

The Lutheran Herald



September 2010

(For Trinity 13–17)

Grace and peace to you in Christ Jesus!

As is no doubt obvious to readers of this publication, *The Lutheran Herald* has undergone some significant changes since its last issue. The decision was made at the 2010 diocesan synod to introduce several changes to the format of *The Lutheran Herald*, the most important of which is the decision to begin providing devotional materials by means of this publication. There has been a dearth of such resources in recent years—at least, of those written from a scriptural, confessional perspective—and it is our hope to address this need.

The *Herald* will continue to carry news regarding the diocese, and our brethren of the ACLC. It will also offer more lengthy theological essays on occasion. But effective immediately, we are devoting our primary diocesan publishing efforts to meeting the daily needs of the confessional remnant. It is our hope that the Lord will bless these efforts, and use the proclamation of His Word for the strengthening of His saints.

Please note that it will be our standard practice to include devotions for Monday through Saturday; the expectation is that readers will be in the Divine Service on Sundays. However, on occasion a writer will elect to include a Sunday devotion, as well.

The devotions for this first revised issue of *The Lutheran Herald* were written by Pr. Jeffrey Ahonen, Dcn. Jerry Dulas, Dr. Kent Heimbigner, Pr. Robert Lawson, Jr., and Pr. Mark Mueller. Dcn. Dulas and Pr. Eric Stefanski served as the editorial committee.

***Yours in Christ,
Bishop James Heiser***

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From the Propers for Trinity 13

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 10:23-37 (NKJV)

Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it." And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself." And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves? And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

The COLLECT

Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain that which Thou does promise, make us to love that which Thou does command; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Monday, August 30: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 Trinity 13

“I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.” 1 Thessalonians 5:27

Beloved in the Lord, I am reminded of a message, writ large on a hill overlooking Ciudad Juarez, facing El Paso, Texas. It says simply, “*La Biblia es la verdad. Leela!*” It means, “The Bible is the truth. Read it!” And so it is: God’s Scriptural Word of Law shows us our sin, invites us to mend our sinful life, and teaches us to appreciate how great our need for forgiveness really is. God’s Scriptural Word of Gospel announces to us that we have that much needed forgiveness, on account of the Person and Work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. With this comfort we can face all of the trials and tribulations of life and yes, even the hour of our death, confident that our Lord will never leave us nor forsake us.

Therefore, “I charge you by the Lord” to read the Scriptures, listen to what they say, repent of your sins, and trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. God be with you, and bless your devotion to His holy Word.

Suggested Hymn: “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word” (TLH 261, LSB 655)

Prayer: Blessed Lord, grant us so to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Holy Scriptures that we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life. Amen.

“. . . charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.” 1 Tim. 1:3b-4.

The Apostle mentions “other doctrine, fables, and endless genealogies.” Too many people think that being a Christian involves little more than leading a reasonably moral life. The Scriptures warn us time and again that is not so! Rather, we are to reject all false doctrine, and trust in the saving doctrine of the Holy Scriptures. Further, we are to reject “fables,” the “pop-wisdom” that may be quite popular in our day and age, but does not come from God’s Holy Word and therefore cannot be trusted. Nor should we trust in our heritage or our race or ethnicity, for we are saved by grace, not by race.

Dear ones in Christ, rejecting falsehood is part and parcel of clinging to the truth. Accept no imitation salvation offers. Only Christ can save us.

Suggested Hymn: “Lord, Help Us Ever to Retain”, (TLH 288, LSB 865)

Prayer: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, correct our errors, and lead us ever in the way of truth, for Jesus sake. Amen

“...God our Savior . . . desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” 1 Timothy 2:3b-4

God our Savior desires all men to be saved! In the hour of temptation or tribulation, when the devil whispers into your ear, “You see? God doesn’t care about you!”, the words of Holy Scripture defend you. You can answer the devil, “Yes He does! I know He does, because the Bible says God wants all to be saved, and that ‘all’ most certainly includes me!”

Will all finally be saved? No. But do not fear that God loves your unbelieving friend or relative less than you do. God is perfect love. He wants to save everyone. Pray God to send His Spirit, in His time that through Word and Sacrament He may bring many to salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Suggested Hymn: “Hark, the Voice of Jesus Crying,” (TLH 496, LSB 826)

Prayer: Almighty and Everlasting God, You do not desire the death of the sinner. Turn the hearts of those who do not yet serve You, that they may repent, and trust in your Son Jesus Christ unto life everlasting. Amen.

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:

God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,

Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the
world, Received up in glory.” 1 Timothy 3:16

God was manifested in the flesh! Wow! Of all the things we might have thought God would try; only God could have thought to go about saving us like that! The Scriptures reveal, and Christ Himself reveals, the true and living God—a God who is both genuinely just and genuinely merciful. Jesus Christ spent His whole earthly life keeping God’s Law perfectly. He never sinned once, nor was He tainted by original sin from birth as we are. Then, having lived a perfect life, Jesus offered Himself up as our substitute-punishment-bearer. He suffered as one of us, true man, for our sins. But because He was also true God, His sacrifice was an infinite, unlimited sacrifice; big enough to take away all sin of all time. The work was done, and now the message is proclaimed. Such is the mystery of godliness. Thanks be to God!

