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FROM THE PROPERs FOR TRINITY 9

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 16:1-9 (NKJV)

He also said to His disciples: “There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. So he called him and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.’

Then the steward said within himself, ‘What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.’

So he called every one of his master’s debtors to him, and said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ And he said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ So he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ So he said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ And he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’ So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.

The Collect

Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.



Diocesan Summer Camp 2012





RECENT VISITATIONS—Bishop Heiser recently conducted his annual visitations of St. Luke Lutheran parish in Kenai and Homer, AK (June 4–8) and St. Boniface Lutheran Church in Niles, MI (June 16–17). As always, the visits were a reaffirmation of the faithfulness of faithful teaching and practice of the parishes of our diocese.



As the quarrels in government increase, each side blaming the other for the country's massive unemployment problems, each side pointing fingers at the other for the terrible accumulated debt, and each side ramping up their campaign rhetoric so as to dissuade voters from supporting their opponent, one often asks in a state of exhaustion and near confusion if there is anyone in the room who has an inkling of wisdom who can lead this country forth and bring sanity back to the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of our representative republic...for, it certainly seems that insanity reigns in the halls of government, and therefore society!

Solomon was faced with a trying case that would surely test him and his stature with the people. But, unlike most political figures of his day and ours, Solomon was not concerned about swaying people and garnering their confidence (and votes) by rendering the most popular decision. Rather, he was concerned about rendering the *right* decision.

As a follower of Yaweh, Solomon submitted to the LORD and therein found wisdom to bring forth a God-pleasing judgment that preserved life and justice. Seeking his wisdom in the Word of God, Solomon became the wisest king in Israel—because God was with him. His judgments were based in righteousness that flowed from the LORD Himself.

In a day when the true Church and faithful shepherds are fast fading into the shadows—when the Gospel is compromised, twisted, and perverted—let us beseech God to grant His wisdom to those in leadership, and that those leaders, both secular and Christian, will have hearts that truly hear His wisdom.

The Psalmist states, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD.” (Psalm 33:12a) Israel under King Solomon was more richly blessed than they could ever have imagined. The massive amount of food required to sustain the royal palace and all of the military each day is nearly incomprehensible. Yet, with all that was required, there was no complaint from any quarter in rendering the needs unto wise King Solomon, and there was no want throughout the nation. It is certainly accurate to say that superpower Israel was richly blessed by God under the rule of the wise King.

But it is very important to note that the blessing came from God Himself, as did the wisdom to rule. Neither the wisdom, nor the material wealth and well-being of the nation came from man. God provided it all, and God was honored in and through it all as He cared for His beloved people.

Worldly knowledge is truly valuable, and it is especially a treasure when the recipient of it uses such knowledge for the good of mankind. But, there is no knowledge that is of greater value than that found in the Word of God, and when that is received it is because God grants both the mind and the wisdom.

As a student of the Word, you may never get a degree acknowledged by man, but that does not mean you are not wise. Be wise in the things of God as found in His inerrant Truth, and peace and joy shall be in your heart and life along this wilderness journey as you see Christ using you as His vessel, redeemed by His blood.

The evil will not prosper forever. Sooner or later God will execute His justice on all those who have troubled His people and mocked His blessings to this world. Jezebel and the house of Ahab are examples of this.

Throughout every year and every generation since Adam and Eve, Satan has tried to destroy God’s people. At times it seemed as though Satan was winning, through his widespread lies and seductions to corrupt power, but God’s own power and plans never faltered. He protected His people and kept the power of the devil in check so that His holy promises would be accomplished. A Son would indeed come through His faithful people, and Satan would be defeated by that Son’s own death and resurrection.

Soon, according to the Lord’s time, there will be a day when the lingering prince of this fallen world will be thrown down from his lofty perch, and the memory of him will be wiped out from the land. Still, even in his last days Satan paints himself up as a harlot and wears his empty crown in every last effort to seduce and antagonize God’s people.

Jesus Christ is already anointed and victorious, and He is most certainly coming in glory to finish off the enemy who troubles us. It may be sad and disturbing to see the perverse efforts of a deposed Satan in his last days, but we must hold fast to the Lord’s promises, which have never failed! In Christ Jesus is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen!

