

On account of your faith in the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the tree of the holy cross for your salvation, the heavenly Father has blotted out your transgressions and sins like a thick cloud. We have all experienced thick fog, and how impossible it is to see very far when we are in it. So, too, are your sins blotted out. They cannot be seen. They are blotted out on account of the merits of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Therefore, we rejoice and sing “Alleluia!” Praise the Lord! The whole world rejoices and sings—the lower parts of the Earth; the mountains; the forest, and every tree in it. We have been made Christians in the womb of the Church in Holy Baptism. Our heavenly Father has washed us and made us His children on account of the sacrifice of His Beloved Son Jesus.

We now cling to Him in faith and lay our transgressions before His throne of grace, so that we might receive from Him, forgiveness, life and salvation. He has opened for us the door of Heaven and eternal life. He has destroyed, once and for all, the power of death and the grave, so that we might live with Him for all eternity with all the saints of Heaven. Our sins have been blotted out and we receive eternal life, even though we deserved the punishment that our Lord Jesus Christ endured. For this we give eternal thanks and praise.

We pray: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who celebrate the solemnities of the Lord’s resurrection may by the renewal of the Holy Spirit rise again from the death of the soul; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

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Lesson from the Book of Concord Laetare Sunday

The Fourth Petition.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Here we are mindful of the poor breadbasket, namely, of our body and the necessities of the temporal life. It is a brief and simple word, but it is also very broad and comprehensive. For if you speak of, and pray for, daily bread, you pray for everything that is necessary in order to have and enjoy the same, and also against everything which interferes with it. Therefore you must enlarge your thoughts and extend them afar, not only to the oven or the flour-barrel, but to the distant field and the entire land, which bears and brings to us daily bread and every sort of sustenance. For if God did not cause it to grow, and bless and preserve it in the field, we could never take bread from the oven or have any to set upon the table.

To speak briefly, this petition includes everything that belongs to our entire life in the world. For on that account alone do we need daily bread. But to our life it is not only necessary that our body have food and covering and other necessities, but also that we live in peace and quiet with those among whom we live and have our intercourse in daily business and conversation and in every manner possible; in short, whatever pertains to the interests of family, of neighbors and of government. For where these things do not prosper as they ought, the necessities of life also must fail, and life cannot be maintained. There is, besides, the greatest need to pray for temporal authority and government, as that by which, most of all, God preserves to us our daily bread and all the comforts of this life. For though we had received of God all good things in abundance, we should not be able to retain any of them, or use them in security and happiness, if He did not give us a permanent and peaceful government. For where there are dissension, strife and war, there the daily bread is already taken away, or at least diminished.

—The Large Catechism, §71–74

FRIDAY, APRIL 1: EZEKIEL 17:22-24

EASTER

This Kingdom of Heaven is described by the Prophet Ezekiel as a “majestic cedar” tree. This tree has as its root the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ on another tree—the holy cross. This root—our Lord Jesus—was planted on the high and prominent mountain of Golgotha for all the world to see. There He suffered and died in innocence to redeem us from sin, death and the devil.

The Apostles went out from Jerusalem and grafted in more and more branches into this tree by preaching Christ crucified and risen from the dead to all the world, so that now the world is filled with the branches of this tree, which protects the birds—all those who have been baptized into the faith—as they dwell in its branches.

This “majestic cedar” which was formed from the Branch of Christ is the Church. All those who cling to our Lord Jesus Christ and His merits of salvation—all the little birds—find their life and protection within her branches. We find our home and our food in this tree, and we continue daily to hear God’s Word. We receive and rejoice in His Sacraments, which bestow upon us forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation, so that we might live in her branches for all eternity.

We pray: O Almighty and Eternal God, Who through the resurrection of Thy Son hast sealed the promise of our resurrection, grant unto us the grace to joy in this Thy promise, as we await the consummation of all the saints; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In our Lord Jesus Christ we have both an High Priest and a Lamb for sacrifice. Our High Priest offers up Himself on the tree of the holy cross for our sins and the sins of the whole world. His Name is “BRANCH.” He is the branch from the stump of Jesse, Who took on our flesh, so that He might redeem us from sin, death and the devil.

