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(TRANSFIGURATION—INVOCAVIT)

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HOLY GOSPEL**St. Matthew 17:1-9 (NKJV)**

Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"

And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead."

The COLLECT

O God, who in the glorious transfiguration of Thine only-begotten Son has confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the fathers, and who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons, mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth, and reigneth, ever one God, world without end.

Christ's third temptation consists in temporal honor and power; as the words of the devil clearly teach, when Satan shows and offers Christ all the kingdoms of the world if He should worship him. To this class those belong who fall from their faith for the sake of honor and power, that they may enjoy good days, or not believe further than their honor and power extend. Such are also the heretics who start sects and factions in matters of faith among Christians, that they may make a great parade before the world and soar aloft in their own honor. Hence one may place this third temptation on the right, and the first on the left side. The first is the temptation of misfortune, by which man is stirred to anger, impatience and unbelief; the third and last, the temptation of prosperity, by which man is enticed to lust, honor, joy, and whatever is high. The second or middle temptation is spiritual and deals with the blind tricks and errors that mislead reason from faith.

Now these three temptations taken together are heavy and hard; but the middle one is the greatest; for it attacks the doctrine of faith itself in the soul, and is spiritual and in spiritual matters. The other two attack faith in outward things, in fortune and misfortune, in pleasure and pain etc., although both severely try us. For it is sad that one should lay hold of heaven and ever be in want and eat stones where there is no bread. Again, it is sad to despise favors, honors and possessions, friends and associates, and let go what one already has. But faith, rooted in God's Word, is able to do all things; is faith strong, then it is also easy for the believers to do this.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Invocavit* from the Church Postil)

Now, this temptation [*“If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down”*] seldom takes place in outward material things as bread, clothing, house, etc. For we find many foolhardy people, who risk and endanger their body and life, their property and honor, without any need of doing so; as those do who wilfully enter into battle or jump into the water, or gamble for money, or in other ways venture into danger, of whom the wise man says in Sirach 3, 27: “Whoever takes pleasure in danger, will thereby be overcome”; for in the degree one struggles to get a thing, will be succeed in obtaining it; and good swimmers are likely to drown and good climbers are likely to fall. Yet it is seldom that those of false faith in God abstain from bread, clothing and other necessities of life, when they are at hand. ...

But in spiritual matters this temptation is powerful when one has to do with the nourishment not of the body but of the soul. Here God has held before us the person and way, by which the soul can be forever nourished in the richest manner possible without any want, namely Christ, our Saviour. But this way, this treasure, this provision no one desires. Everybody seeks another way, other provisions to help their souls. The real guilty ones are those who would be saved through their own work; these the devil sets conspicuously on the top of the temple. ... Who these are, we have identified often enough and very fully, namely, workrighteous persons and unbelieving hypocrites under the name of being Christians and among the congregation of Christian people. For the temptation must take place in the holy city and one temptation is seldom against another. In the first temptation want and hunger are the reasons that we should not believe; and by which we become anxious to have a full sufficiency, so that there is no chance for us to believe. In the second temptation, however, the abundance and the full sufficiency are the reasons that we do not believe, by which we become tired of the common treasure, and every one tries to do something through his own powers to provide for his soul.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Invocavit* from the Church Postil)

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’” (Mat. 13:24–30 NKJV)

The Saviour Himself explained this parable in the same chapter upon the request of His disciples and says: He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man; and the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the children of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy that sowed them is the devil; and the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. These seven points of explanation comprehend and clearly set forth what Christ meant by this parable. But who could have discovered such an interpretation, seeing that in this parable He calls people the seed and the world the field; although in the parable preceding this one He defines the seed to be the Word of God and the field the people or the hearts of the people. If Christ Himself had not here interpreted this parable every one would have imitated His explanation of the preceding parable and considered the seed to be the Word of God, and thus the Saviour’s object and understanding of it would have been lost.

Permit me to make an observation for the benefit of the wise and learned who study the Scriptures. Imitating or guessing is not to be allowed in the explanation of Scripture; but one should and must be sure and firm.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for the 5th Sunday after Epiphany*, Church Postil)

Now this Gospel teaches us how the kingdom of God or Christianity fares in the world, especially on account of its teaching, namely, that we are not to think that only true Christians and the pure doctrine of God are to dwell upon the earth; but that there must be also false Christians and heretics in order that the true Christians may be approved, as St. Paul says in 1 Cor 11, 19. For this parable treats not of false Christians, who are so only outwardly in their lives, but of those who are unchristian in their doctrine and faith under the name Christian, who beautifully play the hypocrite and work harm. It is a matter of the conscience and not of the hand. And they must be very spiritual servants to be able to identify the tares among the wheat. And the sum of all is that we should not marvel nor be terrified if there spring up among us many different false teachings and false faiths. Satan is constantly among the children of God. Job 1, 6.

