

God's Word had been spoken to Jeroboam in 1 Kings 11, promising him the ten northern tribes and promising to establish his house if he would heed the Lord's Word. It was, after all, for failing to heed the Lord's Word that Solomon and the house of David were being punished.

But Jeroboam refused to believe the Lord or heed His Word, setting up instead the infamous high places on the northern and southern borders of his kingdom as alternate (and illegitimate) places of worship to keep the northern tribes from going to God's Temple in Jerusalem, where God Himself had placed His name forever. This attempt to worship the LORD in ways and in places not sanctioned by the LORD was the great sin of the house of Jeroboam and resulted in the permanent destruction of the northern kingdom.

God is serious when He threatens to punish false worship. He condemns false worship so forcefully because He wants sinners to stop looking for Him where He is not found and to seek Him in the one place where He is to be found. In the Old Testament, that place was the Temple. In the New Testament, it is Christ. Every other form of worship is worship of the Law in which man devises his own ways to please God and earn His favor. But true worship is to receive God's blessings where He gives them out: in His Word and Sacraments, where we receive from Christ the gifts that He has earned for us, even eternal life.

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THE HOLY GOSPEL**ST. MARK 8:1-9 (NKJV)**

In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples to Him and said to them, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar."

Then His disciples answered Him, "How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?"

He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?"

And they said, "Seven."

So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and they set them before the multitude. They also had a few small fish; and having blessed them, He said to set them also before them. So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments. Now those who had eaten were about four thousand. And He sent them away.

The COLLECT

O God, whose never-failing providence orders all things both in heaven and earth, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

It is not surprising that Solomon's son Rehoboam, the boy raised in glory and luxury, was determined to hold onto his glory and luxury at all costs. The boy who watched his father turn away from the LORD to accumulate wealth, wives, and idols, was unconcerned about the Lord or the burdens of the people God had placed under his rule. He sought nothing but his own glory and power, and it resulted in the permanent division of the kingdom of Israel.

What a different King we have in Jesus, the Son of David who chose not to be born in a glorious earthly palace, but in a stable. We have a King who chose to set His glory aside for love of mankind; who chose, not only to lighten the burden of sinners, but to take the burden of the Law off their backs and live under it for them, to take the punishment for their sins onto Himself and pay the penalty in their place. Rehoboam promised to make the yoke of Israel heavy, but Jesus promises the opposite: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Therefore, His is an eternal kingdom that will never be divided, nor will His subjects ever be put to shame.

From the beginning God had warned Israel not to intermarry with the pagan nations around them, or else they would be led into idolatry by their pagan wives. But Solomon stopped listening to God's Word when earthly wealth, pleasure, fame, and glory captured his heart and seduced his soul. He turned away from God and clung to his foreign wives "in love." The king's secret idolatry soon turned into open idolatry that led the whole nation of Israel astray. Who would have thought Solomon could fall so hard?

Riches, fame, glory, and unbelieving spouses continue to seduce Christians away from faith in God. The Apostle Paul warned against these and similar things: "Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition" (1 Timothy 6:9). If we think we can ignore God's warnings and stand firm on our own, then we fall into Solomon's trap.

But even amidst the punishments God sent upon Solomon and Israel, He preserved one tribe to Solomon's heirs because of His promise to David of a Son who would reign forever. From this one tribe of Judah has come another Son of David, who stood firm against every assault and temptation, who refused the devil's offer of worldly riches, fame, and glory, and who chose instead to reign as King from a cross. This King now reigns over a kingdom of grace, earnestly calling us away from sin and earthly desires to cling to Him who loved us, and to receive strength from His Word in our daily battles against carnal temptations.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Seventh Sunday after Trinity

Article XXVI.

It has been the general persuasion, not of the people alone, but also of such as teach in the churches, that making Distinction of Meats, and like traditions of men, are works profitable to merit grace, and able to make satisfactions for sins. And that the world so thought, appears from this, that new ceremonies, new orders, new holydays, and new fastings were daily instituted, and the teachers in the churches did exact these works as a service necessary to merit grace, and did greatly terrify men's consciences, if they should omit any of these things. From this persuasion concerning traditions, much detriment has resulted in the Church.