On the cross—on the altar of His sacrifice for all mankind—He tore down the old Temple, which required the daily sacrifice of animals to bring forgiveness to those who brought their sacrifice in faith. But on the third day He rebuilt the Temple and rose again from the dead, so that no longer do we have to sacrifice animals, but His once-and-for-all-time sacrifice serves to bring forgiveness, life and salvation to those who cling to Him in faith.

We now have a memorial of this sacrifice—of His suffering and death on our behalf—in the meal of His Body and Blood given under bread and wine. This meal gives forgiveness, life and salvation to all those who partake of it in faith, by the power of the Holy Ghosts working through that meal. Many come from all over the world to receive the gifts that meal bestows, as we remember our Lord and Savior’s sacrifice for us and receive the crown of eternal life.

We pray: O Almighty and Eternal God, Who hast bestowed on us the crown of life through the death of Thy Son, grant us faith to show forth in our lives that which we profess with our lips; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

People sometimes stumble over the divinely sanctioned genocide carried out by the people of Israel against the Canaanites. But in today’s reading, Moses reveals the justice of God’s command. It was because of their wickedness that God ordained their destruction, from the wickedness of their inherited sin to the wickedness of their idolatry, to the wickedness they committed against one another. They had justly deserved God’s temporal and eternal punishment.

But so had the Israelites. They shared the same inherited sin, passed down from Adam. They had committed idolatry at Mt. Sinai with the golden calf just weeks after hearing the First Commandment pronounced by God Himself. They had rebelled against God repeatedly over the forty years they spent in the wilderness and were branded by God as a “stiff-necked people.”

The sins of the Canaanites earned the just punishment of God. But whose righteousness earned the favor God showed to Israel? Not their own. They were spared and brought into the Promised Land solely by God’s grace, for the sake of the coming Christ, and for the sake of God’s own promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In the same way, it was not because of any righteousness on our part that God sent His Gospel to us, worked repentance in our hearts, and brought us into His kingdom. It was all grace. It was God’s fulfillment of His promise to Abraham that in his seed “all nations on earth will be blessed.” Remember your sins, lest you ever begin to imagine that you deserve a place in Christ’s kingdom. But also remember Jesus Christ, “through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand” (Romans 5:2).

Gracious Father, have mercy on us for Jesus’ sake and preserve us ever in Your grace. Amen.

In His pure goodness and grace, God chose Israel above all the nations of the earth. He redeemed them from slavery in Egypt, carried them on eagle's wings through the wilderness, and was about to give them the bountiful Promised Land of Canaan. He did all this out of fatherly divine goodness and mercy, and not because they had earned or deserved it.

What did God require of those whom He had saved? That they should fear Him and love Him so that they would walk in His ways and keep His commandments. The Law served as the guide for how the children of God, who had been saved by grace, were expected to live in God's kingdom.

Now grace has been shown beyond the nation of Israel as the light of Christ lightens all nations, and as all people are called to repent and believe in Christ for salvation. Now "the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man has appeared." Now "He has saved us, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit...that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:4-7).

As those who have been saved from the slavery to sin and made heirs of the Promised Land of heaven, we are also guided by God's commandments to fear and love God, so that we gladly act according to His commandments, honoring God and serving our neighbor.

O God, You are our praise, our God who has done great and awesome things for us in sending Your Son to redeem us from our sins. Guide us by Your commandments, that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we may ever love and serve You. Amen.

When our loving and merciful Lord and Savior Jesus Christ died on the cross on Good Friday an earthquake shook the earth and Jerusalem. The graves of those who had fallen asleep arose from their graves and entered the city to witness to all who would hear of grace and mercy of the Lord Jesus, Who had just won the victory over death and the grave.

Even though by all outward appearances it looked like the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees, and even the devil himself, had gained the victory through the death of our Lord. In reality, their kingdom of death and grave had been overthrown. Their evil mob and their passion for the death of our Lord Jesus only appeared to have the victory; Satan and his army only appeared to defeat Christ.

But Heaven and Earth were shaken that day by our Lord Jesus, and the power of death and the grave were overthrown. Now, all those who believe on our Lord Jesus Christ and cling to His throne of grace have the victory in Him and His works.

Through His death and His resurrection the whole world benefitted. He sent His apostles into all the world to proclaim the good news of our Lord's salvation from sin, death and the devil. Therefore, we rejoice that our dark souls, stained with sin, have been enlightened by the light of the Christ, and we now enjoy the victory over death and the grave, and possess eternal life.

