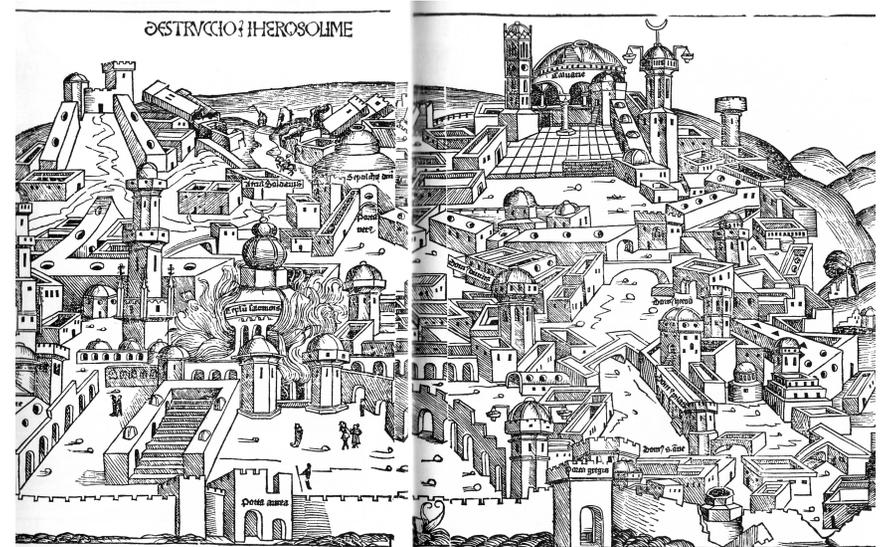


THE LUTHERAN HERALD



The Destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

TRINITY 24—TRINITY 27
(NOVEMBER 3—NOVEMBER 29, 2014)

A PUBLICATION OF
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF
NORTH AMERICA

THE GOSPEL **ST. MATTHEW 9:18-26 (NKJV)**

While He spoke these things to them, behold, a ruler came and worshiped Him, saying, “My daughter has just died, but come and lay Your hand on her and she will live.”

So Jesus arose and followed him, and so did His disciples.

And suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of His garment. For she said to herself, “If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well.”

But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, “Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And the woman was made well from that hour.

When Jesus came into the ruler’s house, and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd wailing, He said to them, “Make room, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping.” And they ridiculed Him.

But when the crowd was put outside, He went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. And the report of this went out into all that land.

THE COLLECT

Stir up, we beseech Thee, O Lord, the wills of Thy faithful people that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of Thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

God’s justice is fair. He has every right to punish and destroy those who corrupt His will, because all His works and ways are for the good of all mankind. Those who poison His designs with careless faithlessness also threaten to harm many others who would otherwise be helped by the Lord’s work. So, His judgments and severe consequences are not like the petty vendettas of man, but the diligence of a holy, benevolent King who seeks the best for all those in His care.

Israel’s sin is not just a simple failure to follow instructions. Their wicked negligence mocked and obscured the mercy that God would bring to the world through His Son. They continued to ignore God’s promises and twist His commands, even to the day that the Christ came to them and fulfilled so many of those promises. But, as Jesus said in His parable, “The owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect him when they see him.’ But when the vinedressers saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.’ So they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.” (see Luke 20:9-19).

The Lord’s Word is our salvation. It was no small thing that Israel compromised His Word. The message of repentance and salvation through Jesus Christ is of utmost importance, and our Lord’s will to bring that message to us all shows that His mercy and benevolence is greater than His anger and wrath.

We pray: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your profound mercy shown to us in Jesus Christ. Keep us faithful to Your Word and will so that all nations may learn Your wisdom and be saved by Your Gospel, in the Name of Christ Jesus. Amen.

“The Lord alone will be exalted in that day.” In spite of the lies of those who despise God, His will is not opposed to human happiness. To the contrary, it is opposed to human selfishness and destructive pride. The works and possessions of mankind cannot offer any good guidance on kindness and mercy because our nature is to serve ourselves first. But if God teaches us His ways and enables us to walk in His paths of righteousness, we will learn the true way of happiness and peace.

