

better understanding of the total number of men who desire to begin their studies.

Another matter of scheduling: at present, the Summer Camp which is being overseen by Pastor Sullivan and Holy Cross Lutheran Church (Kerrville, Texas) is still scheduled to take place June 22-26. However, the pandemic has had a way of making many schedules 'tentative.' It is our earnest hope that we will be able to proceed with our camp. Please keep in touch with your pastors, and Pastor Sullivan, regarding any updates.

A word of thanksgiving for wonderful news: Pastor Josiah and Maria Scheck have been blessed with the birth of a son, Enoch Hezekiah, who was born on April 8 and baptized on Holy Saturday.

As regards my duties in the coming months: I am working to finalize the visitation schedule for this year, and I will be in touch with the pastors and deacons arranging for as many visits as possible to take place this summer, before we get into the seminary year. I hope to be able to announce a schedule in the next issue of the *Herald*.

The Lord bless and sustain you through His means of grace in these trying times. I know that this Eastertide has thus far been a unique experience for all of us in certain regards, but the consolation and peace which the Lord of the Church grants to His saints remains unchanged, and unchangeable.

Yours in Christ,
Bishop Heiser

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



MAY 4–30, 2020

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NORTH AMERICA**

The Calendar

(continued from page 3)

May 3	Easter 3	TLH 268
May 10	Easter 4	TLH 260
May 17	Easter 5	TLH 458
May 21	The Ascension of our Lord	TLH 387
May 24	Exaudi	TLH 267

(Hymns of the Day are for the appointed Festival or Sunday.)

FROM THE BISHOP

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

The world continues to wrestle with various responses to the Wuhan virus pandemic, and thus the Church continues to cope with the ramifications of those actions. Around the world (for the lockdowns in Colombia and the Philippines have certainly been very trying for our brethren in those nations, as well) and around our nation, obviously a wide variety of social and political responses have been made. The lesser and greater magistrates continue to hash through both the legal and economic implications of these various approaches. In some circumstances, the impact has been manageable, while for others the burden on churches has been arduous. Meanwhile, competent medical opinion is profoundly divided over what is to come in the months ahead of us.

This is simply a noteworthy example of the world being what it has been since the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Jesus declared in Matthew 24: “And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in diverse places.” So it shall be until the end of the age. Still, we acknowledge that the economic, political, and medical implications of the present crisis will be with us for a long time, as the world measure such things.

As all of you know, the lockdowns associated with the pandemic also necessitated not holding our Synod and Colloquium at its regularly scheduled time. However, we are taking care of a number of critical tasks which would normally have been attended to during synod. Foremost among these is the completion of the colloquy process for four clergy, three of whom are presently serving congregations:

- Pastor Ernie Bernet, Discipleship Lutheran Church
2700 FM 1195, Mineral Wells, TX 76067
<https://www.discipleshiplc.church>
- Pastor Daniel Mensing, Good Savior Lutheran Church
4090 S. Melpomene Way, Tucson, AZ 85730
<http://goodshepherdlutheranchurchtucson.com>
- Rev. Floyd Smithey, Knoxville, Tennessee
member of St. Peter & St. Paul Lutheran Church
(Simpsonville, SC) exploring prospects for a new congregation in Knoxville, TN.
- Pastor Brandon Warr, Saint Patrick Lutheran Church, UAC
3003 Caroline Drive, Chipley, FL 32428
<https://www.facebook.com/stpatricklutheran/>

We welcome these brethren into the fellowship of the diocese. It is always heartening to see that there are faithful servants of the Lord eager to proclaim His Word and administer His Sacraments.

At present, there are several other clergy who are actively involved in the colloquy process, and it is my hope that there will be additional good news to report in the months to come.

