

Many people think of the Bible as just another book. They may find the words of the Bible uplifting, or sometimes challenging, or possibly a fine moral compass. What is missing in all this is the fact that the Bible is God's Word. What they miss is the fact that God is speaking through those words. It's His line of communication to humanity. His Word is His link to mankind. Thus, when one hears the Word of God, God is speaking to that person whether the person realizes it or not.

Now a fascinating aspect of this communication is found in the opening verse of the Book of Amos: "The words of Amos, who was among the sheepbreeders of Tekoa." Amos is hardly a man of high societal standing. And yet it is he, and other prophets like him, who is called by God to take on the powers that be; kings, or princes, or priests.

Like the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, kings, princes, and priests, with all their supporting cast around them, looked "pleasant to the eyes." On the other hand, this prophet was but a lowly man and his entourage was a flock of sheep.

Yet, this is a perfect image God's Word. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." He is "gentle and lowly in heart." He says, "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep." And by God's gracious favor, we get to be His entourage.

Um? Wait a minute. We are more than just His entourage we are "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ".

Dear Jesus, Thy Church with longing eyes for Thine expected coming waits. Amen.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



OCTOBER 2—SEPTEMBER 30, 2017

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

The Calendar

October 1	Trinity 16
October 8	Trinity 17
October 15	Trinity 18
October 18 (W)	<i>St. Luke, Evangelist</i>
October 22	Trinity 19
October 28 (Sa)	<i>St. Simon and St. Jude, Apostles</i>
October 29	Trinity 20
October 31 (Tu)	<i>The Festival of the Reformation, 500th Anniversary Jubilee</i>

The 500th Anniversary of the Reformation

As Confessional Lutherans rejoice in the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation of the Church, it is not hard for us to comprehend the spiritual trial which confronted our forefathers in the faith when they realized how far astray so much of visible Christendom had gone in their day. Contending with the forces of Rationalism, Post-Modernism and all of the hydra-headed forms of Ideology, the clear Gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is rarely heard in many so-called Lutheran churches. This Jubilee Year is an occasion for those who have been baptized into Christ Jesus to be renewed in this clear confession and to contend for the Christian verity in our generation. The Lord has granted this time to our generation, and continues to give gifts to His saints to contend with the assaults of the evil one.

It is a great joy that the Lord has granted a seminarian to our diocese who is now in his third year of studies; however, the needs of the Church are great, and there is a need for more men to step forward and receive such instruction, so that, if the Lord so wills, they may be called to such service in the fullness of time to proclaim the saving Gospel. Also, I hope that all members of the congregations affiliated with this diocese would be steadfast in support for the seminary—and all the labors of our fellowship. —*Yours in Christ, Bishop Heiser*

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 2: JOEL

TRINITY 20

The Prophet Joel, as with the prophets who came before him and after him, called the people to repentance. It would appear, and rightfully so, that is what God wants of His people. That was the message of the Hosea that we read earlier this week. Earlier this week we also remembered the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. The posting of the 95 Theses by Martin Luther on the door of the church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517.

The first of Luther's 95 Theses summarizes the life of the Christian. "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." The Divine Service begins in said fashion. We confess our sins and God forgives us.

Such is the life of the Christian wherein, by virtue of our baptisms, the Holy Spirit leads us to daily confess our sins and to put our trust in the only One Who is truly trustworthy, our Savior. This is the Gospel, a Gospel of which we can never hear enough. Daily, we need to hear that we are justified before God on the basis of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Daily, we need to hear that because of God's grace toward us He gives us faith to trust in what Christ has done.

"So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm."

Dear Father, although we have deserved Thy righteous wrath and manifold punishments, yet, we entreat Thee most merciful Father, remember not the sins of our youth nor our many transgressions, but out of Thine unspeakable goodness, grace, and mercy forgive us. Amen.

As we complete our reading of the Prophet Hosea, we find that God cannot but bring His Gospel message to the people. The Israel He loves and the Israel He longs for is found in the One: “Out of Egypt I called My Son.” For the sake of His Son, God will not turn His back on this rebellious people. For the sake of His Son, God will not turn His back on you.

Throughout the Book of Hosea, there is the echoing voice of God as heard throughout the centuries. The message remains the same, “Repent. Turn to Me and I will restore you.” Indeed, as we hear in Ecclesiastes, “There is nothing new under the sun.” Sin remains sin no matter how one tries to pretty it up or one seeks to justify doing wrong.

The only Hope for Israel remains the only Hope for all mankind, namely, Jesus. God demands perfection of mankind and Jesus was perfect. Sin must be paid for and it was by Christ. Many will clamour, “We must keep up with the times,” as though the Church must change if it is to remain relevant.

