

Common ground is either neutral ground or a spot at which the inner unity of the communion of saints flashes into visibility. It is not union ground. There never was a union of Christendom in the sense usually referred to, unless the mediaeval union of external rule under the papacy be meant thereby, and, we do not believe there will ever be a permanent earthly re-union of Christendom. The antithesis will ever be operative. But there is at this time a unity of all Christians, the unity of Christ Himself, and it constitutes the communion of saints. This unity should more and more be realized and made visible, but it must start from within outward; and outer organization must honestly express, and not cover up, the inner condition of truth and principle. It is the mistake of our age, for any spiritual religion whose strength is in Faith and communion with God, to lay all stress upon an external organization and a surface appearance of unity. It is a still greater mistake to degenerate distinctive faiths into a low minimum of common faith, or to attempt a union of the common minimum with a tenacious but individual preservation of what is distinctive.

If Protestantism were to combine, by way of elimination, or of absorption of peculiar principle, it would be the beginning of the end of Faith. The genus without the species is an abstraction. When you broaden a stream by sacrificing its positive life-currents, you gain a marshland and not a mighty river. It is dangerous to unite in parallel action, without parallel and common conviction—for the thin partitions of custom or half-dead conviction will soon wear away, and there will be formless coalescence. The only safe combination is by common conviction.

[TO BE CONTINUED IN THE APRIL ISSUE]

—from *The Confessional Principle and the Confessions of The Lutheran Church as Embodying the Evangelical Confession of the Christian Church*, by Theodore E. Schmauk and C. Theodore Benze, (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911), p. 899–902

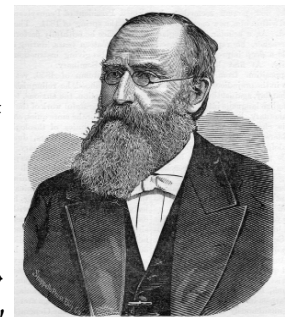
THE LUTHERAN HERALD



“Somewhere on earth, if the gates of hell have not prevailed against the Church, there is a Communion whose fellowship involves no departure from a solitary article of Christian faith--and no man should be willing to be united with any other Communion. The man who is sure there is no such Communion is bound to put forth the effort to originate it. He who knows of no Creed which is true to the Rule of Faith, in all its articles, should at once prepare one that is. Every Christian is bound either to find a Church on Earth, pure in its whole faith, or to make one. On the other hand, he who says that the Church is wrong, confesses in that very assertion, that if the Church be right, he is an errorist; and that in asking to share her communion while he yet denies her doctrine, he asks her to adopt the principle that error is to be admitted to her bosom, for as an errorist and only as an errorist can she admit him.”

—Charles P. Krauth, D.D.

The Conservative Reformation and its Theology



MARCH 2011

(SEXAGESIMA—OCULI)

The Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America

Grace and peace to you in Christ Jesus!

The quotation from C. P. Krauth on the cover of this issue of *The Lutheran Herald* reminds us that the necessary divisions which have come to pass in the history of Christ's Church boil down to the simple question of whether or not one is, and will remain, faithful to the teaching of God's Word. To put it another way: Does the Truth matter, or not?

The world is unconcerned with the Truth, although it may show a great deal of interest in facts. For example, the multitude who heard the parable of the sower and the seed may have walked away thinking, "Yes, Jesus has correctly related what happens when you sow seed in a field." But the multitude did not ask the question which filled the hearts of the disciples: "What does this parable mean?" The disciples sought the Truth, and they knew that Jesus, who is the Truth, could enlighten them concerning the meaning of this parable—and could teach them all things.

When there are those within the Church who shrug their shoulders at the presence of error being proclaimed instead of God's Word and who readily tolerate false teachers within the communion of the Church if that is what is necessary to keep a worldly peace, their ambivalence is a testimony against their claims to orthodoxy. If you love the Truth, you hate the lies. And the Truth calls us to repent of any idolatry which would love worldly peace and unity more than the peace and unity which are bestowed by the Holy Trinity.

Thus the Church always rejoices in the proclamation of the Truth. Once again, we are blessed by the labors of faithful teachers of the Church, who proclaim the Word in its truth and purity for the benefit of those who read these pages. This month's devotions were written by Pastors Jeffrey Ahonen, Steve Brockdorf, Mark Mueller and Deacons Jerry Dulas and Tony Oncken.

*In Christ,
Rt. Rev. James D. Heiser
Bishop, the ELDoNA*

stands firm against amalgamation, alliance, or federation. First of all, she is not on a common foundation with all other Protestant Evangelical denominations. This has been made to appear sufficiently. In the second place, she has had large experience in all these proposals, and has rejected them generations ago. Her very birth, her youth, and the crises of her manhood were involved in this very question. It was the great question that arose, with the birth of Protestantism, at the Diet of Spires. It was the question at the Marburg Colloquy. It was the question urged tenaciously by Philip of Hesse at Augsburg. The Augsburg Confession excluded the Reformed Principle. It was the question for whose successful solution Bucer lived in vain. It was the question of the Variata of 1540. It was the question of the extreme Philipists and Crypto-Calvinists. It was the question of the princes at the Frankfurt Recess. It was the question of the Electors at the Convention at Naumburg. It was the question that split and disintegrated the Church, until it was settled, gently but firmly, in the best spirit of Luther and the best spirit of Melancthon, in the Concordia of 1580.

