

Clergy of the ELDoNA, affiliated congregations and missions, and sister churches

Rt. Rev. James Heiser

Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

Rev. Jeffrey Ahonen

Good Shepherd L.C., Tony, WI; Alpha & Omega Lutheran Mission, Winter, WI; Apologia Lutheran Mission, Deer Park, WI; Peace L.C., Ironwood, MI

Rev. Ernest Bernet

Discipleship L. C., Mineral Wells, TX

Rev. David Carver

St. Paul L. C., Taylorsville, NC

Rev. Jerald Dulas

Sts. Peter & Paul L. C., Simpsonville, SC; All Saints Lutheran Mission, Myrtle Beach, SC; St. Michael & All Angels Lutheran Mission, Martinez, GA

Rev. Douglas Handrich

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

Rev. Kent Heimbigner

Charity Lutheran Church, Burleson, TX

Rev. Michael Henson

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL; Memphis Lutheran Mission, Lakeland, TN

Rev. Daniel Mensing

Faith Lutheran Church, Beaverton, OR

Rev. Randy Moll

Good Shepherd L.C., Rogers, AR

Rev. Mark Mueller

Redeemer L. C., Cambridge, MN

Rev. John Rutowicz

St. Boniface Lutheran Church, Niles, MI

Rev. Paul Rydecki

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Las Cruces, NM; Sts. Peter & Paul Lutheran Mission, Silver City, NM

Rev. Josiah Scheck

Christ Lutheran Church, Richmond, MO

Rev. Eric Stefanski

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Harrison, AR; Emmanuel Lutheran Mission, Conway, AR

Rev. Joshua Sullivan

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Kerrville, TX; Faith Lutheran Mission, Leander, TX

Rev. Timothy Tolar

St. Luke Lutheran Church, Kenai, AK
Homer Lutheran Mission, Homer, AK

Rev. Brandon Warr

St. Patrick Lutheran Church, Chipley, FL

Rev. Dcn. Gary Harroun

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Dcn. Martin Jackson

Good Shepherd L. C. Rogers, AR

Rev. Dcn. Anthony Oncken

Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

Rev. Dcn. Floyd Smithey

Sts. Peter & Paul Lutheran Church, Simpsonville, SC; Sts. Peter & Paul Lutheran Mission, Knoxville, TN

International Fellowship:

Rev. Fillmore Alvarez

St. Mary's Lutheran Church
Navotas City, Philippines

Rev. Carlos Marin

Iglesia Confesional de Colombia
Medellin, Colombia

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



**ATTENDEES OF THE 2021 DIOCESAN FAMILY CAMP AT
HOLY CROSS LUTHERAN CHURCH (KERRVILLE, TEXAS)**

AUGUST 1—SEPTEMBER 4, 2021

**A PUBLICATION OF
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF
NORTH AMERICA**

The Calendar

August 1 Trinity 9 TLH 625
 August 8 Trinity 10 TLH 420
 August 10 (T) St. Laurence, Deacon and Martyr
 August 15 Trinity 11/St. Mary Theotokos TLH 369
 August 22 Trinity 12
 August 24 (T) St. Bartholomew, Apostle
 August 29 Trinity 13/The Beheading of St. John the Baptist
 TLH 347

ST. IGNATIUS LUTHERAN SEMINARY—Seminary classes resume on Tuesday, September 7.

DIOCESAN VISITATION SCHEDULE—The diocesan visitations for 2021 continue. Bishop Heiser visited Pr. Schultz and the saints of Divine Savior Lutheran Church (Niwot, CO) on July 4 (the pastor and congregation are independent of any synod). He visited Pr. Mensing and Faith Lutheran Church (Beaverton, Oregon) on July 10 and 11 and Pr. Rydecki and Emanuel Lutheran Church (Las Cruces, New Mexico) on July 16. He participated in the Family Summer Camp at Holy Cross L.C. in Kerrville, Texas the week of July 19–23, preaching for two of the services and teaching two sessions of the classes on the Church Calendar. The bishop participated in the SouthEast Pastor's Conference hosted by Saints Peter & Paul Lutheran Church in Simpsonville, SC on July 26 and 27 and conducted his visitation of Pr. Carver and St. Paul L.C. (Taylorsville, NC) on July 28. Further scheduled visitations include:

AUGUST 11 Pr. Scheck & Christ L.C. (Richmond, MO)
 AUGUST 12 Pr. Handrich & Holy Cross L.C. (Peoria, IL)
 AUGUST 13 Pr. Rutowicz & St. Boniface L.C. (Niles, MI)
 AUG. 14–15 Pr. Henson, Dcn. Harroun & Trinity L.C. (Herrin, IL)
 AUGUST 17 Pr. Stefanski & Holy Trinity L.C. (Harrison, AR)
 AUGUST 18 Pr. Moll, Dcn. Jackson & Good Shepherd L.C.
 (Rogers, AR)



From around the diocese

Episcopal Visitations are a combination of formal and informal elements. Pastors and deacons provide a overview of their ministry in the past year, reporting on catechesis, Bible classes, providing sermons for review, etc. Often, there is a Divine Service or Vespers, and an opportunity for the Bishop to speak with members of the Parish. Here are a few pictures from the re-

cent visitations with Pastor Mensing and Pastor Rydecki and the congregations which the Lord has entrusted to their care.



