

## 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

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**Rev. Mark Mueller**

Redeemer L. C., Cambridge, MN

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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  
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St. Patrick Lutheran Church, Chipley, FL

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**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

**IGLESIA LUTERANA MISIONERA DE  
TARAPOTO-PERÚ**

Tarapoto, Perú

# THE LUTHERAN HERALD



**OCTOBER 31–NOVEMBER 27, 2021**

**A PUBLICATION OF  
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NORTH AMERICA**

## The Calendar

November 7	Trinity 25/All Saints' Day	TLH 522/TLH 465
November 11 (R)	St. Martin of Tours, Bishop and Confessor	
November 14	Trinity 26	TLH 36
November 21	Trinity 27	TLH 67
November 28	Advent 1	TLH 95

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**ST. IGNATIUS LUTHERAN SEMINARY**—The Fall Quarter will end on **November 12**. The seminarians will then have a two-week Thanksgiving break before the resumption of classes with the Winter Quarter, which will start on **November 29**. In the Winter Quarter, the classes will be as follows:

E009—Greek Readings 2 (1 hr.)

E003—Psalms (2 hrs.)

H003—Medieval Church (3 hrs.)

H009—Readings in Medieval Theology (1 hr.)

P002—Catechetics (3 hrs.)

**DIOCESAN YOUTUBE CHANNEL**—There is now an official diocesan YouTube channel. Currently, the content consists primarily of several of the seminary Matins services, the diocesan documentary on the Justification: “Justification Made Clear,” which Pr. Carver created for the diocese several years ago; and presentations from the most recent colloquium. The plan is to steadily add content, including more presentations from past colloquia.

Please subscribe to the channel and share videos with those whom you believe would benefit from them. If you search YouTube for “the ELDoNA,” the diocesan channel should be the first option which appears. Thank you!

**SUPPORT FOR PASTOR MARIN AND THE CONFSSIONAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF COLOMBIA**—At the last synod, approximately \$7,000 was designated in aid to the Colombian church and Pastor Marin to cover rent for the church and

SATURDAY, NOV. 27: MAT. 25:31–46 27<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Very often in the Church we emphasize God’s love, grace, and forgiveness; and rightly so. But notions of love, grace, and forgiveness lose their true meaning when false teaching about the Law makes them unnecessary. Our world has no problem accepting a loving God, a gracious God, a forgiving God. The world’s idealized version of God sounds good and doesn’t disturb one’s life of impenitence. But what is forgotten is that in order to have a forgiving God, one must have a need to be forgiven. In order to have a gracious God, one must be in need of grace. In fact, grace and forgiveness lose all meaning without a judgment. If God simply “accepts” everyone as the world would suppose, then no one needs to be pardoned, no one needs to escape a coming catastrophe of judgment.

But Jesus is clear in this, His Mount Olivet discourse to His disciples. There is a judgment coming on the world, and He is the judge. Over and over again in this discourse of Jesus’ we see not a picture of universal acceptance of mankind, but a dividing of people into two categories. Jesus “shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead,” as the Church confesses in her creeds. So we proclaim true love, grace, and forgiveness according to His righteous will, and abide as faithful sheep by His Spirit.

Prayer: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 26: HEB. 12:22–29 27<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY A. TRINITY**

Let us not forget that this epistle is addressed to the “Hebrews,” that is, the Jews. These are Jews who are willing to hear the words of this letter, so this warning is given to them. This reading is a comparison between Mount Sinai and the Christian Church. In the Old Testament we see the assembly of Israel and Moses leading them. Now the saints and holy ones assemble with Jesus leading. The Jews often cared deeply about the giving of the Law through Moses, so the warning to them is this: do not reject the voice of God now.

