

# THE LUTHERAN HERALD



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(EASTER 3–WHITSUNTIDE)

*The Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America*

As we consider our Lord's words, "A little while...and you will see Me," we read today God's declaration through Ezekiel of how extremely disappointed He is with His people. They had abandoned Him and His Holy name to run after false gods, seeking their power for protection—the opposite of the purpose for which they were called and of the result that their trials should have brought.

Purely out of mercy and grace, God chose to make His name great among the people by restoring His chosen nation, initiating a cleansing whereby His people might be redeemed and given new hearts. By means of His new testament, through which He remembers our sin no more for Jesus' sake, His word of promise is connected with water to cleanse us, as we read in Titus 3: 5f: the kindness of God appears, "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. "

Through the Spirit of God giving us new hearts, we can remember our Baptism in which we are restored and recreated to declare the greatness of God; to honor, serve, and obey Him, upholding His holy name.

Baptized into Thy name most holy, O Father, Son and Holy Ghost, I claim a place, though weak and lowly, Among Thy seed, Thy chosen host. Buried with Christ and dead to sin, Thy Spirit now shall live within. Amen.

vs 6–8 “*Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God. And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, Since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, Let them show these to them. Do not fear, nor be afraid; Have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.’*”

God is given an assortment of well-deserved names in today’s passage. First, He’s Israel’s *King*—the wise and perfect ruler who governs all the affairs of God’s people. He’s also our *Redeemer*—who buys us back from the prison of sin in which we’re enslaved. He’s the *Lord of Hosts*—who generals a “multitude of heavenly host”—who obey His every command and carry out His every will. He’s *the First and the Last*—who already existed “in the beginning” and will be present at the end of time and exist into all eternity.

Appropriately, then, Isaiah says there is no other *Rock*—no other immovable, unchangeable deity like this God. All others are “pretend” gods—who vie for the interest and affections of man, but exist only in the imagination of the unbeliever.

Therefore, we are reassured once again that our God can be trusted for all things in this world and the next. To Him be all glory both now and forevermore.

As we explore Jesus’ “A little while...” the time in which we wait to see our Savior again, we see the importance of stopping and pondering the Word and Work of our Lord Jesus, who has redeemed us “not with silver or gold, but with His holy precious blood, and His innocent suffering and death, that we might be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He has risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity.”

In today’s reading, we hear why God chose to restore His blessing to Israel: their restoration to the faith would vindicate the holiness of God’s great name. In this way, the promise of God to Abraham would be fulfilled—that in Him all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. In Christ, this blessing of God continues to be shown to the nations through the saving waters of Holy Baptism as the Church continues faithfully bearing witness to the work of God the Son, conformed to His holy Word.

This being the case, Man has no reason to boast or claim any glory for this privilege of being made a child of God. God’s gift of redemption remains in focus when one is blessed to understand that God chose to show compassion to sinful mankind through Christ purely out of His love for us.

With one accord, O God, we pray: grant us Thy Holy Spirit; look Thou on our infirmity through Jesus’ blood and merit. Grant us to grow in grace each day that by this Sacrament we may eternal life inherit. Amen.

Today's reading brings encouragement from our heavenly Father through the Prophet Haggai to the Governor of Judah, the High Priest Joshua, and the faithful remnant left among them. While waiting as God's people for their redemption, Judah had become discouraged, since all they did for the Lord's sake appeared to be in vain. So often, everything they accomplished was torn down and destroyed by neighboring countries. Yet, God reminds them of His everlasting presence, which is to be their strength.

Awaiting the "little while..." when our Lord is to return as promised, our efforts, too, often seem in vain. While the Word and work of Jesus is taught in its truth and purity, the sacraments administered in accord with Christ's institution, little effect appears in people's lives. Families brought up in the Lord's nurture allow divorce to be how they deal with differences, instead of practicing forgiveness. Drugs and alcohol claim one teenager after another. Many run from one congregation to another to have their egos appeased, unable to abide a pastor faithful to God.

In the midst of such heartache and disappointment, hear the words of our Lord spoken through Haggai: "Be strong" and remember that the Lord is with you, according to the new testament in His Son's blood, remembering your sin no more. His Spirit still guides His Church through His Word—everlasting truth!—and His works continually grant us peace and strength to remain faithful.

