

In the reading for today the King of Assyria sent Hezekiah a letter demanding his surrender. He boasted of his great power and threatened to destroy Hezekiah's kingdom. When Hezekiah received the letter he took it to the Temple and laid it out before God. He explained what he thought about it, admitted that he was powerless to do anything about, and prayed to God for help. Hezekiah knew where to go for help.

Many times in life you and I find ourselves in situations that we too are powerless to control. In fact, we are powerless to control most situations in our lives.

In the New Testament Jesus teaches His church to pray the Lord's Prayer. Hezekiah's prayer in verses 15-19 was very similar to it. In Luther's explanation of the Introduction to the Lord's Prayer he says with these words God tenderly invites us to believe that our dear heavenly Father will hear and answer our prayers.

Hezekiah began by hallowing God's name, then he asked God to incline His ear and hear, and to open His eyes and see the predicament Hezekiah was in, and then asked that God's will would be done. We pray "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We pray for everything that we need for this life. We pray for forgiveness, for protection from temptation, and for deliverance from evil.

Then Hezekiah left the situation in God's hands. With the Amen—the "yes, yes, it shall be so"—we, too, leave our needs in God's hands. We, like Hezekiah, should be certain that these petitions are pleasing to our Father in heaven, and are heard by Him; for He has promised to hear us.

We pray: Thy will be done. Amen, amen, it shall be so.

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# Lesson from the Book of Concord The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 2: 2 KINGS 18:1-37

TRINITY 14

## Article XI.

Of Confession, they teach, that Private Absolution ought to be retained in the churches, although in confession an enumeration of all sins is not necessary. For it is impossible, according to the Psalm: “Who can understand his errors?” [Psa. 19:12].

## Article XII.

Of Repentance, they teach, that for those that have fallen after Baptism, there is remission of sins whenever they are converted; and that the Church ought to impart absolution to those thus returning to repentance.

Now repentance consists properly of these two parts: One is contrition, that is, terrors smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin; the other is faith, which, born of the Gospel, or of absolution, believes that, for Christ’s sake, sins are forgiven, comforts the conscience, and delivers it from terrors. Then good works are bound to follow, which are the fruits of repentance.

They condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that those once justified can lose the Holy Ghost. Also those who contend that some may attain to such perfection in this life that they cannot sin. The Novatians also are condemned, who would not absolve such as had fallen after Baptism, though they returned to repentance. They also are rejected who do not teach that remission of sins cometh through faith, but command us to merit grace through satisfactions of our own.

—Augsburg Confession

In the reading for today there is a reference to King Hezekiah destroying “the bronze serpent that Moses had made.” In Numbers 21 we find that more than 700 years earlier, during the Exodus, God used this bronze serpent as the means of healing the Israelites who had been bitten by the fiery serpents sent to punish them for their rejection of the Lord and Moses, His prophet. In the past the Lord gave their forefathers the good gift of healing through this bronze serpent. But now they worshiped the bronze serpent—the physical means—rather than the God who gave the gift. The bronze serpent was one of many things God’s Old Testament people had from the Exodus to remind them of the Lord’s grace to them and of His guidance. But their corrupt human hearts had led them to worship the reminder rather than to worship God.

You and I also have many reminders of God’s grace to His people in Jesus Christ. We have His Word. We have Baptism. We have the Lord’s Supper. He gives us His Church and His pastors to distribute these means by which He calls us into His Kingdom and keep us in that kingdom. He gives us these means to strengthen us to live our lives to His glory in a cruel and dangerous world. Satan, the world, and our own sinful nature try very hard to draw us away from God and try to lead us to worship anything rather than the One True God—the Holy Triune God. But by God’s grace you and I, like Hezekiah, may trust in the Lord, hold fast to Him, and not depart from following Him.

We pray: Keep, we beseech You, O Lord, Your Church with Your perpetual mercy. Amen.

In the text for today we hear the Lord, through the prophets, continue to call His people to repent. The prophets repeatedly said, “Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes’... Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God.” Throughout the Old Testament God’s chosen people continued to reject His Word. Even in the New Testament the Jewish leaders rejected the Word come in the flesh and had Jesus killed! Finally, in 70 A.D. judgment came and Jerusalem was destroyed. The Old Testament kingdom was finished, never to return.