THE TRUE POSITION OF THE CONFESSIONAL PRINCIPLE IN COOPERATION.

The true position of the Lutheran Church in the midst of bland Romanism and active Protestantism, is firmness without unfriendliness; love without laxity. She should strive for all movement whose aim is unity, up to the point where it becomes evident that unity does not exist. She should shun all movements whose aim is union, that is, the cover or bond of unity thrown over diversity of principle.

Where there is common ground, there is possibility of cooperation. But no cooperation is possible whose practical or ultimate effect is to slight or ignore even the least central and most insignificant outpost of Lutheran principle. For the truth is organic, and it is the duty of the body to stand by, and not to sacrifice, even its smallest and most remote member—its little finger, which is faithful in the discharge of duty. The principle formulated in the sphere of love by our Saviour, applies here in the sphere of faith: "Inasmuch as ye have not done it unto the least of these, ye have not done it unto me."—"He that is faithful in little will be faithful in much." This organic nature of the faith is the key that solves the relations of fundamental and non-fundamental, and that has practically been used by the Formula of Concord to determine the principle of the adiaphora.

“THE CONFESSIONAL PRINCIPLE OF THE BOOK OF CONCORD AND CHRISTIAN COOPERATION.”

NOT A NARROW-MINDED CHURCH.

This [that cooperation between Lutheran Church and those of the Reformed is impossible, if one is to remain faithful to the doctrine of Holy Scripture] is not narrowness—it is a historical fact. We have not invented the fact—it has thrust itself upon us; and if there be any criticism of narrowness against us, it must not be with reference to the fact, but with reference to our recognition of it. The Lutheran Church is not a narrow-minded Church. She is above and beyond all, a church that stands for clear fact, rather than for pure logic on the one hand, or for mixed sentiment on the other. The Lutheran Church can cooperate in many matters, but not on general sentiment, and only and always where definite limits are set. She is not a diplomatic church; and, because she does violence to her open-minded nature in ecclesiastical diplomacy, she is nearly always worsted when she engages in it.

We believe the Federation of Churches will do good to Reformed Protestantism. It will draw together those who belong together. It should persuade those who are united on every essential doctrine, and divided by nothing but sectarian or denominational particularity, to give up the latter, and become one mighty American religious brotherhood. We believe, too, that it will help the Lutheran Church. Those Lutherans who prize the aims of a Federation which is essentially a Reformed Protestant body in objects and methods, above the object, teaching and method of the Lutheran Church, will be kept busy in vain in refining the Reformed oil out of a Reformed mass; or will find that the Lutheran oil is being simply absorbed in the Reformed mass.

Let us sum up the reasons why the Confessional Lutheran Church



From the Propers for Sexagesima Sunday

THE GOSPEL

St. Luke 8:4-14 (NKJV)

And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable:

“A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.” When He had said these things He cried, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

Then His disciples asked Him, saying, “What does this parable mean?” And He said, “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that ‘Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.’

“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.

“Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.”

“But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.”

The COLLECT

O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

“Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!”

It is not wealth by itself that is the problem. Truly, all of the worldly riches that any man possesses has come to him from God Himself, Who provides daily bread – “everything that belongs to the support and wants of the body, such as meat, drink, clothing, shoes, house, homestead, field, cattle, money, goods . . .” -- to all men (SC III). These come from God’s own hand, and are divine blessings indeed.

The issue for the rich man – and for the poor man -- is not these riches. It is the placing of his *trust* in riches that places one’s soul in grave danger. It is one’s *love* of money that is “a root of all evil” (1 Tm 6:10). It is man’s *fear* of poverty that leads him to serve mammon as his lord (Mt 6:24). Truly, it is hard – in fact, it is impossible – for the man who does not fear, love and trust in God above all things to enter the kingdom of the One True God.

Yet, with God, all things are possible. God commands all to look to Him as the source of all worldly wealth – or die – and kills the mammon worshiper. God invites all to see Him as the gracious and generous Giver, Who gave His Only-Begotten Son to save even idolaters from sin and death and to raise them up to new and everlasting life. God provides His Word and Sacraments through which He gives His Holy Spirit to rich and poor alike, “so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life here in time and yonder in eternity” (SC III) and thus receive the very Kingdom of God!

Pilate, therefore, wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them. But they shouted, saying, “Crucify Him, crucify Him!” Then he said to them the third time, “Why, what evil has He done?”

As yesterday’s devotion focused on the passive obedience of Jesus, today’s meditation is about His active obedience. Pilate can find no fault in Jesus, so he cries out “. . . *what evil has He done?*” Indeed, Pilate was right. There is no fault to be found in Jesus.

His faultless life also serves our salvation. First, as man, Jesus is able to serve as our substitute. “*But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons*” (Gal. 4:4–5). But it’s not as though Jesus “pulled rank” as God, using His deity to buffer the temptations of the devil. As stated in yesterday’s devotion, Jesus is in His state of humiliation—not fully exercising His divine nature. “*For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin*” (Heb. 4:15). But as we know, Jesus also had to be God, even though rarely manifesting those attributes. For only a God could be without sin, as Jesus is.

So we see Jesus in a two-fold way. We see the Man who took on human flesh to be our replacement under the Law—and to suffer and die. We see also the God who lived a perfect life—and whose death paid for the world’s sins. What a Redeemer!