We pray: O God, Who through the resurrection of Thy Son didst win life and freedom for the world, continue, we beseech Thee, these Thy gifts unto Thy people that they both walk in perfect freedom and attain unto life eternal; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

All of us are poor, miserable sinners ruled in this life by a wicked, profane and iniquitous king. We are ruled by sin, death and the devil—the unholy trinity. On account of our sin, we are not worthy to a part of the spiritual Israel, and deserve to be led into eternal exile in Hell, where the wicked and profane prince of Hell, the devil, scowls as fierce as he will against all of the good creation of God.

But our loving and merciful God and Father sent us a new Prince and Ruler; His One and Only-Begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. By His perfect obedience to the Law of God and on account of His suffering and death in our place on the tree of the holy cross, the wicked and profane prince of the world, the devil, has been overthrown. He can no longer harm us. He has been judged; the deed is done. He cannot rule over us any longer.

We have been rescued and ransomed from sin, death and devil. They have no more power over us. Therefore, us poor, miserable sinners—even though we do not merit it on account of anything that we do—have the gift of eternal life with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and with all the company of the spiritual Israel forever.

We pray: Almighty God, Who through the resurrection of Thy Son didst secure peace for our troubled conscience, grant unto us evermore this peace, that, trusting in the merit of Thy Son, we at length come unto the perfect peace of Heaven; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

As the Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land, God attached many great promises to their obedience, and many awful threats to their disobedience. It was part of the Mosaic covenant that every imaginable form of earthly prosperity would certainly accompany the Israelites if they would remain faithful to God's laws, even as every imaginable form of earthly disaster would surely befall them if they failed to keep to God's commandments.

These blessings and curses were not spoken by Moses to all people on earth, nor do they apply to anyone in the New Testament era. The all-encompassing earthly blessings were promised only to the Old Testament nation of Israel, and the terrible curses were threatened only against Israel. No one in the New Testament era should expect such specific earthly rewards from God for obedience, nor should we view every disaster as the result of some specific sin committed by someone.

But what do these blessings and curses teach us? They teach us how serious God was, and still is, about His people honoring His Word and living in daily contrition and repentance. As Luther explains the close of the commandments in the Small Catechism, "God threatens to punish all who transgress these commandments. Therefore, we should fear His wrath and not do anything against them. But He promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore, we should also love and trust in Him and gladly act according to His commandments."

Heavenly Father, You once cursed Your beloved Son for us on the cross so that we might obtain every spiritual blessing in Christ. Have mercy on us for His sake, and grant that we may live in contrition and repentance all our days, until You bestow on us the heavenly rewards of grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The blessings God promised to Israel for their obedience to His commandments covered every aspect of life on earth. They were promised big families, healthy bodies, long life, bountiful harvests, plentiful possessions, victory in every battle and prosperity in everything they did. It sounds almost like heaven on earth.

It's not that God required sinlessness from the Israelites in order for them to receive these blessings. What God required from them was that they take His commandments seriously, that they repent of their sins. God required that they trust in the promises He made to forgive their sins by means of the many sacrifices outlined in the Law of Moses, all of which pointed ahead to the coming Christ. At various points throughout their history, when Israel was living in repentance and faith in their good and gracious God, they experienced these blessings, just as Moses had foretold. Truly, if any nation on earth could have experienced a permanent heaven on earth, it would have been Israel.

But Israel's repeated rejection of God throughout the Old Testament and their ultimate rejection of God's Messiah demonstrates that heaven on earth simply isn't possible. Our flesh is too corrupt, and death is still a reality here. God does not intend even for the members of His Holy Church to dwell on this earth in peace and prosperity forever.

Instead, we have been given every spiritual blessing in Christ. Our sure and certain hope is the redemption that is in Christ Jesus and the inheritance reserved for us in the new heavens and earth, where moth and rust will not destroy, where our sinful flesh will no longer exist, and where only blessings and joy await.

O Lord, by Your Word and Sacraments, strengthen and preserve us in the true faith unto life everlasting, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The power of Death and Grave has been destroyed for all those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Death and Grave have been our plague and our destruction. We cannot escape Death and Grave. We need an intercessor. We need someone or something to ransom and redeem us from the power of Death and the Grave, because we are unable to do so of our own efforts and strength.

