

Suffering is not fun. It hurts and sometimes leaves deep scars. In fact, it can also lead to death—as it did throughout Biblical history, and as it does to this day in our fallen world where the persecution of the Christian faith is increasingly evident.

Jesus says we are blessed when we are persecuted for living as His children. Saint Paul, among others, reiterated such words throughout his epistles, and then he said that we should “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4).

Rejoice? Always? Yes. Rejoice. Always. Rejoice even in times of persecution and suffering for righteousness’ sake. For when we are humbly enduring tribulation for the sake of the Gospel, then the Lord can use us to His glory, by filling us with Himself and shining His light in the darkness. Then we can go the extra mile, and even give the shirt off our back, when needed.

When we understand that we are all sinners and earn nothing but hell for all of our sins, then as contrite beggars we can truly appreciate the gift of God’s grace and mercy in Christ Jesus. For without the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb of God, we would have no worthy righteous garment to cloak us.

But by God’s grace we have been redeemed in the blood of the Lamb, who endured all the suffering and persecution of hell, even being forsaken by His own heavenly Father. Jesus died in payment for all our sins, and rose victorious with His majestic scars. Now, in faith we are blessed with His robes of righteousness unto life everlasting in heaven.

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THE HOLY GOSPEL**ST. LUKE 17:11-19 (NKJV)**

Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

So when He saw them, He said to them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.

So Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?”

And He said to him, “Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.”

The COLLECT

Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Because of his faithfulness to speak the Word of God in all truth, John the Baptist was imprisoned and ultimately suffered martyrdom: death by beheading (Matthew 14:8–11). Instead of compromising and just ecumenically ‘getting along’ with everybody, John remained faithful. He provides a great example for pastors and people today!

John’s ministry was winding down, and Jesus’ ministry was gearing up. But the theme was the same, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” In fact, with Jesus the kingdom of heaven was literally at hand—for Jesus was the kingdom wrapped in flesh and blood. The shepherds saw it in the manger; the wise men saw it in the house; and the Temple elders saw it when He was twelve.

But most people, then and now, often have a hard time seeing Jesus as the kingdom of heaven because of self-imposed blindness. People want their own version of a messiah, much like the Israelites at Sinai’s foot wanted to mold and fashion God into a golden calf. People contemporize God into what they desire, and thus they mock Him and deny Him—just as the Jews and their leaders did during the latter part of Holy Week.

Anything other than the true God is contemptible and not Christian. That which is truly Christian keeps Christ as the center, the focus of the Divine Service and all of life. That which is Christian revolves around Jesus.

Christ’s earthly ministry continues to this day in His Word and Sacraments within His Bride, the mysteries being properly handled by His divinely called pastors. May He continue to be the focus of all His people as we proceed forward in faith.

The temptations of Jesus in the wilderness, three of which are specifically recorded in this text, teach us about trusting the Lord alone and not falling prey to half-truths or deceptions. Herein we learn the importance of knowing the Lord's Word and trusting in Him alone through it all.

Christ endured the numerous temptations from the father of lies as He entered upon His three years of public ministry on this earth. He confronted Satan head-on in these wilderness battles, being grounded in the one true faith in which He was catechized as a child and professed before the elders at the Jerusalem Temple at the age of twelve.

Satan, the world, and the flesh tempt each and every child of God countless times throughout this earthly journey. How can one be properly equipped to confront such temptations? Only by being in Christ, and that means being immersed in His Means of Grace—Word and Sacraments—each step of this pilgrimage, partaking of Him in His Divine Service as often as possible.

He who endured and arose victorious over all of the temptations and trials of the devil freely gives us the antidote to all sin in His Word, and Baptism, and Absolution, and Supper. Christ does not abandon His children to face the unholy on our own—for such would lead to absolute failure. Instead, He beat Satan back so that we also can order Satan to leave in the name of Jesus.

Because Jesus died on the high mount of Calvary, the glory of heaven is freely given to all who confess Christ alone. Herein is peace and joy!

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity

I. Of Sin.

Here we must confess, as Paul says in Rom. 5:11, that sin originated from one man Adam, by whose disobedience all men were made sinners, and subject to death and the devil. This is called original or capital sin.