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes. Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies. Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee; in life, in death, O Lord, abide with me! Amen.

*vs 23-24 Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD.*

Twice St. Paul echoes the words of Jeremiah in writing to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:31 and 2 Cor. 10:17). He summarizes: "he who glories, let him glory in the LORD." This repeated emphasis shows that man needs to hear such advice over and over. Why? Because man, by nature, is a self-glorifying creature. Boasting is a natural outlet for sinful man—who loves to puff himself up—while belittling his God. Such action is folly and self-destructive—for there is no greater danger than exercising the pride of man.

When we catch ourselves in such a state, which is all too often, we need another good look at the Law's mirror—that we may see ourselves as we truly are. When we reflect on this pitiful sight, we're driven to find satisfaction elsewhere. May we, along with St Paul, boast only in the cross of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 6:14) May we be known only for our devotion to Him and His work, glorying only in what He has done and continues to do, for only His work is of enduring value. May we sing with all fervor: "In the cross of Christ I glory, towering o'er the wrecks of time..." (TLH 354, LSB 427)

*vs 22–25 “Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself; The word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, And shall not return, That to Me every knee shall bow, Every tongue shall take an oath. He shall say, ‘Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength. To Him men shall come, And all shall be ashamed Who are incensed against Him. In the LORD all the descendants of Israel Shall be justified, and shall glory.’ ”*

Twice in the last two verses of today’s text, we hear the phrase “in the Lord.” It is He alone who grants salvation, He alone who judges the quick and the dead. What a relief to us believers to know that the same Christ who loves us so much as to give His life for us is the same One who separates the sheep and the goats!

For the unbeliever, though, there will be no “slack cut.” They will be forced to bow to the king—and admit the inevitable. “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11).

God grant that we guard the great treasure of our salvation—and thank and praise our Lord for such a wondrous gift of love.

As our examination of Jesus’ words, “A Little While...” draws to a close, our reading points us toward that for which we ultimately appreciate our Lord’s Word and work: seeing the Kingdom of God fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

Zechariah has a vision of this Kingdom, seen in the building of the “New Jerusalem.” This Jerusalem, unlike the old one, needs no walls or boundaries set for protection, as no enemies would be within it or able to prevail against it; nor could its size be measured—there would be no limit to its beginning or end.

This is fulfilled when Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that neither going to Jerusalem nor Samaria was essential to worshiping God, but worshiping in Spirit and in Truth. We live in that truth; having been granted new hearts and minds through our Baptism, the Spirit of God, we see that the Kingdom of God is where Jesus Christ is: in His Word and Sacraments, the marks of the Church. Where these marks are, no boundaries or walls are needed, for Christ has already defeated our enemy, Satan, through His life, death, and resurrection. As we hear the words of Absolution and are fed His body and given to drink of His blood in the Sacrament of the Altar, Jesus’ sacrifice is remembered both by God and by us and we receive this ongoing forgiveness, trusting that His love is limitless and cannot be measured.

Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word; curb those who fain by craft and sword; would wrest the Kingdom from Thy Son, and set at naught all He hath done. Amen.

Zechariah had been preaching the kingdom of Christ and the power and fruit of the Gospel faith among the Gentiles. Now he proclaims the destruction of the temple and of the Jewish people, who wish to keep the old kingdom and not receive the new—to keep their supposed obedience to God under the old Sinaitic covenant, instead of having the gift of grace under the New Testament sealed with the blood of Jesus Christ. By such pride, they perished and lost both.

In these last days, as we wait for the return of our Lord and Savior, the only message we should expect to hear, want to hear, is that the Kingdom of Christ is at hand! Such requires a severe preaching of the Law, always exposing our sins to us, declaring God's wrath against those choosing other gods... yet, culminating in the sweetness of the Holy Gospel, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us, thereby redeeming us, "not with silver or gold, but with His Holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death, that we might be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He has been raised from the dead to live and reign to all eternity."

Only by this message may the Church remain faithful to the Word and work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. God grant this to us, for Jesus' sake!