We have that intercessor in our Lord Jesus Christ, Who suffered our punishment on the tree of the holy cross. He is our intercessor; we can go to His throne of grace and ask for mercy and pity for our manifold transgressions because He has already fulfilled the Law. He shows us mercy, because the wrath of God the Father was fully poured out upon Him on the cross. The Father showed Him no pity. His battle was with Death and Grave, and they deserved no pity from Him.

On account of His grace and mercy toward us we have been given the victory over Death and Grave, and we now have, as a promise of God, eternal life. All those who cling to our Lord God in faith have the eternal reward of life with Him. For this we praise and thank Him.

We pray: O God, Who in the Paschal Feast hast redeemed the world, grant unto Thy people Thy heavenly gift that they may both attain unto perfect freedom and advance unto life eternal; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Holy Saturday is sometimes the forgotten day of Holy Week. Nothing is happening. Holy Week began with Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. We find Jesus busy preaching and teaching. By Thursday evening He is in the upper room and institutes His Supper. Later that evening, He is betrayed into the hands of those who would ultimately crucify Him on that Friday.

A great deal had taken place during the week and now it's Saturday. It's quiet. Indeed, "It is finished!" It is Saturday, the Sabbath, and Jesus now rests from His labors in a tomb meant for another.

We already know the rest of this story. He, whose "visage was marred more than any man," will arise from the dead. As soon as the sun sets and the Sabbath is over, the time for His body to rest in the tomb is over. It's the beginning of a new day, the beginning of a new creation that is found only in Christ and the forgiveness of sins He secured on the cross.

One day our bodies also will rest from their labors. We will be placed in the grave, graves that Christ has sanctified by His resting in the tomb. Christ has given us the promise of the resurrection to eternal life with Him.

So, on this day when there seems to be a lull in Holy Week, let us not forget this special day. Remember that the Sabbath, a day of rest, was God's creation, and that our rest is found in Him and His life-giving Word.

O God, who didst enlighten this most holy night with the glory of the Lord's resurrection, preserve in all Thy people the spirit of adoption which Thou hast given, so that, renewed in body and soul, they may perform unto Thee a pure service. Amen.

Fourteen verses describing the blessings promised for Israel's obedience are followed by 54 verses describing the curses threatened if they would turn away from God. They were certainly given ample warning by Moses.

Every natural disaster, every sickness, every loss in battle that Israel suffered should have served as a sure indicator that they had sinned against God, and as an urgent call to repentance. But throughout most of their history, they made excuses for the curses they suffered and refused to repent, until eventually the final curses of destruction (for the northern kingdom) and captivity in a foreign land (for the southern kingdom) were brought against them.

Still, even after all their rebellions and transgressions, God also promised (Deuteronomy 30) that, if they would repent and turn back to Him, even in exile, He would have mercy on them and bring them back to their land, so that the Christ could be born there and make atonement for their sins. What unfathomable grace!

The curses that came upon Israel for their disobedience are not a cause for boasting on our part, but serve as a lesson for us. Paul writes to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 10) so that we learn to fear God's wrath and take to heart His call to repentance now, so that we do not receive His grace in vain. For "behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

O Lord, who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Return, O LORD! How long? And have compassion on Your servants. Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days! Amen. (Psalm 90:11-14)

After forty years of faithful service to God, Moses, the man of God, died. He had spoken with God as a friend speaks with a friend. He had revealed God's Word to Israel. He had performed many signs and wonders. He had given them bread from heaven for forty years. He had been a judge for the people in their disputes, an intercessor for them when they had sinned, a commander for them in battle. And, for all his service and sacrifice, he had often been despised by the very people whom he served. Before he died, the Lord gave him the opportunity to look upon the Promised Land, but he wasn't allowed to lead the people to their goal.

Moses was the greatest prophet of the Old Testament; there was no prophet like him—not until Jesus came.

Jesus was like Moses, but greater. He knew God as the only-begotten Son who is "in the bosom of the Father." He performed even greater signs and wonders. He is the Living Bread that came down from heaven, that, if a man eats it, he will live forever. He is the Judge of all mankind, yet also our Advocate and the One who intercedes for us at the right hand of God. He is not just our commander; He is our King. And although He was despised and rejected, and even put to death by those He came to serve, He was also raised from the dead and will lead all who believe in Him safely into the heavenly Promised Land.

Lord God, we give You thanks for Moses and the Law he gave, but especially for Your Son and His Gospel, through whom we have received grace for grace. Amen.