“He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey...” This is not according to modern pet-loving ideas, but with older sensibilities: anonymously and to keep his stench and disease away. No mourning, no supplanting the memory of his evil, because he didn’t look for the Messiah, but abused God’s people. “Woe to him,” even if the unbelieving world mourns his departure, his name is not in God’s Kingdom.

We could easily apply this reading to today’s world, against representatives of a political party, industry, lobby, etc., because we see Jehoiakim-like behavior all around. But two things should prevent us. First, applying these words to our opponents without being ready to apply them to ‘our side’ violates verse 18. Nothing should keep us from calling all evil “evil”, even when sentimentalism or ‘party loyalty’ would deter us. If we fail, we put ourselves in danger of being those who try to remove the specks in the eyes of others without first removing the logs in our own.

Second, we must personally heed the history of Jehoiakim, so that neither we, nor our children, repeat it: his father (Josiah) was a righteous king who led a reformation and looked toward the coming of Christ. Because of this, Josiah governed with equity and sought the salvation and blessing of his people. We must, therefore, have our eyes fixed on Jesus by the hearing of His Word and the reception of His Body and Blood, so that we do not let self-interested loyalties displace God and His Word, lest we become worthy of the same condemnations.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain that which Thou dost promise, make us to love that which Thou dost command; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.



Family Camp at Kerrville—a few pictures cannot summarize such a wonderful week of study and sharing time with friends. Everyone had a great time!



SE Pastor’s Conference—Pr. Dulas hosted a two day conference in Simpsonville, SC. Pr. Warr, Pr. Dulas, Bp. Heiser, Pr. Carver, Pr. Stefanski, and Dcn. Smitley (not pictured) participated.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity

The Seventh Commandment. Thou shalt not steal.

After our person and wife or husband, temporal property is the nearest good. That also God wishes to have secure, and has commanded that no one shall damage or injure his neighbor in his possessions. For to steal is nothing else than to get another's property wrongfully into our possession. This comprehends all kinds of advantage in all kinds of trade to the disadvantage of our neighbor. This is indeed such a widespread and common crime, but so little regarded and observed, that it exceeds all measure, so that if all thieves—who nevertheless do not wish to be considered such—were to be hanged to the gallows, the world would soon be desolate and would be without both executioners and gallows. For as we have just said to steal is not only to rob our neighbors' coffers and pockets, but to be too far-reaching in the market, in all stores and shops, wine- and beer-cellars, workshops, and in short whenever we trade or take or give money, goods or work.

As, for instance, to explain this somewhat roughly for the common mass of people, so that it may be seen how godly we are: When a man-servant or maid-servant does not serve faithfully, and does damage, or at least allows it to occur when it could be prevented, or otherwise from indolence, idleness or malice neglects the goods entrusted to him, to the spite and vexation of master and mistress. And when this is done purposely (for I do not speak of unavoidable casualties), you can dispose of thirty, forty dollars a year, which if another had taken secretly he would be hung by the rope. But you even bid defiance and make your boast of it, and no one dare call you a thief! ... Likewise also in the market and in common trade this course prevails to the greatest extent, where one openly defrauds another with defective goods, false measures, weights, coins, and by taking advantage by expert arts and uncommon transactions or dexterous inventions, in short by getting the best of the bargain and wantonly oppressing and distressing him. And who indeed can even recount or imagine it all?—The Large Catechism, ¶223-225, 227

FRIDAY, SEPT. 3: HABAKKUK 1:12–2:4 13TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Named for the Greek letter 'Chi' ('X'), a chiasm is a pattern: thing-one is said, thing-two is said, thing-two is repeated, thing-one is repeated. Habakkuk 2:4 can be understood as an 'antithetical chiasm' (one where the repeating parts contradict!): 1) "Behold the proud"—pride; 2) "His soul is not upright in him"—uprightness lacking; 2) "But the just shall live"—uprightness present; 1) "by his faith"—humility.

Pride is the antithesis of faith. By pride, Lucifer falls and then tempts Adam to fall; by faith in the Second Adam, man is restored. The soul that is not upright is in death (even while the body lives); thus, only the just one is alive.

These observations can form a syllogism (two true statements necessarily leading to a conclusion): 1) Since one is only alive if he is just (even if the body is in death) and 2) righteousness is only by faith (not by pride/works), 3) life is by faith—that is, the one with faith in Christ has everlasting life.

The works of the proud are not considered, because "his soul is not upright"; the righteous soul is alive because works are only considered in light of his receiving righteousness by faith. Thus, faith is the instrument that receives, righteousness is the condition created, and the result of being in that condition is ongoing (even eternal) life, so "The just shall continue to have life by his faith."

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain that which Thou dost promise, make us to love that which Thou dost command; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

St. Paul was careful in his use of his status and vocation, whether in the Church or in the world. With the authority that a deacon could call upon, that a pastor could, that a bishop could, certainly as an apostle, he could simply say, “This is what God’s Word says!” Or he could say, “This is what is necessary for the work I am doing!” or, “This is most sanctified and reverent, so do it!” Instead, he says, “Since you are a faithful Christian, I appeal to you out of your love for Christ that reflects His love for you: help me!”

Paul maximizes this wisdom in his report of Onesimus being brought to Christ. Philemon suffered the financial loss of his legal slave fleeing and, worse, the knowledge that, even if found and returned, both slave and master would live in fear of ongoing strife between them, of future fleeing, and so on. Now, Onesimus who had been useless and lost to Philemon would, if Philemon insisted, return as a new man in Christ and serve him, not considering it any more as slavery, but serving a brother in Christ.

