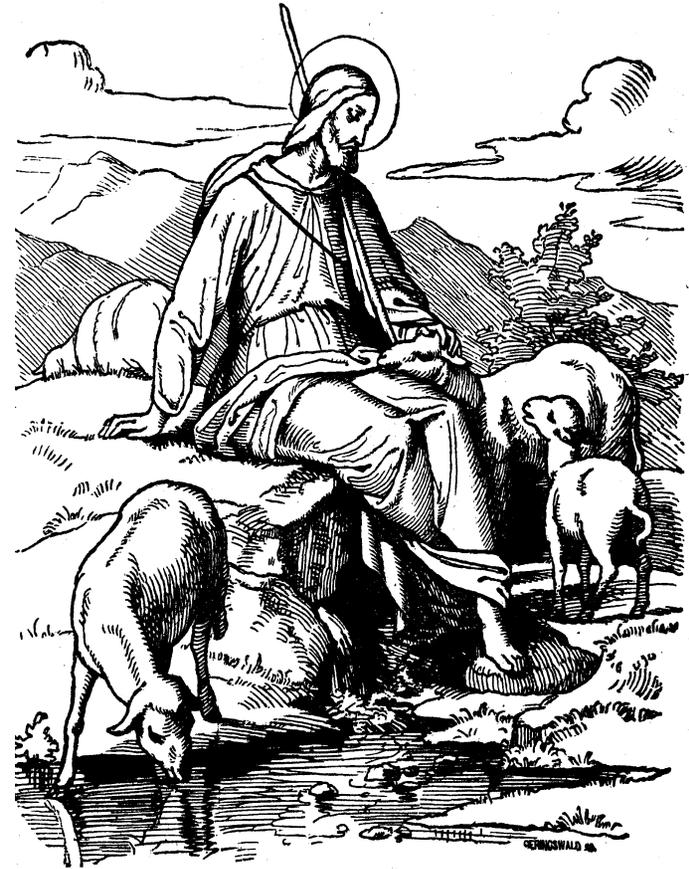


When the Israelites had arrived at Kadesh, in the desert of Paran, Moses sent out spies in accordance with the wishes of the people. They found a land “flowing with milk and honey” but, as they were frightened of the people who dwelt there in the general vicinity of Hebron, whom they described as giants, they spread tales about the nature of the land, that it “devours its inhabitants.” As those who were sent to spy out the land were leaders from each of the tribes, their word apparently had validity among the people. Only Caleb is recorded as having expressed confidence in the ability of the Israelites to possess the land for their own.

There are times in our personal lives and in the life of the congregation when the odds against us seem insurmountable. The temptation to fear is great because the risks seem so high even when measured against great rewards. We may choose to “err on the side of caution,” but perhaps then that is exactly what we are doing—erring! We might then pause for continued prayer, keeping in mind that rashness is not the same thing as courage. But we do well to remember that, if it be according to the will of God, we can do all things through Christ Who strengthens us. (Phil. 4:13)

I will lift up my eyes to the hills—
From whence comes my help?
My help comes from the Lord,
Who made heaven and earth. (Ps. 121:1)

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



MISERICORDIAS DOMINI—ROGATE
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THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. John 10:11-16 (NKJV)

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

THE COLLECT

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

Moses was by no means guilty of “turf protection.” He had asked the Lord for relief from the pressures of his task of leading the Israelites and God had, therefore, shared some of the Spirit that was on Moses with seventy elders in order to give them power and validity in their positions. Even when Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the camp, Moses responded by saying, “Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets.”

Moses’ brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, had been given special gifts by God. There was no one among the women of Israel esteemed as a prophetess above Miriam; and Aaron, as high priest, was spiritual head of the whole nation. Not satisfied, they chose to become jealous of Moses and attacked him under the pretext of his having taken an Ethiopian wife. “Who made you the sole mouthpiece of God?”

There may be any number of people in a congregation with better people skills and speaking ability, but the Lord has called only one to serve as Pastor. Granted, he does not see God directly, as did Moses, or receive visions and dreams, but is, instead fed and directed by the same Word of God which lightens the way for the entire priesthood of believers. Praise God that when he humbly utters the words of Holy Absolution, we may hear him as if Jesus Himself were speaking to us from the chancel.