Suggested Hymn: “Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness” (TLH 371, LSB 563)

Prayer: O Lord God, Heavenly Father, grant us so to hear Your Holy Word, that we would ever embrace the mystery of godliness, and come to everlasting life, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.” 1 Timothy 4:16

The Holy Spirit leads St. Paul to counsel St. Timothy, and all of us, to keep faith and life together. Believe that Jesus’ death on the cross really has atoned for your sins. Believe that in Baptism, and repeatedly in Holy Absolution and Holy Communion, Jesus’ forgiveness has been made yours, personally. And then, God grant us grace, not to contradict our forgiveness by living like we were still holding on to those sins, but rather to live a holy, repentant life that confesses before God and to the whole world that we are forgiven in Christ Jesus. Further, we pray that God would have use of our “lived out and confessed” faith, not only that we would be saved, but that through such living confession others also, “those who hear,” may be made co-heirs with us of everlasting life in Christ Jesus.

Suggested Hymn: “We now implore God the Holy Ghost,” (TLH 231, LSB 768)

Prayer: Almighty God, grant us Your Holy Spirit, that we may ever live repentant lives, and so also grow in love and good works, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.”

1 Timothy 5:17

Dear ones in Christ, pray for your Pastors. They serve you as those who watch over your souls. They must know how rightly to divide Law and Gospel, when to warn and when to forgive, and for this they need to be devoted to the Holy Scriptures. Encourage them to be diligent in this matter of word and doctrine, that they may faithfully call us to repentance and the forgiveness of sins. And when they do as the Lord has entrusted them, God grant us grace that we would not resist the call to repentance, but rather bow to it, receive forgiveness, and thus remain heirs of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Suggested Hymn: “God of the Prophets” (TLH 483, LSB 682)

Prayer: O Almighty God, by Your Son, Jesus Christ, you entrusted the holy Apostles with earnestly feeding Your flock. Make all pastors diligently to preach Your holy Word, and make the people obediently to follow Your word, that they may receive the crown of everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

From the Propers for Trinity 14

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 17:11-19 (NKJV)

Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” So when He saw them, He said to them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?” And He said to him, “Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.”

The COLLECT

Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

“O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge---by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace be with you. Amen.” 1 Timothy 6:20-21

Our Lord Jesus Christ has entrusted the Ministry of the Gospel to St. Paul, and the Holy Spirit has led St. Paul to entrust the Ministry of the Gospel to St. Timothy. It is a precious gift! What greater treasure could there be than the Good News that our sins are forgiven and that we have everlasting life, for free, on account of Jesus’ perfect life, and holy death on the cross, and glorious resurrection from the dead? Why would anyone not rejoice in such news, and cling to it with all their might?

Sadly, many turn away, and we may even be thus tempted from time to time. Dear ones in Christ, God has given us something so much better in His Word, and He has given it to us “for us men and for our salvation.” Let us “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” that saving Word, that eternity may be ours, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Hymn suggestion: “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word,” (TLH 261, LSB 655)

Prayer: Blessed Lord, teach us rightly to treasure the saving truth of Your holy Word we may always hold to it. Let your Word ever be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

“Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.”

When you open your Small Catechism today, turn to the first page of each of the six chief parts of Christian doctrine and note the introduction at the top of each: “As the head of the family should teach them/it in a simple way to his household.” The catechism provides a pattern for the instruction that the head of the family is charged to deliver to those under his protection and care, so that all of the members of the household might learn well these words.

This is why we give careful attention to the teaching and learning of the catechism; in doing so, we “hold fast to the pattern of sound words” -- words of God that stir up the Holy Spirit of God within each of us. By His sound words, we are preserved in sound mind through the Spirit of Power, kept with Christ Jesus in the one true faith through all temptations, persecutions, and sufferings. Refreshed through His sound words and His holy sacraments, received in faith, we serve our neighbors in love – especially the fellow members of the household of faith -- with acts of mercy, committing ourselves into Christ's once-wounded hands and trusting that we will find mercy from the Risen Lord at the last. Truly, He is able to keep what we have committed to Him until that Day; God grant it to us all, for Jesus sake. Amen.

“And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, . . . and they overthrow the faith of some.”

From the experiences of loved ones, and perhaps even our own life experience, we know far too well that a cancer causes great harm to a body – even robbing the body of its very life. This is true even of the Body of Christ, as the Apostle Paul teaches, equating the horrific effect of false doctrine upon the Church and the Christian to a cancer in the body. The heresy, which sounds good to the ear of the Old Adam, appears totally harmless – even edifying -- when it is taken into the body; however, it is soon engaged in its destructive work. Unlike the Word of Truth, which creates and nurtures faith within the body, the false word operates to “overthrow the faith.”

