

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28: LUKE 12:1-34

INVOCAVIT

Sunday we heard our Lord Jesus say, “It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” The Word of the Lord, written in Holy Scripture, spoken by a rightly called pastor, and given to us tangibly in the Sacrament, are the Christian’s true sustenance. Like physical bread, God feeds us with His Word to sustain our faith throughout the daily crosses we each bear. The Christian, throughout his life, learns to love the bread of God’s Word and crave it every day.

The sinful flesh does not believe this and desires to fill the belly with good food. The tempter has led many astray, turning many Christians and their pastors into “belly servers” who think only of their next meal, that is, comfort in this life. Jesus tells us of the rich fool, who worked to fill his belly with the good things of this life while despising the sustenance of the soul. His end was destruction. Jesus tells us not to worry about daily bread, the things we need for this body and life, because our Father in Heaven knows we need all these things and promises to provide them. Both parables are gentle reminders that “man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” We ought never to let worry, the gathering of wealth, and concern for daily bread come between us and our confidence in the Lord for every good thing, temporally and spiritually.

O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD

**SEPTUAGESIMA—INVOCAVIT
(FEBRUARY 2015)**

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord Septuagesima Sunday

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27: LUKE 11:37-54

INVOCAVIT

CHAPTER XI. OF GOD'S ETERNAL FOREKNOWLEDGE [PRE-DESTINATION] AND ELECTION.

Concerning this article no public dissension has occurred among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession. But since it is a consolatory article, if treated properly, and by this means the introduction in the future of a controversy likely to cause offence may be avoided, it is also explained in this writing.

AFFIRMATIVE

The Pure and True Doctrine concerning this Article.

1. First of all, the distinction between foreknowledge and predestination, that is, between God's foreknowledge and His eternal election, ought to be accurately observed.

2. For the foreknowledge of God is nothing else than that God knows all things before they happen, as it is written (Dan. 2:28): "There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days."

3. This foreknowledge is occupied alike with the godly and the wicked; but it is not the cause of evil or of sin, so that men do what is wrong (which originally arises from the devil and the wicked, perverse will of man); nor the cause of their ruin, for which they themselves are responsible; but only regulates it, and fixes to it a limit how long it should last, and that everything, notwithstanding that in itself it is evil, should serve His elect for their salvation.

4. The predestination or eternal election of God, however, is occupied only with the godly, beloved children of God, and this is a cause of their salvation, which He also provides as well as disposes what belongs thereto. Upon this [predestination of God] our salvation is founded so firmly that the gates of hell cannot overcome it (John 10:28; Matt. 16:18).

5. This is not to be investigated in the secret counsel of God, but to be sought in the Word of God, where it is also revealed.

6. But the Word of God leads us to Christ, who is the Book of Life, in whom all are written and elected that are to be saved, as it is written (Eph. 1:4): "He hath chosen us in Him" [Christ] "before the foundation of the world."

7. Thus Christ calls to Himself all sinners and promises them rest, and He is anxious that all men should come to Him and permit Him to help them. To them He offers Himself in His Word, and wishes them to hear it, and not to stop their ears or despise the Word. He promises besides the power and efficiency of the Holy Ghost, and divine assistance for perseverance and eternal salvation.

8. Therefore we should judge concerning this our election to eternal life neither

Appearances can be deceiving. The Pharisees and Lawyers appear to be very pious, devout, godly men. But this is far from the truth. They burden souls with the necessity of man-made works while there is no faith toward God in their hearts. They tithe the most miniscule of herbs but there is no true love for neighbor in their bones. They look like great students of the Scriptures yet they despise God's holy prophets and murder them, building their tombs to cover the tracks of their transgressions.

Appearances can be deceiving. Christ appears to be rude and even hateful as He preaches against these men. But this is far from the truth. Jesus castigates these men because they are false teachers who are leading His sheep astray into the pit of Hell. Jesus loves all people and wants them all to believe in God's grace, which He comes to bring in His death and resurrection. These men, with their falsehood, stand in the way of the pious souls who would believe and be saved. What appears as mean and calloused is in reality the depth of love for sinners.