“And Hazael said, ‘Why is my lord weeping?’ [Elisha] answered, ‘Because I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel...’” (2 Kings 8:12).

The Lord promises blessings to His faithful, but those blessings sometimes come through trials and sad events. Elisha knew that many people would suffer and die on account of Israel’s conflict, but the Lord did not give him command to change certain events, so Elisha’s faith bound him to say and do as the Lord had revealed.

Jesus endured similar feelings. In the nineteenth chapter of Luke, Jesus wept over Jerusalem and the things the people would suffer due to their faithlessness. In Matthew’s Gospel, He endured the sorrow of His impending betrayal, suffering, and death. Still He prayed, “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done” (St. Matthew 26:42).

The life of God’s faithful people will always involve struggles against sin and sadness until Christ returns in glory and we are confirmed in the resurrection and the life everlasting. But in the meantime, let us pray that He strengthen us by His Spirit to stand faithful in times of sadness, so that we may show forth His truth as our Lord did and His prophets before us. Amen!

The initial plans of David, to build a house of worship unto the Lord, were now being carried out by his son, Solomon. Nothing but the best would be used to build a perfect House unto the perfect God. God granted Solomon peace on his borders so that he could proceed with the plans of his father—and he did just that.

Solomon, as a wise and Godly businessman-leader, took advantage of his connections with other countries and people of influence so as to bring to pass a magnificent building project that ultimately would dwarf everything to which man thereafter would aspire. He did not use and abuse his friends and others, but always treated them with the utmost respect and dignity, seeking only to enlarge his circle and proclaim the faith of Yaweh. He was clearly unlike the leaders of other nations, in that he proceeded with this massive building project not to his own glory and honor, but to the glory and honor of the LORD God.

Certainly Solomon provides a lesson in interpersonal relations with the heathen surrounding us: by giving life-profession to our lip-profession, the Gospel Seed is spread far and wide through our vocations—and who knows where that Seed will sprout and take root! Many heathen at the time of Solomon were converted from their idol-worship to the true God. This further pointed to the New Testament era when the Gospel would be preached to all nations (the Gentiles) on earth.

God blessed Solomon with the wisdom and ability to proceed with this worthy project that ultimately pointed to the spiritual temple founded in the incarnate God—Jesus.

Details, details, details. Why all the details in the Sacred Record regarding the construction of the House of the LORD, the great Temple? Could it be to show that everything done for God is to be orderly and planned, well thought out and procured—only of the best that man can offer? To show that the House is to be something extra special, the place of residence of the LORD Himself in the midst of His people, where He would gather them as His beloved ones?

Certainly our God is not a God of chaos, but of order. Furthermore, while the humble surroundings of the Bethlehem stable were certainly appropriate for the impromptu worship of God by the nomadic shepherds, the House of God should be at least as ornate as the homes in which His people in that place—whether Solomon’s home or ours. In and by the beauty and reverence of God’s House, we are reminded of what we were on the outside, and of what we now are made in the Messiah as we are gathered around Him.

Truly, we become that which is portrayed by our surroundings! The Temple details shows us the reverence with which we ought to proceed into the House of God on a regular basis, the place of which its highest beauty consists in His making us holy and righteous there. We are brought into the Lord’s holy presence, the Old Testament veil having been fulfilled and removed in Jesus on Golgotha. Let us enter with godly trembling, fear, and awe in heart and life as we approach Him face to face, for such is befitting the Divine Service.

In today’s reading the Israelites were besieged by their enemy to the point that common waste had become precious commodities. Some became so desperate that they cannibalized their children. Things like these also happen when people become starved of God’s Word. When deprived of righteousness, they place great value on crude things, and when they are cut off from holy nourishment, they wickedly try to sustain themselves on the flesh of others.

Satan tries to rob the world, and Christendom, of God’s provisions. Some Christians are so starved of the Truth that they ascribe great value to perverse relationships, and others pay dearly for worldly status, which is at best no better than kindling for a fire. The devil wants us to be desperate so that we are easier to conquer, even driven to surrender or self-destruction.