Today is Good Friday. It bears repeating. Today is GOOD Friday. This is the day that gives meaning to Christmas and Easter, those two days favored by most Christians. Without Good Friday and the death of Jesus, there is no hope for a world filled with sin and death. Christmas would only be a baby in a manger and Easter just an empty tomb that was never occupied. Without the death of Jesus, our lives would have no purpose, because all there would be is sin and death.

The people of Jerusalem rejected the Lord and had Him crucified. They paid the price for their rejecting Him as Jerusalem was later destroyed and brought to rubble. They had listened to the "false and deceptive visions" of false prophets. The false prophets were not interested in God's unchanging message of repentance: "They have not uncovered your iniquity."

Such false prophets can be heard this very day. They do not preach about sin and grace, but about how God wishes for their hearers to be happy. All their hearers need to do is follow the right formula and God will bless them with health, wealth, success, and fame.

Be thankful that God has opened your eyes to the truth of your sin, and the truth of Christ crucified for you. Our Lord was crucified "and indeed it was very good."

Almighty and everlasting God, who hast willed that Thy Son should bear for us the pains of the cross that Thou mightest remove from us the power of the adversary, help us to remember and give thanks for our Lord's Passion that we may obtain remission of sins and redemption from everlasting death. Amen.

“For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin,” (Ecclesiastes 7:20) not even a high priest like Joshua. To make matters worse, there stood the Accuser, Satan. Satan was there “to oppose” Joshua, who was dressed in the filth of his sins. So what does Joshua do for himself? Or better, what can Joshua do for himself? He is filthy with sin and can’t change his status as a sinner. But God can!

God removes Joshua’s sins and clothes him “with rich robes.” Joshua can do nothing. God does everything. “See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes.” Joshua simply receives what God gives.

Now that Joshua has been forgiven, a burden is placed upon him. He was told by God to “walk in My ways” and “keep My command.” But how? God’s answer is found earlier in Zechariah, “Return to Me” (Zechariah 1:3). Turning to God with a repentant heart keeps one walking in the ways of the Lord.

The Christian life is not found in blazing one’s own path of righteousness. The Christian life is found only in looking to God for mercy and having Him create a clean heart within you. Your forgiveness comes as a result of God’s “Servant the BRANCH.” He removes your iniquity and gives you life, His life. He gives you His own Body and His own Blood to strengthen and preserve you in the true faith.

O Lord God, who hast left unto us in a wonderful Sacrament a memorial of Thy Passion, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may use this Sacrament of Thy body and blood that the fruits of redemption may continually be manifest in us. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Judica Sunday

Chapter VI. Of the Third Use of the Law.

1. We believe, teach and confess that although men rightly believing and truly converted to God have been freed and exempted from the curse and coercion of the Law, they nevertheless are not on this account without Law, but have been redeemed by the Son of God, in order that they should exercise themselves in it day and night, (Ps. 119). For even our first parents before the fall did not live without Law, which Law of God was also written upon their hearts, because they were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26sq.; 2:16 sqq.; 3:3).

2. We believe, teach and confess that the preaching of the Law is to be urged with diligence, not only upon the unbelieving and impenitent, but also upon the rightly believing, truly converted, regenerate, and justified by faith.

3. For although they are regenerate and renewed in the spirit of their mind, yet, in the present life, this regeneration and renewal are not complete, but are only begun, and believers are, in the spirit of their mind, in a constant struggle against the flesh, i.e. against the corrupt nature and disposition which cleaves to us unto death. On account of this old Adam, which still inheres in the understanding, will and all the powers of man, it is needful that the Law of the Lord always shine upon the way before him, in order that he may do nothing from self-imposed human devotion; likewise, that the old Adam also may not employ his own will, but may be subdued against his will, not only by the admonition and threatening of the Law, but also by punishments and blows, so that he may follow and surrender himself captive to the Spirit (1 Cor. 9:27; Rom. 6:12; Gal. 6:14; Ps. 119:1 sqq.; Heb. 13:21).

4. Then as to the distinction between the works of the Law and the fruits of the Spirit, we believe, teach and confess that the works which are done according to the Law, as long as they are and are called works of the Law, are only extorted from man by the force of punishment and the threatening of God’s wrath.