Jesus wants to speak truth to us each week through the Office of the Ministry. Jesus wants to forgive our sins through Word and Sacrament each week. He desires to strengthen our faith through these same means, so that we do not become burdened with falsehood, but stand firm in the faith of Christ alone. Jesus demonstrates His love for you in this: that He wants you to hear His pure Gospel and believe for your salvation.

O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Everybody wants a sign. The atheist demands a sign that proves God's existence. The American Evangelical wants a sign of what decision he should make. The anxious and despondent crave a visible sign of God's favor to quell the fiery rage of doubt. Everybody, at some point, seeks a sign that God is present and that He is graciously disposed to us.

The Christian is not to seek any sign for God's existence or favor outside of the one sign God gives: the sign of Jonah. Jesus is the greater Jonah Who preaches not just repentance from your sins but the Gospel that forgives those sins! He is the greater Jonah Who was consigned not to the belly of a fish but to the belly of the earth for three days, having died to atone for the sins of the entire world. Whereas Jonah comes in the reek of fish vomit and death, Jesus comes in the scent of love and compassion for sinners lost in their way.

You don't need a sign of God's favor. He has given you His Only-Begotten Son into death as your savior from your sin and your sinfulness. There is no need to look for signs of God's goodness in the changes and chances of this life. In His mercy Christ gives you even more visible signs of His gracious favor. He washes you with water and Word, He speaks to you through your pastor, and He puts His body and blood on your lips. Christ in Word and Sacrament is the only sign He gives, and the only sign we need.

O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

from reason nor from the Law of God, which would lead either into a dissipated, dissolute epicurean life, or into despair, and would excite in the heart of men pernicious thoughts (and such thoughts cannot be effectually guarded against as long as they follow their own reason), so that they think to themselves: "If God has elected me to salvation, I cannot be condemned, although I do whatever I will." And again: "If I am not elected to eternal life, it matters not what good I do; for my efforts are nevertheless all in vain."

9. But the true judgment concerning predestination must be learned alone from the Holy Gospel concerning Christ, in which it is clearly testified that "God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all," and that "He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (Rom. 11:32; Ez. 18:23; 33:11; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 2:2).

10. To him, therefore, who is really concerned about the revealed will of God, and proceeds according to the order which St. Paul has observed in the Epistle to the Romans, who first directs men to repentance, knowledge of sins, to faith in Christ, to divine obedience, before he speaks of the mystery of the eternal election of God, this doctrine is useful and consolatory.

11. That, however, "many are called, few are chosen," does not mean that God is unwilling that all should be saved, but the reason is that they either do not at all hear God's Word, but wilfully despise it, close their ears and harden their hearts, and in this manner foreclose the ordinary way to the Holy Ghost, so that He cannot effect His work in them, or when it is heard, they consider it of no account, and do not heed it. For this [that they perish] not God or His election, but their wickedness is responsible (2 Pet. 2:1 sqq.; Luke 11:49, 52; Heb. 12:25 sq.).

12. Moreover, a Christian should apply himself to the article concerning the eternal election of God, so far as it has been revealed in God's Word, which presents Christ to us as the Book of Life, which, by the preaching of the holy Gospel, He opens and spreads out to us, as it is written (Rom. 8:30): "Whom He did predestinate, them He also called." In Him, therefore, we should seek the eternal election of the Father, who, in His eternal divine counsel, determined that He would save no one except those who acknowledge His Son, Christ, and truly believe on Him. Other thoughts are to be entirely banished, as they proceed not from God, but from the suggestion of Satan, whereby he attempts to weaken or to entirely remove from us the glorious consolation which we have in this salutary doctrine, viz. that we know that out of pure grace, without any merit of our own, we have been elected in Christ to eternal life, and that no one can pluck us out of His hand; as He has promised this gracious election not only with mere words, but has also certified it with an oath, and sealed it with the holy sacraments, where we can call to mind in our most severe temptations, and from them comfort ourselves, and thereby quench the fiery darts of the devil.

“Your faith has made you well.”

We do not believe in Jesus Christ by our own reason or strength. Faith is worked in us and expressed through us by the power of God’s Holy Spirit. We can take credit for our spiritual life in Christ through faith no more than we can take credit for the breath in our lungs or the blood in our veins. These gifts are part of His grace, from which our physical and spiritual life comes.