Again this Gospel teaches how we should conduct ourselves toward these heretics and false teachers. We are not to uproot nor destroy them. Here He says publicly let both grow together. We have to do here with God's Word alone; for in this matter he who errs today may find the truth tomorrow. Who knows when the Word of God may touch his heart? But if he be burned at the stake, or otherwise destroyed, it is thereby assured that he can never find the truth; and thus the Word of God is snatched from him, and he must be lost, who otherwise might have been saved. Hence the Lord says here, that the wheat also will be uprooted if we weed out the tares. That is something awful in the eyes of God and never to be justified.

From this observe what raging and furious people we have been these many years, in that we desired to force others to believe; the Turks with the sword, heretics with fire, the Jews with death, and thus uproot the tares by our own power, as if we were the ones who could reign over hearts and spirits, and make them pious and right, which God's Word alone must do. But by murder we separate the people from the Word, so that it cannot possibly work upon them and we bring thus with one stroke a double murder upon ourselves, as far as it lies in our power, namely, in that we murder the body for time and the soul for eternity, and afterwards say we did God a service by our actions, and wish to merit something special in heaven. (Martin Luther, *Sermon for the 5th Sunday after Epiphany, Church Postil*)

The Scriptures present to us two kinds of true fasting: one, by which we try to bring the flesh into subjection to the spirit, of which St. Paul speaks in 2 Cor 6, 5: "In labors, in watchings, in fastings." The other is that which we must bear patiently, and yet receiving willingly because of our need and poverty, of which St. Paul speaks in 1 Cor 4, 11: "Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst," and Christ in Mt 9, 15: "When the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, then will they fast." This kind of fasting Christ teaches us here while in the wilderness alone without anything to eat, and while He suffers His penury without murmuring. The first kind of fasting, one can end whenever he wills, and can satisfy it by food; but the other kind we must observe and bear until God Himself changes it and satisfies us. Hence it is much more precious than the first, because it moves in greater faith.

This is also the reason that the Evangelist with great care places it first: Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, that He might there fast and be tempted, so that no one might imitate His example of their own choice and make of it a selfish, arbitrary, and pleasant fasting; but instead wait for the Spirit, who will send him enough fastings and temptation. For whoever, without being led by the Spirit, wantonly resorts to the danger of hunger or to any temptation, when it is truly a blessing of God that he can eat and drink and have other comforts, tempts God. We should not seek want and temptation, they will surely come of themselves; we ought then do our best and act honestly. The text reads: Jesus was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness; and not: Jesus Himself chose to go into the wilderness. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." Rom 8, 14. God gives His blessings for the purpose that we may use them with thanksgiving, and not that we may let them lie idle, and thus tempt Him; for He wishes it, and forces us to fast by the Spirit or by a need which we cannot avoid.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Invocavit* from the Church Postil)

THE HOLY GOSPEL**St. Matthew 4:1-11 (NKJV)**

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’” Jesus said to him, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’” Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’” Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

The COLLECT

O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Therefore this passage should in all reason terrify the grand inquisitors and murderers of the people, where they are not brazened faced, even if they have to deal with true heretics. But at present they burn the true saints and are themselves heretics. What is that but uprooting the wheat, and pretending to exterminate the tares, like insane people?

Today’s Gospel also teaches by this parable that our free will amounts to nothing, since the good seed is sowed only by Christ, and Satan can sow nothing but evil seed; as we also see that the field of itself yields nothing but tares, which the cattle eat, although the field receives them and they make the field green as if they were wheat. In the same way the false Christians among the true Christians are of no use but to feed the world and be food for Satan, and they are so beautifully green and hypocritical, as if they alone were the saints, and hold the place in Christendom as if they were lords there, and the government and highest places belonged to them; and for no other reason than that they glory that they are Christians and are among Christians in the Church of Christ, although they see and confess that they live unchristian lives.

In that the Saviour pictures here also Satan scattering his seed while the people sleep and no one sees who did it, He shows how Satan adorns and disguises himself so that he cannot be taken for Satan. As we experienced when Christianity was planted in the world Satan thrust into its midst false teachers. People securely think here God is enthroned without a rival and Satan is a thousand miles away, and no one sees anything except how they parade the Word, name and work of God. That course proves beautifully effective. But when the wheat springs up, then we see the tares, that is, if we are conscientious with God’s Word and teach faith, we see that it brings forth fruit, then they go about and antagonize it, and wish to be masters of the field and fear lest only wheat grows in the field, and their interests be overlooked.

