

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



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(HOLY WEEK—EASTER 3)

The Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. Matthew 21:1-9 (NKJV)

Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. 'And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them.'" All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.'" So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them. And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' Hosanna in the highest!"

THE COLLECT

Almighty and everlasting God, who hast sent Thy Son, our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon Him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross that all mankind should follow the example of His great humility, mercifully grant that we may both follow the example of His patience and also be made partakers of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God world without end.

Recalling Sunday's Gospel, Jesus was telling His disciples what to expect as He was about to suffer, die, rise on the third day, and ascend to the right hand of the Father. Because of their connection they would suffer "a little while." Life, would seem hopeless, feel abandoned; the world was against them. However, in such unrest, they could rejoice and be comforted in the Word and work of Christ until His return, trusting that no one could destroy their gift of life.

The Prophet Ezekiel gives God's people the assurance that His plan for mankind's redemption would take place in spite of appearing to be halted by their exile. Life appeared hopeless as nation after nation came to destroy them. In the midst of their feeling abandoned, God described how He would preserve the promised land for Israel's return from captivity.

We, too, are in "a Little while," awaiting Christ's return. Lives appear hopeless; our economy struggles. Does God see the church suffering against Satan's attacks? The whole world appears against Christianity and the Gospel.

In the face of this, the Holy Spirit returns us to the promise of Jesus, which we heard a few weeks ago, "Because I live, you shall live also." Our lives have been preserved by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, whose desire is that our eyes be fixed on His powerful Word and what He has accomplished for us by His work.

Lord, may we remember You have defeated sin, death, and the power of the devil through Your life, death, and resurrection. Enable us to rejoice, knowing no one can take away what You have created and promised, eternal life!

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. John 16:16-23 (NKJV)

"A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father."

Then some of His disciples said among themselves, "What is this that He says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" They said therefore, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is saying."

Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, "Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'? "Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. And in that day you will ask Me nothing.

THE COLLECT

Almighty God, who shows to them that are in error the light of Thy truth to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness, grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion that they may avoid those things that are contrary to their profession and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

God's Temple, the Holy Christian Church, must ever be cleansed. False doctrines and practices that do not tell the truth about God must always be purged and the pure doctrine and sacraments, which are able to save, must be restored.

The Christian heart, too, is the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16-17). For the Spirit dwells there by our baptism into Christ. We are forgiven and cleansed. The sinful flesh remains, though. Thus, *"The old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts; and that a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever."* (Small Catechism)

Jeremiah, called the Church of his day to be cleansed. He rebuked the false preachers for their lying words that excused the people's sin. He called the people to turn away from false doctrines; to purge out wickedness and return to the Lord Who had been gracious to them.

So too, did Jesus go into the Temple, His own house, to cleanse it. With whips He drove out the money-changers who bought and sold for selfish gain. Then He went to the cross. Whips were applied to Him as He suffered and died to save us from the devil's works and ways. Now, cleansed by Jesus' blood, we are free—free to leave all the ways of falsehood and disobedience; free to stand before God with a good conscience and sing:

Oh, let Thy suff'rings give me pow'r

To meet the last and darkest hour!

Thy blood refresh and comfort me;

Thy bonds and fetters make me free. (TLH 148:4)

The Lord says in Isaiah 50, *“For your iniquities you have sold yourselves, and for your transgressions your mother has been put away.”* (v. 1) We have no excuses. We love our sins, like old chairs—tattered and worn, but comfortable. We doubt God’s warnings because it doesn’t appear that His judgment is imminent, if it will ever happen at all. Repent! Things are not as they appear.

Sinners also doubt God’s power to save because His ways seem so foolish and powerless. So He continues, *“Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver?”* (v. 2)

Christ crucified appears foolish, but God shows His saving power in weakness. *“I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.”* (v. 6) In His suffering, our Lord is truly our Servant Who saves us. He atones for our sins, frees us from the devil and draws us to Himself in Heaven.