First, the doctrine of grace and of the righteousness of faith has been obscured by it, which is the chief part of the Gospel, and ought to stand out, as the most prominent in the Church, that the merit of Christ may be well known, and that faith, which believes that sins are forgiven for Christ's sake may be exalted far above works. Wherefore Paul also lays the greatest stress on this article, putting aside the law and human traditions, in order to show that the righteousness of the Christian is another than such works, to wit, the faith which believes that sins are freely forgiven for Christ's sake. But this doctrine of Paul has been almost wholly smothered by traditions, which have produced an opinion that, by making distinctions in meats and like services, we must merit grace and righteousness. In treating of repentance, there was no mention made of faith; all that was done was to set forth those works of satisfaction, and in these all repentance seemed to consist.

Secondly, these traditions have obscured the commandments of God; because traditions were placed far above the commandment of God. Christianity was thought to consist wholly in the observance of certain holydays, fasts and vestures. These observances had won for themselves the exalted title of being the spiritual life and the perfect life. Meanwhile the commandments of God, according to each one's calling, were without honor, namely, that the father brought up his family, that the mother bore children, that the Prince governed the Commonwealth,—these were accounted works that were worldly and imperfect, and far below those glittering observances. And this error greatly tormented devout consciences, which grieved that they were bound by an imperfect state of life, as in marriage, in the office of magistrate, or in other civil ministrations; on the other hand, they admired the monks and such like, and falsely imagined that the observances of such men were more acceptable to God. ...

Wherefore our teachers must not be looked upon as having taken up this matter rashly, or from hatred of the bishops, as some falsely suspect. There was great need to warn the churches of these errors, which had arisen from misunderstanding the traditions.

—The Augsburg Confession, §1–11, 18–19

MONDAY, AUGUST 4: 1 SAMUEL 18:10-30

TRINITY 7

Saul was afraid of David and sent him away because the Lord was with David and no longer with him. The Lord's presence caused Saul distress because he had resisted the Holy Spirit.

If we do not have the Holy Spirit we hate God and His Word. Even the most pleasant Gospel promises seem burdensome to us and, at most, we will like only a wrong understanding of God's Law that leads us to think that we are doing well. In truth, we can never do enough, and the only One who could (and did) is the very One we reject!

Despising the Holy Spirit causes tension between the hearer of God's Word and the one speaking it, as well. As David became the target of Saul's spear, so does the faithful pastor become the target for the fiery darts of the obstinate sinner. Even for a Christian, the fact that our Old Adam wishes to rise and conquer makes us resistant to the Word of God.

It is only by the grace of God in Jesus Christ that our wickedness is overcome and we are made to be at peace with God. No effort of our own can make us righteous. Christ's holy life and innocent death has paid for our own resistance and failure in God's Law, and His Holy Spirit creates a new heart within us. Give thanks to the Lord for the mercies He shows to us by His Word, His Spirit, and His faithful servants who bring that Word to us, and may He always preserve us from obstinacy such as Saul's.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 27: 1 KINGS 9:1-9; 10:1-13 TRINITY 10

God renewed His promise to Solomon to put His name in the Temple and to have mercy there. But He also threatened to abandon the Temple if Solomon and his sons should turn away after other gods. For a time, Solomon took comfort in God's promise and heeded His warning. His wisdom and his riches became famous throughout the world, and the Temple of the LORD became a beacon to the nations, so that the queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon and to visit this glorious Temple.

God did eventually abandon Solomon's Temple when Solomon and his sons went astray. But it had to happen that way, because only one Son of David could build a perfect House for God. Only one Son of David, Jesus Christ, could truly love the Lord His God with all His heart and serve as a permanent King over God's people. His wisdom surpasses that of Solomon, and His glory is infinitely greater.

But the glory of Christ, unlike the glory of Solomon's Temple, is still hidden from the eyes. And many, as Jesus lamented in Matthew 12:42, reject His wisdom—the righteousness of faith—and stand condemned for that rejection. But we need not cross the earth to find Jesus like the queen of Sheba did to find Solomon. Jesus is as near to us as His Word and Sacraments, and it is the very promise of His grace and mercy by which the Holy Spirit convinces us that Jesus is who He says He is, the Son of God, the great King, and our Savior from sin.

