

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



APRIL 4–30, 2022

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The Calendar

The Lutheran Hymnal (1941): TLH; *The Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book* (1912): ELHB;
The Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary (1913): ELH

(Monday: M; Tuesday: T; Wednesday: W; Thursday: R; Friday: F; Saturday: S)

April 3	Lent 5–Judica	ELH 587
April 10	Palmarum	TLH 146
April 14 (R)	Maundy Thursday	TLH 163
April 15 (F)	Good Friday	TLH 172
April 16 (S)	Holy Saturday	TLH 190/ELH 335
April 17	Easter–The Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord	TLH 195
April 19 (T)	Philip Melanchthon, Confessor	
April 24	Easter 1–Quasimodogeniti	TLH 208
April 25 (M)	St. Mark, Evangelist	

ST. IGNATIUS SEMINARY UPDATE—The Spring quarter began on February 28. The classes this quarter are as follows:

E009—Greek Readings 3 (1 hr.)

S005—Creation and Redemption (3 hrs.)

H004—Reformation (3 hrs.)

E004—Isaiah (3 hrs.)

The seminary midterm break will begin Saturday, April 9 and classes will resume Monday, May 2. The break is situated around Holy Week, Easter, and the annual Colloquium and Synod of the diocese.

SUPPORT FOR ST. IGNATIUS SEMINARY—The work of the seminary is of critical importance for the ongoing purpose of this diocese, preparing future pastors to serve in congregations of our fellowship. In the past year, there has been a significant decrease in financial support for St. Ignatius. While the seminary has sufficient reserves to continue its work for several years, it is important that we do not deplete these reserves. If you would be willing to help provide such support, it can be sent to ELDoNA via the treasurer, Rev. Michael Henson, Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church 1000 North Park Ave. Herrin, IL 62948



VISITOR AT SALEM AND ST. IGNATIUS SEMINARY—Michael and Kayla Schommer and their children recently visited. Michael (center) is considering application to begin studies at St. Ignatius in the next triennium.

COLLECT AND PSALM FOR USE IN THIS TIME OF WAR—As the Russian regime engages in its barbaric and unjustifiable war against Ukraine, the bishop of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church has asked that prayer would be offered on behalf of the Ukrainian people. The following Collect is appointed for that purpose and it is to be used in the Divine Service and Prayer Offices of Matins and Vespers throughout Lent:

O almighty Lord God, who alone riddest away tyrants, stir up Thy great strength, we beseech Thee, and come and help Thy Church; scatter the counsels of them that secretly devise mischief, and do Thou bring the dealings of the violent to naught; cast down the unjust from high places, and cause the unruly to cease from troubling; allay all envious and malicious passions, and subdue the haters and evil-doers. Look in mercy on those immediately exposed to peril, conflict, sickness, and death; comfort the prisoners, relieve the sufferings of the wounded, and show mercy to the dying. Remove in Thy good providence all causes and occasions of war, dispose the hearts of those engaged therein to moderation, and of Thy great goodness restore peace among the nations; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The use of Psalm 37 as an imprecatory Psalm may also be used in the Prayer Offices, in addition to the appointed Psalm of the day or week.

—Bishop Heiser

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Judica Sunday

Chapter VI. Of the Third Use of the Law.

1. We believe, teach and confess that although men rightly believing and truly converted to God have been freed and exempted from the curse and coercion of the Law, they nevertheless are not on this account without Law, but have been redeemed by the Son of God, in order that they should exercise themselves in it day and night, (Ps. 119). For even our first parents before the fall did not live without Law, which Law of God was also written upon their hearts, because they were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26sq.; 2:16 sqq.; 3:3).

2. We believe, teach and confess that the preaching of the Law is to be urged with diligence, not only upon the unbelieving and impenitent, but also upon the rightly believing, truly converted, regenerate, and justified by faith.

3. For although they are regenerate and renewed in the spirit of their mind, yet, in the present life, this regeneration and renewal are not complete, but are only begun, and believers are, in the spirit of their mind, in a constant struggle against the flesh, i.e. against the corrupt nature and disposition which cleaves to us unto death. On account of this old Adam, which still inheres in the understanding, will and all the powers of man, it is needful that the Law of the Lord always shine upon the way before him, in order that he may do nothing from self-imposed human devotion; likewise, that the old Adam also may not employ his own will, but may be subdued against his will, not only by the admonition and threatening of the Law, but also by punishments and blows, so that he may follow and surrender himself captive to the Spirit (1 Cor. 9:27; Rom. 6:12; Gal. 6:14; Ps. 119:1 sqq.; Heb. 13:21).

4. Then as to the distinction between the works of the Law and the fruits of the Spirit, we believe, teach and confess that the works which are done according to the Law, as long as they are and are called works of the Law, are only extorted from man by the force of punishment and the threatening of God's wrath.

5. But the fruits of the Spirit are the works which the Spirit of God who dwells in believers works through the regenerate, and are done by believers so far as they are regenerate [spontaneously and freely], as though they knew of no command, threat or reward; for in this manner the children of God live in the Law and walk according to the Law of God, a manner which St. Paul, in his Epistles, calls the Law of Christ and the Law of the mind (Rom. 7:25; 8:7).