I know that my Redeemer lives; what comfort this sweet sentence gives! He lives, He lives, who once was dead; He lives, my ever-living Head. Amen.

*v. 18 For thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: "I am the LORD, and there is no other."*

Today's reading hearkens back to the familiar words of Genesis 1:1-2 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep."

God is the indisputable Maker of all things. We confess as much in the First Article of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." And what we see in the Genesis text, and now in Isaiah, is that creation was a *progression* of events. It was a six-day process of God "separating" and "gathering" on days 1-3, and "making" and "filling" on days 4-6. Slowly and daily, the heavens and earth took on greater detail, until the Creation was complete after six days.

In addition to God's "creativity," today's text highlights the *purpose* of His creative work: habitation. God didn't make a giant "toy" that He could "observe" and "play with." Rather, He made everything with the highest of His creation in mind. God's love for man is unfathomable and unstoppable. For not only did He put the whole of Creation at man's feet—that it may serve our earthly needs—but God went on to give us an even greater gift—that of His one and only Son. It is ever to be marvelled at how "God so loved the world!"

*vv. 3–5 And when the man went out to the east with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the water came up to my ankles. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through the waters; the water came up to my knees. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through; the water came up to my waist. Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed.*

Ezekiel prophesied in one of the darkest eras of Israel's history. After repeatedly breaking her covenant with God, she was chastened by God through the swords of other empires. With the destruction of the temple in 586 BC, God's discipline was complete. The Northern Kingdom had been vanquished by Assyria, and the Southern Kingdom, Judah, was in exile in Babylonia. This was a time, then, when hope among God's people was at its lowest.

What we see in this latter section of the book of Ezekiel, is the prophet bolstering the exiles—with a vision of God's unrestrained kindness and limitless resources. An angelic guide gives Ezekiel a tour of God's restoration as God literally pours out His love for man—symbolized by abundant and deep rivers of water.

God is always doing what's best for us. Even though we endure discipline, it is always meant to bring about restoration and renewal. We need never doubt it: we have a God of love, whose mercies are new every morning!

## FROM THE PROPER FOR THE CANTATE SUNDAY

### THE HOLY GOSPEL

**St. John 16:5-15 (NKJV)**

“But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.”

### THE COLLECT

O God, who makes the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

*“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced.”*

Our faith is in Jesus Christ, not in men, or governments, or political powers. Sometimes it is difficult to remember this in our current times, which means it is even more important that we do remember! People look at world events in modern Jerusalem and they wonder how this relates to the will of God, yet they forget that His will has already been made clear in Christ. The true “house of David” and “inhabitants of Jerusalem” are now those who keep the faith in the Anointed One, the true Son of David and Prince of Peace.

Jesus revealed the Father and His will, but even at that time the people who were confused about the matters of temporal Jerusalem failed to see all that He had done to fulfill God’s promises. In keeping the will of His Father perfectly, Jesus was the One whom they pierced on the cross, and as He rose again from the dead and ascended into Heaven He showed us that our life in Him also will transcend the struggles of this earth.

God’s Spirit of grace and supplication makes us able to live according to this faith in our Risen Lord and do those things that are truly according to His will. We should work to uphold what is right and just in this world and to do our best as citizens, but not because our salvation depends on it. We do it so the Gospel of Christ may have free course throughout the world!

*vv. 28–29 “And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”*

Joel speaks of a day when the Holy Spirit would be given to all people. In Joel’s and his hearers’ experience, the Spirit had been “selectively given.” Through dreams and visions, God had revealed His will to specific individuals—like Joseph and Jacob and to Moses and the 70 elders of Israel. Moses himself longed for the day when more would be blessed with God’s Spirit: “Oh, that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!” (Numbers 11:29).

The day of which Joel writes is, of course, Pentecost—fifty days after Jesus’ resurrection. The Book of Acts records: “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit...” (Acts 2:1–4a). Peter then goes on to say that this was the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy. (Acts 2:16) Today, we are *all* privileged to have God’s will revealed to us as the gift of salvation is described, offered, and delivered to all—through the Spirit-filled work of God’s inspired Word.