However, when Jesus came in the flesh He taught that the Lord’s Kingdom has come. And in the Lord’s Prayer He tells us to pray, “Thy kingdom come.”

In his explanation Luther says, “The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also.” How does God’s kingdom come? “It comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.”

We have been brought into His kingdom through Baptism, “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:5-7).

We pray: Lord, keep us in Your baptismal grace. Amen.

Being a faithful child of God means that you will experience trouble in this world. But thanks be to God that He has overcome the world in Jesus Christ!

Faithless compromise is a common problem in our age. One does not have to look very hard at the majority of religious organizations, and even many congregations, to see that they have compromised their teaching and practice for the sake of getting along in this world.

Elijah was called to be faithful and live according to the Word of the Lord. That meant he had to stand against the prevailing wickedness. It also meant that he would be sent into hiding and receive his food and drink in ways that made it very clear his needs were met by the Lord’s provision. He was not to pander or “get along” just so he could maintain his normal standard of living. The Lord gave His Word that He would provide for Elijah, not that it would be comfortable or normal.

As Christians we are called to observe all that Christ Jesus has commanded (Matthew 28:20). This means we are to live according to His Word and Spirit that create faith in us, that strengthen and renew us in the holy food, drink, and washing of His Sacraments, and that show us the clear works of love and righteousness we are to do. Sometimes this calling means we will also have to endure trials and troubles, but the stories of Elijah and of our Lord Jesus Christ show us that He will provide. His Word is Truth!

We pray: Heavenly Father, please give us our daily needs, and keep us steadfast in the true faith, which is our forgiveness and life in Jesus Christ crucified. Amen.

This story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal is one of the truly memorable miracles in Scripture. One would think that being there and beholding the Lord's display of power would be hard to forget. But we humans are true to our fallen nature, and it would only be a matter of time before the people would forget the significance of God's all-consuming fire and turn back to false gods.

The fact that any one of us is faithful to God and His truth is as much a grand miracle as the fire that consumed the stones, dust, and water with the sacrifice that was prepared. Our hearts, souls, and minds are so saturated with sin and fickle self-interest that only the supreme power of the one true God--Father, Son, and Holy Ghost--can turn people. Even as He makes us able to repent and believe in the forgiveness of our sins in Jesus Christ crucified, we become distracted again, forgetting the most profound miracle ever to occur in history, the sacrifice of our Lord on the cross.

While miracles as grand as Elijah's victorious sacrifice over the prophets of Baal occurred occasionally, God continues to send His Word and work in us day after day, minute after minute. This is also a profound miracle that should not be forgotten! We are richly blessed as He sends His Word to us in His Church, in the preaching and teaching of the Ministry and Divine Worship, and in the faithfully administered Sacraments. May He always keep us mindful and thankful of this holy work in our midst!

We pray: Heavenly Father, bless us with Your Word and Spirit, and let Your kingdom come among us; keep us in the true faith, in Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the Books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy the Lord, through Moses, clearly laid out how the children of God were to worship Him, and how He would bless them. It is also clear from the other books of the Old Testament that God's people seldom worshiped Him as commanded. King Ahaz, in our text, was not concerned about God's will. Instead, he sacrificed his sons to the false gods. He commanded Urijah, the priest, to set up an altar to the false gods in the temple of the Lord. Ahaz and Urijah both thought they could worship God anyway they wanted.

Today this phenomenon is still going on in churches that are supposedly Christian. We hear it said: "There is only one god—we can worship in any way we choose . . . or we can call that god by any name we choose . . . or we can use whatever holy book we choose . . . or the Bible is the book we choose, but it says whatever we want it to say." It is very popular today to preach to the "felt needs" of the people. But that has always been true.

"Felt needs" are not necessarily our real needs. Felt needs often come from our sinful hearts. But Christ knows our real needs. He sends His pastors to the church to preach His words of Law and Gospel and to administer His Sacraments. In Baptism our old man is drowned and the new man comes forth. He is then fed and sustained in this new life by God's Holy Word and the Body and Blood of Christ.

We pray: Lord, give our pastors strength to preach and teach Your Holy Word in its truth and purity, and give us ears to hear You. Amen.