What an amazing image—the king standing before God’s altar like a priest, in the Temple he had built, praying for his people! He praises God’s choice to dwell among men in this one place on earth, and He pleads with God graciously to accept the worship rendered in this place and to hear the prayers directed toward it, to hear, and always to forgive. What a king Israel had in Solomon!

We have a much better Priest-King in Jesus, the legal son of Joseph, descended from Solomon. He not only reigns in His Church as King, but also sacrificed Himself for us and still intercedes for us as our great High Priest. He stands at the right hand of God as the Advocate for God’s people, not once, but always.

What do His prayers for us, the New Testament Israel, sound like? Listen to Solomon. “May You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear in heaven Your dwelling place; and when You hear, forgive.”

Jesus knows that His people will sin, but as John says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Jesus also knows that some will fall away into impenitence and unbelief, as many in Israel did. But, like Solomon, He prays for their repentance, that they may be restored to God’s grace and forgiveness, because His once-for-all sacrifice will never lose its power to cleanse and to heal. And His prayers never cease for those who have been called by His name in Holy Baptism.

Jonathan wished to do as God had commanded, to honor his father and mother. Normally doing such a thing would require obedience to father and mother, but when Saul commanded Jonathan to sin, the son would show true honor by obeying God above man (Acts 5:29), regardless of the current failings of the man who reared him. Standing firm in God’s Word, Jonathan implored his father to do the right thing. And his argument prevailed!

However, Saul soon revealed the problem with his re-gency: he seems not so much to lead Israel out of and away from its sin (as a good king and shepherd ought to do), but to follow Israel in making a commitment that is soon broken. Just as the nation had said at Sinai that they would do everything in accord with the Law that the Lord handed down through Moses, but straightway departed therefrom, so Saul did with his promise concerning David.

It is easy to commit to righteousness on a bright, sunny, peaceful day, when God’s grace in the past is well seen and His provision for the future seems reasonable. In the darkness of sin and its consequences, though (as when the distressing spirit came upon Saul once again), falling away is easier. Yet, as with Saul at Naioth, a day comes wherein God cannot be resisted, and all must acknowledge Him, even to their shame.

Jonathan and David established a treaty that will endure regardless of what Jonathan's father, Saul, the current king, intends for David. God has anointed David to be king after Saul, rather than the kingship passing to Jonathan. That is an enormous truth in itself—that the expected crown prince resigns himself to God's will so fully as not only to accept, but to love, the one who will reign in place of him.

The content of the treaty and oath do the same: the Lord be with you and defeat all your enemies as He did for my father, and if I become such an enemy, then may He destroy me as well. Yet, not intending to oppose David, Jonathan seeks a similar attitude from David, that David may truly rule in a godly manner. He adds, "you shall not only show me the kindness of the Lord while I still live, that I may not die; but you shall not cut off your kindness from my house forever, no, not when the Lord has cut off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth."

Truly, the grace of God shown David by Jonathan was met with faith—this undeserved kindness paid to David simply because the Lord had chosen him and given it to Jonathan to believe that David was so chosen—was remembered and acted upon by David when his enemies were cut off and David restored Mephibosheth.

The Temple of the Lord was built, as the Lord had promised David. It was built by the son of David, who sat on his father's throne, ruling over Israel. It was dedicated by the sacrifice of countless animals. The ark of the covenant was housed in it, with its Mercy Seat that was sprinkled with blood once a year, covering up the tablets of the Law inside the ark. God's glory filled the Temple, and He promised to dwell there forever.

Solomon's Temple is one of those prominent Old Testament shadows prefiguring the realities found in Christ. The new Temple is Christ Himself, together with all those "living stones," believers in Christ, whom Christ has incorporated into His Body, the Church. The new Temple has been built and is still being built, as promised, by the Son of David, who sits on His father David's throne, ruling over the Church. The new Temple was dedicated, not by the blood of many beasts, but by the one sacrifice of Jesus' body.