(Martin Luther, Sermon for the 5th Sunday after Epiphany, Church Postil)

Then the church and pastor marvel; but they are not allowed to pass judgment, and eagerly wish to interpret all for the best, since such persons bear the Christian name. But it is apparent they are tares and evil seed, have strayed from the faith and fallen to trust in works, and think of rooting out the tares. They lament because of it before the Lord, in the heartfelt prayer of their spirit. For the sower of the good seed says again, they should not uproot it, that is, they should have patience, and suffer such blasphemy, and commend all to God; for although the tares hinder the wheat, yet they make it the more beautiful to behold, compared with the tares, as St. Paul also says in 1 Cor 11, 19: “For there must be false factions among you, that they that are approved may be made manifest among you.” This is sufficient on today’s text.

(Martin Luther, Sermon for the 5th Sunday after Epiphany, Church Postil)

The blind man represents the spiritually blind, the state of every man born of Adam, who neither sees nor knows the kingdom of God; but it is of grace that he feels and knows his blindness and would gladly be delivered from it. They are saintly sinners who feel their faults and sigh for grace. But he sits by the wayside and begs, that is, he sits among the teachers of the law and desires help; but it is begging, with works he must appear blue and help himself. The people pass by him and let him sit, that is the people of the law make a great noise and are heard among the teachers of good works, they go before Christ and Christ follows them. But when he heard Christ, that is, when a heart hears the Gospel of faith, it calls and cries, and has no rest until it comes to Christ. Those, however, who would silence and scold him are the teachers of works, who wish to quiet and suppress the doctrine and cry of faith; but they stir the heart the more. For the nature of the Gospel is, the more it is restrained the more progress it makes. Afterward he received his sight, all his work and life are nothing but the praise and honor of God, and he follows Christ with joy, so that the whole world wonders and is thereby made better.

(Martin Luther, Sermon for Quinquagesima in the Church Postil)

Sixthly, the blind man stands firm, presses through all obstacles and triumphs, he would not let the whole world sever him from his confidence, and not even his own conscience to do it. Therefore he obtained the answer of his prayer and received Christ, so that Christ stood and commanded him to be brought unto Him, and He offered to do for him whatever he wished. So it goes without all who hold firmly only to the Word of God, close their eyes and ears against the devil, the world and themselves, and act just as if they and God were the only ones in heaven and on earth.

Seventhly, he follows Christ, that is he enters upon the road of love and of the cross, where Christ is walking, does righteous works, and is of a good character and calling, refrains from going about with foolish works as workrighteous persons do.

Eighthly, he thanks and praises God, and offers a true sacrifice which is pleasing to God, Ps 50,23: "Whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth Me; and to him that ordereth his way aright will I show the salvation of God."

Ninthly, he was the occasion that many others praised God, in that they saw what he did, for every Christian is helpful and a blessing to everybody, and besides he praises and honors God upon earth.

Finally, we see here how Christ encourages us both by His works and words. In the first place by His works, in that He sympathizes so strongly with the blind man and makes it clear, how pleasing faith is to Him, so that Christ is at once absorbed with interest in the man, stops and does what the blind man desires in his faith. In the second place, that Christ praises his faith in words, and says: "Thy faith hath made thee whole"; He casts the honor of the miracle from Himself and attributes it to the faith of the blind man. The summary is: to faith is vouchsafed what it asks, and it is moreover our great honor before God.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Quinquagesima* in the Church Postil)

THE GOSPEL

St. Matthew 20:1-16 (NKJV)

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you." So they went.

Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, "Why have you been standing here idle all day?"

They said to him, "Because no one hired us."

He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive."

So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, "Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first."

And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, saying, "These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day."

But he answered one of them and said, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?"

So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.

The COLLECT

O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Savior, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Some church fathers applied this Gospel to all the preachers from the beginning to the end of the world, and taught the first hour was the time of Adam, the third that of Noah, the sixth that of Abraham, the ninth that of Moses, and the eleventh hour that of Christ and His apostles. Such talk is all right for a pastime, if there is nothing else to preach. For it does not harmonize with Scripture to say that the shilling signifies eternal life, with which the first, or Adam and the holy patriarchs, were dissatisfied, and that such holy characters should murmur in the kingdom of heaven, and be rebuked by the householder and made the last, that is, be condemned.

Therefore, we will let such fables pass and abide by the simple teaching and meaning of Christ, who wishes to show by this parable how it actually is in the kingdom of heaven, or in Christendom upon the earth; that God here directs and works wonderfully by making the first last and the last first. And all is spoken to humble those who are great that they should trust in nothing but the goodness and mercy of God. And on the other hand that those who are nothing should not despair, but trust in the goodness of God just as the others do.