The Lord deserves to be exalted because the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are the only source of good for mankind. God the Father is our maker, the source of everything that is good in our lives. The Son teaches us and has brought us forgiveness through His sacrifice. And the Holy Ghost works in us to guide our hearts, minds, and strength toward those things that are truly good and holy. Whereas the vain pride of mankind only seeks short-sighted pleasures and gratifications.

As God’s faithful people, we look forward to the day when sin will be removed from the face of the earth and all pain and selfishness will be ended. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting, which we confess in our creeds. At that time the Words of Isaiah will be completely fulfilled, and God will truly be exalted with the fullness of His glory in Jesus Christ. And then we will dwell with Him in a world that is truly peaceful and filled only with the goodness that He has always intended for us.

We pray: Lord God, Thy kingdom come, and Thy will be done, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The text for today is a wonderful testimony to the power of the Lord’s forgiveness and great mercy, found in the confession of sins that leads to absolution. The bulk of our devotion is a listing of some of the most vile behavior imaginable, as well as a level of rebellion and rejection of God and His grace that can only be described as severe and aggressively belligerent. It is a description of a time when God’s people seem to be actively daring God to react regarding their faithless contempt for Him and His word. Throughout all of this the Lord mercifully continues to call His chosen back to Him, and to faithfulness regarding His statutes and promises.

This is not so different from our age when many of us who claim the title of Christian speak and act more like children of the world, indulging in every worldly distraction possible. In spite of our active rebellion and callousness toward God and His Word, He continues to call us to return to Him and His Means of Grace. His Word and Sacraments call us to return to His unmerited grace for the forgiveness of our sins and redemption of our souls. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool,” says the Lord (Isaiah 1:18).

If you will only return to your Lord in repentance and confess your sinfulness, He who calls you will Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it.

When one reads the words of today's devotion, he might be compelled to think of the Lord's plea recorded by the prophet Isaiah: "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6-7).

In our text from Jeremiah the Lord laments the fact that, though He searches diligently, He cannot find a single man who seeks truth in all of Jerusalem. May it not be said of us that we took the grace of the Lord so lightly that we did not diligently seek truth, and Him, throughout our days. The Lord desires that all be saved, so if we are blessed to hear the Gospel, but yet turn away from the eternal truth contained in it, there is no one to blame but ourselves.

Like ancient Jerusalem in our text, we live in a land abundantly blessed by the Lord. Yet it seems to be ever more challenging to find a man who seeks truth. Rather than truth, the big pursuit today is for self-indulgent satisfaction and denial of guilt. It is always someone else's fault, and many refuse to repent though we know all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. God is forever gracious and merciful, but if we insist on rebellion and reject the truth, He has no choice but to judge us according to our self-proclaimed desire of not being His children.

The Lord makes clear His will for His people. He teaches us to repent of our sins, and hold fast to His Words. Unfortunately, many who call themselves Christians insist on making things more difficult, less clear, and ultimately more sinful than they need to be. One does not always need to look to the world to see wickedness. It is just as easy to see in the sins of those who are supposed to be God's children.

Like Israel in Isaiah's time, church bodies are plagued with the wounds and putrefying sores of unfaithfulness. They ignore parts of God's Word, yet insist that they have done nothing wrong and refuse to repent of their manifest corruption. And often their folly is so crass that one does not have to be an experienced theologian to see that they are making such compromises for self-serving reasons.

The prophet Isaiah sets forth for us the Lord's clear, basic principles for being among His faithful children: repent of your wickedness, and cling to His Word. Our Lord Jesus preached the same thing during His public ministry, "The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15). So the faithful do not hide behind convoluted justifications, or appeal to their so-called great acts of faithfulness in order to avoid repenting of their manifest sins. They do not act as obstinate children who lash out or offer shallow token apologies. We do as our Father has taught us; we repent and return to His Word. It is only in that Word that we have true righteousness, not because we keep it, but because that is where we are kept alive in Christ Jesus, our Redeemer and Savior.