The remaining details for the schedule for the seminary are being finalized. The first day of classes for the Fall Quarter will be Tuesday, September 8 (the Commencement Service will be on Sunday, September 6/Trinity 13). **For men who are considering attending St. Ignatius Lutheran Theological Seminary beginning in the Fall Quarter: Please contact me ASAP via email: bishopheiser@mac.com.** This will allow us to have a

When Lazarus was raised from the dead, the enemies of our Lord became only more enraged. “Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death.” This is no longer a fury of the moment; it is a satanic hatred that plots murder. The gift of life for Lazarus fills the Pharisees with a monstrous desire to destroy the One who is life and salvation. And there was no lack of those who were eager to serve their evil, for their response to seeing Lazarus alive was not to repent, but to run to the Pharisees and make the event known to them.

But even in the midst of their murderous conspiracy, Caiaphas, being high priest, prophesied: “You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.” St. John thus wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit: “Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.”

We cannot know whether Caiaphas and those around him had any inkling of the true meaning of his words, but still they were fulfilled. The fulfillment of the Word was not dependent on sinful men; the Word was fulfilled according to the will of the Triune God. And the Church is gathered from among the nations, and shall be preserved against all the treachery of the evil one, and the Lord of heaven and earth will gather in people to abide in His peace forever.

We pray: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee, and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

I have been overjoyed to see the way in which so many of you—whether as individuals or as entire congregations—have responded to the need. The multiplication of services (both in person and ‘online’) to bring the Word of God to His saints, has increased the labors of many of our pastors in recent months. Pastor Ahonen, the diocesan secretary, has been of tremendous assistance, coordinating links on an ongoing basis on the diocesan Facebook page (www.facebook.com/Evangelical-Lutheran-Diocese-ELDoNA-113374425365493/) which assists people in finding online services.

Salem Lutheran (Malone, Texas) has been provided services for Faith Lutheran (Beaverton, Oregon) by means of a Matins service each Sunday on Salem’s Facebook page. It is our hope that ‘in person’ services in Oregon will soon be able to resume, and Deacon Oncken is working with me on establishing a proposed schedule for such visits.

The outpouring of financial support to aid those who are suffering a shortfall at this time has been a blessing. The diocesan treasurer, Pastor Henson, forwarded the following that I might share it with all of you:

Due to the generous donations from several people and congregations, we have been able to send out \$9,000 to help various ELDoNA congregations, pastors, and a layman who have been hard hit by the Coronavirus. We still have some funds in the bank and expect that there will be more donations to come in. As the financial effects of the virus linger, we will continue to disburse more funds as the needs arise. Thanks again.

In addition to this support, two of the congregations have also sent support for Pastor Marin and the congregation in Colombia. I would simply add my own word of thanks to all of you who have offered such support to your brothers and sisters in Christ. Your faithful stewardship of the resources which the Lord has provided is making a big difference. I will endeavor to keep all of you apprised of the needs which may arise as we continue to cope with the economic impact of the pandemic.

(see final two pages of this issue)

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Jubilate Sunday

FRIDAY, MAY 29: JOHN 11:28–44

EXAUDI

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

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

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

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

Twice, the Lord groans within Himself. After the confession of Martha, there is the seeming weakness of Mary, and the doubts which trouble the crowd. Mary does not speak of the resurrection; rather, there is almost resentment in her words: "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Now that Lazarus is dead, she seems to think only of that circumstance as one from which not even Jesus could deliver her brother. And the crowd seems to be filled with nothing but doubt: "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?" Similar words would be heard when the Lord was on the cross: "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him." It is little wonder that the Lord groaned within Himself.

The raising of Lazarus is of a markedly different character from that of Jairus' daughter, and the son of the widow of Nain: neither of them had been buried. But the Lord had waited before coming to Bethany, so that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. All understood what it meant for a man to have rested in his tomb for four days, and it horrified them.

The Lord declared, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." The Word—"Lazarus, come forth!"—was fruitful, and foreshadows that glorious resurrection which is to come, when the Lord will call forth His Church from our graves to dwell with Him forever.

We pray: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee, and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

After the manner in which so many among the Jews violently rejected the Word, the disciples were hesitant to return anywhere near Jerusalem. The bravery of St. Thomas is particularly notable: “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.”