They were well aware of the wrath poured out on the faithless at Mount Sinai, and that covenant was mediated through a man, Moses. The new covenant is spoken through the second person of the Holy Trinity. What wrath awaits those who spurn the Son of God? The voice of God shook the whole mountain of Sinai, but this time the voice of God will shake heaven and earth. Do not be on the wrong side of that shaking. The Christian Church receives a kingdom that cannot be shaken. We shall be purified, not destroyed. Be counted in the company of Christ’s people.

Prayer: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

parsonage. Also, a commitment was made to solicit additional funds to assist the Pastor and his family. The generosity of saints throughout the diocese led to a total of nearly \$7,700 being raised in support of Pr. Marin and the Colombian church, so that \$6,000 is being sent in personal assistance for Pr. Marin and his family.

**“THE CHURCH OF THE AUGUSTANA” FILES FOR RECOGNITION WITH GOVERNMENT OF THE PHILIPPINES**—Pr. Alvarez and St. Mary’s Lutheran Church (Navotas City) have filed for formal recognition as a Lutheran denomination. However, given the number of “Lutheran” church bodies already recognized by the government, the government denied them the legal use of the name “Lutheran”. The solution? Revert to the old usage of the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and use the name “The Church of the Augustana”. (This is the way the Lutheran Church was formally described in law and in treaties throughout the Reformation/Post-Reformation period.) Once the final approval is granted, the Church will be able to own property, have a bank account, and have a tax exemption.

**DIOCESE RECOGNIZES FELLOWSHIP WITH IGLESIA LUTERANA MISIONERA DE TARAPOTO-PERÚ**—The diocese began discussions with pastors of the Missionary Lutheran Church, Tarapoto-Peru earlier this year. Through a series of email and video meetings between the Peruvian clergy, Pastor Marin, Pastor Rydecki, and Bishop Heiser, numerous theological topics were addressed and clarified, including regarding Justification, the doctrine of the ministry, and various issues of Adiphora. Following discussions between the diocese and the mission church, a formal request for recognition of altar and pulpit fellowship was sent to the diocese. After consideration and discussion of this request, fellowship was recognized. We look forward to working together in this fellowship which the Lord has established.

# Lesson from the Book of Concord The Twenty—Second Sunday after Trinity

## The Fifth Petition.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

This point now pertains to our poor miserable life, which, although we have and believe the Word of God, and do and suffer His will, and are supported by His gifts and blessings, is nevertheless not without sin. For we stumble daily and transgress because we live in the world, among men who do us great wrong and give cause for impatience, anger, revenge, etc. And besides we have Satan at our back, who attacks us on every side, and fights (as we have heard) against all the foregoing petitions, so that it is not possible to stand always firm in such a persistent conflict.

Therefore, there is here again great need to call upon God and to pray: “Dear Father, forgive us our trespasses.” Not as though He did not without, and even before, our prayer forgive sin (for He has given us the Gospel, in which is pure forgiveness) before we prayed or even thought about it. But this is to the intent that we may recognize and accept such forgiveness. For since the flesh in which we daily live is of such a nature that it neither believes nor trusts God, and is ever active in evil lusts and devices, that we sin daily in word and deed, in sins of omission and commission, by which peace of conscience is destroyed, so that it is afraid of the wrath and displeasure of God, and thus loses the comfort and consolation of the Gospel, it is an unceasing necessity that we have recourse to this petition, and obtain therein consolation wherewith to again comfort the conscience.

But this should serve to break our pride and keep us humble. For He has reserves this prerogative to Himself, that if anyone boasts of his godliness and despises others, he may regard himself in the light of this prayer, and thus he will find that he is no better than others, and that in the presence of God all must lower their plumes, and be glad merely that they can attain forgiveness. And let no one think that as long as we live here he can reach such position that he will not need such forgiveness. In short, if God does not forgive without intermission, we are lost.

—The Large Catechism, §85–91

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 25: ZEP. 3:8–9 27<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY A. TRINITY

The Lord is telling his faithful to “wait for Me.” The wicked He mentions in verses two and three will be dealt with. His patience will come to an end for these devouring lions who harm His people.