In the reading for today it is clear that the Lord had laid out a clear, straight line for His people to follow: They were to believe and follow the Word of God! As usual, the people ignored God's Word, going their own way. God sent Amos to prophesy their destruction. The priest demanded that Amos no longer prophesy in the land, and Amos replied he had been sent by God and could speak only what God gave him to speak.

In Acts 13 this same problem comes up. Paul and Barnabas were preaching Christ to the Jews, and the Jews rejected their words. St. Paul replied, "It was necessary that the Word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles" (verse 46). There is that straight line again—the Word of God!

In the New Testament Church—the Church of today—the Word of God is still the straight line. It still stands as the plumb, the standard by which God works in His Church. The Church has no other standard. Just as the Old Testament prophets preached the Word in its truth and were rejected, so also pastors today continue to preach the Word in its truth and are also rejected.

But the Holy Spirit still comes and works in the hearts of the faithful where He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies His Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

We pray: Keep, we beseech You, O Lord, Your Church with Your perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without You cannot but fail, keep us ever by Your help from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation. Amen.

Never underestimate the power of sin and temptation. Even after all the things that Elijah had done by the Word and power of God he was still afraid of the evil threats of Jezebel. He was so tempted to give up hope that he prayed for death. Elijah was still troubled by all this after God had showed His tremendous power against the false gods and prophets of Baal.

Satan attacks and tempts God's people constantly, but thankfully God does not abandon us. With Elijah the Lord sent His Word to strengthen and preserve him in the work for which He prepared him. The Lord showed that He is the one who comes not only in powerful things like the miracle against the priests of Baal, but also in a simple voice that speaks His Words. Also, He showed that He is the one who provides all power and sufficiency for His servants, not the people themselves. So whether we think we are weak or strong, it is the Lord who accomplishes all good things, and He is the one who ought to be glorified!

Just as the Lord told St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness," He also comes to all who are faithful and works in and through them by His Word and Spirit. The weakness that is inherent in all of us due to our sinful nature is a serious threat at all times, and, again, not to be underestimated. But our Lord shows that He has overcome our sins in Jesus Christ, and by Him alone we are made able to arise and do His will!

We pray: Lord God, strengthen and preserve us in the true faith according to our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“...because Jezebel his wife stirred him up.”

Ahab’s sin resembled Adam’s sin in some ways. Both were taken into the sins of their wives, and both were held accountable for their failings as head of their houses. And for both the consequences of their sin and failure went beyond just their own lives, but extended to many more under their charge and who would come after them.

Sin is always far more serious than human minds understand. It not only affects us as individuals, but it also becomes part of the ongoing chain of events that make up human life and history. Our sins harm ourselves, our neighbors, and those who come after us, often in ways that we don’t even realize. Even internal sins bear results that become outward sooner or later. Sin brings destruction and death, no matter how small or private we think the sin is.

However, the seriousness of sin also serves to show how profound God’s mercy is. Part of His response to Adam’s sin was the gracious promise of redemption. And with Ahab God showed mercy because he humbled himself. The Lord did not have to relent in these cases. He could have left these men to face the full extent of what their failure brought on them and those after them. But God showed mercy and forgiveness that would culminate in Jesus Christ being crucified for the sins of the world.

So even as everyone’s sins are very serious and have far-reaching effects, God’s mercy is even greater. He shows us this in His own death in Christ our Savior, which has far-reaching effects for all mankind, especially those who believe.

We pray: Heavenly Father, grant us Your Spirit that we may be humbled before You in true faith and forgiven in Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

The prophet Isaiah received his call about 740 B.C. By this time Israel had a long history of ignoring God’s Holy Word and rejecting the prophets. In Isaiah’s first prophecy after his call, God warned His people that because of the hardness of their hearts He is going to harden their hearts even more. As Isaiah proclaimed this message given to him by the Lord, the leaders and people of Old Testament Israel did in fact continue to reject God’s message. God said, “Go and tell this people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’” After nearly two more centuries of rejecting God’s warnings, in 587 B.C. Israel was destroyed and most of the people were taken away into captivity.