But the Lord of heaven and earth travelled to Bethany to give further testimony to His divine nature, and the work which He had come to accomplish. “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.” The prayer of Martha is of a character similar to that which Jesus’ mother offered at the wedding feast in Cana: Martha simply states the need, and trusts in the Lord’s power to accomplish all things which are pleasing in His sight. The confession which St. Peter made in Matthew 16 is reiterated by St. Martha: “Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.’” This is the faith which is worked by the Holy Spirit, and it is a faith which sustains the children of God in all trials and temptations.

We pray: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee, and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

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

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

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

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

—The Large Catechism, the Lord’s Prayer

When Jesus finished preaching in the synagogue about the necessity to eat His flesh and drink His blood in order to have eternal life, many of His own disciples replied, “This is a hard saying.” Many things the multitudes could believe about Jesus, but when confronted with the teaching that this Man was God, who had come from God and had to be believed in as God who is the only Way to life, they stumbled.

Why did they stumble? Did Jesus fail to preach in a win-some enough manner? Was the Holy Spirit not drawing, not working through Jesus’ words? No, Jesus’ words were “Spirit” and “life.” He preached the truth. He preached perfectly. But many simply would not believe in Jesus as their God, and so they left Him.

Nothing has changed. Many people who hear the truth of Christ rightly preached, who may even join a church and live as Christians for a while, eventually walk away for no other reason than that they stumble over Jesus. The only question at that point for those who remain is the question Jesus posed to His twelve disciples. “Do you also want to go away?” If, by God’s grace, you are convinced, as eleven of the twelve disciples were, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, if you’re convinced that your church teaches the word of Christ correctly, then you have all you need. You have Jesus. And with Him, you have also the Father and the Holy Spirit, and the sure hope of everlasting life.

Prayer: O Father in heaven, by Your Word You have graciously drawn us to Jesus as Your Son and our Savior. Keep us firm and steadfast in the faith, that we may always find joy and contentment in His teaching. Amen.

Today’s reading offers another example of the way in which the ungodly reject the teachings of God’s Word. “The Jews answered Him, saying, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.” False teachers (and the world, in general) will commend the charitable works undertaken by the Church, but the moment that the servants of the Lord begin to proclaim the Law and the Gospel, the attitude changes. Suddenly, grudging respect is replaced by hatred, and the ungodly reach for stones to hurl at those who preach the Word of God.

The Lord sets forth the immutable standard for faith in the Christ: “If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.” As the Christ is risen from the dead and has ascended to the right hand of the Father, He has fulfilled His Word. And He will fulfill all that which He has proclaimed concerning His return in glory at the end of the age.

We pray: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee, and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

“Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him ‘How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.’” This is a tactic which false teachers often utilize: when confronted with a clear teaching of Holy Scripture—a teaching which is witnessed in the received practice of the Church—they will still claim that the matter is ‘vague’ or that Scripture ‘doesn’t give a definite answer.’ Consider that the false teachers have behaved in this way with regard to the Baptism of infants, or the presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar: what is clear in Scripture, and attested by the universal practice of the Church is denied because of their prideful private interpretation.

Jesus directly confronted those who tried to hide behind an imagined ambiguity: “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you.” They will not receive the Word, because they do not believe. The Church proclaims the Word, and the Holy Spirit creates faith in the hearts of the sheep of His fold.

The Word does not rely on our ‘winsomeness’ to make it effective. The seed of the Word is sown, and we trust that the Lord will grant it fruitfulness according to His gracious will.

We pray: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee, and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

It was about six months before the great Passover of Holy Week, the time for the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus’ brothers wanted Him to travel south to Judea for the Feast, but not to keep the Feast, not to preach the Gospel that He had been sent from God to save sinners from sin, death, and the power of the devil. They wanted Him to increase His following, to impress the crowds with His miracles, to be a good politician, or rabbi, or revolutionary leader. Even His own brothers regarded Jesus according to the flesh (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:16). They didn’t believe in Him as the Son of God.

