

SATURDAY, APRIL 28: JOHN 9:35-41 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

The text before us today is abundant with grace and judgment, Law and Gospel. Jesus seeks those who are the out-cast, He offers grace to those who turn to Him in their need. Jesus does not force Himself on anyone. Those who do reject Him are met with the only thing such rejection leaves available: the Law.

The Law always judges, always condemns, because no one but Jesus perfectly fulfills the Law. These simple Scriptural truths are on display in all their clarity in the seven verses that conclude the ninth chapter of Saint John's Gospel. The Pharisees and the man who had miraculously received his sight both heard the same proclamation of Christ, but had very different reactions to the message. The man heard Gospel, the Pharisees heard Law. Jesus simply stated His divine truth, and God's grace produced sight and hearing. Those who would not receive His invitation to partake of His merciful grace were left with righteous judgment.

We pray: Lord Jesus, through Your Means of Grace keep us always focused on You as our Teacher and Redeemer. For our redemption You gave Yourself to the death of the cross and by Your glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of the enemy. Grant that all our sin may be drowned through daily repentance and that day by day we may arise to live before You in the righteousness and purity of Your grace; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

# THE LUTHERAN HERALD



APRIL 1–APRIL 28, 2018

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## *The Calendar*

April 1        Easter  
April 8        1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Easter  
    April 9 (M) Festival of the Annunciation  
April 15       2<sup>nd</sup> S. after Easter  
April 23       3<sup>rd</sup> S. after Easter  
    April 25 (T)     Festival of St. Mark, Evangelist  
April 30       4<sup>th</sup> S. after Easter  
(Please note: because the traditional date for the Festival of the Annunciation falls on Palmarum, the Festival is transferred to the Monday after the First Sunday after Easter, i.e., April 9.)

### *2018 Synod and Summer Camp*

This year's Diocesan Synod will take place at Salem Lutheran Church (Malone, Texas) during the week of June 25–29 so that it will coincide with the annual Summer Camp, which will also be at Salem. (The 2018 Colloquium was held in January in Fort Wayne, Indiana.)

Although the Colloquium and Synod usually occur during the same week, they were divided this week to accommodate the Seminary schedule, so that the clergy of the diocese would gather after the seminarian's conclusion of his studies to conduct his theological colloquy. Josiah Scheck's colloquy is presently scheduled to take place on Tuesday, June 26. The seminary graduation is scheduled for Wednesday evening, June 27.

This year's Summer Camp will build on the theme of last year, continuing our exploration of the history of the Lutheran Church through the settlement of the Americas, beginning with the Church in New Sweden (Delaware) in the 1630s.

Further details concerning both the Synod and Camp will be available in future issues of *The Lutheran Herald* and from the pastors of the diocese.

**FRIDAY, APRIL 27: JOHN 9:14-34     4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EASTER**

The repeating of the same question and circular argumentation of the Jews reveal their unwillingness to accept the clear confession of Jesus as the Christ. They repeatedly declare He is a sinner without presenting any proof, while refusing to accept the obvious evidence of Jesus' miraculous work that contradicts their false accusations of Him. The Pharisees' prejudice toward Jesus being a sinner will not allow them to see Him and His ministry as He and it truly are. This sinful tendency toward God and His Word continues today. Many approach Christ and the Scriptures with the preconception that they cannot be true because that would contradict these people's previous devotion to rejecting God.

The text ends with the Jews uttering a classic attack used by those opposed to the Truth presented by the Lord through Scripture and the Holy Spirit. How often is the confrontation of sinful behavior or a faithful confession of God's Word met with the accusation of "you have no right because you are not without sin!" Unfortunately, the guilt of sin often leads to denial and defensiveness instead of repentance.

Christ tells us that He must do His Father's work as long as there is time. Likewise, we must do the work that our heavenly Father has called us to as His children and disciples of His Son Jesus Christ.

We pray: Heavenly Father, give us the grace and wisdom to judge rightly and mercifully, always remembering that we poor sinners come before You purely by grace through Christ Jesus. Amen.

**THURSDAY, APRIL 26: JOHN 9:1-13 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EASTER**

How often the clear words of God and the obvious works of His hand are rejected by those who refuse to hear and see, though they have ears and eyes. How often our fallen preconceived notions cause us to misinterpret the things of this life, as well as the things of God. The disciples see the crushing judgment of the Law falling upon man, but Jesus sees the abundant grace of God overflowing upon man.

Without grace and faith in Jesus Christ it is impossible to see or hear the wonderful works of God rightly, as is demonstrated in our text by those who know the man born blind who now sees. They cannot bring themselves to believe that it is the same person. Christians today confess the reality of Christ's ministry in their lives through word and deed, to which the unbelieving world says, "Where is He?" Through faith we rejoice in the miraculous Means of Grace, to which the unbeliever says, "Where is the miracle?" But the Lord continues to pour out His grace and call sinners to repent and believe, and mercifully enables them to do so by His Word and Spirit!