We see this in our day; vicious anti-Christian men who delight in destroying everything good and Christ-like. Leaders and powerful persons throughout the world who stand against Christ will be overthrown. The sand in the hourglass is running out. God will gather all these nations together and pour out His wrath. Those who are His, and all His good creation, will be purified and transformed. The hardened, the wicked, will be consumed in His “fierce anger.” There is a judgment and all men will have to answer to God.

Then God will give His people a “pure language,” or literally a “pure lip,” to serve Him. We who are repentant and believe will not be destroyed, but transformed so that we may serve our God unencumbered by our sinful flesh. There will be peace within us, and we will be single-minded. And we will be at peace with our brothers and sisters because we will have perfect unity.

Prayer: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

When? When will these things happen? When Jesus speaks of the temple, He is really speaking of Himself. That is our first clue to understanding “when?” His resurrection is the beginning of the end of the age. A new world is breaking forth as Jesus rises from His tomb. The age of the Church proclaiming the Kingdom of God is here. We are living in the end times.

Then Jesus answers His disciples’ question with warnings not to be deceived, and about the violent persecution to come. This gives us the impression that the Church age will be an extended period of time. It will take some time for multiple false Christs and false prophets to arise, for multiple earthquakes and wars and persecutions to happen. We do not know how long this will be, but we have been experiencing it for a while now.

Then Jesus says: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” We are certainly close to that point. There are very few nations on this planet who have not had the Gospel preached to them. Jesus’ second coming is sooner than we think.

Prayer: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The text of our meditation for this day expounds on and emphasizes the proclamation presented in verses ten through twenty. It is provided by Jesus to assist the disciples, and us, to more fully understand and appreciate the magnificence of the parables. It also helps us see the extreme blessing we receive in having these divine riddles revealed to us through faith and the working of the Holy Spirit. If the message of the parable is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, it will emerge from the hiddenness of the parable’s veiled utterance and come to light. In that coming to light the apostles, and all confessing believers coming after them, will play an important role. This is especially true of those who are sent out to preach and teach through the Office of the Holy Ministry; it is therefore of crucial importance that they should have ears to hear, and take heed of what they hear. The measure of faithfulness to the Word which they give will be connected to the measure of the blessing which they will get in their ministry; faithful attention to the Word is of primary importance above all else.

Prayer: O almighty God, who hast knit together Thine elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of Thy Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, grant us grace so to follow Thy blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living that we may come to those unspeakable joys which Thou hast prepared for those who unfeignedly love Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The text before us today is all about the long suffering love of God toward His chosen. His love compels Him to always forgive these Elect if they will return to Him in repentance after their sinful rebellion against His Word and will. The verses we are looking at compose a prayer of Solomon, where this wisest man pleads with the Lord to remember His promise to always hear the prayers and pleas of those He has called to be His Elect.

The prayer presented is part of the dedication of the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem built by Solomon. He prays that the Elect (in this context consisting of the Old Testament Israel) could have a place to come before the Lord and bring their hopes, desires, and needs to Him in prayer and sacrifice, according to the instructions of the Lord delivered to the Elect through Moses. The prayer is worded in such a way as to remind the Israelites of their redemption from slavery and their delivery from captivity in a foreign land at the time of the Exodus. Solomon prophesied about a time when these Old Testament Elect would again turn from their loving Lord and insist on rebelling against His holy Word until He has no choice but to let them be carried into slavery. But the loving Lord continued to call them again and again to repentance.

Prayer: O God, our Refuge and Strength, who art the Author of all godliness, be ready, we beseech Thee, to hear the devout prayers of Thy Church, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). He created a lovely world that delights us even now. The hills, seas, and forests inspire us. Yet, after sin entered the world at man’s fall we have been dogged by tragedy and fear. Life is full of ambushes, and God seems so far away. What parent hasn’t spent a few nights awake during the affliction of his child? And some hardships must be born with patience and endurance, because there is nothing else to be done.