Christ is the ark of the New Covenant, whom God set forth as a Mercy Seat by His blood. He covers the Law and forgives sins to those who look to Him in faith. All God's glory—the Deity Himself—dwells in Christ bodily. God's gracious presence has been located for us in Christ, and Christ in the Church, where the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed and sins are washed away. Christ Himself builds this Temple through the ministry of the Word, and unlike Solomon's Temple, this Temple will endure forever. The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

THE HOLY GOSPEL **ST. LUKE 19:41–48 (NKJV)**

Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

Then He went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it, saying to them, “It is written, ‘My house is a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’” And He was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him, and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.

THE COLLECT

O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

How tragic the hardness of King Saul’s heart! Having driven out the Holy Spirit in the pursuit of establishing a dynasty for himself, Saul’s anger so burned toward David that he would even throw his spear at his own son—the one whom, in Saul’s mind, David was depriving of the throne.

Jonathan, though, is resigned to God’s will and loves the one who would be king instead of him. “Why should David be killed? What has he done?” he asks his father. That is, “What is wrong with David other than that God chose him, instead of your son, to be the next ruler of His nation? Why do you seek to kill David, when you really wish to kill the Lord?”

This is so often the case with our anger and our transgressions of the Second Table of God’s Law (Commandments 4–10). Sometimes it is not people that we wish to hurt, but the Lord Himself. Consider Genesis 9:6, when God says that the man who sheds another’s blood shall have his blood shed by Man because God created Man in His image. Whenever we seek to murder another human, we are, as it were, murdering God in effigy.

Such is the case also when we steal, because we do not believe the Lord has given or will give us what He’s ought; and when we lie because we do not trust Him to work all things together for our good if we abide in the truth. And so forth with the other Commandments.

The heart of David was troubled because he acted against the King of Israel by cutting off a piece of his robe, even while David's men had encouraged him to cut not only fabric, but flesh. Yet, "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord," David says.

Even when the one placed into office by the Lord proves himself wicked, as Saul had done, we are to reason that there must be some benefit to this being the case—even if the main benefit is suffering that leads us to repentance.

Whether a leader of our nation or the pastor of our congregation, there is a purpose to his occupying the office that he does, even if he is faithless or corrupt. When a civil leader does wrong it may well be that we and our fellow citizens need both to learn and to educate so that his policies may not bring further evil upon us, either correcting him or replacing him through the proper means for so doing. For a pastor who is preaching or teaching contrary to God's Word, we must seek his repentance, and if he resists the Scriptures, then we must protect Christ's Flock from him, but we must do so with the same humility as we see in David today.

It is strange that Solomon should say that his father David "walked before You [God] in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You." Of course it is right that a son should honor the memory of his father and to speak only the best of him, but this seems a bit much. "Righteousness" and "uprightness of heart" seem strange descriptors of a man who committed adultery and murder. But they are true because David's righteousness did not depend on his own deeds; it depended on the One who was his righteousness for him.

David repented: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:7). He repented of his sins and trusted in the grace of God his Savior. This is what made him righteous and upright of heart. It is what makes any of us righteous. It is what makes us saints.

Solomon also shows this faith in God and asks to carry out his vocation honorably and faithfully. He acknowledges that his power and authority come from God, and so he wants to honor God in his calling as king. God is pleased that Solomon asks for wisdom, but he really shows that he understands his place before God. Solomon will not be morally perfect during his lifetime either, but he knows where perfection comes from, or better, from *Whom* it comes. We do well to ask God to help us in our vocations as husbands, wives, sons, daughters, mothers or fathers. We honor Him when we acknowledge our place before Him.

Why ask for Abishag as a wife? Yes, she was beautiful, but there were other beautiful women to be had, especially for an important and wealthy man like Adonijah. Solomon's reaction gives us a clue. Solomon reacts with indignation and declares a death sentence on Adonijah. This seems a bit severe if Adonijah is just lonely. But Abishag was a way for Adonijah to assert his claim to the throne again.

According to C.F. Keil: "Although Abishag had been only David's nurse, in the eyes of the people she passed as his concubine; and among the Israelites ... taking possession of the harem of a deceased king was equivalent to an establishment of the claim to the throne." This explains Solomon's reaction. Solomon had already forgiven Adonijah's sin of rebellion once. There was not going to be a second pardon.