Therefore, let everyone heed the call to repent. Let everyone *“trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon his God.”* (v. 10) God’s fire is surely coming upon those who refuse His mercy. But He gives believers the strength of His death and His life in the Gospel and Sacraments. Thus we have grace to put down the flesh and live for heaven.

The sinless Son of God must die in sadness;

The sinful child of man may live in gladness;

Man forfeited his life and is acquitted,—

God is committed. (TLH 143:5)

“I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them.” Ezekiel 34:23a

Ezekiel promises the coming of the Shepherd--“one shepherd” who will be over the Lord’s sheep, and who will feed them. Without a shepherd, the sheep scatter, and are easily picked off by every predator living out in the wild. But with a shepherd, the sheep are protected. The Lord promises that His people will no longer be “prey” for the nations.

Already, we have that Shepherd. The Lord is our Shepherd, and He has assumed our flesh, become “one of the sheep,” so to speak, that He might redeem all we who like sheep have gone astray. He made Himself the sacrificial Lamb, so to atone for all of the sin of all of the “straying sheep” of all time. His death on the Cross forgives us.

As the people of the Old Testament partook of the body of the Passover Lamb, so do we. We eat and drink the Body and Blood of The Passover Lamb in Holy Communion. The angel of death passes over us, and we are delivered from the threatening judgment of God against the sin of the unbelieving world. Our Good Shepherd actually feeds us with Himself, for the forgiveness of sins, and together with that, the promises of life and salvation.

We may still fall victim to unbelieving forces in this world. We may yet be “prey.” But they can only destroy the body. They cannot destroy the soul. The resurrection to eternal life will be ours, and we will participate in the eternal marriage feast of the Lamb, for the sake of that very Lamb, our crucified and risen Savior Jesus Christ!

“I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down,” says the Lord God.” Ezekiel 34:15

The Lord promises to feed His flock. A flock is something a Shepherd has, and we will look at that more in tomorrow’s devotion. For today, consider what it means that we get to be the “flock” of the Lord! The verse immediately above mentions two things: He will feed us, and He will make us to lie down.

We see a grand picture of both of these things in the feeding of the 5,000, when Jesus makes the people sit and feeds them. The 23rd Psalm makes similar promises. But it all points forward to Jesus feeding us with the bread of life--His Word and Sacraments--the “means” by which He creates and sustains saving faith in our hearts! So first off, dear ones in Christ, don’t starve. As Jesus offers to feed you with His Word and Sacraments every Sunday, by all means, feast!

But second of all, remember that He will take care of you, watch over you, protect you. Sheep that may have to run at any minute do not “lie down.” When our Lord says He will make them “lie down,” He’s promising to protect us. Thus, again, at the end of the 23rd Psalm we read that “goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” The Hebrew word for “follow” is actually “stalk,” like a predator would stalk a sheep. What do you fear is stalking you? Sin? Death? The devil? In His cross and resurrection, Jesus has defeated them all. As long as you remain in the Lord’s green pastures, the only thing “stalking” you will be His goodness and mercy. Lie down. Relax. You are fed and protected by Jesus.

Jeremiah was unwavering in the word he preached against the vice and idolatry that filled the land of Israel. He warned of the coming punishment because of Israel’s wickedness and unbelief. Jerusalem would be destroyed and Babylon would sweep the entire nation into captivity.

When Jesus said, *“A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and in his own house”* (Mt. 13:57), He wasn’t speaking only of His own time. Jeremiah was also rejected, even by his own kin—especially by them. The people of his own home town—Anathoth—violently opposed him, even seeking to kill him.

So we see how it goes so often for those who faithfully preach the Word of God. The more unrepentant sinners are rebuked for their sins the harder they become, just like the Sodomites and Pharaoh and the people of Anathoth of old, all of whom were swept away in judgment.

