

SATURDAY, JUNE 1: MICAH 7:14-20 5TH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

“Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?” The true God is unique for His mercy. The false gods of the world are characterized by anger and vengeance. The pagans would make sacrifices to their false gods because they feared their wrath; they hoped that the gift of a sacrifice would change their god’s attitude and make them more approachable.

Today, “Evolution” has taken the place of a pagan god for some. Evolution is raised to the level of godhood when men give it credit for creation. They treat Evolution as though it created all that we see by means of death and violence. Survival of the fittest is how it is worshiped; the “more fit” creatures make sacrifice by killing the “less fit” in order to survive. The men who worship this false god become like it; they rejoice to do violence to God’s Truth and His Church—spiritually and, sometimes, physically. Those who reject the God of life and mercy find themselves worshipping a god of death and violence.

Our God alone is a God of grace. He will not let sin go unpunished, but He punished His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, for our sins, so that all who trust in Him would be forgiven and would not be punished for their sins. “There is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared” (Psalm 130:4).

We pray: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe Thine only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens, so may we also in heart and mind thither ascend and with Him continually dwell; who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

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The Calendar

May 5	Easter 2
May 12	Easter 3
May 19	Easter 4
May 26	Easter 5
May 30	The Ascension of our Lord



FROM THE BISHOP

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

I am writing this to you as our week of the diocesan synod is progressing. It is a great joy to report that tremendous progress is being made on our work together. The scholarship of the pastors and deacons of our diocese is testified to by the

quality of the papers which are being presented—the colloquium is, as always, quite edifying. An updated form of the Justification Theses has been finished and approved. Schedules are being made for Visitations throughout the year. We’ve been discussing how best to expand on the work of St. Ignatius Lutheran Seminary. We are coordinating efforts for continuing our work with our brethren in Colombia and the Philippines. In all, it has been a very productive week.

Among the most important aspects of the synod and colloquium, however, is the time which it provides for brethren to be together. Separated by such distances throughout the United States, this is an opportunity which we always look forward to with great eagerness. Hearing the brethren present sermons for the mutual edification of the fellowship is crucial, and a source of great joy for the brethren.

*Yours in Christ,
Bishop Heiser*

FRIDAY, MAY 31: MICAH 7:7-13 5TH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

“I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my case and executes justice for me. He will bring me forth to the light; I will see His righteousness.” The anger of God is more helpful than the anger of men. God is merciful and His anger is short-lived. He disciplines those He loves so that they learn to trust in Him, but He does not bring down the fullness of His anger against them. When He has finished testing them with hardship, He honors them and makes them examples of His mercy and grace. Not so with men. It is man’s sinful nature to love violence. For this reason King David, when faced with the consequences of his own disobedience, pleads, “Please let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are very great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man” (1 Chronicles 21:13).

Therefore, we should fear and obey God, rather than men. When we sin, God is merciful and will forgive our sins through faith in Christ, and He is powerful enough to deliver us from the anger of men. But, if we put our trust in men rather than God, men will not save us, nor will they remain faithful. It is better to trust in God than in men.

We pray: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe Thine only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens, so may we also in heart and mind thither ascend and with Him continually dwell; who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

There is a strange tension in this passage. On the one hand, God is “High and Lofty”; on the other hand, He is “with him who has a contrite and humble spirit.” This is the same as to say that God is righteous and just (Psalm 33:5), and that He “justifies the ungodly” through faith (Romans 4:5). God is holy and righteous, but His righteousness is best shown in His acts of grace toward lowly sinners.

Today the Church celebrates the Ascension of our Lord, when the Lord Jesus Christ bodily ascended to the right hand of God the Father. Even though He rules from that “high and lofty” throne at the Father’s right hand, He is still very present here on earth with those of a “contrite and humble spirit”—that is, with those who believe. The Lord Jesus never left us; He is just as present with us today as when He walked the earth with His apostles. What has changed is how He is present. He is present with His Church everywhere through the Word, preached and read, and through the Lord’s Supper. Through these means, though He sits in heaven, He is very present to comfort and strengthen those who repent of their sins and turn to Him in faith.

We pray: O King of Glory, Lord of hosts, who didst this day ascend in triumph far above all heavens, we beseech Thee, leave us not comfortless, but send to us the Spirit of Truth, promised of the Father; O Thou who with the Father and the Holy Ghost livest and reignest, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The prophet Micah, a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah, prophesied of the return of God’s people, even before they had gone into exile (1:16)! Micah emphasized God’s comfort—a comfort which they would need during their future exile in Babylon and the Jewish dispersion throughout the world. Three verbs are used to show the certainty of God’s action: assemble, gather, and put them together. Although only a faithful remnant would come back, God would multiply that remnant so that they would become a great people. Micah said that the praise and rejoicing of God’s flock would become “a loud noise because of so many people.” Of prime importance is that the LORD (Yahweh) would be their king! He would be “at their head.”