5. But the fruits of the Spirit are the works which the Spirit of God who dwells in believers works through the regenerate, and are done by believers so far as they are regenerate [spontaneously and freely], as though they knew of no command, threat or reward; for in this manner the children of God live in the Law and walk according to the Law of God, a manner which St. Paul, in his Epistles, calls the Law of Christ and the Law of the mind (Rom. 7:25; 8:7).

6. Thus the Law is and remains both to the penitent and impenitent, both to regenerate and unregenerate men, one and the same Law, namely, the immutable will of God; and the distinction, so far as it concerns obedience, is alone in the men, inasmuch as one who is not yet regenerate does what is required him by the Law out of constraint and unwillingly (as also the regenerate do according to the flesh); but the believer, so far as he is regenerate, without constraint and with a willing spirit, does that which no threatening of the Law could ever extort from him.

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome, Art. VI

Today we read how God purely out of His fatherly divine goodness and mercy calls His chosen people to return to His ever flowing river of grace. Thru Isaiah, God calls His people to remember their being bound in slavery, yet freely released as they willingly followed Moses into the promised land, and how nation after nation fell before the greatness of the Lord to preserve their identity. Yet not all have remembered, as God boldly asks, “What injustice has ever been found in Me that you should run after other gods, which are not even other gods; why, when no other nation has ever abandoned their god?”

How often do we evaluate our identity as God’s people apart from the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ? Are we still as excited as when we first believed? This Lenten Season we have another opportunity to see that it is an evil and bitter thing to forsake the Lord our God. Luther’s words regarding the significance of baptizing with water come into play here. It is the reminder of our daily drowning (repentance) that sinful man so he cannot rule our hearts and minds to run after other gods, which are not gods at all.

May we daily remember how we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called us by the Gospel, enlightened us with His gifts, sanctified and kept us in the true faith, which leads us to repentance!

We pray: Jesus, I will ponder now on Thy holy Passion; with Thy Spirit me endow for such meditation. Grant that I in love and faith may the image cherish of Thy suffering, pain, and death, That I may not perish. Amen. (TLH 140, vs. 1)

St. Paul wrote, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.” Jeremiah was indeed an heir of the kingdom. For the sake of God’s Word, Jeremiah suffered at the hands of the people. He brought God’s Word of judgment to them, and the people sought to kill him: “Let us cut him off from the land of the living.” Sound familiar?

Another prophet, Isaiah, said this about the Messiah sent by God: “By oppression and judgment He was taken away. Yet who of His generation protested? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people He was punished.”

The anger of sinful mankind toward God is real. It manifests itself in hostility toward God’s children, and sadly, it can also be seen in how God’s children sometimes treat each other. Maybe it is anger. Maybe is it the thoughtless words that are spoken. Or maybe it is the “silent treatment.” Whatever it takes to mistreat another, sin will find a way.

God did not abandon Jeremiah. He preserved him in true faith unto life everlasting. Likewise, God will not abandon you. He gave you His Spirit in Holy Baptism, and each day He brings you to repentance and turns you to Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

Grant we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who of our evil deeds are continually afflicted, may mercifully be relieved by the Passion of Thine only-begotten Son. Amen.

When we think of heroes we can easily find ourselves thinking of the likes of Superman, or Batman, or Captain America. They defeat the “bad guys” by overpowering them. The image that comes to mind is the “good guy” standing over the “bad guy” with his foot on the “bad guy’s” chest. “Victory is mine!”

It is Tuesday of Holy Week. We are one day closer to the Cross. We are moving ever closer to the suffering and death of Christ, as described by Isaiah. Jesus doesn’t look anything like a superhero. Jesus would soon give Himself to being struck on the back, to having His beard plucked, and finally to being nailed to the Cross. Then, the Hero dies.

From the “depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God,” a place unreachable by our human thoughts and intellect, comes forth “Good News.” Strange as it may appear to human reason, God defeats death by crucifying His Son. The Hero dies so those whose sins He bore, the sins of His enemies, might live. Though the Hero’s heel is bruised, the serpent’s head is forever crushed. The serpent’s power over creation has been vanquished.

Indeed, “the Righteous shall live by faith,” as demonstrated by Jesus who “fears, loves, and trusts” His Father above all things. “For the Lord will help Me,” “He is near who justifies Me,” and “Surely the Lord God will help Me” are words of faith. All the way to the point of death, Jesus trusted His Father. And as we know, death could only hold Life in the tomb but three days!