We pray for God’s deliverance from affliction in this world. But here we have a word that deliverance is coming. Our Lord says, “Behold, I make all things new.” He doesn’t destroy that which was before, but transforms it. His good creation will be made good again. In fact, it already has been made new. Jesus recreates all things in Himself. In so far as we are in Him, we are living in that glorious new world. We are just waiting for our bodies to catch up. There is a glorious present, and an even more glorious future awaits us. We can take comfort that a glorious new world awaits the people of God.

Prayer: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Jesus' second coming will take everyone by surprise. That is, no one knows the day He will come. All the foolish people who try to write books or preach that they know the date of Christ's return. They try to tell you it's this date or that date, but they simply haven't read or have ignored Christ's own words. We are to watch continually, without ceasing or tiring. We should watch as a constant vigil. We are to be ever ready. We may be surprised by the suddenness of the coming, but we should not be caught unprepared.

We should pray all the time that the Lord would keep our hearts stirred up and in expectation of Him. This life of prayerful watching and waiting is not a call to an idle lifestyle, sitting around waiting for something to happen. It is a call to a purposeful lifestyle; a lifestyle that takes the words of Christ seriously. It is a lifestyle that is lived in the presence of God, in the expectation that today my Lord may come. It is easy to forget that. It is easy to get distracted, but our Lord commands us to watch!

Prayer: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Law and Gospel of our Lord has been proclaimed even from the time of the Old Testament. Luther's Small Catechism teaches us to remember the warning and promise of God from Exodus 20:5-6, which are similar to today's verses. The Word of our Lord consistently teaches that He calls His people to faithfulness and righteousness, and He promises to show great mercy toward those who abide in this faith and obedience. But those who reject His commands and hate Him are subject to the harsh consequences. This was true at the time of Moses, and it is still true for us as the people of Christ's Church.

Sin makes us all guilty of hating God and His righteousness. We all fall short and rebel against His Commandments. But His mercy is expressed in our time through the preaching of Christ crucified. All people are called to repent of our failure to observe His commands. And we are called to believe in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our forgiveness. When we do come to faith in the Gospel of Jesus by the work of His Spirit, then we are again called to keep His Commandments and walk in His righteousness. We have the prophecies of Moses fulfilled in Jesus, but the mercies and blessings are still from the same Lord!

Prayer: O God, our Refuge and Strength, who art the Author of all godliness, be ready, we beseech Thee, to hear the devout prayers of Thy Church, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

THURSDAY, NOV. 4: LUKE 21:5–9 22<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

The destruction of the Temple described in the verses before us today was fulfilled in 70 A.D. when the Roman armies took Jerusalem, burned the Temple, and destroyed the city. The Jewish historian Josephus in his record entitled “Jewish War” describes the Jerusalem Temple with statements like “...one stone at the southwest corner was some 36 feet long,” and “Whatever was not overlaid with gold was purest white...” He describes how Herod gave a golden vine for one of its decorations, and “Its grape clusters were as tall as a man.” The full magnificence of the Temple as adorned by Herod has only recently come to light through archaeological investigations on the Temple hill.

It is hard for most of us to appreciate the level of opulence and splendor being spoken about by the disciples and Jesus in this text. All of this was looted or destroyed by the Roman legions. They concluded by running a plow across the city on the four points of the compass to make clear that it was all destroyed and would not be restored ever. However, the Lord permitted this to happen so we could see that the true presence of God is now found in Jesus Christ and His Church.

Prayer: O God, our Refuge and Strength, who art the Author of all godliness, be ready, we beseech Thee, to hear the devout prayers of Thy Church, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

## Lesson from the Book of Concord The Last Sunday after Trinity

### ARTICLE XVII.

Also they teach, that, at the Consummation of the World, Christ shall appear for judgment, and shall raise up all the dead; He shall give to the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, but ungodly men and the devils He shall condemn to be tormented without end.