In the Christian Church believers are “called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified.” We had been sold in slavery to sin, but our Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, has come and saved us. Our Lord has led us through death and the grave so that we may not fear. Because He did “break out,” we too “will break out” of the bonds of sin and death. Through the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments we are gathered out of the world into the holy Christian Church and His flock. We remain safe in His fold.

Just as Moses led God’s people out and the LORD was with them, so now our King Jesus passes before us and is seated at the right hand of God. We will pass through the gates of the shadow of death and be welcomed into His heavenly kingdom.

We pray: O heavenly Father, gather us from the east and the west along with the faithful remnant that we may sit down with them in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

TUESDAY, MAY 7: ISAIAH 30:19-26 2ND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

God “will be very gracious” to us and we “shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem.” Nevertheless, the prophet Isaiah understood that we will not be without trouble and hardship, for he writes “...the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction...”

Though heaven will be only joy, the members of the Church on earth reach that final glory through adversity and affliction. “Believers are not renewed in this life perfectly or completely, for although their sin is covered by the perfect obedience of Christ, so that it is not imputed to believers for condemnation, and also the mortification of the old Adam and the renewal in the spirit of their mind is begun through the Holy Ghost, nevertheless the old Adam clings to them still in their nature and all its internal and external powers...9] Therefore, because of these lusts of the flesh the truly believing, elect, and regenerate children of God need in this life not only the daily instruction and admonition, warning, and threatening of the Law, but also frequently punishments, that they may be roused [the old man is driven out of them] and follow the Spirit of God, as it is written Ps. 119:71: It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes” (FC SD VI 7-9). Isaiah speaks of this affliction when he says, “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it.’” As we look forward to “that day,” we call out to the Lord in our time of troubles. The Lord has not abandoned us. He has forgiven us for our sins.

We pray: O Lord, show us the way to eternal life, that we may walk in it. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 29: ISAIAH 29:18-24 5TH SUNDAY A. EASTER

During the ministry of Christ the deaf heard the Word of God taught after He unstopped their ears. He gave sight to the blind so that they saw the creation and their Savior. The humble increased their joy as the Lord taught them that it was they, not the proud and pretentious, who were blessed. The poor had the Gospel preached to them, not those who thought they were righteous without the Lord’s help. Through Christ’s preaching many entered His kingdom as children of God. The children of Jacob, the true Israel, increased, not by the work or will of men, but through faith in Christ’s promises.

Although Christ has ascended into heaven, His ministry continues. Throughout every age He works through His called and ordained servants, heirs of the Apostolic Ministry. They preach the Law to those who scorn the Word and complain about doctrine. Those who watch for iniquity are rebuked. Those who trust that they are righteous apart from the Lord’s help are shown their sin so that those who err in spirit might come to understanding, stop their complaining against the Lord, and learn the doctrine of the Gospel. Through the preaching of Law and Gospel Christ unstops ears and gives sight to the spiritually blind, making them into sons of God through faith in His Gospel. The preacher is Christ’s instrument. These children are not the preacher’s work, but the work of God’s hands.

We pray: O God, from whom all good things do come, grant to us, Thy humble servants, that by Thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be right and by Thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

TUESDAY, MAY 28: ISAIAH 4:2-6 5TH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

The Branch of the Lord is beautiful and glorious. The Branch is Christ, the one who comes forth from the roots of the stem of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1). He is beautiful and glorious in that God the Father has exalted Him and given Him the name that is above every other name. The Branch gathers a remnant of Israel together in His holy Church by writing their names in the book of life, or as Isaiah says here, “everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem.”

This remnant is called holy as well. They are not holy in and of themselves, nor have they been made holy. They are called holy, that is, declared righteous by God on account of faith in Christ and justified freely by God’s mercy. He forgives their sins, washes away their filth in the waters of Holy Baptism. Where formerly God appeared to Israel in a pillar of fire and cloud, He promises to be present in Word and Sacrament over every dwelling in this Jerusalem, the faithful Church. He has said, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). He is a refuge from the elements for His people, that is, from the hardships of life and the tempests of temptation. This is a beautiful picture of life in Christ’s Church. Here He daily and richly forgives all your sins as you make His Tabernacle your dwelling and refuge.

We pray: O God, from whom all good things do come, grant to us, Thy humble servants, that by Thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be right and by Thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 8: JEREMIAH 3:11-19 2ND SUNDAY A. EASTER

God’s people were divided into the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The prophet Jeremiah primarily spoke to the northern kingdom in order to announce their exile in 721 B.C. and to call them to repentance. Although confession is the act of man, it is produced by the working of the Law of God. The Law reveals our offenses against God and neighbor. The Law works in us contrition--sorrow over sin--and leads us to acknowledge our iniquity.

There are many who see confession as failure. They fight against it with all their strength. What we learn through the Word is that confession is not only good for the soul, but that God actually desires to hear our confession. In order to encourage our confession, the Triune God tells us, “For I am merciful... I will not remain angry forever.” Our God desires to forgive. He sends pastors to preach the promise of the Gospel and the absolution of sins for the sake of His dear Son. That good news works the gift of faith in us.