Most people are familiar with the old expression, “Be careful what you wish for.” The fulfillment of your wish could turn into a nightmare, causing you to regret having desired it at all. James tells us we do not have because we do not ask (4:2). But the Israelites, especially the non-Israelite multitude accompanying them on their journey, were not humbly beseeching Yahweh for a little variety in their sustenance. They were ungratefully complaining about the blessing which was theirs in the manna which they gathered six mornings per week. What’s more, although Moses sorely felt the weight of their grumbling on his own shoulders, the people’s bitterness was directed against God Himself.

We pray regularly, “Give us this day our daily bread”; and God answers that prayer. “God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.” (Lord’s Prayer, SC)

“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matt. 6)

We, as Christians, blessed to be recipients of grace in the kingdom of God, may call upon Him in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks (Second Commandment, SC).

Lesson from the Book of Concord Misericordias Domini Sunday

Article XIV.

Of Ecclesiastical Order, [the Lutherans] teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.

Article XV.

Of Rites and Usages in the Church, they teach, that those ought to be observed which may be observed without sin, and which are profitable unto tranquility and good order in the Church, as particular holydays, festivals, and the like.

Nevertheless, concerning such things, let men be admonished that consciences are not to be burdened, as though such observance was necessary to salvation. They are admonished also that human traditions instituted to propitiate God, to merit grace and to make satisfaction for sins, are opposed to the Gospel and the doctrine of faith. Wherefore vows and traditions concerning meats and days, etc., instituted to merit grace and to make satisfaction for sins, are useless and contrary to the Gospel.—The Augsburg Confession

Article IV. Of the Papacy.

That the Pope is not, according to divine law or according to the Word of God, the head of all Christendom (for this name belongs to Jesus Christ solely and alone), but is only the bishop and pastor of the Church at Rome, and of those who voluntarily or through a human creature (that is a political magistrate) attach themselves to him, not to be under him as a lord, but with him as brethren and associates, as Christians; as the ancient councils and the age of St. Cyprian show.

But today none of the bishops venture to address the Pope as brother; but they must call him most gracious lord, even though they be kings or emperors. Such arrogance we neither will, can, nor ought with a good conscience to approve. Let him, however, who will do it, do so without us. —The Smalcald Articles, Part II, §1–2

God told Moses, “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.” If even the angels, who are pure and holy, must veil their faces in the presence of God’s face (see Isaiah 6), surely sinners cannot see the full force of God’s divine glory without being consumed.

The Lord gave Moses a glimpse of His presence by placing him in the cleft of a rock, covering Him with His hand, and then passing by so that Moses would view just His back. Whatever part of the Lord Moses saw that day, he did not see what we see. He did not see Jesus. Jesus Christ is the express image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). Jesus is God’s full glory, manifest through His human nature so that we sinners can behold Him and receive His life in the place of our death.

You must behold Him with the eyes of faith. You “see” Him, not with your eyes, but with your ears as you listen to His voice in the holy Gospel. This is the voice of the One who promised Moses, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” This is the voice of your Good Shepherd who called out to you and claimed you as His own in your baptism. It is He who says to you, “Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). In the Word of absolution and in the Supper of His Body and Blood he grants you His rest, which is the gracious forgiveness of all your sins.

The Lord made His presence known among the children of Israel in their desert wandering with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. When His presence lifted and moved on after varying periods of time the Israelites would break camp to follow Him, traveling tribe by tribe, grouped together behind four standards or banners, which were rallying and organization points for the people.

Sadly, in our day the visible Church is divided. However, the real Church, the congregation of saints and true believers, rallies not around standards or banners but around the Cross of Jesus, our Savior. We follow where He leads, picking up our own crosses, trusting in a Lord who has never, ever backed down on a promise.

Our life journey can be arduous and fraught with danger. Although, of those who traveled 40 years through the wilderness only Caleb and Joshua survived, we go forward fed not with manna and quail, but with the Word of God, strengthened by the holy Sacraments and assured of our destination. The Israelites traveled toward the Promised Land. We travel toward that home that Jesus has gone ahead of us to prepare, so that where He is we may be also. He has promised, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

“Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass” (Psalm 37:5).