FROM THE PROPERs FOR THE  
PENTECOST

THE GOSPEL

St. John 14:23-31 (NKJV)

Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.

“These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. You have heard Me say to you, ‘I am going away and coming back to you.’ If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’ for My Father is greater than I.

“And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me. But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. Arise, let us go from here.”

THE COLLECT

O God, who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgement in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who with Thee and the Holy Ghost, lives and reigns, ever one God, world without end.

TUESDAY, MAY 8: ISAIAH 65:1-7

CANTATE

God, in His mercy, has called us to be His children through Christ crucified. But every single person throughout history who has been blessed by His Spirit to have this faith has had to struggle with the temptation to sin and compromise. In our reading from Isaiah the Lord is indignant about things like incense and foods, yet today there are Christians who do things that are far more public in compromising His Word. And unfortunately, many of God’s people seem indifferent about it. Why should we care about the little things when so many people don’t care about the bigger things?

An important reason for God’s anger towards the carelessness of His chosen people was that He did not want His Words confused with the corrupt things of men. This is also why it is a grievous thing that modern “church leaders” commit public acts of compromise with religions and powers that explicitly hate Jesus Christ and seek to undo His work. Faithful Christians should be appalled by these things, but instead they act as if such things were token gestures that have no bearing on the Church. As a result, society enjoys the fact that God’s people are “finally coming around”.

The cross of Christ is no small matter. Neither is faithfulness to God’s Word. Satan is happy to eat away at us through the small things if it means we become lazy and indifferent about bigger things. This is why we must look to God’s Word and Spirit to uphold us against *every* temptation.

Lord have mercy on us, forgive us, and renew us from those times when we inevitably fail. Amen.

The Word of God speaks to us of time, and eternity. Today's reading is our Lord's Words on the blessings He will give to His servants and the consequences that come to those who have betrayed His mercy. At some points in history it is easy to see this happening, but other times it is very difficult; seeming to be quite backwards from His Words. But God is most certainly not a liar. It is a joyous thing when the events of this world resemble the glories of His eternal kingdom, but even when they do not, His unseen blessings remain true.

There are greater things than "health and wealth" in our present time, and the blessings or consequences of our life now are part of God's greater desire to bless us eternally. "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). So even if things appear to be bad for the faithful servants of Christ, we know that they are still blessed in other ways.

Even the punishments and harsh consequences that come upon the unfaithful have a broader significance. It would be better for them to learn repentance and faithfulness through correction now, rather than go unpunished and oblivious to their eternal peril.

May God grant us the blessings of His Spirit so that we are truly faithful according to Christ Jesus, and keep us from delusions of faithfulness that are focused on worldly things. Amen.

The doctrine of election is of limited value to Lutherans. It tells us a truth as far as it goes. We are chosen by God for salvation and we can be assured of our safety in our God's loving hands. But to delve into the mystery of why some are chosen and some fall away is not given to us; the 'why' is not for us to know. In this passage it is beyond us to know why some are revived in the Spirit and some remain in wickedness. All we are to concern ourselves with is living in Christ before the face of the Father.

Many shudder at the thought of the end coming upon them—and it would be truly frightening for us, as well, without the loving face of our Savior. For us, the frightening face of death has been supplanted by the gentle and loving face of our saving God. And we shall spend our lives getting to know that face, living our lives before that face, living *coram Deo*. This is the life that will lead you to maturity. This is the life that will instill in you a quiet steadiness. This is the life that will get you through the trials and hardships of life. This is the life that will help you face the end of this earthly life, and make you confident before the face of God on judgment day.

Lord Jesus Christ, help us to live every moment of our lives before your face. Help us to see You in everything. Help us to view our entire lives as opportunities to serve you. Help us *coram Deo vivere* (to live in the presence of God). Amen.

There is a thriving business today in survival supplies. One can hear advertisements on radio and television to buy gold as protection against a devalued currency. One can buy ammunition and dehydrated food for storage against natural catastrophe or economic collapse. Some people are returning to a more natural and self-sufficient lifestyle. They are growing their own food in gardens, hunting, learning to make their own clothes, etc. These are all fine and laudable endeavors. These people are not complacent about their physical reality. As in the tale of The Grasshopper and the Ants, they are busy preparing for hard times that may come.