As a result, Jesus’ brothers were able to avoid the hatred of the world for a while longer. Only those who openly confess Christ before the world can truly be hated by the world, as countless Christians would experience in the brutal tortures, imprisonments, and executions that would follow those who followed Christ. By God’s grace, Jesus’ brothers were brought to believe in Him after His resurrection and joined that number of those who were gladly hated for Jesus’ sake.

Any number of “Christian” churches still behave as Jesus’ brothers did in today’s reading. They seek popularity with the world, while downplaying the doctrine of Holy Scripture and the truth that Jesus is the true God, who condemns the world’s works as evil, even as He calls the wicked to repent and believe in Him for forgiveness. As for you, be counted among those who stand for Jesus as His Word reveals Him, not as the world wants to see Him.

Prayer: Father, help us to know Your beloved Son rightly, to confess Him openly, and to suffer the world’s hatred with peace, love, and joy. Amen.

Jesus ended up attending the Feast of Tabernacles, but not to make a big show or to dazzle the people with miracles. He went to teach, although He did perform one miracle while He was there: He healed a man on the Sabbath. The authority of His teaching amazed His listeners; His audacity to “work” on the Sabbath made them angry; and His claim to have been sent by God to teach and to work made them ready to kill Him.

But He gave them a test to know if He was telling the truth: “If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority” (John 7:17). Do you want to do what God wants? Keep the Law of Moses! But if you devote yourself to keeping it, you will find that you don’t keep it. You’ll find that you’re a sinner in need of a Savior—a Savior who is human like you, but righteous; a Savior who is God, so that He can win you back from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Yes, if you want to do what God wants, you will see that Jesus is telling the truth, and that the prophets, including Moses, all point directly to Him and testify that in Him alone is salvation.

Prayer: Father in heaven, You have brought us to believe that Jesus came from You in order to reveal You to us, including Your gracious plan of salvation through faith in Him. Open our hearts to believe everything He teaches and to put it into practice, with faith toward You and with love toward one another. Amen.

Jesus proclaimed the Gospel, and there was division among the Jews, and many blasphemed Him. We should always remember this whenever people claim that ‘doctrine divides’: the proper response is, “Just like it is supposed to.” St. Paul wrote to the Romans concerning such divisions: “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.” (Rom. 16:17–18 NKJV) The division which occurs when the truth is proclaimed takes place because of the evil motivation of those who reject the truth.

The Jews were divided between the blasphemers and those who recognized that the works of the Lord were in harmony with His Word: “Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings. And many of them said, ‘He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?’ Others said, ‘These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?’” But the determination of who was right did not rest with which men prevailed in the conflict, but with the Word. Jesus declared, “Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.” Thus Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, and ascended to the right hand of the Father on the fortieth day of His resurrection, demonstrating the Truth through His fulfillment of His Word.

We pray: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee, and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Exaudi Sunday

IX. Of Excommunication.

The greater excommunication [i.e., execution or banishment], as the Pope calls it, we regard only as a civil penalty, and not pertaining to us ministers of the Church. But the less [i.e., the so-called 'lesser excommunication'] is true Christian excommunication, which prohibits manifest and obstinate sinners from the sacrament and other communion of the Church until they are reformed and avoid sin. And ministers ought not to confound this ecclesiastical punishment or excommunication with civil penalties.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III

The selections from the Book of Concord for the Sundays of the Church Year are from H. E. Jacobs' translation of the Book of Concord, and are taken from the table of suggested lessons for Sundays and Festivals of the Church. (The table of appropriate lessons was originally found in Pipping's Christliches Concordienbuch [Leipzig, 1734].)

THURSDAY, MAY 7: JOHN 7:25-36

JUBILATE

There was plenty of speculation about Jesus in Jerusalem. There were plenty of assumptions, plenty of rumors. But there was little interest in finding real answers, or the people would have asked Jesus to explain things to them. We may even wonder why He didn't simply address their questions directly and clear up some of their misconceptions.

What we see at this last feast which Jesus attended before His final Passover is Jesus teaching those who would be taught, and speaking in riddles to those who would not. Many who questioned Him were questioning in unbelief. To them, He did not present logical arguments. He did not try to reason them into believing, to market Himself. He did not plead with people to believe in Him. He spoke with enough bold, clear truth to bring people to faith, if they didn't stubbornly resist His Holy Spirit.