They condemn the Anabaptists who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned men and devils. They condemn also others, who are now spreading certain Jewish opinions that, before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed (exterminated).

—The Augsburg Confession



It is one thing to die having never received Baptism. It is another thing to receive Baptism, to take the Lord's Supper, and then to fall away from Christ. Those in the second group will be judged more harshly than those in the first. Those who have never been baptized are God's enemies, but those who first received it and then fell away are traitors. Therefore, the author of Hebrews is calling Christians to remain repentant, lest they receive a harsher condemnation than the pagans.

This is why the Lutheran Church, in accordance with Christ's command in Matthew 28, carefully catechizes her members—that is, we teach them the Doctrine of Christ before admitting them to the Lord's Supper. A poorly trained Christian may not understand what he is getting into and, falling away, invite God's vengeance. In order to protect the weak and ignorant from judgment, the Lutheran Church only communes those properly trained and examined: “the sacrament is offered to those who wish to use it, after they have been examined and absolved” (Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV:1). This practice is infinitely more loving than the practice of the “evangelicals”, who welcome everyone to the altar, regardless of confession. Such “open communion” is a sick cruelty on men's souls.

Prayer: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; 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 Devil and all other unclean spirits are not interested in the truth. They seek to cause damage and confusion. The man who was possessed by demons was an extreme example of what Satan and demons can do to all people through sin. Evil forces would have us exposed and shameful in appearance. They would have us dwelling in places of death. They would have us scream accusations and indignant queries at God, insisting that He should just leave us alone. And they would sow scandal and fear among us.

However, as the possession of that particular man was an extreme example, Christ also used that occasion to teach a broader lesson to all who can hear and see through faith. We learn that demons certainly fear and despise Him. We learn that the abyss was certainly prepared for such unclean spirits, and it is a place to which none of them wants to go. They fear and resent the judgment that they know must come upon them. But we also learn that even though our Lord lets them move about and cause problems in the created world, He still has complete power and authority over them.

The demons were able to say confusing things and stir up some amount of chaos in those events, but ultimately the Savior used those events to make known the great things that He does among men, in that place and time, and for all who faithfully learn from the stories of the Gospel.

Prayer: O God, our Refuge and Strength, who art the Author of all godliness, be ready, we beseech Thee, to hear the devout prayers of Thy Church, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

We are told in this text that Joseph wept when his brothers told the story of their father supposedly voicing concern about Joseph seeking revenge for their previous treachery. They threw themselves to the ground before him. One might suppose that Joseph was saddened by the thought that his brothers might be falsely implicating their father in their story. Or that he may have regretted his failure to reassure them sooner that he had already forgiven them. Regardless of the answer to these possible thoughts, the text does give us insight into the fulfillment of Joseph's dreams during his youth that revealed the brothers all bowing before him.

It is worth noting that in his youth he saw the dream as showing his glory and power over his older siblings, but in his maturity of spirit, brought about by a life of walking humbly with his God, he came to see it as a humbling experience and a reason for quiet contemplation. Such is possible for all the faithful, for years of life and experiences of hardship, coupled with God's graciousness along the way, often create godly insight in the humbled faithful.

Prayer: O God, our Refuge and Strength, who art the Author of all godliness, be ready, we beseech Thee, to hear the devout prayers of Thy Church, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

One word which is grossly misused by the people of the world is the word "deserve". Someone says, "I worked for this, therefore I deserve it." Answer: you do not deserve it, but God, out of grace, gave it to you through earthly means. Someone says, "They got what they deserved." Answer: they actually deserved worse, and so do you.

The truth is, no one deserves any good and everyone deserves damnation. In this life God does not give us what we deserve, according to Psalm 103: "He has not dealt with us according to our sins" (v. 10). The only ones who get what they deserve are the unbelievers at the final Judgment. But, until then, even unbelievers enjoy the undeserved things of creation and God's undeserved patience as He waits for them to repent.