However, even though all be faithless, “He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.” Christ is ever faithful to His promises, and never denies His gracious nature. He sends His servants in mercy to minister to the afflicted through His Word, patiently and humbly correcting those who are in opposition, that they may come to their senses in repentance of their adherence to the false teachers and teachings, and know the truth of complete forgiveness in the Crucified Christ. By this Word, in both its verbal and sacramental forms, the cancer of false doctrine is destroyed, true faith is created anew, and belief is restored in the true resurrection to everlasting life – of Jesus on the third day and of all the faithful in Christ on the last. God preserve you from all falsehood and keep you in His Truth until that day. Amen.

“... that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”

That is why the bishop must not be divorced, the pastor is not to be a drunkard, and the deacon is not to be greedy. It is not merely because God has commanded these things, and thus the clergyman rightly ought to fear His wrath and not act contrary to them. At the same time, through every commandment God promises grace and every blessing to all who love Him and keep His commandments, and that is the ultimate reason for the minister's submission to these qualifications. For Christ's gracious blessings of forgiveness and eternal life fall not only upon the faithful bishop, pastor, and deacon for his own sake, but for the sake of those who are likewise blessed through the faithful ministry of the servant of the Word.

It is all about service to the Word and service of that Word to Christ's people, as the Apostle's instruction concerning the qualifications for the pastoral office concludes: “that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict.” The faithful pastor convicts and exhorts himself first, so that the faithfulness in doctrine and life that arises through repentance and forgiveness adorns the ministry, as he then convicts those whose lives are in contradiction to the Word of God and exhorts them to faith and faithful living in the the Crucified and Risen Savior – his Savior, too. God ever enable such faithful ministry among us, for the sake of all of His people. Amen.

“But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine. . . .”

Sound doctrine is not merely a Sunday morning matter. Sound doctrine is not a matter to be confined within the walls of the Church. Sound doctrine is not a matter that concerns only the pastor. Sound doctrine matters on every day of the week, in every corner of the world, within the heart of every Christian. Sound doctrine absolutely matters, because it matters to God.

Indeed, sound doctrine is the very matter of life in God our Savior. Jesus Christ is the Word of God in the flesh, Who entered our world to teach the way of salvation from the sin and guilt that we bring before God our Maker. The doctrine of His Law shows our sin, that we might lament and repent of it. The doctrine of His Gospel shows our Savior, that we might receive and believe in Him and the forgiveness of sins and salvation that the Crucified and Risen One brings before the world. Through the sound doctrine conveyed through the purely-preached Word and the rightly-administered Sacraments, He raises up disciples whose new life in this world is shaped entirely by His Word and empowered entirely by His Spirit, adorning the doctrine of God our Savior. Sound doctrine becomes the rule and norm for male and female, young and old, master and servant -- in every place that life takes us -- all the days of our life until life everlasting. God grant such lives grounded in His sound doctrine to us also. Amen.

“Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.”

All authority in Heaven and Earth is given to the Crucified and Resurrected Jesus, and Christ grants this authority to the pastors of His Church on Earth, so that His people might be made members of the Church in Heaven forever!

This is the purpose for Christ’s authoritative institution of holy absolution, and for bestowing the office of the keys upon the pastor of the congregation. It truly is a peculiar power -- one unlike any other authority given among men and therefore is not to be despised by any man -- that would make an action in this world “as valid and certain, in heaven also, as if Christ, our dear Lord, dealt with us Himself.” Marvelously, Jesus has called and ordained His servants through His Church to exercise such power on His behalf, rebuking with all authority manifest sinners, retaining their sins upon them, and excommunicating them from the congregation as long as they refuse to repent. Yet, this is with the hope that this proclamation of Law leads the sinner to confession of his sin and repentance of his sinful life, that the pastor might turn the key that opens up Heaven anew in the absolution of all sin by the atonement of Christ and faith in His Gospel. God grant that all Christians submit to such a wondrous authority, on account of the One Who has bestowed it for their sake and eternal blessing. Amen.

From the Propers for Trinity 15

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. Matthew 6:24-34 (NKJV)

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

The COLLECT

Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy help, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

“Take It Easy!”

Gal 3:25–6:1a — If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

“Take it easy!” Have you ever used that plea? We tend to use it when we’re cornered—trapped—caught in the act. It’s not a plea of innocence, but a plea for mercy.

That seems like something unrealistic for those who would plead with *God* for clemency. After all, through His perfect eyes, we look plenty guilty...and even the slightest infraction against His Holy law deserves the death penalty. Yet, even though we justly deserve His “temporal and eternal punishment,” God, in His mercy, does not give us what we deserve. Instead, He gave His *Son* what we deserve: Jesus bore the Father’s righteous wrath in our place, so God treats us with undeserved mercy.