We pray: Lord God, forgive us our trespasses, and renew us always in the Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified. Amen.

The Lord protected Daniel from the lions, but there have been other times when His faithful people were not spared from the violence of evil men by means of lions, or other brutal acts. That does not mean the Lord loved Daniel more and those others less. It shows that God works when and how He chooses, according to His own wisdom, not ours.

We are all called to be faithful like Daniel. We are to be upright, diligent, and above reproach. But there is no guarantee that we will avoid difficulties by acting rightly. Sometimes it is part of our Lord's omniscient, holy will that we be allowed to suffer at the hands of evil men so that the glory of God and His Word may be magnified. After all, it is a selfish thing for any of us to think that our physical comfort is more important than the eternal spiritual welfare of others who would be saved by our Lord's holy designs.

God Himself suffered and died for the sake of doing that which is most righteous. As His children and servants we can expect the same, because this sinful world hates the Word of God and His righteousness. Sinners despise the fact that His holy wisdom would keep them from their selfish pursuits. Such resistance cannot be avoided, but we have His comforting assurance that all will be well in Him. "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33).

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, always grant us Your Spirit so that we may not grow weary in doing Your righteous works. And keep us steadfast even as we endure tribulations in the Name of our Savior, Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today's reading presents a people who have utterly rejected their Lord and refuse to be reconciled to Him, though He offers gracious forgiveness for all their past sin if they will simply return to Him in faithfulness. We might look at this with astonishment, not wanting to believe that people can be so blind or stubborn (or maybe both), but the reality is that this situation is not that different from what we see in today's church.

Many of us know people who fit the description in today's text, perhaps even have loved ones who resemble the rebellious stiff-necked children in Jeremiah's time. How many in churches throughout the world refuse to accept God's Word as truth? Many want to claim the title of Christian, but insist on rejecting Christ's words. How is this any different from the men of Judah who claimed security in the Temple at Jerusalem while rejecting the statutes of God? It is no different, for you cannot claim to be a Christian if you insist on denying what the Lord proclaims to be truth.

In our text the Lord directs us to look at the people and places of the past that have insisted on rebelling against Him and His Word to see what will become of those who insist on doing likewise. Throughout the verses, God continues to call for repentance and pleads for His people to return to Him because He desires all to be saved, even those who reject Him. Ultimately, when judgment befalls anyone it is because of sin and a failure to receive the grace offered, for the Lord judges justly and all His decrees are righteous.

The prophet speaks in the first part of verse 19, the Lord in the last part. Judah laments due to her Babylonian exile as Jeremiah envisions a very bleak future. The people are perplexed at their fate, still wondering how God could have permitted the destruction of His land and temple, for they refuse to connect their fate to their idolatry. The vision of the coming calamity is so vivid that Jeremiah's heart is sick within him. Israel's self-inflicted wound seems incurable. The best medicine and the ablest physician cannot heal the fatal malignancy. The end is at hand because the Lord is not in Zion anymore to preserve a people who have provoked Him to anger with their graven images.

Devotion to country and love for His people do not blind God to the unrestrained crimes which have destroyed the very foundation of communal living and faithfulness to His Word. Falsehood, iniquity, evil, oppression, and deceit have made the citizenry a company of treacherous men. The lawlessness is so revolting that Jeremiah would rather be in the desert, where he would not have to see it—but the Lord sees it and has no choice but to punish them for these things. More lamentation is in order, because in His wrath God will make the cities of Judah a desolation, without inhabitant. If anyone in coming generations thinks he is wise but fails to understand why the land is laid waste like a wilderness, let him know that the Lord warned the idolaters in advance what they must expect for having flagrantly followed their own hearts, rather than His law and voice.

Today's reading is the source of the idiom "see the writing on the wall." People typically say this when they think warning has been given about some approaching trouble. Such was definitely the case for the faithless King Belshazzar.