True “wellness” comes from being made whole by God. So the quest for having a perfect body or soul in this fallen world is impossible apart from His power. Infirmity and death are unavoidable for our bodies. They bear the outward testimony that sin is a painful and deadly force. And for our souls, apart from the Holy Spirit working faith in us, there is only death.

Thanks be to God that He does make us whole according to faith and His Word. In His gracious providence He will grant us health and wholeness of body, but the thing to be remembered—according to faith—is that this wholeness of our bodies is only temporary and points to the greater perfection that the faithful will have in the resurrection of the dead! And the wholeness of our soul is the most important wholeness of all, because by faith in Christ Jesus we have forgiveness, peace, and everlasting life.

We pray: Lord God, grant us true faith by Your Spirit so that we may be made truly well in body and soul for all eternity; In Jesus Christ. Amen.

Like Martha, we often worry about our daily life today and tomorrow. The flesh still hears the temptation to be “like God” and tries to achieve that through worry, which is nothing more than borrowing tomorrow’s trouble for today. Mary, on the other hand, shows us what the child of God is to be doing: sitting at the feet of Jesus, hearing His doctrine, and contemplating it for salvation.

Jesus knows our weakness and our tendency to worry. To help us in our worries and frettings, He teaches us to pray for the things the Lord promises. The sinful flesh feels trapped when it is commanded to pray for those things that God promises. But amazingly enough, everything we truly need is promised to us by our Lord! We need His kingdom of grace to come among us through His Word and Sacraments. We need His will to be done, His good and gracious will of saving faith in our hearts and protection from the devil, world, and ourselves. We need daily, not weekly or monthly or yearly bread, which includes everything we need for this body and life. We need absolution from our sins. We need deliverance in the hour of temptation. We need rescue from every temporal and spiritual evil. Christ promises us all these things so we ought not worry over them, and instead ask God the Father to give us His promised gifts. There is no need to worry. God has promised you everything you need, and will answer your prayer asking for those good things in His good and gracious time.

O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Seventy were given great authority. Being Christ's representatives, they had authority to heal, cast out demons, and trample on Satan's agents. But they were not to rejoice in this authority received from Christ. They were not to glory in any given success while preaching the kingdom in any given city. Nor were they to wallow in self-pity when cities rejected their preaching of the kingdom, repentance and faith. The power, the successes, the failures, none of those belonged to the laborers. These laborers were to rejoice in their salvation, that no matter what outcome their ministry had, their names were written in Heaven.

The same is true for you, dear baptized children of God. Whatever you are given to do: rejoice that your names are written in Heaven. If you have been entrusted with Christ's Office of the Ministry, work at that ministry with all your might, but rejoice in your salvation. Have you been called to the office of parent, child, employer, employee, citizen, volunteer, or retiree? Whatever vocations God has given you to do, "do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men." (Col. 3:23) All of your vocations are gifts from the Lord to you and to your neighbor. Each vocation has its responsibilities and authority from God. But do not rejoice in any authority you have because it belongs to Christ. Do not wallow in your vocational failures. Rejoice that your Lord writes your name in Heaven, that by faith in Christ your sins are forgiven and your everlasting life is secure.

O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

"And whoever will not receive you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them."

It is a serious and tragic thing to ignore the Word of God. His Word is not just one more set of platitudes to be taken or left on a sort of smorgasbord of philosophies. His Word is truth. His Word is the only source of redemption and life. It is the only true key to wisdom and peace in this world, so to reject it is not a matter of rejecting some idle news. To reject it is a matter of rejecting the reality of life. So those who reject this truth and cling to dangerous lies should be marked and avoided, because their dangerous adherence to falsehoods creates peril for themselves and for everyone else who abides in that rejection.

Those who reject the wisdom of God's Law and the faithful preaching of the Gospel in Jesus Christ crucified reject the repentance of their deadly sins, and they reject the only thing that will give them forgiveness and life. God's faithful people should not be indifferent about that rejection. We are to always point them back to God's Word of life so they may hear it faithfully by the power of God's Spirit.