Friend, do not be unbelieving, but believing! Listen to the Word God has put into the mouth of your pastor. When he rebukes you do not lash out at him, but heed the warning and repent. Confess your sin and change your ways and your thinking. Jeremiah only wanted to comfort his kinfolk with God’s mercy. So did Jesus, and so do Jesus’ pastors. They want to tell you of Him Whom Jeremiah pictured. Jesus is the *“docile Lamb brought to the slaughter.”* (Jer. 11:19) He went willingly into death to take away your sin. He is the *“Shepherd who dies for sheep that love to wander.”* (TLH 143:4) Trust His faithful word spoken through His called servants and live.

Joshua led the children of Israel across the Jordan River and into Canaan. So today, Jesus, the greater Joshua, goes forth to redeem His people and lead them into heaven. For both *Jesus* and *Joshua* mean, *"The Lord saves."*

In Zechariah 3 another Joshua, a high priest, stood before the Angel of the Lord with Satan opposing him. He stood *"in filthy garments,"* for all men are infected with the filthiness of sin. How could He stand against Satan so dressed? The Angel said to those near him, *"Take away the filthy garments from him."* Then He told Joshua, *"See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes."* The Angel Himself fought for Joshua, for He told Satan, *"The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord Who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!"* (v. 2) The Angel clothed Joshua in pure robes and a clean turban, freeing him from all his iniquity.

Today our greater High Priest goes forth to rebuke the devil. He is the final priestly victim who offers Himself once and for all. First, though, He washes His disciples' feet, signifying the continual putting on of clean baptismal robes in the Word of Absolution. And He institutes a blessed meal of forgiveness and life, the sacrament of His very Body and Blood, given and shed for us, cleansing us of all our sins. Thus, even as Holy Baptism bathes us in the cleansing Blood of Jesus, so this Supper pours that life-giving Blood into us.

A precious food is this indeed,—

It never fails us in our need —

A heavenly manna for our soul,

Until we safely reach our goal. (TLH 163:5)

"For thus says the Lord God: 'Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.'" Ezekiel 34:11

What a gracious God we have! Have you ever looked at something you have done, and wondered to yourself, "Wow, that was really bad, I wonder if God will still forgive me? Have I messed up so bad that He no longer cares about me?" It is a haunting question, and at one time or another, most of us have asked it.

For an answer, consider Israel! Idolatry, adultery, oppression of the widow and the orphan, every manner of violation of God's law, every manifestation of faithlessness you can think of! It got so bad that God sent them into exile . . . His great "wake up call" to Israel, showing them their need to repent. But, did God write them off?

Oh, no! He wanted them back so bad that He promised He Himself would go seeking His sheep. He did that--literally--when He assumed our human flesh, died on the cross for our sins, rose again, and sent His Holy Apostles and the Apostolic Ministry to continue His sheep-gathering work after His ascension. Repent of your sins. Jesus' sacrifice truly does forgive you, and He has gone to all lengths necessary to seek you out, save you, and give you everlasting life.

“Return, O backsliding children,” says the Lord; “for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.” Jeremiah 3:14

Our Lord calls upon Israel to return, “for I am married to you.” Some will and some will not heed that call, of course, but as many as do return--repent and believe--these He will bring to “Zion.”

How intimately the Lord Jesus Christ is married to the church! Remember how Adam’s wife was created by God from a wound in Adam’s side. During our ongoing Easter celebration, we remember how the Bride of Christ is brought to life from the wound in Christ’s side. From the spear wound in the side of Christ’s crucified body, there came forth blood and water, St. John tells us. And from that water and that Body and Blood the “Bride of Christ,” the Holy catholic Church, is brought to life and continually nourished!

Jesus will never divorce His Bride, and He will never seek any other bride. As we remain in the Faith, in the Church, we remain also the Bride of Christ. We may look at our own families and sorrow that there are only two of us--we may look at our home town and tremble to think we may be the only one saved from there--but our Lord warned us it would be so. Nevertheless, thanks be to God that His good Word and Spirit have called us, returned us to our Lord, clothed us with the wedding garment of His righteousness in Holy Baptism, and fed us with the marriage feast of the Lamb in Holy Communion. Heaven is ours, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Bridegroom!