Paul invites Philemon to do the same: as one who would be willing to come to Paul and serve in the spread of the Gospel that saved him, Philemon could do this, instead, costing him nothing at all. He could give up the slave who had departed anyway, and commend him as a brother who will serve the Lord. What an amazing example of Christian intercession and reconciliation in this letter!

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain that which Thou dost promise, make us to love that which Thou dost command; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“Do not fear, little flock.” Do not fear what? Do not fear that somehow you won’t have enough to live on, as if everything depended on you and your anxious toiling. There is no need to cling to your possessions and hoard them away. Your Father is pleased to give you His kingdom! So you are free to part with what you have and give it away, showing mercy toward others instead of worrying about yourself.

Do not let fear for earthly things cripple you, so that you waste your time worrying. Instead, focus on Christ’s return. He hasn’t put you in charge of fixing the world; He has given you a certain set of responsibilities, according to your vocations. Be about those responsibilities, so that Jesus finds you carrying them out when He returns to bring you into the heavenly kingdom your Father is so pleased to give.

Some have been given the vocation of the holy ministry, of the oversight of the household of God. They are charged with caring for souls, loving God’s people selflessly, preaching faithfully, warning earnestly, and comforting tenderly. Pastors are encouraged in today’s reading, but also warned. If they neglect their office, if they become worldly, if they mistreat their members or fellow pastors, if they fall into gross sin and vice, then they will be surprised by Jesus’ return and cast out of the kingdom. So pray for them, and encourage them in their service.

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

The unjust steward in Sunday's Gospel (Luke 16:1-9) did favors for others to help himself. But God's children have a much better reason to do good, namely, because our Father is good, and we are called to be like Him.

St. Paul's words to the Ephesian Christians reflect Jesus' teaching in today's reading: "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children" (Ephesians 5:1). We are to love as God loves. But whom does God love? It's true, He has a special love for His baptized and believing children. But Jesus reminds us that God loves also His enemies and does good even to those who hate Him, those who ignore Him, and those who offer Him no word of thanks or praise. That is a good thing for us, because we were once among His enemies. As Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). It was that very word of God's love for unworthy sinners that brought us out of our natural hostility toward Him to become those who now love Him.

Those who love God are commanded to be like God in showing love and kindness to our enemies, to those who hate us, mistreat us, or ignore us, and to do it for no other reward than this, that we are privileged to be like our merciful Father in heaven.

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

"To be justified" in the Bible was a legal term meaning, "Based on the evidence, I find you 'not guilty'." What evidence gains or displays such a verdict from God? Someone else has been found guilty of our crimes, St. Paul says! Jesus "has been made sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21), so the Triune God considers it conclusive justice for Him to be punished in our place. With Him as our 'Plea,' we are declared guiltless by God, not by mistaken identity, but by willing substitution, mercifully accepted by the Judge and the Substitute, in which the Holy Spirit gives us confidence.

St. James asks whether we have truly received that declaration. It produces certain things in us, and excludes their opposite—though our flesh can display conduct that blurs the content of our faith. Do our works show trust in Christ's substitution for us, or a lack of trust? James's words bring self-examination and redirect us to Christ—to true appreciation for what He gave to save us, and from what and to what we have been saved.

What Abraham believed was shown in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac: God would fulfill His promise of a Descendant through Abraham's childless son, regardless of his death! It was also shown in his giving Lot the choicest lands, not dismissing him with, "Be clothed and fed..." If your works do not display a true and right faith, it is not better works that you need, but the Sacrament's nourishment of your faith, so that it lives and breathes God's grace to your neighbor.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain that which Thou dost promise, make us to love that which Thou dost command; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Lord understands the fallen reality in which we live. He warns us not to harden our hearts, reasoning about our neighbor how we might get the most out of him, “lest it become sin among you,” and His laws governing unfortunate circumstances be taken as legitimizing exploitation. He teaches concerning what should never be and never would have been if we had remained sinless in Eden. Against such, we are to “help and befriend our neighbor in every bodily need” and to help him protect and improve his possessions and income, to retain his inheritance, spouse, and workers, not to betray or slander him, but protect his reputation, and so on, as the Small Catechism says.

Jesus repeats what verse 11 says, that the poor will always be with us. Whether it is a political dreamer constructing social policies to “end poverty forever” by oppressing businesses or over-taxing workers, or his opponent who cries, “just make them work!” and “capitalism will prevail!,” we must beware of such utopian claims. God has said, “poverty will always continue” on this earth. Instead of dreaming of ending it, He tells us to open our hands and not let our hearts grieve, to do what will lead our neighbor into the most good, whether he loves or despises us for it. Countrymen-slaves are to be treated as those also paid for when you were, even if not yet brethren. Therefore, your fellow ‘atoned-for,’ not just your brethren through faith, are due such treatment as accords with the grace you have received.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain that which Thou dost promise, make us to love that which Thou dost command; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Jesus holds up two examples for us in today’s reading, one negative, the other positive.

The negative example is the scribe. He loves to be acknowledged for his learning and position and to receive special treatment for it. He should be using his learning and position to serve his fellow Israelites. Instead, he uses his position to mistreat those who are “beneath” him, like the poor widows, for whom he shows no mercy or concern whatsoever. Beware of such people, Jesus says. And beware of becoming like them. Such haughty, impenitent sinners will receive greater condemnation for the position of power they abuse, for the evil they do, and for the good they leave undone. They have neither faith nor love.