If God, who is Holy, can show mercy to us sinners, how could we not treat our fellow sinners with mercy as well? Can we harshly condemn our brothers and sisters in Christ? Certainly, it is our responsibility to point out manifest sin—if we neglect to do so, we contribute to the spiritual demise of our neighbor—but we should always speak with the intent that he may be restored. That requires a healthy dose of humility, of remembering always that we, too, have our “moments,” our faults. May God grant us such a “spirit of gentleness” in the way He grants us all things: by bringing us ever to recall that He deals with us in mercy. Amen.

Monday, September 13: Titus 3:8–15 Trinity 15

“Do the Obvious”

Titus 3:8 — The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.

“Devote themselves to good works”? I thought we were saved by God’s grace! Have the “rules of salvation” now suddenly changed? Are we to put the work of Christ behind us, so that we can “get on with right living”?

Of course not: Jesus is never relegated to the “back seat” of our lives. His work is not only the blanket that forgives, but the power that causes us to live as His brothers and sisters. In other words, if Christ is with you to save, He’s also in you to produce fruit that reflects that new man. Martin Luther said: “Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works; evil works do not make a wicked man, but a wicked man does evil works.” And, again: “No one may fulfill the law unless he is freed of the law and no longer under it. It is not works that fulfill the law, but the fulfillment of the law produces works.”

Here is the “two-sided coin” called “justification and sanctification.” We must neither mix the two, nor pit one against the other. Works don’t save (justification), but a saving faith does works (sanctification). So “do the obvious.” In the freedom of knowing your salvation doesn’t depend on your works but, rather, that the love of Christ that you have received produces works pleasing to God, follow the vocation to which our Lord has called you, with faith ever strengthened through the Gospel so that you do what comes natural to the “new you,” glorifying Him who has given you this gift. Amen.

“What Better Gift?”

Philemon 1:25 — The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

St Paul’s words, here, are well known, as they should be. They fittingly conclude many sermons, following the Paul’s pattern here and in his letters to the churches at Galatia (Gal 6:18) and Philippi (Phlp 4:23). With what better words could we leave someone—whether a church or an individual?

Consider the choice of words. First, there’s “grace”—“unmerited divine assistance,” Webster says. Truly, grace is “unmerited” [by *us*!] and “divine,” but “assistance” is hardly strong enough for what Lutherans would associate with “grace.” Such a word falls far short of rightly expressing the *unilateral* work of God in salvation (which we refer to as *divine monergism*) and, thus, cheats Christ of His work. Grace is “all or nothing”; it’s does 100% of the work, or it is not grace at all.

Next, see where this “grace” finds its root: it is “*of* the Lord Jesus Christ.” Only Christ Himself is able to grant us “undeserved salvation.” As God, He had the ability to live a perfect life—necessary for one to be the sin-bearer for all people. As man, He could be our replacement under the law, having the “frail flesh” that could die on a cross.

Finally, where is this “grace of Christ” directed? It’s to go to all nations, for God desires that all be saved by the grace of Christ. Therefore, what better closing could be given to our conversation, than to ask God’s grace to be given, that we would desire (and say) what our Lord does? Amen.

“Jesus is the Last Word”

Hebrews 1:1–2 — Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

We Americans certainly have a passion for what is new: the latest must certainly be the greatest. It’s in line with our Darwinian philosophy that claims our world is constantly improving. So, almost by default, almost without question, we grab the most modern product or ideology and place it on our mantle. There it’ll be revered...for a while...

To those with such a worldview, it almost seems as if the author of Hebrews concurs with this thinking. He says that God in “olden times” had spoken through prophets—and that was fine “way back then”...but now, there is Jesus—to replace what’s gone before.

But neither he nor we can concur with this worldly logic.

First of all, Jesus hasn’t come to *replace*, but to *fulfill* what had gone before. What was prophesied of old has come to fruition in Jesus. As Jesus Himself said just before He ascended: “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” (Luke 24:44)

Second, Jesus is the *last word*. There are no others to look for in these “last days,” but it is for these days that this One was given. As the people before His incarnation believed in what was promised, we believe in what was accomplished. Either way, it’s always been, and always will be, salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Amen.

“Once Humbled, Now Exalted”

Hebrews 2:9–11 — But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers...

As with yesterday’s devotion, so we find today centered around Jesus Christ. This should be no surprise, though, for any study that doesn’t revolve around Christ should be considered suspect!

First, we see that for a “little while,” He became “lower than the angels.” He left His “state of exaltation,” and entered into humility—taking on our humanity, our role as servants under the Law. The Nicene Creed states it well: “... being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man...” When Jesus was “crucified, dead, and buried,” this was not a tragic end to a well-meant beginning, no mere matter of the political intrigue of the Jews and Romans. His entire life and death was with the purpose and foreknowledge of God. “Who...for our salvation,” the Creed says: Jesus *had* to take on our flesh—that He might take our place under the law, then use that same frail flesh to pay in blood for the sins of the world.

