Paul says that we were circumcised in Holy Baptism, where the Old Adam was put to death, so that we might rise with Christ (Coossians. 2:11-15).

Since you were baptized and have heard the Gospel, the Spirit has circumcised your heart. Therefore, you love the Lord and your neighbor, albeit imperfectly, until the Day of Resurrection when sin is cut away and removed entirely. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Almighty God, You gave Your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon Himself. Grant that we, Your adopted children by grace, may daily be renewed by Your Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.
(Prayer for Spiritual Renewal, LSB p.312)*

Tuesday of the 14th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 20, 2022

Today's Reading: Galatians 5:16-24

Daily Lectionary: Nehemiah 4:7-23; 1 Timothy 3:1-16

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

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Once you were ruled by the flesh. Once you were a slave of sin. You gratified your wicked desires. No longer! You are now a slave of Christ. Jesus is your Lord and Master. He rescued you from sin. On the Cross He paid the price for your freedom. Then, He marked you with His own Name in Holy Baptism.

The Law could not rescue you from sin. The Law is good, but sin used the Law to keep you imprisoned (Galatians 3:22-23). Like gasoline added to fire, the Law made sin abound (Romans 5:20). The Law didn't merely reveal sin. The Law increased sin, for its threats stirred up resentment toward God, dread of His wrath, and a covetous desire for whatever God forbids. Grace, on the other hand, extinguishes the fire. Your guilt is absolved and your heart begins to love the God who first loved you.

Does this mean that I can sin as much as I want? Of course not! If we intentionally sin, we are returning to our former master. We are intentionally gratifying the desires of the flesh, as if we were slaves of sin yet again. We were liberated from sin, so that we might be led by the Spirit. To follow the Spirit is to walk away from sin, for the two are against each other. Remember these words of our Lord: "No one can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24).

This is the life of repentance: to turn your back on sin and to walk with the Spirit, to renounce the works of the flesh and to put your faith in Jesus. Such faith will produce the fruit of the Spirit. When we repent of our sins and give them to Jesus, they cannot harm us. When we cling to our sins, Jesus cannot help us. Therefore, repent of your sins and give them to Jesus. Crucify the flesh (Galatians 5:24), so that you might walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put upon ourselves the armor of light now in the time of this mortal life in which Your Son, Jesus Christ, came to visit us in great humility, that in the Last Day, when He shall come again in glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to life immortal; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Prayer for Newness of Life in Christ, LSB p. 311)

St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist

SEPTEMBER 21, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 9:9-13

Daily Lectionary: Nehemiah 5:1-16; 6:1-9, 15-16; 1 Timothy 4:1-16

*"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."
(Matthew 9:12)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. This spring I got sick—right before Holy Week, no less! I was coughing, blowing my nose all the time, and felt tired and weak. And that darn cold wouldn't quit! It took three weeks before I had no more symptoms. Should I have gone to my doctor? Perhaps, but I was certain that he couldn't help me. He would tell me, "Take some cold medicine and rest," and then charge me for such "wisdom."

Sometimes the Bible describes sin as a sickness. If sin is a disease, it's a bad one. It lasts a lot longer than a few weeks. It lasts a lifetime! And sin is deadly. Those sick with sin will die. You can't fight it. Sin is far worse than cancer. And you've got it! This disease is passed from Adam to his descendants, and you caught it from your mom and dad!

If sin is a sickness, then Jesus is the good physician. And He's the kind of doctor you can trust. He won't look you over and say, "Yep, it's sin. Sorry, I can't help you. Just take some cold medicine and enjoy life while you still can. Here's the bill." No, Jesus can help the sin-sick soul. He can do something that no other doctor can do: He can take your sickness and let it kill Him, and then give you His health and life!

Matthew the evangelist describes in his Gospel how Jesus "took our illnesses and bore our diseases" (Matthew 8:17). He took our sin, and then He suffered the fate of all sinners. He died, while feeling the full weight of God's displeasure. Since He paid for our sins, Jesus can grant us His life. He can apply the sweet balm of Absolution to our wounds. He can feed us the medicine of immortality—His Body and His Blood. Through Word and Sacrament, His life is bestowed upon us! Jesus takes our sickness and gives us His health. He suffers our death and shares with us His life. Luther called this the "joyous exchange." Are you a sinner? Then Jesus is the doctor for you! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Son of God, our blessed Savior Jesus Christ, You called Matthew the tax collector to be an apostle and evangelist. Through his faithful and inspired witness, grant that we also may follow You, leaving behind all covetous desires and love of riches; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the Feast of St. Matthew)

The 18th Sunday after Trinity

OCTOBER 16, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 22:34-46

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

*Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David."
(Matthew 22:41-42)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Pharisees sent a lawyer—an expert of the Torah—to Jesus. He asks Jesus a Law question: "Which commandment is the greatest?" The Pharisees probably hoped that they could accuse Jesus of elevating some commandments above the others. Jesus answers the question by giving two commandments, which perfectly summarize the entirety of the Law. When Jesus says, "Love God and neighbor," He is basically saying, "The whole Law is important." You cannot trap Jesus.

The Pharisees thought that understanding the commandments of God is crucial to understanding the Old Testament. Jesus agrees that the commandments are important (Matthew 22:40). Still, there is a more important question, namely, "Who is the Christ?" Jesus believed that the entire Old Testament testified about Him (see Luke 24:44 and John 5:39). Therefore, if you do not understand what God said about the Christ and do not see how various people, events, and ceremonies foreshadowed His work, then you do not truly understand the Old Testament.

The Pharisees did not understand the Bible, because they did not understand the Gospel. The Scriptures contain both Law and Gospel. Both are good and important. Nevertheless, the Gospel is the central message of the Bible. In fact, the Law serves to prepare us for the Gospel. By revealing our sin, the Law leads us to Christ. The Bible is not so much about what you should do as it is about what Jesus has done for you.

Remember this when you search for a new church, or read a book by a scholar you don't know, or listen to some Christian radio program. Are they preaching Jesus? Is Christ the main message? If not, beware! They are missing the very heart of the Bible. Like the Pharisees, they know the Bible, and yet don't know it. Do not follow them. Instead, follow those teachers who will lead you to the crucified and risen Christ. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, because without You we are not able to please You, mercifully grant that Your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the 18th Sunday after Trinity)

Saturday of the 17th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 15, 2022

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

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

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

Give peace, O Lord, to those who wait for you, and let your prophets be proven faithful." From the Introit for the 18th Sunday after Trinity)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. In our Introit for tomorrow, we ask for two things. First, we ask that the Lord would give peace to His saints, to those who wait for the Lord. Second, we ask that the prophets of the Lord would be proven faithful. These two petitions go hand-in-hand.