So, how did this work out for the people of Israel? Quite simply, their efforts to be like the world were quite successful. However, their efforts to be like the world also turned them away from God.

St. Paul, wrote, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” The “good and acceptable and perfect will of God” is that you be in Christ and conformed to His image. That image became yours in Holy Baptism.

Dear Jesus, keep me in Your grace. Amen.

The Rechabites didn’t drink wine or live in houses. Why? Because these things were evil? No, but simply because their ancestor, Jonadab, the son of Rechab, had commanded his children not to do these things. And for over two hundred years his descendants obeyed out of respect for their ancestor.

The Lord praises the Rechabites for this and holds them up in stark contrast to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. God had given commandments to His adopted children, the people of Israel, promising grace and every blessing to all who kept His commandments, but threatening punishment on all who disobeyed. But they repeatedly disobeyed in spite of God’s repeated pleas and warnings sent to them through one prophet after another. Judah’s rejection of God’s Word was acted out as King Jehoiakim cut up the scroll of the prophet Jeremiah and threw it into the fire, piece by piece.

If we know how to respect our earthly fathers, how much more should we respect our heavenly Father? But this is how badly original sin has damaged us. We would rather obey the laws of a man than the laws of God, because “the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Romans 8:7). Only by God’s grace and forgiveness can we now approach God in peace, know Him as our dear Father, and then begin to keep His commandments as grateful children should.

*O Lord, look down from heaven, behold
And let Thy pity waken;
How few are we within Thy fold,
Thy saints by men forsaken!
True faith seems quenched on every hand,
Men suffer not Thy
Word to stand;
Dark times have us o’ertaken. (TLH, 260, st. 1)*

Few true prophets have ever been well-liked by most of their hearers, but the people of Israel had grown especially rebellious by Jeremiah's time. He spoke the truth to a people who hated the truth, always telling them what their unbelieving ears didn't want to hear. He offered peace to those who would willingly go captive to Babylon, but they hated him for suggesting that Jerusalem would fall. So they convinced King Zedekiah to throw him down into a pit full of mud. And "Jeremiah sank in the mire." No wonder he is known as the weeping prophet!

The life of a prophet is hard. The Son of God Himself was hated by most and made to suffer for the truth He spoke, so His servants can also expect to face shame and indignity. No one should approach the Holy Ministry thinking he will have a "good" life on earth. As St. Paul writes, "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (Romans 8:36).

But in rejecting God's prophets, apostles, and faithful pastors the world is only harming itself, because what the world rejects is the very hope and forgiveness in Christ that God still graciously holds out through the preaching of His servants. And His servants, even though they suffer in this life, "sinking in the mire" in more ways than one, will be sustained by the very Word which they preach and rewarded after the pattern of the Lord Christ, whom they have served.

*With fraud which they themselves invent Thy truth they have confounded;
Their hearts are not with one consent On Thy pure doctrine grounded.
While they parade with outward show, They lead the people to and fro,
In error's maze astounded. (TLH, 260, st. 2)*

There is not much that is uplifting in today's reading from Hosea. God is angry with Israel over its apostasy. Many people long for a god who shows no anger at all and simply loves people without showing any concern for His own righteousness. But as today's reading from Hosea shows that God is indeed angry with sin and with sinners.

God cannot simply turn His back on sin as though it doesn't exist. God's justice demands payment for sin, and in Christ we find God's justice. On the Cross, the justice of God is meted out on Jesus. God's demand of payment for sin is fulfilled in Christ's death.

Though His anger against the people of Israel and Judah was real, its purpose was to serve the Gospel. God takes no joy in the death of anyone. It is His desire to "have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." But sadly, as we will read in tomorrow's lesson from Hosea 13:9, "O Israel, you are destroyed, but your help is from Me." What happens to Israel as the result of their sin is their own fault, and not God's fault. Had they listened and turned to God for mercy, they would have received it.

On this day of the Feast of All Saints, we give thanks to God for His faithfulness in calling His Saints and preserving them unto eternal life. Though His people suffer much in this world, they have His promise of life after this life. The life to come is one free from sin and its effects. Come Lord Jesus!

Blessed Savior, You have called us to be Your own and have given us faith to believe our sins are forgiven because of what You have done. Amen.

On this very special day, October 31, 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, our reading from Hosea begins with two important words, “Hear this.” Take a moment to think about those words, “Hear this.” What does one hear when another speaks? One hears words.