But the Lord abides with us always, like Elisha was with the people of Israel. He spoke the Word of the Lord to them that their trial would pass and they would be richly blessed. There was no need for the people to lose faith in God. In fact, they would hear the good news that God had already defeated their enemy and the siege persisted under empty pretense!

Likewise, our enemy has already been beaten by Christ Jesus. Satan still posts his tents to keep us in fear, but for those who have faith in the Truth there is nothing to fear. Our victory is already won in Christ, and through Him we have a sure line of blessing and sustenance that can never be cut off by the enemy.

The Lord is righteous, but He is also merciful. Ultimately, He is wise beyond our understanding. In some parts of Scripture God calls for thorough destruction of those who rise up against Him and His people, yet in other parts we see Him spare their lives and even bless them in certain ways. The circumstances of each situation may be different, but in all cases the Lord's wisdom is at work.

Sometimes the Lord's plans are difficult to see. In today's reading, He could have easily destroyed the armies of Syria, but instead He spared them through taking their sight. If they would not have been blind they would have tried to kill Elisha, and been destroyed themselves. But instead, they were saved from death and brought to a great feast!

Our responsibility is to have faith in Him and obey His Words. That is why it is important for us to always search the Scriptures and hold fast to our Lord's teachings. There are instances where He is very clear that the unrepentant heart of those who hate God's Word should be run through with the fiery sword of His Law. Yet, there are also instances that are less clear, and we must wait on the Lord to do as He wills.

Let us pray that He open our eyes so that we do not lean on our own short-sighted wisdom, but rather stand faithful in the truth of His Wisdom so that His grace may ultimately be proclaimed in the cross of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The solemn dedication of a new Church building is indeed a joyful event and something for which thanks and praise to the Lord God on the part of the assembly is very appropriate. Such is the case in front of us with the dedication of the magnificent Temple by Solomon, the dignitaries, and the whole nation of people; it was a most holy procession and observance.

As the Ark of the Covenant was brought forth and placed in the Holy of Holies, the glory of God overshadowed the Temple. There was no doubt that His presence was amongst them just as in the New Testament the eternal Word made flesh came and dwelt amongst His people. Even to this day the Lord God is with His faithful in Word (including Confession and Absolution) and Baptism and the Supper. What we yet look forward to *in these last days of sore distress* is the new Jerusalem when *the tabernacle of God with man* shall be realized as fulfilled and endure for all eternity.

Solomon's dedicatory prayer for God's grace is also our prayer in the New Testament Church. As the Bride remembers to confess her sins and beg for forgiveness, God hears her prayer, forgives her, and delivers her. Pray God that such is the prayer of the Church each time we gather in His Divine Service, that He hear us and abide with us in His mercy and grace, granting us hungering and thirsting hearts as we gather in His House, hearts that are filled with thanksgiving, peace, and joy by His Word and Sacrament to go forth forgiven and strengthened in Him alone.

The complex of majestic buildings that formed Solomon's residence and palace took thirteen years to construct. Most people do not spend near that much time today in planning and building their house! But Solomon, by God-given wisdom, did: he took keen interest in precision and perfection.

The enclosure of the great court of the royal palace was a carbon copy, one might say, of the enclosure surrounding the court of the priests in the Temple. King Solomon ruled and lived in the midst of his people, amongst his people, near the Temple of the Lord God, in such a way as to make it clear that his reign was of God and under God.

In the same way, the greater Son of David, Jesus Christ, lives amongst His people in His House where His people are brought together for His Divine Service of Word and Sacrament. Our Lord is not aloof or far off but, rather, near and ever present. What comfort and peace belongs to the child of God who trusts in the Lord alone, thus walking in His path as clearly dictated in His Holy Word. What abundant joy fills the heart and life of the soul that regularly gathers, at its Lord's invitation and command, in the refuge of His Sanctuary to partake of His glorious Feast of Salvation.

May you always remember that God does not forsake His own, but dwells in the midst of His people in His precious and powerful Means of Grace. A blessed day to you tomorrow as you gather as a guest and family member in His House to feast on Christ crucified and risen!