What is the prophet to do? A prophet speaks the message that God has given Him to speak. False prophets say that they speak for the Lord, but deliver a message of their own invention. Faithful prophets speak the Word of the Lord. Prophets proclaim the accusing Law, of course. They proclaim the Gospel, too, however. Indeed, this is their proper work: to announce the Good News to those sinners who wait for the Lord!

And what does that Good News do? It gives peace to the saints. It calms their troubled consciences and gives them hope for the future. They hear that God delights in them now and forgives their sins. And so, they do not dread the coming of the Lord. Instead, they eagerly anticipate it, for they know that he comes to give them eternal life.

What a fantastic prayer with which to open the Divine Service! We pray that our modern day prophets—our pastors—would speak the Good News that God has given them to speak. We ask that our pastors would preach about Jesus, who obeyed the Law in our place, and paid our debt in full, and then reversed death on Easter morning. And then, we ask God to use that Good News to give us that peace which surpasses all understanding.

Is it any wonder why the saints are glad to go to the house of the Lord? They are glad, because they know what they will hear there. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, giver and perfecter of our faith, we thank and praise You for continuing among us the preaching of Your Gospel for our instruction and edification. Send Your blessing upon the Word, which has been spoken to us, and by Your Holy Spirit increase our saving knowledge of You, that day by day we may be strengthened in the divine truth and remain steadfast in Your grace. Give us strength to fight the good fight and by faith to overcome all temptations of Satan, the flesh, and the world, so that we may finally receive the salvation of our souls; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(For Blessing on the Word, LSB p.308)

Thursday of the 14th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 22, 2022

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism:* Baptism, part 2

Daily Lectionary: Nehemiah 7:1-4; 8:1-18; 1 Timothy 5:1-16

What benefits does Baptism give? It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare. Which are these words and promises of God? Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Small Catechism: Baptism)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Our Lord has attached so many great and wonderful promises to Baptism. Jesus told His disciples to make more disciples by baptizing them (Matthew 28:19). A disciple is a forgiven sinner. Indeed, Peter told the Jews gathered in Jerusalem to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38) and Acts 22:16 tells us that Baptism washes away our sins. Paul says that the Church is cleansed "by the washing of water with the Word" (Ephesians. 5:25-26).

Jesus also said that you enter the Kingdom of God by being born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5). If Baptism brings you into the Kingdom of God, then it takes you out of the kingdom of darkness (Colossians 1:13). Baptism rescues us from the devil.

Baptism grants us life and salvation. Jesus promises that Baptism saves us in Mark 16:16. Peter affirms that Baptism saves in 1 Peter 3:21. Also, Paul says that God saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). Of course, our Protestant friends will protest that water cannot save you. Faith alone saves you. Well, it is true that faith saves us, but faith in what? We put our faith in the promises of the Lord. When He makes a promise, we believe Him. If the Lord says, "Pick up that straw and live," faith doesn't sneer at the straw and say, "How can mere straw save anyone?" Faith trusts the Lord and picks up the straw. Likewise, when our Lord connects His promises to Baptism, faith believes and receives the Gifts offered in the water.

To despise Baptism is to doubt the Lord. Faith is ready to receive His Gifts, no matter how the Lord chooses to deliver them. The Lord brought the world out of water (Genesis 1:2). He rescued Israel by sending them through a sea. If He wants to give me eternal life and rescue me from sin and the devil by means of water, He can certainly do that! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

All who believe and are baptized Shall see the Lord's salvation; Baptized into the death of Christ, They are a new creation. Through Christ's redemption they shall stand Among the glorious heav'nly band Of ev'ry tribe and nation. ("All Who Believe and Are Baptized" LSB 601, st.1)

Friday of the 14th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 23, 2022

Daily Lectionary: Nehemiah 9:1-21; 1 Timothy 5:17-6:2

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. (1 Timothy 5:17)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. In many Lutheran churches, there are a group of laymen called elders who aid the pastor in his ministry. Frankly, it is a bit odd to call these laymen elders. In the New Testament, the elders of the congregations are pastors.

According to the Bible, Christians should assemble with other Christians, and every Christian assembly needs a pastor. And Christians are expected to treat their pastors a certain way. First, they should honor and respect their pastors. Second, we are told in 1 Timothy 5:18 that Christians should pay their pastors for their work. Third, Paul knows that pastors will make enemies, and so he tells us to never admit a charge against a pastor, unless there are two or three witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19). In sum, you should respect and love your pastor, provide for him, and protect him.

Why? Pastors do important work. They oversee the ministry of the congregation. This means giving guidance and encouragement when needed, of course. It also includes leading the Divine Service—giving the Gifts of the Lord, and then leading the people in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. They preach the Word of God, applying the Law and the Gospel to us. They teach the Christian faith—milk to new converts and meat for the spiritually mature.

This is important work, indeed. Where the Word is preached, the Spirit works. The forgiveness of sins was won on the Cross, but gets distributed to individual sinners in the Church through the ministry of the Word. No ministry, no forgiveness. No ministers, no ministry. If you don't respect and love your pastor and he gets burned out, or if he doesn't get paid and must get another job, or if you allow false accusations to result in your pastor's removal, then who will give you the Word? Your pastor is a sinner, to be sure. He is also a wonderful gift. God placed him in your congregation so that you always have access to His Word. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and gracious God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You have commanded us to pray that You would send forth laborers into Your harvest. Of Your infinite mercy give us true teachers and ministers of Your Word who truly fulfill Your command and preach nothing contrary to Your holy Word. Grant that we, being warned, instructed, nurtured, comforted, and strengthened by Your holy Word, may do those things which are well pleasing to You and profitable for our salvation; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Friday of the 17th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 14, 2022

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 12:13-32; Matthew 12:38-50

“Take care that you do not offer your burnt offerings at any place that you see, but at the place that the Lord will choose in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I am commanding you.” (Deuteronomy 12:13-14)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Moses warns the Israelites that they cannot offer their sacrifices just anywhere they please, but they must offer their sacrifices to God only in that place that God chooses for Himself. If a Jew wanted to make a sacrifice, he had to go to the Temple in Jerusalem. In this way, God marked Jerusalem as the place of atonement—the place where the Lamb of God would be slain on a cross to take away the sins of the world.