How much more should we shun spiritual complacency? Are we working while it is day to strengthen our souls? We are to be teaching our children to memorize God's Word through the Small Catechism. We should be building our Christian character and virtue through devotion to Word and Sacrament. We should be building up a store of spiritual strength against the day of trouble. And such days of spiritual trouble are certain. Blessed is the man who cultivates Godliness. He will "dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places, though hail comes down on the forest, and the city is brought low in humiliation."

How blessed we are to have the Word of God in its purity preached among us and the sacraments rightly administered! Let us not take these things for granted, but cherish them: they are our greatest treasures. Amen.

*"For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, saying, 'Peace, peace!' when there is no peace."*

Superficial peace and unity is a dangerous thing. It is also a lie. The lie of false peace is hellish malpractice from the father of lies himself. It pretends to cure things that only God's Word has the power to cure. It becomes even more dangerous when the lie of false peace is considered acceptable if it is used with "pious" intent. Then it is known to be a lie, but used anyway in deceitful service to God's name.

It is tragic enough that Satan attacks the people of God with temptation to outright faithlessness and denial of Christ, but it is even more heartbreaking that he has tricked those who believe in the Gospel to peddle his insidious poison for him. Even though a Christian may have a saving faith in Christ's atonement, if he or she supports a false outward unity "for the sake of Jesus", then they poison the well for those who come after them. It is foolishness to compromise the Word of God for the sake of spreading the Word of God!

Our help is in the Name of the Lord, in Jesus Christ, who would have us observe all that He has taught the Church. We do not need to pretend to have peace or unity for the sake of worldly things, because we already have it in the spiritual things of Christ! May God always protect us from partaking of, and from passing along, the poison of Satan's false cures. To Christ alone be all glory! Amen.

*“Therefore love truth and peace.”*

In contrast to yesterday’s consideration of false peace, today we meditate on the real peace that comes from God’s truth. The Spirit and Word of God bring people together in true unity because those people are made to love the same truth. We know peace because we cling to His Words, and we are united in the forgiveness and love that come from Christ.

The Gospel of Christ crucified and the wisdom of all His teachings are more than sufficient for man’s well-being. Our identity in Jesus may place us at odds with the rest of the fallen world, but He has always been truthful with us about that reality as well. Furthermore, the peace that comes through the forgiveness of sins in Christ is far more valuable for mankind than any worldly cooperation. We would fail to actually love others by pretending to go along with them, yet secretly resenting and condemning them. It is better to show them the truth so they might truly say, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”

It is no coincidence that Christ’s Church enjoys a cheerful feast of joy and gladness, and unity in truth in the Lord’s Supper. Our Lord has said much about the importance of our peace and unity that comes from the Body of Christ. May He continue to bless us and work through us to faithfully teach others to know that Peace of the Lord, bringing them in true unity with that Body and Blood that brings our salvation!

We live and work in a world that is very ungodly and hostile to the faith. Our government and social institutions are even more so. It can be very disheartening from day to day. Ten minutes of talk radio can make one think the end of the world is at hand. But God promises us relief: “Do not fear, O My servant Jacob, And do not be dismayed, O Israel! For behold, I will save you from afar.”

God is not so far away that He cannot rescue us, and He has every intention of doing so. We must always remember that while we seem like the losers in this world—the despised, the marginalized—we are the ultimate winners. Our Lord will save us and make us co-heirs with Him.

Yet, this road to our victory isn’t a lazy afternoon stroll. It is a hard journey, and on it God will “rightly correct” us. Christians need to be purified. We need to have the sinful, silly, and lazy habits burned from us by fire. The fire of adversity does not strike most Americans as it used to. They are “rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.” More is the pity for them. It is a blessing (though not a pleasure) to be sifted and purified by adversity. This is the Holy Ghost’s work, and it is wonderful in its results. Because we are purified, because we are rightly corrected, we are not destroyed utterly.

Thank God we are the legitimate sons of our Heavenly Father, to be trained and disciplined as those who are truly loved, not treated as bastards and left to roam like feral beasts. Amen.