The Lord allowed the people who had been defiled by a corpse to keep the Passover, but levied banishment against those who were clean but did not observe it. Persons who had touched a dead body were considered “unclean,” and therefore strictly forbidden to participate in the fellowship offerings. The Lord graciously provided that they would be able to observe the Passover one month later, after they had become ceremonially clean.

We rejoice today that “unclean” sinners like you and me are welcome to join together in the worship of God, there to be cleansed by the powerful words of Holy Absolution and to feast on the Word of God. We are freed to offer a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Sadly, there are those who consider themselves “clean” already and absent themselves from the assembly of believers. They have cut themselves off from God and His people. Even as the Lord allowed an “extension” for those unable to observe the Passover on the appointed day He also allows us the gift of time during this, His kingdom of grace. We, who are clean and unclean at the same time (saints and sinners), pray for those who have placed themselves outside the community of faith. And we do so rejoicing in God’s grace and mercy.

Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed His blood for me;
 Died that I might live on high, Lived that I might never die,
 As the branch is to the vine, I am His, and He is mine.
 (TLH 342:1)

With Moses safely hidden in the cleft of the rock, and with His hand covering Moses, the Lord passed by. As He did so He proclaimed His Name. What is God’s name? What does He reveal as His identity? He reveals Himself to be a holy and powerful God who punishes sin. Above all, though, He is a gracious, compassionate, forgiving God.

Why did God bother to give His people the Law in the first place, only to immediately forgive them when they broke these commandments? We ask that about Israel, but we should also ask it about ourselves, for we have any number of our own golden calves to which we have bowed.

The answer is “Jesus.” When God’s anger smoked against the people, Moses offered himself for punishment in their place. But he too was a guilty sinner, so his death could not atone for the sins of other sinners. Yet, Moses told Israel that God would send another Mediator, like him, only better than him (see Deuteronomy 18:18).

The better Mediator is our Lord Jesus Christ of whom Moses was a type. Jesus actually did what Moses could only offer. Though innocent, He became the guilty One as the sin of the world was imputed to Him. Because He knew that Jesus would certainly come and die for their sins, God was able to forgive the calf-worshippers at Mt. Sinai. And by the merits of His death and resurrection, He also delivered forgiveness to us in Word and Sacrament, by which we know for certain that our sins are blotted out too.

Moses would go into the Tent of Meeting to receive the Lord's commands for Israel. When he came out to speak with the Israelites and transmit to them all that the Lord had spoken he needed to veil his face, so frightening was the Lord's glory which shined from Moses' face.

In 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 the Holy Spirit tells us what these things mean. Moses' face reflected the awesome glory of the God, whose holy perfection no sinner can live up to. God's Law is the very standard of His own holiness, which no sinner can keep. The holiness of God's Law, above all, exposes our sin, even as it exposes Israel's sin. It leaves us helpless and hopeless. Thus the Law, given through Moses, is the *ministry of condemnation* that dooms sinners to die in their unrighteousness every time it is preached.

There is, however, another word from God for sinners who are drawn to repentance through the preaching of the Law. This word shines with a far greater brilliance than the Law of Moses. It is the *ministry of righteousness*—the Gospel. The Gospel is the preaching of Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world by His self-sacrifice. The Gospel says that in Christ all sin is forgiven.

The Lord spared the firstborn of Israel, taking instead for His own the Levite men from the age of 25 to assist the priests in the tabernacle of meeting. Their preparation for service included sprinkling with water. We would assume it to have been simply clean water, like that used by the priests to prepare themselves for worship. Also, a part of their dedication was the sacrifice of two young bulls; the one a burnt sacrifice, the other a sin offering. The Levites were thus sanctified to the Lord.

We too were sanctified and set apart for the Lord's service, regardless of our vocation on earth, when we were cleansed in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. As with the Levites, it was a washing with simple water, but water together with the Word of God. Through that blessed act of God we share in the death of our Savior Jesus Christ. As He rose again, victorious over sin and death on the third day, so also we emerged from the font not only cleansed, but also sanctified by God and blessed with the promise that we need no longer fear death.