In all four Gospels these words are used by the Apostles to teach Christ’s Church how important it is to listen to God’s Word. In the Small Catechism we have been taught that Baptism “works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare...” We have been given eyes to see and ears to hear. As we hear God’s Word and see God at work we have the promise that “by daily contrition and repentance the Old Adam in us is drowned and dies with all sin and evil desires, and a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”

We pray: Dear Heavenly Father, give us eyes to see, and ears to hear You speak to us Your words of Law and Gospel in Word and Sacrament. In Jesus Christ’s name, Amen.

It is said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, each time expecting different results. One can only marvel at the seeming obstinacy of the kings of Israel and Judah, whether they were out-and-out evil or were almost doing right in the sight of the Lord. In Israel, the repeated offense against God was the sin connected with Jeroboam, the son of Nebat—the worship of golden calves. “These are your gods, O Israel!” In Judah, it was the making of sacrifices and burning incense on the high places. As a result, there was, in the case of Azariah, the infliction of leprosy. In other cases, plots and counterplots, and flowing blood. Some reigns were merely one month in duration!

It is as if these kings believed God’s Word had meaning limited only to specific people and their specific circumstances. The Lord had appeared to Solomon generations before and said, “But if you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods, and worship them, then I will uproot them from my land which I have given them ... ‘Because they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and embraced other gods, and worshiped them and served them; therefore He has brought all this calamity on them’” (2 Chronicles 7:19-22).

We pray: Lord of heaven and earth, strengthen us to raise our voices boldly to speak against the sins that corrode our nation, which are celebrated by a people who have wandered from Your Word and have no true understanding of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

“Thus says the LORD: ‘Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?’ ”

Ahaziah continued to act faithlessly as his father and mother had. He led the people into sin and worship of false gods. He also continued to persecute Elijah because he spoke the Word of God. The Lord could have given up on the people and this king too, but He continued to show mercy. He continued to send His messenger and His Word which gave them a chance to acknowledge that there truly is a God in Israel!

Obstinate sinners despise being questioned by the Lord’s truth, but what they fail to realize is that this is more merciful than being left to their self-destruction. The two captains that first came against Elijah were made aware that he was a man *of God*, yet they still sought to bring him death. They disregarded the power of the true God that Elijah served and brought about their own death instead.

May God continue to send His righteous Word to this world and give people a chance to repent and fear the Lord. And may He continue to keep His faithful people safe from those who hate Him and His Word, while also using us to speak His righteous wisdom and mercy to the rebellious.

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, let Your kingdom come, and Your will be done. In Jesus Christ’s name, Amen.

It is tempting to consider only the miracles and spectacles in this story of Elijah and Elisha. But we should not overlook the theme which ties all these events together, which is the public ministry of God's holy Word.

At that time Elijah was no longer hiding, but traveling from place to place, and it was known among people in each place that the Lord would soon take him away. This message and the miracles that accompanied Elijah were not for his glory, but to show that God was with him and His powerful Word was made known through him.

Elisha was made to understand this, and after Elijah was taken up he showed that a spirit of power and wisdom was upon him as well. But this was not just Elijah's spirit; it was the Spirit of God which had done such things in Elisha's master, and now in him.

In the ongoing life of the Church God continues to send men to proclaim His Word and perform His miracles. And these things are not for the man's glory. They are for the people to see and understand. God continues to use His ministers to show His power and grace. Pastors proclaim the Old Testament that came through Moses and Elijah, and they perform miracles with water, but now these things also have the greater glory of being fulfilled in Jesus Christ! The Law and the prophets point to our need for Christ's forgiveness, and the waters are made pure by His Word and used to baptize us into life in Him!

We pray: Heavenly Father, continue to send Your servants among us who preach Your Word with power, and help us to hear, understand, and truly believe it. In Jesus Christ's name, Amen.

In Amaziah we see yet another ruler who was almost faithful in God's eyes. But his kingdom did not prosper because he did not rule as his ancestor David had. Amaziah was not faithful in all ways, but only in some. While there is no indication that Amaziah himself sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, that was the practice of his people and he did nothing to deter them.

The high places were places of worship on elevated ground, sometimes not more than a mound in a valley. They were not necessarily altars built on mountaintops. Here the people, and sometimes their rulers, worshiped animals, constellations, goddesses, and fertility deities. Even Solomon, because of his foreign wives, worshiped at the high places, for which sin he paid dearly. Divine retribution was levied upon Amaziah in the form of military defeat by the Northern Kingdom, Israel, in a battle that apparently did not have to take place. It resulted in the breaking down of Jerusalem's northern wall and the loss of all the gold and silver in the house of the LORD, and, finally, some years later, Amaziah would be killed after having fled to Lachish.