Through confession and absolution, our God wins the victory! God uses the power of the Gospel to change us. Those who fear and love God do not “follow the dictates of their evil hearts. Rather than backsliding, there is the Christian life of confession and absolution. Jeremiah says, “You shall call Me, ‘Father,’ and not turn away from Me.” Luther says in A Brief Exhortation to Confession, “We have the advantage of knowing how to use confession beneficially for the comforting and strengthening of our conscience” (4).

We pray: Father, according to Your great compassion, blot out my transgressions. Amen.

THURSDAY, MAY 9: EZEKIEL 34:1-11 2ND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

In St. Mark 6:34, it says, “And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd.” It is a terrible thing to be a sheep without a shepherd. The prophet Ezekiel says that when God’s people were without shepherds, they were scattered and became food for all the beasts of the field. In addition, it is not a good thing to have an evil shepherd. Woe to those shepherds who do not feed the flock, but instead rule them with force and cruelty.

We live in the New Testament, the promised Day of the Lord. Our risen Good Shepherd has come. Jesus is, in fact, searching for His sheep when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command. When the pastor preaches the Word of God and thus feeds the sheep with Law and Gospel, Jesus is seeking out His sheep. Jesus said, “He who hears you, hears Me.” In the catechism we are reminded that, “This (absolution) is just as valid and certain even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.”

Today’s Scripture is directed at the pastors! God does, indeed, want His flock of believers to have shepherds, and He wants those shepherds to feed the flock. The Lord desires that his called ministers “feed my lambs.”

We pray: Good Shepherd, continue to provide for Your sheep that we find in Your shepherding rest for our souls. Amen.

MONDAY, MAY 27: AMOS 9:8-15 5TH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Sinful Israel scorned the Word of the Lord. They scoffed at the prophet’s warnings and refused repentance. They continued to heap judgment upon themselves while the Lord tarried, boasting, “Calamity shall not overtake nor confront us.” They trusted that the temporal peace and life of ease they enjoyed would go on forever, rather than trusting in the Lord who brings peace. For this they will be destroyed from the face of the earth. The Northern Kingdom will go into exile, never to return to the land.

“Yet I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob.” The Lord will sift Israel as grain in a sieve. The ungodly “are like the chaff which the wind drives away” (Psalm 1:4). “Yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground.” Those who are grain, who trust in the Lord and rely upon Him, will remain His treasured possession and live. Not only will there be a remnant, but the tent of David will be restored. He will send the Messiah who will rule this remnant of Israel, along with the Gentiles who call on His name.

This promise was fulfilled at the ascension of Christ, the Son of David according to the flesh, who now rules all things. His kingdom is spiritual peace and prosperity, where His people lack no good thing. He even calls us Gentiles into His kingdom and rules over us by His Word and Holy Spirit.

We pray: O God, from whom all good things do come, grant to us, Thy humble servants, that by Thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be right and by Thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

mony in Zach. 1:12: “O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem?” Although concerning the saints we concede that just as when alive they pray for the Church universal in general, so in heaven they pray for the Church in general, albeit no testimony concerning the dead praying is extant in the Scriptures, except the dream taken from the second book of Maccabees (15:14).

Moreover, even supposing that the saints certainly pray for the Church, yet it does not follow that they are to be invoked. Although our Confession affirms only this, that Scripture does not teach the invocation of the saints, or that we are to ask the saints for aid. But since neither a command, nor a promise, nor an example can be produced from the Scriptures concerning the invocation of saints, it follows that conscience can have nothing concerning this invocation that is certain. And since prayer ought to be made from faith, how do we know that God approves this invocation? Whence do we know without the testimony of Scripture that the saints perceive the prayers of each one? Some plainly ascribe divinity to the saints, viz. that they discern the silent thoughts of the minds in us. They dispute concerning morning and evening knowledge, perhaps because they doubt whether they hear us in the morning or the evening. They invent these things not in order to treat the saints with honor, but to defend lucrative services. Nothing can be produced by the adversaries against this reasoning, that, since invocation does not have a testimony from God’s Word, it cannot be affirmed that the saints perceive our invocation, or that they especially perceive that God approves it. Wherefore the adversaries ought not to force us to an uncertain matter, because a prayer without faith is not prayer. For as they cite the example of the Church, it is evident that this is a new custom in the Church; for although the old prayers make mention of the saints, yet they do not invoke the saints. Although also this new invocation in the Church is dissimilar to the invocation of individuals.