There is an old children’s rhyme which says, “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.” But as we know, things said by others can and do hurt, not the least of which is God’s Word of Law. When God speaks to us through His Law, it does, indeed, hurt. In fact, it does more than hurt, it kills the Old Adam within us. But such “killing” must take place for sin must die within us daily if the New Man is to rise up and serve Christ because of the grace and mercy shown to us by God in Christ.

The “Solas” of the Reformation encapsulate our great heritage as Lutherans. Sola Scriptura, “Scripture Alone”, which is the very Word of God, tells us of Sola Gratia, “Grace Alone”, which is the reason God give us Sola Fide, “Faith Alone”, to believe that we are saved Solus Christus, by “Christ Alone”, bringing us back to He Who is the Word made flesh.

So when your conscience feels the burden of the Law remember Hosea’s words: “Come, and let us return to the Lord; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up.” Indeed, though broken by the Law, Christ will always heal you!

Dear Lord Jesus, You have suffered the pains we so deeply deserve. For Your own Name’s sake, relieve my conscience burdened with sin and keep ever before me the joy of forgiveness. Amen.

God had mercifully provided relief and a future for the Jews who were allowed to remain in the land of Israel, if they would only stay there and submit to Babylonian rule. But the wicked rebelled, determined to seek refuge in Egypt instead, and so the godly, too, were forced to miss out on the blessings they could have had in the land of Israel. Why did they even consult Jeremiah when they already had their minds made up? Because their guilty conscience craved some relief, even if it was a lie.

The conditions are not much different today for faithful preachers and hearers of the Word. The wicked long to have a Christian preacher tell them that their evil ways are not evil, and there are plenty of false prophets around who are willing to do just that. Faithful Christians are often forced to live out their lives in a godless society, in a godless land. What is left for us to do?

We do the same thing that was left for Jeremiah. Preach the Word. Hear the Word. Lead holy lives according to it. Trust in the Lord Christ to build and to sustain His holy Church through His Word and Sacraments, even as the society crumbles around us. Pray. Love. Bear the cross with the patience that God will provide. And rejoice, for “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

*May God root out all heresy And of false teachers rid us
Who proudly say: “Now, where is he That shall our speech forbid us?
By right or might we shall prevail; What we determine cannot fail;
We own no lord and master.” (TLH, 260, st. 3)*

The Jews who were determined to go to Egypt were not simply weak believers in the true God who were suffering and wondering what to do. They were idolatrous unbelievers, committed to worship the “queen of heaven” instead of the Lord from now on. For them, there was no comfort from the Lord, but only more words of judgment.

In contrast, Baruch, Jeremiah’s faithful assistant, was a struggling believer who mourned over the hardships he was facing in Israel. “Woe is me now! For the LORD has added grief to my sorrow. I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest!” Through Jeremiah the Lord comforted Baruch. Part of that comfort was the reminder that the Lord had not promised prosperity for Judah at that time, but destruction. “Do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for behold, I will bring adversity on all flesh.”

Throughout the Bible God sternly rebukes the unbeliever, even as he suffers for his unbelief, while He speaks to His suffering children in Christ with words of strength, forgiveness and comfort. The truth has always been that “we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Those of us who live through the dying days of this earth should not “seek great things” for ourselves. But in the midst of disaster God still speaks to us as He once did to the Church in Revelation, “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

*Therefore saith God, “I must arise, The poor My help are needing;
To Me ascend My people’s cries, And I have heard their pleading.
For them My saving Word shall fight And fearlessly and sharply smite,
The poor with might defending.” (TLH, 260, st. 4)*

As we work our way through the Book of Hosea, it is easy to become distracted by the life of Hosea. It is best we focus on the message of Hosea to the people of Israel and Judah.

When you stop and think about the situation facing Hosea, it is, in its essence, really no different from the situation facing any preacher of the Word. The people of Hosea’s time were deeply into idolatry, specifically Baal worship. The people whom God had delivered from the hands of their Egyptian oppressors, had turned from the One Who showed Himself true and faithful unto other gods. It is a story that repeats itself throughout the Old Testament.

When one sins, one turns away from God to that which one finds more appealing than God Himself. As Luther wrote in the Large Catechism regarding The first Commandment: “confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol.”

Hosea’s message was simply the message God sends to people throughout time, that is, repentance, faith, and the Kingdom of Christ. Hosea, like the prophets before and after him, called the people to repent of their sins and turn to God for forgiveness.

Hosea offers comfort to those who trust in God for their forgiveness: “I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord.”

Dear Lord, leave me not under the oppression of sin but turn me to your glorious Son and the forgiveness He earned on Calvary’s Cross. Amen.