It is not told us why Amaziah allowed the continuation of pagan worship. Was it cowardice, the hope for popular support, or just ignorance? So also, today, pastors can find it easy to be *almost* faithful in God's eyes, failing to exercise their God-given authority as stewards of the mysteries of God in various ways, including failing in their responsibilities regarding admission to the Lord's Table.

We pray: Heavenly Father, as You have not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind, strengthen us to be faithful and obedient in our service as Your holy people. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Joash began his 40-year reign at the tender age of seven under the regency of Jehoiada the priest. Even after becoming old enough to hold the reins of government by himself, Joash received the counsel and support of Jehoiada, doing “what was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest.”

Joash eventually had the temple restored and reinforced. In this, he took an active leadership role, which resulted in the fiscal support for such a massive undertaking. He was not a passive leader. But what had begun so very well ended dismally. After Jehoiada’s death, Joash was duped into the worship of lifeless idols. God’s prophets were sent to the people and were rejected. And when Jehoiada’s son Zechariah prophesied the doom of Judah because they had turned from the Lord, Joash had him stoned.

God then sent a small Syrian army to conquer the larger army of Judah and, having been wounded in battle, Joash was killed by his own servants, who recognized his apostasy, especially in the slaying of Jehoiada’s son.

Jehoiada was not one to be forgotten quickly. So highly regarded was he that he was buried in the City of David among the kings. No such honor was bestowed on Joash. Nor was such an honor bestowed on our Savior Jesus, Lord of lords and King of kings. In life He had no place to lay His head, and in death He was laid in a borrowed tomb. But death could not hold Him and He rose victorious on the third day, and He has promised to all who would be faithful unto death a crown of life!

We pray: Heavenly Father, keep us steadfast in the true faith so that we may not perish, but have everlasting life in Christ Jesus. Amen.

## Lesson from the Book of Concord The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

### Article XX. Of Good Works.

In the twentieth article they [the Roman Catholics] lay down these words, viz. that they reject and condemn our statement that men do not merit the remission of sins by good works. This article they clearly declare that they reject and condemn. What is to be said on a subject so manifest? Here the framers of the Confutation [the Papists’ answer to the Augsburg Confession] openly show by what spirit they are led. For what in the Church is more certain than that the remission of sins occurs freely for Christ’s sake, that Christ and not our works is the propitiation for sins, as Peter says (Acts 10:43): “To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth on him shall receive remission of sins”? To this Church of the prophets we would rather assent that to these abandoned writers of the Confutation, who so impudently blaspheme Christ. For although there were writers who held after the remission of sins men are just before God, not by faith, but by works themselves, yet they did not hold this, viz. that the remission of sins itself occurs on account of our works, and not freely for Christ’s sake.

Therefore the blasphemy of ascribing Christ’s honor to our works is not to be endured. These theologians are now entirely without shame, if they dare to bring such an opinion into the Church. Nor do we doubt that his most excellent imperial majesty and very many of the princes will not allow this passage of the Confutation to remain, if they be admonished of it. On this topic we could cite infinite testimonies from Scripture and from the Fathers. But above we have quoted a sufficient number on this subject. And there is no need to testimonies for one who knows why Christ has been given for us, who knows that Christ is the propitiation for our sins. Isaiah says (53:6): “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” The adversaries on the other hand teach that God hath laid our iniquities not on Christ, but on our works. Neither are we disposed to mention here the sort of works which they teach. We see that a horrible decree has been prepared against us, which would terrify us still more if we were contending concerning doubtful or trifling subjects. Now since our consciences understand that by the adversaries the manifest truth is condemned, whose defense is necessary for the Church, and increases the glory of Christ; we easily despise the terrors of the world, and patiently will bear whatever is to be suffered for the glory of Christ and the advantage of the Church.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §78–82

In all four episodes of today's reading the Lord demonstrates his provision for those who trust him. The Lord delivers the widow's sons from slavery by providing a superabundance of oil for her to sell. The Lord gives the Shunammite woman a son. When the boy dies, the Lord gives the boy to her mother again by raising him from the dead. The Lord removes death from a pot of stew for the sons of the prophets and feeds one hundred men with only twenty loaves of bread. In each of these episodes the Lord shows you that He is able to provide for all of your bodily needs. To God, famine is nothing, nor is destitution an obstacle. The Lord promises to care for those who put their trust in Him.