Again, the adversaries not only require invocation in the worship of the saints, but also apply the merits of the saints for others, and make of the saints not only intercessors, but also propitiators. This is in no way to be endured. For here the honor belonging only to Christ is altogether transferred to the saints. For they make them mediators and propitiators, and although they make a distinction between mediators of intercession and mediators of redemption, yet they plainly make out of the saints mediators of redemption.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §1–14

FRIDAY, MAY 10: EZEKIEL 34:12-22 2ND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

With today’s appointed Scripture God directs words to His flock, His sheep. They are words which distinguish “between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats.” In yesterday’s reading the false and wicked shepherds were removed from office; today the false and wicked sheep are removed from the fold. Those sheep who were strong or with power to influence were using their influence to oppress the weak.

St. Paul makes a distinction between sheep at the administration of the Lord’s Supper in Corinth, saying, “For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you” (1 Corinthians 11:19). The rich “were getting drunk” and the weak were “hungry.” St. Paul exhorts them saying, “Do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing?” Through Jesus’ provisions of Word and Sacrament His flock is led to good pasture. He will save His flock from the oppressive sheep. And He will guide His flock to love each other and lift up the weak.

There are surely those sheep who are strong—thanks be to God. Nevertheless, our God is not just the God of the strong, but also of the weak. Our God desires to “bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick.” The strong are not to use their strength to oppress, but to help the weak. Romans 15:1-2, “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.”

We pray: O Lord, trusting in Your forgiveness, give us strength in Your Word. Lead us to love our neighbor, bear with the weak, and carry their burdens. Amen.

Great David's greater Son is the King after God's own heart. Jesus is God's beloved Son in whom He is well-pleased.

Ezekiel calls our Messianic King "My Servant, David!" We are called God's "flock, the flock of My pasture!" How did we find ourselves in such a blessed relationship so that God says, "I, the LORD their God, am with them, and they, the house of Israel, are My people"? It all comes down to the covenant of peace which God made with us. We were prey for the wild beasts. We were under the bonds of a yoke and had been enslaved. We were consumed with hunger. We could not bridge the gap, but the Father sent His beloved Son to take on human flesh and redeem us.

After His resurrection our Lord came to His disciples saying, "Peace be with you." He showed them the nail prints on His hands and feet. Those wounds could not hold Him. "... and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bands of their yoke and delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them." Our Jesus has delivered all believers from "the sentence of death" (2 Corinthians 1:9). The Lord has brought us into His land (the Church) so that we live in safety. We are free and we are fed by the fruits of the land. The pastoral office has been given the keys of the kingdom to forgive the sins of the repentant. We are God's "garden of renown."

We pray: Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for Your new covenant which bring us peace and forgiveness. Strengthen our faith in the Son of David, our Lord Jesus. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Rogate Sunday

Chapter IX.

Article XXI. Of the Invocation of Saints.

The twenty-first article they [the Roman Catholics] absolutely condemn, because we do not require the invocation of saints. Nor on any topic do they rhetoricate with more prolixity. Nevertheless they do not effect anything else than that the saints should be honored; likewise that the saints who live should pray for others; as though indeed the invocation of dead saints were in addition necessary. They cite Cyprian, because he asked Cornelius while yet alive to pray for his brothers when departing. By this example they approve the invocation of the dead. They quote also Jerome against Vigilantius: "On this field," they say, "eleven hundred years ago, Jerome overcame Vigilantius." Thus the adversaries triumph, as though the war were already ended. Nor do they, in their stupidity, see that in Jerome against Vigilantius there is not a syllable concerning invocation. He speaks concerning honors to the saints, not concerning the invocation. Neither have the rest of the ancient writers before Gregory made mention of invocation. Certainly this invocation, with these opinions which the adversaries now teach concerning the application of merits, has not the testimony of the ancient writers.

Our Confession [the Augsburg Confession] approves honors to the saints. For here a threefold honor is to be approved. The first is thanksgiving. For we ought to give thanks to God because He has shown examples of mercy; because He has shown that He wishes to save men; because He has given teachers or other gifts to the Church. And these gifts, as they are the greatest, should be amplified, and the saints themselves should be praised, who have faithfully used these gifts, just as Christ praises faithful business-men (Matt. 25:21, 23). The second service is the strengthening of our faith; when we see the denial forgiven Peter, we also are encouraged to believe the more that grace truly superabounds over sin (Rom. 5:20). The third honor is the imitation first of faith, then of the other virtues, which everyone should imitate according to his calling. These true honors the adversaries do not require. They dispute only concerning invocation, which, even though it would have no danger, nevertheless is not necessary.

Besides, we also grant that the angels pray for us. For there is a testi-

Throughout the Scriptures God has taught mankind that flesh and blood are important, powerful images of life and death. After Adam and Eve's fall in Genesis, God used skins of flesh to cover their sinful nakedness. The flesh and blood sacrifices of animals were vivid components of faithful Old Testament worship according to His commands. And eating the Passover lamb's body and marking doorways with its blood were profound points for remembering God's promises to His faithful people.

