

SATURDAY, JUNE 30: ROMANS 3:1-31 4TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

The people were often divided into two groups: Jews and Gentiles. This division was not based on race at all. Simply put, the Jews had “the oracles of God,” and the Gentiles did not. When the Jews referred to the Gentiles as dogs, it was because the Gentiles did not practice the distinctions concerning clean and unclean foods, the Sabbath observance, or marital chasteness. The Jews observed that the Gentiles lived like dogs, doing whatever came up in their sinful minds. But despite the great advantage of knowing God’s commandments, no one is saved by the Law. “They are all under sin.”

Even more important than the righteous requirements of the Law, the Gentiles did not know about the promise of salvation through faith in the Savior. The promise of reconciliation in the Old Testament was revealed in the New Testament—“the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.” Without the Word of God the Gentiles would not have known that God would justify freely by His grace. The Jews should have known and believed in Jesus Christ, whom God set forth as the propitiation for all sins. That many Jews didn’t believe in Christ is a sad fact. “Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar.”

Our God is the God of both Jews and Gentiles! Through the Law all the world becomes guilty. Apart from the Law, by the revelation of the Gospel, “a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”

We pray: Holy God, we justly are judged to be guilty by the Law, but we rejoice that You declare us righteous through faith in the holy and righteous Son of God, our Savior. Amen.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



JUNE 4—JUNE 30, 2018

**A PUBLICATION OF
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF
NORTH AMERICA**

The Calendar

June 3	Trinity 1
June 5 (T)	St. Boniface, Martyr
June 10	Trinity 2
June 17	Trinity 3
June 24	Trinity 4/The Nativity of St. John the Baptist
June 25 (M)	Festival of the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession
June 29 (F)	St. Peter and St. Paul, Apostles

2018 Synod and Seminary Graduation

This year's Diocesan Synod will take place at Salem Lutheran Church (Malone, Texas) during the week of June 25–29. (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.

FRIDAY, JUNE 29: ROMANS 2:1-29 4TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

St. Paul is preaching the same sermon which Jesus preached in Matthew 7:1-5, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." In Romans 2 some were judging others with the Law, but not applying the same Law to themselves. They would acquit themselves of judgment, but not others. These moralists even scorned the need for repentance, thinking they were better than others.

The believer in Christ lives a life of daily repentance and trust in the Gospel for salvation. It's not that believers don't use the Law to judge. We use it without discrimination, even judging ourselves. Salvation is not simply outward behavior, but inward faith in Jesus Christ. "He is a Jew who is one inwardly." Those who live lives of repentance and faith are not "just hearers of the law," condemning others, but the justified in Christ are "doers of the law," applying the Word to their own lives daily.

We pray: Lord, the riches of Your goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering lead us to repentance. Give us thankful hearts of faith that trust in Your Son for our salvation. Inspire rightful thinking in us and direct us to act in accordance with Your teaching. Amen.

The words, “I am not ashamed of the gospel...,” is a great understatement. St. Paul boasts about the Gospel! He is always preaching the message of forgiveness. He loves the good news about Jesus Christ! In another place Paul says, “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). There are others who spend all their time speaking about the law (Galatians 6:12), or about genealogies (Titus 3:9), or about myths (1 Timothy 1:4). Those are the ones who are ashamed of the message of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. The reason for which St. Paul is so crazy about speaking the Gospel is because He knows what the Gospel is. The promise of the forgiveness of sins is not just a story, but the message which God uses to create faith and thus convert people.

All of the Holy Scripture can be divided into the Law and the Gospel. In the Law “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...” “The righteous judgment of God [is] that those who practice such things are deserving of death.” However, the Gospel is the place where God is powerfully working to create faith and work salvation. Through faith in Christ the righteousness of God is revealed and given out.

We pray: Heavenly Father, when Your Law reveals that by my sin I deserve death, comfort me with the Gospel message of forgiveness of sins and the gift of Christ’s righteousness. Amen.

“It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” This is a popular saying at the time of the writing of the account of Saul’s conversion. Farmers used teams of oxen to till the land. The farmer would move the oxen along by using a goad, a long pole with a pointed piece of iron on the end. If an ox were to kick back against the goad, the goad would be driven into the flesh of the ox as a result. Thus, the more the ox kicked, the more the ox would hurt himself.