We pray: Lord God, send Your faithful servants to preach and teach Your Word so that all nations may turn from their faithless rejection of the truth and be given abundant life in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Miracles are special ways that God displays His gracious power. He is the author of all creation, so the natural order of things is established according to His good will. But occasionally He sees fit to do things outside the normal order to help or teach us.

Christ's miracles were not just parlor tricks or an idle display of power. He was teaching the abundant and powerful nature of God's mercy. From humble rations many, many people would be fed and renewed, with copious provision to spare. The greater, most important lesson of that miracle was that through one humble man—Who is also true God—many, many nations would be fed the Bread of Life and renewed in saving faith in Jesus Christ crucified.

Jesus walked on the troubled waters to show that He was God Himself. He used this power to teach the disciples that He has power over all things, and that He comes to bring peace and calm to the troubled souls who are baptized and believe in Him. And those who are healed by simply touching Him are a small illustration of the greater healing that will come in the resurrection. All who are made well by faith, which comes from the Holy Spirit touching them, will be made completely whole in body and spirit for all eternity because the Son of God comes to us that we may take hold of Him in His Word, His flesh and blood in the Supper, and His Baptism which cleanses us.

We pray: Lord God, continue to bless us in the good order of Your benevolent creation, but we especially pray that You also bless us through the miracles of Your grace, manifest among us in the Word and Sacraments of our Savior, Christ Jesus; In His Name. Amen.

No one gets it. The disciples want to remain in Transfiguration glory. They lack the faith to cast out a demon. They cannot understand Jesus' clear words about His betrayal. They jockey for the position of "the greatest," wanting to call down fire from Heaven upon unbelievers. Would-be disciples do not understand the true nature of following Jesus. Everyone turns to the inventions of their hearts: what they think Jesus should be and what they think being a disciple should entail.

Verse 44 stands near the center of today's reading. "Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men." Jesus keeps the main thing the main thing. What kind of Christ and Lord will He be? One who willingly suffers for the sake of others. One Who serves, not to earn greatness but to serve penitent sinners with salvation. One Who does not want to destroy men's lives but Who wants to save men's lives.

We often, like the disciples and crowds, neglect the true purpose of Christ and the will of God. We do this out of ignorance, busyness, and the sinful desire to make Christ in our own image. To remedy this, we must let these words sink into our ears so that they may take root in our hearts. Jesus came to be delivered into the hands of men so that He could suffer, die, be buried, and then be raised for you so that your sins can be daily covered through faith in the atonement earned at the cross.

O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Invocavit Sunday

Article XXI.

Of the Worship of Saints, they teach, that the memory of saints may be set before us, that we may follow their faith and good works, according to our calling, as the Emperor may follow the example of David in making war to drive away the Turk from his country. For both are kings. But the Scripture teaches not the invocation of saints, or to ask help of saints, since it sets before us Christ, as the only Mediator, Propitiation, High-Priest and Intercessor. He is to be prayed to, and hath promised that He will hear our prayer; and this worship He approves above all, to wit, that in all afflictions He be called upon [1 John 2:1]: “If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father,” etc.

—the Augsburg Confession

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5: MARK 7:1-30

SEPTUAGESIMA

“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

There are many individuals, congregations, and organizations in Christendom that honor God with their lips, but reject the truth of God’s Word and cling to false doctrines of men. Every person certainly stumbles at one time or another. However, here we are talking about those who do not just stumble and then repent, but those who cling to falsehood. Their hearts are far from God.

The truth of the Gospel is a profound gift to all mankind. God’s Word tells us that our peace does not come from our own efforts. It comes from His forgiveness for our mistakes, and the continuance in the good works that He teaches us. Groping around for wisdom and fulfillment in the godless teachings of men fails to bring real peace because it is ultimately based on man himself.

Those who would be called Christian must hold fast to the clear teachings of God above all others. The uncompromised Word of Law teaches real wisdom and real repentance for our many weaknesses. And most importantly, His uncompromised Word of Gospel shows us that our sins are forgiven in the work of God, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Anything apart from these holy and perfect teachings obscures these wonderful gifts of truth, and threatens to poison or kill the souls of others. Lord deliver us from this evil!