The fruits of this sin are afterwards evil deeds which are forbidden in the Ten Commandments, such as unbelief, false faith, idolatry, to be without the fear of God, arrogance, blindness, and, to speak briefly, not to know or regard God; secondly, to lie, to swear by God's name, not to pray, not to call upon God, not to regard God's Word, to be disobedient to parents, to murder, to be unchaste, to steal, to deceive, etc.

This hereditary sin is so deep a corruption of nature, that no reason can understand it, but it must be believed from the revelation of Scriptures, Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12 sqq.; Ex. 33:3; Gen 3:7 sqq. Wherefore the dogmas of the scholastic doctors [that is, medieval Roman Catholic theologians] are pure errors and obscurations contrary to this article, for by them it is taught:

That since the fall of Adam the natural powers of man have remained entire and incorrupt, and that man by nature has right reason and a good will, as the philosophers teach.

And that man has a free will to do good and omit evil, and, again, to omit good and do evil.

Also that man by his natural powers can observe and do all the commandments of God.

And that, by his natural powers, he can love God above all things, and his neighbor as himself.

Also if a man do as much as is in him, God certainly grants to him His grace.

And if he wish to come to the sacrament, there is no need of a good intention to do good, but it is sufficient if he have not a wicked purpose to commit sin; so entirely good is his nature and so efficacious the sacrament.

Also that it is not founded upon Scripture that, for a good work, the Holy Ghost with His grace is necessary.

Such and many other things have arisen from want of understanding and learning concerning both sins and Christ our Saviour, and they are truly heathen dogmas which we cannot endure. For if these dogmas would be right, Christ has died in vain, since there is in man no sin and misery for which He should have died; or He would have died only for the body, not for the soul, inasmuch as the soul is entirely sound, and the body only is subject to death.

—The Smalcald Articles

The first verses of today's reading remind us of yesterday's Gospel: like the lepers whom Jesus cleansed, we were walking about in a living death, dying more and more every day. "By nature" the Holy Spirit has St. Paul say—our condition by conception and birth, not something that we are brought into later—by nature we were sinful and unclean, by nature we were under the wrath of God. Thus, we must have a God Who is as the true God is: rich in mercy, seeking our good even while we were lost and condemned in our sin, sending forth His Christ so that He could atone for our sins. By His grace—God's favor that we do not and cannot deserve—our Lord saves us through faith, making us alive together with Christ.

"Making us alive together" immediately reminds us of Romans 6. Baptism is spoken of there as crucifying and raising us; thus, it is a means of this grace coming to us. Thus, this grace that saves us through faith and apart from any works of our own in Ephesians 2 is the grace that comes to us through Holy Baptism—and, indeed, through the Gospel in both its visible (Baptism and the Lord's Supper) and invisible (reading, preaching, and Absolution) forms.

Only through these means does grace come to us and save us, incorporating us into the One New Man called the Church. There we are also reconciled to one another, because we know our membership depends entirely upon Christ's having reconciled us to God, so that we are entirely His workmanship: sinners who are now saints by grace!

[For reference, please see hymn 483 in *The Lutheran Hymnal* in addition to the appointed text.]

Prepare! For what? Prepare for the kingdom of God coming in real-presence flesh and blood. Such certainly was fulfilled as John the Baptist witnessed and proclaimed.

But sometimes pastors, as the sons of the prophets, proclaim truths of God that many people brush off as unimportant or not immediately relevant since it appears that their words are vapor and unsubstantiated. Israel of the Old Testament did this time and again, ignoring God and His faithful prophets. Such deafness, willful rejection, and rebellion ultimately led to their demise. The Old Testament is replete with such accounts.

When the divinely called John the Baptist mounts the pulpit in the Lord's Church, his words are to be heeded. They are not some 'op-ed' as can be found in the newspaper. His words are being spoken in the stead of Christ for the benefit of all who have ears to hear and will listen.

John proclaimed the truth in Law and Gospel regarding the Lamb of God who was soon to appear as the Atonement Offering for all mankind. God appearing as flesh-and-blood Man, in fulfillment of the Genesis 3:15 Messianic promise, was soon to appear. The people were encouraged to be on the lookout for Him, to be anxiously anticipating Him.

Thanks be to God that He sent His only Son to be our Savior—our Savior who comes to us in His Word, in Baptismal water, in the Feast of His body and blood, in Absolution, and in His Divine Service. He is present!