It is a serious thing to wield the sword as a king, to kill by the authority of the crown, but it must sometimes be done. The German princes had to put down the peasants' revolt. Queen Elizabeth I of England had to execute traitors and would-be assassins in her land. It seems likely that they struggled with thoughts of not being forgiven for the killing they had to do, but they could comfort themselves with the example of King Solomon. Executing dangerous criminals is part of the burden of the crown. The king is "an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil" (Romans 13:4). When we are forgiven our trespasses in the civil realm, we ought to take care to amend our lives and not become a curse on society.

1 Samuel 25 gives us an example of those who understand God's grace and those who do not. Nabal did not understand that all he had was by the Lord's doing, so he acted cruelly and capriciously. After David and David's men protected his shepherds and flocks, Nabal was willing to act as if these protectors did not deserve any hospitality, regardless of the Lord's teachings that His people were to show such even to strangers and foreigners.

However, Nabal's wife, Abigail, understood that life was not deserved, but God's gift. So she does what her husband should have done and pleads for David's mercy for the members of her household, taking responsibility upon herself for her husband's sin. Like the Son that Samuel prophesied would come from David's line, Abigail would take the burden and pay for the safety of those who did not deserve it.

David understood mercy as much as he understood righteousness, and he saw that the Lord was having mercy on him through Abigail—preventing his avenging the Lord from being the sin of avenging himself. He granted Abigail's request, received her gifts, and would do no damage to her household.

Abigail's word to Nabal, on the other hand, worked God's own vengeance. When he heard how Abigail had saved them, he became as a stone until, after his continuing that way for ten days as a sign to all, he died.

THE HOLY GOSPEL **ST. MATTHEW 7:15–23 (NKJV)**

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn-bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.’ Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

THE COLLECT

Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee; may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

It is not surprising that when a man is negligent in tending to his family life, things go awry. God forgave David’s sin with Uriah and Bathsheba, but the consequences of his sin cascaded down through his life. Now, it is not guaranteed that an attentive father will not have a rebellious son, but it is almost certain a neglectful father will have trouble.

Adonijah had not learned to fear the Lord. It was the Lord’s choice to choose Saul, and then David, and now David’s successor. But Adonijah took it into his own hands to become king. There are few things as wicked as a rebel and a usurper. He does not only fail to acknowledge the rightful king, but also fails to acknowledge the God who sets kings on their thrones and removes others. This sin of Adonijah is not just rebellion against his father, but rebellion against the God who chose his father and his father’s successor.

God’s will was to be heard in the voice of David, whom God had anointed. So, when David declared Solomon king and had him anointed by the priest Zadok and the prophet Nathan, there was no doubt about which king was the true one. Everyone would look at Adonijah’s claim to the throne as usurpation and illegitimate. All positions in life, all vocations, must have God as their ultimate source or they will amount to nothing.

What a thunderclap it must have been for David to hear the words, “You are the man!” He is immediately confronted with the truth that God knows everything he has done. His delusions that he had gotten away with it, that God did not see or did not care, are blown away. The shock must have been paralyzing for a second. Then Nathan declares God’s judgment and it all sinks in. In this book all we hear of David’s repentance at that moment is the confession, “I have sinned against the LORD.” But this was genuine and profound. This was no perfunctory confession. And we hear God’s absolution through Nathan’s mouth, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.”

But there was a unique problem. David was God’s chosen, and if God did not punish him, many would think that God was wicked or did not exist. David’s sin would turn people away from God if there were no consequences. All men have an innate sense of justice. God must be just, or the world will make no sense. In fact, the Gospel must have the Law for it to make sense. The condemnation of the Law is what makes the Gospel so sweet.

While none of us looks forward to the consequences of justice being carried out against us, we can at least be thankful when we suffer punishment for our wrongdoing because God’s world is still understandable, and we have the hope of a perfect life in heaven.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Eighth Sunday after Trinity

Article XIV. Of Monastic Vows

As monastic vows directly conflict with the first chief article, they ought to be absolutely abolished. For it is of them that Christ says (Matt. 24:5, 23 sqq.): “I am Christ,” etc. For he who makes a vow to live in a monastery believes that he will enter upon a mode of life holier than the ordinary Christians, and by his own works wishes to earn heaven not only for himself, but also for others; this is to deny Christ. And they boast from their St. Thomas that a monastic vow is on an equality with baptism. This is blasphemy against God.