Therefore we must not consider this parable in every detail, but confine ourselves to the leading thought, that which Christ designs to teach by it. We should not consider what the penny or shilling means, not what the first or the last hour signifies; but what the householder had in mind and what he aims to teach, how he desires to have his goodness esteemed higher than all human works and merit, yea, that his mercy alone must have all the praise. Like in the parable of the unrighteous steward, Lk 16, 5f., the whole parable in its details is not held before our eyes, that we should also defraud our Lord; but it sets forth the wisdom of the steward in that he provided so well and wisely for himself and planned in the very best way, although at the injury of the Lord. Now whoever would investigate and preach long on that parable about the doctors, what the book of accounts, the oil, the wheat and the measure signify, would miss the true meaning and be led by his own ideas which would never be of benefit to anyone.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Septuagesima*, from the Church Postil)

The second part of our Gospel treats of the blind man, in which we see beautifully and clearly illustrated both the love in Christ to the blind man, and the faith of the blind man in Christ. At present we will briefly consider the faith of the blind man.

First, he hears that Christ was passing by, he had also heard of Him before, that Jesus of Nazareth was a kind man, and that He helps every one who only calls upon him. His faith and confidence in Christ grew out of his hearing; so he did not doubt but that Christ would also help him. But such faith in his heart he would not have been able to possess had he not heard and known of Christ; for faith does not come except by hearing.

Secondly, he firmly believes and doubts not but that it was true what he heard of Christ, as the following proves. Although he does not yet see nor know Christ, and although he at once knew Him, yet he is not able to see or know whether Christ had a heart and will to help him; but he immediately believed, when he heard of Him; upon such a noise and report he founded his confidence, and therefore he did not make a mistake.

Thirdly, in harmony with his faith, he calls on Christ and prays, as St. Paul in Rom 10, 13-14 wrote: "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed." Also, "Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Fourthly, he also freely confesses Christ and fears no one; his need constrains him to the point that he inquires for no one else. For it is the nature of true faith to confess Christ to be the only one who can and will help, while others are ashamed and afraid to do this before the world.

Fifthly, he struggles not only with his conscience, which doubtless moved him to think he is not worthy of such favor, but he also struggles with those who threatened him and urged him to keep quiet. They wished thereby to terrify his conscience and make him bashful, so that he should see his own unworthiness, and then despair. For wherever faith begins, there begin also war and conflict.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Quinquagesima* in the Church Postil)

From this it now follows how foolish they act who teach that people should patiently bear their sufferings and death in order to atone for their sins and obtain grace; and especially those who comfort such, who should be put out of the way by the civil law and the sentence of death, or who are to die in other ways; and pretend that if they suffer willingly all their sins will consequently be forgiven them. Such persons only mislead the people for they bury out of sight Christ and His death upon whom our comfort is founded, and bring the people to a false confidence in their own suffering and death. This is the worst of all things a man can experience at the end of his life, and by it he is led direct into perdition. But you learn and say, Whose death! Whose patience! My death is nothing; I will not have it nor hear of it for my consolation. Christ's suffering and death are my consolation, upon it I rely fore the forgiveness of my sins; but my own death I will suffer, to the praise and honor of my God, freely and gratuitously, and for the advantage and profit of my neighbor, and in no way whatever depend upon it to avail anything in my own behalf before God.

It is indeed one thing to die boldly and fearlessly, or to suffer death patiently, or to bear other pain willingly; and another thing to atone for sin by such death and sufferings, and thus obtain grace from God. The first the heathen have done, and many reckless villains and rough people still do; but the other is a poisonous addition, devised by Satan, like all other lies, by which he founds our trust and consolation upon our own doings and works, against which we are to guard. For as firmly as I should resist one, who teaches me to enter a monastery, when I wish to be saved; so firmly should I also oppose any who would in my last hour point me to my own death and suffering for consolation and hope, as if they would help to wash away my sins. For both deny God and His Christ, blaspheme His grace and pervert His Gospel. They, however, do much better who hold a crucifix before the dying and admonish them of Christ's death and sufferings.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Quinquagesima* in the Church Postil)

... Parables are never spoken for the purpose of being interpreted in all their minutia. For Paul compared Christ to Adam in Rom 5, 18, and says Adam was a figure of Christ; this Paul did because we inherited from Adam sin and death, and from Christ life and righteousness. But the lesson of the parable does not consist in the inheritance, but in the consequence of the inheritance. That just like sin and death cling to those who are born of Adam and descend by heredity, so do life and righteousness cling to those who are born of Christ, they are inherited. Just as one might take an unchaste woman who adorns herself to please the world and commit sin, as a figure of a Christian soul that adorns itself also to please God, but not to commit sin as the woman does.