God is righteous, and merciful. He is merciful because on countless occasions He gives faithless people fair warning that the wages of their sins is death and condemnation. The Law of God proclaims to all mankind "Repent!" His teachings show us that if we serve and trust in our own selfishness we will damage ourselves and others. And, despite what obstinate God-haters say, He does not desire the death of any man. He wants to help us and keep us from the impending trouble of our sins. "Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways!'" (Ezek. 33:11). And in 2 Peter 3:9, "[The Lord] is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

However, God is also righteous. He cannot lie and say there is no sin in one who clings to his sins. The one who loves his sin more than God will suffer the consequences of his choice. God has provided in the blood of Jesus Christ all that is necessary for us to be righteous. By the innocent suffering and death of Jesus He has paid the consequences of our sin, and He sends us His Spirit so that we may repent and believe in this salvation!

We pray: Lord God, keep us steadfast in Your Word and Spirit, that we may rightly understand the wisdom of Your holy Words and act in true faith towards You, according to our righteousness in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

There is no true power and glory apart from God's righteousness and mercy. Throughout the ages mankind has tried to gain power through wickedness and tyranny, but those kingdoms fall and become examples of man's folly. Megalomaniacs want to be remembered for their greatness, but are usually remembered for their failures instead.

Without the mercy and righteousness that comes from God there is only selfishness, fear, and death. Tyrants serve themselves, fear losing what they have accumulated, and still end up dying the death of sinful men. And the subjects of tyrants do not love their evil lords, but act out of self-preservation. However, the kingdom of God is very different from all this.

In Christ Jesus we see the King Who held great power and glory, but humbled Himself in service and kindness. He served those who would call Him "Lord." And He showed that kindness and justice are more powerful than mere violence. The true King of kings did not fear death, but went innocently into it; and rather than be a disgrace in the memories of men He became the risen Lord of Heaven and Earth.

True power is exemplified in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God establishes authority and justice in the world through His Word, and the Son of God is His flesh and blood example of that. Likewise, peace and mercy are manifest in Christ's work and sacrifice. In His own body our Lord satisfied justice, purchased us to be part of His kingdom, and declared His benevolence to all who would faithfully call Him Lord.

We pray: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your gifts of order and justice in this world. Keep us steadfast in our faith in the power of Your Son, rather than in the works of men. In Jesus Christ, our true Lord, Amen.

Judah will be judged, just as Israel had been judged earlier. Constantly expressing the people's need to repent if they are to avoid destruction, Jeremiah tries to rouse his hearers from their fatal complacency by labeling their apostasy a revolt against God. Their unfaithfulness was not the sin of a weak moment, but a deliberate conspiracy to defy God. Nor could they profess ignorance of wrongdoing, for they had God's Word. According to the words of the covenant He would be their God and they His people, if in response to this undeserved gift of grace they would obey His voice and keep His commandments. In the stubbornness of an evil heart and in the face of persistent warnings they repudiated the sacred pledge of obedience. Hence, the curse pronounced on disobedience in the covenant will go into effect. Chosen to be God's beloved, the covenant nation faces imminent destruction. Neither Jeremiah's prayer or its hypocritical ceremonial observances in God's house can avert its doom.

It is not surprising that rebels, conspiring to dethrone God, should also plot to silence His messenger. After the Lord revealed to Jeremiah that his own townspeople of Anathoth devised schemes designed to cut him off from the land of the living, they openly threatened him with death if he were to continue to prophesy in the name of the Lord. These wicked machinations would not go unpunished, for in reality they were but another revolt against God Himself. In answer to Jeremiah's appeal for God's vengeance on those who persecuted His ambassador, the Lord of hosts authorized him to announce the evil to come upon the men of Anathoth.

When Jeremiah carried his divine warning into the court of the Lord's house, Pashhur the priest beat and restrained him overnight. He ridiculed and discredited Jeremiah for daring to speak words against the temple. However, this only caused Jeremiah to announce the threat of the apostate nation's doom more emphatically and pointedly than before. He identified the destroyer "from the north" as Babylon. He singled out Pashhur as one of the victims of war and exile.