On the other hand, the Lord, who always sees what churchgoers put into the offering plate, holds up a poor widow as a shining example. She has no position of power. Quite the opposite! The pennies she places in the offering box look like nothing compared with the large sums being given by the rich. But God sees things as they really are. The rich will not suffer any loss for what they give; they will have plenty left over for themselves. The widow has little to live on as it is, but gives what she has to the Lord, out of love for Him, trusting in His merciful providence. She has both faith and love. May her example inspire the same in us!

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

As Christ rattles off the list of witnesses that testify about Him (John the Baptist, His own works, the Father Himself), He finally comes to the greatest witness of them all: the Holy Scriptures.

The very Scriptures that the Jews were citing to prove Jesus wrong were the ones that had been pointing to Jesus all along. In just the first five books of the Bible, the writings of Moses, Jesus was revealed over and over: the Word by whom all things were created (Gen. 1), the Seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), the Seed of Abraham and Heir of the Old Testament (Gen. 17:8), Jacob's Ladder (Gen. 28:12), the Hero from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), the Passover Lamb (Ex. 12), the Mercy Seat on the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:21), the true Temple and Tabernacle of God (Ex. 29:45), the true atoning Sacrifice for sin (Lev. 16, etc.), the Star that would rise out of Jacob (Num. 24:17), the Joshua who would lead God's people into the Promised Land of heaven (Deu. 1:38), the Prophet like Moses to whom the people of Israel were commanded to listen (Deu. 18:15,18).

Most of the Jews didn't listen. But that is all the more reason why we must. "Search the Scriptures," Jesus commands. And listen to them as they reveal God's plan of salvation for sinners, a plan that centers around Jesus Christ, crucified and risen again. Believe the witnesses! Believe in Him!

Prayer: Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Moses is commanded to begin with exactly the words God used in making His treaty at Mt. Sinai. The Lord identifies Himself in terms of His essence and His actions. "I am the Lord," God says; that is, "Yahweh/Jehovah," meaning "He Who Is Self-Existing and Dependent on No Other." That is the underlying reality of His name, indicated by the "I am that I am," which He gave Moses at the burning bush. He is His own cause and, therefore, none can end Him, supersede Him, deliver from Him, or prevent His doing as He promises or as He threatens.

When He joins this already awesome name with "God" ("Elohim," "Mighty One"), He does so in a way that makes those names a comfort and kindles the desire to do as He says: He inserts the pronoun "your." "I am the Lord, your God," which is a shorthand reminder of the fuller expression in Exodus 20, which continues, "who brought you out of Egypt, the House of Bondage; You will have no other gods." In this reading (and the chapters of Leviticus that follow), He fleshes out some specifics in how they were to live as those saved from bondage by His grace alone.

This prefatory statement of principle governs our understanding of what He commands and of how He gives righteousness: not by walking after the ways or wisdom of those humans and false gods He was conquering, but only by seeing from His Word what is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life," even our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain that which Thou dost promise, make us to love that which Thou dost command; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity

Article XVIII.

Of the Freedom of the Will, they teach, that man's will has some liberty for the attainment of civil righteousness, and for the choice of things subject to reason. Nevertheless, it has no power, without the Holy Ghost, to work the righteousness of God, that is, spiritual righteousness; since the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God [1 Cor. 2:14]; but this righteousness is wrought in the heart when the Holy Ghost is received through the Word. These things are said in as many words by Augustine in his *Hypognosticon*, book iii: "We grant that all men have a certain freedom of will in judging according to [natural] reason; not such freedom, however, whereby it is capable, without God, either to begin, or much less to complete aught in things pertaining to God, but only in works of this life, whether good or evil. 'Good,' I call those works which spring from the good in Nature, that is, to have a will to labor in the field, to eat and drink, to have a friend, to clothe oneself, to build a house, to marry, to keep cattle, to learn diverse useful arts, or whatsoever good pertains to this life, none of which things are without dependence on the providence of God; yea, of Him and through Him they are and have their beginning. 'Evil,' I call such works as have a will to worship an idol, to commit murder," etc.

They condemn the Pelagians and others who teach that, without the Holy Ghost, by the power of nature alone, we are able to love God above all things; also to do the commandments of God as touching "the substance of the act." For, although nature is able in some sort to do the outward work (for it is able to keep the hands from theft and murder), yet it cannot work the inward motions, such as the fear of God, trust in God, chastity, patience, etc.

—The Augsburg Confession

FRIDAY, AUGUST 6: LUKE 12:54–59

9TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

In every culture, at every time, human beings have been able to read the weather, to some extent, to know what's coming based on what they see. If only people were as skillful at applying the same principle to spiritual things!

At the time of Jesus, all the signs were flashing at the Jews that the "time of their visitation" (cf. Luke 19:44) had come, that the Messiah had arrived, that Jesus was He, and that He was about to offer Himself as the atoning sacrifice for their sins. Other signs were there, too, that judgment was coming on all who stubbornly rejected their Messiah. But many shut their eyes to the signs. Just as a person who is justly accused by another would be wise to reconcile with his adversary before they get to court, so the Jews would have been wise to reconcile with God through Christ before they arrived at the Day of Judgment. If not, there would literally be hell to pay.