The idea of evil oppressors being fed their own flesh and blood is a gruesome thought, but it also emphasizes the power of that image. And all of these examples of flesh and blood in God's work point us toward His ultimate work in our Savior and Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob, our Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of being fed the food and drink of our own violence as enemies of God, He gives us the Sacrament of His own Flesh and Blood. In His Holy Supper He gives us food and drink that, even though it testifies to the violence of His crucifixion and death, is not an image of horror. It is a blessing of faith! It strengthens and preserves us in the true faith that we are no longer enemies of God, but made His beloved children in Jesus Christ!

We pray: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise, that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Jubilate Sunday

The Third Petition. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Thus far we have prayed that God's name be honored by us, and that His kingdom prevail among us; in which two points is comprehended all that pertains to the honor of God and to our salvation, that we come into the ownership of God and all His possessions. But the great need is, that we cling firmly to them, and do not suffer ourselves to be torn therefrom. For as in a good government it is not only necessary that there be those who build and govern well, but also those who make defense, afford protection and maintain it in security; so here also, although we have prayed for the things of the greatest need, viz. for the Gospel, faith and the Holy Ghost, that He may govern and redeem us from the power of the devil, we must also pray that His will be done. For if we are to abide therein, there will be wonderful encounters, so that, on account of them, we must suffer many thrusts and blows from everything that ventures to oppose and prevent the fulfillment of the two petitions that precede.

For no one believes how the devil opposes and exerts all his powers against them, and cannot suffer that anyone teach or believe aright. And it hurts him beyond measure to suffer his lies and abominations, that have been honored under the most specious pretexts of the divine Name, to be exposed, and that he be disgraced, and besides be driven out of the heart, and suffer such a breach to be made in his kingdom. Therefore, with all his power and might he chafes and rages as a fierce enemy, and marshals all his subjects, and enlists the world and our own flesh as his allies. For our flesh is in itself indolent and inclined to evil, even though we have accepted and believe the Word of God. The world, too, is perverse and wicked; this he incites against us in various ways, and kindles and adds fuel, that he may hinder and drive us back, cause us to fall and again bring us under his power. That is all his will, mind and thought, for which he strives day and night, and never rests a moment, but employs all arts, malicious devices, ways and means which he can invent.

We therefore who would be Christians must surely reckon upon having the devil with all his angels, together with the world, as our enemies, who will bring every possible misfortune and grief upon us. For where the Word of God is preached, accepted or believed, and produces fruit, there the holy

cross cannot be wanting. And let no one think that he shall have peace; but he must risk whatever he has upon earth—possessions, honor, house and estate, wife and child, body and life. That hurts indeed our flesh and the old Adam. For the test is to be steadfast and to suffer with patience whatever afflictions befall us, and to yield whatever is taken from us.

Therefore there is just as much need, as in everything else, that we pray without ceasing: “Dear Father, Thy will be done, not the will of the devil and of our enemies, nor of anything that would persecute and destroy Thy holy Word, or hinder Thy kingdom; and grant that we may bear with patience and may overcome in whatever it be our lot to suffer on account of this Thy will, so that our poor flesh may not yield or fall away from weakness or indolence.”

In these three petitions we find expressed in the simplest manner the need which pertains to God Himself, yet all for our sakes. For whatever we pray concerns only us, namely, as we have said, that the will of God, which must be done without us, may also be done in us. For as His name must be hallowed and His kingdom come without our prayer, so also His will must be done and succeed, although the devil with all his adherents raise a tumult and rage in fury, and undertake to utterly exterminate the Gospel. But for our own sake we must pray that, even against their fury, His will be also done without hindrance in us, that they may accomplish nothing, and we remain firm against all violence and persecution, and submit to the will of God.

Such prayer must indeed be our protection and defense now, to repel and overcome all that the devil, pope, bishops, tyrants and heretics can do against our Gospel. Let them rage all together and attempt their utmost, and deliberate and resolve how they may destroy and exterminate us, that their will and counsel may prevail. One or two Christians with this petition alone shall be our wall against them, upon which they shall dash themselves to pieces. This consolation and confidence we have, that the will and purpose of the devil and of all our enemies must fail and come to naught, however proud, secure and powerful they know themselves to be. For if their will were not broken and frustrated, the kingdom of God could not abide upon the earth or His name be hallowed.

—The Large Catechism, the Lord’s Prayer

FRIDAY, MAY 24: ZECHARIAH 8:18-23 **4TH SUNDAY A. EASTER**

“In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.’ ”

God’s will has always been that the joyous new song of forgiveness and everlasting life would be proclaimed to all nations. The special work of Israel and the Jews was the work of keeping His Word faithfully and teaching it to all others rightly. Even though many turned from this path, there was still one Jewish man who did this work perfectly, our Lord Jesus Christ. He was, and continues to be, the One that the nations are drawn to so that man may know the one true God is with His people.

This is our special work and identity as His Church. Having come from the other nations, we are made part of the Body of Christ, and He is with us. The glorious song of the Gospel of Christ crucified is proclaimed and taught in our midst. We are to invite people to go with us in the way of Truth so they may see God in the righteousness of His Law, in the work of His Spirit to bring faithful repentance, and in the forgiveness of sins through the Baptism, Absolution, and Body and Blood from His beloved Son, Jesus Christ!