The Apostle Paul warns Pastor Timothy, as well as all Christians, to beware of people who exhibit fruits of unrighteousness, fruits not in accord with the pure teachings of God. Of course, in order to separate oneself from such teachings, practices, and individuals requires the ability to test the spirits and discern which is true and which is false. How is this done? It is done by being a student of the Word.

One cannot fight the good fight of faith and pursue righteousness if one is not grounded in Christ Jesus as found in Word and Sacrament within the Bride of Christ. To enter the battle without the proffered armaments only ensures one's demise. Think about Samson or Daniel, Moses or Jeremiah, Job or Joshua; by God's grace they moved forward with the shield of faith in God alone, ultimately making the good confession.

The Lord always provides instruction and guidance, cleansing and strength from His Means of Grace so that His people can continue as faithful servants. And His servants learn with each passing day on this wilderness journey to treasure the 'trust' that has been given to them.

This text beautifully reflects Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount as well as many wise words found in the book of Proverbs. By being in the Word of God, we can be strengthened to properly critique what we daily hear and see so that we may live as children of light; and we can daily be immersed in the cleansing of all sins in Christ Jesus our Savior. In this way we can know the truth and live in the freedom of the Gospel!

It tests us sorely when we see a faithful Christian appear to be abandoned by God. His trials and tribulations make us wonder how our Lord could treat him so—and whether something worse might be just around the corner for us, as well!

Especially when we see faithful pastors abused both by the secular world and by those within the Church who would promote various errors, we may wonder at God's permitting such things to be. St. Paul, though, asks his readers not to become discouraged when they hear of his imprisonment, his shipwrecks, his being constantly opposed everywhere he went. His suffering such things, he says, "is your glory." It is your glory because it, like the crucifixion that won your forgiveness, shows how great God's love for you is in Christ: our Lord's grace makes those who are His workmanship in Christ Jesus strong to persevere so that you receive the Gospel. He would have you see His Word delivered through such adversity precisely because it shows you that it is a Word that you can rely upon when you go through adversity.

The Triune God is certainly "able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think," so we have every reason to consider the suffering of such adversity as something that is not because of any lack of power in Him, but so that we may see the lack of power we have without Him. In this way, we are strengthened in the inner man, as St. Paul says, depending solely upon His might, rooted and grounded in love as Christ dwells in our hearts through faith.

We who confess that we are saved solely by grace through faith, that we are, therefore, His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, wish to “walk worthy of the calling with which [we] were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” This does not happen by continuing to walk in the futility of our minds as those “by nature children of wrath,” but by those who are now “renewed in the spirit of [our] mind” constantly drowning the Old Adam by daily contrition and repentance, our new man—created anew after the image of God—daily rising to go forth to live in true righteousness and holiness.

How shall this be done? “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men”—namely, “some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,” so that you might have what you need by the Office of the Ministry being carried out to the building up of the Body of Christ. St. Paul points to the measure of this being done as the unified confession of the true doctrine.

When we are “no longer be[ing] children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine,” we can speak the truth in love, both to one another and to those outside of the Church, each of us building up one another as we reflect the Gospel to one another, confessing always our need and that need being met in the blood of Christ.

Honor and respect are fast becoming obsolete character traits in our nation. Most people are concerned about ‘me, me, me,’ and they have no concern or loving respect for others. Especially is this obvious throughout secular society in its actions and communications. This negative trend is not only manifested in politics and in the media, but it is also often evidenced on the street and in the store.

Additionally, and sadly, the lack of honor and respect is also quite obvious in Christian congregations. When ‘roast pastor’ is the main course around the dinner table on Sunday noon, God’s Office of the Holy Ministry is not benefited, and therefore the Bride of Christ suffers deeply. Such attacks are cruel and ungodly, emanating from the father of all lies who desires discord, gossip, slander, condemnation, and division within the flock.

Honor is a godly virtue that is becoming increasingly rare in this devolving culture and country. But such a fact should not be the reason for the Christian to throw up his hands in exasperation and give up. Instead, the Christian family is in a unique position to instill these positive attributes (and others) in their children within the home environment, as well as within God’s House. Living in Christ, meditating on and following His Word, regularly confessing sin and being absolved, all these lend toward living the virtues of honor and respect as we are enabled by Jesus Christ.

Godly honor of all others, including the divinely called pastor, begins at home in the Word of God. May the Lord grant growth in these virtues to all of His children for the sake of the Gospel.