What a day it was—clean water, clean clothing, clean linens, and a clean little you and me—a day marked with joy and congenial company celebrating together! But it all means nothing without the sanguinary sacrificial suffering and death of Christ on the cross.

Not all the blood of beasts On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace Or wash away
the stain.
But Christ, the heav'nly Lamb, Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name And richer blood than they.
(TLH 156:1&2)

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. John 16:23-30 (NKJV)

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

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

THE COLLECT

O God, from whom all good things do come, grant to us, Thy humble servants, that by Thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be right and by Thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The Old Testament priests functioned on behalf of the Lord and in the place of His people. The high priest in particular represented the Lord to Israel, and all of Israel to the Lord as he went about his sacrificial duties in the Tabernacle. Wearing the holy vestments, he was “clothed” in God’s holiness. The stamp of God’s holiness was pressed upon his head in the gold plate of his turban which read, “HOLINESS TO THE LORD.” Likewise, he bore the entire nation of Israel on his heart in the twelve stones of the breastplate that he wore over the ephod.

Jesus is the great high priest of His Church. He is the revelation of God’s holiness and glory toward us, clothed in the garb of our human flesh and blood. He was anointed by the Spirit at His baptism to be both priest and victim, who would win for Himself a holy people by offering the once-for-all atoning sacrifice for sin. By raising Christ from the dead, the Father appointed Him chief and eternal priest to serve as our intercessor and mediator before the throne in heaven (Hebrews 5:1-10; 7:1-28).

All those who believe and are baptized into Christ are clothed in the pure garments of Christ, for through baptism their robes have been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14). Baptized believers are stamped with Christ’s holiness in the forgiveness of their sins. Thus they serve God the Father as his royal priests together with Christ, each according to his or her station and vocation (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

In Exodus 29:45 the Lord had promised that the Tabernacle would be the place where He would graciously “dwell among the children of Israel and be their God.” He would speak to them through Moses and Aaron. Through the ritual sacrifices, meals, and other ceremonies of this place Israel would have safe access to His presence. There they would obtain the blessings of His forgiveness and His abiding protection and care. This was meant to point to Christ, who “came with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation” (Hebrews 9:11). “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

Jesus Christ is *Immanuel*—“God with us.” Jesus has promised, “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). And again, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). God gave the tabernacle and its worship services to Old Testament Israel so that He could dwell with His people. In Christ, God now tabernacles among us.

This is the basis of our worship, for in the Divine Service we, the baptized, gather in Christ’s name and He is present in our midst to act as our God. There He speaks His gracious word of forgiveness and blessing to us. There He feeds us with His own Body and Blood, covered in the tent of bread and wine, that we might share in His holiness and life.

Today’s lesson is meant as a warning to Israel. To those who know the history of Israel through the Old Testament, it seems like a prophecy of exactly what would happen. Israel would walk contrary to the Lord. They would turn their ears away from the Word of the Lord and not listen to their Savior. Pestilence comes. Israel is delivered into the hands of their enemies repeatedly. Famine, war, disease, and sword perpetually follow Israel as divine punishment for their wickedness and apostasy. Yet, even exiled in a foreign land, if Israel confesses their iniquity and treachery and humble themselves, then the Lord will not abhor them, spurn them, or abandon them. The Lord teaches Israel that He will punish them for their sins in order to bring about repentance. Even in His chastisements the Lord will not abandon them completely.

The Scriptures teach us that God disciplines His baptized sons and daughters for their growth, and also so that they learn to repent of their sin and flee from temptation. We pray with the Psalmist, “O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger, Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure” (Psalm 6:1). We know that though He chasten us, it is not in wrath, but to discipline us as sons. Hebrews 12:11 reminds us, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” We know that the Lord’s chastisement is a manifestation of His fatherly love and mercy and that, like Israel, the Lord will not abandon us completely.

FRIDAY, MAY 23: LEVITICUS 26:1-20

CANTATE

“I will set My tabernacle among you, and My soul shall not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.” The Lord wants to walk with His people. The Lord walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day in the Garden of Eden. Sin ruined that walking together and man became estranged from the Lord, choosing rather to be “like God” rather than be content walking as the “image of God.” When the Lord collected His people from Egypt He desired to walk with them. To do this He would need to forgive their sins and cleanse them from their impurity. He would need to give His holiness to them. He did these things through the Divine Service in the Tabernacle where He dwelt with Israel. This was not how the Lord would spend eternity with His people. He desired to walk with them again.