Jeremiah proved to be an iron pillar, unbending and unbent by opposition. However, he was not a self-made hero. In the latter verses of the chapter he reveals how desperately he needed God to fortify him with spiritual stamina for the task, which was so distasteful to him. He was so troubled by this call that he even tried to ignore the divine impulse to speak as an inspired prophet. He was filled with terror by the whispering of former friends, plotting to take revenge on him. In order to overcome his frustration and fear he had to remind himself that, because the Lord had promised to be with him "to deliver" him, his persecutors could not overcome him.

Prayer not only quieted his fears, but also gave him the boldness to praise the Lord as if He had already delivered him from the hand of evildoers. However, the moment he took his eyes off the Lord and became introspective, he slipped back into dark brooding over his fate. The sudden change of mood from praise for God to deep melancholy will not surprise anyone who has wrestled with God and His will for their life.

THE GOSPEL**ST. MATTHEW 25:1-13 (NKJV)**

Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

And at midnight a cry was heard: "Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!" Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.

And the foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out."

But the wise answered, saying, "No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves."

And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us!"

But he answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you."

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

THE COLLECT

Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end.

From Luther's Church Postils, 1544

Twenty Sixth Sunday after Trinity: Matthew 25:31-46, continued:

The second reason why Christ especially mentions these works of mercy and their omission, from the fifth commandment, is, that he wishes to remind us, who have been called to be Christians, have received mercy through our Lord, have been redeemed from the wrath of God and the guilt of the fifth commandment and from eternal death, and on the contrary have a gracious God, who is good to us in time and in eternity, to remind us, I say, to look upon all this and regard it as having been done not only for our salvation but also for an example. For, since he has shown us such mercy as to save us, we are also to act toward our neighbor in a manner as not to transgress against the fifth commandment, which especially demands love and mercy.

And we are not to do these things simply because of the commandment and of the threatening of judgment, but for the sake of the example of the excellent and great goodness God has shown. For this example cannot be without blessed results, as God's work of redemption is not without power and good fruit. Although most people become worse from having heard the Gospel, there must nevertheless be some who rightly understand it and remain faithful to it; for he says that he will separate them into two flocks; therefore there must also be pious ones who have kept this commandment.

THE GOSPEL**MATTHEW 24:15-28 (NKJV)**

“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes.

“But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.”

THE COLLECT

Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Twenty—fifth Sunday after Trinity

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21

TRINITY 26

From Luther's Church Postils, 1544

Twenty Sixth Sunday after Trinity: Matthew 25:31-46, continued:

XIV. Of Monastic Vows.

As monastic vows directly conflict with the first chief article, they ought to be absolutely abolished. For it is of them that Christ says (Matt. 24:5, 23 sqq.): "I am Christ," etc. For he who makes a vow to live in a monastery believes that he will enter upon a mode of life holier than the ordinary Christians, and by his own works wishes to earn heaven not only for himself, but also for others; this is to deny Christ. And they boast from their St. Thomas [i.e., Thomas Aquinas, of the 13th century] that a monastic vow is on an equality with baptism. This is blasphemy against God.

—Smalcald Articles, Part III

Now, had it not been told us we should be inquisitive beyond measure to know what would happen on the last day, and what Jesus would say and do on that day. Here we are now told, and have set before us first of all, death, which no one can escape; but after that the day of judgment. Then it shall come to pass that Christ will bring together by means of the resurrection all who have ever lived upon earth; and at the same time he will descend in great inexpressible majesty, sitting upon the throne of judgment, with all the heavenly host hovering around him; and all the good and bad will appear, so that we shall all stand exposed before him, and no one will be able to conceal himself.

The appearance of this glory and majesty will immediately become a great terror and pain to the condemned, as we read in today's Epistle lesson, lest they shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, 2 Thess. 1:9-10...

What a terrible sight this will be, when the ungodly shall see not only all God's angels and creatures, but also the Judge in his divine majesty, and shall hear the verdict of eternal destruction and hell fire pronounced upon them forever! This ought surely to be a strong, powerful admonition for us to live as Christians, so that we may stand in honor and without fear at the right hand of this majestic Lord, where there will be no fear nor terror, but pure comfort and everlasting joy.