Daniel has visions that reveal how the Ancient of Days will destroy all earthly kingdoms, yet the saints of the Almighty will possess an everlasting kingdom. No matter who the agents of evil are, they will meet their end in God's timing. Along with Daniel, a prayer (or cry) for mercy is ever what is brought about in God's believing, baptized children while on this side of glory. His will, however, is always best. Although some mystery surrounds the visions of Daniel, God's promises are sure and certain through the "Son of Man" who is Christ Jesus!

O how God's own people rejoice in the whole counsel of His Word. For in His Law we know God as Lawgiver and Judge, and our lost condition is revealed to us. Then, in our terror, God reveals to us the Good News of the Gospel, that Christ Jesus actually became sin to fully atone for the sins of the world and merit our forgiveness! It's in being brought to recognize the immensity of one's sin (and the total depravity therein) that believers are brought to understand that Christ's sufferings are for them. Such God-created, repentant faith God imputes as righteousness in His sight!

We pray: O almighty and most merciful God, of Thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech Thee, from all things that may hurt us, that we, being ready, both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that Thou wouldst have done; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

God was bringing severe judgment on Judah at the time of Jeremiah. The entire nation had collapsed religiously, morally, economically, and socially. The destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans was the ultimate shaming of the people of Judah, and the neighboring countries rejoiced at Judah's demise.

That was a grave mistake on their part. God sent Jeremiah to proclaim judgment on all those nations for their own wickedness, including their joy over Jerusalem's destruction. If God judged His own covenant people so severely, what would the fate of these nations be who had never wanted anything to do with the true God or with His covenant?

As the Apostle Peter writes, "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now, if the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Peter 4:17-18).

The visible Christian Church is declining. She has been so ravaged by false teachers that she is barely recognizable in the world, and the world rejoices at her apparent fall. But as God once brought judgment on both Judah and the surrounding nations while preserving a remnant of believers from them, so, too, in our time, God will continue to preserve a remnant of grace and to draw some of the unbelievers into her fold before the Final Judgment comes on all those who persist in unbelief.

*As silver tried by fire is pure
From all adulteration,
So through God's Word shall men endure
Each trial and temptation.
Its light beams brighter through the cross,
And, purified from human dross,
It shines through every nation. (TLH, 260, st. 5)*

The destruction of Babylon was prophesied by Jeremiah, even at the height of her power. She had persecuted the Church of God, not acknowledging her role in God's plan to discipline His people, but seeking to exalt herself above God. So God prophesied her destruction, even as He called His people to come out of her captivity and return to the Promised Land.

The Apostle Peter applies the term Babylon to the city of Rome, which, at that time, was beginning to persecute the Christians who were living under her authority. The Apostle John applies it to the false church, the home of the Antichrist (which is still Rome!), as John predicts her demise, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (Revelation 14:8). And just as God called Israel to come out of Babylon, so Jesus calls His New Testament Israel, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4).

"Come out of her" is still God's call to His people in these last days as He prepares to bring destruction on the false church and final salvation to His penitent people. So as Christians recognize error and false teaching anywhere within the visible Christian Church, they are to "Come out of her!" or, in the words of St. Paul, "Note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them" (Romans 16:17).

*Defend Thy truth, O God, and stay This evil generation;
And from the error of its way Keep Thine own congregation.
The wicked everywhere abound And would Thy little flock confound;
But Thou art our Salvation. (TLH, 260, st. 6)*

Nebuchadnezzar gives the appearance that he's impressed that God rules all earthly kingdoms, yet he continues living as before. God then causes him to live like a beast for a while. Afterward, Nebuchadnezzar praises the King of heaven who is able to humble those who walk in pride. The Lord humbles in order to exalt. He does His alien work (the Law) in order to do His proper work (the Gospel). But our pride-filled, sinful nature never likes it, for it fears, loves, and trusts only in itself!

Daniel suffers for continuing to pray to the one true triune God. Although God allows suffering—working through the enemies of faith—He uses such suffering for His good, strengthening those of the one true faith. Even though He can (and sometimes does), God's Word never declares that He will always remove our temporal suffering in this life. In fact, His Holy Scripture proclaims a theology of the cross, focused on Christ crucified.

Just as Daniel came out of the den un-devoured by the lions (a sign of God's ultimate triumph over all forces of evil), so Christ came from the tomb. This is the same victory He accounts to those who repent and believe in the fully atoning merits of Jesus for them!

We pray: O almighty and most merciful God, of Thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech Thee, from all things that may hurt us, that we, being ready, both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that Thou wouldst have done; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In the Book of Daniel the author writes in the third person from chapters 1-6 as he relates what happened to him and three companions at the court of Nebuchadnezzar and of Belshazzar, the last Babylonian regent, and during the reign of Cyrus, the first Persian king. Then in chapters 7-12 Daniel switches to speaking in the first person, telling of visions that were granted to him.