Saul sought nothing but to harm the followers of Christ. In doing so Saul was really persecuting Jesus, for those who believe in Christ are members of His body. But the harder Saul fought against Jesus, the more he was “kicking against the goads.” Saul was really doing harm to himself. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31).

Jesus confronted Saul with the truth of Saul’s sin. Though Saul thought he was serving God by persecuting Christ’s followers, Saul was in fact attacking the God whom he thought he served. In seeing, Saul did not see the truth. Yet, with scales covering his eyes, Saul was led to see the truth of God’s forgiveness in Christ. The scales fall off, Saul is baptized, and he preaches the truth of forgiveness that was granted him in Christ.

We pray:

The will of God is always best And shall be done forever;
And they who trust in Him are blest, He will forsake them never.
He helps indeed In times of need, He chastens with forbearing;
They who depend On God, their Friend, Shall not be left despairing. Amen. (TLH #517, st. 1)

There are two important things to note about Peter's encounter with Cornelius and the reaction of these two men. The first is Cornelius' reaction to the arrival of Peter: "As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him." Overreaction? Cornelius was told by an angel to request Peter come to his house. Cornelius knew this was no ordinary man since Peter was the one who had preached with great authority the sermon on Pentecost.

The second thing to note is Peter's reaction to Cornelius' way of greeting him: "But Peter lifted him up, saying, 'Stand up; I myself am also a man.'" Peter knew he was just a man. The difference in Peter's life was that Jesus selected him to be a disciple. There was nothing about Peter worth worshipping, for he was a sinner. Peter was simply a person chosen by Christ to preach the Gospel.

Both Cornelius and Peter recognized their respective roles. Cornelius knew Peter was sent by God to preach "all the things commanded [him] by God," and Peter knew that he was just a man. He was a man entrusted by God to speak the Word that God had given to him.

We pray:

God is my Comfort and my Trust, My Hope and Life abiding;
And to His counsel, wise and just, I yield in Him confiding.
The very hairs, His Word declares, Upon my head He numbers.
By night and day God is my Stay, He never sleeps nor slumbers. Amen. (TLH #517, st. 2)

The announcement of the good news of our Savior did not begin with the New Testament, but was promised beforehand by the Old Testament prophets. The heavenly Father told King David that one of his descendants would be the promised Messiah. Jesus was that Seed of David! The second person of the Trinity was born "according to the flesh." The Nicene Creed says He "was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man." Isaiah foretold that our Savior, according to the flesh, was as a regular man. "He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him" (Isaiah 53:2).

Nevertheless, in His words and works, the man Jesus Christ showed Himself to be the Son of God. By His teaching with authority Jesus showed Himself to be the only One who came down from heaven. In His miracles Jesus showed Himself to be of the same substance as the Father. Finally, it was in His resurrection from the dead that Jesus "was declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness." St. Paul's apostleship and the faith of the Roman believers were the result of someone's preaching of the fulfilled resurrection of the God-Man Jesus Christ. When the Lord sends you a pastor to preach the Gospel to you, receive His grace with thanksgiving.

We pray: O Lord, through the preaching of the Gospel, bring forth in us the fruits of faith. Amen.

God had a plan to move St. Paul from Jerusalem to Rome in order to spread the message of the good news of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ there, as well. When first arrested in Jerusalem, “the Lord stood by him and said, ‘Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome’ ” (Acts 23:11). When St. Paul arrived in Rome, he was confined to house arrest for 2 years. Three days after arriving in Jerusalem, St. Paul met with the leading men of the Jewish synagogues in Rome. Though they knew of St. Paul and had heard people speak against that Jewish sect which we call Christianity, they had not heard of St. Paul’s case and his appeal to Caesar.

These leaders and others returned on another day and heard St. Paul bear witness as God had told him he would do in Acts 23:11. Paul “...explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.” In his testimony the Apostle Paul emphasized “the hope of Israel,” which is none other than our Savior, Jesus Christ.

God brought the message of salvation to you as well. You are saved through faith in Christ. Paul’s witness under house arrest in Rome was a part of God’s plan. As the Apostle to the Gentiles, we give thanks that God used him to write many books of the New Testament.