Jeremiah wept over Jerusalem. The Babylonians had reduced her to rubble. Her nobles were carried away and her prophets found no genuine visions from the Lord because of their unfaithfulness. Everything was now mourning. Bystanders mocked, saying, *“Is this the city that is called the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?”* (v. 15) God had forsaken Israel because Israel had forsaken Him.

But God would not utterly forsake His people. He would sustain a faithful remnant in captivity. Jerusalem would be rebuilt after the time of captivity. The Father’s total wrath over sin would be directed at Christ.

Today, then, our Lord, shoulders the entire sin of a fallen world. He endures the fiery, hellish torment as He suffers the just punishment for our offenses upon the cross. From the cross He cries out, *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning?”* (Ps. 22:1)

Today we do well to weep before a stripped altar. We weep, though, not for Jesus, but for ourselves. For *“He was wounded for our transgression, He was bruised for our iniquities.”* (Is. 53:5) Still, let not the mourning of this day overwhelm the joy. Jesus did all things for our salvation, for *“by His stripes we are healed.”* (Is. 53:5) When He cries out, *“It is finished,”* the price is paid; sin is atoned for; Satan is defeated; and death is done. God will raise Him from the dead declaring that we are justified and forgiven.

Our Lord's *visage* was indeed "*marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men.*" (v. 14) How they wept—those who held the features of His battered and bloody corpse. His cold, limp body was utterly defeated. But His defeat was His victory, and ours. For His cry, "*It is finished,*" was the cry of redemption for sinners.

Jesus died and was buried. Satan seemed to have his day. Then He descended into hell, not as a defeated victim, but as conquering hero. So we confess in the Formula of Concord, "*The entire person, God and man, after the burial descended into hell, conquered the devil, destroyed the power of hell, and took from the devil all his might.*" (Jacobs, p. 643)

The grave has no power over our Lord. Easter will bring the discovery that the tomb is empty, that the Suffering Servant is "*exalted and extolled*" and is "*very high.*" (v. 13) So it is for us. Christ suffers, dies, is buried, descends into hell, and then rises so that He might "*sprinkle many nations*" (v. 15) with the water of Holy Baptism, plunging us into His blessed death and tomb where there is rest. For Christians, what else is the grave other than the body's resting place in Jesus' grave? It is the place where the body awaits its rising, for if, through baptism, "*we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.*" (Rm. 6:5)

And when my spirit flies away,

Thy dying words shall be my stay.

Thy cross shall be my staff in life,

Thy holy grave my rest from strife. (TLH 148:6)

"Yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, But your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' Whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left."
Isaiah 30:20b-21

Israel had a problem. Can you believe it? They hadn't been listening to faithful teachers of the word! Instead, they'd told them to "get out of the way, turn aside from the path" (v. 11). Yes, sometimes, the problem is false teachers. But other times, the problem is a false laity who will not give ear to faithful teachers!

Jesus Himself, of course, is the great fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. He taught as one having authority, not as the scribes. And whether people received His words, or responded with "this is a hard saying, who can bear it?" and walked away, Jesus never wavered. "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by Me." In other words, "This is the way, walk in it."

And, by the grace of God, we have been given Pastors who know what to do in the pulpit. They don't give pep-talks or do stand-up comedy. They say to you, "this is the way--repentance and forgiveness of sins in the Name of Jesus--walk in it!" God grant us ongoing repentance, and a faith that ever walks in the hope of eternal life for the sake of our crucified and risen Lord!

"I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob, I will surely gather the remnant of Israel." Micah 2:12a

The Lord promises: He will gather His Israel. He even promises in verse 13, "they shall make a loud noise because of so many men." It is easy for us to feel like Elijah with his "I alone am left" prayer. And yet, we are not alone (as Elijah also discovered!) The Lord will gather His Israel, and they will be no small handful.