In many ways, this text doesn't apply to us today. We are not required to sacrifice animals, since Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice. We no longer have a holy building located in one place. Now, the Church is the Temple and can be found all around the world.

Nevertheless, there is some important application to be made here. Moses says that we must worship God in the way that God wants to be worshiped. That's still true today!

Every church must call a pastor. Pastors are not optional, for the Lord instituted the pastoral Office. Likewise, Christians must gather together in person. Jesus wants His followers to live and to worship as a community. The proclamation of the Word is essential. The Lord's Supper is crucial. The proper response to the grace given in Word and Sacrament is always prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.

Whenever we fail to worship the way our Lord told us to worship, we risk missing out on some gift that our Lord would have us receive. Indeed, we risk stirring up His wrath, for one is terribly proud if he thinks that he can decide how best to worship His Creator and Redeemer. However, if we take to heart our Lord's instructions and draw near to Him in the way that He prescribes, then we are sure to please Him and to receive the Gifts that He desires to give. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

This day, God's people meeting, His Holy Scripture hear; His living presence greeting, Through bread and wine made near. We journey on, believing, Renewed with heav'nly might, From grace more grace receiving, On this blest day of light. (“O Day of Rest and Gladness” LSB 906, st.3)

Thursday of the 17th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 13, 2022

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

*“See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse.”
(Deuteronomy 11:26)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Boy, that sounds familiar. Blessing and curse are important words in the book of Genesis. In the beginning, God created man and woman, and then, “God blessed them” (Genesis 1:28). Later, we learn about the Tree of Life, which represents what God wants for humanity—eternal life with God.

There is another tree, however. In the beginning, God alone determines what is good, such as His creation (Genesis 1:31), and what is not good, such as man’s being alone (Genesis 2:18). The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil presents the man and woman with another path. Instead of trusting God to decide what is good for them, they can decide for themselves what is good and then seize it. The man and woman decide to take this path—the foolish way of sin. The result of this decision was a curse.

Moses sets before Israel a blessing and a curse. Indeed, the Law set these two words of the Lord before every generation of Israelites. Like Adam and Eve, each generation chooses sin and the curse.

This is precisely why we need Jesus, the New Adam. He’s the Man who chose the path of blessing. He loved and trusted God above all things. He loved His neighbors, putting them even before Himself. Jesus rightly possesses the Father’s blessing. Nevertheless, He was cursed—forsaken by His Father on the Cross; suffering the penalty that we deserve.

Having exhausted the curse, He reversed it on Easter morning. The New Adam was granted immortality and a seat at God’s right hand—everything that the Tree of Life promised. And Jesus shares that blessing with us—with every sinner who has been given faith in Him.

Moses set before the people of Israel a blessing and curse—a blessing for those who obey the Law; a curse for those who disobey. Now, Jesus puts forth a blessing and a curse—a free, undeserved blessing for those who seek mercy in Him; a curse for those who want no intercessor, but would rather get what they deserve. May we all come to the Cross—the new Tree of Life—and find in the crucified Christ the free blessing of God. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*As by one man all mankind fell And, born in sin, was doomed to hell, So by one Man, who took our place, We all were justified by grace.
(“All Mankind Fell in Adam’s Fall” LSB 562, st.5)*

Saturday of the 14th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 24, 2022

Today’s Reading: Introit for the 15th Sunday after Trinity
(Psalm 86:4, 6, 15a, 16; antiphon: vv.1a, 2b, 3)

Daily Lectionary: Nehemiah 9:22-38; 1 Timothy 6:3-21

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

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Read Psalm 86 in its entirety. Clearly David composed this psalm in a time of trouble. David calls himself “poor and needy” (Psalm 86:1). He asks God to preserve his life and to save him. At the end of the psalm, David says that insolent and ruthless men are seeking his life (Psalm 86:14, 17). Thus, David asks the Lord to listen to his prayer and to save him.

Are ruthless men trying to kill you? Probably not. Still, you might feel like your life is in danger at times. Perhaps a terrible economy or unemployment has you shaken. You fear that one day your cupboards will be bare. Or perhaps your family has not been able to pay the bills and you are worried that they will turn off your electricity. That means no A/C during hot summer days and no heat during the cold winter. Or maybe your fears are not money related. Maybe you fear that your doctor will return with your tests and give you some really bad news.

The point is that we live in a dangerous world. So, we fear death. In Matthew 6:24-34, Jesus calms our fears. He reminds us that we have a good and gracious Father in heaven, who will surely feed and clothe us. We are never in true danger, since we rest in the hands of a loving God.

David knew this. He confesses that God is “merciful and gracious” (Psalm 86:15). And so, instead of wringing his hands and pacing the floor, David brings his fears to his God. “Listen,” David says to God, and indeed the Lord does listen. He listens to your prayers, too. “Ask,” the Son of God said, “and it will be given to you” (Matthew 7:7).

Of course, this doesn’t mean that we won’t suffer or die. It means that God will deliver us from death. And sometimes that means taking us through death and out the other side. This is what happened to Jesus. He prayed that His Father would deliver Him from death. God heard His Son, allowed Him to die on a Cross, and then made death release Him on Easter morning! And what happened to the only-begotten Son of God on Easter morning must also happen to the adopted children of God on the Last Day. 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, st.1)*

The 15th Sunday after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 25, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 6:24-34

Daily Lectionary: Malachi 1:1-14; Matthew 3:1-17

"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."
(Matthew 6:33)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. We worry. We worry a lot. We worry about what we will eat and what we will wear. We worry about this life, which must end. And make no mistake, it will end, no matter how much food we have on hand or how many outfits are hanging in our closet. We need to get our priorities in order.

Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Don't seek food and clothes first. That's what the heathen do. No, seek first the favor of God and His saving works. Seek the Lord and His grace. For you see, if you have the Almighty on your side and He cares for you, then you don't have to worry about anything. The One who can feed the countless birds and dress the countless flowers can certainly feed and dress you! If you have the grace of God, then everything else will be added to you!

Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. You have already found it, or rather it found you. When you were baptized, you became a citizen of God's kingdom—nay, even more than that! You became a member of the royal family, a child of God! A good king takes care of his citizens, but even wicked kings take care of their own children. How much more will your King and Father take care of you?