We pray: Almighty God, give me the desire to attend the service of the Word and Sacrament that I may have a sure and certain faith in the hope of Israel, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The scattering of people as a result of persecution is an awful thing. Many times the people were persecuted by close friends and family. They were uprooted, and they left behind most of their earthly possessions. But as we heard in today’s reading, the scattered people were used by God.

“For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel” (Augsburg Confession, article V). It pleased God to use these scattered people to preach His Word in the lands where they were driven. They preached the Word.

We, too, are to tell people about the hope within us when the opportunity arises. But what if we fail to do so? The fact is, we often fail to tell people about Jesus. But the greater fact is, in spite of our failures, God does not fail. “This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day” (John 6:39).

Alas, when we fail to tell someone about Jesus, it is we who are missing out. We are missing out on the opportunity to speak. And if it be God’s will, He will send someone else to speak to that person. After all, He intends to lose no one.

We pray:

Lord Jesus, this I ask of Thee, Deny me not this favor:
When Satan sorely troubles me, Then do not let me waver.
Keep watch and ward, O gracious Lord, Fulfill Thy faithful saying:
Who doth believe He shall receive An answer to His praying.
Amen. (TLH #517, st. 3)

You may have noticed a sort of ebb and flow to the accounts recorded in Acts. There are times of seeming triumph, like Peter preaching on Pentecost, and then times that seem like defeat, when James is killed and Peter is thrown into prison. Yet despite all the ups and downs that occur to God's people in the Book of Acts, one thing remains unvarnished: "the word of God grew and multiplied."

Such is the power of God's Word. Nothing can stand in its way, nor will God suffer fools to think of themselves as god. In Peter, Herod thought he had captured a prize he could parade before the people. Yet God delivered Peter from prison and left Herod to the worms.

As we live our lives in the vale of tears, we find ourselves struggling against the forces of evil. Indeed, Satan wishes to devour us. But our solace is not to be found in escaping the tribulations of this world. Our comfort is when we find safe harbor in the wounds of Christ and understand that as members of His body we will share in His sufferings.

Not every Christian may receive a miraculous deliverance from evil as did Peter. But every Christian has the same promise from God that He will never leave nor forsake you, especially in the hour of death. Our strength lies within the One who has overcome death.

We pray:

When life's brief course on earth is run And I this world am leaving,
Grant me to say: "Thy will be done," By faith to Thee still cleaving.
My heavenly Friend, I now commend My soul into Thy keeping,
O'er sin and hell, And death as well, Through Thee the victory reaping. Amen. (TLH #517, st. 4)

In Acts 19:21 "Paul purposed in the Spirit" to go to Jerusalem, and then Rome. The circumstances by which St. Paul was to testify in Rome were probably not what he had anticipated. Over time the details gradually became clear. The prophet Agabus foretold that the Jews of Jerusalem would have Paul arrested (Acts 21:10-11). After his arrest the Lord Himself assured him saying, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome" (23:11).

In today's text St. Paul is a prisoner on his way to Rome. His boat is in the midst of a great storm in which "all hope" of being saved had been abandoned. An angel assures him, "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you." Although shipwrecked, none of those aboard the ship would perish. St. Paul trusted in this promise and proclaimed it to those aboard the ship. The centurion relied on this promise when he averted the sailors' scheme to surreptitiously leave in the boats, and later overruled the soldiers' plan to kill all the prisoners.

Things most likely will not go as we have anticipated. Nevertheless, as we travel through this world, we do have God's promise of forgiveness in Jesus Christ (Mark 16:16). We have His promise in temporal things too. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). We have the promise that "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

We pray: Everlasting Father, give us faith to rely and act upon Your promises. Amen.

“But he [Paul] said, ‘I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason.’ ”

King Agrippa suggests to Paul that his much learning has driven him mad. This is his response: “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason.” In a world where everything is thought to be relative, claiming that there is a truth to which one must submit does indeed come across as madness. In our day, perhaps even more than in that one, people are going to think we’re crazy too.

Let them, and let us keep on speaking the truth as Paul did to Agrippa, expressing his profound desire that Agrippa would also become a Christian. Against the skeptic’s accusation of madness, God grant us grace that we too may respond that we speak words of truth and reason.

We cannot use logical reasoning coercively, as though we could argue someone into the faith. Only the Holy Spirit can ultimately convert the soul. What we can do is demonstrate that faith is not something that requires us to shut off our brains. The Word of the Lord is indeed the truth, and where someone thinks it unreasonable, it is their reason and not God’s Word that is flawed. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not only the truth, but it is the only saving truth we have been given. God grant us grace to stand this ground.