God is ever in pursuit of man, ever trying to bring him to repentance and belief. God punishes unrepentant King Jehoiakim of Judah and allows many Judeans to become exiles in Babylon. Even though they are in the land of Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel and his friends reveal their God-given faith that the Lord is in control while the false gods are revealed as mute idols. God works through Daniel to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream about the dissolution of all earthly kingdoms.

Many in today's world can be impressed with God's merciful works. Yet they will turn right around and fall into idolatry (even blatant idolatry, just as Nebuchadnezzar). We who are believing, baptized children of God are susceptible to the same falling away. But God keeps pursuing us through His Word and Sacraments, mercifully bringing us to repentance and belief in the fully atoning merits of Christ crucified. Through such God-created repentant faith, Christ's merits protect us from the continual fires of the world, the devil, and our sinful nature!

We pray: O almighty and most merciful God, of Thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech Thee, from all things that may hurt us, that we, being ready, both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that Thou wouldst have done; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The aptness of the name "Lamentations" is evident throughout these chapters; so many centuries removed from the fall of Jerusalem, the description of the sorrows of the people in those days is still painful to read. Tradition attributes this book to Jeremiah, and in these chapters we see the testimony of the prophet concerning all that has befallen those who did not repent. "How lonely sits the city that was full of people!" (1:1) What unfolds in these chapters is a series of images of the depths of depravity which are manifest when those who have not repented find a measure the punishment for their sins visited upon them in this life. Thus we read, "The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment, with no hand to help her!" (4:6) Death has come to the land, with famine, nakedness, and sword. Even the mothers are turned against their children—a measure of the depravity which has come upon the people!

But even in these bleak circumstances, there is still hope. "Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. 'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'Therefore I hope in Him!'" (3:22-24) These words are read in the church on Jubilate Sunday in the Easter season, a powerful instruction that in the very midst of the travails of this life which are visited on us on account of sin, that still the mercy of the Lord abounds, and His saints have hope in every circumstance of life, for they have been baptized into Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Prayer: Lord, we beseech Thee, grant Thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil and with pure hearts and minds to follow Thee, the only God; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Ezekiel begins with the king, Jehoiachin, in the fifth year of his captivity when the Word of the Lord came to the prophet. All things are coming to pass as the Word of the Lord has declared.

From the Lord's first words to the prophet, we are taught regarding the nature of the prophetic office. The prophet only stands by the power of the Spirit of the Lord, and the word which he proclaims is the word of the Triune God, no matter whether the people want to receive it. The Lord knows that His people are rebellious—even in their captivity—but they will not be able to deny that the word of the Lord has come to them, even now: “As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse—for they are a rebellious house—yet they will know that a prophet has been among them.” (2:5)

Ezekiel is not sent to the heathen; as the Lord says to him, “For you are not sent to a people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, but to the house of Israel” (3:5). But this does not mean that they will receive him: “But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel is impudent and hard-hearted.” (3:7)

Ezekiel proclaims the Word of the Lord so that those who hear and repent will be saved; as for the rest, they will be held responsible for that which they have heard: “Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.” (3:19) The servant of the Lord does not take his calling lightly; and those who hear will give an answer for what they have heard. Thus the saints repent when they hear the Law of the Lord, and are comforted again by the Gospel. This is our daily walk as Christians.

Prayer: Lord, we beseech Thee, grant Thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil and with pure hearts and minds to follow Thee, the only God; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

An exact manner of worship and the exacting standards that reveal God's perfection by which He measures man conclude Ezekiel. Because God holds all of mankind to His standards, we, by our fallen nature, are revealed as woefully inadequate. Ezekiel is taken to the inner court where a stream of water begins flowing, transforming the Salt Sea because of the stream's pure healing powers.

We hear of this again in the last book of Holy Scripture: “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” (Revelation 22:1-2)

The idealized promised land is the prophetic symbol of a place in which the type of worship described previously will be possible. By God's gracious guidance we are blessed to already get a taste of such worship on this side of glory through His Divine Service to us. The permanency of the pulpit, altar, and baptismal font—along with a liturgy composed of His truth—rightfully reflect the unchanging character of the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God for such a taste!

We pray: O almighty and most merciful God, of Thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech Thee, from all things that may hurt us, that we, being ready, both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that Thou wouldst have done; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In these chapters (and through chapter 46) God reveals the purpose of His restored and abiding presence: to receive the worship of the Communion of Saints. The perfect, holy God almighty could only have perfection before Him.