We pray: Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word, and keep our hearts on Christ Jesus alone by the power of Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

“The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”

God’s work of redemption does not happen in a vacuum. Jesus Christ lived in this sinful world and dealt with the trials and temptations that are common in it. And He overcame them. He did not compromise with the powerful religious leaders and their lies. He proclaimed the truth against them and used them as an example of how dangerous corruption can affect anyone. He did not just cooperate and then bloodlessly declare how things ought to be. He lived and personified the truth and was executed for it. He overcame that as well and rose again after three days.

The preaching of Jesus Christ does not continue in a vacuum either. There are trials, adversaries, and serious persecutions that surround also the faithful preaching of Christ. The poisonous leaven of false religious leaders should not be accommodated; it must be resisted. It provides the framework for teaching repentance from such wickedness and faithfulness to the truth in rejection of the devil’s lies. And there will be suffering for those faithful teachers who stand against the more powerful corrupt teachers. But as Jesus Christ overcame all these things and manifested the everlasting glory that God’s children will possess, we too will overcome such things by the power of His Spirit and faithfulness to His truth in repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

We pray: Lord God, deliver us from the leaven of false teachers and the lies of the devil. Grant us true repentance and faithful adherence to the victorious cross of Jesus Christ so that we may overcome all the suffering of this world and obtain glorious life in our Savior at the Last Day. In Jesus Christ. Amen.

“But who do you say that I am?”

Who is Jesus? Who do you say that He is? This is a profoundly important question. Is He a great teacher? Is He a political revolutionary? Is He a lunatic? Is He one deity among many others? Or is He God Himself, the one true God, in flesh and blood?

Only one of those answers is thoroughly acceptable. The account of all He did and said does not allow for light consideration. The simple reality that He taught “The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day” has serious implications.

C. S. Lewis presented in his book *Mere Christianity* a popular apologetic question that deals with this point. He suggests there are three options; Jesus was either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. Because Jesus claimed to be the Son of God and taught that He would rise again from the dead for the sake of the world, He could not just be consider a good teacher. A man who said such things is either a tremendous liar, or a madman (as Lewis says, “on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg”), or He is truly the Christ, the Son of God, who is one with the Father.

However, reason and logic do not make us able to faithfully say Jesus is our Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to say that. Thanks be to God that He does make us able to see that He has given us life eternal in His Son!

We pray: Lord God, make us to always confess faithfully that Your Son, Jesus Christ, is our true Lord, and true Savior. Amen.

We see our Lord healing the infirmity of both the young and the old. Faith makes us children of God, not the age of our flesh and blood.

Our bodies are gifts from God, but they are also instruments through which He can exhibit His power. Our frames readily show the consequences of sin as they grow sick and age. But He sees fit to heal us and bless us on occasion so that we may see two important lessons.

The first lesson is that, regardless of our body, He heals our souls in Jesus Christ. Our sins are forgiven, and even when our mortal body dies from the natural results of fallen creation our souls are preserved in the safekeeping of our Lord Jesus.

The second lesson is that, if our bodies are healed by His wonderful power, it is a testimony and preview of the resurrection and the life everlasting, which also comes only through Christ. That resurrection and restoration of the created world is also a part of the great work that our Lord did when He innocently sacrificed Himself on the cross, and then rose again in His own resurrection. That new life is a picture of the abundant life that all the faithful will have because of Him, being made whole in soul and body!

We pray: Heavenly Father, heal our souls with the forgiveness of our sins in Your Son, Jesus Christ; and restore our bodies to the goodness of Your original created order for all eternity as we live to glorify You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

How is it that One Who was glorified by God and was so powerful as to overcome a very powerful demon could be betrayed and killed by mere men? This was only possible because the Son of Man laid down His life by His own power! In His great power He would also take His life up again and rise the third day to show He had overcome sin and death!

Our Lord's innocent submission to death was the most profound display of power that God has done for us. The glory of His transfiguration is directly connected with His death and resurrection. He is worthy of all honor and glory because He paid for the sins of mankind and brought redemption to all who would believe and be baptized. By His death, which itself manifested a stunning amount of power, He drove out and crushed not just a powerful demon, but Satan himself.