We pray: Almighty God, all that we possess is from Your loving hand. Give us grace that we may always see this, and thus live our lives ruled by Your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**MONDAY, APRIL 2: LUKE 24:13-35**

**EASTER MONDAY**

The Scriptures tell us plainly what the Messiah's person and work was. Even in the Old Testament it was clearly there. The Old Testament told what the Messiah must go through and what would happen when His suffering was finished. Jesus chastises His disciples on the Emmaus road for not knowing that. He calls them slow witted or foolish for not knowing the Scriptures. Their intellect had been dulled by their lack of belief. They knew the Scriptures, but they did not really ponder and study the Scriptures properly.

If Jesus chastises them for not knowing their Bibles well enough, what would He say to you and me today? Jesus shows them in the Scriptures, from the beginning to the end, that all the Scriptures have described what He was going to do. The Scriptures cried out concerning Jesus because the heart and content of the scriptures is Jesus.

We have our eyes opened to this new reality in the same way that the disciples on the Emmaus road did, through the Scriptures. We also have our eyes opened through the sacraments. We have our eyes opened through these means because Jesus is in them. He comes and stays with us through these means. The Sacrament of the Altar is not just a symbolic memorial to Jesus' death, but it also brings us the life of the Resurrection. The Word of God tells us of the new reality that exists for us, and then that Word creates it.

We pray: Lord, help us to see You in Your Word and Sacraments. Amen.

Why do we say “Christ is risen from the dead” on Easter Sunday? Why don’t we say “Christ was risen from the dead”? It is because that event never ends. The resurrection begins Christ’s restored life forever. And it begins our lives forever as well.

Yes, historically speaking, Christ was risen from the dead all those centuries ago, but the living reality is that Christ is risen today, and every day, till the end of time and beyond. Easter morning extends forever, to this morning, to the end of the age. The resurrection is forever. Jesus lives forever, and in Him we live forever. Praise the Lord for it!

The “was” and the “is” of the resurrection are both important. Our faith is based in an historical event. It is based on the specific event that happened two thousand years ago in a garden tomb in the early morning. If that event did not take place, none of the rest of our faith is worth anything. Jesus was actually, physically raised from the dead, and our Christian faith does depend on it. As St. Paul says, “And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.” But how does St. Paul respond to those who deny the resurrection? He says, “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.” That is the Christian answer. Christianity depends on Jesus having risen from that tomb in Jerusalem all those centuries ago. You can be assured He did. A number of faithful Christian women were there and bore witness to the fact.

We pray: May we always remember that we are alive through Christ Jesus now, and live in His resurrection life. Amen.

In today’s text Jesus lays out the two paths that are possible in this life: the path of Truth, and the path of lies. The whole argument as to which path you are on boils down to the simple test of who do you believe Jesus is: Is He the Christ or is He not? It is just that simple, the rest of the debate is just varying shades and angles of justifying one or the other of those two answers.

The one who accepts Jesus at His word is given true freedom, the freedom of a true son and heir to the Kingdom. The one who refuses to accept Jesus as who He says He is remains a slave, enslaved to sin, death, and the devil. The slaves can rationalize about being free, but that does not change the truth of the matter that they are not. The Jews in our text demonstrate this with their claim of freedom due to being “Abraham’s descendants,” while exhibiting an amazing disregard for the reality of Roman rule in their lives. Verses 30 and 31 describe the Jews as believing in Jesus, but verse 37 makes it clear that lies cloud their understanding. They lacked faith in Jesus as the Word, the promised Redeemer. Thus they remained enslaved to the Law, sin, death, and the devil.

We pray: Heavenly Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit working Your will in us, may we see the path of grace so mercifully laid through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Christ speaks of His earthly mission in this text, continuing the discussion that was started with the Pharisees at the Temple in yesterday's meditation. Today the Lord's confession of Himself intensifies as the focus tightens on His sacrificial death as the Lamb of God who atones for the sins of the world. The mission of the Son is to save the world, not to condemn it (John 3:17); yet, when God's saving intent collides with man's unbelief, judgment will be the result. Jesus can therefore say of Himself, "I judge no one" (John 8:15), and with equal truth, "For judgment I have come into this world" (John 9:39). One statement cannot be truly understood without the other (Law and Gospel) as they complement and interpret each other (Scripture interprets Scripture). This reality is presented by contrasting the stark difference between the eternal destiny of those who believe in Jesus as the Christ and those who do not believe His testimony of Himself as the promised Messiah.

Jesus points to several conflicts or contradictions between the home of His adversaries and His home, as well as His destiny and theirs. He also continues yesterday's theme of His will always being in harmony with His Father's will. He concludes today's text by prophesying that the Jews will not understand His true identity and the ultimate source of His words until after He has been lifted up (crucified) by them.

We pray: O Lord, grant us faith so we may cling only to You and Your Word and persevere unto glory through Your grace. Amen.