Then Jesus said to the chief priests, captains of the temple, and the elders who had come to Him, “Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not try to seize Me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

“*Swords and clubs*” would hardly have been enough, if you were taking on God. That is, when God has His “power switch” turned on. But we’re now deep into Jesus’ passion, and nearing the end of His state of humiliation. It’s a time when Jesus “shut down His power”, and let the powers of darkness have their way. It was an integral part of Jesus’ “passive obedience”, which was necessary to earn our salvation.

There are two parts to what we call “justification”. Simply, justification means that God declares all sinners righteous by the active and passive obedience of Jesus Christ. Such obedience to the Father’s will forms the backbone of our salvation. Without it, your pastor’s declaration of forgiveness would be hollow; there’d be no substance behind the words. Without Jesus’ active and passive work, we would have nothing.

So today, we see Jesus earning our salvation passively, allowing Himself to suffer all, even death, to pay for the great stockpile of sins past, present, and future. Let us stand in wonder at our God—Who not only wields His power when He needs to, but also withdraws it—when it serves to earn our salvation.

“Then many warned him to be quiet; but he cried out to all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’”

Joshua was needed in Jericho again, for Satan was at work there once again. The ill effects that the devil had brought into the world when he led Adam and Eve into sin had caused their descendant, Bartimaeus of Jericho, to become blind. Now the devil was sowing the seed of discord in the hearts of many others there in that city, leading them to act mercilessly toward poor Bartimaeus by trying to prohibit him from begging Jesus for help.

But Joshua was at work in Jericho again, also. Jesus – whose name in Hebrew is Joshua – had come to Jericho that day to save His people. Like His namesake of the Old Testament, through whom God had worked to knock down the walls that shielded Jericho so that its wickedness could be purged (Joshua 6), Jesus had come to Jericho that day to destroy the devil’s scheme. He thwarted the plan of Satan and the uncaring people that called for Bartimaeus’ pleas to go unheeded, and the Son of David brought His mercy upon the son of Timaeus by restoring his sight.

Today, Joshua comes to your city. In response to your prayer, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven,” Jesus comes by His Word and Spirit and “breaks and hinders every evil counsel and will which would not let us hallow the name of God nor let His kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, the world, and our flesh; but strengthens and keeps us steadfast in His Word and in faith unto our end” (SC III). Truly this is His gracious and good will -- for you!

“Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’”

The true business of the Church is not about the paying, but the praying.

The temple in Jerusalem had adopted a different business plan. At first, providing a convenient way to exchange foreign currency and to purchase sacrificial animals was a helpful service to their brethren who had traveled from many nations and great distances to the temple. However, the sellers soon turned this service into a vice, greedily enriching themselves through excessive exchange rates and sale prices. They were preying on the people in order to obtain worldly wealth, rather than praying with their brethren in order to attain heavenly treasure. Truly, it had become a den of thieves, with men robbing not only their fellow man, but also robbing God of His glory as the centerpiece of His own House (Mal 3:8-12).

The raising of money is a necessary business within the Church, in order to pay the pastor his wages (1 Ti 5:18) and to provide for the House of the Lord and all of its articles (2 Chr 24:9-14). Yet this is ever to remain a service secondary to the true business of the Church, which is the faithful receiving of the divine service that God renders to us (Ex 20:8-11). His service of us through Word and Sacrament is – and ever must be -- the centerpiece of the Church. Our worship of Him is the receiving of His forgiveness, life, and salvation through faith (Ap IV.49) and showing forth the fruits of faith in our offerings, prayers, and service to others (Ap XXIV, 27-28). May our call never be “Let us pay!” but “Let us pray!” in His House.

And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.”

These simple words of our Lord have been interpreted in various ways. Because of their serious nature, these interpretations have also caused great controversy. At stake is no less than the delivery of Jesus’ forgiveness. Therefore, we dare not miss their true meaning.

First, let’s look at what they don’t mean. One view says that the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. But the reading doesn’t imply this, and later St. Paul specifically mentions the earthly elements of “cup” and “bread”, which we consume along with Christ’s Body and Blood (1 Cor. 10:16).

Another view refuses to acknowledge the miraculous nature of the Lord’s Supper, calling it only a feast of “remembrance”. The bread and wine are mere “tools”—an object lesson that helps us recall Christ’s sacrifice. This interpretation also fails to identify the intended sense of Jesus’ words.

As Lutherans, we cling to the simple and clear words of Jesus. As with any “last will and testament”, the words are straightforward, so as not to be misunderstood. Therefore, we confess this: that in, with and under the natural elements of bread and wine, we receive the supernatural elements of Christ’s Body and Blood. So there’s a simple message here that we can apply to all Biblical interpretation. Namely, that we cling to Jesus’ words as He intends them, not as we suppose them to be.

And He said to them, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

In this statement, Jesus is referring to what we call today “The Two Kingdoms”. And though they sometimes compete against each other, they’re meant to have complementary roles. The first is spiritual, called the “Kingdom of the Right”. It is comprised of believers, and operates under the authority of God’s Word. It uses His Law to convict us of our sin, and the Gospel as the healing balm of God’s forgiveness in Christ. These means comprise the whole realm of governing the body of believers we call the “invisible church”.