You are members of the kingdom. You have been dressed in a righteousness that far surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20). Jesus wrapped your sins around Himself, and then He dressed you in His righteousness. This isn't the story of the prince and the pauper. It is the story of the Savior and the sinner—the righteous Savior takes our place on the Cross, so that the sinner can take His place at His Father's table.

So, stop worrying! The heathen want to extend their lives another week, another month, another year, but you will live forever in the Kingdom of God! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

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

Wednesday of the 17th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 12, 2022

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism:* Confession

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

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

(Small Catechism: Confession)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Your pastor has probably been confronted by a visitor once or twice who was deeply offended and disturbed by the public Confession and Absolution. "Who are you to forgive sins? God alone forgives sins!" Funny enough, no one ever protests when I marry people. No one ever says, "Who are you to marry them? Only God can make them one flesh!" Marriage and Absolution are not that different from each other, if you really think about it.

God alone joins together a man and a woman. God alone forgives sins. God works through society to marry couples. You aren't married until you give the state your marriage license. Likewise, God works through the Church to forgive sinners. See John 20:22-23, if you need proof of that. Of course, a particular person—an agent of the state—needs to pronounce a couple married. Likewise, a particular person—an agent of the Church—must pronounce people forgiven. When I say, "I pronounce you man and wife," I am acting as an agent of the state and speaking for God. Likewise, when I absolve people, I act as the public servant of the Church and speak for God.

When you confess your sins to your pastor, he doesn't give you his forgiveness. He gives you God's forgiveness! He acts as God's mouth. He can do that, because Jesus died for the sins of the world, and then the risen Jesus gave the Church the Keys—the authority to forgive sins in His stead—and the Church appointed your pastor to wield the Keys for the Church. If Jesus authorizes pastors to speak for Him, then they can speak for Him, and you should believe what they say. These are not their words. They are His words.

I wish that everyone who heard the Absolution would receive it with joy. It truly is a precious gift. You get to hear the Lord's message for you—a message of free, unconditional forgiveness. There is no penance, no restitution; just mercy ringing in the ears. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The gifts of grace and peace From absolution flow; The pastor's words are Christ's For us to trust and know. Forgiveness that we need Is granted to us there; The Lord of mercy sends Us forth in His blest care.

(*"The Gifts Christ Freely Gives" LSB 602, st.3*)

Tuesday of the 17th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 11, 2022

Today's Reading: Ephesians 4:1-6

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

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

(Ephesians 4:1-3)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. In our Epistle lesson, Paul talks about the unity of the Christian Church. He says that there is one Body of Christ, one Church. This one Church is animated by one Spirit—the Holy Spirit. Believers of all times and places share a common Father and a common Lord. There is one faith that we confess and there is one Baptism that brings us into the Church. This is the unity that Paul celebrates.

He also urges us to live a certain way. He wants us to practice humility, gentleness, and patience. These virtues are the ways love expresses itself when handling sinners. When someone sins against me, love says, “True, he did sin, but you have sinned often yourself.” When someone sins against me, love corrects him gently. When someone sins against me, love doesn’t want to condemn him and dismiss him quickly, but wants to give him another chance. Basically, Paul wants us to forgive each other, just as God forgives us for the sake of Christ crucified.

And this is an important admonition. If we do not mortify our flesh, which is proud, mean, and impatient, and if we do not practice love, then we risk severing the bond of peace. You see, our good works don’t create or maintain our relationship with God. That relationship is created and maintained by the blood of Christ. However, our love does maintain our relationships with each other. Without love, schism occurs. And schism displeases our Father and breaks the heart of our Savior.

Did Jesus die merely so that we could have a private relationship with Him? No! He died to bring us into His family. He unites us to Himself, so that we are united to each other. Our Baptisms into Christ create that unity, and His Spirit and Word maintain it. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen

Though with a scornful wonder The world sees her oppressed, By schisms rent asunder, By heresies distressed, Yet saints their watch are keeping; Their cry goes up, “How long?” And soon the night of weeping Shall be the morn of song.
(“The Church’s One Foundation” LSB 644, st.3)

Monday of the 15th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 26, 2022

Today's Reading: 1 Kings 17:8-16

Daily Lectionary: Malachi 2:1-3:5; Matthew 4:1-11

The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

(1 Kings 17:16)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. When sinners are given an abundance, they become selfish. They want to receive far more than they need. In times of scarcity, things are different. When we have nothing, we become quite grateful when we receive only a little.

Thus, during a great drought, Elijah didn’t come to the widow expecting a great feast. He only asked for a morsel of bread (1 Kings 17:11). He asked only for a few bites of food. The drought was so severe that even this was too great a request. The widow said she had enough flour and oil to make a small cake or two to feed herself and her son—their last meal. They planned to eat a few bites and then wait to die.

Our God is able to take something so small and insignificant and do great things with it. Elijah spoke a promise from the Lord. That Word of God attached itself to the flour and oil, thereby multiplying it, albeit in a way that was unseen. The widow saw a little flour and oil in small containers, but as she poured, the flour and oil just kept coming out! Thus, God saved Elijah, this widow, and her son!

We live in a land of plenty and rarely experience physical hunger. Thanks to the Spirit, we recognize that we lack righteousness, and so we hunger for it (Matthew 5:6). We come to God, believing that He can fill us. He puts into our mouths a morsel of bread, not even a mouthful. It seems rather insignificant, doesn’t it? Nevertheless, God can take something so small and insignificant and do great things with it.

The pastor speaks a promise from the Lord. The Word of God attaches itself to the bread. It doesn’t multiply, but it does become something far more than it once was. Although it remains hidden to our eyes, the bread becomes the very Body of our Lord—yes, that same body that was nailed to the Cross. The bread isn’t enough to fill up our bodies, but the Body of our Lord does indeed satisfy the soul. For as we receive the Lord’s Supper, we are given the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation! In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O living Bread from heaven, How well You feed Your guest! The gifts that You have given Have filled my heart with rest. Oh, wondrous food of blessing, Oh, cup that heals our woes! My heart, this gift possessing, With praises overflows.
(“O Living Bread from Heaven” LSB 642, st.1)

Tuesday of the 15th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 27, 2022

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

Daily Lectionary: Malachi 3:6-4:6; Matthew 4:12-25

Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches.
(Galatians 6:6)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. No one likes to talk about money in church. No one wants to talk about what they give or get a lecture about how they ought to give. Trust me, pastors really don't like preaching about the offering plate! Regardless, Paul talks about it a lot. And so, we need to talk about it. Paul talks about it because he sees it as a Gospel issue. The Gospel is at stake here! Think about it: If your pastor has to work a second job to feed his family, how much time does he have to deliver the Gospel to sinners? If a congregation isn't taking care of its pastor, eventually that church might find itself without a pastor. And then, who will preach the Gospel? Who will absolve? What becomes of the ministry when the saints won't support it?