St. Matthew shows us this, beginning already with Jesus' genealogy. He is Israel, reduced to one. He calls the Twelve, a new Israel. One of them fails, of course, and so the remaining Eleven prayerfully select St. Matthias to take His place. For a New Israel, it has to be Twelve!

Who is this "remnant" of Israel? The sons of Abraham aren't necessarily those who are of the blood-line of Abraham, but rather those who are of the faith of Abraham! Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his "son of promise," Isaac, in the confidence that the Lord could raise him from the dead. Now, we share the faith of Abraham, confident that God has indeed raised from the dead His own Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Christ who conquered death and the grave can certainly conquer the challenging circumstances the Church faces today. He will gather the remnant--and blessed are we, for we are numbered among them, by grace, through faith in the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

FROM THE PROPER FOR THE
FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD

THE HOLY GOSPEL

ST. MARK 16:1-8 (NKJV)

Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away; for it was very large.

And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples; and Peter; that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you."

So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

THE COLLECT

Almighty God, who through Thine only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, hast overcome death and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life, we humbly beseech Thee that as Thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction! Pity is hidden from My eyes."

We live in the already, but not yet reality. Already Christ is risen and rules eternally, but we do not yet see His glory fully revealed. Already we have eternal life, but we do not yet have its fullness.

Even though everything we know about the spiritual reality comes to us through our physical senses, we cannot perceive spiritual things by our senses. This confuses us. We want to feel, to hear, to smell. We are easily confused when we read the Psalm and hear how God will destroy our enemies. We think of terrorists, play-ground bullies, ambitious co-workers, and corrupt legislators. But God tells us our real enemies are sin, death, and the devil.

Christ Jesus has already conquered death by death, it is done. Yet we will still have to pass through the door of death, short of Christ's return in glory. When Jesus does return, death will be obliterated without pity. Why? Because we are God's children, and God has no pity on the enemies of His children. He protects us at all cost as He showed by giving His Son to save us.

Suggested hymn: Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands (TLH 195, LSB 458)

Prayer: Keep us, Holy Spirit, who have come to the joy of resurrection unto eternal life; through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. John 10:11-16 (NKJV)

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd."

THE COLLECT

God, who by the humiliation of Thy Son did raise up the fallen world, grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou has delivered from the danger of everlasting death do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

God's called and ordained men go forth as His prophets-priests-kings in His Office of the Holy Ministry. He instructs them and uses their tongues to proclaim His message of salvation to wandering, hungering, thirsting, and lost souls across the face of this spiritually desolate Earth, from the inlands to the coastlands. Faithful servants of the Lord proclaim His pure Law and Gospel; they are His mouth-piece to the people. Such was Isaiah to the Israelites.

What is the response? The faithful respond with hearts of thanksgiving and praise for what the Lord has made known to them as He has called them by their name to be His very own. They respond with gratefulness for the cutting Law and healing Gospel delivered from him who comes in the name of Lord to bring light to their darkness.

God takes care of His people. He leads them forth with an unwavering arm of strength, laying enemies low, providing footing and stability every step of this tumultuous journey. He straightens the crooked paths and leads the blind into the joy of light. And He does this through His called pastors who proclaim nothing other than the Messiah, the One who fulfilled all of this for the Israel of old and the Israel of today—the faithful Church.

The Messiah has come to bring the Gospel light to the Gentiles. While the heathen call upon their deaf and mute idols, God's people call upon Him, and He answers them.

Call upon your Lord and trust in Him to deliver you. He shall not forsake you nor mislead you!

How pathetic it is that politicians quote the Scriptures when it suits them and holler "Separation of church and state!" when condemned by them. Socialists claim the early church was socialist, while working to rid themselves of religion. Peace, peace, people cry as they make themselves enemies of God. We too are prone to twisting God's word. Sex outside of holy marriage is wrong until we are tempted and then it is simply the result of how we have been treated and beyond our control. Coveting is wrong when eyes are on what we have, but a statement of unfairness when we covet.