Almighty and everlasting God, grant us grace to pass through this holy time of our Lord’s Passion that we may obtain the pardon of our sins. Amen.

Our text for today has God describing Israel as lost because of their continued rejection of the one true God, and their constant desire to run after idols in whom they have placed their hope. God, as always, calls one to see his error, and in mercy is calling for repentance and recognition Him, that He is their only Savior! But because of their hardened heart, God sees the need for Israel to see how it is a fearful thing for them to fall into the hands of the living God.

Today, Satan is still urging God’s people to refuse to see the seriousness of sin, to refuse to believe that sin is folly, and that those who live in it bring about their doom (Proverbs 5:22-23). To such a person the same sense of humor could be implied as in the second part of Hosea 13:13, as God says: “Israel, you didn’t have enough sense to know when it was time for you to be born.”

May we during this penitential season be strengthened to see that all sin is a hateful thing in the sight of the Lord, but with contrite hearts be encouraged by remembering that Jesus Christ has defeated our sin. Its wage has been paid, and Satan has been defeated thru Christ’s sacrificial suffering, death, and resurrection from the grave.

We pray: Make me see Thy great distress, anguish, and affliction, bonds and stripes and wretchedness and Thy crucifixion; make me see how scourge and rod, spear and nails, did wound Thee, how for man Thou diedst, O God, who with thorns had crowned Thee. (TLH 140, vs. 2)

Today our reading reveals the devastation that will come upon Jerusalem; all for not heeding the voice of the Lord: “She has not trusted in the Lord;” for not seeking His guidance and following after His ways: “She has not drawn near to her God.” This rebellion against the Almighty was not just one or two groups of people who had gone astray, but involved the princes, the judges, and the priests.

One of the reasons for such rebelliousness came from not heeding God’s guidelines for being and remaining holy. They were to be set apart from other nations, but they chose to intermarry and condone practices of the Ammonites with incest between fathers and daughters. Now when the Word of God is despised, the Lord takes it away. Since the Lord is present in His Word, to have it removed is to have the presence of God depart from us. That essentially means that rebelling against the Word of God effectively tells the Lord that we no longer wish to be His people. We no longer want Him to be our God. What was Israel thinking?

While the people of Israel had a history of being rebellious, so do we, according to our sinful human nature. That is why it is necessary to consistently heed the written voice of the Lord, and daily examine our own hearts and decisions. We should not allow ourselves to fall into the trap of pushing away a kind, just, and merciful Lord, as Israel did.

Let us pray: Yet, O Lord, not thus alone make me see Thy Passion, but its cause to me make known and its termination. Ah! I also and my sin wrought Thy deep affliction; this indeed the cause hath been of Thy crucifixion. Amen. (TLH 140, vs. 3)

We have arrived at Holy Week, the great week of weeks. The call of the Lord to “all you of Judah” applies to us this day, “Amend your ways and your doings.” Throughout time, the message of God to a fallen world remains unchanged, “Repent!” Through the prophet Jeremiah, God recounts the many sins of Israel: oppression, shedding of innocent blood, idolatry, theft, adultery, swearing falsely, etc. One need only look at the list of sins to see nothing has changed with regard to the sins people commit to this day.

God points to the hypocrisy of the people of Jeremiah’s day. Abominable things were done by those who claim to be God’s people, and they went to the temple claiming their actions were God-Pleasing. They had turned the Temple into “a den of thieves.” Sound familiar? When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem He found the Temple was once again a “a den of thieves.” There it was; hypocrisy in the name of God.

The irony of the Cross is that the Jesus who had cleansed the Temple would later bear the sins of the same people who had disgraced the Temple. Upon the Cross Jesus would become a disgrace before God and Man as He atoned for the sins of the world.

Hypocrisy is still found in the church. Abominations such as women’s ordination, evolution, abortion, and homosexuality, to name a few, are claimed be God-pleasing.

Jesus paid the price for these sins, too. May God bring them repentance and continue to lead us to repent of our sins.

Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who amid so many adversities do fail through our own infirmities, may be restored through the Passion and intercession of Thine only-begotten Son. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Palmarum (Palm) Sunday

Article III.