He does this in the incarnation of the Son of God. The second person of the Holy Trinity assumes human flesh so that He may dwell with His people in a way far superior to the Tabernacle and Temple. Christ dies as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, so that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life. He gives the gifts of the cross to His people through the Divine Service of Word and Sacrament, thereby dwelling with us in time so that we may dwell with Him forever in paradise once again.

SATURDAY, MAY 10: EXODUS 40:17-38 MISERICORDIA DOMINI

The glory of God was veiled in a cloud. The cloud acted as a screen to shroud the fullness of the divine presence from sinful eyes in order to prevent their death. In that cloud the Lord God willingly confined His gracious presence as He led Israel safely out of Egypt and through the desert. Now, with the tabernacle completed “the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”

Jesus is the glory of the triune God, veiled in humanity (see John 1:14). Clouds appear in the Gospels to remind us of this. Whenever they appear big things happen. On the Mount of Transfiguration, from a cloud, the Father’s voice disclosed the glory of Jesus. The Father commanded Peter, James, and John to listen to Him, for He is the incarnate Word through whom the Father speaks. And as Jesus ascended into heaven a cloud covered Him.

Jesus’ humanity is the cloud that veils His divinity. The preaching of the Gospel delivers Jesus so that we come to discover “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). Jesus is our place of worship. In Him the Divine Service is enacted. In Him we have access to the Father’s grace, for He brings us near to the Father and presents us to Him. His flesh is our new and living way into the Father’s presence.

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

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

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

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

THE COLLECT

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

We live in a world in which the Lord’s name is misused and blasphemed easily and often. To modern ears today’s lesson may seem harsh. A man blasphemes the Lord’s name and curses. He is brought before Moses and then sentenced to death by stoning. The reason the blasphemer must die is because the blasphemer has cut himself off from his only source of absolution. The Lord says in verse 15, “Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin.” To curse God is to disavow Him and His gifts and judge oneself unworthy of everlasting life. One cannot blaspheme God and simultaneously expect mercy and clemency from God. Since the blasphemer has no mediator to bear his sin, and disbelieves the Word of the true God, he must bear his own sin.

The name of the Lord is a gift for the Christian to treasure and hallow. God’s name is hallowed “When the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God also lead holy lives in accordance with it” (Luther’s Small Catechism). We are given God’s Triune name so that we may call upon Him in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks. To blaspheme our Lord’s name by cursing, false doctrine, and immoral living is to drive the Holy Spirit away from us so that we have no choice but to bear our own sin. May the Lord inspire thankfulness in our hearts for His name and the proper use of His name so that we may call upon Him, worship Him, and rejoice that He bears our sin.

The Day of Atonement was not for Israel to do but for Israel to receive. No work is to be done, and the one who does any work is to be destroyed. By this our Lord wants to teach all Christians that our atonement is not the work of our own hands. During Lent, and every Sunday, we gather to hear of our atonement won by Jesus, and have that atonement applied to us in the absolution and in the Lord's Supper. We have not earned that salvation. We have done nothing because atonement is the work of Jesus and its application the work of the Holy Ghost. So, the entire work of salvation is God's work, not our work.

Israel is also to afflict their souls. The Lord desires true contrition from them, which is to sorrow over their sins, repenting of them and wanting to be rid of them. St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 7:10 that "godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death." The affliction the Lord desires from Israel (in both testaments) is the affliction which leads us to repent of our sins so that we can hear the Gospel. In the Gospel we hear that in Christ our sins are forgiven, our guilt covered, and our shame is taken away. In the Day of Atonement we see a picture of the Christian life. We are commanded to repent, cease our strivings for our own atonement, and receive the atonement of Christ by faith.