In 1 Kings 17, Elijah and the widow are living through a famine caused by a lack of rain. There are worse things, however. One might experience a famine of the Word. One might live in a town where there are no preachers proclaiming the Word of God—that Word which delivers forgiveness and eternal life. “Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

The offering is an essential part of Christian worship. Our Father provides for our bodies and our souls. He provides for the soul by sending us pastors who preach Christ crucified and absolve sinners in His stead. Pastors deliver the Gifts, and the saints receive them by faith. When the saints truly receive the Word with faith, they receive the Word with joy and thanksgiving. In gratitude, those who receive the Word share all good things with their pastors, which includes their income. They give without grumbling, for they know that what they have received in the Divine Service is far more precious than money. And whenever Christians receive the Word by faith with thanksgiving, God is sure to provide more of that Word. Since God feeds and clothes the pastor through the generosity of the saints, he can continue to deliver the Word to them. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen

Almighty God, all that we possess is from Your loving hand. Give us grace that we may honor You with all we own, always remembering the account we must one day give to Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

(Prayer for Proper Use of Wealth, LSB p. 311)

Monday of the 17th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 10, 2022

Today's Reading: Proverbs 25:6-14

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

Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of a gift he does not give.
(Proverbs 25:14)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Rain is a precious thing in the Middle East. In some parts of that land, they receive as little as eight inches of precipitation each year! Without enough rain, your crops will fail, which means hunger and poverty. If a severe drought hits, then the rivers and lakes might run dry, in which case you might not have much clean water to drink.

In such a climate, there is nothing more disappointing or annoying than a cloud that appears as if it could give you rain, but then doesn't. Likewise, a person who promises great gifts, but never gives them, brings great disappointment and frustration.

There are lots of churches and teachers who promise great gifts. They promise good news, but never give any. Instead, they give conditions: “Do this and you'll live!” Since we are all sinners, they might as well say, “You won't do it. So, you won't get it!” They don't say that, however. They are not that honest. So, they promise a gift, which is received by none in the end. I expect that you may have family and friends who go to these churches. I bet they feel disappointed and frustrated. They have received the Mass and done penance, but don't feel any more righteous. They have heard hundreds of “Seven Steps to a Better Life” sermons, but their lives are no better.

Just think, you can be that person who brings them joy and relief! You can be the person who offers great gifts and actually delivers! You can give them that life-giving rain—the Word of God (Isaiah 55:10-11). You can tell them, “Do you want to live forever with God? Do nothing! Everything necessary was done for you by Jesus! Just go to Him and receive! Want to know more? Come with me to my church!”

And what will they get at your church? Gifts promised and given! Indeed, they will hear your pastor speak the Absolution in the first five minutes of the service. How refreshing! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord God, bless the Word wherever it is proclaimed. Make it a word of power and peace to comfort those not yet Your own and to confirm those who have come to saving faith. May Your Word pass from the ear to the heart, from the heart to the lip, and from the lip to the life that, as You have promised, Your Word may achieve the purpose for which You send it; through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen. (For Blessing on the Word, LSB)

The 17th Sunday after Trinity

OCTOBER 9, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 14:1-11

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

"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 14:11)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. In the Collect, we ask that God would help us to withstand the temptations of the devil. One of the greatest temptations of the devil is the idea that we must climb the ladder to get to the top, so to speak. We must seize power, freedom, wealth, and the like. We must create our own honor. The devil said it best to the first woman: "Take the fruit. Seize the wisdom that God is withholding from you. Become as great as God Himself!"

Notice that if you are seizing, then you are not receiving. A gift is not something earned or taken. It is possible that God was withholding some wisdom from Adam and Eve, intending to give it to them at the proper time. However, they did not allow God to give them good gifts, because they seized what they coveted. They tried to make themselves great. Thus, God was cheated of the opportunity of giving them greatness.

This is the point that Jesus is trying to make. If you are at the bottom, then God can elevate you. If you have nothing, God can give you everything. If you are not earning or taking, then God can give freely.

God desires to give every good and perfect gift to all sinners. So, what is He to do with those who are desperately climbing and selfishly seizing? He knocks them down with the Law. He empties their hands with a word of condemnation. Those who think they are at the top are pushed over by the uncompromising commandments and fall to the bottom. And that act of condemnation is an act of mercy. At the bottom, sinners can find Christ! He humbled Himself and went to the very bottom, so that, when the Father exalted Him, He could carry us up to the top with Him.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus warns that the day will come when God will humble the wicked and won't bring them up again. They will fall, this time into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15). Our Lord doesn't want that to happen. So, in the meantime He does His alien work of humbling sinners, so that He can do His proper work—justifying and exalting them! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, we implore You, grant Your people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil and with pure hearts and minds to follow You, the only God; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(collect for the 17th Sunday after Trinity)

Wednesday of the 15th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 28, 2022

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

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 1:1-18; Matthew 5:1-20

How can water do such great things? Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God's word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says in Titus, chapter three: "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying."

(Small Catechism: Baptism)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When Naaman dipped himself in the waters of the Jordan, he was healed of his skin disease (2 Kings 5). How could water do such a great thing?

Ironically, the same Protestants who scoff at Baptism and wonder how water could ever do such great things treat the muddy water of the Jordan River with special reverence (or rather, superstition). They seem to think that the Jordan River is something special, something holy. Many long to be baptized in the Jordan and countless tourists have filled small bottles with water from the Jordan to take to their homes.

We know that the water of the Jordan is just water, no different than the water in your tap. You won't find any fountain of youth or water with any kind of magical properties. Water is just water.

How did the Jordan heal Naaman? God connected a promise to the Jordan: "Dip yourself in the Jordan and be healed." The Word of God is effective and does what it says.