Later, Jesus would explain many things to His disciples in private, including what He meant about "going away" in a "little while" (cf. John 16:16-28). He was foretelling His death and resurrection. So also He has explained many things to us through the Scriptures of the Apostles, if we will only listen. But whether or not we understand everything the Bible says, we have enough clear words of Jesus to know Him and to trust Him. And whether or not we can give crystal clear explanations of His Word to those around us, we can trust that the simple message of Law and Gospel is enough to convert those who hear, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, help us always to submit our human wisdom to Your divine wisdom. Enlighten our eyes by Your Holy Spirit and help us to understand Your Word rightly, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Just as Jesus offered “living water” to the woman at the well (cf. John 4), so He calls out to the crowds in today’s reading, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink” (John 7:37). To come to Jesus is to believe in Him for salvation. To drink is to receive the Holy Spirit, and with Him the forgiveness of sins, rebirth, and eternal life. The evidence of the Holy Spirit, who is given to all who believe in Jesus, would appear on the Day of Pentecost, when the outward signs of the Spirit “flowed” from the believers like rivers of living water.

These things have been revealed to us by the same Holy Spirit, through the witness of the apostles and the preaching of the Word, not by the wisdom or authority of any human being. The religious leaders in today’s lesson rejected Jesus as the Christ and mocked the ignorant crowds for trusting Jesus instead of trusting their own religious leaders. While God has appointed ministers in the world, we know that not all ministers preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified. They don’t all direct us to trust in Him in order to be justified before God. Watch out for those who don’t. Give thanks for those who do, and drink deeply of the Holy Spirit as He comes to you through the Word that is preached. And from that faith let all the fruits of the Spirit flow into your life, with love and with all the virtues of a godly Christian.

Prayer: Lord, our sins have caused us to hunger and thirst for righteousness. We thank You for calling us by the Gospel and for filling us with the righteousness of Your Son, even as we ask for the continued guidance of Your Spirit. Amen.

“And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias.”

Earlier this week we observed that eleven was the ‘wrong’ number. Jesus is Israel reduced down to one holy Man. In calling twelve disciples, our Lord was making for Himself a New Israel, and that is us, the holy Church.

The Eleven also knew that there needed to be a twelfth. There were qualifications that twelfth man would have to meet: one who had been with them for the whole of the Lord’s ministry, and one who was a witness of His resurrection. But two men were found to meet those qualifications. How does one decide? How would people answer today? Which one is the better public speaker? Which one is healthier, stronger, more attractive, more dynamic? The disciples have none of that. They simply entrust the matter to the Lord, and they draw lots.

So too today; by whatever earthly mechanism a man is made a pastor, we trust God to use that to place the right man in the right place at the right time. And then we rejoice to receive the sin-forgiving gifts--Word and Sacrament--which God has called that man to distribute.

Prayer: Oh God, You have told us that with Your called and ordained servants You place ‘spiritual treasure in earthen vessels.’ Grant us grace to overlook the earthenness of the vessels, and instead to receive all the spiritual treasures that You give us through them. Amen.

“And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them.”

St. Luke gives us two glimpses of our Lord’s Ascension, one at the beginning of Acts, and this one at the end of Luke. The last thing this “glimpse” records our Lord doing is blessing them. And with what words did our Lord bless them? The Aaronic benediction that we hear at the end of our Sunday service? Something else? We are not given the words. We don’t know. What we do know is that “He lifted up His hands.” And that says quite a lot, doesn’t it? Nail holes from when He was crucified, but there He stands, alive and ascending into heaven.

The nail holes tell us that the payment for the sin of the world has been made. The living Jesus tells us that His payment has been accepted, and death itself has been overthrown. All that, in and of itself, is the blessing. The disciples joyfully praise God, and we join them. Our salvation has been accomplished, and we rejoice to tell others that through faith in Him they may be justified and made heirs of eternal life together with us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, I thank and praise You for Your holy life, Your atoning death, Your glorious resurrection, and now also for Your ascension into heaven; all for my salvation. Fill my heart with gratitude, and by Your Holy Spirit open my mouth to speak of it. Amen.