We pray: “Merciful Lord, I give You thanks that You have given me the Holy Spirit, that I may believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Have Your use of my mouth, as it may please You, to open the ears of others to hear Your Word and to convert their souls; in Jesus’ name. Amen.

“For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24). Elymas was such a false prophet. As a sorcerer, he could perform “great signs”. He could wow the people with his sorcery in an attempt to deceive people in the name of God, which is a violation of the Second Commandment. Thus, Elymas stood before the proconsul defying Barnabas and Saul, all in the hope of turning the proconsul away from Christ.

Such modern day “sorcerers” abound and can be seen on TV. They perform so-called miracles in order to wow their audiences, thereby deceiving many people into thinking they are authentic messengers from God. While it appears that various and sundry maladies and illnesses have disappeared from those who were supposedly healed, the only thing that disappears is the money from the wallets of those deceived.

God would not tolerate such deception. Through the voice of Saul, Elymas’ eyes were blinded. The real power of God, not deceptive sorcery, was demonstrated by Saul, and as a result the proconsul believed.

The real power of God continues to show through in spite of the deceptiveness of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. While the false prophets on TV may not be going blind, God’s power is still active in our lives as the Holy Spirit works daily to lead us to repent of our sins and to trust in Christ for forgiveness.

We pray:

I leave all things to God’s direction, He loveth me in weal and woe;
His will is good, true His affection, With tender love His heart doth glow.
My Fortress and my Rock is He: What pleaseth God, that pleaseth me. Amen. (TLH #529, st. 1)

“For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake” (Acts 9:16).

Indeed, Saul found out the hard way what it was to be a preacher of Christ crucified. He faced opposition at every turn. In Lystra Saul is stoned to the point where he is dragged out of the city and left for dead! By God’s grace he survived. But all the more alarming than being left for dead is the fact Saul went back to Lystra. Saul was concerned about the souls of those who witnessed his supposed demise at the hands of the wicked. He wanted the faithful to know the truth: “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”

The Christian life is a paradox. It is the easiest thing in the world because God has done, is doing, and will do everything to assure your salvation. Yet, it is the hardest thing in the world because every day Christians are assaulted by the devil, the world, and their own sinful flesh.

Paul would ask the question that plagues the troubled heart of the Christian: “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24).

We pray:
My God desires the soul’s salvation, Me also He desires to save;
Therefore with Christian resignation All earthly troubles I will brave.
His will be done eternally: What pleaseth God, that pleaseth me.
Amen. (TLH #529, st. 5)

“[Paul] answered for himself, ‘Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all.’ ”

St. Paul defends himself. Roughly paraphrased, he claims “I haven’t offended in anything at all.” It is important to keep the distinction between “civic righteousness” and “righteousness that avails before God” clear in our minds. Many even who call themselves Lutherans confuse it, and too much of the rest of the Christian world has no concept of this distinction at all.

Before God, we can not say we are innocent by our own merits. We are by nature sinful and unclean, and in thought, word, and deed, by what we do and by what we fail to do, we daily add to our own sinfulness. We can never be good enough to deserve the approbation of God.

But before men, when we are falsely accused of offending either against the law or against reasonable social norms, we should by all means insist that we are not guilty. Maintaining and defending our own reputation can very much serve the Gospel, especially when the false narrative is “look what awful people those followers of Christ are.”

God grant us this day, and all days, not to offend in anything, either against the law or against common decency.

We pray: Lord God, before You I plead guilty of all sins. As You graciously forgive me for Jesus’ sake, I pray also preserve me this day from any offense that would bring shame to the pure confession of the holy Faith, through Jesus Christ, my dear Savior. Amen.

THURSDAY, JUNE 21: ACTS 24:1-27 3RD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

“But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.”

Paul had been accused of offending Judaism. As he offers his defense he makes it very clear that “the Way” (this was what Christianity was first called) was in fact the rightful continuation of the faith of his Jewish fathers, and that he did indeed believe what was written in the Old Testament (which he calls “the Law and the Prophets”).