In the same way, the Lord connects His promises to the waters of Baptism. He promises that Baptism will wash away your sins (Acts 22:16), crucify and bury you with Christ (Romans 6:3), give you new life (Titus 3:5-8), make you a disciple (Matthew 28:19), and save you (Mark 16:16). Faith believes the promise and receives what was promised in Baptism. It's as simple as that. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The gifts flow from the font Where He calls us His own; New life He gives that makes us His and His alone. Here He forgives our sins With water and the Word; The triune God Himself Gives pow'r to call Him Lord.
(*"The Gifts Christ freely Gives" LSB 602, st.2*)

St. Michael and All Angels

SEPTEMBER 29, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 10:17-20

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 1:19-36; Matthew 5:21-48

Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Angelology (the study of angels) is fascinating. There are different kinds of spirits: cherubim, seraphim, angels, archangels, etc. They have different jobs: Some are messengers or warriors, while others worship God, guard sacred space, etc. There are a lot of interesting details that Scripture gives us, and yet many more questions are left unanswered!

But let's keep things simple. There are spirits, who serve God specifically for our sake. Angels are servants. Since Jesus has paid for your sins and reconciled you to God, our heavenly Father specifically commands them to help us. We are God's children. Angels are mere servants. What fascinates me most about the existence of angels is what this tells us about God. Apparently, God likes to achieve His goals through others, even in heaven. In other words, God could simply make things happen by sheer will. He is almighty, after all. Nevertheless, God invites creatures to participate in His work. In heaven, the angels participate in the work of God.

And what about on earth? On earth, God invites humans to participate in His work. For example, God gave the Church the Holy Scriptures through prophets and apostles. He didn't have to do it that way, but He wanted to. Likewise, God distributes the forgiveness of sins through the work of pastors. He speaks through ministers of grace. And guess what? God works through you, too! He might use you to give someone their daily bread. He might use you to protect someone from harm. He might use you to teach or encourage someone. He might use you to lead someone to Christ. God gives us vocations, making us His ministers on earth. So, go about your daily work, knowing that you are participating in God's work. Also, know that you are more than mere servants. You are His children on account of Christ. Therefore, God will send His angels to care for you and protect you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Everlasting God, You have ordained and constituted the service of angels and men in a wonderful order. Mercifully grant that, as Your holy angels always serve and worship You in heaven, so by Your appointment they may also help and defend us here on earth; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels)

Saturday of the 16th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 8, 2022

Today's Reading: Introit for the 17th Sunday after Trinity

(Psalm 119:1-2, 5-6; antiphon: vv.137, 124)

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

Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart. Psalms 119:1-2)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The psalms were the songs and prayers of Israel. Men like David composed them and for centuries the people of Israel used them for worship. Therefore, the psalms are truly the songs and prayers of Jesus. He is Israel-Reduced-to-One, after all. He came to represent Israel as Her Head. He came as a substitute, obeying the Law in Israel's place to reverse the curse of the Law. Therefore, the psalms find their rightful home in His mouth.

Who is the Blessed Man, the Man in whom God delights? Jesus! His way was completely blameless. He walked in the Law of the Lord, treasuring every testimony of God and seeking the Father with His whole heart. His eyes were fixed on the commandments and He never wavered in keeping them.

The good news is that Jesus swaps places with us. Although He was completely blameless, He took the blame for our sins and was punished for them. Then, He gave us the credit for His obedience, so that we would not be put to shame on Judgment Day.

And that's not all. While Jesus did experience the shame of our sin on the Cross, He was not left naked and ashamed. No, the Father raised Him from the dead and clothed His obedient Son in glory. Then, the risen Jesus poured His Spirit out on us, so that the Spirit might change our hearts. The Holy Spirit pours the love of God into our hearts, so that we begin to seek God. He leads us, so that we walk in the law of love. Hence, we can pray these psalms with Jesus.

Sometimes our flesh gets the better of us. Often our eyes glance at idols or we stumble on the way. Thankfully, such sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ. That grace turns our eyes back to God and helps us stand. We begin to keep His testimonies and live according to the commandments, until that day when sin's poison is removed from our souls and we can serve God perfectly. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Speak, O Lord, Your servant listens, Let Your Word to me come near; Newborn life and spirit give me, Let each promise still my fear. Death's dread pow'r, its inward strife, Wars against Your Word of life; Fill me, Lord, with love's strong fervor, That I cling to You forever!

("Speak, O Lord, Your Servant Listens" LSB 589, st.1)

Friday of the 16th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 7, 2022

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

“And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant....”

(Deuteronomy 6:10-11)

In the Name ✝ of Jesus. Amen. The Lord gave Israel a home. He gave them land. However, He gave them so much more than that. He gave them a land full of plunder! They won't build their own cities, but will take the cities built by the Canaanites. They won't have to fill their houses with furniture, but will move into houses already furnished by their previous owners. They won't have to dig cisterns or plant orchards. The Canaanites already did all that hard work.

On the one hand, this is the reality of military conquest. Israel will conquer a land and this means inheriting whatever their enemies leave behind. On the other hand, this is an example of God's gracious ways. God loves giving gifts to His people. And you don't earn a gift, or work for it, or make it for yourself. You simply receive and enjoy it!

Whenever sinners interact with God, they expect no gift—only a wage, something for which you must labor. This is the point of the Divine Service. We draw near to God week after week to be surprised by grace—to receive anew His Gifts. The baptized receive a kingdom that they did not build. They receive an eternal reward that they did not earn. They don't work as servants, but rather sit at the King's table as His family.

As we experience God's grace in the Divine Service, we learn to see His grace throughout our lives. We come to see everything as a good gift! We do not deserve food, clothes, house, family, friends, or the like. We deserve nothing but hell. Since Jesus died for all, God gives to all men these good things.

And, of course, as we experience God's goodness in this life, we wait to enter at last our Promised Land—the new creation—where we will experience the fullness of God's goodness. In the Name ✝ of Jesus. Amen.

Heavenly Father, God of all grace, govern our hearts that we may never forget Your blessings but steadfastly thank and praise You for all Your goodness in this life until, with all Your saints, we praise You eternally in Your heavenly kingdom; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

(Prayer for Thanksgiving to God, LSB p.310)

Friday of the 15th Week after Trinity

SEPTEMBER 30, 2022

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 1:37-2:15; Matthew 6:1-15

“Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall enter. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it.” (Deuteronomy 1:38)

In the Name ✝ of Jesus. Amen. Moses would not lead Israel into the Promised Land. He would die just outside the land, because he sinned against God. Thankfully, God raised up a man like Moses named Joshua. He would guide Israel into the Promised Land and lead the Israelites into battle against the Canaanites.