This submission is foolishness to man. It cannot be properly understood apart from faith. But thanks be to God that He reveals this glory to us through faith in His Word! When His Spirit opens our eyes we are able to understand how the history of God's works and promises among man were fulfilled in His submission to death. The sins of us all, from Adam and Eve to each one of us, were paid for by His blood. And so we have the glorious forgiveness that comes from His powerful act. This is why the cross of Christ is even more glorious than even the transfiguration or His greatest miracles. God loved us and gave Himself to save us in this!

We pray: Lord God, all thanks, glory, and honor to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost on account of Your powerful mercy in Jesus Christ! Help us to always understand and live according to the blessings of our salvation in Him. Amen.

“Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.”

Children are capable of a trust and humility that is much harder for adults. Children are generally teachable, whereas adults often think they are already wise and try to explain away things that do not fit with their established notions or habits.

Likewise, the “old Adam,” our sinful mind, thinks it is already wise and has no use for God’s wisdom. It turns His laws into tools for self-righteousness, and it ignores His Gospel as foolishness. It rejects the kingdom of God because it thinks it already has things figured out according to its own wicked, narcissistic kingdom. But by contrast, the man that is born again according to the Holy Spirit is able to receive God’s kingdom like a little child because his mind is made humble and teachable. The faithful child of God is empowered to be a disciple, a student, of all that Christ commands. Therefore, that person is made wise unto repentance and able to see and hear the truth of the Gospel!

Christ draws us near as little children; we do not approach Him because we manage to figure it out on our own. And according to the merciful love of the Father, Jesus touches us and blesses us like parents care for their children. He washes us and makes us clean in the water of Baptism. He feeds us and strengthens us in the Supper. And, He teaches us, making us wise unto our salvation in Him, by His Word.

We pray: Heavenly Father, keep us steadfast in Your Spirit so that we may always be Your faithful children as Christ Jesus gathers us, touches our lives, and blesses us according to the grace of Your kingdom. In His Name. Amen.

“Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?” Simon answered and said, ‘I suppose the one whom he forgave more.’ And He said to him, ‘You have rightly judged.’”

Our pride would tempt us to make this text about comparing the number or gravity of one person’s sins against another’s. But we are all dead in our sins. There are only two options for mankind: dead, or not dead. We are dead if our sins remain on us, neither repented nor absolved. But we are made alive in Christ Jesus by faith. Faith makes us repent of our sins and enables us to believe and rejoice in the forgiveness that comes from Christ’s death on the cross.

The more significant consideration is how much one understands the depth of his debts and the magnitude of what has been forgiven. The one who faithfully repents of the sins that come to mind and trouble his conscience is truly forgiven and truly blessed. But the one who understands that not only the sins he has committed are grievous, but also that the sin which permeates his very nature is deadly, yet completely forgiven by the blood of Jesus, is tremendously blessed in this faithful realization.

Only God can forgive us, but God is also the only one who can move us to faith and repentance. All glory goes to Him. But for each of us there is the individual experience of understanding how significant Christ’s forgiveness is. That experience does not make us more righteous in the eyes of our Lord, but we are definitely blessed in the depth with which we are able to appreciate His amazing grace in Jesus Christ!

We pray: Lord God, open our hearts and minds by Your Spirit so that we may faithfully repent of our many sins, as well as the original sin that tainted us. And make us love Your Son ever more, according to the profound grace that we have received in Him. Amen.

The important contrast in today's reading is between the elders' words about the centurion, the centurion's words about himself, and our Lord's words about him.

The elders fell into the usual error of the Jews, where they focused on the works of man for one's worthiness before God. They praised the centurion to Christ because the man "loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue." It is indeed a good thing to serve people and support the church, but these are not things that make one worthy of God's favor. They are works that ought to flow out of faith, created by the Holy Spirit and the only thing that truly brings us God's favor on account of Christ Jesus.

On the other hand, the centurion showed humility. "I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof." He did not try to appeal to his deeds, but recognized that Christ had great authority. He humbly asked the Lord to use that power and authority to have mercy, not on himself, but on another, his dear servant.