Hence the substance of the parable in today's Gospel consists not in the penny, what it is, nor in the different hours; but in earning and acquiring, or how one can earn the penny; that as here the first presumed to obtain the penny and even more by their own merit, and yet the last received the same amount because of the goodness of the householder. Thus God will show it is nothing but mercy that He gives and no one is to arrogate to himself more than another. Therefore he says I do thee no wrong, is not the money mine and not thine; if I had given away thy property, then thou wouldest have reason to murmur; is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?

Now in this way Christ strikes a blow first against the presumption (as he also does in today's Epistle) of those who would storm their way into heaven by their good works; as the Jews did and wished to be next to God; as hitherto our own clergy have also done. These all labor for definite wages, that is, they take the law of God in no other sense than that they should fulfil it by certain defined works for a specified reward, and they never understand it correctly, and known not that before God all is pure grace. This signifies that they hire themselves out for wages, and agree with the householder for a penny a day; consequently their lives are bitter and they lead a career that is indeed hard.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Septuagesima*, from the Church Postil)

Now when the Gospel comes and makes all alike, as Paul teaches in Rom 3, 23, so that they who have done great works are no more than public sinners, and must also become sinners and tolerate the saying: “All have sinned,” Rom 3, 23, and that no one is justified before God by his works; then they look around and despise those who have done nothing at all, while their great worry and labor avail no more than such idleness and reckless living. Then they murmur against the householder, they imagine it is not right; they blaspheme the Gospel, and become hardened in their ways; then they lose the favor and grace of God, and are obliged to take their temporal reward and trot from Him with their penny and be condemned; for they served not for the sake of mercy but for the sake of reward, and they will receive that and nothing more, the others however must confess that they have merited neither the penny nor the grace, but more is given to them than they had ever thought was promised to them. These remained in grace and besides were saved, and besides this, here in time they had enough; for all depended upon the good pleasure of the householder.

Therefore if one were to interpret it critically, the penny would have to signify temporal good, and the favor of the householder, eternal life. But the day and the heat we transfer from temporal things to the conscience, so that work righteous persons do labor long and hard, that is, they do all with a heavy conscience and an unwilling heart, forced and coerced by the law; but the short time or last hours are the light consciences that live blessed lives, led by grace, and that willingly and without being driven by the law.

Thus they have now each a penny, that is, a temporal reward is given to both. But the last did not seek it, it was added to them because they sought first the kingdom of heaven, Mt 6, 33, and consequently they have the grace of everlasting life and are happy. The first however seek the temporal reward, bargain for it and serve for it; and hence they fail to secure grace and by means of a hard life they merit perdition. For the last do not think of earning the penny, nor do they thus blunder, but they receive all.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Septuagesima*, from the Church Postil)

And this is the true foundation, thoroughly to know Christ's passion, when we not only understand and lay hold of Christ's sufferings, but also of His heart and will in those sufferings, for whoever views His sufferings in a way that they do not see His will and heart in them, must be more terrified before them than they are made to rejoice on account of them. But if one sees Christ's will and heart in His passion, they cause true comfort, assurance and pleasure in Christ. Therefore Ps 40, 7-8 also praises this will of God and of Christ: “In the roll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do Thy will, O, my God.” The Epistle to the Hebrews says on this point: “By which will we have been sanctified”; Heb. 10, 10; it does not say: Through the suffering and blood of Christ, which is also true, but through the will of God and of Christ, that they both were of one will, to sanctify us through the blood of Christ. This will to suffer He shows here in this Gospel when He first announced that He would go up to Jerusalem and allow them to crucify Him; as if He had said, look into my heart and see that I do all willingly, freely and cheerfully, in order that it may not terrify nor shock you when you shall now soon see it, and you think I do it reluctantly, I must do it, I am forsaken, and the power of the Jews force me to it.

“But the disciples understood none of these things,” says Christ, “And this saying was hid from them.” That is as much as to say: Reason, flesh and blood, cannot understand it nor grasp that the Scriptures should say how the Son of Man must be crucified; much less does reason understand that this is Christ's will and He does it cheerfully; for it does not believe it is necessary for Him to suffer for us, it will deal directly with God through its own good works. But God must reveal it in their hearts by His Spirit more than is proclaimed by words into their ears; yea, even those to whom the Spirit reveals it in their hearts believe it with difficulty and must struggle with it. Such a great and wonderful thing it is that the Son of Man died the death of the cross willingly and cheerfully to fulfil the Scriptures, that is, for our welfare; it is a mystery and it remains a mystery.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Quinquagesima* in the Church Postil)

This Gospel presents to us again the two thoughts of faith and love, both in that Christ says He must go up to Jerusalem and suffer crucifixion; and in that Christ serves and helps the blind man. By the first thought, that of faith, it is proved that the Scriptures are not fulfilled except by Christ's sufferings; also that the Scriptures speak of no other theme than of Christ, and they treat only of Christ, who must fulfil the Scriptures by His death. But if His death must do this, then our death will add nothing to that end; for our death is a sinful and a cursed death. However, if our death be sin and cursed, which is the highest and severest suffering and misfortune, what can our suffering and death merit? And since our sufferings are nothing and are lost, what can our good works do, in view of the fact that suffering is always nobler and better than doing good works? Christ alone must be supreme here and faith must firmly lay hold of Him.