The visions of God's restoration undoubtedly continue! Ezekiel envisions worshippers who have been restored to God's favor. They are made up of those who have been reconciled to God by the High Priest who "with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12). We need not fear to come into God's presence. God "imputes no iniquity" to His faithful people (Psalm 32:2), but rather "imputes righteousness apart from works" through faith alone! (Romans 4:6-8).

The Communion of Saints, however, still live in a fallen world. And they succumb to temptations and lapse into unholy thoughts, words, and deeds. Therefore, through faith alone, they repentantly bring a "sin offering" and a "guilt offering," confessing their wrongs to God and pleading for forgiveness. The Saints, through faith, also "enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise" (Psalm 100:4). Everything that the Saints think, say, and do by the Holy Ghost through faith becomes "a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Romans 12:1).

We pray: O almighty and most merciful God, of Thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech Thee, from all things that may hurt us, that we, being ready, both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that Thou wouldst have done; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Lord directed Ezekiel to undertake several prophetic actions which indicated to the people the judgment which was about to befall them. The coming siege and fall of Jerusalem would be devastating to the rebellious, idolatrous people. Repeatedly, the Lord declares that a third would be lost by thirds: A third would be lost to pestilence, a third to the sword, a third to famine.

The corruption of the Lord's people is such that their wickedness outstripped that of the heathen nations around them; as regards Jerusalem, "She has rebelled against My judgments by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against My statutes more than the countries that are all around her; for they have refused My judgments, and they have not walked in My statutes." (5:6) Their culpability is all the greater for having known the will of the Lord, and rejected it. In the midst of the corruption of much that claims to be 'church' in our day, this is a powerful warning.

As great as the iniquity of the people has been, and despite what would seem to be the looming destruction of the entirety of Israel, still the Lord proclaims that a remnant will be preserved: "Yet I will leave a remnant, so that you may have some who escape the sword among the nations, when you are scattered through the countries. Then those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations where they are carried captive, because I was crushed by their adulterous heart which has departed from Me, and by their eyes which play the harlot after their idols; they will loathe themselves for the evils which they committed in all their abominations." (6:8-9)

Prayer: Lord, we beseech Thee, grant Thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil and with pure hearts and minds to follow Thee, the only God; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Though the destruction had not yet come, the Word of the Lord declares the certainty of its imminent arrival. Again and again we read, “the end has come... the time has come.” The iniquity—the idolatry—of the people called out for judgment, and the vision which the Lord grants to His prophet demonstrates the vanity of the iniquitous man who imagines he will conceal his sin from the sight of the Triune God. “Then He said to me, ‘Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the room of his idols? For they say, ‘The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.’” (8:12) That which they imagined would be hidden even from the sight of God is made known to all generations, because their sins called down the wrath of the Lord.

It is a terrifying thing to read the end to which the people had come: “Disaster will come upon disaster, and rumor will come upon rumor. Then they will seek a vision from a prophet; but the law will perish from the priest, and counsel from the elders.” (7:26) Whether they sought a false prophet to speak a lying word, or sought—in fear for the loss of their material abundance—that a true prophet might intercede for them, a further sign of the divine judgment is the absence of the prophet, priest, and elder.

What great consolation is ours, when the Lord speaks to us in His Law, and we, in sorrow, repent. For the blood of Christ Jesus, who died to accomplish the atonement for all sin, is our hope, and believing in Him, we have the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Prayer: Lord, we beseech Thee, grant Thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil and with pure hearts and minds to follow Thee, the only God; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel’s major task was to warn those still in Jerusalem that there was no future for them as an independent kingdom. As Ezekiel moves into chapters 40 and onward, symbolism makes up the basis for these concluding chapters. Already God has promised to deliver His people from captivity. He now describes an even greater deliverance through His promised Messiah. Ezekiel begins a temple tour and sees the exacting standard by which God measures mankind. People from every direction, tribe, and nation will be drawn into His presence. Ezekiel notes how holy the place is by mentioning that only the son of Zadak can approach and minister there. Having completed their tour of the temple complex, the man of bronze leads Ezekiel out of the east entrance, heading back to the location where their tour had begun.

Even as we are believing, baptized children of God, we remain on this side of glory. This means that the world, the devil, and our sinful flesh will ever attempt to keep us captive to sin. God, in His rich mercy, has supplied our great deliverance from such captivity! Faith in the fully atoning merits of Christ crucified is the only way to be declared justified and truly free!