Yes, human beings place themselves on Christ's throne. We want to sit in judgment of God's word. "Spare the rod and spoil the child" is said to be abuse, and "If it feels so good it can't possibly be wrong." We are all wicked princes whose iniquity will end. Better that it end now in repentance than later in destruction!

Christ the King has risen; we will not get rid of Him. Our only hope is to bow before Him and beg His mercy. And He is merciful. He died for us, we can be sure He does not wish to destroy us. The throne is His, and at His feet there is forgiveness. He is the risen Savior, and in His arms there is acceptance and the inheritance of eternal life.

Suggested Hymn: Christ the Lord is Risen Today; Alleluia! (TLH 191, LSB 463)

Prayer: Forgive us, Lord, for our rebellion. Fill us with the Holy Spirit so that we live for Your glory. Amen.

“Hallelujah! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!” we cry. This is no empty wish, no leap of faith. This is reality, and we rejoice in it: “Hallelujah!”

Philosophers, like Pilate, would have us believe that we cannot know what truth is. Scientists would have us believe that Christianity is a fairy tale. Literary Critics would have us learn social truths from the Scriptures and nothing more. Our culture would have us dismiss it as out of date and irrelevant. After all, that was so long ago, they didn’t even have the Internet!

But the Scriptures trace real, verifiable events. The lineage of Christ is traced from Adam. The promise to David that one that descended from his own body would rule forever is restated and fulfilled. Nothing has change with regard to man’s sin. The true stories of the Bible are as shocking in the wickedness of man as anything on television today. Betrayal, deceit, conspiracy, murder, adultery, incest, and indescribable brutality are all presented as being common to mankind. Also presented is man’s helplessness to save himself. Man’s inability to save himself has not changed, and therefore neither has his need for the Savior.

Thankfully, God has given us a Savior who died for all the wickedness of mankind, and rose on account of our justification. This is reality. This is life. In this we rejoice with confidence: Hallelujah! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!

Suggested Hymn: Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense (TLH 206, LSB 741)

Prayer: Holy Spirit, always keep in our minds the truth of the resurrection that we do not doubt but believe unto eternal life. Amen.

The great prophet Isaiah is leading his people in prayer to the Lord God Almighty concerning the enemy Assyrians who are at the gate of the Holy City. Begging for mercy, even though there is no merit on the part of the people, Isaiah with the faithful contingent pleads to the Lord in this urgent time for His hand of protection. With war, certain plunder, and absolute destruction awaiting them at the hand of this cruel enemy, only God can intervene and save them. And when victory comes, it is the Lord who is honored and exalted, who gives them stability amidst their former lukewarm faithfulness.

This prayer of Isaiah is timeless and therefore very appropriate for our world in these last days of sore distress when the political climate is rising and instability is increasing in one country after the next. It would behoove the faithful contingent of Christians to continually approach the Lord God in heartfelt prayer, begging Him for His protection and providence in these increasingly dangerous times—even within our own nation.

Isaiah states that the response of the grateful people to God’s unmerited blessings is one of true justice and righteousness, of irreproachable conduct followed by a sanctified manifestation in their daily lives to the Lord for all that He has accomplished for them. The people fear and honor the Lord, treasuring Him.

This is still the response of God’s people today as they gather in His Bride around His powerful Means of Grace; here His people manifest their faith in Him. Then they depart in Simeon’s peace, living their faith in God.

Not only was Jonah a reluctant prophet, but he is the one prophet who did not want his message to succeed in the purpose for which God had sent it. In his ethnic arrogance he wanted to fail so that he could see God's wrath brought forth upon the Ninevites. Certainly this does not sound like a faithful prophet-priest-king of God, does it?

Jonah reminds us that God's called pastors are all sinners who themselves struggle with all manner of temptations and prejudices. Indeed, faithful pastors—faithful undershepherds—can understand the trials of the sheep because they themselves also undergo the same treacherous and deadly attacks from the sinful world, their own flesh, and the devil--the unholy trinity.