All religions have a central, core value or belief. For some it is obedience to God. For others it is progression toward perfection. For Christianity, life and fellowship with God are at the heart of our religion. Overcoming death and having a restored loving relationship with God is what everything is about in Christianity. It is interesting that Christians proclaim essentially the same message at a funeral that they do on the most important feast day of the year. They proclaim life over death through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We preach the resurrection at a funeral, and we preach the resurrection at Easter.

It is a profoundly serious religion we have because it deals with the very heart of our existence. It deals with life and death even on the most important of celebration days. It is a profound religion because it is true, because it is God's message to us. What is the message of the Word of God? The Apostle John lets us know that the Word is Jesus Himself. Jesus of Nazareth is the Word of God, the living Word. The words that came from His mouth two thousand years ago not only told about life, but were life itself, because they were from Him. Jesus didn't just live, but was the source of life. He is the living one, as the angels said, "Why do you look for the living [one] among the dead?" His words are connected to His person. He is life, and His words are life.

We pray: May we always stay connected to the very source of life, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Would God the Father accept the Son's sacrifice on our behalf? The resurrection was the answer to that question. The resurrection is confirmation that the Father accepts the sacrifice of the Son and we are set free. There is no broken relationship between us and God. It has been healed. Jesus bridges the gap.

How can we be sure that what Jesus said in the Bible was true? Because it happened. Jesus rose from the grave "just as He said." Jesus said He would rise from the grave, and it happened. And so, when He says that those who trust in Him will live forever, it will happen. When He tells us that our sins are forgiven, it is true, it has happened. Jesus is as good as His word, and that is great comfort for those who trust Him.

The resurrection is a seal of assurance to us that Jesus has accomplished what He said. But the resurrection means fear for those who do not trust in Christ. The Roman soldiers who knew nothing of Him were terrified, even to the point of unconsciousness. The chief priests and Pharisees were afraid of the resurrection and tried to cover it up. For all those who do not trust in Jesus, there is no hope in the resurrection, only fear. There is only fear because the one they rejected has become the victor. Nothing can stop Him. For those who believe in Him there is a holy fear, but one that is overcome by unspeakable joy. Their Lord has won. Their Lord is victorious. Their Lord has given them all hope, and joy, and peace. All this belongs to the Christian because all that Christ has He gives to us.

We pray: Lord, give us true hope, joy, and peace in eternal life through Jesus Christ. Amen.

In today's text we hear our dear Lord give bold testimony concerning Himself and the holy redemptive mission He is on with His earthly ministry. Jesus expounds that this earthly ministry in which He is engaged is not a journey He undertakes alone, for His Father and He are One. The central point of Christ's mission is presented in the opening verse of the text where He explains that He is the light of the world, and all who follow Him will have that magnificent holy light illuminate their life.

Jesus comes from the Father in heaven, and He is returning to His Father's house once He has fulfilled all He has come to accomplish with His earthly ministry. His testimony concerning Himself is true, for He and His Father are One, and His Father testifies from heaven as to the validity of Jesus' identity, and the validity of His earthly ministry. The veracity of this testimony is obvious to all who have eyes to see and ears to hear, but those like the Pharisees, who deny the clear testimony of God recorded in Scripture, will insist on being blind and deaf to these gracious words of divine Truth that call all to repentance and forgiveness through faith by grace.

We pray: Lord of light, create in us a love of You and Your Word, nourishing us through Your holy Means of Grace that we may through them be made Your true disciples, reflecting Your light now and forever. Amen.

Jesus teaches us the distinction between the Law and the Gospel. The Law decrees that this woman, who has been caught in the act of adultery, be stoned. This is what the Law does. It condemns sinners. This woman surely felt that condemnation in her heart. The scribes and Pharisees imagine that they are without sin. The Law has done its work on the woman. It has not done its work on these men. So Jesus says, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” The Law now convicts these men so that they leave in shame. Jesus has shown them to be sinners as well.

The difference between this adulterous woman and her accusers is that the scribes and Pharisees don't stick around to hear Jesus' next word to sinners. The woman, feeling her sin and burdened with guilt, remains behind to hear Jesus' word to sinners who know their sin. “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.” This is the kingdom of Christ: Sins being removed as far as the east is from the west, transgressions cast into the depths of the sea, and iniquities blotted out. This woman is released from her sin and instructed to avoid that sin from now on.

Christ continues to do His gospel work in the church where He daily and richly forgives all our sins. When the Law condemns you for your sins, flee to Jesus for refuge from God's wrath and receive absolution. Then, go and sin no more. Strive against sin and do not let it reign in you.

We pray: Heavenly Father, forgive our sins, which are many, for the sake of Christ's sufferings and death. Give us joy in the absolution and strengthen us to go and sin no more. Amen.

In the third article of the Apostles' Creed we confess that we believe in “the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” We confess that we believe in the resurrection of our bodies. Our bodies will be raised again from the grave.