The killing, the blood, and the burning in today's reading is quite different from the violence that is called "entertainment" in our age. It is one thing to see a movie or television show where the wages of sin are illustrated in the behavior of people. Villains kill for pride or lust, heroes use force for justice, but the things we watch are typically special effects and parts of stories that have no direct connection to our lives. The bloodshed and violence against the sacrificed animals was real, and those beasts that were killed came from the very livelihood of the people who were gathered to see. Furthermore, these sacrifices were commanded by God, and He revealed His own glory to the people in connection with these things.

In spite of what our "sanitary" society may want us to think, sin is not clean. It is not bloodless and detached from us. By our sinful hearts we are guilty of assault and murder just as much the criminals on TV. There is indeed blood on our hands, but Satan would rather keep us distracted by flickering lights and images rather than realize that fact. But our Lord calls us to see the truth.

In our age we have the blessing of God's glory revealed in the cross of Christ, to which all those bloody sacrifices of the Old Testament were a sign and preview. We are no longer called to gather around the blood of animals. We are gathered around the Body and Blood of the Lamb, Christ Jesus, Who gives us eternal life by the Gospel and Sacraments!

Rebelliousness and carelessness have consequences. Such sins are even more serious when they interfere with the teaching of our Lord's salvation for us. The teachings of God are not trifles to be handled haphazardly, because if we obscure God's holy Words we risk leading others astray from the true saving faith.

The Lord dealt with the sons of Aaron in a serious way. However, consider the significance of their actions. The Lord used fire to show His power by which He takes the sacrifices of man. The "strange" or "profane" fire that Aaron's sons brought before God showed that they disregarded God's commands and gifts, and that they were foolishly relying on their own provisions, rather than that which the Lord had given them.

The similar problem we face now is those false teachers who bring a strange or profane spirit before the altar of our Lord. False teachers seek to conform the Church to the world, or bring the idol's institutions into the holy place of God. Their spirit is not of humility and obedience to God's Word, but of carelessness, even rebellion. Such teachers should be removed from the place of feeding Christ's lambs.

The sins of all mankind have been paid for in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, and He gives us this free gift of salvation and eternal life through the power of His own Holy Spirit and the real gifts of faithful preaching and the sacraments. These blessed gifts should not be confused or poisoned with profane things from sinful men. May He help us to always treasure, support, and grow in these holy blessings. Amen.

The Israelites have a liturgical calendar. Sabbaths are holy and no work is to be done on them so that the Word can be heard and pondered. The Passover is to be celebrated by eating unleavened bread for seven days to remind Israel of her salvation from Egypt. No customary work is to be done on the first and seventh day of Passover. Of course, the Passover lamb, as commanded in Exodus 12, is to be slaughtered and eaten as well. Pentecost arrives and its fifty days culminate with the new grain offering and "with the bread seven lambs of the first year, without blemish, one young bull, and two rams." The liturgical calendar focused upon the sacrificial offerings and the grain/drink offerings. Israel was to seek atonement for her sins in the bloody sacrifices and give thanks to the Lord for His gracious provision in the grain and drink offerings.

The Christian is not bound by Moses, so we are not obligated to refrain from work on the Sabbath. But we are to keep the holy day, which since apostolic times has been Sunday. We keep the holy Lord's Day by being in the Lord's house, hearing the Lord's Word. Our worship also revolves around sacrifice, not the blood of bulls and lambs, but a once-for-all sacrifice of the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Though foreign to us, the liturgical calendar of the Old Testament is much like that of the Church Catholic, designed for our benefit, so that we might set aside days and seasons for gathering around the Word and Sacrament of our Passover Lamb, Jesus.

The Sons of Aaron are to be holy because the Lord who calls them is holy. They will be touching holy things and offering holy sacrifices. They will be wearing holy garments and approaching the Most Holy Place where God dwells to offer the blood of atonement for the sins of the people. The priests, being sanctified by the Lord, must not come into contact with death and defilement. The priest cannot even have a physical defect himself. This burden teaches us about our Lord Jesus, who is the High Priest of the New Testament, because the entire Old Testament priesthood is a portrait of Christ's person and work for us.

Jesus is the only one without physical or ceremonial defect. Jesus is not made holy by God as the Old Testament priests were; Jesus is holy because He is God in human flesh. He is the only perfect man, the only one who is able to enter into the heavenly tabernacle and atone for the sins of the world fully and completely. "But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:11-12). Let us give thanks that through faith our High Priest makes us holy, as He is holy before God the Father in heaven, by forgiving our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness.