The second is the “Kingdom of the Left”, which applies to all people, believer and unbeliever alike. It operates under the laws of the government where we live. As responsible citizens, we’re to obey those laws, even when we deem them unfair. It is also our responsibility to use peaceful means to change laws, if such laws oppress our fellow man. Certainly abortion falls into this category.

But even though these two kingdoms are very different in purpose, they can benefit one another.

The Christian, by definition, is one who loves his or her neighbor unconditionally. What could be easier on the State than having citizens like that? When the State uses laws to protect freedom of speech and religion, the Church cannot help but benefit—as She preaches salvation by Christ alone—without fear of punishment. Let us then, like Jesus, distinguish well between the two—by serving as good citizens of both country and heaven.

“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

How do we know what are the things of Caesar that we are to render to him? What things are God’s, which we are to give back to Him? In presenting this truth to the people, Jesus used a coin as a clear illustration of how to make this determination. Look at the image and inscription that it bears, and you find to whom it belongs.

Now, look at yourself. Whose image and inscription do you bear? Recall that “God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen 1:27). This image and likeness of God, lost through man’s fall into sin, has been restored in Christ Jesus (Col 1:15). You have put on Christ in your baptism (Gal 3:27) and have been renewed into the image and likeness of God (Col 3:10). The very Name of God is inscribed upon you, as you are baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost (Mt 28:19). You belong to God!

Thus, Dear Christian, render to Caesar – to all earthly authorities that God Himself has called to be over us – the honor, service, obedience, esteem, and love that are due under the Fourth Commandment, for such things are Caesar’s by God’s own decree. Yet our highest allegiance, exceeding that which we owe even to our earthly parents, is owed to the One Who owns us, Who has bought us at a price (1 Cor 6:20), that we “may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness” (SC II). This is most certainly true!

“And He, rebuking them, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ.”

Yes, the demons knew that Jesus was the Christ. “I know who You are -- the Holy One of God!” said one; “You are the Christ, the Son of God!” exclaimed others. These were all true words. Yet Jesus did not allow the demons to proclaim them – and so they did not speak. They knew that His Word forbidding them was a word of authority – the very highest authority – the very Word of God.

For the same reason our churches teach thus about preaching and teaching in the church without being called and ordained to do so: “Of Ecclesiastical Order they teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called” (AC XIV). This doctrine and practice acknowledges that being a pastor in the Church requires more than the ability to profess the truth; it requires God’s own authority to do so. God the Holy Trinity is the sole authority in the Church, and only God can authorize a man to enter the Office of the Holy Ministry. The Church and Her ministers call and ordain a man to serve at the font and pulpit and altar only after careful examination and prayerful consideration of a man’s doctrine and life, to see whether he has indeed been authorized by Christ Himself to preach rightly and administer His Sacraments according to His institution. In this way God’s people are assured that the man who baptizes, absolves, and feeds them does so under authority – the very highest authority – the very Word of God!

“Then another came, saying, ‘Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief. For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.’ And he said to him, ‘Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?’”

The last of the servants in Jesus’ parable is given a mina to invest for his master (about 3 month’s wages). But the servant chooses, on his own, to pack it away—claiming his master to be “*austere*”—a tough, cold character—who’d be ruthless in his accounting. But that wasn’t true. The man really didn’t know his master at all. The master knew there was little time at hand, and the money needed to be invested. But the servant did nothing. He had no relationship with his lord. His master’s trust didn’t foster excitement, but rather was allowed to fizzle.

We too have been given a trust, with very little light left in the day. We need to use the time we’re given to maximum effect. We need to be in the Father’s house—that we may be doing the Father’s will. The great treasure of the Gospel has been given to us; let us then be anxious in helping that fruit grow many times over—as we share the gospel light in the midst of this dark world.

And those who heard it said, “Who then can be saved?” But He said, “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.” Then Peter said, “See, we have left all and followed You.” So He said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life.”

“What do you want, a medal?” I think if you or I were in Jesus’ spot, that might be something we would’ve said to Peter. Consider his statement: *“See, we have left all and followed You”*. This comes right on the heels of Jesus’ parable of the rich man—who had a great obstacle in his path to heaven. His problem wasn’t riches per se; it was his elevation of riches to a “godlike” status. So Peter comes through with his own justification, to convince Jesus that he, as well as the other disciples, is worthy. “We’re not like that stingy rich man, Lord. Just look at how much we’ve given up. We should be ‘shoe-ins’ for heaven.”

But Jesus isn’t impressed. He just finished saying that salvation is an act of God, not of man. Getting rid of harmful baggage doesn’t impress God; it’s simply the logical conclusion of treasuring our salvation. To possess eternal life is the greatest gift we can receive, so why should we let anything threaten that possession? May God grant us that priority—that goods, fame, child and wife will never compete with the glories of heaven.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

As the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to his household.

What is the Sacrament of the Altar? It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself.

Where is this written? The holy Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and St. Paul, write thus:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread: and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and gave it to His disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Take, drink ye all of it. This cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sins. This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me.

What is the benefit of such eating and drinking? That is shown us in these words: Given, and shed for you, for the remission of sins; namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things? It is not the eating and drinking, indeed, that does them, but the words which stand here, namely: Given, and shed for you, for the remission of sins. Which words are, beside the bodily eating and drinking, as the chief thing in the Sacrament; and he that believes these words has what they say and express, namely, the forgiveness of sins.