As Christians, we say that we believe this is our future. This resurrection of the body that we believe in finds some interesting support in our gospel reading. Jesus' appearing to His disciples after the crucifixion gives us some information as to what this resurrection of the body might be like. It is likely that many people in our society do not properly understand or believe in the bodily resurrection. Many people would no doubt think that after they die they become a spirit of some sort, invisible, ethereal. It is no problem for most people to believe in life after death, but what sort of existence they will have is something little understood. The tired and wasted bodies, the diseased flesh that we carry around, would be an intolerable burden to us if we were stuck with them as they are. But these tired, wasted bodies will be renewed and made like Christ's resurrected body. We will know health and vigor. When Job said, “...and though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God,” he meant that the corrupted body of this world will be renewed when we see our Lord face to face.

We pray: Lord, make us faithfully confess, “I believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” Amen.

“He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ had made provision so that His disciples could receive the news of His victory over death, and yet they still failed to believe when they heard it. They feared and trusted in things other than the Words He had given them before and after His death on the cross. Throughout His entire work of salvation for us He has given His Word, sent people to remind us of it, and performed great signs and wonders to emphasize it. Sin blinds us and makes our hearts hard, but in His mercy He keeps sending His Word among us.

It was even significant that the Lord chose Mary Magdalene and other women to be primary witnesses to the empty tomb and His resurrection. Scholars observe that it is a compelling point about the history of the resurrection of Jesus that it relied on the testimony of women. In that culture the testimony of these women would not have been worth much.

The Lord has used unlikely means throughout history to show us, teach us, and remind us that His work for our salvation is real. To this day He uses simple men and women, simple water, and simple bread and wine to show us that the testimony about Him is true. Through these He points us back to His Word and His powerful works that are to be the focus and foundation of our faith that He loves us and saves us from death and the devil.

We pray: Lord, give us Your Holy Spirit and create true belief, true love, and true trust in Your merciful grace toward us in Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Savior. Amen.

On the final day of the Feast of Tabernacles Jesus cries out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” St. John explains that Jesus spoke about the Holy Spirit who would be given after Christ’s glorification in His resurrection and ascension. The scriptures prove this true by telling us of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. As in chapter 4 when Jesus says something similar to the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus promises the living water to quench the spiritual thirst of mankind. In Matthew 5:6 He says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.”

How does the Holy Spirit quench our thirst for righteousness? The Spirit does this by leading us to repentance and faith in Christ’s merits earned for our sake. The Holy Spirit creates faith in our hearts and that faith is counted as righteousness because faith receives the righteousness of Christ. Apart from faith, sinners thirst after spiritual righteousness and dig wells within their own hearts, trying to siphon out even the smallest droplet of righteousness. But the human heart is a well without water, for we have no righteousness of our own. So Christ earns a perfect righteousness for mankind and gives it to all who believe the Gospel. Faith in Christ, created by the Holy Spirit, quenches our thirst for righteousness and gives us peace of conscience and peace with God.

We pray: Lord God Heavenly Father, grant us this living water of Thy Holy Spirit always, that we may not seek righteousness in our hearts or works, but in the true fountain of our salvation, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.



**THURSDAY, APRIL 19: JOHN 7:25-36 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EASTER**

Jesus is bold in the face of His enemies and persecutors. Some in the crowd said, “Is this not He whom they seek to kill? But look! He speaks boldly, and they say nothing to Him.” Christ is bold to speak because His message is not His own, but His heavenly Father’s words.

This same boldness possesses the apostles after Pentecost. How often in the book of Acts did Peter, John, and others speak boldly before the crowds of people and the Jewish authorities who had rejected and murdered Christ? Yet they did not shrink back or waver with fear and cowardice before the enemies of the gospel. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the apostles became embodiments of Psalm 27:1, “The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?”

God gives the same Holy Spirit in baptism which was poured out upon the apostles, so that we are bold to trust God’s promises in the face of trial, cross, and persecution. It is written in Hebrews 10:23, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.” Like Christ speaking in John 7, we know that the One in whom we trust is faithful to all His promises. He forgives our sins when we repent and flee to Christ. He has made us sons in holy baptism. He has promised to never leave or forsake us. “Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech” (2 Cor. 3:12) whenever the Lord gives us opportunity to confess Christ before men.

We pray: Almighty God, grant us boldness to trust Your sure and certain promises, and boldness to confess Your Son before men for the sake of their salvation. Amen.

**MONDAY, APRIL 9: JOHN 21:1-25 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EASTER**

Five times Jesus appeared to His apostles as a group after He rose from the dead. In almost every case, there was a ‘sending’ that took place—Jesus sending out His apostles for the work of the ministry.

Peter, too, was to have a part in that ministry, even though he had three times denied Jesus before men. Three times in today’s reading Jesus gave Peter the chance to confess his love for Jesus, and with each confession of love, Jesus commended His precious sheep and lambs to Peter’s care as their earthly shepherd, that is, as their “pastor,” which means “shepherd.”