This “state of humiliation” was but for a “little while,” for our Lord and Savior is now “crowned with glory and honor.” As Philippians 2:9 puts it: “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name...” God grant that we always cling to these twin natures of Christ—who used both to win our salvation. Amen.

“One of Us”

Hebrews 4:14—5:2 — Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness.

The book of Hebrews gives great emphasis to Jesus’ being our High Priest. What does a high priest do, and how did Jesus fulfill that role?

The high priest represented the whole nation before the Lord; Jesus would be the One who would take the place of all humanity—living a perfect life and dying a sacrificial death in our stead. The high priest who would enter the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement; Jesus Christ who would go to the cross and the veil of the Holy of Holies would be torn in two.

We see this “great exchange,” a judicial act two millennia in the past—Jesus took on the guilt of all, so that all may stand acquitted and be free—but it is not so remote transaction as it may seem: the One who stands in for the many is our *Brother*. The One who now stands in judgment did not distance Himself from sinners, but stood in our place *as one of us*. Thus, He can “sympathize with our weaknesses,” even though He did not sin. We cannot cry out (as we often do with others), “You don’t know what it’s like!” We can pray “lead us out of temptation and deliver us from evil,” knowing that the High Priest who intercedes for us has *been there* and knows full well what we’re going through. We can “draw near to the throne of grace with confidence,” knowing that we will indeed “receive mercy and grace to help in time of need.” Amen.

“Despising the Gift”

Hebrews 6:4-8 — For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

Verses 4-8 of Hebrews 6 deal with the difficult doctrinal issue of “hardening.” This addresses the former believer, one who was “once enlightened,” who had “tasted the heavenly gift.” Such had “tasted the powers of the coming age,” having been given the seed of salvation, that would carry them from this world to the next. All things needed were given, so that eternal life would await.

The race of salvation is a marathon, not a sprint, and along the way the devil seeks to wrest that salvation from us. He uses good times—that we may forget the need for God. He uses tough times—that we may blame God for impotence or indifference. All of us are tempted, and we all fall for many of those temptations. But the condition described here is the deliberate and repetitive act of sinning, where we slowly blind our consciences and harden our hearts. We read these words a bit later in Hebrews: “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.” (Hebrews 10:26-27)

How important, then, to be diligent in our faith. May we never become lax in the regimen of prayer, that we continually ask God to shield us from the Evil One. Rather, may our faith be fed regularly through Word and Sacrament, that we may be sustained unto life everlasting. Amen.

From the Propers for Trinity 16

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 7:11-17 (NKJV)

Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has risen up among us”; and, “God has visited His people.” And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.

The COLLECT

Lord, we pray Thee that Thy grace may always go before and follow after us and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth, and reigneth, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Hebrews 7 teaches two kinds of righteousness: Active righteousness (Law) and passive righteousness (Gospel). Active righteousness is our own effort to keep God's Law, and it's for this earth only. Indeed, how could we function in the world without the Law and its inherent morality? Sadly, we know all too well the devastation of immorality and disobedience all around us, even in our own lives. Yet, the Law's righteousness *is* only for this life. It's temporary, even as the old covenant and its Levitical priesthood was temporary because of the temporary nature of its priests with all their inherent weaknesses.

Our neighbor may view us as righteous by our efforts to be good, but God does not, for He has a different standard: *Be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect (Mt. 5:48)*. The Law, then, cannot make us righteous in His sight because we can't do it. All it can do is show us that we are stone-cold dead sinners. What is needed is the priesthood of Christ, the eternal priest in the order of Melchizedek. In Him the old priesthood with its bloody sacrifices found their end. In Him the Law finds its perfect fulfillment *for us*, for He has fulfilled the Law *in our place*, and has *offered His body once for all (Heb. 9:10)*. Covered in His righteousness through baptism, God views us as righteous. This is the passive righteousness of the Gospel, and it's a gift. It is passive because we *do* nothing. We simply receive Christ's righteousness through faith and God regards us as perfect.

The old covenant was incomplete and inadequate because it was only a foreshadowing of eternal things to come. Its bloody sacrifices provided only a temporary solution for sin. Its rituals cleansed only for a time while pointing God's people ahead to their final salvation. And this, only so long as Israel followed the covenant just as God had given it. The real fault with the old covenant, then, lay with the people themselves. They promised to obey, but they wouldn't. They couldn't.

God Himself would need to intervene and usher in a new covenant. So He has. *The fullness of the time has come* (Gal. 4:5), and the old covenant has vanished away. The eternal High Priest, Christ Jesus—God in the flesh, born of a woman under the law—has offered His own Body and Blood upon the altar of the cross once, for the redemption of all. Unlike the blood of animals, which could only outwardly purify the flesh for a time, the sinless blood of Christ cleanses sinners totally and completely—body, heart, and soul.