Who, then, receives such Sacrament worthily? Fasting and bodily preparation is, indeed, a fine outward training; but he is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: Given, and shed for you, for the remission of sins. But he that does not believe these words, or doubts, is unworthy and unfit; for the words For you require altogether believing hearts.

From the Propers for Quinquagesima Sunday

THE GOSPEL

St. Luke 18:31–43 (NKJV)

Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.” But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.

Then it happened, as He was coming near Jericho, that a certain blind man sat by the road begging. And hearing a multitude passing by, he asked what it meant. So they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. And he cried out, saying, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Then those who went before warned him that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he had come near, He asked him, saying, “What do you want Me to do for you?”

He said, “Lord, that I may receive my sight.”

Then Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

The COLLECT

O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Savior, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

From the Propers for the Third Sunday In Lent (Oculi)

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 11:14–28 (NKJV)

And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled. But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.” Others, testing Him, sought from Him a sign from heaven. But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils. He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters. When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”

And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, “Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!” But He said, “More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

The COLLECT

We beseech Thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of Thy humble servants and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to be our defense against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Prayer changes things, but not necessarily in the way people assume it does. God knows our needs and He cares for us, so our prayers do not reveal anything new to Him or inspire any newfound benevolence toward us. His Word commands us to pray and teaches us how. When done faithfully, prayer changes...us!

Faithful prayer flows from God's Word and His Holy Spirit at work in us. God uses prayer to remind us that He is listening and He does abide with us, even when Satan continues to tempt us to despair that we have been abandoned. That is why "Thy will be done" is at the heart of all faithful prayer. Sometimes it includes waiting for His will to unfold. His Spirit would have us submit to His promises that He indeed loves us, and will bring justice when it is due.

Prayer is also a blessing to others who hear they are the subject of our prayers. This is because prayer is the expression of faith and love, which flow from our Lord. If we pray for the well-being of others it is because we love them and want them to know God cares for them as well. Even if we pray for God's justice to come upon others, there is to be true love, desiring that those who sin be brought to justice under God's Law for their benefit, as well, that they might repent and be faithful to Christ.

God grant the Son of Man indeed to find faith on earth, in us and in our prayers for others. Amen!

Today we have an image of the true Christian Church on Earth. The Bride of Christ will suffer. She will be poor—this means that she will not be a big "organization" where everybody's "felt needs" are being met; she will have to learn to go without the things of this world—indeed, she will have to forsake them, in order that she may focus on the eternal things to come.

She will be hungry—that is, she will be hungry for righteousness, for the will of God to be done, over against the will of man. She will weep—she shall have sorrow not only over her own sinfulness, but shall also weep for all those who are trapped in sin and death, on account of their refusal to repent and believe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. She will also be hated, excluded, reviled, and cast out as evil—her life in this world will not be filled with "success" as far as the world defines it; she will be labeled as "unloving" and as "hypocritical"; that which God has called good and holy—that which she upholds—will be called "evil," and that which she calls evil will be called "good."

This is the Church into which we have been baptized, a Church that suffers as her Lord and Savior suffered on the tree of the cross. However, our suffering will be met with the eternal gifts of God—forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, rejoice in your sufferings—evidence that you belong to the one, true Church.

“Judge not, and you shall not be judged.” These words are some of the most misused in all of Holy Scripture. They have often been used by those who are not willing to repent of their sin, but want to continue in their sinful behavior and, sadly, encourage others to do likewise.

The problem is that these words are rarely considered within their context by those who would misuse them. Our Lord Jesus is not saying that the Church should not pass judgment on sin and sinners. The simple fact that in His prudence He gave to the Church two keys—one for remitting and one for retaining sin—answers against this assumption.

No, what our Lord Jesus is preaching against by these words is those who condemn people for committing a particular sin, when they are in fact knowingly committing the same sin themselves and refuse to repent. Do you see the difference? It is one thing to condemn someone for a sin in which you yourself are knowingly committing; it is another thing completely to call someone to repentance for a sin that is damaging their eternal soul, since you desire their eternal well-being.

So then, how does one avoid the hypocritical position that our Lord warns about in today’s pericope? By daily contrition and repentance, that is, through living out one’s Holy Baptism—daily drowning the Old Adam, so that a new Adam may arise and live in and through you each day who reflects the love and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.” According to our Lord this is to be our response even when we have done all the things commanded of us. Consider what our reply should be when we have failed and sinned!

Humility is an important part of Christian discipline, and Jesus illustrates that to us in a number of ways. First off in today’s reading, He would have us be mindful to avoid causing offense among His faithful. We have great freedom in Christ, and He forgives much, but that does not justify carelessness in our works and confession of the faith. We must also be ready to forgive those who faithfully repent of their offenses. We are never so holy that we can show less grace than our Lord has already shown us.

Jesus also emphasizes humility when the apostles ask that He increase their faith. As with the mustard seed and the mulberry tree, simple faith can accomplish great things. Even the simplest works, though, must serve the glory of Christ and His Gospel. Whether He gives us profound miracles to accomplish for the Church, or “simple” service in raising up a faithful Christian family, the work we are given to do as Christians is the work of His Kingdom.

We do not work for our own glory. We work so that others may see Christ and glorify Him for the life and forgiveness that He brings for us (and for them) from the Cross! May He help us to always remember and rejoice in this truth!