Can't you see all the signs pointing to Jesus as the Christ? Can't you see the signs pointing to His imminent return for judgment? There is little time left. You would be foolish to waste it. Instead, be wise. Stay close to God's Word. Live in daily contrition and repentance. Serve God and your neighbor in the little time you have left, as one who has learned from the Holy Scriptures to discern this time.

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

Many people think of worldly wealth as something great and important, a goal to aim at, a status to achieve. But God thinks of wealth differently. He thinks of it as something small, as the least important thing with which He can entrust us.

Jesus reminds us in today's reading that we are always servants, even slaves. The question is, who is our master? In this case, it is either God whom we serve, or Mammon, that is, worldly wealth.

God has given us six directions for managing the wealth which He has placed into our hands and of which He remains the Owner: (1) For the ministry of His Church, (2) for the needs of our family members, including ourselves, (3) for showing kindness to fellow Christians, (4) for showing kindness to all men in general, (5) for paying taxes, and (6) for our own enjoyment as we await the true joy of the next life.

Mammon, on the other hand, has its own directions for its use: (1) For protection against poverty, (2) for a refuge in times of trouble, (3) for hoarding more and more, (4) for exerting power and influence over others, (5) for showing off, and (6) for chasing after the pleasures of this life.

If God is our Master, then let us daily reject the directives of Mammon and earnestly follow those of God. He is worthy of both our trust and our service. Mammon is worthy of neither.

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

As Isaiah pens these first-person words of God, note what is not said: "I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the Lord, do not keep silent..." God does not say, "I am your watchman," rather, "I have set watchmen." God can perform His will however He chooses. He can, and has, worked directly by His own hand (parting the Red Sea, or healing the blind as He did in yesterday's reading). But normally God works through means. Even the precious message of His Gospel and the shepherding of His Church He entrusts to the care of man.

This does not mean that God stands aloof and allows whatever outcome may be. Rather, He provides the tools for His faithful shepherds to do His work and will. This precedent is seen with the prophets, continued with the Apostles, and now lies with the humble hands of today's pastors. Note that verse 6 says they are always on the job, never ceasing to keep watch over the flock, never ceasing to proclaim the truth of God's message. Let us be supportive of our watchmen—our pastors—that they may be effective and joyful in their calling, as they in turn serve God's people.

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

Blindness was a distressingly common disease in Palestine. It came partly from the glare of the sun on unprotected eyes, and partly because people knew little of the importance of cleanliness and hygiene. In addition to the obvious hardship that resulted, the blind would get little aid—having to resort to begging to sustain themselves.

The four Gospels give us six accounts of Jesus healing blindness, some of which overlap. In addition to the healing, the standout in today's reading is the pleas of the two blind men: "Son of David, have mercy on us!" Matthew introduced Jesus as "Son of David" at the start of his Gospel (1:1), but this Messianic title had not been used of Jesus since. There is great irony, then, that the first ones to acknowledge Jesus this way are two men who are blind. Neither the crowds nor the religious leaders—not even Jesus' own disciples—have lauded Him as such.

Marking Jesus as the new and better David was key to recognizing His coming as Messiah. He not only fulfilled prophecy by coming from David's line, but replaced the warrior image of David by bringing the message of eternal peace with God. In our sinful blindness, may we be made as astute as these two blind men—who confessed who Jesus truly is--receiving both their physical and spiritual sight.

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus 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 The Tenth Sunday after Trinity

Of Chapters and Cloisters.

That chapters and cloisters were formerly founded with the good intention to educate learned men and chaste and modest women, and ought again to be turned to such use, in order that pastors, preachers, and other ministers of the Churches may be had, and likewise other necessary persons for the administration of the government in cities and governments, and well-educated maidens for mothers and housekeepers, etc.

If they [i.e., chapters and cloisters] will not serve this purpose, it is better that they should be abandoned or altogether destroyed, rather than continued with their blasphemous services invented by men as something better than the ordinary Christian life and the offices and callings appointed by God. For all this also is contrary to the first chief article concerning the redemption made through Jesus Christ. In addition, that they also (as all other human inventions) have not been commanded, are needless and useless, and besides afford occasion for dangerous and vain labor, such services the prophets call Aven, i.e. pain and labor.

—Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article III

The crowd was not pleased with John's harsh, ascetic manner, and they were not pleased with Jesus' easygoing, merciful manner. Jesus responds with a proverb to make His point.

A more contemporary way of saying it is this: "There's just no pleasing some people." This writer recalls the wisdom of a grandmother, teaching a lesson that has endured in memory some fifty years. With a smile on her face, she quoted this brief poem to her little complainer grandson: "As a rule, man is a fool. When it is hot, he wants it cool; When it is cool, he wants it hot. Always wanting what it's not." Jesus teaches us in a similar way in His Word, with wit and wisdom, with poetry and proverbs. He uses the harsh manner of the Law and the merciful manner of the Gospel. All this He does to save us from ourselves and from our sinful tendency to be our own gods, judging all things according to our childish whims.

The results of salvation are evident in the lives of His people. As Jesus said, "wisdom is justified by her children." Or, as we might say, "The proof is in the pudding..." His grace does have its effect in us. By grace, our salvation translates into living like the saved, and at least in part, we rejoice a little more and complain a little less.

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

You and I live in the "sandwich" of time. Others call it the "now but not yet." In the Apostles' Creed, we live after the part that says "He sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty," and before the next part that says "from thence He will come to judge the quick and the dead."