"...if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" (2 Kings 5:13).

Luther's Small Catechism asks concerning baptism, "How can water do such great things?" To which it answers, "It is not the water indeed that does them, but the Word of God which is in and with the water, and faith, which trusts such Word of God in the water."

Christians should never forget that the sacrament of Holy Baptism is a miracle! The purpose of God's miracles has always been to exemplify His power and mercy, and throughout history He has used His miracles to lead people to faith in His holy Words. Now the Church has been told by Christ Himself to administer this miraculous washing not occasionally, but to as many people from all nations as possible, according to Christ's teaching! "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (St. Matthew 28:19-20).

Like Naaman was sent to Israel to be cured of his leprous disease, many are pointed to the one true Church, which is the Body of Christ Jesus, so they may be cured of sin and condemnation. Christ performs the same simple miracle with ordinary water, which is made extraordinary by the power of God's Word and Spirit. And the result is forgiveness of sins, faith, and new life in our crucified Lord, Jesus Christ!

Those who despise God's Word discredit the stories of His miracles. When secular institutions talk about Christianity they often consult religious "experts" who reject the idea of God's miracles. But if people set their minds against the possibility of miracles they will have a warped view of the Faith that is taught in the Scriptures.

Elisha's miracles served the Word of God. He was seen as one who serves God and delivers the blessings of God. The people in today's reading were not blessed only in the miraculous help they received, but also, and more importantly, in the merciful teachings God revealed through His prophet.

Even unbelievers are blessed by God's miracles. Life itself is the result of divine miracles, but miracles make no sense if they are not seen in connection with the power and mercy of the blessed Trinity. And even though we do not have prophets and miracle-workers who are exactly like Elisha, God has still very much blessed us with the presence of His holy men who perform divine wonders in the Ministry of Christ's Church.

Our children and our selves are saved from Satan as we are baptized into Jesus Christ, who paid the debt of our sins. The dead are raised to life by the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ crucified. And many people are well fed from the one Loaf of Jesus' Body and Blood.

May God richly bless us with His Spirit, so that we may truly know the miracles of the Father as the power of His Words, which testify of our life in Christ Jesus. Amen.

THE HOLY GOSPEL**St. Luke 19:41-48 (NKJV)**

Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

Then He went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it, saying to them, "It is written, 'My house is a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" And He was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him, and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.

The Collect

O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The Lord appears to king Solomon for a second time. He speaks these assuring words: “I have heard your prayer.” Whose prayers does the Lord “hear”? God is all-knowing, of course. He is aware of every word ever muttered by a pagan to a false god. But God’s “hearing” of Solomon’s prayer, and ours, is something more than that. It is a “receiving favorably” of those prayers...receiving them as words of faith spoken in faith to the true and living God.

Nevertheless, there is no biblical guarantee of “the perseverance of the saints.” “Once saved” is not necessarily “always saved.” So the Lord warns Solomon: “if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart ...then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever...But if you or your sons at all turn from following me, and...go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land.”

We have received more than Solomon received. He received a promise. In Christ, we have received the fulfillment of that promise. God grant us grace, therefore, this day and always, to repent of the old sinful nature that would “turn us aside to other gods,” other ideologies, other ways of life. God grant us grace to cling to the fulfillment of all His promises to Solomon, to cling in faith to Christ, the everlasting King, who was slain for our sins and now rules all creation and especially His church to the end that we may be saved by grace through faith in Him.

THE HOLY GOSPEL**St. Mark 7:31-37 (NKJV)**

Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee. Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him. And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue. Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, “Eph-phatha,” that is, “Be opened.”

Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly. Then He commanded them that they should tell no one; but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

The Collect

Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it comes that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus Thy Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

While this week our texts have emphasized the result of having joyfully receive the Word of the Lord, or adamantly rejecting it's message, we focus on the blessed ending of having joyfully received the Word of the Lord.

Our lesson for today pictures Elijah preparing for his departure from this world, via a whirlwind, and the passing of His mantle to his understudy, Elisha. Three times Elijah has asked that Elisha abandon him in his travels to three different destinations where the Lord has sent him: Bethel, Jericho, and the Jordon. Three times Elisha refuses to abandon Elijah saying, "As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!"