Moses commanded the Old Testament Israelites, “He who commits adultery with his neighbor’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death” (Leviticus 20:10). It takes two to commit adultery. Where was the adulterous man in today’s reading? The Pharisees didn’t bring him, because they weren’t interested in understanding or fulfilling the Law of Moses. They were hoping Jesus would openly speak against the Law so that they could hold it against Him. He wasn’t about to play along.

Sometimes people get distracted by wondering what Jesus was writing on the ground. That’s not the focus. His laid-back writing on the ground was His way of showing He took the Pharisees’ accusation against the woman as seriously as they did; that is, not at all. It also allowed them time to ponder His words, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.”

Jesus did not come to hold the secular office of judge, jury, and executioner, though He will do those things when He comes again. He came the first time to call sinners to repentance and to remove God’s condemnation from those who repented, as He did for the woman caught in adultery. God has never desired the death of the sinner, “but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11). “Go and sin no more,” Jesus said to the pardoned woman. So He says to all pardoned sinners, that we may walk daily in repentance and faith, and be filled with joy and hope as we cling to Him, in whom alone we have forgiveness.

Prayer: Father in heaven, move us by Your mercy to show the same mercy to others, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Cantate Sunday

Chapter V. Of the Law and the Gospel.

Statement of the Controversy.

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

Affirmative.

Pure Doctrine of God's Word.

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

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

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

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

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

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

THURSDAY, MAY 21: ACTS 1:1-11

ASCENSION

"Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven?"

"Why?" the angels ask. In our language "why" can mean one of two things: it can mean "what caused you to do this," or "what do you hope to accomplish by doing this?" What caused the Apostles to gaze up into heaven is easy: what would any of us do if we saw someone float up into the sky until a cloud hid them? The angels are asking the second question, "what do you men hope to accomplish by gazing up into the sky?"

There are many things we do which, in terms of the buildup, are entirely understandable. But the wiser question is to ask what we will accomplish by our action. The Apostles know they have things to do. And those things are not going to happen by gazing at the sky. God grant us wisdom to ask ourselves "why" in the sense of "what will this accomplish?" May our words and actions be those that accomplish the work our Lord has given us to do.

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

“Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’.”

“The eleven disciples,” it says. There ought to be twelve. There is no room for confidence in the number. They meet at a mountain; good things seem to happen on mountains. But this mountain is in Galilee, Galilee “of the Gentiles.” There is no room for confidence in this mountain. While the disciples worshiped Jesus, even then it says “some doubted.” It doesn’t even say which ones! They’re all suspects. So, there is no room for confidence even in the disciples’ confidence.

Then we hear Jesus: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” There! There is where we may place our confidence, there alone! Our confidence is in Christ alone, and there it must stay. God guard us against the fatal mistake of adding a little something to Christ, as if to make it all a little more certain! He locates Himself in the teaching and in Baptism, so we cling to these as we cling to Jesus. And thus we live in the promise that He is with us all our days.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, grant me sincerely to trust only in You and in the gifts by which You come to me: gifts of Word and Sacrament. Keep me steadfast therein all my days. Amen.

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

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

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

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

Negative.

Contrary Doctrine which is Rejected.

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

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome

MONDAY, MAY 11: JOHN 8:12-20

CANTATE

When we think about the life of Jesus, the time when He walked this earth, one phrase is important to remember: "...for His hour had not yet come." This phrase reminds us of a very important aspect of our Lord, that He is in control at all times. It was only a few weeks ago that we entered that most holy of weeks when His hour had come, the time appointed by God before the foundation of the world. At no time was Jesus not in control: "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father" (John 10:17-18).

St. Paul wrote: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Therein we find comfort. If Christ was, and is, in complete control of His life, and if you are in Christ, then Christ is in complete control of your life, even to the point of your death. When your hour comes, He will lay down your life and has the "power" to take it again. The Christian's final words are those of the Lord, "Into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

Prayer: O Lord, You have given me life; when my hour comes grant me a peaceful end and usher me into Your presence. Amen.