The remnant. This term has always indicated the Church of our God. As Isaiah addresses Israel here we should always remember that he is not talking to a national body. The Jewish nation is a symbol for the Church, as it was, at that time, the visible body in and among which the Church was hidden. “For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham” (Romans 9:6-7). It is by faith that the status of “Israel” rests on a people. This is who the Church is, the people of faith.

Thus, when God variously causes Israel to rejoice or fear His wrath in this passage, it is because He is variously speaking to the whole nation or to the faithful remnant. Israel was always divided into these two categories and the Church is still manifested in these two ways. For example, between 70 and 80 percent of all people in Nordic nations are “Lutheran,” yet only about 2 per cent attend church.

In this passage, God says of national Israel, “I *know* their works and their thoughts.” He knows how unfaithful they are. Yet, He will give them a sign to bring them back to Him: “Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against.” (Luke 2:34) Those who survived this time of sifting would bring the Gospel to the world.

God still operates this way. The Child still comes among us as a sign. We are sifted. The remnant takes the Gospel to the world. Amen.

Our God is not a timid spirit, or an indifferent spectator. In His holy wisdom and mercy He does show great patience with mankind, but we are never to think He has forgotten about His people. We are tempted to despair, thinking that the bold promises He made in Isaiah are forgotten ideas and now God has left the Church at the mercy of faithless powers in our age. Satan would gladly have us forget that our Lord and Savior is the Mighty One of Jacob.

However, we must cling to the sure promise of His Word that great triumphs will come from God at the end of the age! As St. Paul reminds us, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). It is verses like this and the ones from our reading in Isaiah that should embolden us to continue faithfully defending and proclaiming the Word of God. Even if a break in the struggle is nowhere in sight, we must remain in Christ and carry forth His Gospel for the sake of those who still need to hear all that Christ teaches!

We suffer with Christ so that His forgiveness from the cross may be proclaimed. His suffering was surely not in vain, and neither is ours. May God keep us steadfast in His Son and enable us to boldly go forth as His people under the strength of His Gospel and the power of His wisdom. Amen.

**FROM THE PROPERs FOR THE  
ROGATE SUNDAY**

**THE HOLY GOSPEL**                      **St. John 16:23-30 (NKJV)**

“Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.”

His disciples said to Him, “See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God.”

**THE COLLECT**

O God, from whom all good things do come, grant to us, Thy humble servants, that by Thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be right and by Thy merciful guiding may perform 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.

**TUESDAY, MAY 22: ZECHARIAH 14:1–21**

**EXAUDI**

An essential key to understanding today’s reading is to recognize Zechariah’s book for the extremely symbolic work that it is. We say this not to rationalize away its message or to empty it of significance, but to confess that we can only understand it rightly if we work within the confines of its genre. People often harm God’s Word by refusing to recognize the symbolic nature of what is written in certain parts of scripture. Conservative people instinctively want to take the scriptures literally, and this is a good and healthy impulse. Yet, a truly literal understanding allows the literary context to rule over our desires and instincts: poetry must be read as poetry, history must be read as history, and apocalyptic literature must be read as apocalyptic literature, with understanding of how each genre operates.

Thus, we are not to calculate the ‘when’ of future events or theorize about the ‘how’ of Jesus’ first footstep splitting the Mount of Olives at His return. Instead, consider the Mount of Olives in light of our Lord’s ascension: safety will be found through that mountain, that is, through the One who rose from that mountain.

Similarly, it is clear that not every nation would come to the physical Jerusalem to worship each year, and all the nations will not come there to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. These symbolically indicate the worship of Christ in His Church, the New Jerusalem. All Christians, from the entire world, celebrate the same Eucharist and hear the same Word of salvation. Those who reject Jesus will receive God’s plagues for their wickedness, but those who worship Jesus receive everlasting blessing and peace. Amen.

Here in Zechariah's scroll we have a prophecy of the suffering of Christ. Of course, Zechariah doesn't fully comprehend all the details of what he is prophesying, but the Holy Spirit has Him record in advance what will happen "in that day," that is, in "the last days," the days when the completion of the purpose of the world is revealed—the "day" that extends from the Christ's incarnation until His return.