This attitude of the centurion was recognized by the Lord as great faith! It is a tremendous blessing that God should praise any of us for our faith, especially in front of others as an example. However, the glory still does not go to the centurion, or any of us who receive such recognition. The glory still, and always, belongs to God, because it is He who creates and fulfills that faith by His Spirit, the Word of Jesus Christ, and the Sacraments that strengthen our faith!

We pray: Heavenly Father, make us truly faithful and meek before the glory of Your holy presence, and bless us by the authority of Your Word and the salvation we receive in Jesus Christ. Amen.

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

People often desire glory and authority because they believe those things mean they can do as they wish, serving their own interests. However, our Lord makes it clear that true power and true glory do not belong to tyrannical megalomaniacs. True power and glory are connected with those great leaders who serve others faithfully, diligently, and righteously.

God Himself serves man. As we say in the traditional ending of the Lord's Prayer, "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory..." But those attributes of our righteous God come from the fact that He serves us and takes care of us according to them! He created us and sustains us by His infinite power. His kingdom is made up of the very creatures that He serves as they are gathered to Him. And His glory gives all a clear picture of where the source of our help and provision comes from.

These attributes are very much true of God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, as well. His earthly life was characterized by service. He healed the sick and broken, He taught all who would hear about the blessings that come from the Word, and most importantly of all He gave His life as a ransom. He innocently suffered and was executed for no crime of His own, but as payment for the sins of the world. And as the Gospel says, "whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life!"

We pray: Heavenly Father, Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. We give thanks for Your grace to us, most of all in Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

“Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.”

Sometimes our Lord Jesus is mischaracterized as being only a mild-mannered teacher of peace and love. However, the story of Him driving out the money changers shows that that image of Jesus is not completely accurate.

In many instances we see Christ clearly condemning the actions and teachings of those who burden God’s people with faithless errors. By modern standards He actually would be considered intolerant and hateful towards these wicked people. But in reality He is neither a teacher of timidity and a naive live-and-let-live message, nor is He a hateful extremist. He teaches love and mercy, but He also upholds truth and justice. He exemplifies righteous patience and humility, but He also is bold and zealous for making God’s righteous judgment known as well.

God’s message to mankind is not “peace at any cost;” it is the message of peace at the cost of Christ’s blood on the cross. Jesus Christ’s innocent suffering and death are profoundly important because they are the fulfillment of God’s promises for our salvation. Our Lord would *not* be promoting love and peace if He allowed His saving Word to be corrupted by false teachers and peddlers. Those who are truly hateful and intolerant are those who obscure the truth that helps us and saves us. His judgments and measures against falsehood are serious because our salvation in Him is serious!

We pray: Lord God, keep us safe from false teachers by Your justice, and comfort us with Your peace in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our focus and foundation must be on the sound teaching of God’s Word. We cannot hope to help others or stand grounded ourselves if we lack the truth of all that Christ has commanded.

False teaching is the plank that blinds people and makes them dangerous leaders. They may be eager to help and love others, but if their vision is blocked by errors they put themselves and those who follow them at serious risk.

Error is also the poison that causes bad fruit in the lives of men. Satan’s lies and man’s disobedience in the beginning caused that poison to be present in all our lives. But it becomes worse when people resist the Holy Spirit and let the corruption continue to stay and build.

Error is also a weak foundation for a house or institution. The whole structure can collapse because falsehood is unstable. And those that dwell in an institution that has sin compromising its foundation are in danger as well.

The truth in Jesus Christ is the only thing that helps us and sustains us. As the Holy Spirit enlightens us in the Word we are then able to lead others to the wisdom of God’s righteousness and the mercy of His forgiveness for our sins. Also, the constant presence of these blessings through life in the faithful Church with the Word and Sacraments strengthen and preserve us in our sure foundation.

We pray: Lord God, open our eyes with Your truth, and keep us steadfast in our Savior, Jesus Christ crucified. Amen.

The wisdom of God is very different from the wisdom of false teachers. False teachers take the Word and abuse it, resisting the Holy Spirit and His guidance in faithfully applying the Word. However, because they use parts of the Word they manage to fool some into thinking that they are teaching a faithful message. This is why false teachers must always be marked and avoided. They play dangerous games that can result in the damnation of others.