"For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect." (Heb. 10:1)

True atonement comes only in Jesus Christ. All the sacrifices commanded by God served to point forward to the full atonement that our Lord accomplished for all mankind. He would finally make us perfect through laying down His own life to bleed and die upon the cross. However, the value of these sacrifices should not be underestimated. Such things taught faith, which is a necessary aspect of God's work of salvation for us.

The sacrifices and other observances that God commanded to His people in the Old Testament taught them, and us, the importance of faith. It is by faith that we believe that Christ has redeemed us and made us righteous as we were baptized into His death. It was also by that same faith that the people of God looked forward and trusted that His promises of atonement would be finished by His Holy Seed.

But it must also be remember that this faith is not from us (see Eph. 2:8). True faith is from God's own Spirit. Faith that comes from man's own reason or assumptions is strange and profane like the fire that Aaron's sons offered and brought about their death. That is why the signs and commands that our Lord gives to us are so important. They are the things by which He shows us our true life and righteousness in Him alone. To Christ Jesus be all the glory! Amen.

“It is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.”

Again, the blood of animals itself did not accomplish forgiveness for God’s people in the Old Testament. They were forgiven because of God’s promise of Christ in connection with these sacrifices.

The people were instructed not to consume the blood of the animals because they were not to see their life coming from these animals. Their life would come from the blood of the firstborn Son of God. This becomes a very significant point when Jesus declares that “My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.” (John 6:55) The importance of faith connected to God’s promises and instructions is emphasized when some do not believe our Lord’s Words and cling to the outward command of not drinking blood.

The simple act of any ceremony can become an idol if it is divorced from the Word of God. But it is by faith that we understand Baptism is not water alone, but water comprehended in God’s command and connected with His Word (see Luther’s Small Catechism). By faith we understand that the bread and wine of the Sacrament of the Altar are His Body and Blood indeed. And by faith we understand that the blood of His atonement on the cross is truly the sacrifice that saves our souls and gives us the hope of the resurrection of our bodies and the life of the world to come! Without His Holy Spirit creating this faith in us these blessings are missed or misunderstood.

May He keep us steadfast in the true faith, and bless us according to the holy blood of our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.

repentance or reproof, but properly nothing else than a preaching of consolation, and a joyful message which does not reprove or terrify, but against the terrors of the Law consoles consciences, points alone to the merits of Christ, and again comforts them by the precious preaching of the grace and favor of God, obtained through Christ’s merit.

7. As to the revelation of sin, because the veil of Moses hangs before the eyes of all men as long as they hear the bare preaching of the Law, and nothing concerning Christ, and therefore do not learn from the Law to perceive their sins aright, but either become presumptuous hypocrites as the Pharisees, or despair as did Judas; Christ takes the Law into His hands, and explains it spiritually (Matt. 5:21 sqq.; Rom. 7:14). And thus the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all sinners (Rom. 1:18), how great it is; by this means they are instructed in the Law, and then from it first learn to know aright their sins—a knowledge to which Moses never could coerce them.

Therefore, although the preaching of the suffering and death of Christ, the Son of God, is an earnest and terrible proclamation and declaration of God’s wrath, whereby men are for the first time led aright to the Law, after the veil of Moses has been removed from them, so that they first know aright how great things God in His Law requires of us, nothing of which we can observe, and therefore should seek all our righteousness in Christ—

8. Yet, as long as all this (namely, Christ’s suffering and death) proclaims God’s wrath and terrifies man, it is still not properly the preaching of the Gospel, but the preaching of Moses and the Law, and therefore a “strange work” of Christ, whereby He attains His proper office, i.e. to preach grace, console and quicken, which is properly the preaching of the Gospel.

Negative.

Contrary Doctrine which is Rejected.

Therefore we reject and regard incorrect and injurious the dogma that the Gospel is properly a preaching of repentance or reproof, and not alone a preaching of grace. For thereby the Gospel is again converted into a law, the merit of Christ and the Holy Scriptures obscured, Christians robbed of true consolation, and the door opened again to the Papacy.