God has not revealed why disasters happen to some and not to others. But He has revealed that what they "deserve" has nothing to do with it. The best proof of this is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He, only, was without sin, yet He suffered the damnation men deserved to give men the life He deserves. Now He labors patiently with all men, preparing their hearts through the Word to receive faith and live.

Prayer: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; 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. Ignatius, on the way to his martyrdom, wrote to his fellow Christians in Rome, “Now at last I am beginning to be a disciple. May nothing visible or invisible envy me, so that I may reach Jesus Christ. Fire and cross and battles with wild beasts, mutilation, mangling, wrenching of bones, the hacking of limbs, the crushing of my whole body, cruel tortures of the devil—let these come upon me, only let me reach Jesus Christ!” (Michael Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 231). St. Ignatius knew that he was saved by grace and through faith. This faith made him reject this fallen world, and he longed to attain that perfection which was promised him in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, when he was sentenced to death for his confession, he rejoiced because he was about to receive his greatest desire: the removal of all sin.

In this life, we will never reach sinless perfection, although we will be perfect in the life to come. God gives to each of us a different level of maturity with which to resist sin and practice righteousness. Nonetheless, St. Paul bids us “be of the same mind,” that is, despise the fallen things of the world and desire the perfection of heaven where Christ sits at the right hand of the Father.

Prayer: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; 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 Twenty—fifth Sunday after Trinity

### XIV. Of Monastic Vows.

As monastic vows directly conflict with the first chief article, they ought to be absolutely abolished. For it is of them that Christ says (Mat. 24:5, 23 sqq.): “I am Christ,” etc. For he who makes a vow to live in a monastery believes that he will enter upon a mode of life holier than the ordinary Christians, and by his own works wishes to earn heaven not only for himself, but also for others; this is to deny Christ. And they boast from their St. Thomas [i.e., Thomas Aquinas, of the 13<sup>th</sup> century] that a monastic vow is on an equality with baptism. This is blasphemy against God.

—Smalcald Articles, Part III

“Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

People “church shop”. They browse at different churches like they would shop for cars or furniture. And what do they look for? So often it’s the nice building, the exciting youth group, the congregation that is full of “clean living” and “proper” folk. So when Jesus warns the disciples about leaven, it is easy for people to think in “Pharisee” terms: Jesus is telling them to avoid “unclean” food. But no, that was not what Jesus was warning them against. The danger was false doctrine.

The Pharisees would have you believe that eternal life depended on your works. The Sadducees would have you believe there is no afterlife. And we have plenty of advocates for these false doctrines today. Turn away from them. Jesus Christ died on the cross for you, so you could have eternal life as a gift. Cling to Christ. Hold fast to the promise of the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Prayer: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

“Beware of the mutilation! For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit.”

“The mutilation” means the Jews. He calls them “the mutilation” because they were physically circumcised, but not spiritually. They did not understand that the promise of circumcision had pointed to the Christ. Since the Jews deny the Christ, their circumcision is without meaning and nothing more than self-mutilation.

In contrast to this, St. Paul declares, “We are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit.” We who are born again through Baptism and the Spirit have the circumcision of the heart—which is repentance unto life in the Lord Jesus Christ. Even in the Old Testament, circumcision helped no one if it was not accompanied by true repentance, for Moses had said, “circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer” (Deu. 10:16).

Now that the Christ has fulfilled the Old Testament, physical circumcision has no spiritual purpose. What matters is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as received through the sacrament of Baptism. It is written: “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith” (Col. 2:11–12).

Prayer: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead.”

Does he mean physically dead or spiritually? Though a strange way of speaking, the rest of Scripture helps us to interpret it. Nowhere does Scripture speak of preaching the Gospel to the physically dead, that they might “live according to God.” On the contrary, Hebrews 9 says, “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (v. 27). Therefore, St. Peter cannot mean that the Gospel was preached to those already physically dead.