THE HOLY GOSPEL

ST. LUKE 14:1-11 (NKJV)

Now it happened, as He went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, that they watched Him closely. And behold, there was a certain man before Him who had dropsy. And Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”

But they kept silent. And He took him and healed him, and let him go. Then He answered them, saying, “Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?” And they could not answer Him regarding these things.

So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: “When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’ Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

The COLLECT

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

Today’s reading hinges on the “therefore” in 5:1: “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.” All the Law that rains down upon us in the verses before and after is made understandable: imitate your Father in Heaven, the One Who was kind and tenderhearted toward you and “in Christ, forgave you.” (4:32)

In that forgiveness, “all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking...with all malice” are put away. It is not that you are commanded to stop these things on your own, but that they are stopped by the reception of forgiveness. Continuing in them would mean that you weren’t really receiving forgiveness, not trusting that Christ has paid for your sins, because one who so trusts has no need of these things. “We are members of one another,” St. Paul writes, parts of the same body, joined together and not meant to be separated. Shall we have disdain for the other parts of our body? Shall we treat them as ‘foreign objects’, instead of what the Holy Spirit says that they are? If we do, we are not living as those who understand and have received what the Father has given us in Christ.

There is great comfort for us here: this epistle was written to people just like us. God did not say, “You don’t act like you understand my forgiveness, so I am taking it back!” Instead, all of this points us back to our need for the Blood of Christ shed for us—the cure for our lovelessness, Christ’s loving us and offering Himself for us, the “sweet-smelling aroma” that does away with the stench of our sin.

St. Paul does not make Christ and the Church fit into what the world thinks marriage should be. Instead, God established holy marriage in the Garden of Eden to depict Christ and the Church.

Starting with Christ and the Church (instead of with Adam and Eve or with you and your spouse), submission and sacrificial love become clear. The wife submits to the husband as the Church submits to Christ—Her Savior Who washed Her with the water connected to His Word, so that He displays Her as perfect and without blemish, no matter how She was when He found Her and how She would be without Him.

So also, the husband is to love his wife and give himself for her just as Jesus did for the Church. As Jesus did, the husband is to serve her by taking her faults as his own so that he holds her as guiltless—to value her as highly as he is valued, as the eternal God valued Man. As the Church does not “submit” to Christ first of all by obeying Him, but by receiving His gifts, so the godly husband makes it clear by what he says and does that he wishes to give his bride all good things. The wife’s submission is, above all else, to receive her husband’s love; all else flows from that.

Such an understanding (of Christ and the Church and of one’s own marriage) results in the “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and plucking the stringed instrument wholeheartedly to the Lord”—a fitting and circumspect redemption of the time in these evil days.

Today we read: “Bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things.” We spend thousands of dollars annually on healthcare insurance premiums alone. Many spend more on various exercise equipment, activities and club memberships. Yet our bodies will eventually die, short of Christ’s return in glory. Most spend little on spiritual healthcare, which has eternal consequences. This clearly presents the reality of what we value. It isn’t as if godliness only profits in the future. It has many real benefits here and now.

Who can put a value on peace with God now? What should we be willing to give for a conscience that is quiet because it is clean? What can we pay for freedom from anger, hatred, envy, and having to defend ourselves for every bit of dignity and value we can retain because we don’t have any real value or dignity?

Christ brought us peace with God and clean consciences. He freed us from sin, and gave us infinite value by buying us with His infinitely precious blood. He brought us dignity by dying an ignoble death to save us. These benefits and more are of great use to us now. And they never lose their value. Instead, as the Scriptures say, we go from Glory to glory. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

So the faithful sing with confidence: Hence, all earthly treasure! Jesus is my Pleasure, Jesus is my Choice. Hence, all empty glory! Naught to me thy story Told with tempting voice. Pain or loss, Or shame or cross, Shall not from my Savior move me Since He deigns to love me. (TLH 347:4)

Who qualifies to be a pastor? Where will the Church find ministers? Line by line of the requirements of ministers destroys the illusion that anyone is good enough for the work. Any man desiring it should tremble at the thought of being in that Office. Yet, the Church needs pastors, and it remains that it is a good thing for a man to desire to be a pastor. Here is one more place where something is impossible for man, but possible with God.

The end of today's reading summarizes how it is possible both for the sinner to be saved, and for sinful men to serve in the Holy Office of the Ministry: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels (messengers), preached, believed on, and received in glory. The connection between Jesus having all authority and the Gospel being preached, is quite significant. Even some of the men to whom Jesus gave the command to make disciples doubted.