Elijah needs to be reminded just as he was faithful to the Lord and His work, there is another whom the Lord has chosen: Elisha who will also be faithful. Elijah even tests Elisha to help determine his faithfulness by asking him the question, "Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?" Elisha asks for a double portion of the spirit that was upon Elijah. We read that because of Elisha's determination to remain at his master's side even until death, he receives this blessing of the Spirit.

Oh, to have a blessed end, and to see others faithful to the Word of the Lord, is most comforting! This is possible to have because of the Word of God, has been spoken in our hearing, enabling us to see our sinfulness, acknowledging the person of Jesus Christ, Who works faith in our heart through the power of the Holy Spirit to follow after the one Triune God.

Solomon had prayed for wisdom, and the Lord not only gave him this gift, but many other gifts as well. There is a difference between "wisdom" and "intelligence." There are people who are good at math, but have no "people skills." Solomon was given wisdom, not just intelligence, but good intuition for what to do and how to deal with people in administering the affairs of the kingdom. He became so famous for his wisdom that many foreign leaders sought his counsel!

But there is a difference between having wisdom, and using that wisdom faithfully. St. Paul counsels St. Timothy that the Holy Scriptures "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 3:15). Note that! Not just wise, but wise "for salvation." And that particular wisdom is "through faith which is in Jesus Christ."

Solomon built a great kingdom. But as we shall see in the coming days' devotions, he also turned from the Lord. He took the wisdom God had given him, and eventually used it in the service of his own greatness, rather than in the service of the Lord. It is written, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. God grant us never to become so wise that our wisdom comes detached from its starting point! Rather, God continue to work in us such devotion to the words of the Holy Scriptures, that for all our days, we may be and remain repentant, believing, "wise for salvation" through faith in our crucified and risen Savior Jesus Christ.

Israel had been warned not to intermarry with the pagan tribes around them. And the Lord was very blunt as to why: “They will turn away your hearts after their gods.” (Deut. 7) Do you suppose they argued with God? “Sure, Lord, a lesser man might let his wife influence him like that. But not me. I will keep the Faith whole and undefiled, even though that daughter of unbelievers is the one I want to marry.”

Is it any different today? Time and again, there will be a teenager I know who is all excited about their new boyfriend or girlfriend. They proceed to tell me how smart they are, and what a good sense of humor they have, and how they like the same music and doing the same stuff for fun. Then I ask, “what church do they go to?” And too often, the answer is, “Oh, I don’t know. We haven’t gotten around to talking about that.”

We cannot separate ourselves from the world around us, and it would not be faithful to do so anyway. But be careful what ideas you let take root in your head. Be careful what ideologies you let take up residence in your homes. Most of all, be careful who you marry, and encourage your children and grandchildren to do the same. God grant our marriages to be outposts of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth; and icons both of the self-sacrificial love Christ our Bridegroom has for His Bride the Church, and of the obedient love that we as the Church strive to have for our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, Who sacrificed Himself for our salvation.

Today our reading allows us to see evidence of mankind’s sin passed on from one generation to the next, and with it, the curse of death. Like Ahaz, Ahaziah his son, having never received the Word of the Lord to guide him in decision making, naturally calls upon other gods to determine the future, rather than calling upon the Name of the Triune God.

However, the Triune God, whose desire it is to show mercy, sends Elijah to enable Ahaziah to acknowledge the Triune God, his sinfulness, and turn in repentance. But like his father before him, rejects the Word of the Lord adamantly and seeks to kill Elijah.

Today, many people continue to call upon other gods due to the rejection of that same Word which converts and guides man’s heart to acknowledge God and live for Him. We read of this in Romans 1: “Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator....” We see evidence before us today in the self-centered lifestyles such as slaughtering infants through abortion; and the turning away from God’s design of marriage between a man and a woman.

Yet in the midst of this the Triune God, whose desire it is to show mercy, sends men into the Office of the Holy Ministry to proclaim the powerful Word of the Lord that enables believers to acknowledge the Triune God, their sinfulness, live in repentance and rejoice in the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ.