We pray: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise, that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

THURSDAY, MAY 23: JEREMIAH 8:4-13 4TH SUNDAY A. EASTER

This lesson about false teachers is one of the most important warnings in Scripture. The lie of “Peace, peace!” is more dangerous than the fool’s message that rages against God or denies His existence. The deception of false peace attributes lies to God’s name (breaking the 2nd Commandment), and makes a mockery of His true teaching (breaking the 3rd Commandment).

This lie was a problem in the time of the prophets, and it is still a problem in our own age. That is why faithfulness to God’s Word is so important. Truth is more important than outward peace. Satan offers the illusion of peace to those who compromise the truth of God’s Commandments. The pretense of unity and walking together can be achieved if repentance is not preached. But if the blessing of God’s message of repentance is taken away, then the Gospel of forgiveness in Christ is also snatched from people, because they are fooled into thinking they have peace when they are actually sick and in peril from sin.

Sometimes the Lord takes away our peace in order to teach us repentance, humility, and trust in His grace. This holy blessing is better than resting quietly in the death of Satan’s falsehoods. Thanks be to God that Christ Jesus is our Way, Truth, and Life, and that He may be found in those humble congregations and fellowships that uphold the truth, rather than proclaim a false peace.

We pray: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise, that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

MONDAY, MAY 13: EZEKIEL 36:1-15 3RD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Today’s lesson is two-fold. In the first seven verses we hear of God’s impending judgment on the foreign occupation of the Holy Land. The next eight verses tell of Israel’s restoration to that land from exile. The time of captivity in Babylon will come to an end in God’s time, and His people will return and enjoy the blessings of the Mosaic Covenant. “But you, O mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to My people Israel, for they are about to come.” Prosperity will once again be enjoyed by the children of Israel.

More importantly, they will return with new hearts, knowing they’ve been forgiven by their God. In other words, we have before us another application of God’s Law and Gospel. Israel learned from her captivity that she abandoned her oath of faithfulness to God, and now would return for a new start. That’s how we learn from God’s chastisement. God does not pour His wrath on us for our sin, for that could only be endured by Christ on the cross. Rather, He allows circumstances in our lives to “curb” us--to awaken us when we stray from His path. Always in the right way and at the right time, God disciplines those He loves. Let us give thanks to our God who works all things together for good for those called according to His purpose.

We pray: Oh, that the Lord would guide my ways to keep His statutes still! Oh, that my God would grant me grace to know and do His will! (TLH 416:1)

TUESDAY, MAY 14: EZEKIEL 36:16-32 3RD SUNDAY A. EASTER

This reading approaches the Babylonian Exile in a different way. Since God's chosen were taken from their land, some would think their God was powerless to prevent it. But the exile was not merely an "unfortunate event of history," but one in which God played a direct role in world history to discipline His rebellious people: "Therefore I poured out My fury on them for the blood they had shed on the land, and for their idols with which they had defiled it. So I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed throughout the countries; I judged them according to their ways and their deeds." By their expulsion and subsequent return, God will be vindicated not only among Israel, but among the nations who had occupied their land: "And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD," says the Lord GOD, 'when I am hallowed in you before their eyes.'"

How often are we as guilty as they—living as if God were impotent and unimportant. Daily we must confess that by our words and actions we defame the holy name of God, either by omission or commission.

We pray: My Jesus, as Thou wilt; oh may Thy will be mine! Into Thy hand of love I would my all resign. Thro' sorrow or thro' joy conduct me as Thine own and help me still to say, "My Lord, Thy will be done." (TLH 420:1)

WEDNESDAY, MAY 22: ISAIAH 65:8-16 4TH SUNDAY A. EASTER

God's promises have eternal implications. If they didn't, many of His statements in Scripture would have little importance. Things constantly change and move in this world, and ideas about earthly inheritances and dwelling places are small in the bigger picture of millennia gone by and possible generations to come.

The blessings we experience in time now are indeed a good thing. But they are small, and often passing. The most prosperous people in history suffered unpleasant things, and the most pitiful people have known joys. But the greater truth is that our Lord uses all these things to teach us about eternal blessings.

We are unable to see all things from an omniscient, eternal perspective. But God is able, and so He uses our temporal experiences to teach us about eternal blessings. His promises of joy and prosperity give us a glimpse into the profound joys of the life of the world to come, where sin and suffering will be gone. And His promises of punishment and weeping are a serious warning that teaches man to repent now while he has the blessing of the Lord's patience, before the time comes when one must face judgment for rejecting His grace. These are the same ideas that we hear when His Word is faithfully preached concerning repentance and forgiveness in our Lord Jesus Christ!

We pray: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise, that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

TUESDAY, MAY 21: ISAIAH 65:1-7 4TH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

“I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts...”