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome

Lesson from the Book of Concord Cantate Sunday

Chapter V. Of the Law and the Gospel.

Statement of the Controversy.

Whether the preaching of the Holy Gospel be properly not only a preaching of grace, which announces the forgiveness of sins, but also a preaching of repentance and censure, rebuking unbelief, which is rebuked not in the Law, but alone through the Gospel.

Affirmative.

Pure Doctrine of God's Word.

1. We believe, teach and confess that the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is to be maintained in the Church as an especially brilliant light, whereby, according to the admonition of St. Paul, the Word of God may be rightly divided.
2. We believe, teach and confess that the Law is properly a divine doctrine, which teaches what is right and pleasing to God, and reproves everything that is sin and contrary to God's will.
3. Therefore everything that reproves sin is and belongs to the preaching of the Law.
4. But the Gospel is properly such a doctrine as teaches what man who has not observed the Law, and therefore is condemned by it, should believe, viz. that Christ has expiated and made satisfaction for all sins, and, without any merit of theirs [no merit of the sinner intervening], has obtained and acquired forgiveness of sins, righteousness that avails before God, and eternal life.
5. But since the term "Gospel" is not used in one and the same sense in the Holy Scriptures, on account of which this dissension originally arose, we believe, teach and confess that if by the term "Gospel" the entire doctrine of Christ be understood, which He proposed in His ministry, as also did His apostles (in which sense it is employed, Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21), it is correctly said and written that the Gospel is a preaching of repentance and of the forgiveness of sins.
6. But if the Law and the Gospel be contrasted with one another, as Moses himself is called a teacher of the Law, and Christ a preacher of the Gospel, we believe, teach and confess that the Gospel is not a preaching of

FRIDAY, MAY 16: LEVITICUS 18:1-6, 20—19:8

JUBILATE

The Lord knows that sins of fleshly desire are a constant temptation to mankind. As with all of God's commands, there is much wisdom and common sense to be considered in these ordinances. Abuse of physical relations can easily harm the mind and the body. Such harmful relations are understandably prohibited by our Lord because of these damages.

God warns us against these things partly because of the immediate hurt they can cause, but He also judges against these behaviors because they can shape and define people's very identities. If one's identity is primarily a "ladies man" or a "homosexual," then his identity is not first and foremost a "Christian." Such people serve two masters, and if their physical desires are given a status anywhere near the priority that God should have, then they have already made God a mere second place. As Luther's Small Catechism reminds us, we are to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. If one's lifestyle is defined by things that are in disregard of the clear prohibitions of His Word, then that person does not hold God above all things.

Our Christian identity is in Christ Jesus. Christ alone was the One Who walked perfectly according to the ordinances of God. He lived righteously so that we could live in Him. For all our sins against the commands of God He can grant forgiveness, but if we seek to ignore or rationalize our transgressions, then we reject that forgiveness and our true identity in Him.

May He keep us steadfast in His Word so that we may walk according to the fullness of life that we have in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Much of the subject for this week's readings has been on blood and sacrifice, which foretell the love God shows us in Jesus Christ's own bleeding and death on the cross. The commandments in today's reading emphasize the love and concern that He would also teach us to have for our neighbors. Overall, it is important that we remember (and remind others who say differently) that God has always been loving and benevolent towards mankind.

In godless societies it is easy to see that man naturally gravitates to selfishness and disregard for his neighbor's well-being. God gives such commandments because we have to be taught and reminded not to be wicked. However, Satan's goal is to turn such things away from our Lord's order. The world tells us that God is mean and oppressive, bloodthirsty and vengeful, and that we can find true goodness and freedom when we remove him from our lives. But the wicked cultures that live by that lie are hardly loving towards their neighbor.

Our society struggles with murder of the unborn, mistreatment of the old, animosity between social and economic classes, and embracing unnatural appearances and relations. When distanced from the benevolent teachings of God, man does not show that he is loving and benevolent. We are by nature selfish and vengeful. Our Lord is the One Who is loving, even in the holiness of His statutes and judgments. By His wise commands He teaches us how to truly love, even in the exercise of justice and discipline. And He truly shows us His own love for us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Who has redeemed us from our sinfulness.

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

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

THE COLLECT

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