TUESDAY, MAY 19: JOHN 10:6-10

ROGATE

"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

The holy Faith is slandered in many ways, but among them is this: "If I become a Christian, I will have to give up the 'fun' things in life." This is simply not true (although some secularists might, with their legalism, give some credence to the "if it's fun, don't do it" mentality). Jesus tells us specifically that He came to give us life--abundant life.

First and foremost, of course, that means the life of the world to come. He promises us eternal life, free from pain, want, hunger, or disease. We will be freed from our old sinful natures, and will for the first time, and forever onward, know what it feels like not to have a single sinful inclination anywhere in us! Yet our Lord comes to give us abundant life in this world too. What could be more life-affirming than to know that we have been made right with God, the Maker of heaven and earth?

So we get to live this life at peace: forgiven, loved by God, and honored with manifold opportunities to serve Him and our neighbor, in service that makes our lives truly meaningful. God grant us His grace, that with grateful hearts we may both do His will, and genuinely enjoy it.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, thank You for the gift of life, and the gift of life eternal. Let Your Spirit work in me, that doing Your work may be a genuine pleasure to me. Amen.

“And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.”

Sheep recognize the voice of their shepherd. It is a simple analogy, really. We who belong to the Lord will recognize His voice when we hear it. We will know it because we are familiar with it. At some banks part of their training for new bank tellers is to put them in a room for a whole day with nothing but real money. They count it, and feel the ridges on the presidents' coats. They smell it. They tear it. They rub it on white paper, which it smudges, because the ink never dries. They see the fibers and the watermarks. This is counterfeit recognition training. The theory is, if they get familiar enough with real money, they will recognize it; something won't feel right when they encounter a fake.

This is how we should be with the voice of our Shepherd. We ought to familiarize ourselves with His voice, with the words and teachings of Holy Scripture, that we can faithfully test the spirits, avoid lying hirelings, and support faithful servants of our Lord. God grant us to know the saving truth of Jesus' words so that nothing can lead us astray.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, grant me ever to grow in my knowledge and understanding of Your Holy Word, that Your Holy Spirit would keep me in the one true faith in Jesus. Amen.

Today's reading from St. John's Gospel picks up where we left off yesterday, “Then Jesus said to them again, ‘I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come.’” Prior to Jesus' crucifixion, the church leaders of that time were able to talk to God face-to-face. They had opportunity after opportunity to repent and believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. But they refused.

The proof that Jesus was the Messiah was not going to be demonstrated simply through signs and wonders. The final proof that Jesus was the very Son of God would be found in the fact they crucified Him: “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He.” The final proof of Jesus' divinity is known through His crucifixion. Even though they proved the Scriptures to be true by crucifying Jesus, they would not believe.

After Jesus' resurrection the church leaders did seek Jesus, albeit for the wrong reasons. Even though they crucified Jesus, there would have been forgiveness for them had they repented. However, they were “of this world” and not of Christ. They sought His body in order to prove Jesus wasn't alive. But alas, they could not find what didn't exist--a dead Jesus. Through the faith God has given us we know our Lord is alive forever!

Prayer: Almighty God, grant unto me that I may without any doubt believe Your great and precious promises. Amen.

I would draw your attention to one little word from today's reading: "in". This little word makes all the difference in understanding what you have just read. Two distinctively different groups of people were listening to Jesus, yet both groups were believers. What makes this all the more strange is that some of these believers have the devil as their father.

Now, we usually think of believers as having God as their Father. But this isn't exactly true. We need only listen to James: "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!" (James 2:19). The difference between the two groups of believers rests upon that one word, "in". "As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him..."

Those who reject God's forgiveness remain enslaved by sin, and have the devil as their father and master. There is no hope found in them because they only look within themselves. As God's Word proclaims, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man." (Matthew 7:21-23)

However, those who do not look within, but rather believe in Jesus "abide in [His] word." It is the Word of God that gives life to believers. Believers in Jesus know the truth because the Word of forgiveness of sins brings freedom to those enslaved by sin. Believers in Jesus are now free to live as Christ works in them and through them in service to others.