We pray: O almighty and most merciful God, of Thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech Thee, from all things that may hurt us, that we, being ready, both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that Thou wouldst have done; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The men whom God had appointed to shepherd Israel with His Word had failed. They were to care for the sheep, feeding them with the Word of God. They were to strengthen the weak and fainthearted with the Gospel. Those who were broken by the burden of their sin were to be bound up with the consolation of the forgiveness of sins. Those that had been driven away by fear or false belief were to be gently recalled to the flock. But the shepherds of Israel did none of these things. They fleeced the sheep, feeding themselves with earthly things. Their God was the belly, which they served at the expense of the sheep. For all this God would punish them.

He is the Good Shepherd and does not want His flock to starve from lack of teaching. He declares that He Himself will search for and seek out His sheep. He assumes human nature to seek out the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. During His ministry on Earth He feeds the spiritually hungry. He binds those broken with sin by forgiving their sins. He seeks out the lost sheep by walking the countryside, calling all to repent and believe the Gospel of a God Who provides atonement for their sins. This is why Jesus says in John 10:11, "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep." By giving His life for the sheep He provides what the sheep truly need: atonement and the promise of the forgiveness of sins for all who believe.

We give You thanks, heavenly Father, that You have graciously sent Jesus to be our Good Shepherd to give His life for the sheep and feed us with the true food of the Gospel. Amen.

The ways of men and angels are again brought into sharp contrast, for we see that the cherubim never turn aside and never deviate from their path, while the deviation of the people from the clear Word of the Lord has grown worse and worse. The people are scattered among the Gentiles, but this is only after their own actions have made it clear that they will not abide in the word: "And you shall know that I am the LORD; for you have not walked in My statutes nor executed My judgments, but have done according to the customs of the Gentiles which are all around you." (11:12)

In these chapters, the prophecy makes it clear that the time of the Lord's judgment on Jerusalem will be delayed no longer: "For I am the LORD. I speak, and the word which I speak will come to pass; it will no more be postponed; for in your days, O rebellious house, I will say the word and perform it," says the LORD GOD." (12:25) But even in the scattering of the people, the remnant is preserved: "Thus says the LORD GOD: 'I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.'" (11:17) The remnant would be gathered in the land one again so that the promise which the Lord had made concerning the Seed of Abraham, who is the Christ, would be fulfilled. For the Lord preserves His Church, and grants to her that which she needs.

Prayer: Lord, we beseech Thee, grant Thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil and with pure hearts and minds to follow Thee, the only God; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The false prophets and the women seeking to fabricate charms share several common traits, but the most important is that they lie in the name of the Lord. The false prophets says “Thus says the Lord!” but without the surety which comes from actually having been sent by God: “... yet they hope that the word may be confirmed.” (13:6b) And the wicked women are those whose lies “have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and you have strengthened the hands of the wicked, so that he does not turn from his wicked way to save his life.” (13:22) In both cases, death and destruction are spread by those who would claim that they ‘mean well.’

The people of God do not need ‘happy thoughts’ and false assurances; what they need is the Word of the Lord. Thus, in Ezekiel, we have the word that the false prophets will be cast out and destroyed by the Lord so that they saints will have the assurance when they hear the Word of God that it is precisely that: the Word of the Lord. The wicked ways of fallen men and women have tried to manipulate the Word since the fall in the Garden of Eden, and the wicked false prophets and those who practice divination have sought to get rich telling people what they want to hear, rather than what they need to hear. The sheep, however, know the voice of their Shepherd, and His doctrine sounds forth to the ends of the earth.

Prayer: Lord, we beseech Thee, grant Thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil and with pure hearts and minds to follow Thee, the only God; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The wicked shall die in his iniquity unless he repents. The Lord graciously promises that all who turn from their sin and look to Him for mercy shall find mercy. He swears by Himself that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked but wants them to repent of their iniquity and live by faith. The Lord then warns those who are righteous by faith of willfully sinning. If a man who is righteous by faith turns from his righteousness he will die and his former righteousness will count for nothing. The warning is clear: do not sin willfully because doing so casts out the Holy Spirit and faith.

The Israelites gnashed their teeth at this, imagining it unfair. Many today gnash their teeth at the Word of the Lord and imagine that Christians cannot lose their salvation, even by willfully sinning against their conscience. The Lord says through the prophet that such a terrible fate is possible if we turn from the righteousness of faith and willfully engage in sinful behaviors. Such willful sinning drives out the Holy Ghost and faith, for these cannot coexist with the intention to sin. God tells us this as a warning so that we do not willfully sin. That is Law. But the Gospel remains as well. He does not want anyone to perish in his sins, even willful sins. So He swears that He does not want us to die in our sins but wills that we daily repent, believe the Gospel that our sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, and then fight sin by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Lord God, cleanse me from secret faults and keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Amen.