Our text reports that Ahab's wife, Jezebel, took severe actions to end the life of Naboth, who owned an inherited vineyard for no reason other than she despised God. The problem came when Naboth simply refused to sell it to Ahab. Jezebel wrote letters with Ahab's judicial seal, plotting with Israel's officials to frame Naboth for apparently having blasphemed God and the King, which held the penalty of death. Ahab is guilty as well in that he knew what she was doing, and gladly took possession of the vineyard after Naboth was stoned to death.

Because the Triune God is always seeking justice and it is His desire to grant mercy to a repentant soul, Elijah is sent by God to speak boldly of Ahab's sin, and place a curse upon him and his kingdom.

Upon reading this text, one at first might ask whether Ahab simply repented because he was caught by Elijah in his sin, or because the curse was so severe! This apparent questioning of Ahab's repentance being genuine or not, is not for us to decide. What we do know is that God saw that Ahab's heart had been humbled before the Lord, and the curse would not be upon him in his lifetime.

Today's reading does make it clear that the Word of God must be proclaimed in all of its severity of Law and its sweetness of Gospel, for no man ever knows the time frame when the Holy Spirit may have the opportunity to work genuine repentance in man's heart, and turn him back to the Lord and be renewed in the covenant faith.

Shortly after the death of king Solomon, the nation of Israel split in two. The northern ten tribes broke away. But Jerusalem and the temple were in the southern kingdom of Judah! Can you imagine the difficulty the king of the northern country of Israel would have, if the center of his people's religious devotion remained in another nation to the south?

So he ordered two calves to be made out of gold, and spoke the words above. "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem." In other words, faithfulness is no longer convenient. I have made the faith more convenient for you. Why not imagine your God in the form of these golden calves? You can worship them right here, no muss, no fuss, no inordinate travel time.

Beware of a "more convenient Christianity"! In so many ways, whether we think of joining a less faithful church "because it is closer," or practicing open communion, or opening the Office of the Holy Ministry to women or letting laymen do the things that He has entrusted Pastors with doing, so often, the argument for watered down faithfulness is "convenience." And just that fast, believers in both Old Testament and New have found themselves tempted to give away the Faith. Keep the faith. The heirs of the Church of the martyrs can certainly allow themselves to suffer a little inconvenience. Let the saving word of Christ in its truth and purity be the priority. And God keep us steadfast in that saving word unto life everlasting!

The text tells us about a “man of God.” He is not named. But he is entrusted by God with speaking His word, and he does so. We discover that he had been told by the word of the Lord, “You shall not eat bread nor drink water there.” Nevertheless, an older prophet came to him and beckoned him with the words of the verse above. To make a long story short, the “man of God” believed the false prophet’s lie, disobeyed the word he already had from the Lord, and went back and ate and drank. The Lord pronounced judgment, and a lion killed the “man of God.”

The point is simple: yes, there are false prophets in the world, and they will answer for their falsifications of the Word of the Lord. Nevertheless, you are responsible for whether you believe them, or faithfully turn away! The Lord has spoken to us very clearly in His Word. He did not breathe the Bible to make it hard to understand. No! God is clear that we are sinners. God is clear that He has sent Jesus Christ to live a perfect life for us, to die an atoning death for us, and to rise again gloriously victorious over sin, death, and the devil for us.

As you value your salvation, turn away from those who treat it as a small matter to corrupt the truth of God’s Word. Instead, cleave to the ministrations of those who proclaim God’s Word to you in its truth and purity, and who administer the sacraments to you according to Christ’s institution, unto the salvation of your soul.

Today’s reading has to be an encouragement and a reminder to all who are called and ordained spokesmen for the Word of the Lord, and a plea for all laity to realize that their called servant of the Lord is as human as they are.

We are reminded that when the Word of God is spoke in all it’s truth and purity, it is either received or rejected. Called spokesmen of God having received the Word of the Lord joyfully are blessed with the Holy Spirit not only to speak boldly for the sake of their hearers, but also strength to acknowledge their own sinfulness and the constant need to rely on God’s power to continue their calling. Today’s reading reveals this in the adamant rejection of God by Jezebel.