Jesus is *the* true Israelite, the very fulfillment of the law. He *is* the true High Priest, and His Body and Blood *is* the perfect sacrifice for sin that never need be repeated. Eternally He serves as Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, showing His Blood to the Father. At the same time He serves as the Chief Pastor of His Church by administering His saving Blood to us. In baptism, absolution, preaching, and Supper, God has mercy on us. He forgives our sins, and we know that He remembers our lawless deeds no more.

Old Testament Worship prefigures Christ and the New Testament Worship. Consider the Holy Place with its lamp-stand, its showbread, and its altar of incense. Christ Himself is the Light of the world, Who drives out the darkness. He is the true Bread of Life. His own sacrifice is the true smoke of incense, the saving aroma in God's nostrils. Even now Christ lives and reigns eternally to make intercession for us in heaven.

So do our candles signify the Light of Christ in our midst. Our prayers, offered through faith in Christ, are a blessed incense to "Our Father." Likewise, the sacramental bread is the true Showbread, the very Body of Christ, by which we have Communion with God.

Consider the Holy of Holies. The Ark contained the two tablets of the Law. Christ Jesus is the new Ark, for the Law of God was in His heart and His perfect life is the fulfillment of that Law. The Mercy Seat covering the Ark signified the covering of sin through the blood of the sacrifices. Christ Himself is the Mercy Seat, for He alone is the covering for all sin.

So long as the first tabernacle stood, only the High Priest could enter behind the veil once a year to sprinkle the blood. But in the death of the eternal High Priest the veil is torn. Full access into heaven belongs to all baptized believers. Now God graciously comes to us in the Divine Service to sprinkle us with the Blood of Christ. So, at our Altar we enter into the presence of God Himself, by the Blood of Jesus, to receive the eternal inheritance.

The life of all flesh is in its blood. Blood is life, for it is the blood that keeps the heart beating and the brain and other organs functioning.

We have a sin-problem, though, which makes our blood by nature impure and unclean. We lack any and all righteousness. What courses through our veins is “death-blood” not “life-blood.” Thus, we are alienated from God, for His holiness is simply incompatible with any uncleanness whatsoever. We must die! Divine justice requires it. *The wages of sin is death.* God demands blood!

Thanks be to God that What He demanded, He Himself gave. God’s own Son, Christ Jesus, has *redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature ... with His holy, precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death.*

The Old Testament prefigured it. The Lord hid Adam and Eve’s naked shame with the animal skins. Likewise, the blood of millions of animals provided a temporary ritual atonement for sin. Finally the types had their end, however, for *Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. The blood of Jesus Christ God’s Son cleanses us from all sin.* We are forgiven and set free.

Now we have a better testament than Israel: “Drink ye all of it.” Israel was prohibited from tasting any of the blood of their sacrifices. Our Lord’s gift to us, however, is His very own blood to drink for the remission of all our sins. The Holy Communion is our most precious treasure because it is the pure life-blood of God’s Lamb which cleanses our death-blood and grants us access into heaven.

Salvation is won! The way into the Holiest is open through the blood of Christ. Types and shadows have their end in Him, for He has consecrated a new and living way into God's presence. *By one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.* Forgiveness for all our sins and perfect righteousness in God's sight is our birthright. For we have received the new birth of Holy Baptism. That precious sacrament is the *answer of a good conscience toward God*, our hearts having been sprinkled from an evil conscience by Jesus' blood.

Thus, let all the baptized *fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.* In the pure Word, read and preached, in absolution and Supper, the Holy Spirit continues to bring heaven down to us as He distributes this forgiveness and salvation. The Divine Service, the *assembling of ourselves together*; is, then, the heart and soul of the baptismal life.

Let us never neglect this Divine Service, for such willful neglect would be a rejection of Christ's atoning sacrifice—a grievous sin indeed. Despising the Word and Sacraments is to trample the Son of God underfoot. It is to make His precious blood something common—truly an insult to the Spirit Who has such wondrous gifts to give.

Rather, let all the faithful enter boldly before the throne of grace. There God does His work of justifying us and making us holy that we may live in faith toward Him and in fervent love toward one another.

Abel felt Cain's jealousy and finally his angry blow. Enoch experienced his tiny church of faithful believers being persecuted by their faithless, tyrannical relatives. Noah saw one day turning into the next as he labored those 120 years to build the ark. Yet, these three fathers did not live by what they felt or experienced or saw. They lived by what they heard. They lived by faith, for faith lives **not** by what the eyes see or by what the flesh experiences. Faith lives by what the ears hear.

By faith alone these three were righteous before God, until finally they saw. Abel's death was his gateway into paradise. Enoch was plucked from the earth as a witness ahead of time to the resurrection. Noah persevered and finally saw His salvation as he and his family experienced rescue.

Trust, dear Christian, in what your ears hear in the Word. That Word cannot lie. *Faith is the evidence of things not seen.* Though you only see water, bread and wine, the Word says, "*I baptize you,*" and so it is done. The Word says, "*This is My Body, given for you;*" "*This is my Blood, shed for you,*" and so it is. The Word says, "*I forgive you,*" and so you are forgiven.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for. Every heavenly treasure God has to give is already yours by faith. Do not doubt it. One day you shall see and experience fully, and what a joyous day that will be. That is faith's hope, and it is a hope that cannot be disappointed, for He Who is faithful has promised it.