These miracles also point us to the Lord Jesus, who does many of the same miracles as Elisha. Christ is the greater Elisha who wins our release from the slavery of sin. He raises us to new life through His Gospel. He takes away the sting of death from our lives by promising us resurrection from the dead, and He feeds His faithful with living bread from heaven. Our heavenly Father provides all the needs of our body in this life. Through Christ Jesus, the Father provides our souls with everything we need, not only for this life, but also for the life of the world to come.

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, we give You thanks that You give us daily bread of body and soul. Teach us to recognize every good gift You give to us and give us faith to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving; in Jesus' name. Amen.

Jehoiada the priest had seven years to witness the policies and priorities of the usurper-queen, Athaliah, daughter of the wicked Ahab. He used the time well, strengthening his relationship with military leaders at what our army would call "company level," and also marshaling the support of the priests and Levites.

First, protected on all sides by armed men, some of them bearing King David's weapons which had been stored in the Temple, they anointed the very young Joash. "Long live the king!" From this point, all activity would bear the name of Joash, king of Judah, for whom Jehoiada served as regent. Then Athaliah was slain, but not in the Lord's house, lest it be made unclean. There was no such consideration necessary regarding the slaying of Mattan, the priest of Baal, as the altar of his false god was immediately destroyed. Proper worship at the Lord's temple was restored.

It is of interest to note, as America is again deeply involved in its quadrennial effort to select a president, that the placing of the boy-king Joash on the throne and the overhaul of life in Judah were supported from the grassroots level all the way up to the nobles and governors of the people, and all for the purpose of fulfilling God's promise to keep a descendant of David on the throne. In other words, this all took place according to the will of God.

We are subject to governing authorities because their responsibilities have been instituted by God Himself (Romans 13:1). We subject ourselves in the confidence that in the end the true government is on the shoulders of Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, whom David called Lord.

We pray: Heavenly Father, bless in all ways those whom You have given to exercise authority over our nation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, had been king of Judah. He walked in the evil ways of Israel in part because his wife was Athaliah, the daughter of the wicked Ahab. In the effort to secure his reign he slew his brothers and some of the princes of Israel when he became king. The Lord brought Aradians and others against Jehoram and his sons were slain, except for Jehoahaz, the youngest.

When Jehoram died of a horrifying disease of the bowels, Jehoahaz, also known as Ahaziah, became king. He too did what was evil in the Lord's sight, getting entangled in an alliance with Jehoram (also known as Joram), the son of Ahab, king of Israel. The Lord used this situation to bring about an encounter with the over-zealous Jehu, who not only killed Ahaziah, but also many of his family members. Those who survived were slain by Athaliah when she seized the throne. However, one young son of Ahaziah survived—Joash, the sole remaining descendant of King David.

In the pain and confusion of life, as the often highly complex drama unfolds, we sometimes forget, if only briefly, who really is in charge. In this highly charged Old Testament account, God keeps His promise to David that there would always be a descendant on his throne.

We pray: Lord of heaven and earth, thank You for the testimony of the Gospel concerning Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. Through Him we have received grace for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name (Romans 1:2-5). In Jesus' name, Amen.

Naaman's washing seven times in the Jordan River prefigures our washing from the uncleanness of sin in Holy Baptism. The leprosy of sin clings to our flesh from our conception. It manifests itself as our hearts are filled with evil thoughts which spill out from us in sinful words and deeds. Without the intervention of the Lord this leprosy of sin damns all men, women, and children. But thanks be to God that He gives us a washing of regeneration and a new birth of water and the Spirit. As the Jordan River water cleansed Naaman's leprous flesh, so the waters of Holy Baptism cleanse sinners from the filth of sin and guilt.