Isaiah gives us words of great comfort when he says "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing." Certainly, we can use these words as hope for the future, when Christ returns and brings with Him a new heaven and new earth. But in our current state, the tentacles of sin have wrapped themselves around everything and everyone. Therefore, all of us should long for the days ahead when all our troubles--both from without and from within--will cease.

But even now, there are still treasures to enjoy. Christ has not only abolished sin, but He delivers forgiveness for that sin on a regular basis. Through His ever-present Means of Grace we have relief from the sins that so burden us. That realization should cause our blind eyes to see, our ears to open, and our lips to show forth His praise. Salvation unto us has come!

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

After declaring God's promise of judgment upon those who reject Him, Isaiah gives God's opposite pledge for those who repent. "In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness. The humble also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice In the Holy One of Israel." Isaiah uses terms that equate to earthly calamity (deafness, blindness, poverty) to indicate such spiritual conditions make us ripe for the kingdom of God (similar to Jesus' words in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5).

Whatever state of life we find ourselves in, the Christian is always to look ahead. There is danger if we do not. If we live in earthly good fortune, we can become distracted and consumed with the rewards of this world. If we must suffer, we can be tempted to despair in wondering why God doesn't help in time of need. St. Paul addressed this as he reminded the Christians in Rome: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). It takes diligence and commitment to always have such a view. Such a path is only possible through the divine blessings of prayer and the Means of Grace. May we be so committed to each of them.

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

"Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.'"

The temple was not a religious talisman that automatically saved attenders from the consequences of their wrongdoings. The same is true today. Mere church attendance is not saving, in itself. We do not confess salvation "by membership alone," but "by faith alone." Hebrews 11:6, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." God gives by grace, and we receive through faith.

A necessary part of a true, living faith is repentance. Nothing is automatic. For the people of God in Jeremiah's day, they could not simply live as they pleased, expecting that their association with the temple would somehow automatically get them off the hook. Similarly, for God's people in our day, mere association with a congregation does not thereby automatically get them off the hook either. Instead, through faith in Jesus Christ, we are saved by His grace and made right with God. Then, and only then, is our worship also acceptable to Him. As Luther explains in the Catechism, we live our lives of faith by daily remembering our baptism, that is, by daily repentance and receiving forgiveness. Grace gives; faith receives.

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

St. Paul instructs us that there is “no other foundation” than Jesus Christ, for the Church, our salvation, our faith, our hope, and our lives. It is also a common theme in our hymns: 385 “Now I have found the sure foundation, Which holds mine anchor ever sure...”; 427 “How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord...”; 460 “Behold the sure Foundation-stone, Which God in Zion lays...”; 466 “Christ, Thou art the sure Foundation...”; 473 “The Church’s one foundation Is Jesus Christ, her Lord...”.

In *The Lutheran Hymnal*, those are just the hymns that actually have the word ‘foundation’ in the title. That theme, however, appears in at least another nineteen hymns. It is an important theme, so it is important to have constant reminders in the Church, especially since it is so easy in this fallen world to get distracted with ourselves and the things that pertain to us.

It is not about us; it is about Jesus. When we make it about us, our world soon crumbles around us as our opinions prove to be nothing more than shifting sand. However, when we live on the receiving end of God’s grace through Christ, our lives are built on the foundation, cornerstone, and solid rock of His truth, and we stand firm in Him. “On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand...” (TLH 370).

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

Today’s reading provides us with words that should resonate with all of us. As he had faced death, King Hezekiah now reflects on his condition, writing from the depth and darkness of his soul. “I said, ‘In the prime of my life I shall go to the gates of Sheol; I am deprived of the remainder of my years’ ... My life span is gone, taken from me like a shepherd’s tent; I have cut off my life like a weaver. He cuts me off from the loom; from day until night. You make an end of me.” In our weak and sinful nature we cannot appreciate all the glories that await us in heaven. We find ourselves, like Hezekiah, lamenting having to leave what is familiar, even if our earthly life is often difficult. Such is the view of death this side of glory.

That is why God must enlighten us with His promises. And only by the Spirit working through His Word is such a perspective attained. It prompted the king himself to change his frame of mind. “Indeed it was for my own peace that I had great bitterness; but You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back.” Let us be continually reminded of God’s presence, both now and forever, declaring with St Paul: “to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Jairus was one the rulers of the synagogue. As such, he would help with the day-to-day running of the synagogue. Even though most of the rulers would be opposed to Jesus, Jairus came to Him humbly, even falling at Jesus' feet. His daughter was dying and he was begging for Jesus to heal her. In route to Jairus' house, Jesus was interrupted by a woman who had suffered twelve years from a "flow of blood," spending all her money on physicians who failed to help her condition. But the mere touch of Jesus' garment brought her complete relief. Just then came news that Jairus' daughter had died. But much like the raising of Lazarus, this progression from deathly ill to death itself would only do more to convince the crowds that Jesus was the Son of God. And yet, Jesus "commanded them strictly that no one should know it," so that the people would not get the impression He was only a "this world" God.

It is certainly proper that we ask Jesus for help and deliverance in time of hardship. He knows that we are people who are constantly in need of His provision for "daily bread," which takes many forms. But let us never lose sight of His ultimate reason for coming, that He may provide us with deliverance from our prime affliction, that of eternal death.