False teachers are also quick to try and protect themselves by hiding behind misapplied verses like “Judge not, and you shall not be judged.” But if their teaching is faithful and their use of God’s Word is according to the Holy Spirit, then they have no need to worry about being judged. Our Lord’s point is that man should not judge according to himself or his own wisdom. That does not mean no one shall be judged, or marked as false, or avoided for their dangerous lies. Such Pharisaical teachers are not judged according to men or their wisdom, but according to the Word of God. Their lies are exposed by the very Word that they mishandle, and they are judged by it, not by any man.

The holy Word judges all of us and exposes our sins. But by the grace of God and the power of His Spirit we are made able to repent of those sins, not hide them or make excuses. Then the Gospel of our Lord is applied to teach us that those same sins are forgiven in Jesus Christ!

We pray: Lord God, Your Word judges righteously; keep us steadfast in Christ so that we may not be judged according to our sins, but declared faithful and righteous in Jesus’ name. Amen.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

Many people think that the Christian faith is about as important as a hobby. They act like it is a marginal thing that can serve its purpose and then be forgotten as is convenient. But in reality the Christian life and faith ought to permeate every aspect of our being.

To live according to our faith completely does not mean that we ought to forsake the normal world and seek piety in the isolation of a monastery. We live and serve in a regular, fallen world. The challenge is in being faithful while not letting the fallen world distract us or cause us to compromise. However, because we are all still sinful in this life, we do get distracted and we do compromise. We fail to keep this first commandment.

Thanks be to God that our righteousness does not depend on us keeping that commandment. It depends on Christ’s atonement for us and the Holy Spirit bringing us to faith in that redemption, and making us able to love the Lord our God to the best of our abilities.

Our hearts are sinful, our souls are tainted, our minds are wicked, and our strength is fleeting; but the Spirit of God is powerful and eternal! We should rejoice in the fact that our eternal life is not based on our keeping the commandments, but instead is based on God keeping us in Jesus Christ, the crucified!

We pray: Lord God, create in us a clean heart, and renew Your right Spirit within us, keeping us steadfast in Christ Jesus. Amen.

“And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority.”

God’s Word is not an idle philosophy. It is not just one of many viable perspectives in a sea of subjective truths. His Word is *the* truth, objective and universal. And when it is preached and used according to the Spirit of God it has great power and authority!

We confess in the Nicene Creed that we believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom all things were made. Christ is the Word of God made flesh, so even as all creation was spoken into existence by the Word of God, all things have their beginning according to the power and authority that is found in our Lord Jesus.

The Word of the Law has power to teach us righteousness, but it also has the authority to condemn those who ignore it or make it into a lie. And by the work of the Holy Spirit it teaches us about our trespasses and gives us the understanding to faithfully repent of our sins.

Most of all, the Word has power and authority to save us from death and hell. The Word of our forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ crucified is the most precious power and authority that God has revealed to us. By His death and resurrection Christ conquered the grave and has authority over the living and the dead. Other “words” or philosophies cannot do this. Eternal life is found in the Word of Jesus Christ alone!

We pray: Lord God, let Your Word always abide with us, according to the power of Your Spirit. Keep us steadfast in Your Word, which alone gives us life in Christ Jesus. Amen.

““But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’—He said to the man who was paralyzed, ‘I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.’”

Our Lord’s ability to perform miracles and heal infirmities is truly amazing, but His ability to forgive the sins of man is far, far more amazing! According to the perception of man, the words “Your sins are forgiven you” are far less impressive than instantly healing severe paralysis. But the Holy Spirit gives the faithful the ability to see that the forgiveness of sins is greater than the healing of any physical problem.

Christ’s forgiveness heals our souls, and if our souls are not healed then the weaknesses of our bodies are irrelevant. Our bodies and souls will be thrown into the darkness if we are without forgiveness and life in Jesus. But if our souls are made well by the Word of God, then we can endure any bodily trouble, and even look forward to our bodies being made completely new in the resurrection and life everlasting!

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, forgive our sins according to Your mercy in Jesus Christ, our crucified Lord, and bless our present physical life according to Your good will. And keep us steadfast in Your Son so that we may look forward to the life of the world to come, when all things are made new in Him! Amen.