Also they [the Lutherans] teach, that the Word, that is, the Son of God, did take man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, so that there are Two Natures, the divine and the human, inseparably conjoined in one Person, one Christ, true God and true man, who was born of the Virgin Mary, truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, that He might reconcile the Father unto us, and be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but for all actual sins of men. He also descended into hell, and truly rose again the third day; afterward He ascended into Heaven, that He might sit on the right hand of the Father, and forever reign, and have dominion over all creatures, and sanctify them that believe in Him, by sending the Holy Ghost into their hearts, to rule, comfort and quicken them, and to defend them against the devil and the power of sin. The same Christ shall openly come again to judge the quick and the dead, etc., according to the Apostles' Creed.

—The Augsburg Confession

THURSDAY, MARCH 17: MICAH 3:9-12

LENT 5

Our reading for today has Micah proclaiming what God has given him to speak regarding faithlessness of Israel's leaders and the destruction of Jerusalem. With another "Hear this" he announces to the wicked leaders the punishment God has in store for their crimes of cruel extortion, slave labor, injustice, bribery, and witchcraft, and then claimed immunity for themselves on the grounds that they were God's people. Sadly, they never reflected that the Lord demands sanctification of life and punishes sin.

Micah proclaims because of their sins, and their lack of repentance, Jerusalem would be laid in ruins. The palace grounds on Mount Zion would become tillable soil, the rest of the city a pile of broken stones, the height on which the temple stood like the hills of a forest covered with brush.

Some church leaders today have built up great fortunes by exploiting God's people, establishing fine buildings and institutions for the benefit of self-recognition. Sadly it is accomplished at the cost of the salvation for the public. Too often only a social gospel of love is proclaimed, and a clear lack of God's Law that challenges the immoral lifestyles practiced today. As a result, the people's hearts and souls are never convicted of sinfulness, nor see the need of receiving the forgiveness of sins through the means of grace.

Now especially there is a need to have the Word of God proclaimed in its truth and purity, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution.

Let us pray: Grant that I Thy Passion view with repentant grieving nor Thee crucify anew by unholy living. How could I refuse to shun every sinful pleasure since for me God's only Son suffered without measure? Amen. (TLH 140, vs. 4)

Our text can be portrayed in the words of Jesus as He quotes Isaiah in Mark 7:6-7 saying, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written ‘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.’”

Such is the difference between those who hear and believe the Word of the Lord, receiving a poor and contrite spirit, and those who reject the Word of the Lord, whose souls delight in their abominations, and who practice evil in the sight of the Lord.

The Lord looks upon the faithful and the unfaithful, and speaks words of courage and contempt. To the faithless God promises to bring their worst fears on them, for when He called, no one answered; when He spoke they did not hear. As a result, they chose to do that which despises God. To the faithful our Lord encourages steadfastness, where the glory of the Lord is seen in their lives in front of those who have made them to be a mockery before men. Instead of revenge, show mercy and joy for all to see.

Today, God is reminding us that He is in charge; He will allow those who reject Him and His Word to reap their own condemnation. Having hearts strengthened through His grace and mercy, may the faithful only be concerned about advancing the Gospel, which gives new birth through the Church.

Let us pray: If my sins give me alarm and my conscience grieve me, let Thy cross my fear disarm, peace of conscience give me. Grant that I may trust in Thee and Thy holy Passion. If His Son so loveth me, God must have compassion. Amen. (TLH 140, vs. 5)

Tomorrow, having past through another 40 days of self-examination, we will celebrate the beginning of Holy Week with another Palm Sunday, hearing these words: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.”

For many of the Jews, having heard these words spoken through God’s messenger, were looking forward to having all their surrounding nations defeated once and for all, and Israel and its glorious reign as God’s chosen people would subdue her enemies once and for all to reign eternally.

Today, we rejoice knowing that the words of Zechariah were fulfilled in the Person of Jesus Christ, God’s only begotten Son, who entered into Jerusalem to sacrifice Himself for the sins of the entire world, setting free prisoners from sin, death, and the power of the devil, once and for all times.

When these words of the prophecy were first spoken, God’s people had waited a very long time for them to come true. While they waited, they trusted in this promises of God to be fulfilled in the very same way that God’s people wait for their King to return for His second appearance. We wait by faith, which enables one to trust in the voice of our Lord, for He is our Creator, whose Kingdom is not of this world.

Let us pray: Grant that I may willingly bear with Thee my crosses, learning humbleness of Thee, peace mid pain and losses. May I give Thee love for love! Hear me, O my Savior, that I may in heaven above sing Thy praise forever. Amen. (TLH 140, vs. 6)