Lutherans to this day face a similar challenge. “Wasn’t Lutheranism invented 500 years ago?” No, not really. Just as Christianity rightly embraced the fulfillment of the Old Testament in Christ Jesus, Luther proclaimed the true Faith in continuity with the teachings of the Prophets and the Apostles, over against the innovations of Rome. Lutheran congregations that uphold the clear confession of the Reformation are part of the same Way that Paul confessed.

Know the Scriptures. Worship the God of our fathers according to those Scriptures. Most of all, hold to the Gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ. Herein, and herein alone, is our legitimacy and sufficiency in Christ Jesus.

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, grant me by Your Holy Spirit truly to love Your Word, devoutly to read it, rightly to understand it, and faithfully to live according to it, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Second Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE XIII.

Of the Use of the Sacraments, they [the Lutheran theologians] teach, that the Sacraments were ordained, not only to be marks of profession among men, but rather to be signs and testimonies of the will of God toward us, instituted to awaken and confirm faith in those who use them. Wherefore we must so use the Sacraments that faith be added to believe the promises which are offered and set forth through the Sacraments.

They therefore condemn those who teach that the Sacraments justify by the outward act, and do not teach that, in the use of the Sacraments, faith which believes that sins are forgiven, is required.

—The Augsburg Confession

In yesterday's Collect we prayed, "O Lord, who never fails to help and govern those whom You do bring up in Your steadfast fear and love, make us to have a perpetual fear and love of Your holy name." In all of our readings from Acts this week we are strengthened and assured that the Holy Trinity does, indeed, still today, guide us and keep us in His care.

When Paul and Barnabas came to Antioch they preached and taught the Law and Gospel in its truth and purity. However, it is never very long after the Word of God is preached until false teachers come in and lie. This happened in the Garden of Eden. It happened on St. Paul's missionary journeys. And it still happens today. False teachers always try to get the last word on God. They try to convince God's people that maybe God needs a little bit of our help to save us.

Because of our Biblical Lutheran teaching we realize that we are saved only by God's grace—given to us by God through faith alone. That faith is worked in us by God through Word and Sacrament. No "good" works, no keeping of the Law does anything toward our salvation. In his explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles Creed, Luther writes: "the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." Only the work of the Holy Spirit, working through Word and Sacrament, can give me eternal life.

We pray: O Lord, who never fails to help and govern those whom You do bring up in Your steadfast fear and love, make us to have a perpetual fear and love of Your holy name, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

"And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul."

Paul had been brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious governing assembly. It was made up of Pharisees and Sadducees, and they disagreed about much. They didn't agree about whether or not angels were real, and more importantly, they didn't agree about whether or not there would be a resurrection of the dead. The only thing they meaningfully agreed on, at least for the moment, was that they didn't like Paul and the message of Christ.

Paul declared his belief in the resurrection, which gets these two groups arguing with each other, and the Roman commanding officer finally orders his soldiers to take Paul away. Some of Paul's frustrated opponents then decide to take this extreme oath to kill him.

When you tell God's truth, this happens. People get angry and hostile toward you in a manner that seems irrationally disproportionate to the particular issue at hand. This is because there are spiritual forces behind that kind of hostility. Keep speaking the truth. Speak it gently, and with love, but speak it. The Lord will have His use of your faithful words.

We pray: Lord God, grant me by Your Holy Spirit courage to speak Your truth faithfully, even in the face of hostility, that Your Word and Spirit may convert hearts and grant true peace in Christ. Through the same Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

Paul is recounting the story of his conversion after having persecuted the Church. It is curious that Jesus says to him “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” We as the Church are truly the Body of Christ, so that when the Church is persecuted, Christ says He Himself is persecuted! Ananias comes to Paul, restores his sight, and then says, “Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

Note what Ananias didn’t say. He didn’t say “arise and be baptized as a public testimony to your having received the Lord on the road to Damascus.” No, Baptism is where the washing away of Paul’s sins would happen, and was therefore by no means a matter to be delayed.

Many miss that today. Apathy combines with false doctrine in our day and age to make people think of Baptism as a small matter, something they’ll get around to (for themselves or their children) “on down the road.” Treasure your Baptism! And speak of it and the forgiveness you received there with a “corrective joy” to those who think little of it, that they too may rejoice in the Lord’s gift of the forgiveness of sins, which was purchased on the cross and delivered in Baptism.