Naaman despised this good gift of God at first, thinking little of the water of the Jordan River. Many today despise the water of Holy Baptism because they, like Naaman, separate the water from the Word of God's promise to work in, with, and under the water. Some want to make it less about the Word of God and more about the amount of water. Naaman made this same mistake by focusing on the water quality. Still others imagine the word connected with baptism to be a word of law, commanding obedience and stripping the water combined with the Word of all saving effect. May we, as Naaman did, continually learn to trust the Word of promise that God attaches to the simple element of water which makes it a "washing of regeneration" for us.

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, grant us faith to believe the Word You attach to water in Holy Baptism. May we always trust that through that washing of water and the Word, our sins are forgiven, Your wrath is turned away, and that we have everlasting life; in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Lord, through the prophet Elisha, delivered Israel from their enemy, the king of Syria, twice in this reading. First, the Lord revealed to Elisha where the Syrian armies would be so that he may advise the King of Israel to avoid those places. The Lord protected the king of Israel by informing him of the enemy's schemes. Second, Elisha blinded the eyes of the Syrian army when they came looking for him. He showed his servant how the enemy, for as strong as he may seem, is nothing compared to the heavenly host which protect them. Elisha then shrewdly took the Syrians captive and led them to the King of Israel's doorstep so that he could take them prisoner.

In a similar fashion Christ our Lord leads us in our daily battle with the enemy the devil. In His Word Christ informs us of the schemes of the old evil foe, so that we are not ignorant of his weapons and machinations. Knowing how the devil works through temptations to misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice, we know to be vigilant against such attacks. Second, like Elisha, Christ our Lord routes the devil and makes a public spectacle of him on the cross, destroying his power over all who believe in Christ's atonement for the forgiveness of their sins. He takes the devil prisoner on our behalf so that we no longer need to fear him, though we do remain vigilant against his continual schemes.

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, grant us vigilance to withstand Satan's fiery darts and assaults against our souls through manifold temptations. Remind us always that Christ is victorious over the enemy, and that by faith in the promise of the gospel, we daily receive the victory He won on our behalf, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Jehu was zealous in carrying out his mission from the Lord as relayed through the prophet Elijah. He slew Ahab's seventy sons and also forcefully brought Baal worship to an end in Israel. His faithfulness in this task was commended by the Lord, who told him that because of it his sons would sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.

Still, in two important matters Jehu was other than faithful. For one thing, he went beyond the bounds of the Lord's directive by slaying the forty-two brothers of Ahaziah, king of Judah. For his bloody overstepping he was castigated by the Lord through the prophet Hosea, who said that He would bring to an end the kingdom of the house of Israel (Hosea 1:4). What's more, Jehu "took no heed to walk in the Law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart; for he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, who had made Israel sin." That is, he did not bring to a halt the worship of the golden calves, which Jeroboam had instituted in imitation of Aaron's sin, even to the point of speaking the same poisoned words, "These are your gods, O Israel."

Heaven help us when we heed God's Word only when it serves to promote our own agenda, whatever that might be.

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, defend us against the duplicitous nature of our own sinful flesh, and move us through Word and Sacrament to worship You—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—in spirit and truth. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# Lesson from the Book of Concord The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity

THURSDAY, AUGUST 18: 2 KINGS 6:24-7:20

TRINITY 12

## Article XVIII.

Of the Freedom of the Will, they teach, that man's will has some liberty for the attainment of civil righteousness, and for the choice of things subject to reason. Nevertheless, it has no power, without the Holy Ghost, to work the righteousness of God, that is, spiritual righteousness; since the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God [1 Cor. 2:14]; but this righteousness is wrought in the heart when the Holy Ghost is received through the Word. These things are said in as many words by Augustine in his *Hypognosticon*, book iii: "We grant that all men have a certain freedom of will in judging according to [natural] reason; not such freedom, however, whereby it is capable, without God, either to begin, or much less to complete aught in things pertaining to God, but only in works of this life, whether good or evil. 'Good,' I call those works which spring from the good in Nature, that is, to have a will to labor in the field, to eat and drink, to have a friend, to clothe oneself, to build a house, to marry, to keep cattle, to learn diverse useful arts, or whatsoever good pertains to this life, none of which things are without dependence on the providence of God; yea, of Him and through Him they are and have their beginning. 'Evil,' I call such works as have a will to worship an idol, to commit murder," etc.