An old saying goes, “little things mean a lot.” Another old saying says “the devil is in the details.” The two go well together: if Satan cannot tempt us to sin in large matters, such as grand theft, murder, or adultery, then he is still happy to have us fall in smaller ones, such as wasting resources, despising our neighbor, or thinking unchaste thoughts. The Enemy is patient, and if he can’t break us in two quickly, he is content to chip away at us slowly.

Furthermore, Jesus teaches us this can be reflected in our wills. If we have no self-control in small matters, we are that much more likely to lack discipline with weightier things. Faithfulness to God is not a part-time endeavor, nor is it an easy thing. We put our souls in a dangerous position if we simply repent “as needed” and then disregard God’s wisdom the rest of the time. And it is worse to repent and then willfully go back to the sins just forgiven. These habits are a spiritual cancer that can kill our faith.

Jesus teaches us in today’s verses that we must strive to be faithful and disciplined in all things, large and small. His grace forgives our greatest sins and our smallest sins, and His mercy can likewise be reflected in the greatest and smallest things. But, again, Satan tempts us especially in the small things where we underestimate him. So let us be diligent and disciplined in the small things, remembering the all-encompassing mercy of Christ’s forgiveness for us!

“Lord, I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.” These words are appropriate for Ash Wednesday, for they reflect the humility that comes from the knowledge and weight of one’s sinfulness. We are not worthy that our Lord should come under our roof, that is, make a dwelling among us, for we daily sin much and are greatly in need of forgiveness.

“Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof, but speak the word only, and my soul shall be healed.” This ancient prayer, the *Domine non sum dignus*, would be prayed by the celebrant before communing Himself before the distribution. Three times he would pray, each time beating his breast with the middle, ring, and pinky finger of his right hand at the words “not worthy.” It was to serve as a reminder that he was but a humble servant of the One who truly held the authority to forgive the sins of those who repented and came to the Altar to receive His true Body and Blood given in bread and wine.

Our Lord, through His called ministers, heals us, that is, forgives our sins, by the Word which He attaches to the bread and wine. By this word, we, His servants, are truly healed of all of our iniquities. Thus, even though, on account of our sins, we are not worthy for our Lord to make a dwelling among us, by His Word, He makes us worthy to receive Him and His forgiveness.

During the Advent season, St. John the Baptist serves as the forerunner of our Lord, proclaiming His incarnation to save mankind from its sins. Here at the beginning of Lent, he directs our eyes to the purpose of our Lord's coming in the flesh—His crucifixion. This is shown by the words of our Lord Jesus, “Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me”—because it is the cross of our Lord, the means of the world's salvation, that is an offence to the world.

The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is an offence because it is a visible reminder of the penalty of sin. The penalty for sin is death—and the God/man must suffer and die for the sins of the whole world, as only He could. He perfectly fulfills the Law through His obedient life, and as the one, true High Priest, offers Himself up as the Lamb of sacrifice to atone for all sin.

Therefore, when we see the Lord hanging dead on the cross, we are reminded of our sinfulness, and the penalty that warranted our Lord's sacrifice. The world does not want to be reminded of their sin; sinners naturally desire to continue in their disobedience, and therefore mock and ridicule the cross and all those who cling to it. However, for those of us who have repented of our sin, and look for forgiveness through the cross of our Lord, we are truly “blessed” for when we look upon our Lord's lifeless body on the cross we see our forgiveness, life and salvation won for us.

In this current world, we will never truly understand the depth of God's love for us; today's reading is Jesus' way of giving us a glimpse. Our days become wasted with so much sin. We have the blessings of all creation, even the blessings of God's grace and forgiveness, and still manage to be caught wanting when trials and spiritual famine hit us. Yet, no matter how profound our sins, God is overjoyed to bless us and forgive us when we are brought back to His presence!

The eagerness of God's love should help us to understand why the sin of rejecting Christ is so serious. Sin would have us all starving, ready to eat filth, dying alone. Yet, God did not sacrifice merely a fatted calf to celebrate with us, but He sacrificed Himself in Jesus Christ, in order to save us. In light of all He did—the sacrifice made, all the sins forgiven, giving us the Word by which the Holy Spirit creates faith and gives us the power to believe—for us to reject His mercy is a crass and profound mockery.

Neither should we question or resent God's ability to forgive others, even if their sins are visibly far worse than ours. The brother of the “prodigal son” wrestled with this sin. But the father taught him the truth that Christ would have us understand about our heavenly Father, that God is truly joyous and glad to have us alive again. We are saved from the death of sin, found and made alive from being lost in the wastefulness of this fallen world!

It is stunning how Jesus talks about hating people in today's reading. The Word tells us to love one another, love our neighbor as ourselves, and love our enemies. Now Jesus says that we cannot be His disciples unless we hate those who are closest to us! What does this mean?

If we truly would be disciples of Christ we must realize that all things are under Him. We confess in the Nicene Creed that all things were created through Christ, and that He was crucified for our salvation. So, if we love our fathers and mothers, wives and children, and brothers and sisters, who are blessings from God, how much more should we love God Himself, who gives us both physical and spiritual life?