Article XV. Of Human Traditions

The declaration of the Papists that human traditions serve for the remission of sins, or merit salvation, is altogether unchristian and condemned, as Christ says (Matt. 15:9): “In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” And Titus 1:14: “That turn from the truth.” Also their declaration that it is a mortal sin if one do not observe these statutes, is not right.

These are the articles on which I must stand; and if God so will I shall stand even to my death. And I do not know how to change or to concede anything in them. If anyone else will concede anything, he will do it at the expense of his conscience.

Lastly, the Pope’s bundle of impostures still remains, concerning foolish and childish articles, as the dedication of churches, the baptism of bells, the baptism of the altar-stone, with its godfathers to pray and offer gifts. Such baptism is administered to the reproach and mockery of holy baptism, and should not be tolerated. Afterwards, concerning the consecration of wax tapers, palm-branches, cakes, spices, oats, etc., which nevertheless cannot be called consecrations, but are nothing but mockery and fraud. There are infinite other such deceptions, which we commit to their god, and which may be adored by them, until they are weary of them. We will not be confused by them.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III

In our reading, David once again spared Saul's life. He would not assassinate the king, even though Saul had repeatedly shown great wickedness towards him. David was both faithful and merciful.

These are the characteristics of strength from God. Strength and power are not just seen in the destruction of one's enemies, but in how righteousness is shown to those enemies. There are times where God establishes the authorities in order to bear the sword and punish criminals, but there are other times where He sends His messengers with the power of His Word. And those messengers do not come to kill or punish, but to exhort and convince those who act godlessly so that they are mercifully given the opportunity to repent of their evil.

The omnipotent Lord Who made Heaven and Earth would have no fault in pinning us to the ground and letting us die in our wicked pursuits. But He shows the world that the greater part of His strength is in love and mercy. "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom.5:8). We are saved from the wrath that our sinful treachery should bring upon us. His Only-Begotten Son was nailed to the cross and a spear was driven into Him so that we might be justified by faith in His blood, which was shed so that we would have peace with God.

May the Lord keep us steadfast by His Spirit in that faith that clings to the cross and lives by His blood, and may He always protect us by His merciful strength. Amen.

Even with the wonderful self-awareness David had, and all of his faith in God, he still is but a man who is subject to sin. It is always astounding to hear people who are interviewed on television after some horrible crime say that the suspect could not have possibly committed such a crime. "It was not like them to do such a thing," or so we hear. But of course, it is within everyone's nature to sin, and sin in the most heinous ways, given the right circumstances.

It is easy for us to sin. We are driven by lusts and fears. Our minds are darkened and captivated by sin. We are not able *not to* sin. The only escape from sin is through the power of the Holy Ghost. We must fervently pray to be kept away from sin. We must pray for the awareness to be able to physically flee from sin and not to indulge it. Only through God's help can we do this. Once sin is indulged, it grows. And if it involves others directly, it will grow that much faster, and with greater harm.

One surely wonders why David thought that God could not see all that he was doing and that there would be a reckoning. But sin can drive us to rationalizations that are clearly absurd to anyone else. Unrepented sin ultimately makes us fools. We end up looking ridiculous for believing we could get away with it. We must live our lives *Coram Deo* (in the presence of God) so that we may face our Lord on the last day.

King David went into the sanctuary on Mount Zion in order to pray and praise the God who had done so much for him. David had a tremendous sense of humility as he sat in the presence of Almighty God. One cannot have any real sense of who one is without a real sense of who one is before the Eternal God.

In a recent survey, 55% of Americans believe that they are smarter than the average American. This attitude shows a real lack of humility on the part of a large segment of the American populace. Americans also tend to flatter themselves with regard to their morality. But even if one were superior to others in various ways, one is not superior to God in any way. This realization is the first step in understanding who you are in the world.