But it wasn’t to Peter alone, or even to Peter primarily that Jesus entrusted the pastoral ministry. It was to all the apostles and to all who would later be appointed by the Holy Spirit through the call of the Church as pastors and overseers of the flock of Christ. Although the risen Christ is the Good Shepherd, He tends His sheep through the ministry of the shepherds whom He has given to the Church.

For their part, it must be love for Christ which drives and characterizes their ministry. And for the sheeps’ part, they must not imagine that they have no need of the pastors whom Christ has sent. Pastors faithfully preaching and administering the Sacrament, sheep gratefully being fed by their Shepherd through the ministry of His pastors—this is the good and gracious will of the risen Christ for His Church until He comes again.

We pray: O Lord Christ, we give You thanks for faithful pastors and for the faithful flocks who benefit from and support their ministry. In Your mercy, govern Your sheepfold so that no sheep are ever left without the care of faithful and loving pastors. Amen.

**TUESDAY, APRIL 10: JOHN 2:12-25 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EASTER**

The house of God, the temple in Jerusalem, was the one place on earth where God promised to hear prayer and to accept sacrifices for sin. So Jesus, the faithful Shepherd, could not allow the house of God to be desecrated with profane buying and selling and with the din and filth of animals for sale. It was nothing but a distraction from the prayers which were to be offered there, and from the animals which the priests were sacrificing for the sins of the people. Zeal for His Father's house—and for the people who needed the service of that house—consumed Him.

The sign of His authority over that house was fulfilled on Easter Sunday. The Jews did, indeed, destroy the house of God, the body of Jesus, but He raised it up in three days.

The temple was a temporary symbol, pointing to Christ. God dwells in the body of Jesus, sacrificed for sin once for all and now alive forever and ever. Where Jesus is—that is where God promises to hear prayer. Where Jesus is—that is where God continually views the once-for-all sacrifice made for sin and has promised to show mercy for His sake.

Where is Jesus? He is present for us where He has promised to be: in every assembly throughout the world where His Gospel is preached and His Sacraments rightly administered. The faithful pastor will be zealous for God's house and see to it that Christ is proclaimed purely, with no buying and selling of God's favor, and with no din of false doctrine or mundane distractions to obscure the Son of God.

We pray: Gracious Father, hear our prayers and be merciful to us as we approach You only through Jesus, trusting in His merits. Amen.

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18: JOHN 7:14-24 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY A. EASTER**

“I did one work, and you all marvel.” The one work to which Jesus refers is the healing of the infirmed man by the pool of Bethesda in chapter 5. The Jews sought to kill Jesus because He had done this on the Sabbath (5:16). The Sabbath was the rest day and no work was to be done on the seventh day. Jesus points out the hypocrisy of the Jews by pointing to their practice of circumcision. All newborn males were to be circumcised on the eighth day of their life, even if the eighth day fell on a Sabbath. The Jews did God's work on the Sabbath! Now they want to kill Christ for doing the same, for the work of God is the restoration of sinful mankind.

The Sabbath is for man's benefit, as Jesus points out in the other gospels. The Sabbath was to benefit man by being a day set aside for rest in order to hear God's Word. Through the preaching of the Word, God heals sinful man by proclaiming the gospel of the free remission of sins for Christ's sake. This makes sinners whole because God declares them righteous when they believe that for Christ's sake they have a reconciled God who is a gracious Father and not an angry judge. This faith brings rest to the soul and peace to the conscience burdened with sin, guilt, and regret. Jesus' healing of the infirmed man at the pool of Bethesda is a picture of the work He does in His earthly ministry and now through the preaching of His Word. He makes sinners whole, gives them rest, and restores their souls.

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, grant us faith so that we may daily flee to Christ for true rest of soul and peace of conscience. Amen.

**TUESDAY, APRIL 17: JOHN 7:1-13 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EASTER**

Jesus' family assumes that He seeks renown and glory so they urge Him to go to Jerusalem openly. There all the Jews can see His miracles. Jesus refuses. "I am not yet going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come." Does Jesus lie, since after His brothers have gone up to Jerusalem, He goes in secret? No. The prophet had foretold, "Nor was any deceit in His mouth" (Is. 53:9). Jesus told them that He would not yet go to the feast, nor would He go openly, for St. John writes in verse 1 that the Jews sought to kill Him. When His time had fully come, then He would go up to Jerusalem openly, riding on a donkey while "Hosannas" fill the air. When His time had fully come, then He would go to Jerusalem for all the world to see, not with miracles, but with His sufferings and death for the sins of the world.

Often we, like Jesus' brothers, want to inform God of the appropriate time to act. We pray in impatience. Too often we proscribe the means and manner in which our Lord should grant our requests. This is more than impatience. It is a lack of faith in God because we trust ourselves more than we trust the Lord who has promised to answer prayer. Like Jesus' brothers, too often we assume our ways are the best ways when in reality the time to grant our request has not fully come. Christ reminds us in today's text that His ways are not our ways. His ways are perfect. He hears our prayers and answers them in His wisdom, when the time is fully come.