Jesus' point is that if we cannot love God more than even our closest family, we fail as disciples of His Word. If our loved ones stand opposed to the truth of Christ, we must love one and hate the other. This is especially important for Christians in current times, where the truth of God's Word is constantly being mocked and twisted by denominationalism. We are sinfully expected to tolerate false teaching and corrupt fellowships for the sake of being in the same denomination as mom or dad, brother or sister, grandmother or grandfather. But faithfulness to all that Christ has commanded is more important.

This is a hard teaching, but Christ our Lord who loves us more than anyone has taught us this. May He also give us the strength to do it! Amen!

The penitential time before Easter is divided up into three segments. The first part, which we just came through, is known as Pre-Lent. During this part of the penitential season we are prepared for the coming of Lent by hearing on three consecutive Sundays the themes of invitation, catechesis, and enlightenment. The second part is Lent proper, from *Invocabit* to *Laetare*. During this part the focus of the Church is on sin. The third part of the penitential season is known as *Passiontide*. During this part the focus of the Church is on the Passion of our Lord, hence the name.

Today's pericope sets the theme of the current season of Lent—our sin. In this text, we see the effects that sin has upon the world: fear and doubt (just like the Apostles felt in the midst of the wind and waves); the attacks of Satan and the spiritual powers of darkness (seen in the demon-possessed man, who was possessed by "Legion"); frailty of health (just like the woman who had a flow of blood for 12 years); and death (seen in Jairus' twelve year old daughter).

These evils attack us every day in every way, but throughout today's reading we consistently see our Lord's power over sin, death, and the devil—He calmed the sea; He cast out the demons; He healed the woman with the flow of blood; and He raised Jairus' daughter from the dead. Our Lord does the same for us, for He gives us faith to believe on Him, that He has freed us from sin, death, and the devil.

In the readings for the first few days of Lent we have been prepared for this penitential season by hearing about humility, our offence of sin, and the effects of sin upon the world. Today, our Lord sends us relief from effects of sin, death, and the devil by sending out His Apostles, who have “power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases...to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.”

Where do we find relief from the stain of sin and death in our lives? In the Word of God! It is by the Word, which is preached and administered by His holy ministers, that we receive the forgiveness, life and salvation won for us on the cross. And our Lord in His abundant mercy and grace does not just gift His Word through preaching, but also through the other means of grace: Holy Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, confession and absolution, and the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren.

It is through these means that our sick souls are healed of the infirmity of sin. We are made new creatures, who lovingly and willingly seek to know our Lord’s will and gladly do it. Having been made new creations by the working of the Holy Ghost, we gladly give thanks for all that our Lord has done for us. We show our thanks by gladly receiving the meal of salvation, which our Lord prepared for us of His very own Body and Blood given in bread and wine. May this Body and Blood sustain you unto life everlasting!

God is patient and merciful, but also righteous and just. Misconceptions about God come from focusing on one set of these attributes over the other. Some draw Him as a passive, permissive caricature that simply wants us to love, get along, and not hassle folks about what is right or wrong. They picture God as some sort of laid-back “hippie” or a kindly grandpa. Then, there are those who want to see God as always demanding and threatening, driving us toward perfection with a boot and a whip. To these people God is a tyrant and a harsh, abusive father-figure.

“For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Exodus 20:5-6). God is supremely merciful, but if we hate Him and reject His mercy, all that remains is the consequences of our rebellion. However, keeping His commandments involves not just outward obedience, but also faith and understanding. Jesus illustrates this in today’s reading with His teaching about remembering the Sabbath day.

Christ neither does away with God’s commandments, nor permits them to be taken tyrannically. In maintaining their absolute expectation of perfection, Jesus teaches them according to the mercy that alone meets that expectation: through faith in Him who kept them perfectly we are free from the bondage of sin and the beginning of keeping the commandments according to kindness and mercy to others is given us.

From the Propers for the Second Sunday In Lent
(Reminiscere)

THE HOLY GOSPEL St. Matthew 15:21–28 (NKJV)

Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.”

But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, “Send her away, for she cries out after us.”

But He answered and said, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, help me!”

But He answered and said, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.”

And she said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”

Then Jesus answered and said to her, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

The COLLECT

O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

From the Propers for the First
Sunday in Lent (Invocabit)

THE HOLY GOSPEL St. Matthew 4:1–11 (NKJV)

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’” Jesus said to him, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’” Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’” Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

The COLLECT

O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

And they were all amazed at the majesty of God. But while everyone marveled at all the things which Jesus did, He said to His disciples, “Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men.” Luke 9: 43-44

Today’s full reading shows us that many things lead away from Christ. Concern about status, attachment to family, what we feel, what “we’ve always done,” what government and culture approve, and the idea that things have changed so much that God’s expectation must have changed as well—these and more keep us from hearing Christ. We often don’t realize when we are of the wrong spirit. It is difficult to walk by faith, to be guided only by God’s Word. Yet, only God’s Word can serve as the basis of the knowledge of salvation and of fellowship with God and man.

We are directed away from human experience to God’s Word. God’s Word tells us that human nature has not changed—nor has God and His expectation of us. God’s Word further tells us that our salvation has not changed either. “Let these words sink down into your ears,” for the Son of Man was betrayed into death for our salvation.