We do well to encourage able men to prepare themselves to serve in the ministry. God is able to sanctify sinners and keep them unto eternal life. God is also able to provide ministers for His Church and keep them above reproach.

We beg the Holy Spirit: O mighty Rock, O Source of Life, Let Thy dear Word, mid doubt and strife, Be strong within us burning That we be faithful unto death, In Thy pure love and holy faith, From Thee true wisdom learning. Thy grace And peace On us shower; By Thy power Christ confessing, Let us win our Savior's blessing. (TLH 235:6)

Without the truth, you neither can nor should run anywhere; you will only fall. Without righteousness covering what is most vital, you will be run through. If you are not carried along by the message of peace from God, of what point is your going? Without faith always being held forth to protect you, the darts of the enemy will stick in your armor and set you ablaze. With salvation upon your head—with Christ as your Defender being most prominent—not only are you protected, but your enemy shall fear. Wielding the Word of God not as a club, but as a sword, being thrust just where it needs to be and how it needs to be by the working of the Spirit whose sword it is, you are able to stand, able to withstand the enemy in the evil day. Trust in His might and that His power has been most greatly displayed in the work He has done for you and for all mankind—taking on your sin and successfully defeating it, and you will stand no matter the attacks of your wily foe.

Trusting in His might, the Lord's salvation is displayed: children obeying their parents; parents raising their children to know the Gospel; servants respecting their masters as God's representatives and masters treating their servants as if the servants were Christ. These are the actions of those who are clothed with the full armor of God, the actions of the truth held in confidence and with thanksgiving—actions created only by the grace of God that has saved you through faith, the works of one confident of not needing to be saved by his own works.

THE HOLY GOSPEL ST. MATTHEW 6:24-34 (NKJV)

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

“Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

“Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

“Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

“So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

The COLLECT

Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy help, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Today’s reading addresses some of the most difficult things that face the Church today. Men need to do their duty, so do women. Since the fall into sin, men and women have not been fulfilling their God-given roles. In the Garden when Eve was being tempted, Adam failed to pray and preach to his wife. Eve went out from under her head, Adam. She first followed, then promoted a strange doctrine. No wonder in the curse it was noted that woman would desire to rule over man, but man would rule over her. Men and women were not created to be in conflict. They were created with complimentary roles that would build each other up.

It is not as if things have gotten better. Things have actually gotten worse. The rebellious nature of mankind encourages men to flee from responsibility, and women to seek power over men. If men did their duty in the Church and presented themselves fit and ready for the ministry, then there would not be as much pressure to ordain women. If women were encouraged toward godly modesty, they would not seek power in the Church. Yet God is faithful, and reminds us of the way things are to be. The Holy Spirit continues to present God’s will to us, forgives us our sins through Christ’s ministers, and makes us desire to do God’s will.

For this reason we are reminded: God these commandments gave therein To show thee, child of man, thy sin And make thee also well perceive How man unto God should live. (TLH 287:11) And we cry: “Have mercy Lord!” The Lord is merciful.

Today's reading begins: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ." This is the Paul who confesses that that he is chief among sinners. He persecuted the Church. He approved when the first martyr of the New Testament era was murdered. He actively sought permission to round up Christians. He was among those of whom Jesus said, "The time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service." (John 16:2) It is no small miracle that Paul is an apostle.

Jesus said, "Pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:44) St. Stephen prayed God would not charge his murders with that sin. To pray that way is to know the grace and mercy of God, that despite our deserving nothing but eternal torment, God has forgiven us in Christ. It is a faith that sees persecution being not so much of the self, but of the body of Christ. God, true to His nature, did far more than St. Stephen asked. Not only did He not charge Paul with that sin, but made Paul the greatest preacher of the Gospel among the Gentiles.