We pray: Lord Jesus Christ, in Your death on the cross You purchased the forgiveness of the sin of the world, and in Holy Baptism You have given that forgiveness to me. Grant me so to rejoice in that forgiveness that I would long for nothing else, but rather order all of my days and all of my deeds according to Your good pleasure. Amen.

Our reading in the book of Acts certainly makes it clear that God, the Holy Trinity, indeed guided His Church in the early days. Through the Apostles and the elders of the Church in Jerusalem God guided the Church through the circumcision problem. He guided Paul and Silas to include Timothy in their ministry. He kept them from preaching in Asia and directed them instead to Macedonia. The Lord used various appearances of angels, miracles, and spiritual guidance for His Church to spread the faith as He willed. In the book of Acts miracles were done to show that the message just preached was the true and abiding Word.

Many people in our world today would like to see these kind of miracles, but would they believe them any more than the Pharisees did? Today, Christ’s Church still performs miracles, but these miracles come in the form of preaching, teaching, baptizing with water, and eating and drinking the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. This is where the miracles are today.

In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus sends out His Church with His authority to make disciples of all nations. How does He say to do this? “Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always.” It is His miracle that the Holy Trinity continues to keep, sustain, and grow His Church through Word and Sacrament, using only fallible men as pastors.

We pray: O Lord, who never fails to help and govern those whom You do bring up in Your steadfast fear and love, make us to have a perpetual fear and love of Your holy name, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13: ACTS 17:1-15 2ND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Paul and Silas spent three Sabbath days in the synagogue at Thessalonica showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the promised Messiah. Our text says “some were persuaded,” but the Jews who were not persuaded became envious, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house where Paul and Silas were staying.

Opposition is always present when the truth of God’s Word is proclaimed. Dr. Luther wrote of this opposition: “In the light of the past, strife is to be expected. He who would teach Christ and confess that He is our Righteousness must soon hear that he is a dangerous man who disturbs everything. ‘These that have turned the world upside down [the Jews said about Paul and Silas, Acts 17:6-7] are come hither also... and do contrary to the decrees of Caesar.’ ” (Compare also Acts 24:5 and Acts 16:20.) Luther continues: “Thus people accuse Luther nowadays of being a disturber of the papacy and the Roman empire. If I were quiet, everything that strongly armed one possesses would rest in peace, and the pope would no longer persecute me. But in that way the Gospel of Christ would be obscured. However, when I speak the pope is confounded and falls. I must lose either the mortal pope or the eternal Christ, and with Him life eternal. But of two evils the lesser is to be chosen. Therefore may the earthly and mortal pope fall rather than the celestial and eternal Christ.” (from *What Luther Says*, p. 843)

We pray: O Lord, who never fails to help and govern those whom You do bring up in Your steadfast fear and love, make us to have a perpetual fear and love of Your holy name, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

MONDAY, JUNE 18: ACTS 21:1-39 3RD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

“Then Paul answered, ‘What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’ ”

It is a classic case of “my will be done” thinking versus “Thy will be done” thinking. It had been prophesied that Paul would be bound and handed over by the Jews to the Gentiles in Jerusalem. Paul was prepared for that. Some of his fellow believers loved Paul, of course, and didn’t want anything “bad” (as their own wills saw it) to happen to him. Just like the faithful people of old, we do that too, without thinking. We envision events unfolding in an unpleasant way, and in knee-jerk fashion try to avoid it.

Paul was thinking with greater piety. He was prepared to face whatever the Lord’s will might be, confident that “the will of God is always best,” as one of our hymns says it.

Dear ones in Christ, God is gracious in matters of this life, and gives us much that is pleasant. But do not insist on the pleasant. When His will is best accomplished by way of our own hardship, whether we can see what good will come of it, or we have to trust God’s goodness by faith, God grant us grace to say “Thy will be done,” and mean it.

We pray: Most merciful heavenly Father, grant us grace to receive both pleasure and hardship from Your merciful hand, trusting that You will use it both for our own temporal and eternal good, and for the good of others, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Third Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE XII. Of Repentance.

In the twelfth article they [the Romanists] approve of the first part, in which we set forth that, to those who have fallen since baptism, the remission of sins can be imparted at whatever time, and as often as they are converted. ...