We pray: Heavenly Father, grant us the patience that comes from trusting You above all things. Amen.

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 11: JOHN 3:22-36 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EASTER**

John the Baptist was a faithful shepherd. His faithfulness was shown in many ways, not the least of which was his humility. He wasn't a preacher because he craved followers or fame. He was a preacher because God had sent him to point people to Christ. He knew that Christ was the heavenly Bridegroom who came to sanctify and cleanse His Church with the washing of water by the word, to shed His blood for her, to make her His bride. That meant that John—and every pastor after him—was not the Bridegroom, but only the friend of the Bridegroom. "He must increase, I must decrease."

Still, what a privilege to be a friend of this Bridegroom! What an honor to be called to point sinners to Him for cleansing!

The faithful pastor does just that. He doesn't preach himself. He doesn't preach to get people to like him or to follow him. He preaches Christ Jesus and Him crucified. If his popularity wanes, it doesn't matter. What matters is that he fulfills whatever role, great or small, that the Lord has for him in directing people to the only One who can shelter them from God's wrath. The motivation of a faithful pastor is love for Christ and love for souls, for the wrath of God abides on all who don't believe in Christ, as John says. And as Paul says in Romans 10, "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"

We pray: O Lord Jesus, bless Your Church with humble pastors who are devoted to pointing sinners to You, who loved us and gave Yourself for us to save us from wrath and punishment! Amen.

**THURSDAY, APRIL 12: JOHN 4:1-27 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EASTER**

Jesus' encounter with the adulterous Samaritan woman at the well highlights the perpetual challenge faced by all preachers of the Gospel: What do you do when you know that the person standing in front of you is spiritually dead, and you have the very water of life that can raise that person from the dead? You can't force them to drink it. How, then, do you pass it on?

What did Jesus do? He initiated a conversation which quickly led to a discussion of spiritual truth. He spoke of His ability and His willingness to give living water to whoever wants it. He exposed her adultery with a sign of His omniscience. He revealed her idolatry and false worship as a Samaritan. And then He revealed Himself as the Christ, as the One who had come to atone for sins and to reconcile sinners to God. In other words, He simply preached the Law and the Gospel, with genuine kindness and sincerity.

As we know, many times Jesus preached the Word, and His hearers didn't want the water of life He offered, stubbornly refusing to believe the Gospel He spoke. But in this instance, the word He spoke brought the woman to faith.

The faithful pastor can do no better than to imitate Jesus, taking advantage of the opportunities that present themselves to speak the Law and the Gospel with unbelievers, some of whom will be led by the Holy Spirit to drink and live forever. And all of us can look for opportunities to have conversations like the one Jesus had at the well, even if it's as simple as inviting someone to church.

We pray: Merciful God, grant us opportunities to bring Your living water to others, boldness to speak, and wisdom to know what to say. Amen.

**MONDAY, APRIL 16: JOHN 6:60-71 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EASTER**

By worldly standards Jesus is a failure. The great multitude leaves Christ because of His doctrine. "From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more." Being offended at His teaching, they abandon the teacher. What had begun as a great crowd is now reduced to twelve men, one of whom has been led astray by the devil. Most people, upon experiencing such a terrible reversal of fortune, would rush after the defectors and beg them to return to the fold. Many in our day see people leaving the church and rush to soften the Christ's doctrine in order to appeal to fleshly understanding and human reason.

Jesus does neither. He asks the Twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" His question brings forth a beautiful confession of faith from Peter. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

By this the Holy Ghost teaches us that the size of the crowd or the number of people in a church is not a sure sign of God's blessing and favor. Rather, "narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:14). Whether the church is large or small is irrelevant. We do not rely on numbers, for that is the Lord's business. We rejoice that we have the words of eternal life, Christ's pure doctrine in all its articles. This is the sure sign of God's blessing and favor, that we have pure doctrine and clear confession of Christ for our salvation.

We pray: O God, grant us eyes to see Your true blessing upon our churches, Your Word purely preached and a true confession of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

“[T]here are two modes of partaking of the flesh of Christ; the...spiritual, concerning which Christ, John 6:54, especially speaks [note: especially, not solely; while the Lord’s Supper hadn’t been instituted, so those who heard Jesus wouldn’t immediately understand, those who read John’s record decades later would see what the Formula of Concord now details], and which is effected only by the Spirit and by faith, in the preaching and in the meditation on the Gospel...without which spiritual partaking...[the] oral eating in the Lord’s Supper, is not only unprofitable, but also injurious and culpable. But this spiritual eating is nothing else but faith, that is, to hear the Word of God, (in which is offered unto us Christ...with all the blessings which he obtained for us with his body given unto death for us, and with his blood shed for us—namely, the grace of God, remission of sins, righteousness, and eternal life,) to embrace the same with faith...and to support ourselves by it in every time of need and in all temptations.