Therefore, Moses tells Israel to encourage Joshua. All the responsibility has been laid on his shoulders. Use your words to build him up, so that he can bear it. With their amazing God-given faculties, humans can achieve difficult tasks, but insults and criticisms can break a man's spirit and cause him to fail. Words of kindness and praise, on the other hand, can make a man stand tall, even when he is confronted by a mountain of a problem.

Jesus opened the way to the true Promised Land—eternity in the new creation. Sin should exclude us from entering Paradise, but Jesus took our sins and He died for them. The way is open! The risen Lord gives you pastors to help lead you into the Promised Land. They announce the Gospel, telling you that the way is open. They address your fears and doubts with the Word. They help you resist the devil through meditation and prayer. They feed you the Bread from heaven to give you the strength to move forward.

Therefore, encourage your pastor. A lot of responsibility has been put on his shoulders. He needs your help bearing it. Speak kindly to him. Praise his successes. Ask him if he needs any prayer. Be ready to comfort him when he experiences his own troubles and tribulations. Encourage him, for by his preaching of the Word he shall cause you to inherit the Promised Land. In the Name ✝ of Jesus. Amen.

Keep me from saying words That later need recalling; Guard me lest idle speech May from my lips befalling; But when within my place I must and ought to speak, Then to my words give grace Lest I offend the weak.
(“O God, My Faithful God” LSB 696, st.3)

Saturday of the 15th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 1, 2022

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

(Psalm 86:1, 7, 12–13; antiphon: vv.3, 5)

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 2:16-37; Matthew 6:16-34

*For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul
from the depths of Sheol. (Psalm 86:13)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. I hope you enjoyed Psalm 86 last Saturday, because the lectionary has given us yet more of it. And who can blame the framers of the lectionary? It truly is a great psalm.

Once again, we hear the pleas of King David. He is crying out to the Lord and he hopes that God will be gracious and incline His ear to him. In the middle of the psalm, David expresses confidence that God will indeed hear and save him. The loyal love of God is so great that He has rescued David from death in the past and He will certainly do so again! That's what we are talking about—death. Sheol is the abode of the dead. We might translate it “the grave.” Also, the word translated “soul,” probably refers to David's life. David is saying that God rescues his life from the grave.

I think there is beautiful logic connecting the 14th Sunday after Trinity with the 15th Sunday after Trinity. First, we hear that God will take care of us in this life, for we are more valuable than birds or lilies. But we leave church that Sunday with a feeling that something is left unresolved. God won't always preserve our life, will He? I mean, we will die someday, right? If God will let us die, then does He really care? Thus, the 15th Sunday after Trinity addresses death head-on.

Yes, even the children of God die. Indeed, even the only-begotten Son of God died! However, that doesn't mean that God is unfaithful or uncaring. God's ultimate goal is not to sustain this mortal life indefinitely. He has something better to give us—what the Bible sometimes calls “eternal life,” or, “abundant life.” We might call it, “resurrection life,” or, “immortality.”

Ultimately, God wants to free us from pain, suffering, and decay. He doesn't want us to live forever under the reign of death. So, God allows us to pass through death and out the other side. We die, only to rise again on the Last Day. We will be delivered from Sheol, because death was reversed in the flesh of Jesus. What happened to the Head on Easter morning will happen to every member of His Body. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Almighty God, grant Your unworthy servants Your grace, that in the hour of death the adversary may not prevail against us but that we may be found worthy of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.
(Prayer for a Blessed Death, LSB p. 313)*

Thursday of the 16th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 6, 2022

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

And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.” Matthew 9:15)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. For those who have the ears to hear, Jesus has just revealed who He is and what He came to do. First, He revealed that He is the Bridegroom. That might appear at first to be a quaint metaphor, but actually Jesus is calling Himself Yahweh, the God of Israel. Remember, in the Old Testament the covenant is often compared to marriage and idolatry is often compared to adultery. Israel was considered the Bride of Yahweh. If Jesus is the Bridegroom, then He is God!

The disciples cannot fast now, because they are with the Bridegroom. Now is the time for feasting! And so, the disciples eat many meals with Jesus, sitting alongside sinners and tax collectors. However, there will come a time when the Bridegroom is taken from them. They will fast then. This is the first Passion prediction. Jesus will be taken from His disciples when the Sanhedrin arrest Him and crucify Him.

So, what about now? Is now a time of fasting or feasting?

It is indeed appropriate for Christians to fast now. After all, Jesus ascended into heaven and, although He is truly with us, He is hidden from our eyes. We are waiting for His reappearing and the wedding feast of the Lamb to begin. As we wait, the Church suffers the abuse of the devil, the world, and the flesh, who take advantage of the Bridegroom's absence. So, fasting is appropriate.

On the other hand, fasting cannot be the sole practice of Christians or even the most prevalent practice. The Bridegroom was crucified, but He is not dead. He lives and will never die again. Thus, we have a joy that none can take from us. While we cannot see Him, we know that He is present, especially when the Word is preached and the Sacrament is celebrated. Indeed, every Sunday is a Feast Day—a time of celebration. Christ has won the victory and will return shortly. Where the Spirit makes this known, there must be joy.

So, you are free to fast and grieve, but never lose your Easter joy and hope. He is risen and He will come again! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*All the earth with joy is sounding: Christ has risen from the dead! He, the greater Jonah, bounding From the grave, His three-day bed, Wins the prize: Death's demise—Songs of triumph fill the skies.
(“All the Earth with Joy Is Sounding” LSB 462, st.1)*

Wednesday of the 16th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 5, 2022

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

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

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

In the Name ✝ of Jesus. Amen. The Church has a long history of immersing people in water when baptizing them. Only recently have we preferred sprinkling and pouring, and only to defend our Christian freedom from the legalists who require immersion.

The practice of immersion is reflected in Luther's answer. The Old Adam should "be drowned," and then a new man should "emerge." Then, Luther connects this practice to Romans 6. The baptized is plunged beneath the water to indicate that he is being buried with Christ. He is brought out of the water to indicate that he will live a new life, just as Christ was raised from the dead.

Another practice of the Church has been lost. Once you were baptized naked. Before you could enter the water, you had to take off your clothes. When you stepped out of the pool, you were wrapped in a white robe. This practice was based on Galatians 3:27, Ephesians 4:20-24, and Colossians 3:9-10. Through Baptism, the old is stripped away and Christ is put on.

The traditions are not as important as the message they convey. When you come to the font, you come as a child of Adam. You leave the font a child of God. You were covered in sins, but these were washed away in the water and nailed to the Cross. Now, you are dressed in Christ. He is your righteousness. As a sinner, you should inherit death. At the font, you get death out of the way, and then you emerge, signifying that you are joined to the risen Christ and will live forever.