We confess with Dr. Luther: Fast bound in Satan's chains
I lay, Death brooded darkly O'er me, Sin was my torment night
and day, In sin my mother bore me; Yea, deep and deeper still I
fell, Life had become a living hell, so firmly sin possessed me.
But God beheld my wretched state Before the world's founda-
tion, And, mindful of His mercies great, He planned my soul's
salvation. A father's heart He turned to me, Sought my redemp-
tion fervently: He gave His dearest Treasure. (TLH 387:2, 4)

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE I.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

This represents and sets forth most briefly the essence, will, action and work of God the Father. Since the Ten Commandments have taught that we have no other gods, it is natural to ask the question: What kind of a being is God? What does He do? How shall we praise, represent or describe Him, that He may be known? ... So that the Creed is nothing else than the answer and confession of Christians, arranged with respect to the First Commandment. As if you were to ask a little child: My dear, what sort of a God have you? What do you know of Him? He could say: First, indeed, my God is God the Father, who has created heaven and earth; besides Him I believe in nothing else as God; for there is no one else who could create heaven and earth.

But for the learned, and those who have acquired some scriptural knowledge, these three articles may be extended and divided into as many parts as there are words. But now for young scholars let it suffice to indicate the most necessary points, namely, as we have said, that this article refers to the Creation: that we emphasize the words: CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH. But what is the force of this or what do you mean by these words: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker, etc. Answer: I believe and mean to say that I am a creature of God; that is, that He has given and constantly preserves to me my body, soul and life, members great and small, all my senses, reason and understanding, food and drink, shelter and support, wife and child, domestics, house and possessions, etc. Besides, He causes all creatures to serve for the necessities and uses of life—sun, moon and stars in the firmament, day and night, air, fire, water, earth and whatever it bears and produces, bird and fish, beasts, grain and all kinds of produce, and whatever else there is of bodily and temporal goods, good government, peace, security. So that we learn in this article that none of us has his life of himself, or anything that is here enumerated or can be enumerated, neither can he of himself preserve them, however small and unimportant a thing it might be, for all is comprehended in the word: CREATOR.

Besides this we also confess that God the Father has not only given us all that we have and see before our eyes, but daily preserves and defends against all evil and misfortune, averts all sort of danger and calamity; and that He does

all without our merit of pure love and goodness, as a friendly Father, who cares for us that no evil befall us. But to speak more of this pertains to the other two parts of this article, where we say: "Father Almighty."

Hence we must infer and conclude, since everything which we have and are, and whatever is in heaven and upon the earth, are daily given and preserved to us by God, that it is our duty to love, praise and thank Him without ceasing; and in short to serve Him with all these things, as He has enjoined in the Ten Commandments.

Here we could say much if we would attempt to show how few there are that believe this article. For we all pass over it, hear it, and say it, but neither see nor consider what the words teach us. For if we believed it with the heart, we would also act accordingly, and not stalk about proudly, bid defiance and boast as though we had life, riches, power and honor, etc. all of ourselves, so that others must fear and serve us, as is the practice of the unhappy, perverted world, which is immured in darkness, and abuses all the good things and gifts of God only for its own pride, avarice, lust and luxury, and never once regards God, so as to thank Him or acknowledge Him as Lord and Creator.

Therefore, if we only believed it, this article must humble and terrify us all. For we sin daily with eyes, ears, hands, body and soul, money and possessions, and with everything we have, as especially do those who even fight against the Word of God. Yet Christians have this advantage, that they acknowledge themselves in duty bound to serve God for all these things, and to be obedient to Him.

We ought, therefore, daily to practice this article, to remember and consider in all that we see, and in all good that falls to or lot, and wherever we escape from calamity or danger, that it is God who gives and does all these things; that therein we perceive and see His paternal heart and His transcendent love toward us. Thereby the heart would be aroused and kindled to be thankful for all such good things, and to employ them to the honor and praise of God. Thus we have most briefly presented the meaning of this article, as much as it is at first necessary for the most simple to learn, both as to what we have and receive from God, and what we owe in return, which is a most excellent object of knowledge, but a far greater treasure. For here we see how the Father has given Himself to us, together with all creatures, and has most richly provided for us in this life, besides that He has overwhelmed us with unspeakable, eternal treasures in His Son and the Holy Ghost...

—The Large Catechism

Today's reading mentions Onesimus, whom Paul calls a faithful and beloved brother. When we consider how God is able to do far more than we think or ask, the little we know about Onesimus is very reassuring. Onesimus was a runaway slave. His name means "useful," but he was useless to his master. He met Paul and came to faith, or as Paul wrote in his letter to Philemon, "Who became my son while I was in chains." Onesimus became useful in ways no one would have imagined. He became useful even to God and His people.