From Luther's Church Postils, 1544

Twenty Sixth Sunday after Trinity: Matthew 25:31-46:

The words of this Gospel are in themselves clear and lucid. They have been given both for the comfort and encouragement of believing Christians, and for the warning and terror of others, if perchance, they might be of help to them. While most lessons almost exclusively teach and inculcate faith, this one treats only of the works, which Christ will examine at the last day, that it may be seen that he wishes them to be remembered and performed by those who wish to be Christians and be found in his kingdom.

And Christ himself gives this admonition here in the strongest terms that can be given, both in the consoling promise of a glorious, eternal reward, and in the most terrible threatenings of eternal wrath and punishment upon all who despise the admonition; so that whoever is not moved and aroused by these words can certainly never be moved by anything. For Christ says, he will himself come visibly in his majesty, at the last day, with all the angels, and that he will transplant all who have believed in him and have exercised love toward his followers, into his Father's kingdom of eternal glory all who believe in him and love his saints; and that he will also cast into hell forever all who live not as Christians, and who separate themselves from him and all his saints.

“In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

The Lord had warned Judah by the mouth of Jeremiah that His judgment would fall upon them. The Law of God is not to be trifled with! There is a reason that Luther's explanations of God's Commandments say that we should not only “love,” but “fear and love God so that we...” We should indeed fear His wrath, and not do anything contrary to them.

Nevertheless, there is hope. There is always hope. The proclamation of the Law of God, of wrath and judgment, is always the alien work of God. It is there to crush us, to show us our need for repentance and forgiveness of sins. Showing mercy is the proper work of God; it is His real mission.

In whom shall we hope? The King in those days was a man named “Zedekiah.” His name meant “the righteousness of the Lord,” though he fell miserably short of his own name. Trust not in princes or kings. Trust in “the Lord our righteousness,” our Lord Jesus Christ, the one who by Holy Baptism clothes us in His righteousness unto life everlasting!

“I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’”

With judgment so clearly threatened, some seek a word of comfort. Tell frightened people that “it’s all going to be alright, nothing bad will actually happen,” and you might get quite a following! So, faced with their own sin and the consequences of sin in their lives, people in Jeremiah’s day, and in ours, find themselves sorely tempted to tell us their sweet dreams, their divine visions of “there, there now.”

The “don’t worry, be happy” prophets were false, of course. Beware of the false prophets, the ones who cater to the “customer” rather than calling on you to be conformed to Christ. It is not the church that needs to change (so that you’ll be comfortable without changing). Rather, we need to change, to repent.

We do not find the saving message in the dreams of visionaries, but in the sure and reliable Word of God. We turn to the Scriptures to see what is sin, and we repent of that, even if it has become quite popular to mollicoddle some of our sins these days. But then we believe also what the clear Word of God tells us concerning Jesus Christ: through faith in Him, we are justified, we are forgiven, we have the approbation of God and the promise of everlasting life.

O Lord, God of Hosts, God of Israel, You ever seek the welfare of Your people, and never their harm. Your Word bids us to see this truth by faith, even when the opposite seems apparent to our eyes. You revealed fully this truth through Your Son, Christ Jesus, who was mired in the filth of man’s sin and sank under its weight into death and Hell. Yet through His suffering and death You have worked salvation from sin, death and Hell for man. Even as You raised Christ from the dead on the third day and gave to Him eternal glory, so You will raise up on the last day the bodies of Your faithful ones and give to us eternal life.

Strengthen faith in each of us by Your Word and Your Spirit, so that we trust in Your deliverance and live in confidence in You, whether we face the peril of the sword, famine, or pestilence. Even when close friends set upon us, make us mindful that You are our Ever-Faithful Friend. Cause us to be Your faithful servants in the midst of evil, opening our mouths to speak against wickedness in this world. Encourage us to bravely rescue those mired in injustice, imploring the princes of this world to carry out their calling of ruling justly. Make us ever mindful that in all things You work for the good of those whom You have first loved and who love You in return. Through Jesus Christ, Our Lord, we pray. Amen.