But Christ spoke these words before He finished His passion, when on His way to go up to Jerusalem at the time of the Easter festivities, when the disciples least expected to witness His sufferings, and instead anticipated a joyful occasion at the Feast of the Passover. These words Christ spoke for the purpose that His disciples might later grow stronger in their faith, when they recalled that He had before told them, that He had voluntarily offered Himself as a sacrifice, and that He was not crucified by the power or strategy of His enemies, the Jews. Long before Isaiah also had prophesied that Christ would voluntarily and cheerfully give Himself as a sacrifice, Is 5, 3-7; and the angel also on Easter morning, Lk 26, 6, admonishes the women to call to mind what He here utters, in order that they might be assured and the firmer believe how He suffered thus willingly in our behalf.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Quinquagesima* in the Church Postil)

We must now look at these two words "last" and "first," from two view points. Let us see what they mean before God, then what they mean before men. Thus, those who are the first in the eyes of man, that is, those who consider themselves, or let themselves be considered, as the nearest to or the first before God, they are just the opposite before God, they are the last in His eyes and the farthest from Him. On the other hand those who are the last in the eyes of man, those who consider themselves, or let themselves be considered, the farthest from God and the last before Him, they are just the opposite, in that they are the nearest and the first before God. Now whoever desires to be secure, let him conduct himself according to the saying: "Whosoever exalteth himself, shall be humbled." For it is here written: The first before men are the last before God; the last in the eyes of men are first in the eye of God. On the other hand, the first before God are the last before men; and those God esteems as the last are considered by men to be the first.

But since this Gospel does not speak of first and last in a common, ordinary sense, as the exalted of the world are nothing before God, like heathen who know nothing of God; but it means those who imagine they are the first or the last in the eyes of God, the words ascend very high and apply to the better classes of people; yea, they terrify the greatest of the saints. Therefore it holds up Christ before the apostles themselves. For here it happens that one who in the eyes of the world is truly poor, weak, despised, yea, who indeed suffers for God's sake, in whom there is no sign that he is anything, and yet in his heart he is so discouraged and bashful as to think he is the last, is secretly full of his own pleasure and delight, so that he thinks he is the first before God, and just because of that he is the last. On the contrary should one indeed be so discouraged and bashful as to think he is the last before God, although he at the time has money, honor and property in the eyes of the world, he is just because of this the first.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Septuagesima*, from the Church Postil)

One sees here also how the greatest saints have feared, how many also have fallen from high spiritual callings. David complains in Ps 131, 2: “Surely I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with his mother.” Likewise in another place, Ps 36, 11: Let not the foot of pride come against me”. How often he chastises the impudent, and haughty, Ps 119, 21. So Paul in 2 Cor 12, 7 says: “That I should not be exalted overmuch there was given to me a thorn in the flesh,” etc. And as we have heard in to-day’s Epistle what honorable men have fallen. To all of whom without doubt the sad secret ill-turn came because they became secure, and thought, we are now near to God, there is no need, we know God, we have done this and that; they did not see how they made themselves the first before God. Behold, how Saul fell! How God permitted David to fall! How Peter had to fall! How some disciples of Paul fell!

Therefore it is indeed necessary to preach this Gospel in our times to those who now know the Gospel as myself and those like me, who imagine they can teach and govern the whole world, and therefore imagine that they are the nearest to God and have devoured the Holy Spirit, bones and feathers. For why is it that so many sects have already gone forth, this one making a hobby of one thing in the Gospel and that one of another? No doubt, because none of them considered that the saying, “the first are last,” meant and concerned them; or if applied to them, they were secure and without fear, considering themselves as the first. Therefore according to this saying, it must come to pass that they be the last, and hence rush ahead and spread shameful doctrines and blasphemies against God and His Word.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Septuagesima*, from the Church Postil)

THE GOSPEL**St. Luke 18:31-43 (NKJV)**

Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.” But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.

Then it happened, as He was coming near Jericho, that a certain blind man sat by the road begging. And hearing a multitude passing by, he asked what it meant. So they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. And he cried out, saying, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Then those who went before warned him that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he had come near, He asked him, saying, “What do you want Me to do for you?”

He said, “Lord, that I may receive my sight.”