Paul asked the Colossians for prayers that God would open a door for the word, that he and his companions might preach the mystery of Christ. We see How God opened a door for Onesimus to hear. It is not that we think about for what we should ask, but that God wants us to at least ask. St. Paul noted in Romans 8:26 that we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit intercedes for us. We are privileged, even commanded to ask, and God responds to our prayers in ways that go far beyond all that we think or ask. To Him be glory, honor, and power eternally!

The body of Christ prays: May God bestow on us His grace, With blessings rich provide us, And may the brightness of His face To Life eternal guide us That we His saving health may know, His gracious will and pleasure, And also to the heathen show, Christ's riches without measure and unto God convert them. (TLH 500:1)

God says, “The soul who sins shall die.” (Ezekiel 18:4) The Scriptures don’t give an exception to this, and that presents us with no small problem. One doesn’t have to meditate on today’s Scripture for long to recognize that according to what God calls sin, we are all sinful. Obey parents, do not provoke your children, serve masters in sincerity of heart and not with eyeservice, put off anger and filthy language; put to death fornication, passion, and covetousness are just some of the things mentioned. If we are honest and observant, it will not take long before we cry, “O Lord, who can stand?”

But God, Who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, provides a surprising solution: He kills us, just as He threatens to do. In Romans 6 St. Paul wrote: “Our old man was crucified with [Jesus], that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” God says the soul that sins shall die, then in Holy Baptism He kills us. If we are not killed in Holy Baptism, we will certainly die eternally in Hell one day. But we do not need to fear Hell, nor are we subject to sin any more. God restores freedom to our will so that we may serve God, and not the devil.

Therefore we pray: Baptized into Thy name most holy, O Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, I claim a place, though weak and lowly, Among Thy seed, Thy chosen host. Buried with Christ and dead to sin, Thy Spirit now shall live within. (TLH 298:1)

It would have been better for St. Paul to die and be with Christ, but what was best for him was not uppermost in his mind; instead, what was needful for his congregation.

We need no works for our righteousness and salvation, but only faith in Christ. Covered in Christ’s righteousness, through faith, we are now free to consider how best to serve the needs of our neighbors.

In chapter 2:1-4, then, after instructing us on how rich God has made us in Christ, in Whom we have obtained all things, Paul turns the focus toward living here with our neighbors. As brothers and sisters of Christ we walk in meekness and so consider others greater than ourselves. We walk in love and seek our neighbors’ good above our own. We seek to be a joy to our brethren: always practicing love, pondering it, and growing in it. In all of this, we examine ourselves and recognize our selfish pride and cast it off through daily baptismal contrition and repentance.

So we live not for ourselves, but for Christ, the One Who lived and died for us, and Who rose again and now lives for us: For Christ was filled with the form of God and rich in all good things and needed no work to make Him righteous. Yet, for our sake He labored, worked, suffered, and died that He might serve us with heavenly riches. Now, being rich toward God in Christ, we are free to take on the form of servants and deal with our neighbors as we see that God through Christ has dealt and still deals with us.

It is a misuse of Phil. 2:12 to give sinners even a little credit for coming to faith or for remaining in the faith. *I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him.*

Verse 12 is properly understood in light of verse 13. *The Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.*

“By this means, and in no other way, namely, through His holy Word, when it is heard as preached or is read, and the holy Sacraments when they are used according to the Word, God desires to call men to eternal salvation, to draw them to Himself, and to convert, regenerate and sanctify them” (FC II:50 – Jacobs, p. 562).

Once God has made us alive in Christ, then we *work out our own salvation* to the extent that the Formula teaches: “We should pray [God] without intermission that, through the same Spirit and His grace, by means of the daily exercise of reading, and applying to practice, God’s Word, He may preserve in us faith and His heavenly gifts, strengthen us from day to day, and support us to the end” (FC II:16 – Jacobs, pp. 554-555).

Avoid those things that would separate you from Christ, live in repentance, *hold fast the word of life* (v. 16), and give all honor and glory to God. For in this way **God works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.**

THE HOLY GOSPEL**ST. LUKE 7:11-17 (NKJV)**

Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.

Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has risen up among us”; and, “God has visited His people.” And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.

The COLLECT

Lord, we pray Thee that Thy grace may always go before and follow after us and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth, and reigneth, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The Gospel is a *mystery*, not because it is a riddle to be solved, but because it is the divine truth and reality which cannot be grasped by the frail mind of man apart from divine revelation.