“No longer shall it be the confidence of the house of Israel, but will remind them of their iniquity when they turned to follow them. Then they shall know that I am the Lord GOD” (Ez. 29:16).

God’s people had put their trust in the Egyptian paper tiger. Rather than trusting in the true God for deliverance from the Assyrians, the kings of Judah placed their confidence in Egypt, their ally. Judah had picked a weak ally, but what is worse is that they had the promises of the true God and so often refused to place their confidence in God’s Word alone. The Lord says in today’s reading that once Egypt is subjugated, the house of Israel will no longer place her confidence in Egypt. He will remove the illusion of support from Israel so that they learn to trust in the promises of God for their deliverance.

So it is for His Christians. We often put our fear, love, and trust in the things of this life. Our hearts are daily tempted to place our confidence in our own abilities, our cunning, or our possessions and wealth. None of these will deliver us from the perils of this life, let alone our true adversaries of sin, death, and the wiles of the devil. We have the Lord’s promise in Psalm 50:15, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.” Part of daily taking up our cross and following Christ means to put our confidence in His promises because they are certain and will not fail us. The help of men and worldly things will not save us. Our help is in the Name of the Lord.

Lord God, increase our faith in the promises You give us through Your Gospel and Sacraments. Amen.

A recurring theme in the unfaithfulness of Israel is that they rebelled against God and defiled His Sabbaths. False teachers twist doctrine and practice, making them focused on man’s ideas rather than God’s. This sort of rebellion was there when Satan tempted Adam and Eve, it was there when Israel strayed from God’s Word in the Old Testament, and it is there when false teachers trouble Christendom in this age.

Teaching God’s Word and observing faithful worship practices are both important components of the Church’s life. They cannot be divided and treated as optional parts. Some church bodies talk about making sound doctrine more appealing by wrapping it in worldly worship styles. Or, they emphasize keeping historical worship practices, but ignore false doctrine in their fellowship. Faithfulness involves observing all that He commands in His Word.

The Lord emphasizes that He repeatedly seeks to restore and bless Israel, even after the many times that they rebel. This is true for all mankind, all nations. All have sinned and rebelled against our Maker. For the sake of His Name as it is revealed in Jesus Christ He calls all nations to repent and believe! He wants all nations to be taught His truth and be baptized into His holy Name as Christ taught us, in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And He continues to make the point that all who are His disciples are taught to love His teachings and observe all that He commands.

We pray: O God, forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee, mercifully grant that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

These chapters from the book of Ezekiel contain some jarring signs and comparisons. But the seriousness of sin and Israel's persistent unfaithfulness are grave matters. These people give little thought to the profound consequences that come with their wickedness, so these words are one more example of the Lord's benevolent efforts to call them back and save them.

In our age people act as though they are easily offended when they hear strong words from the Church. Faithful pastors and members may try to confront their brothers and sisters with the seriousness of God's Law and Church discipline, but it is not uncommon for the hearers to claim that they are being attacked by such words. Unfortunately, the current society has fostered such psychological games. People are taught to think they are victims when they are simply being held accountable for their rebellion or negligence.

The Lord calls His people to turn from their sin because the results of wickedness are far worse than the unpleasantness of correction. Our wicked hearts are eager to ignore it all and pretend that everything is OK. But thanks be to God that He continues to call us from our sin. Even more, He gives us His Word and His Spirit, which are the only source of help and power that can bring us from the cowardice and delusions of our otherwise evil hearts. By these He creates faith in us and truly makes us His people in Jesus Christ our Lord!

We pray: O God, forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee, mercifully grant that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Even though it appears that the kingdoms of unbelievers are prosperous, all things are given and taken by the Lord. He allows the wicked to receive good things in His creation, but they are still subject to His judgment if they reject Him.

The Lord gives warnings and threats to His chosen people because He wants them to repent and abide in His righteousness. This does not mean that others can despise His people, even if His people are falling because of their sins. God wants all men to repent and be saved. He desires that all nations would hear His Words and walk according to His righteousness, so no man and no nation has the right to mock those who the Lord is trying to save.

Satan tempts us to compare our state to others. Sometimes we find ourselves lacking earthly things while we are trying to be faithful, but we see others who are sinful and rebellious who have an abundance of earthly goods. Satan would gladly have us confused and compromising for the sake of food and clothing, rather than seeking God's kingdom and righteousness above all other things. Or, the devil would have us ridicule those who do end up suffering outward consequences for their mistakes. In either case, we are forgetting that God loves the world, and Christ came to take away the sins of the world. So let us pray that He make our hearts and minds right to desire that which is His will!

We pray: O God, forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee, mercifully grant that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.