From the Propers for Trinity 17

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 14:1-11 (NKJV)

Now it happened, as He went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, that they watched Him closely. And behold, there was a certain man before Him who had dropsy. And Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” But they kept silent. And He took him and healed him, and let him go. Then He answered them, saying, “Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?” And they could not answer Him regarding these things. So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: “When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’ Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

The COLLECT

Lord, we beseech Thee, grant Thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil and with pure hearts and minds to follow Thee, the only God; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth, and reigneth, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Our Lutheran forefathers quoted verses 5 and 6 of this pericope in article VII of the Augsburg Confession, the article on the Church. So then, “What is the Church according to this text?” The Church is unity. *“One Lord, One faith, One baptism; One God and Father of all;” “One hope;” “One body and One Spirit.”* For those of us counting, that is a perfect number of items that refer to unity, or oneness. Therefore, unity in the Church is important; our fellowship, our agreement on what we believe, is important.

How is this unity to be fostered among us? *“With all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* Therefore, unity is fostered through confession and absolution. Confession is implied by *“lowliness,”* that is, humility. A person who is lowly, is always ready to admit his guilt and faults; to be the first to apologize; to be the first to seek a means of bringing unity by laying his sins before his brothers in Christ. And when his brother hears his faults he forgives. For the brother in Christ, who has heard his brother’s sins, and knows his brother’s faults, treats him with *“gentleness”* and *“longsuffering”* (that is, patience), and bears his brother’s faults in love. When either impenitence or mercilessness exists within the Church, the bond of peace is broken. Unity can only be restored when penitence and forgiveness return.

This chapter from the Epistle to the Hebrews is commonly referred to as the “faith chapter” of the Bible. Faith is often spoken of in our society. It is promoted in TV shows, on news reports, in sporting events, and so on...but few of these advocates of faith ever tell you *in what* you are to have faith. If you listen closely, it becomes apparent that what they want you to have faith in is *faith itself*. Yet, this is impossible: faith must have something to which it clings!

Those listed in Hebrews have their faith directed to one place: the promised Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac, because he believed in the resurrection from the dead, of whom Christ is the firstfruits. Isaac blessed Jacob because of the promised Coming One. Jacob blessed his sons looking forward to the promised Savior. Joseph looked forward to the Promised Land on his deathbed, to God bringing His people out of the house of bondage (both out of slavery in Egypt and slavery to sin). Moses endured the sufferings of the Egyptians, foreshadowing the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith—scriptural faith, faith that is worth something now and forever—clings to our Lord, to His promises, to His rewards. It clings to our Lord in the midst of suffering, for, even as our Lord suffered and was rewarded, so too, will we sufferers be given the crown of glory in connection with Him.

Chapter 12 of the Epistle of Hebrews continues the teaching of Chapter 11 concerning the holy men who were examples of faith, stating that *“we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.”* We are then told throughout this chapter that what those witnesses bore witness to is *“chastisement.”* Chastisement is part of being a Christian. This is far from the “theology of glory,” the teaching that all things will get better when one becomes a Christian, and if things are not good for you, then it is because you are not that good of a Christian.

The writer of Hebrews would have us rather hear about the “theology of the cross,” the teaching that Christians endure a cross in this life, just as our Lord Jesus Christ *“endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”* The writer of Hebrews tells us that true sons of God, endure chastisement, for chastisement is a sign of love. This is contrary to everything that our society teaches—there are even those who would abandon all forms of discipline, because it is “unloving.”

Here, though, we are told just why chastisement from our loving Heavenly Father is for our benefit: it is because it *“yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness.”* Righteousness is the reward of being chastened, for through chastisement we learn God’s law and will, learning how to confess our transgressions and to receive right standing with God through His love and forgiveness.

“Let brotherly love continue.” Brotherly love is the bearing of one another’s sins and faults, remembering that even as I am a poor, miserable sinner, my brother in Christ is also a poor, miserable sinner. Thus, just as we pray for and seek forgiveness from our Heavenly Father through our Lord Jesus Christ, our brother in Christ is to be treated as our Lord would treat us. Here on Earth, *“we have no continuing city.”* In other words, this life is but a gust of wind and a shadow—it soon passes. Therefore, let us be merciful toward our brother, as our Lord is merciful toward us in this time and in these days, for our time in this life is short. Let our hearts be *“established by grace,”* that is, with forgiveness toward one another.

All of this serves to promote unity and peace among us, for unity and peace cannot exist where forgiveness and mercy do not. Our Lord Jesus Christ suffered and died for us, on the tree of the cross, to pay the penalty of not only our own sins, but the sins of our brothers in Christ, and indeed the whole world. He bought us at a price...and that price was His own life. He, therefore, sits on the right hand of the throne of God, judging the quick and the dead, establishing His eternal kingdom. As heirs of that kingdom, who have been granted grace and mercy, together we go forth to Him, established by grace, continuing in this love.