Let any one of the adversaries come forth and tell us when the remission of sins takes place. O good God, what darkness there is! They doubt whether it be in attrition or in contrition that remission of sins occurs. And if it occur on account of contrition, what need is there of absolution, what does the power of the keys effect, if sin have been already remitted? Here indeed they also labor much more, and wickedly detract from the power of the keys. ... For if the power of the keys do not console us before God, what then will pacify the conscience?

Moreover, the power of the keys administers and presents the Gospel through absolution, which is the true voice of the Gospel. Thus we also comprise absolution, when we speak of faith, because “faith cometh by hearing” (Rom. 10:17). For when the Gospel is heard, and the absolution is heard, the conscience is encouraged, and receives consolation. And because God truly quickens through the Word, the keys truly remit sins before God, according to Luke 10:16: “He that heareth you heareth Me.” Wherefore the voice of the one absolving must be believed not otherwise than we would believe a voice from heaven. And absolution properly can be called a sacrament of repentance, as also the more learned scholastic theologians speak. ... Thus faith is conceived and strengthened through absolution, through the hearing of the Gospel, through the use of the sacraments, so that it may not succumb while it struggles with the terrors of sin and death. This theory of repentance is plain and clear, and increases the worth of the power of the keys and of the sacraments and illumines the benefit of Christ, and teaches us to avail ourselves of Christ as Mediator and Propitiator.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §1, 5, 7, 39–41, 42–43

THURSDAY, JUNE 14: ACTS 18:1-28 2ND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

In much of Christendom today there seems to be a great desire to “just get along” with those around us. Popular Christianity today is very quick to give up the authority of the Bible on many moral, social, and religious issues of our day.

As we have been reading in the book of Acts this week, we know that St. Paul is no stranger to persecution. He has been driven out of town, beaten, and jailed for preaching that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world. In Corinth it starts all over again. How much can he take? St. Paul knew from the time of his baptism that he would suffer many things for the name of Christ (Acts 9:16). But here the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.” Paul was comforted by the Word of the Lord, strengthened for the task.

In our Baptism you and I were brought into the Kingdom of God. By Word and Sacrament He has kept us in that Kingdom. Like He did for St. Paul, the Lord comes to us in His Word, He comes to us in His Body and Blood, He strengthens us and says to us, “Do not be afraid.” He says, “I am with you always; even to the end of the age.”

We pray: O Lord, who never fails to help and govern those whom You do bring up in Your steadfast fear and love, make us to have a perpetual fear and love of Your holy name, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Paul deals with several things in this chapter. First, he finds some “disciples” who had not heard of the Holy Spirit. In this instance Paul teaches them the truth, they receive his teaching, he baptizes them properly, and the truth Paul taught was confirmed by the speaking with tongues. They were received into the Church.

St. Paul taught in the synagogue for three months. Some believed, but “some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way...” Paul withdrew and continued to teach those who would listen. God again witnessed to the truth of Paul’s teaching with signs and wonders.

But when the truth is taught, there is also much opposition to the truth. Why then is there so much talk of peace in the Church? Christ Himself warns that if they persecute Me, will they not also persecute you? This is a warning. When the people of God are proclaiming the truth of His Word, the Bible, there will always be those who will try to stop us from speaking that truth.

Lest this make us fearful, in the Seventh Petition of the Lord’s Prayer we pray “But deliver us from evil.” Dr. Luther says in the Small Catechism, “We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.” Indeed, He will keep us safe.

We pray: O Lord, who never fails to help and govern those whom You do bring up in Your steadfast fear and love, make us to have a perpetual fear and love of Your holy name, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

As we close out this week’s devotions Paul gives us a warning as old as the Word of God: “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.” Paul knows that when his apostolic authority is gone false teachers will try to lead God’s people away from Him. Moses gave this warning, as did Jesus, Luther, and as faithful ELDoNA pastors do also. False teachers will always be around, trying to lead God’s people away from the truth.

In the Small Catechism, Luther’s explanation of the Sixth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Lead us not into temptation,” says, “God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.”

In the explanation of the Third Article he says, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ... or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”

St. Paul had been faithful to preach the “whole counsel of God” and now he prays that pastors of all time will do the same thing. He commends the elders (pastors) to the care of God to keep their people in faith through the pure preaching and teaching of the Word.

We pray: O Lord, who never fails to help and govern those whom You do bring up in Your steadfast fear and love, make us to have a perpetual fear and love of Your holy name, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.