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10). The next bit of wisdom is to know who has made one greater than others, if that is the case. God chooses whom He chooses. His favor makes kings. He also chooses whom His people will be. Of all nations, He chose Israel in His good pleasure. He has made Israel His “own people forever,” and so it is true to this day. Israel is still His own people, but we must understand the proper the definition of Israel: only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. David’s house has been established forever in us. So, let us magnify God’s name among us.

Saul was terrified before and after his sin of consulting the medium. Rightly so. One does not need to consult secret arts and dark powers to find the truth. God has made the truth clear in His Word from the beginning. The knowledge Eve gained from misusing the forbidden fruit did not give her comfort. It gave her knowledge, but that knowledge was also tied to despair and destruction. Joy and life were already clear in God’s commands, for both Eve and Saul.

Such is the sin in the dark arts. It is vanity to seek power by misusing the natural order of God’s blessings. Saul was taught how to rule faithfully according to the Word of God, but his faithless choices brought trouble to the kingdom. And rather than repent and do that which is faithful, he continued to chase one bad pursuit after another.

One does not need to consult the spirits of the dead. We have the living Word of God, which points us to the resurrected Christ! If we are terrified by the trials of this sinful world, comfort cannot be found in other worldly mistakes. It is found in the perfect blessings of God’s grace. If we are distressed, there is the Gospel of reconciliation through Christ’s blood and protection of our heavenly Father. If we feel isolated from God, there are the blessings that are poured out on God’s chosen in Holy Baptism and the answer of a good conscience toward Him by the Holy Spirit. And if we are weak, there is the Bread of Life in the Sacrament of Jesus’ Body and Blood, which strengthens us in the true faith.

Saul's selfish faithlessness did not bring him a glorious life. It brought him a thorough defeat, and it brought trouble to the people of Israel. He sought for himself honor and power, but ended up being a sign of failure and a token of mockery against the Lord. The enemies of God's people put Saul's body and his armor on display as a boast that their power and their gods are greater than the God of Israel.

This is the trouble that false teachers also bring to the Lord's Church. Men receive authority in the name of the Lord, but some trouble God's people with vanities and wickedness. When those false teachers fall into scandalous defeat they become a focus for those who scoff at the Church.

Like the valiant men of Jabesh Gilead, we must uphold the honor of God's kingdom. Our trust is not in particular men, but in God and His Word, which gives true strength and honor to faithful men. The offices that God establishes are for the benefit of His people, and so we honor them as good gifts from the Lord. But those who fail in such offices do not show that God is defeated. They show that there is defeat for those who depart from the Word of God.

Saul's life and death were certainly tragic, but they were not worthless. His office would be filled by David, who would bring faithful blessings to the people, and it would be truly perfected in the rule of Christ Jesus, as King of kings and Lord of lords, Who would bring true victory and true peace for God's people in the hope of everlasting life!

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Ninth Sunday after Trinity

The Seventh Commandment. Thou shalt not steal.

After our person and wife or husband, temporal property is the nearest good. That also God wishes to have secure, and has commanded that no one shall damage or injure his neighbor in his possessions. For to steal is nothing else than to get another's property wrongfully into our possession. This comprehends all kinds of advantage in all kinds of trade to the disadvantage of our neighbor. This is indeed such a widespread and common crime, but so little regarded and observed, that it exceeds all measure, so that if all thieves—who nevertheless do not wish to be considered such—were to be hanged to the gallows, the world would soon be desolate and would be without both executioners and gallows. For as we have just said to steal is not only to rob our neighbors' coffers and pockets, but to be too far-reaching in the market, in all stores and shops, wine- and beer-cellars, workshops, and in short whenever we trade or take or give money, goods or work.

As, for instance, to explain this somewhat roughly for the common mass of people, so that it may be seen how godly we are: When a manservant or maid-servant does not serve faithfully, and does damage, or at least allows it to occur when it could be prevented, or otherwise from indolence, idleness or malice neglects the goods entrusted to him, to the spite and vexation of master and mistress. And when this is done purposely (for I do not speak of unavoidable casualties), you can dispose of thirty, forty dollars a year, which if another had taken secretly he would be hung by the rope. But you even bid defiance and make your boast of it, and no one dare call you a thief! ... Likewise also in the market and in common trade this course prevails to the greatest extent, where one openly defrauds another with defective goods, false measures, weights, coins, and by taking advantage by expert arts and uncommon transactions or dexterous inventions, in short by getting the best of the bargain and wantonly oppressing and distressing him. And who indeed can even recount or imagine it all?—The Large Catechism, ¶[223-225, 227

THE HOLY GOSPEL**ST. LUKE 16:1–9 (NKJV)**

He also said to His disciples: “There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. So he called him and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.’