But Christ is Judge of “the living and the dead,” and Romans 10 explains, “Have they not heard? Yes indeed: ‘Their sound has gone out to all the earth’” (v. 18). In this sense, the physically dead heard the Gospel while living, and Christ will judge both the living and the dead according to how they received His Gospel while alive.

The Gospel is not preached to those already physically dead, but it is preached to those spiritually dead. All men are spiritually dead before hearing the Gospel: “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). In this sense, the Gospel is proclaimed to both believers and unbelievers alike, so that everyone who hears might “live according to God in the spirit.”

Prayer: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands.”

Isaiah prophesies that the children of Israel would think themselves utterly forsaken by God. And little wonder; they were going to go into exile. Such is the nature of the “drastic” mercies of God: He will play hardball if that is what it takes to bring us to repentance. But the suffering and death of Israel was not the plan. He gave them hardship that they might repent and ultimately be saved. Salvation is always God’s goal.

Israel would not be forsaken; not *en masse*. Rather, Israel would be reduced down to One in the person of Jesus Christ. He would be utterly forsaken by God as He bore the wages of all sin. He even said so from the cross: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” With the nails that held Him to the cross, Israel was literally inscribed on His hands; and not just the physical descendants of Israel, but all who have faith in Israel’s Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Prayer: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

“So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth.”

This principle of “being separate” is found throughout the Bible, even in the New Testament. 1 Peter 2:9 says that Christians are a “peculiar” or “special” people who proclaim the praises of God. 2 Corinthians 6:17 (quoting the Old Testament) admonishes us to “come out from among them and be separate” from the ways of unbelievers.

Some Christians, misunderstanding the Lord’s meaning, have created for themselves their own “good works” so as to be different from the world and, in theory, pleasing to God. However, inventing our own good works is not pleasing to God. Listening to what He says is a good work; it is what we should do. And if we did what He said, if we were people among whom there was a faithful daily devotion to God, a respectful obedience to authority, no sexual immorality, no gossip, we would be quite different enough, without trying to come up with man-made good works.

God grant us so to love the salvation we have in Christ Jesus that we would faithfully live out the gift of our holiness, and so be discernibly different from the rest of the world.

Prayer: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

When will the kingdom of God appear? When will Christ return for the final judgment? That is what the Jews wanted to know. But that is the wrong question. God, alone, knows when the final judgment will be, hence our Lord says in Matthew 24, “Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (v. 36). What we should be asking is this: “what does God want me to do while I wait for His return?” Answer: God wants me to faithfully use His gifts.

Like the nobleman in the parable, the Lord Jesus Christ has entrusted Christians with His gifts, and He wants us to use them rather than hide them away. Those gifts are the Lord’s Supper, Baptism, and the Scriptures. He gives us the Lord’s Supper, saying, “Take, eat... This do, as often as you drink it” (1 Cor. 11:24, 25). He gives us Baptism, commanding the Church to baptize all nations (Mat. 28:19). He gives His Word—the Scriptures—saying, “If anyone keeps My word he shall never see death” (John 8:51).

The one who faithfully uses God’s gifts is the one who receives the Lord’s Supper in faith, who trusts in the promise of Baptism for the forgiveness of sins, and who believes the Scriptures as the Word of God. This is the man whom Christ will honor at the final judgment. But he who has ridiculed and rejected these gifts, Christ will punish.