Here's the point: Baptism is a new beginning. It isn't an event in the past to be forgotten, but it creates a new reality in which you live. You live in your Baptism. The pattern of dying and rising, or taking off and putting on, continues every day by the grace of God. In the Name ✝ of Jesus. Amen.

Merciful Father, through Holy Baptism You called us to be Your own possession. Grant that our lives may evidence the working of Your Holy Spirit in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, according to the image of Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

(Prayer for Life as a Baptized Child of God, LSB p.310)

The 16th Sunday after Trinity

OCTOBER 2, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 7:11-17

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 3:1-29; Matthew 7:1-12

As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her.

(Luke 7:12)

In the Name ✝ of Jesus. Amen. Whenever I read Luke 7:12, I imagine that classic Dr. Seuss story called *The Zax*. It is a story encouraging children to compromise. You see, a North-Going Zax finds himself facing a South-Going Zax. Neither of them is willing to take a step east or west to let the other pass. And so, the two stand there, stubborn and stuck, until a highway is built around them!

Jesus and His disciples come to the city gate of Nain. Just as they are about to pass through, a funeral procession begins to come out of the gate. If Jesus was the compromising sort, He would realize that He must step aside to let the funeral procession pass. If He doesn't, they cannot get out of the city and Jesus cannot get in.

Well, Jesus won't compromise with death. When death faces Him, Jesus won't take a step to the east or the west. So, what does this mean? Are the two equals, doomed to sit there, stubborn and stuck? Has an unstoppable force met an immovable object?

No. Death is not Jesus' equal. During His earthly ministry, Jesus will restrain Himself and live under death's reign, but in truth death is not His equal or superior. Jesus is the Son of God, after all. Death cannot take away Jesus' life, although for our sake Jesus will hand Himself over to death.

As if to prove that death is not His equal, Jesus doesn't move. Instead, He grabs the bier—before the funeral procession gets any ideas about backing up—and Jesus says, "Young man, arise." The young man takes a breath, opens his eyes, and sits up. And there is nothing that death can do about it.

This confrontation between death and life is simply a prelude of what is to come. Like I said, Jesus will give Himself over to death and for a time it appears that Jesus is stuck. He's not. Jesus lays down His life in order to take it up again. And He takes it up again, in order to share His life with you! In the Name ✝ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, we pray that Your grace may always go before and follow after us, that we may continually be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for the 16th Sunday after Trinity)

Monday of the 16th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 3, 2022

Today's Reading: 1 Kings 17:17-24

Daily Lectionary: Deuteronomy 4:1-20; Matthew 7:13-29

And he cried to the Lord, "O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?"

(1 Kings 17:20)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. We have yet another confrontation with death. Once again, death has taken the only son of a widow. The parallels between this story and yesterday's Gospel lesson are apparent to all. Still, more important are the differences!

This time the prophet Elijah is confronted by death. He behaves quite differently than Jesus, doesn't he? Jesus was so calm, but Elijah freaks out. He cries out to the Lord and in a dramatic show stretches himself out on the boy three times. I think that Elijah is quite aware that he is not death's equal. No, death has him beat. Like all mortals, Elijah lives beneath the reign of death. The only one who can beat something as great as death is Yahweh, the One who gave man life in the first place. So, Elijah throws himself at God's mercy.

Another thing: Elijah comes very close to blaming God for the boy's death. In verse 20, he says, "O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?" Obviously, there is truth in these words. God is sovereign Lord, who kills and makes alive. Certainly He permitted the boy to die. Still, I think Elijah feels that God has forsaken this family.

We react the same way to death. Whenever we see death, we conclude that God has sent the Grim Reaper to destroy us. We think that death is a sign that God has forsaken us. We must remember that Jesus became a curse for us on the Cross (Galatians 3:13). He was forsaken by His Father (Matthew 27:46). Therefore, we can be sure that God is not against us. He won't forsake us. Indeed, Jesus suffered death, so that He might conquer the grave.

Death is a defeated enemy, forced to serve us. The Christian doesn't fear death, knowing that his death brings his soul into the presence of Jesus. Eventually, death must release our bodies. On the Last Day, we will be resurrected, and soul and body will be reunited. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

For me to live is Jesus, To die is gain for me; So when my Savior pleases, I meet death willingly.
("For Me to Live Is Jesus" LSB 742, st.1)

Tuesday of the 16th Week after Trinity

OCTOBER 4, 2022

Today's Reading: Ephesians 3:13-21

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

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.
(Ephesians 3:20-21)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When that widow at Nain saw Jesus outside the gate of Nain, staring intently at her and at her son's body, what do you think went through her mind? Did she know it was Jesus? If so, what did she expect Him to do. For some reason, I doubt that she expected Jesus to resurrect her only son. My guess is that the miracle was a surprise to her. After all, nothing seems more permanent than death. Furthermore, only Yahweh can give life and every Jew expected the dead to rest until the Day of Resurrection. Her reason, experience, and theology would prevent this widow from asking Jesus to resurrect her son.

As Paul says, the Lord is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think. Sinners don't grasp God's power and God's mercy. Our doubting hearts try to limit God. We don't expect God to do the impossible and we don't pray for the unbelievable. What fools we are! Jesus said, "Ask, and you will receive" (Matthew 7:7). Such a promise should cause us to ask for the moon and more!

I think that Paul realized that his imagination was once too small and that it limited God. Once he hoped that God would save Israel. Then, the risen Jesus appeared to him and revealed that He has taken away the sins of the world. Therefore, the people of God will consist of people from every race, tribe, and kingdom. After his conversion, Paul observed the nations streaming into the Church. He witnessed Jews and Gentiles receiving the Lord's Supper together, reconciled to God and to each other. Paul saw what he never expected, and he could only fall on his knees in awe and praise God.

Consider what little things you ask for. Also, consider the marvelous things God gives you—more than you dare ask or imagine! He gives you His grace, His Spirit, His Kingdom, and eternal life for the sake of His crucified and risen Son. Consider all this, and then join Paul in giving glory to this God of surprises. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus, advocate on high, Sacrificed on Calv'ry's altar, Through Your priestly blood we cry: Hear our prayers, though they may falter; Place them on your Father's throne As Your own.

("Hear Us, Father, When We Pray" LSB 773, st.3)