The completion and purpose of this earth's existence is found in Jesus Christ and is accomplished through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Thus, the Father says, "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd." The sacrifice of the Shepherd is not some event that has spun badly out of control, a victory for the wicked; this is the Father's will to sacrifice the Shepherd, and it is the Shepherd's will to be sacrificed. The redemption of the world cannot be accomplished without this. The end days is realized in it. And the sacrifice must be the One who is the Father's "Companion"—the eternal Son, the Man who alone has experienced the communion of the Godhead. A sacrifice of infinite reach can only be accomplished by the infinite One.

Jesus tells us when Zechariah's prophecy is fulfilled. It is the night of His betrayal: "Then Jesus said to them, 'All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'" (Matt. 26:31) But the scattering is only temporary. The awful striking down brings healing and forgiveness to all in Christ, even to this day. Amen.

The Lord shall set and mend the bones that He has broken, for He is ever merciful and abounds in steadfast love toward those who look to Him for their salvation. Though trials and testing may come upon God's people, they are but the chastisement of a loving Father in Heaven Who desires only the redemption of His chosen elect.

The Lord Almighty is indeed powerful enough to shake any and all people to their very core, but for those who love God this is done only to draw them closer to Him and His kingdom. For the same divine power that enables the Lord to shake the very foundations of the creation also allows Him to effortlessly produce abundance and blessing that defies the laws of nature, time, and physics.

Jesus Christ has already redeemed all the elect of God, and there is nothing else required to receive all the riches of God's eternal kingdom but faith in Him as the Lord and Savior. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we are given that faith by grace that looks only to Jesus for its justification before the throne of God. Some in our age look to the things of this world for security and when they possess great wealth, power, and prestige feel secure in saying, "Disaster shall not overtake or meet us." Those of us who know and look to the Lord know that the truth is something different, for the Lord alone will rebuild the ruined and bring forth an abundant harvest where none existed before.

**TUESDAY, MAY 15: ISAIAH 4:2-6**

**ROGATION TUESDAY**

Through the survivors of Israel God will carry forward His plan of universal salvation. The day of judgment is necessary to cleanse away the filth of sin, but that cleansing brings forth a new day and a new reality. A reality in which the Lord is our righteousness, and through His righteousness bestowed upon us by grace we are made holy in the Lord.

As the descendants of Abraham were chosen to be a “holy nation,” so “all the nations” constituting Israel “born according to the Spirit” will be called and dedicated to serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness. Though still exposed to the forces of evil, those “recorded for life” will have the presence, guidance, and protection God once manifested “in a pillar of cloud” and “a pillar of fire” when Israel of old wandered through the desert to the Promised Land.

The Lord is our shade and light in every trouble, for He cares for us in every trial and temptation in His tender mercy bestowed through His atoning sacrifice upon the Cross. By His outstretched arms upon that Cross He shields us from the righteous wrath that pours down from the holy Father in Heaven because of sin. In the glorious light of His Resurrection we each receive the assurance that we too shall rise into the dawn of a new and wondrous age. An age that will be never ending in which we shall reside with our Lord in the New Jerusalem set upon the New Earth beneath the canopy of the New Heaven.

**FROM THE PROPER FOR THE  
EXAUDI SUNDAY**

**THE HOLY GOSPEL**

**St. John 15:26-16:4 (NKJV)**

“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

“These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.”

**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, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

**SATURDAY, MAY 19: MICAH 7:14-20 SATURDAY AFTER ASCENSION**

All who stand in opposition to our God have good reason to fear and tremble, sneer and taunt, for their time is short and they cannot advance beyond the limit set by our Lord. At the same time we who are His people through Word and Sacrament take heart and receive great comfort from the realization that the Lord our God is long suffering and shows only steadfast love toward all those who look to Him in faith as our father Abraham did. Through that faith that looks only to Christ for its justification we (like Abraham) are declared righteous, not because of some merit of our own but exclusively due to the forgiveness won for us by God's Son.

A people with such a promise to live on can pray with new fervor and confidence. We pray to our Good Shepherd to lead us back to the green pastures of His promised kingdom. We are assured that our prayer is heard, for we shall witness wonders similar to the day when the Lord led His people out of Egypt with awesome power and glory.