Prayer: O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

# Lesson from the Book of Concord The Twenty—sixth Sunday after Trinity

## CHAPTER III, ARTICLE VI.

But they [Romanists] object, that love is preferred to faith and hope. For Paul says (1 Cor. 13:13): “The greatest of these is charity.” Now, it is in accordance with this, that to justify is the greatest and chief virtue. Although Paul, in this passage, properly speaks of love toward one’s neighbor, and indicates that love is the greatest, because it has most fruits. Faith and hope have to do only with God; but love has infinite offices externally towards men. Nevertheless we grant to the adversaries that love towards God and our neighbor is the greatest virtue, because the chief commandment is this: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God” (Mat. 22:37). But how will they infer thence that love justifies? The greatest virtue, they say, justifies. By no means. For just as even the greatest or first Law does not justify, so also the greatest virtue of the Law does not justify. But that virtue justifies which apprehends Christ, which communicates to us Christ’s merits, by which we receive grace and peace from God. But this virtue is faith. For as it has been often said, faith is not only knowledge, but much rather to wish to receive or apprehend those things, which are offered in the promise concerning Christ. Moreover this obedience towards God, viz. to wish to receive the offered promise, is no less a divine service, λατρεία, than is love. God wishes us to believe Him, and to receive from Him blessings, and this He declares to be true divine service.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, ¶104–107

THURSDAY, NOV. 11: MAT. 24:29–35 ST. MARTIN OF TOURS

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”

Oh, how we treasure the things of this world! And yet, they will all pass away. We know it, yet still they allure us. Today we remember St. Martin of Tours. He lived in the fourth century.

According to one tradition, he cut his cloak in half when he saw a poor beggar shivering in the winter and gave it to him. The cloak would pass away anyway, and here was a man who needed it (or half of it). St. Martin later became a bishop, and dedicated his life to the Words of the Lord.

Long ago, Hans and Margarethe Luther had a son (born Nov. 10). He was baptized the next day, on St. Martin’s Day, and so he was named “Martin Luther.” Thus the legacy continued, in a way. Martin Luther let the bright light of our Lord’s Words shine out in the Church again. We lay hold of those Words, the Words of repentance and forgiveness, through faith in our crucified Savior. We cling to those Words. All else will pass away, but the Words of the Lord will not. And since His Words declare us righteous and bespeak eternal life to us, we endure unto all eternity, just as our risen Jesus does, and just as His Words do.

Prayer: O God, who didst call Martin to preach the Gospel, grant to Thy servants steadfastness in the confession of the true faith that they would preach that unchanging Gospel in the midst of the darkness of this age, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.”

Time and time again false prophets and false prophetesses have arisen, claiming to know the day of our Lord’s coming again. Sometimes they are minimally more subtle. “It says we cannot know the day or the hour,” they say, “but we might still be able to figure out the month, or the year!” They think they have fulfilled our Lord’s precise Words, yet they have overthrown His clear meaning.

We do not know when He will return. Make peace with that. You are forgiven through faith in Christ. Eternal life is yours in Him. Ultimately, this is what matters. Father Luther once famously said, “If I knew the world would end tomorrow, I would still plant an apple tree today.” As the redeemed of the Lord, be about your vocations. Do today what He has given you today, whether the world ends tomorrow, or a thousand years from now. It is not given us to know times and days, but only to trust that the Day will come, and faithfully to do our duties until then. God grant us to do them in the joyous certainty of our salvation.

Prayer: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

Our Lord gives us a most profound insight into His wisdom. “Why,” one might ask, “does He not tell us when the end will be?” We think, “if only He would tell us, we could be ready! We could prepare!” But let us unpack what that means. In reality, our old sinful flesh would be sorely tempted to procrastinate about that preparation until the last possible moment (as many of us are tempted to do with so many things!). We would end up not preparing until we had to.

Instead, our Lord admonishes us to “be ready,” that is, all the time. If we do not know when it will happen, we find ourselves invited to be ready for it at all times, and this is wisdom from God. So consider what it means to be ready: to be sincerely repentant, to trust in Christ Jesus for our salvation, to be devoted to the things of the Lord, particularly His Word and Sacraments. God grant us this day (and every day) to be ready: repentantly ready, faithfully ready, sacramentally ready.

Prayer: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.