Prayer: Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word. Amen.

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

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

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

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Rogate Sunday

Chapter IX.

Article XXI. Of the Invocation of Saints.

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

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

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

THURSDAY, MAY 14: JOHN 9:1-13

CANTATE

Did you notice? The blind man didn't say anything to Jesus. There was no "Lord, have mercy." Neither did he say, "I want to see." Jesus simply healed the man.

Some Christians espouse the idea that a person must do something to be a Christian: they must ask Jesus into their hearts, or they must surrender to Him, or they must decide to follow Jesus. But the blind man asked nothing of Jesus, and Jesus did everything. Jesus anointed his eyes and told him to go wash them. Without Jesus doing and telling, the man would have remained blind.

This is how it works with faith. God does everything because we, who are dead in trespasses and sins, can do nothing. The Holy Spirit, "the Lord and Giver of Life," comes and anoints us with God's Word. The Law convicts and crushes us, and the Gospel gives us new life. We are washed in the waters of Holy Baptism and our eyes are opened to the Truth.

The truth that this is all God's work was spoken by Jesus: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him." There's that word "in" again. What God was doing to the blind man was not revealed by the blind man, but rather "revealed in him" by God. At this point, the man simply knows that Jesus put clay on his eyes, had him wash them in the pool of Siloam, and he could see. The fullness of this revelation would come later (this Saturday's reading) when Jesus reveals to the man that He is the Messiah.

Prayer: O Lord, enlighten our minds by Your Holy Spirit, that we may be led into all truth. Amen.

There is quite a contrast between the man who was born blind and his parents. His parents were afraid of the church leadership for fear of being put out of the synagogue. They could have confessed the truth and said, “Jesus healed our son who was blind from birth.” But being excommunicated from the synagogue would bring social and financial problems they did not want to endure.

On the other hand, the man who was healed fearlessly spoke the truth of what had happened to him. The parents got to stay in the synagogue, while their son was thrown out.

So what do we learn from this? For some people the take away might be, “Don’t rock the boat. Look at what happened to that guy.” Sadly, that is the approach taken by many people when it comes to church doctrine and practice. They fear what others think more than they fear what God has to say. People find it easier to not “rock the boat” and find excuses to explain why they remain in heterodox church bodies. They may even appeal to church officials as ones who know more, even when those church officials speak contrary to what Scripture plainly says.

God calls us to speak the truth and avoid “those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned” (Romans 16:17). The man who was healed was cast out of the synagogue, but would later be found by Christ and placed into the Church.

Prayer: Bring to naught, O Christ, the errors which bring divisions in Thy Church. Amen.

Earlier this week it was noted how the man who was once blind did nothing. There was no “Lord, have mercy.” Neither did he say, “I want to see.” Out of God’s abundant grace and mercy He healed the man. And as often happens, when God does a wonderful thing in a person’s life, Satan goes on a search-and-destroy mission. In this case, the man is thrown out of the synagogue.

So it is in the life of every Christian. “Receive the sign of the Cross, both upon the forehead and upon the heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ crucified.” At your Baptism you were marked, and that mark became a target in the eyes of Satan. He now sets his sights on you to destroy what God has done in you.

The hymn “A Mighty Fortress” speaks of Satan: “on earth is not his equal.” What does one do when feeling left alone in this battle? We find comfort in these words: “...and when He [Jesus] had found him...” That says it all! Christ is always seeking His sheep. He knows the dangers you face. He finds you again and again in order to protect you and save you. He does not wait for you to come running or crawling to Him before He acts.

While from our perspective it may appear we have been left alone to fend for ourselves, God calls us to view our lives as He sees them: Baptized into Christ. By virtue of your baptism you are inextricably united to Christ. He is always with you to guard and protect you.

Prayer: O Lord, take away the weakness of my flesh so I may not doubt Your presence, but grant me faith to trust You unwaveringly. Amen.