Jonah lost perspective. He did not see the Ninevites as worthy or deserving of salvation from the Lord. Such a curse also lives in the hearts of many Christians today who consider *certain others* as unworthy of the Gospel. Sneers and curses come forth from the mouths of God's people upon those deemed undeserving; this should not be. For the promised Messiah of Genesis 3:15 fulfilled in John 3:16 is not for a select ethnic or social group, but instead for all people--for the entire human race.

Amongst the many lessons that can be garnered from this text is the Lord's pity shown upon the *Gentile* Ninevites and upon reluctant and arrogant Jonah. God in His mercy does not give sinners—including you and me—what we all deserve, but instead in His grace bestows upon us what we can never earn and certainly do not deserve--His Son, our Savior.

Jesus' birth hardly impacted the people of His day. A few came looking for Him, a king killed babies, and some shepherds talked about it. Even Jesus' ministry and death didn't appreciably impact large numbers of people, they turned away, even against Him. Trends come and go. Despots commit murder. Human beings ignore important things. We yawn, and move on caught up with irritations we have trouble letting go of. The way we were treated by our parents, the drivers on the road who have no courtesy are the things that hold our attention.

Jesus' resurrection should have rattled people to the core. But the soldiers who guarded the tomb worried about being accused of failing in their duty, and the priests only thought to cover it up. Jesus appeared in history like a bud, a new branch on a tree small and seemingly insignificant. That bud grew and affects the entire world even as scientist now try to erase His name from the calendar.

For most people nothing has changed. But for those who take shelter beneath the Branch, He is the most significant point of history. He is reality itself because He is the one by whom and for whom all things were made, Who died and rose for us. So the Branch has grown and people from afar come and build the Temple of the Lord.

Suggested Hymn: Built on the Rock the Church doth Stand (TLH 467, LSB 645)

Prayer: Holy Spirit, Lord of faith, grant us such joy in the resurrection that we cannot help but praise our God and Savior to others. Amen.

It has been said, “The more things change, the more they remain the same.” Adam and Eve sought to be more in the image of God than they already were and lost it. At Babel the people sought to make a name for themselves and not be scattered, but they were scattered. At Jesus’ death the builders, that is the priests, rejected Christ and found themselves rejected by Him. To this day government presents itself in the place of God as the answer to everything and the harder human government tries, the more of a mess it makes.

Human government is even now dying and being laid low. Even now the government of Christ is growing. Ironically, Jesus does not call us to rebel against the governments that try to displace Him, but to submit to them! We do not serve two masters, but serve the other because we serve the One.

Christ is already ruling over us, and so we obey the governing authorities. The day will come when all government that stands against Him will be wiped out by His return in glory. But He is already established as King and rules all things for the good of the people He redeemed. He who rules all things see all things and keep us in all things so that the circumstances and events of our lives serve to keep us in true faith and draw the people around us.

Suggested Hymn: Jesus Christ is Risen Today, Alleluia! (TLH 199, LSB 457)

Prayer: King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, grant us humility to wait for Your appearing. Amen.

As he had spent three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so now Jonah would spend three days going through the massive Assyrian capital—spiritually dead Nineveh—proclaiming the message of the Lord God to those whom he and his native Israelites despised and hated. The prophet’s proclamation was one seldom heard in today’s *post-modern* and truly *socialistic-club* churches in this nation, for it contained damning Law so as to convict the people of their sins, and absolving Gospel so as to provide for them a cure from their spiritual cancer, raising them from death to new life in the promised coming Messiah.

A time period of forty days was proclaimed before destruction would befall Nineveh. By the working of the Holy Ghost through the pure Word, the Ninevites, from the greatest to the least, were convicted of their sin and earnestly begged for forgiveness—appropriately depicting the sincerity of their remorse and repentance by the use of sackcloth and ashes. God in His mercy and grace forgave these *enemy outsiders of Israel* and relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them.