“The other mode of partaking of the body of Christ is oral or sacramental, when in the Lord’s Supper, the true, essential body and blood of Christ are received and partaken of orally, by all who eat and drink the consecrated bread and wine, in this holy sacrament. Believers receive the body and blood of Christ as a sure pledge and confirmation that their sins are certainly remitted, and that Christ dwells and is efficacious in them; unbelievers, also, receive the body and blood of Christ orally, but to their judgment and condemnation.

[Thus,]...Christ...requires...spiritual eating, when he further says: ‘This do in remembrance of me;’ for here he demands faith.” (Formula of Concord, Full Declaration, VII:61-65 Henkel trans.)

Lord Jesus, grant that we always eat Your flesh with both mouth and heart, that we receive not injury. Amen.

The fields were white in Samaria as Jesus stood by the well with His disciples. All they had to do was look up and see the people streaming out of the city to come and listen to Jesus. Jesus had sown the seed of the Word with the Samaritan woman. But the Prophets of the Old Testament had also done their work. And the temple rituals in Jerusalem had done their work. And the faithful Jews who traveled through Samaria had done their work, simply by the witness of their faithfulness. The Samaritans had been exposed to all these things over time, and now, finally, they were ready to listen, and Jesus’ disciples would be there to gather in the fruit of the labors of others.

The fields aren’t always white, though. People don’t always come streaming out of the cities to hear the Gospel from a faithful pastor. In most places of the world, the seed was sown long ago, and others who have gone before us have labored long and hard in the ministry of the Word. Sometimes there’s still more sowing to do, sometimes more labor. In some places the seed barely grows. From some places the passing rain shower of the Gospel may have to pass on due to the hardness of men’s hearts. And in other places, there may yet be an abundant harvest to be reaped.

In every case, whatever the condition of the fields, the faithful pastor must labor while it is day. But he knows he doesn’t labor alone. Others have labored before him, Christ continues to labor with him, and there is a reward that awaits him, if he doesn’t lose heart.

We pray: Lord Jesus, send laborers into Your fields, and sustain those whom You have sent. Amen.

**SATURDAY, APRIL 14: JOHN 4:39-45 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EASTER**

Lutherans don't give personal testimonies in our services, as some churches do. But that doesn't mean there's no place for personal testimonies in a Christian's life. On the contrary, the woman of Samaria gave her own testimony, and many people came to listen to Jesus as a result.

But what was that testimony about? Not anything she had done. Not anything she had felt. Not any change in her life, or any description of what Jesus meant to her. Her testimony was about what Jesus had said to her. Her testimony simply passed on Jesus' words. And her testimony also had a purpose: to bring people to hear Jesus for themselves.

It worked. The Holy Spirit used her testimony to begin faith in the hearts of many who heard. Even in those who didn't at first believe, her testimony was effective at getting people to come hear Jesus for themselves. His preaching then confirmed their faith and became the true basis of it, so that after just two days with Him they could confess, "We know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."

The personal testimony of a Christian is good and beneficial, as long as it focuses on who Jesus is and what He has said. It is good as long as it seeks to bring people to the place where the Gospel of Christ is preached by faithful pastors, so that hearers may come to know the Good Shepherd through the teaching of His shepherds, and so come to confess that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.

We pray: O Christ, Savior of the world, bless the testimony of Your people, both pastors and laity, and extend the borders of Your Church, that Your name may be confessed in all the world. Amen.

**FRIDAY, APRIL 20: JOHN 6:30-40 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EASTER**

The Jews were focused on bread, Moses, words, works, and signs, but they failed to see the real focus of all those things, which is Jesus Christ.

From the beginning of time (recorded in the first book of Moses) God was working through His holy Word. He performed gracious works for His people, gave them miraculous signs and wonders, and taught them the ways of faithfulness and righteousness. All these were focused on His Word of promise that the holy Seed would come and defeat sin, death, and the Serpent of Old.

As Jesus said, Moses and the bread in the desert (which was given by God, not Moses) also were focused on Him. Likewise, the Feast of Unleavened Bread was given to Israel by God, through Moses, for the express purpose of reminding them of the signs, wonders, and mercy that He showed to them as He saved them from Egypt.

Jesus is the Christ; the one who saves the true children of God. As the Bread of Life He gives Himself to the people of God entrusted to His care. With the greater use of unleavened bread our Lord gives the Church His very flesh to eat, and in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood He makes us able to proclaim His atoning death on the cross in this Supper until He comes again in glory!

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

**THURSDAY, APRIL 19: JOHN 6:16-29 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EASTER**

No matter how impossible the task—of how much it might appear that we are on our own—trusting in Christ will bring us what is ultimately in the best interest of extending forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. When He tested His disciples, they still struggled with what He says in our reading concerning “working the works of God.” Our flesh still contends against our new man in hearing it, as well.