Unbelievers criticize the Christian faith because they think it is unkind or unfair in its doctrine and practice. But, as our Lord says in Matthew 11, the yoke and burden of His Church is easy compared to the realities of man’s ideas and works. The Church is taught to love others. And sometimes loving others means exercising discipline and judgment, but His Word teaches us to do so in a way that reflects His wisdom and benevolence as part of a bigger picture; whereas man’s thoughts fail to see beyond self-serving desires. Pride and rebellion are often dressed up as “love”.

Proverbs 3 teaches us, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; ...do not be wise in your own eyes...” God’s power and grace transcend our knowledge and perspective. It is a profound blessing that He reaches out to us and teaches us by His Word, enlightens us by His Spirit, and renews us in His forgiveness. Apart from Christ’s merciful blessings in His Church, all that remains is man’s selfish and vulgar ways.

We pray: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise, that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 15: EZEKIEL 36:33-38 3RD SUNDAY A. EASTER

As the Israelites returned to their former homeland after the exile, there would be a dramatic reversal in the land. “Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by. So they will say, “This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.” Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted what was desolate. I, the LORD, have spoken it, and I will do it.’”

The recovery of the land would involve rebuilding the cities and cultivating the soil. In an amazing turnaround, the people would live as if they never left. So prosperous would it be that it brought back images of Eden itself. Even the surrounding nations would be forced to admit that such an enterprise had to involve the Lord’s hand. Whatever directions our lives may take, may we be thankful that the Lord is guiding and directing life’s events for our spiritual good.

We pray: Praise to God, immortal praise, for the love that crowns our days; bounteous Source of ev’ry joy, let Thy praise our tongues employ. All to Thee, our God, we owe, Source whence all our blessings flow. (TLH 572:1)

THURSDAY, MAY 16: HAGGAI 2:2-9 3RD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

God speaks to His prophet Haggai and tells him to ask the people returning from exile: “Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing?” The people had listened to the words of the famous prophets of old—Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah—who promised a restoration that would far surpass anything they had known before. Interpreting this in a literal and earthly sense, the people were sadly disappointed that the current temple was but a shadow of the old. In quality of material, as well as in progress, there was little to look at. God, through Haggai, even called it “nothing.” There would have to be an earnest and monumental effort put forth to even approach the glory of old.

But ultimately, the earthly temple is not the focal point. Even though the temple would eventually be rebuilt, there would be a time when it too would be destroyed: “Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations...” Ultimate restoration would come in a manner not made with hands. The temple would be Christ Himself, dwelling in a New Jerusalem that will know no darkness or end. The restoration promised by the great prophets of old would indeed materialize in the flesh of God’s own Son. On Him alone we build.

We pray: Christ is our Cornerstone, on Him alone we build; with His true saints alone the courts of heav’n are filled. On His great love our hopes we place of present grace and joys above. (TLH 465:1)

MONDAY, MAY 20: ZECHARIAH 12:1-14 4TH SUNDAY A. EASTER

God works through stories and events. Some stories and events are highlighted in the records of history and Scripture by the Lord because they serve the ultimate fulfillment of His particular promises, but other stories and events can still be very important in God’s ongoing work. He established His holy people through Israel, David, Jerusalem, Judah, and our Lord Jesus who came from them, but He also maintains His holy people in the Church amidst the stories and events of our time now.

Sinful men still consider the Church a burden and an adversary. So-called Christians mock small congregations and our fellowship as a “joke” because they resent our confession. And we may not be sent as the “governors of Judah” to bring force against these other people, but they still burn with indignation at the Word of God that we believe, teach, and confess.

Satan himself cannot overcome the Kingdom of our Lord’s truth, so foolish men and confused institutions will fare no better. Our Lord has done mighty things for His Church throughout history, from His first promise to Adam, to Jesus Christ’s atoning death and resurrection, to His ongoing presence by His Word and Sacraments to this day. Thanks be to God for such glorious blessings!

We pray: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise, that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

repentance or reproof, but properly nothing else than a preaching of consolation, and a joyful message which does not reprove or terrify, but against the terrors of the Law consoles consciences, points alone to the merits of Christ, and again comforts them by the precious preaching of the grace and favor of God, obtained through Christ's merit.

7. As to the revelation of sin, because the veil of Moses hangs before the eyes of all men as long as they hear the bare preaching of the Law, and nothing concerning Christ, and therefore do not learn from the Law to perceive their sins aright, but either become presumptuous hypocrites as the Pharisees, or despair as did Judas; Christ takes the Law into His hands, and explains it spiritually (Matt. 5:21 sqq.; Rom. 7:14). And thus the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all sinners (Rom. 1:18), how great it is; by this means they are instructed in the Law, and then from it first learn to know aright their sins—a knowledge to which Moses never could coerce them.