Then Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

The COLLECT

O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Savior, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Here we see why it is no wonder there are so few true Christians, for all the seed does not fall into good ground, but only the fourth and smallest part; and that they are not to be trusted who boast they are Christians and praise the teaching of the Gospel; like Demas, a disciple of St. Paul, who forsook him at last, 2 Tim 4, 10; like the disciples of Jesus, who turned their backs to Him, Jn 6, 66. For Christ Himself cries out here: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear," as if He should say: O, how few true Christians there are; one dare not believe all to be Christians who are called Christians and hear the Gospel, more is required than that.

All this is spoken for our instruction, that we may not go astray, since so many misuse the Gospel and few lay hold of it aright. True it is unpleasant to preach to those who treat the Gospel so shamefully and even oppose it. For preaching is to become so universal that the Gospel is to be proclaimed to all creatures, as Christ says in Mk 16, 15: "Preach the Gospel to the whole creation"; and Ps 19, 4: "Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." What business is it of mine that many do not esteem it? It must be that many are called but few are chosen. For the sake of the good ground that brings forth fruit with patience, the seed must also fall fruitless by the wayside, on the rock and among the thorns; inasmuch as we are assured that the Word of God does not go forth without bearing some fruit, but it always finds also good ground; as Christ says here, some seed of the sower falls also into good ground, and not only by the wayside, among the thorns and on stony ground. For wherever the Gospel goes you will find Christians. "My word shall not return unto me void." Is 55, 11.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Sexagesima*, from the Church Postil)

Hence the substance of this Gospel is that no mortal is so high, nor will ever ascend so high, who will not have occasion to fear that he may become the very lowest. On the other hand, no mortal lies so low or can fall so low, to whom the hope is not extended that he may become the highest; because here all human merit is abolished and God's goodness alone is praised, and it is decreed as on a festive occasion that the first shall be last and the last first. In that He says, "the first shall be last" He strips thee of all thy presumption and forbids thee to exalt thyself above the lowest outcast, even if thou wert like Abraham, David, Peter or Paul. However, in that He also says, "the last shall be first," He checks thee against all doubting, and forbids thee to humble thyself below any saint, even if thou wert Pilate, Herod, Sodom and Gomorrah.

For just as we have no reason to be presumptuous, so we have also no cause to doubt; but the golden mean is confirmed and fortified by this Gospel, so that we regard not the penny but the goodness of the householder, which is alike and the same to high and low, to the first and the last, to saints and sinners, and no one can boast nor comfort himself nor presume more than another; for He is God not only of the Jews, but also of the Gentiles, yea, especially of all, and it matters not who they are or what they are called.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Septuagesima*, from the Church Postil)

THE GOSPEL**St. Luke 8:4-14 (NKJV)**

And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable:

“A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.” When He had said these things He cried, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

Then His disciples asked Him, saying, “What does this parable mean?” And He said, “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that ‘Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.’

“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.

“Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.”

“But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.”

The COLLECT

O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The fourth class are those who lay hold of and keep the Word in a good and honest heart, and bring forth fruit with patience, those who hear the Word and steadfastly retain it, meditate upon it and act in harmony with it. The devil does not snatch it away, nor are they thereby led astray, moreover the heat of persecution does not rob them of it, and the thorns of pleasure and the avarice of the times do not hinder its growth; but they bear fruit by teaching others and by developing the kingdom of God, hence they also do good to their neighbor in love; and therefore Christ adds, “they bring forth fruit with patience.” For these must suffer much on account of the Word, shame and disgrace from fanatics and heretics, hatred and jealousy with injury to body and property from their persecutors, not to mention what the thorns and the temptations of their own flesh do, so that it may well be called the Word of the cross; for he who would keep it must bear the cross and misfortune, and triumph.

He says: “In honest and good hearts.” Like a field, that is without a thorn or brush, cleared and spacious, as a beautiful clean place: so a heart is also cleared and clean, broad and spacious, that is without cares and avarice as to temporal needs so that the Word of God truly finds lodgment there. But the field is good, not only when it lies there cleared and level, but when it is also rich and fruitful, possesses soil and is productive, and not like a stony and gravelly field. Just so is the heart that has good soil and with a full spirit is strong, fertile and good to keep the Word and bring forth fruit with patience.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Sexagesima*, from the Church Postil)