“Count it all joy when you fall into various trials.”

There is no doubt that as a Christian we do and we will face many and countless trials. There are those who will try us because we insist on keeping God’s Word pure. There are those who will try us because we are a small group. There are those who will try us because we preach and teach that certain behaviors, held by our society to be acceptable, are sins. We have and we will face trials from our very own souls which mourn over our past sins, and the troubles that we face in our daily lives. The devil, the world and our sinful flesh are continually at war with us; leading us into great shame and despair.

We know from experience that the *“various trials”* that we face do not lead to joy. Therefore, when the St. James states that we should count our trials as *“all joy,”* we naturally perk up our ears, for this is contrary to our nature. Our trials are a shadow of the trials which our Lord Jesus Christ endured on the tree of the cross for our salvation. When we endure temptation and trial, we are reminded of our Lord’s suffering, and we are therefore reminded of our forgiveness, life and salvation, that was won for us on the cross. The blessed St. James reminds us of this when he says, we *“will receive the crown of life.”* God grant us this!

News from Around the Diocese:

2010 Synod of the ELDoNA—Salem-Malone was our host for this year's synod and colloquium in May. In addition to nearly all of our pastors being able to be in attendance, there were several LC—MS visitors and Pastor Rob Lawson, Jr., the Superintendent of the ACLC. The ACLC had recognized itself to be in doctrinal agreement with the ELDoNA prior to our synod, and the diocese agreed in that assessment. It was with great joy that fellowship was recognized between the ACLC and the ELDoNA. Discussions are already underway regarding future cooperation in several matters of great significance to both groups, including the planned St. Ignatius seminary.

2010 Conference of The Augustana Ministerium—Pastor Heimbigner and the saints of Charity Lutheran Church (Burleson, TX) hosted this year's Augustana Ministerium (AM) conference. Three members of the diocese—Dcn. Oncken, Pastor Henson, and Bishop Heiser—were among the presenters. At present, four members of the diocese (Heimbigner, Heiser, Oncken and Stefanski) serve on the AM Administrative Council.

Visitation of Trinity Lutheran Church (Herrin, IL)—Bishop Heiser visited Trinity-Herrin and preached for the Divine Service on the Festival of St. Mary Magdalene (July 22). The visitation allowed for discussions between the bishop and Pastor Henson and Deacon Harroun, as well as an opportunity for Bishop Heiser to examine Pastor Henson's teaching, and to speak with members of the congregation.

Visitation of St. Philip (Grayslake, IL) and St. Boniface (Niles, MI)—Bishop Heiser also conducted his visitation of the mission served by Dcn. Oncken and the congregation served by Pr. Rutowicz during the days of July 27 through 29.

Dedication at Christ Ev. Lutheran (Richmond, MO)—On August 27, Pastor Hudson and the saints at Christ-Richmond

will celebrate the dedication of their permanent church building. May the Lord bless His saints with many years in which to partake of His grace in that place!

Fall ACLC Pastoral Conference—Several ELDoNA clergy will be in attendance at the ACLC Pastoral Conference in October, which will be hosted by St. Paul Lutheran Church (Escondido, CA). Presenters include Bishop Heiser and Deacon Dulas, as well as Revs. Robert Lawson, Sr. and Robert Lawson, Jr.

Pastor Hunter celebrates 20th Anniversary in the Ministry—On July 25, the saints of St. Paul-Tailorsville surprised their pastor with a celebration of the twentieth anniversary of his ordination. He shared the following with the pastors of the diocese:

Dear Brothers

Sunday the saints at St Paul congregation had a surprise 20th year in the Ministry celebration for me after the Divine Service. They grilled rib eye steaks, with baked potatoes and the works, salad, and dessert. The members asked my wife Julene what they should get me, and she told them how I always wished we had a statue of Christ up above the back door of the sanctuary, blessing the people as they depart. They went on-line and found one that was just the right size. (see attached pictures). So that will be put up soon. I can't wait until we get all the other statues in place which will depict the miracles of Christ. We are placing them on scones in between the stain glass windows. Each of those will be measure about 15-20 inches high. We found the old scones stored up in the attic, which at one time, were used for old-timey lighting candles in between each window. We had an excellent time in praising God for the privilege of sharing the Word of God in it's truth and purity, and administering the Sacraments according to Christ's institution for the last 20

years; the last 15 of which were here serving the saints at St Paul in Taylorsville. ...

(I have to wear the neck-brace till September 25 due to the recent cervical spine surgery I had in late June.)



Pastor Hunter is scheduled to undergo several more surgeries in early October. During that time, Deacon Oncken and Bishop Heiser will visit St. Paul for several Sundays, so that the congregation does not have to go too many weeks without the Sacrament. Please keep Pastor Hunter and the congregation which he serves in your prayers!