Having heard of Elijah’s actions on Mount Carmel, not only shaming Jezebel’s gods, but killing 450 of her prophets, she promise his destruction. Elijah runs for fear of his life, and prays that he might die; that he can’t do this any longer; that he’s all alone!

Faithful servants today may have the same response when the word is not received, but rejected by their hearers. They may feel abandoned when they forget that the God of Jacob is truly with them. God comes to Elijah to strengthen him, not by destructive elements of nature, but by the small quiet voice of God, the Word, Who today is revealed in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. The Word speaks to us in these last days in the Holy Scriptures, strengthening the faithful to continue trusting that the One true God is in total control of all things.

Our text involves the servant to Ahab, Obadiah, who on the one hand is serving his master, yet on the other hand, provides protection to 100 prophets because Jezebel, Ahab's wife, refuses to allow the existence of Pluralism to be practiced in the Kingdom. For her it's either Baal worship or no worship at all. Obadiah's test of faithfulness surfaces while he is seeking fresh grass or water not effected by the drought, and meets up with Elijah. Elijah tells him to report to Ahab, who has sought to kill Elijah, that he has returned. Obadiah is faced with heeding the Word of the Lord: will he receive it or reject it?

Our reading for today unfolds as the entire nation of Israel is faced with the same test: will they receive the Word of the Lord or reject it? The Israelites were told in Deuteronomy, "And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul....Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the Lord's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you."

The powerful word of the Triune God prevails through mercy and enables the Children of Israel to be blessed with the gift of repentance to turn and follow the One True God once again.

Jeroboam, king of Israel, had a son who had become ill. So he sent his wife, in disguise, to Ahijah the prophet, seeking some word of the Lord concerning the fate of his son. He certainly got one! As soon as his wife enters the house of Ahijah, he says, "Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why do you pretend to be another person? For I have been sent to you with bad news." Ahijah proceeds to tell her that, not only will this son die, but the whole house of Jeroboam will perish as a consequence of Jeroboam's faithlessness before the Lord. When she returned to her home, the child died.

Living in a society that treasures "freedom of religion," it can be easy to start thinking of faithlessness as a small thing, to figure that "if my neighbor keeps his lawn mowed and does not throw wild parties, what business is it of mine whether he confesses Christ or not?" So our society embraces ever stranger ideas and ever more wicked lifestyles. Will the wrath of God be held in abeyance forever?

Repent of your sins, and cling to your Savior Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. We learn in the New Testament that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." God does not desire our death, nor the death of our children. He has gone to great lengths to give us eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus. God therefore grant us His grace and His Spirit, that we may indeed repent of our sins, and remain in the Holy Christian Faith all our days.

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 18:9-14 (NKJV)

Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men; extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’” “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

The Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, who is always more ready to hear than we to pray and are wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

In today’s reading, we see the effect of the Triune God’s Word through the preaching of the prophet Elijah.

Ahab determines to worship whom he chooses; in this case, the gods of Baal. Elijah, in his faithfulness as the Triune God’s spokesmen, proclaims, “As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.”

When the Word of the Lord is spoken, it has an effect: it’s either received or rejected. The omniscient God saw Ahab rejecting Elijah’s word to submit to the One true God that can provide rain or a drought. In the midst of the drought, the Lord provides Elijah with food and water by the Brook Cherith on account of his receiving the Word of God.

We also see the Word of the Lord received when He sends Elijah to the widow of Zarephath after the Brook Cherith dried up. At the widow’s home, we see the powerful Word received in her heeding the words of Elijah, to go and make him something to eat. The result: her flour bin does not go empty and the oil jar does not dry up till the drought ends. The widow also acknowledges her sinfulness in thinking the Lord was punishing her with her son’s death. But again, the powerful Word of the Triune God prevails in it’s life-giving peace in the words of the Prophet, “O Lord my God, I pray, let this child’s soul come back to him” preserving Elijah, the son’s life, and the widow’s peace of heart, mind and soul.