After the feeding of the 5000, the disciples head toward Capernaum, but Jesus is not in the boat. Instead, He walks to them amidst of a windstorm on the sea. John’s report magnifies God’s monergism—His unilateral work of coming to save us. They had gotten themselves into the middle of nowhere, their boat tossed by the rising sea as they futilely kept rowing. Then, God in the Flesh (Immanuel) appears walking on the roaring waves and they are afraid. He says not to fear, because He is Jesus (“He That Saves His People from Their Sins”). His Word causes them to believe, so they welcome Him into the boat... and are immediately at their destination (because He is their Destination, even as he is their Path there; even as he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, eternal life consists of knowing Him and the Father).

“The works of God,” therefore, are not works that you seek to do, but the work that He does, sending the One in whom to believe and bringing you to faith in Him. All other works must flow from this, or they have no eternal value at all—and those works that flow from faith are also His, because we are His workmanship .

We pray: Thank You, O Lord, for giving us the honor of doing works that please You, solely through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.

**MONDAY, APRIL 16: JOHN 5:1-17 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EASTER**

In six days, God created all things, visible and invisible. He created matter itself, and then shaped it. Having made land and sea, the various gasses that make up our atmosphere, etc., He brought forth plants and animals and rational beings—beings of spirit alone and of spirit and flesh...and then He stopped creating new things. But did He “rest” in such a way as to stop working altogether? Did He stop sustaining the universe on that first Sabbath and demand that all things function without Him on His “day off”?

Obviously, He continued to sustain all things by His Word, as St. Paul tells the Colossians. The Father continued to work—and, especially, to work for mankind through every Sabbath, by sending the Holy Spirit to bring sinners to faith in the coming Christ through that same creating and sustaining Word!—and Jesus’ healing simply follows that same pattern, expressing that same thought: Man can only rest because God continues to work.

Since the first one in the pool would be healed, one might get the idea that healing came to whoever ‘won the race’. This man, though, already confesses that he would need someone else to get him to the pool, that he wasn’t sufficient of himself to “achieve healing.” Jesus makes it clear that He is the power behind the healing that was being done, that He was continuing to work so that Man could have rest. That rest includes rest from the Law itself, because as Law Giver and Law Fulfiler, He can certainly tell this healed man to carry his bedding home without worrying about whether either has transgressed a man-made addition to the Sabbath’s requirements.

We pray: Thank You, Lord Jesus, for winning true and everlasting rest by fulfilling the Law for us, and giving it to us through faith in You. Amen.

**TUESDAY, APRIL 17: JOHN 5:18-30 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EASTER**

Honor and subjection seem worlds apart to us today. Yet, the rulers and bosses are to serve the good of those whom they oversee, even while subjects and employees are to work for the benefit of those who have been placed over them.

In the Scriptural pattern of marriage, it is the one who submits herself to her husband that is the honored one in the marriage, while the groom's position of headship is to be used only to bring her to a most blessed state. He is to weigh her down with glory, to wash away every spot and blemish and wrinkle, so that she stands blameless and perfect in his sight. That is what Christ has done for us as His Bride, the Church—and He has done it not by the Law, but by the Gospel. He makes us clean through faith in His blood and righteousness, presenting us to Himself as glorious based solely on His own merit. It is the freedom and joy this gives that causes our new man to “live under Him in His kingdom and to serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.”

Of course, our dear Lord Jesus Himself—true God, equal with the Father!—subjected Himself to the Father and would not do anything but the Father's will. While His will and the Father's were one, He still makes this distinction so that we may learn how an equal can be subject and how that role He took to save us does not diminish the need to honor Him, but makes it even more apparent: if we do not honor Him and His work, we cannot claim to honor the Father, as what Jesus does—even healing on the Sabbath—is the Father's will.

We pray: O Holy Spirit, cause us ever to honor the Father by honoring the Son through faith in Him and His work for us! Amen.

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18: JOHN 5:31-47 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY A. EASTER**

The Law of God rightly accuses us of our many sins. The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ tells us that our sins are forgiven, that we are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus, not by our works according to the Law (Eph. 2:8-9). These are good and holy concepts that the Lord gives us in His Word.

Unfortunately, Satan and false teachers take these ideas and misapply them. Satan says things that sound like the Gospel. “You will not surely die...you will be like God...” (Gen. 3:4-5). Or he can offer comfort from the Psalms, “He shall give his angels charge over you...” (Ps. 91:11, Matt. 4:6). But they are twisted lies. False teachers follow his lead and make themselves seem faithful and pious by keeping their own version of the Laws given through Moses. They call themselves faithful children of God while they are careless and rebellious against what He actually says to them.

The true Son of God teaches us to repent when we are rightly condemned by the Law, and to believe the Gospel of our forgiveness in Jesus Christ's Words and works. We are made holy by Him alone, declared righteous on account of the faith He creates in us, and enabled to do righteous works on account of His power and help.

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