The mind of natural man, shrouded in darkness and sin, would never, by its own innate wisdom and strength, even conceive of God's incarnation and His atonement for the sin of the whole world. *The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him* (1 Cor. 2:14).

That the almighty and eternal God would descend into the flesh and blood of a true human nature, in the one undivided person of our Lord Jesus Christ; that this God/Man would submit Himself to His own Law for the sake of sinners and then suffer and die to pay the debt that sinners owe in order to save them – this Gospel, this good news, is simply laughable to foolish human wisdom.

To uncover, reveal and make known this mystery to poor sinners to whom *God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery*, that they might repent, believe the Gospel and be saved, God caused His Word to go forth and be proclaimed. To make known this eternal mystery is the very reason why St. Paul (and all men called and ordained into the holy office) *became a minister according to the stewardship from God. The Ministry was given to fulfill the word of God, for it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe* (1 Cor. 1:21).

Our justification takes place by grace through faith. It is not *our faith* that does it, but the fact that Christ Jesus has redeemed the entire world. We stand not guilty before God, acquitted of all sin, because Jesus has already done all. He has suffered all that mankind ought to have done and suffered. Christ has already done everything for us. We merely trust in what He has done. We draw consolation from His finished work of salvation and trust in it for our salvation and so we are saved.

In verses 4–6 St. Paul lists off a number of qualifications which he had, by which he might boast and have confidence in the holy life he had led. But he would not. He would count everything he had done and suffered for Christ's sake as rubbish and loss in order to gain Christ. The righteousness He obtained by faith was not at all his own righteousness, but that of Christ.

Just so, we are justified and accounted righteous before God by a *foreign* righteousness. God sees in us nothing that He could credit to us as righteousness. Instead, He credits to us righteousness from another. It is that righteousness of which we sing and boast:

Naught have I, O Christ, to offer, Naught but Thee, my highest Good.
Naught have I, O Lord, to proffer, But Thy crimson-colored blood.
Thy death on the cross hath Death wholly defeated
And thereby my righteousness fully completed;
Salvation's white raiments I there did obtain,
And in them in glory with Thee I shall reign. (TLH 366:6)

A *lord* rules over you, but how he rules makes all the difference. A lord who rules over you by force, pounding you into submission, will not bring you joy. But one who rules over you by rescuing you and setting you free from bitter slavery will bring you great joy. This is what Jesus does.

Jesus is “true God, begotten of the Father from eternity.” Does that make you afraid? After all, if Jesus is God this means that He’s the one who gave the Law and the Law accuses you of sin. God (Jesus) is the judge and He will judge this world for its sins against His Law. Jesus is God, so Jesus knows your sin, better than you do.

Still, St. Paul tells us to *Rejoice in the Lord*, and this especially since *the Lord is at hand*. Jesus is near. He will return to judge at any moment. But far from making us afraid, this puts our souls at peace. Why? Because he is *our Lord*. For “He has redeemed me a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sin, from the death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.”

When St. Paul says *Rejoice in the Lord always*, he is saying *Rejoice in Jesus*. For when you have Jesus – when you receive Jesus as He comes to you in His Word and Sacraments, forgiving your sins and granting you true joy and peace – you always have a reason to rejoice.

Baptized believers are delivered from Satan’s power, from his kingdom of darkness, and from the fellowship of his demons. The spirit that is in the unbelievers to darken their minds and drive them to all kinds of evil no longer dwells in God’s children. They have been brought over into the kingdom of His Son. The blood of Christ cleanses the faithful. They are redeemed and they have the forgiveness of sins. They dwell in the heavenly realm in Christ and they are in the company of the holy angels.

All of this God’s people possess for now only through faith as they continue to trek through this earthly life to the day when they will take full possession of their inheritance. What they now have through faith and enjoy in hope, they shall soon receive in glory. But for now it is only a beginning.

Let us grow in this faith. The Holy Spirit wants to give God’s faithful people all wisdom and understanding, greater and greater clarity in the knowledge of God, so that they see deeper and deeper into the mystery of Christ. He wants to give them even greater light and power to walk in a way pleasing to the Lord.

Let us, then, pray diligently and use God’s Word. For through it we come to know better and better the love of Christ. The temptation to laziness and apathy always lies at the door of our hearts. Patience and endurance is required. The Almighty, who has freed us from death and hell, strengthens us with all strength according to His glorious power in all patience and longsuffering with joy.