Suggested Hymn: Lord, Open Thou My Heart to Hear (TLH 5, LSB 908)

Prayer: Lord God, heavenly Father, You are eternal; You do not change. Grant that we who live in a fleeting world might be so guided by Your unchanging Word that we live forever through Faith in Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven. Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” Luke 12:10–12

When Jesus told the apostles the Holy Spirit would teach them what to say when called to confess, He wasn’t suggesting they shouldn’t study the Scriptures—quite the contrary! The Father told them repeatedly to listen to Jesus (Deuteronomy 18:15–19, Matthew 17:5), and Jesus showed them how everything happened just as Holy Scripture said it would. The better we know the Scriptures the better the Holy Spirit can teach us.

We dare not blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, because it is the Holy Spirit who creates faith. If we despise the Holy Spirit, faith cannot be created and sustained. Then we will not confess Christ and He will deny us before the angels of God.

But, the Holy Spirit *has* worked faith in us. Thus, we repeatedly give the good confession, and when our own conscience accuses us, we confess Christ crucified for our sin and He calls us His brothers and sisters before the angles of God. This is what it means to hear the Word of God and do it.

Suggested Hymn: We Now Implore God the Holy Ghost (TLH 231, LSB 768)

Prayer: Holy Spirit work in us so that we not only hear Your Word, but believe. Amen.

It is easy to follow one passage of Scripture while ignoring others, thus holding to our hypocrisy rather than to Scripture. How many times have you heard someone say, “God doesn’t care how I dress.” True, if all one has to wear is rags, then he will be accepted in God’s presence dressed in rags. But if we have fine clothes that we can wear to church but won’t, we confess by our actions that we do not believe God is what the Scriptures say He is: the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Since everything our spirits express is expressed through our bodies, the way we dress to come to church expresses our attitude toward God. When telling His apostles not to worry about material things, Jesus said that the flowers of the field are clothed better than Solomon ever was. So we see that God *is* concerned with how we dress, promising that he will provide for us even as he provides so gloriously for the flowers of the field. Moreover, the Scriptures say much about how we are clothed spiritually: with humility, righteousness, Christ, etc. Yes, we come into the world naked, and God gives us clothing; most importantly, God has clothed us with Christ so that our naked hypocrisy is covered and we appear righteous before Him.

Suggested Hymn: Lord Jesus Christ, With Us Abide (TLH 292, LSB 585)

Prayer: Holy Spirit, remove hypocrisy from us by teaching us all of Your Word so that we stand in the faith revealed in Holy Scripture. Amen.

“He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.” Luke 10:16

We confess: “That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted.” (Augsburg Confession Article V) When Jesus’ ministers draw near to us it is Jesus Himself who draws near. While it is the voice of a sinful human that sounds in our ears, it carries Christ’s Word so that we hear Christ Jesus speak in that voice. Jesus would have peace come to us—not peace between nations in some imagined “brotherhood of man” with “no hell below us” nor heaven above, and “nothing to kill or die for.” It isn’t even peace within families; Jesus was clear that there would be strife between people because of the Gospel.

Jesus’ ministers bring the peace of God that surpasses all understanding: our Savior, speaking in the voice of His minister, tells us that we are no longer enemies of God. He tells us we are at peace with Him...and because our Savior is God Himself, that peace comes from the greatest authority and endures forever.

Suggested hymn: O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe (TLH 263, LSB 666)

Prayer: Lord God, heavenly Father, by our sins we made ourselves Your enemies and in wrath you cursed us and turned away from us. Bless us and keep us, O Lord; smile upon us and be gracious to us; turn Your face to us and give us peace in our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” Luke 11:9,10,13

Are we not all like Esau, selling our birthright for a pot of porridge? We pray for physical health, material prosperity, an easy life, enjoyable weather, but how often do we earnestly pray for the Holy Spirit? And if we do, don’t we confuse the gifts of the Holy Spirit with the Spirit Himself? Even then, do we seek the greater gifts like having some one to preach the Word to us? Do we seek the enduring gifts like faith and hope or the more excellent way of love?

“Ask!” we are commanded, “seek and knock.” You will receive, you will find, and it will be opened to you!” And what should we ask for above all else? The Holy Spirit, the creator and sustainer of faith. We pray by God’s Word. That is, we pray according to His command and promise, seeking what He tells us in His Word He desires to give.

Suggested Hymn: Come, Holy Ghost Creator Blest (TLH 233, LSB 499)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, grant us the Holy Spirit that we may ask what You desire, and receive what we ask. Amen.

“The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness.” Luke 11:34-35

Faithful Lutheran pastors tell their people not to listen to so-called Christian radio, watch religious television, or read the latest religious books. Why? Because the light those things claim to have is not light at all. It is darkness, which points us to our works—a prayer prayed, a decision made, a giving of one’s self, or an experience we have had.

Faithful Lutheran pastors tell their people to read the Scriptures above all, and the Fathers of our church for guidance. They do this because the truth of salvation is delicate and easily ruined. Truth is intolerant. As soon as it tolerates error, it becomes error and is no longer truth. Faithful pastors know: we cannot pray unless we already believe; we do not choose Christ but, rather, He chose us; we do not give to Christ what He bought with His blood; it is not that we experience something that proves we are Christians, but that Christ Jesus experienced the despair of hell on our behalf. There is the true light that has come into the world. Therefore, we focus our eyes on it.

Suggested Hymn: Salvation Unto Us Has Come (TLH 377, LSB 555)

Prayer: Holy Spirit, cause us to look only to the work of our Savior for salvation. Amen.