The Book of Micah ends with a great doxology. It is a song of praise to the Great Redeemer. He forgives gladly and freely, because He delights in steadfast love. He forgives compassionately and therefore wholly; He treads iniquities under foot and casts His penitent people's sins into the depths of the sea, never to rise up and accuse again. It is God's greatest power that He is able to deal with the hopeless tragedy of our sin with grace that delivers us from judgment into glory and life eternal.

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 16: ISAIAH 29:18-24 ROGATION WEDNESDAY**

This wonderful Messianic prophecy is powerfully fulfilled by our Lord Jesus Christ throughout His earthly ministry. He points to this very fact when John the Baptizer sends some of his disciples to Jesus with the inquiry of whether He is the Christ or should they look for another. Our Lord simply points these disciples to the clear evidence all around them in the lame who walk, the blind that see, the deaf who hear, and the poor who have the good news proclaimed to them.

We too, through the holy scriptures which preserve that divine proclamation without error throughout time for all believers, receive this powerful confession of salvation won and graciously bestowed upon poor sinners purely by grace. Beyond the day of judgment and destruction lies the eternal day of restoration: deaf will hear, blind will see, lame will walk, etc. This is all linked with the Messianic age that is ushered in by the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, and will reach its ultimate fulfillment when He returns in glory to bring all His chosen into His kingdom of glory.

Through Christ and the Comforter sent we become God's true children and by the redemption Jesus won for us on the cross we are able to sanctify His Name. In this gift of grace we receive divine instruction and the ability to understand all that has been done for us on the cross of Calvary. The devil can no longer use the guilt of our sin to condemn us, for Christ has paid for that guilt with His own holy precious innocent blood and called us out of shame and into eternal life.

**THURSDAY, MAY 17: EZEKIEL 36:25-27 ASCENSION OF OUR LORD**

What a beautiful Old Testament text for confessing the power of Holy Baptism on the day of the Church year when we receive the command to go into all the world making disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching all that our Lord has commanded.

In many places throughout the bible we are told to transform our mind and heart through the life-giving power of His holy living Word recorded for our benefit. For we know that all of God's Word is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." Here in Ezekiel 36 God declares that He will bring about a change in us that will make this transformation possible.

Throughout holy Scripture the Lord makes it clear that He does the converting of human souls from sinful and dying to holy and living. From the moment of conception our bodies are dying because of sin, but through the powerful working of God (by His chosen Means of Grace) in the human soul that reality is reversed and we are ushered into the new life of faith and salvation.

A new life in Holy Baptism that miraculously gives us faith, and thus the ability and the desire to walk in God's statutes and to be careful to obey His rules. Not to merit justification before His throne, for He has already given us that by grace in the cleansing waters of Holy Baptism, but to willingly submit to the will of our heavenly Father out of love and gratitude for what has already been accomplished in Christ.

**FRIDAY, MAY 18: MICAH 7:7-13**

**FRIDAY AFTER ASCENSION**

He who has been attacked by sin and the devil can rejoice greatly in the promise here presented by Micah. All who look to the Lord for their salvation by grace can take heart, even though they may be knocked down and trampled upon by the evil of this world and the sinful tendencies of their own flesh.

Though we from time to time face the holy righteous wrath of our God toward our many sins of commission and omission we can take great comfort in the realization that our God is a loving gracious Lord Who is steadfast and abounding in mercy and grace toward us in spite of our sinful nature. However bleak things look, the prophetic word, spoken in the Spirit of the Lord, will be realized. There will yet be a remnant of God's people who will in penitence and faith look for deliverance to the God Who justifies the ungodly.

Fallen, in darkness, bearing the indignation of the Lord against Whom they have sinned (the remnant consists not of sinless saints but of believers), they know that the Lord will be their light, that the God Who is now hiding His face from them will lead them to life and victory. To a penitent people the unlimited promise is given. The walls of the ruined city shall be rebuilt, and the boundaries of the people of God shall be enlarged, to contain people of all nations, who come to the city of God and escape the judgment upon a sinful world.