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

Jesus laments, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" Throughout Scripture, this is a familiar ache in God's compassionate heart: He offers His grace, but it is refused by the many. For example, a portion of Isaiah 30:15 is commonly found on wall plaques: "In returning and rest you shall be saved; In quietness and confidence shall be your strength." Such a nice sentiment for the wall! Unfortunately, that is not the whole verse, and that is not the stark reality that this verse actually depicts. Here is the full verse and the full poignancy of it: "For thus says the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel: 'In returning and rest you shall be saved; In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.' But you would not."

"But you would not." "But you were not willing." Whether spoken by the Lord in Isaiah or in Matthew, the sentiment is the same: He laments the woefully missed opportunities of His grace. In Matthew, Jesus says these words shortly before His death on the cross to save humanity from their sin. However, this gracious offer also is not met with universal acceptance. How sad that fact; how lamentable! Grace gives; faith receives. "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

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

“How like a widow is she”—The prophet Jeremiah compares Jerusalem to a widow and laments her desolation at the hands of the Babylonians, and the exile of Judah’s leading people. However, this is not simply a random tragedy, or the result of just one more war in a war-torn world. No, this event had causes, and the fault is clearly not with the Babylonians, nor with God for allowing it, but with the people of Judah because of their sin against God. “For the LORD has afflicted her, Because of the multitude of her transgressions.”

Actions have consequences; sins receive judgment. This is the world of a just and holy God; this is “the day of His fierce anger.” However, we are also told in Scripture, “The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever” (Psalm 103:8-9). This same Lord who is just and holy is also merciful and gracious. Thus, He speaks to us in both Law and Gospel. In mercy and grace Christ dies in our place, and in repentance our faith receives His death as counting for us. His actions have consequences for us; namely, our sins are forgiven in Him. This too is the world of a just and holy God, who is also merciful and gracious.

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

Article XX. Of Good Works.

In the twentieth article they [the Roman Catholics] lay down these words, viz. that they reject and condemn our statement that men do not merit the remission of sins by good works. This article they clearly declare that they reject and condemn. What is to be said on a subject so manifest? Here the framers of the *Confutation* [the Papists’ answer to the Augsburg Confession] openly show by what spirit they are led. For what in the Church is more certain than that the remission of sins occurs freely for Christ’s sake, that Christ and not our works is the propitiation for sins, as Peter says (Acts 10:43): “To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth on him shall receive remission of sins”? To this Church of the prophets we would rather assent that to these abandoned writers of the *Confutation*, who so impudently blaspheme Christ. For although there were writers who held after the remission of sins men are just before God, not by faith, but by works themselves, yet they did not hold this, viz. that the remission of sins itself occurs on account of our works, and not freely for Christ’s sake.

Therefore the blasphemy of ascribing Christ’s honor to our works is not to be endured. These theologians are now entirely without shame, if they dare to bring such an opinion into the Church. Nor do we doubt that his most excellent imperial majesty and very many of the princes will not allow this passage of the *Confutation* to remain, if they be admonished of it. On this topic we could cite infinite testimonies from Scripture and from the Fathers. But above we have quoted a sufficient number on this subject. And there is no need to testimonies for one who knows why Christ has been given for us, who knows that Christ is the propitiation for our sins. Isaiah says (53:6): “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” The adversaries on the other hand teach that God hath laid our iniquities not on Christ, but on our works. Neither are we disposed to mention here the sort of works which they teach. We see that a horrible decree has been prepared against us, which would terrify us still more if we were contending concerning doubtful or trifling subjects. Now since our consciences understand that by the adversaries the manifest truth is condemned, whose defense is necessary for the Church, and increases the glory of Christ; we easily despise the terrors of the world, and patiently will bear whatever is to be suffered for the glory of Christ and the advantage of the Church.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §78–82

As Christians, who have been reconciled to God by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, we can join with St. Paul in saying: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” If we live on in this world, it is not for ourselves, but for Christ, who died for us and rose again (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:15). We desire to live in such a way that Christ and His saving Gospel are glorified by our lives.

And, if we die, it is gain for us; for Christ has won for us forgiveness for all our sins and everlasting life with Him in heaven. When a believer dies, God’s angels carry his soul to the bosom of Abraham (cf. Luke 16:22). On the Last Day, when Christ Jesus returns, the bodies of believers shall be raised up, reunited with their souls, and be forever with the Lord in the mansions of His Father’s house (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; John 14:1-3; Psalm 16:11).

Can you say: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”? If not, forsake your sinful ways, turn to your Savior now, and trust in Him to wash away your sins in His shed blood and to create in you a new life in Him!

Prayer: Almighty and Everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The council commands Peter and John not to speak in the name of Jesus anymore. However, in the very next chapter they are standing before this council again and say: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (5:29). That is pretty clear.

Unfortunately, this verse has been used and abused recently with respect to public health concerns. Can civil authorities order churches not to meet? Can they regulate how many people attend, and dictate whether or not people wear masks, maintain safe practices of sanitizing common areas, keep “social distancing,” and so forth? Well, yes and no. Too quickly have some in churches used these verses from Acts 4 and 5 to claim that civil rule has no authority in the Church. Not true. The same God who inspired Luke to write these words in Acts also inspired Paul to write: “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves” (Romans 13:1-2). That is pretty clear too!

According to the Lutheran teaching about the two kingdoms, we are good, obedient citizens of both realms, and we only resort to Acts 5:29 when obeying civil rule would obviously violate conscience informed by Scripture.

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

Article XI.

Of Confession, they teach, that Private Absolution ought to be retained in the churches, although in confession an enumeration of all sins is not necessary. For it is impossible, according to the Psalm: “Who can understand his errors?” [Psa. 19:12].