O Lord, our God, the unbelieving world does not heed to Your words, which You speak to the world through the inspired writings of Your prophets and apostles. We pray to You on behalf of those who do not pray to You, that You would give to them their daily bread, even as You give us ours, that the needs of the body for life in this world would be met for all people. Provide for each one his food and drink, clothing and shoes, house and home, and all like things, that all might live in security and at peace. We pray especially for that security and peace for our Christian brethren who, like Your servant Jeremiah, are accused of wrongdoing while heeding Your righteous Word. Preserve Your servants from all injustice and deliver them from all who persecute them. Through such times of tribulation and trial, keep them all steadfast in the faith that fears, loves, and trusts in You above all things.

We also pray to You on behalf of our enemies and adversaries, that You would show Your mercy upon them, even as You are merciful towards us, for the sake of the world's Savior, Your Son, Christ Jesus. Through the preaching of Your Word by faithful servants like Jeremiah and the working of Your Holy Spirit through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, deliver those in peril of eternal captivity into Your everlasting Kingdom of love. Let the ongoing proclamation of Your Word cause hearts to be ever turned toward You in repentance of all sin and in faith in Your gracious forgiveness. Sustain Your people with the Bread and Wine that Your Son feeds to His disciples, His true flesh and blood, that provides the faithful with forgiveness, life, and salvation. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen.

“For thus says the LORD God of Israel to me: ‘Take this wine cup of fury from My hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it. And they will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them.’”

How many people think of God as the wise, gentle grandfather in the sky, there to offer you counsel or comfort when you ask for it, but quietly leaving you alone if you don't really want Him intruding into your life at the moment? The Scriptures reveal that God is not like that. He is a perfect God, and in the perfection of His justice every sin must be perfectly punished. He does not ignore a single one. He never responds to sin by letting it slide.

So the nations of the earth will be made to drink the cup of the fury of the Lord God of Israel. The sword of God's wrath is unleashed, and it is “maddening,” as we see all over the world today. We are numbered among those nations. Is there any hope for us? Indeed, there is. Imagine that the Lord God of Israel *drank the cup for us!* Remember Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane? “If possible, let this cup pass from me?” It was not possible. He did the will of the Father, drank the cup of His wrath on the cross, and spared us. Thanks be to God that the cup of God's fury against us was drunk for us by Jesus Christ our Savior!

“And the priests and the prophets spoke to the princes and all the people, saying, ‘This man deserves to die! For he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears.’” (Jer. 26:11).

Did you know they had different denominations back in Jeremiah’s day? Well, okay, they didn’t call it that. But there were “priests and prophets” who spoke lies, who spoke of their dreams, who spoke sweet, sappy, feel good messages that the people wanted to hear. And then there was Jeremiah, who had the irritating habit of speaking the truth of the Word of the Lord.

So, the false priests and prophets cry out for his death! And why? Was he not speaking the truth? Of course, but the truth wasn’t the issue for them! They only cared about what they wanted to hear and what they didn’t!

Dear ones in Christ, when you hear a sermon, be not like these ancient fools. Your Pastor will chastise you with God’s Law. Receive that, and repent. For the next thing your faithful Pastor will do is speak the comforting message of forgiveness of sins. Therefore, receive soberly the message that you really are a sinner, that you may also receive with great joy the message of the forgiveness of all your sins, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

O Lord, God of Israel, by Your Word You come to Your servants, both to command us and to invite us to call on You in prayer, bidding us to trust that You will answer us. Through Your Word You have shown us the great and mighty things that You have accomplished in ancient days, ever faithful to Your promises to Your people. Answer us by accomplishing great and mighty things for Your servants in these latter days. In the midst of our own war against the wickedness of the devil, this fallen world, and the Old Adam within our flesh, bring us health and healing. Heal our wounds, washing them in the water of Holy Baptism and cleansing us from all of our iniquity. Pardon all of the sins we have committed against you and others during the battle by speaking Your proclamation of Holy Absolution to Your faithful Israel. Cause us to return to the places where You reveal the abundance of peace and truth, feeding us with the true Body and Blood of Your Son, Christ Jesus, for our peace. Through these great and mighty things that You accomplish for us You declare Your people to be a name of joy, a praise, and an honor before all people of the earth. Grant that all might hear of the good that You do for us. Lead them by Your Word and Your Spirit to Your Church, that many more voices might join in the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the Bridegroom and the voice of the Bride, the voice of those who will say:

“Praise the Lord of hosts,
For the Lord is good,
For His mercy endures forever!”