Amongst the many lessons contained in this text, it is obvious that God desires all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth of Jesus the Messiah. Not only did Jonah learn this, but so did arrogant Israel, and so did the Ninevites themselves. This is another example of the blessing of God upon the nation (city) that calls upon the name of the Lord.

In the midst of a tumultuous storm, Jonah was given safe haven in the belly of a great fish for three days and three nights (foreshadowing Jesus' time in the tomb centuries later). While this might not appear to be much for accommodations, it proved to be the needed sanctuary that this reluctant prophet of God needed during the midst of his *run away from God*. You might say, though, that he jumped from the frying pan (the storm-tossed ship) into the fire (the putrid and digestive juices of the stomach). On his own he could not escape his sin.

Here in the fermenting, acidic, inferno-environment of the great fish, Jonah faced his sin against the Lord; the Law convicted him and he repented of his sin in this beautiful prayer. And we might add, herein Jonah rejoiced that it was impossible to run away and hide from the merciful and gracious, omnipresent God!

It is much the same as in the Sanctuary of the Lord in His Divine Service wherein He speaks to His people through His faithful called and ordained prophet-priest-king, proclaiming the Law in all of its severity in order to bring the sinful souls to their knees in repentance. It is at this point, when the confessional purging occurs, that the Absolving Gospel can be bountifully applied with the result that the person is washed clean of all filth and dross. Changed in Christ, he can now go forth as His willing instrument of righteousness to live the sanctified life he has been called to live from Holy Baptism forth.

We wonder what things will be like in Heaven. Will I finally be thin? Will I have a full head of hair? Will the shape of my eyes match? Will I be able to walk again? Will the stretch marks and the scars be gone?

We worry about such silly things and make assertions about life in Heaven as if we know the answers. In doing so we reveal just how much we are tangled up in the things of this world.

All we know about Heaven is that we will be free of sin and sorrow, perfect and holy as God knows perfect and holy to be. We should rejoice that the flabbiness of conceit will finally be gone, along with the scars of our sin and stretch marks of our perversions. Our mismatched hypocritical eyes will be beautifully shaped and symmetrical in holy desires, and the lame legs of our will shall leap for joy.

Will we really rise? Will God remember to call even me from the grave? He tells us He will. We are holy to Him because He has crossed out our sins and the wounds of Christ remain even in His glorified body to remind the Father of His children. God remembers us, and overlooks even our sins of worrying about the things of this world. He holds us dear as His holy children in Christ.

Suggested Hymn: Christ is Arisen (TLH 187, LSB 459)

Prayer: Lord, You have blotted out our transgressions; remember us and bring us to the fullness of joy in Your presence. Amen.

THE HOLY GOSPEL**St. John 20:19-31 (NKJV)**

Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side.

Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

THE COLLECT

Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord's resurrection may by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Running away from God and shirking His appointed responsibility, as Jonah tried to do, never works very well; sin will always follow you and find you out.

The reluctance of Jonah may remind us of numerous other people in both the Old and New Testaments who rebelled against the Lord or hesitated to follow His Word, and it may also be a mirror to us in our daily journey. But thankfully, God in His grace spares His children from utter destruction.

The storms He sends are meant not to damn us but to test us and strengthen us to humbly bow to His Word and will. Certainly there are days in which fear overtakes the flesh and we flee for refuge in temporal hiding places like the bottom of a watery ship. But even then God in His mercy grants us the acidic stomach of a fish in which to contemplate our rightful lot in time and eternity. And then He graciously allows us to be spewed forth and given another new beginning as His redeemed servants.

In the Sacrament of Holy Baptism our Lord pours forth His cleansing blessing upon us so that we might be purged of all the filth of this world, so that we might be washed clean of the acid of sin and thus granted a fresh start, much as the sun rises anew each morning.

Thanks be to God for confronting us with our rebellious nature—our sins, so that we might have the saving Gospel wash us clean, granting us a new day in which to live in Him.