Article XII.

Of Repentance, they teach, that for those that have fallen after Baptism, there is remission of sins whenever they are converted; and that the Church ought to impart absolution to those thus returning to repentance.

Now repentance consists properly of these two parts: One is contrition, that is, terrors smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin; the other is faith, which, born of the Gospel, or of absolution, believes that, for Christ’s sake, sins are forgiven, comforts the conscience, and delivers it from terrors. Then good works are bound to follow, which are the fruits of repentance.

They condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that those once justified can lose the Holy Ghost. Also those who contend that some may attain to such perfection in this life that they cannot sin. The Novatians also are condemned, who would not absolve such as had fallen after Baptism, though they returned to repentance. They also are rejected who do not teach that remission of sins cometh through faith, but command us to merit grace through satisfactions of our own.

—Augsburg Confession

FRIDAY, AUGUST 20: MARK 9:33–37 11TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

We by nature desire greatness. We seek positions of prominence and honor. And, that can be true in regard to the Church. We want to lead and not follow. We wish things would be done our way rather than the way the Church has done them for centuries. Like Jesus’ disciples, we sometimes think we deserve positions of honor in heaven, as though we have done more, been more faithful, or are more devoted followers of Jesus than others.

But what does Jesus say? “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.” Then Jesus set a little child in the middle of them and said, “Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me.”

Like our Lord Jesus, who came into this world not to be served “but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45), His followers are called to serve others, even to give our lives (or use them up) that others might know and trust in Christ Jesus, their Savior.

Who will be the greatest in God’s kingdom? It may not be those who rule and hold positions of honor, but those who sit with little children and tell them of Jesus and what He has done for them.

Prayer: Almighty and Everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

God desires that we be sanctified wholly, that our entire lives be conformed to His perfect will. Believers are “predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29). And, it is God’s Holy Spirit, working through His Word and Sacraments, who not only brings us to repent of our sinful ways and trust in Christ but also works to conform our lives to that of Christ Jesus, our Savior.

In obedience to God’s Word, we seek to “comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all,” not render “evil for evil,” “pursue what is good,” “rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks,” not despise God’s Word, test all things and hold fast to what is good, and “abstain from every form of evil.” And, we are urged not to “quench the Spirit,” not to extinguish His gracious working in our lives by neglecting Word and Sacrament or to grieve Him by disobeying God’s Word and going our own way (cf. Ephesians 4:30).

Rather, we are urged to sow to the Spirit by continuing in the hearing of God’s Word, confessing our sins and receiving God’s absolution, and partaking of Christ’s Supper that He would, through these means, move us to daily contrition and repentance and preserve us in the true faith in Christ our Savior unto life everlasting.

Prayer: Almighty and Everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Most of the time people don’t go to a doctor unless they know something is wrong and see the need for medical treatment. The same is true for our lost and sinful condition. We don’t see our need for a Savior unless we first know our utter sinfulness and the wrath of God against sin. As a person who doesn’t realize cancer is growing and spreading in his body does not go to the doctor, so we, when we don’t realize our sinfulness and the punishment we justly deserve, do not see our need for Jesus Christ and His atonement.

This is where the preaching of God’s Law comes in—it shows us what God requires and shows us our sin, that we do not measure up to what God demands. It also reveals to us the punishment for sin—death and eternal condemnation!

Jesus calls sinners to turn from their sinful ways to Him in faith. Through the preaching of the Law, He reveals our sin; but, through the preaching of the Gospel, He promises forgiveness and everlasting life to those who look in faith to Him and His cross. Jesus came into this world to save sinners, and we all qualify for we all have sinned. But, before we see our need to repent and trust in Christ, we need to see that we are sick with sin and cannot save ourselves.

Prayer: Almighty and Everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In many cases, disabilities and diseases are not the direct result of an individual's sins or of the sins of his parents but are the result of the sin-corrupted world in which we live—a corruption brought upon us as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden.

Why does God allow this sin-corrupted world to go on? “That the works of God should be revealed in [us].” Though all of us are sinners living in a world corrupted and cursed on account of sin, God lets this world go on a little longer so that He might open our eyes to the truth through the preaching of His Word. He desires to move us to repent of our sinful and rebellious ways and trust in Christ and His sacrifice on the cross for sins of the world. “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

When we see our sinfulness and trust in Christ for pardon and forgiveness, this is entirely God's gracious working in us. The Scriptures also tell us: “By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Prayer: Almighty and Everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Some may think that Jesus forgave the woman in Luke 7 because of the great love she showed to Him when she kissed His feet and anointed them with expensive ointment. But the parable Jesus told Simon the Pharisee reveals the truth that this woman loved Jesus because she had come to know and trust in Him for mercy and forgiveness.

If two debtors owed their creditor—one 50 days' wages and another 500—and neither had the means to pay and the creditor forgave them both, which would love the creditor most? Simon rightly said the one who was forgiven most would love most. Jesus then pointed out the great love this woman had shown to him when Simon had not even treated Jesus with the common courtesies normally shown to a guest. Jesus said to Simon, “Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little” (Luke 7:47).

Though Simon and his supper guests questioned Jesus' authority to forgive sins, Jesus assured this woman of forgiveness and told her to “go in peace.” Her faith in Jesus' mercy and forgiveness had saved her.

Prayer: Almighty and Everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.