The third class are those who hear and understand the Word, but still it falls on the other side of the road, among the pleasures and cares of this life, so that they also do nothing with the Word. And there is quite a large multitude of these; for although they do not start heresies, like the first, but always possess the absolutely pure Word, they are also not attacked on the left as the others with opposition and persecution; yet they fall on the right side, and it is their ruin that they enjoy peace and good days. Therefore they do not earnestly give themselves to the Word, but become indifferent and sink in the cares, riches and pleasures of this life, so that they are of no benefit to any one. Therefore they are like the seed that fell among the thorns. Although it is not rocky but good soil; not wayside but deeply plowed soil; yet, the thorns will not let it spring up, they choke it. Thus these have all in the Word that is needed for their salvation, but they do not make any use of it, and they rot in this life in carnal pleasures. To these belong those who hear the Word but do not bring under subjection their flesh. They know their duty but do it not, they teach but do not practice what they teach, and are this year as they were last.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Sexagesima*, from the Church Postil)

This Gospel treats of the disciples and the fruits, which the Word of God develops in the world. It does not speak of the law nor of human institutions; but, as Christ Himself says, of the Word of God, which He Himself the sower preaches, for the law bears no fruit, just as little as do the institutions of men. Christ however sets forth here four kinds of disciples of the divine Word.

The first class of disciples are those who hear the Word but neither understand nor esteem it. And these are not the mean people in the world, but the greatest, wisest, and the most saintly, in short they are the greatest part of mankind; for Christ does not speak here of those who persecute the Word nor of those who fail to give their ear to it, but of those who hear it and are students of it, who also wish to be called true Christians and to live in Christian fellowship with Christians and are partakers of baptism and the Lord's Supper. But they are of a carnal heart, and remain so, failing to appropriate the Word of God to themselves, it goes in one ear and out the other. Just like the seed along the wayside did not fall into the earth, but remained lying on the ground in the wayside, because the road was trampled hard by the feet of man and beast and it could not take root.

Therefore Christ says the devil cometh and taketh away the Word from their heart, that they may not believe and be saved. What power of Satan this alone reveals, that hearts, hardened through a worldly mind and life, lose the Word and let it go, so that they never understand or confess it; but instead of the Word of God Satan sends false teachers to tread it under foot by the doctrines of men. For it stands here written both that it was trodden under foot, and the birds of the heaven devoured it. The birds Christ himself interprets as messengers of the devil, who snatch away the Word and devour it, which is done when he turns and blinds their hearts so that they neither understand nor esteem it, as St. Paul says in 2 Tim 4, 4: "They will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables." By the treading under foot of men Christ means the teachings of men, that rule in our hearts, as He says in Mt 5, 13 also of the salt that has lost its savor, it is cast out and trodden under foot of men; that is, as St. Paul says in 2 Th 2, 11, they must believe a lie because they have not been obedient to the truth.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Sexagesima*, from the Church Postil)

Thus all heretics, fanatics and sects belong to this number [the first class of disciples], who understand the Gospel in a carnal way and explain it as they please, to suit their own ideas, all of whom hear the Gospel and yet they bear no fruit, yea, more, they are governed by Satan and are harder oppressed by human institutions than they were before they heard the Word. For it is a dreadful utterance that Christ here gives that the devil taketh away the Word from their hearts, by which He clearly proves that the devil rules mightily in their hearts, notwithstanding they are called Christians and hear the Word. Likewise it sounds terrible that they are to be trodden under foot, and must be subject unto men and to their ruinous teachings, by which under the appearance and name of the Gospel the devil takes the Word from them, so that they may never believe and be saved, but must be lost forever; as the fanatical spirits of our day do in all lands. For where this Word is not, there is no salvation, and great works or holy lives avail nothing, for with this, that He says: “They shall not be saved,” since they have not the Word, He shows forcibly enough, that not their works but their faith in the Word alone saves, as Paul says to the Romans: “It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” Rom. 1, 16

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Sexagesima*, from the Church Postil)

The second class of hearers are those who receive the Word with joy, but they do not persevere. These are also a large multitude who understand the Word correctly and lay hold of it in its purity without any spirit of sect, division or fanaticism, they rejoice also in that they know the real truth, and are able to know how they may be saved without works through faith. They also know that they are free from the bondage of the law, of their conscience and of human teachings; but when it comes to the test that they must suffer harm, disgrace and loss of life or property, then they fall and deny it; for they have not root enough, and are not planted deep enough in the soil. Hence they are like the growth on a rock, which springs forth fresh and green, that it is a pleasure to behold it and it awakens bright hopes. But when the sun shines hot it withers, because it has no soil and moisture, and only rock is there. So these do; in times of persecution they deny or keep silence about the Word and work, speak and suffer all that their persecutors mention or wish, who formerly went forth and spoke, and confessed with a fresh and joyful spirit the same, while there was still peace and no heat, so that there was hope they would bear much fruit and serve the people. For these fruits are not only the works, but more the confession, preaching and spreading of the Word, so that many others may thereby be converted and the kingdom of God be developed.

(Martin Luther, *Sermon for Sexagesima*, from the Church Postil)