Therefore, although the preaching of the suffering and death of Christ, the Son of God, is an earnest and terrible proclamation and declaration of God's wrath, whereby men are for the first time led aright to the Law, after the veil of Moses has been removed from them, so that they first know aright how great things God in His Law requires of us, nothing of which we can observe, and therefore should seek all our righteousness in Christ—

8. Yet, as long as all this (namely, Christ's suffering and death) proclaims God's wrath and terrifies man, it is still not properly the preaching of the Gospel, but the preaching of Moses and the Law, and therefore a "strange work" of Christ, whereby He attains His proper office, i.e. to preach grace, console and quicken, which is properly the preaching of the Gospel.

Negative.

Contrary Doctrine which is Rejected.

Therefore we reject and regard incorrect and injurious the dogma that the Gospel is properly a preaching of repentance or reproof, and not alone a preaching of grace. For thereby the Gospel is again converted into a law, the merit of Christ and the Holy Scriptures obscured, Christians robbed of true consolation, and the door opened again to the Papacy.

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome

FRIDAY, MAY 17: ZECHARIAH 2:1-13 3RD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

The message of the prophet Zechariah compliments and reinforces that of Haggai. Where Haggai urges, Zechariah encourages. In the reading for today we have an interesting segment of Zechariah's vision. He sees a man carrying a measuring line. He doesn't ask who he is or what he's doing. All Zechariah asks is "Where are you going?" The man quickly responds that he is off to Jerusalem to measure its width and length. Based on the succeeding verses, we know this was for the purpose of putting up a wall. In the days of old walls were a vital element of a city. They were literally a matter of life and death. Because of this importance, God Himself would be the rampart of the city: "'For I,' says the LORD, 'will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst.'" As a living fire God is flexible enough to move, and fierce enough to protect.

But this isn't only the promise given to the returning exiles who are being exhorted to rebuild the earthly temple. There is the promise of a much greater Temple to come. This is the city of the New Jerusalem described by John in Revelation, a city without enemy or darkness, as the Lord Almighty not only protects it, but sustains it. Let us ever long to live in God's eternal city.

We pray: And when within that lovely Paradise at last I safely dwell, what songs of bliss shall from my lips arise, what joy my tongue shall tell, while all the saints are singing hosannas o'er and o'er, pure hallelujahs ringing around me evermore! (TLH 619:7)

We see in today's reading the importance of shepherding in the Church. Great benefit can result, even salvation itself, when the shepherd is faithful. Disastrous consequences are guaranteed when the shepherd is not. "Thus says the LORD my God, 'Feed the flock for slaughter, whose owners slaughter them and feel no guilt; those who sell them say, "Blessed be the LORD, for I am rich"; and their shepherds do not pity them.'" Not only does the so-called shepherd suffer the consequences of his actions, but so does the flock under his guidance. There are no excuses for delivering, or receiving, false doctrine. We are all individually responsible to the Good Shepherd for taking in and treasuring the one true faith. There will be no allowance given for "I was brought up this way" or "I was born this way."

How important it is, then, that we seek the Lord where He may truly be found and delivered: where His Word is preached faithfully and His Sacraments administered aright. It is through these Means of Grace, and only through these Means, that salvation is brought to us. Let us then seek, guard, and promote such sanctuaries of salvation.

We pray: Lord of the Church, we humbly pray for those who guide us in Thy way and speak Thy hold Word. With love divine their hearts inspire and touch their lips with hallowed fire and needful strength afford. (TLH 489:1)

Lesson from the Book of Concord Cantate Sunday

Chapter V. Of the Law and the Gospel.

Statement of the Controversy.

Whether the preaching of the Holy Gospel be properly not only a preaching of grace, which announces the forgiveness of sins, but also a preaching of repentance and censure, rebuking unbelief, which is rebuked not in the Law, but alone through the Gospel.

Affirmative.

Pure Doctrine of God's Word.

1. We believe, teach and confess that the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is to be maintained in the Church as an especially brilliant light, whereby, according to the admonition of St. Paul, the Word of God may be rightly divided.

2. We believe, teach and confess that the Law is properly a divine doctrine, which teaches what is right and pleasing to God, and reproves everything that is sin and contrary to God's will.

3. Therefore everything that reproves sin is and belongs to the preaching of the Law.

4. But the Gospel is properly such a doctrine as teaches what man who has not observed the Law, and therefore is condemned by it, should believe, viz. that Christ has expiated and made satisfaction for all sins, and, without any merit of theirs [no merit of the sinner intervening], has obtained and acquired forgiveness of sins, righteousness that avails before God, and eternal life.

5. But since the term "Gospel" is not used in one and the same sense in the Holy Scriptures, on account of which this dissension originally arose, we believe, teach and confess that if by the term "Gospel" the entire doctrine of Christ be understood, which He proposed in His ministry, as also did His apostles (in which sense it is employed, Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21), it is correctly said and written that the Gospel is a preaching of repentance and of the forgiveness of sins.

6. But if the Law and the Gospel be contrasted with one another, as Moses himself is called a teacher of the Law, and Christ a preacher of the Gospel, we believe, teach and confess that the Gospel is not a preaching of