Then the steward said within himself, ‘What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.’

So he called every one of his master’s debtors to him, and said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ And he said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ So he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ So he said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ And he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’ So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.

THE COLLECT

Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

David was no usurper. He did not seek to overthrow Saul, but instead spared him, protected him, loved him, and spoke well of him. All this came from David’s fear of the Lord. He understood that it is righteousness from God to show love even to those who persecute you. But he also knew that Saul was anointed by the Lord, so to act against him was to act against the Lord.

Even though Saul was a tragically flawed representative for the Lord, God still worked mighty things through him. In some ways this can be compared to Israel in the old covenant. The Lord accomplished great holy works among His people, but their repeated faithlessness brought many problems. That which would come after would be greater and overshadow the one before. Like David’s reign surpassed Saul’s, the new covenant in Christ Jesus would outshine the failings of the old Israel (see Hebrews, chapters 8-10).

When men like Saul fail, God still remains faithful. David, Solomon, and the other kings to come after Saul would all stumble. But each in his own way would serve to point forward to the greatest glory and fulfillment of kingship in Jesus Christ. Man would always fail, so only God Himself could come and serve as the true faithful King over His people.

Sinful men would also put forth their hands in an attempt to destroy Christ. But news of this King’s death would not be cause for His enemies to rejoice. News of our King’s death would be the greatest victory in history, as He would rise again and give life to all who believe in Him!

In today's chapter we see David being thoroughly established as an honored king in Israel. Part of this includes making Jerusalem the place from where he rules the kingdom. From there he would go on to conquer the enemies of God's people.

The name Jerusalem is sometimes translated "foundation of peace." While David was an instrument through which God brought justice and prosperity in Israel, true peace would come through the Son of David, Christ Jesus the Lord!

Jerusalem was also the site where Abraham had been prepared to sacrifice Isaac, his miraculous only son. The only begotten Son of the Father would finish the work of achieving peace between God and man by being sacrificed on the cross for the sins of the world. By His death on the cross He would conquer the greatest enemies of mankind: sin, death, and the Devil.

The theme of the blind and lame also points to Christ. The spiritually blind and lame Jews fought against Jesus, scoffing at His coming as the true Son of David. But they would be overcome as Christ showed His holy power. God's Anointed showed Himself to be so by healing those who were blind, lame, and dead, yet made alive and well through faith in Him.

Thanks be to God that our foundation of peace is in Jesus Christ crucified, Who has redeemed us, and makes us to be His in His kingdom through the blessing of His Holy Spirit. Amen.

It might seem harsh that Uzzah was struck dead by the Lord for his error of touching the ark. However, we must remember that God has established the order of things. Actions have consequences. For example, God created electricity to act in a particular way. If we hope to live long on the earth and avoid being electrocuted, we would do well to obey our parents' warnings about power outlets. But if we ignore them and intentionally, or even accidentally, stick a fork in the outlet, electricity will act according to its created nature.

God would have us understand that His holy things are not to be trifled with or underestimated. However, the fact that He does not instantly strike people dead for such carelessness now is not a sign of His ignorance. We receive more patient forbearance out of His divine will. But that does not mean His holy things are any less important, or less powerful.

For example, St. Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 11 that the Body and Blood of our Lord is not to be taken in an unworthy manner or else it will bring guilt and judgment on the one who does. In ways, we are fortunate that the Lord does not strike dead those who ignore this warning. They are given time and opportunity to repent and learn true faithfulness. But that also means the work of the Church is very serious. People can be dying from sin even while they live and breathe.

May our Lord continue to work through us to show all nations the power of Christ's grace and forgiveness, so they may be saved from the death that disobedience would bring. Amen.