Through Jesus Christ, Our Lord, we pray. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Twenty—sixth Sunday after Trinity

CHAPTER III, ARTICLE VI.

But they [Romanists] object, that love is preferred to faith and hope. For Paul says (1 Cor. 13:13):“The greatest of these is charity.” Now, it is in accordance with this, that to justify is the greatest and chief virtue. Although Paul, in this passage, properly speaks of love toward one’s neighbor, and indicates that love is the greatest, because it has most fruits. Faith and hope have to do only with God; but love has infinite offices externally towards men. Nevertheless we grant to the adversaries that love towards God and our neighbor is the greatest virtue, because the chief commandment is this: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God” (Matt. 22:37). But how will they infer thence that love justifies? The greatest virtue, they say, justifies. By no means. For just as even the greatest or first Law does not justify, so also the greatest virtue of the Law does not justify. But that virtue justifies which apprehends Christ, which communicates to us Christ’s merits, by which we receive grace and peace from God. But this virtue is faith. For as it has been often said, faith is not only knowledge, but much rather to wish to receive or apprehend those things, which are offered in the promise concerning Christ. Moreover this obedience towards God, viz. to wish to receive the offered promise, is no less a divine service, *λατρεία*, than is love. God wishes us to believe Him, and to receive from Him blessings, and this He declares to be true divine service.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, ¶104–107

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 14: JEREMIAH 29:1-19

TRINITY 25

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” (Jer. 29:11)

The Lord had threatened to unleash His judgment against the children of Israel, and unleash it He did. They were over-run, looted, plundered; men were killed, women were “taken advantage of;” and many were taken off into exile in Babylon. The theology of “*ex opere operato*,” the notion that because the Ark of the Covenant was among them God would never let them fall, this false doctrine was proven wrong. When we imagine that a “sacrament” makes it safe to be wicked, we are making a faithless use of a gift that was given to strengthen faith, and God will not long tolerate that.

Now, broken and shattered and in exile, the Law had done its work. So God speaks this word of Gospel, this message of “a future and a hope.” Bringing Israel harm was not God’s ultimate goal. Bringing them to repentance and returning them to faith in Him was the goal. He did that. And their future would still be what God called them into existence for in the first place: that they would be His vessel for bringing the Savior into the world.

In the hour of grave trial, do not despair. For the Lord knows the thoughts He thinks toward you, too...thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation through our Savior Jesus Christ.

“‘For behold, the days are coming,’ says the LORD, ‘that I will bring back from captivity Israel and Judah,’ says the LORD. ‘And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.’” (Jer. 30:3)

From the day the children of Israel went into exile down to this very day, there has never been a moment in history in which the majority of Jews lived in the land of Canaan. When the day came, 70 years after they went into exile, that they were allowed to return, most of them had grown up in Babylon. It was home for them. They had no interest in going back. Only a minority of them did...enough so that Jesus could be born where He was supposed to be, and complete His work of bringing salvation to the world by His death on the cross and His subsequent resurrection.

So has God failed to keep this promise? Of course not. In Christ Jesus, Israel is reduced down to one man. He calls twelve Apostles because He is having Himself a New Israel. As Israel passed through the waters to enter Canaan, they pointed us forward to the day when all who would be part of the New Israel of God would enter the promised land of the Church by passing through the waters of Holy Baptism.

You are the fulfillment of this prophecy! The promised land of the Church, and the eternal promised land of Heaven, are yours. You shall possess it, for the sake of Jesus Christ your Savior.

THE GOSPEL**ST. MATTHEW 25:31-46 (NKJV)**

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

“Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

“Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’

“And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’

“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’

“Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’

“Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’

“And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

THE COLLECT

O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord who liveth and reigneth, with thee and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end.