They condemn the Pelagians and others who teach that, without the Holy Ghost, by the power of nature alone, we are able to love God above all things; also to do the commandments of God as touching "the substance of the act." For, although nature is able in some sort to do the outward work (for it is able to keep the hands from theft and murder), yet it cannot work the inward motions, such as the fear of God, trust in God, chastity, patience, etc.

—The Augsburg Confession

Famine drove the people of Samaria to desperation. They resorted to eating unclean animals. Some were so desperate they resorted to cannibalism. It drove nearly everyone to unbelief. The king responded with a lack of faith to the woman who had eaten her son, as well. If the Lord wouldn't help, why should she expect help for him? Even when Elisha spoke a word of promise from the Lord about the end of the famine, unbelief had hardened the heart of the king's servant so that he refused to believe. The promise may have seemed too big. The servant couldn't fathom a complete reversal of Samaria's fortunes in one day.

Four lepers who had nothing to lose and everything to gain gave themselves over to the Syrians, only to find that the Word of the Lord was true. The Lord had routed the Syrian army so that they left all their provisions in their camp. One day there had been absolute lack. The next day there was an abundance, purely by the grace of God. The Lord turned Samaria's mourning into dancing, their hunger into satisfaction and joy. The unbelieving servant of the king, however, lived to see the Word fulfilled, but did not get to taste in the promised goodness because of his unbelief.

This passage serves as a warning to guard against unbelief toward God's promises. Human reason and experience do not comprehend the Word of God. Only faith does that, since faith trusts God's Word as true and reliable, no matter what the external (or internal) circumstances of life might be.

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, strengthen our faith so that we trust in Your promises no matter the circumstances of our lives; in Jesus' name, Amen.

Hazael met Elijah and asked if his master will recover from his illness. Elisha gave what seemed to be a contradictory answer. “Go, say to him, ‘You shall certainly recover.’ However, the Lord has shown me that he will really die” (8:10). Does Elisha speak a lie to the king of Syria? This cannot be the case, for David writes in Psalm 5:4, “You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, nor shall evil dwell with You.” The Lord is never dishonest when He speaks, for that would be contrary to His character. Elijah said plainly that Ben-Hadad will recover from this illness, but in spite of that recovery he will still die. It is wicked Hazael who takes this Word of God and assumes that He is to murder his master.

It is vitally important that we recognize that God’s word never deceives. As it is written, “The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (Psalm 12:6). St. Peter says of Christ, the Word of God in human flesh, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). When God’s Word of Law goes forth we must not doubt that He will punish sin. It is also true that we must not doubt the Word of the Gospel that goes forth after the Law is preached. The heavenly Father, in His gospel call, is just as sincere, for He desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth which is only found in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We pray: Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word of truth through faith in Christ Jesus, so that we may not doubt it but firmly believe it. Amen.

The Word of the Lord will be fulfilled, even if it seems to tarry at times. Having anointed Hazael king over Syria, now He had His servant anoint Jehu king over Israel, fulfilling the Word spoken to Elijah in 1 Kings 19:15-17. Jehu was anointed King over Israel in order to fulfill the Word of the Lord spoken to Ahab, that he would perish on the plot of land he had stolen away from Naboth after murdering him. The same is true for Jezebel’s death. It was in accord with the Word of God spoken from 1 Kings 21:23. Jehu succeeded in his divine mandate, though he went further than the Lord commanded by murdering the king of Judah and by commanding his men to bury Jezebel’s body. Jehu is an imperfect instrument. Yet, the Lord often deigns to fulfill His Word through sinful men.

God did not use a sinful man to fulfill His chief Word though. For that He sent the second person of the Holy Trinity, God the Son, to assume human flesh. Where Jehu, and countless others, were used to fulfill God’s Word of judgment on unbelieving Israel, God used His Only-Begotten Son to fulfill the promise of the Gospel. No man can die for the sins of another. Only the death of a man who is also truly and fully God would do to atone for the sins of the world. By Jesus’ perfect life lived under the law, by Jesus’ bitter, innocent suffering and death, and by His glorious resurrection, He fulfills the Old Testament promises of God’s mercy for all mankind so that all who believe have life through faith in Christ.

We pray: Remind us always, dear Lord, that in Christ Jesus Your Word is fulfilled for us and our salvation; in Jesus’ name, Amen.