6. Thus the Law is and remains both to the penitent and impenitent, both to regenerate and unregenerate men, one and the same Law, namely, the immutable will of God; and the distinction, so far as it concerns obedience, is alone in the men, inasmuch as one who is not yet regenerate does what is required him by the Law out of constraint and unwillingly (as also the regenerate do according to the flesh); but the believer, so far as he is regenerate, without constraint and with a willing spirit, does that which no threatening of the Law could ever extort from him.

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome, Art. VI

Love begins with the Christian Church, with Christians loving other Christians. This does not mean that Christians do not love non-Christians. On the contrary, Christians will love all men better if their love starts where the Christ commanded: “if you have love for one another.”

There is a vocational hierarchy to love. In Matthew 22, our Lord teaches that the greatest commandment is to love God, and the second is to love our neighbor (vs. 37–40). We can only truly love our neighbor if we love God more; if we love our neighbor more than God, it will be impossible to truly love either God or our neighbor.

Just as love for God must come before love for neighbor, our Lord teaches that not all neighbors are loved the same way. Love for fellow Christians must come before love for non-Christians. This does not mean that we do not love non-Christians. Rather, just as loving God leads to loving neighbors, loving God’s saints leads to loving those who are not saints. This is necessary because the greatest good we could wish on anyone is that he becomes a saint through faith and Baptism.

We must love God first, then God’s saints, then those who are not saints. Only in this way can we love all men properly.

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Everyone suffers because of man's fall into sin. Christians, in general, suffer more. In addition to what all men suffer, a Christian suffers for two other reasons: 1) he has made the world and the devil his enemies and 2) the Christ also suffered. Now, suffering is not evil, in a moral sense. We may call suffering "evil" if we mean that it was not part of God's original plan. But it is not a sin to suffer. To despair is a sin; to charge God with moral evil is a sin. But to suffer is not a sin. On the other hand, if we endure suffering by prayer, that prayer is a pleasing sacrifice to God.

St. Paul, in today's text, teaches that God comforts us in affliction. He does not always take affliction away, but He does always comfort. Our chief comfort is that our sins are forgiven through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As often as we pray in faith, God reaffirms to us this promise of forgiveness in Christ. The more we are afflicted, the more we pray. Therefore God uses affliction to bring us closer to Him, so that we lean on Him and grow more confident in the forgiveness of our sins. When fellow saints suffer as we do, we can comfort them in the same forgiveness of sins. We do not comfort with empty words like, "It'll be ok." Our comfort means something: "In Christ, your sins are forgiven."

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“Because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself.”

To swear is to call someone greater than yourself to be a witness of what you say. Oaths are taken with a hand on the Bible as though to say, “As God is my witness, I am telling the truth.” If someone says, “I am not lying”, and we do not believe him, are we more likely to believe him if he adds, “I swear by myself that I am not lying”? Of course not.

If God swears by Himself, it can only mean one of two things: 1) He is a liar, or 2) He is the very highest authority of all. The Pharisees of Jesus’ day chose the first option, saying to Him, “You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true” (John 8:13). However, Jesus demonstrated who He is not only by word, but also by deed. His resurrection from the dead proves that He is God and, therefore, the highest authority of all. “I AM the First and the Last. I AM He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I AM alive forevermore. Amen.” (Revelation 1:17–18)

Since Jesus is the highest authority of all, everything He says is true. When He says your sins are forgiven, they are. When He says, “This is My body ... This is My blood,” we must believe that they are. We are Abraham’s children if we believe what Jesus says.

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore both in body and soul; 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 the children of Israel committed idolatry with their golden calf, Moses was willing to be the substitute for their atonement. He prayed, if God would not forgive their sin, that God would blot out Moses from the book of life instead. In this way, Moses prefigured the Lord Jesus Christ, who would take the sins of all mankind on Himself and die in their place.

However, God rejects Moses's proposition, saying, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book." Moses was not the Christ. Moses was not able to pay for the sins of the people, because he himself was a sinful man. Yes, Moses was a faithful man, who remained with the Lord in faith and did not commit idolatry like the rest. But he was a man, only, and could die for no one's sins except his own. In this way, Moses pointed forward to the Lord Jesus Christ, who would be more than a man; He would be man and God at the same time.

The Lord Jesus Christ is both like Moses and greater than Moses. He is like Moses because He intercedes between us and God, and prays that God would not condemn us for our sins. Again, He is greater than Moses because His sinless blood is worthy to atone for the sins of all people. And He did atone for the sins of all people!

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“A testament is in force after men are dead.”

In civil matters, we understand the idea of a “last will and testament,” in it a man leaves instructions for his children on how his earthly possessions are to be distributed. When properly processed, a man’s last will and testament possesses the binding force of law. But it does not go into effect until the man has died.

Christ is “the Mediator of the new [testament]” (the words “covenant” and “testament” are the same in Greek). On the night when Christ was betrayed, He took the cup and said, “This is My blood of the new [testament], which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). The institution of the Lord’s Supper is His last will and testament. Then He died, causing the testament to take effect. After this He rose from the dead, making His testament a communion in His living body and blood.

Therefore, the practice of the Lord’s Supper has binding force on the Christian Church; she must practice it according to His institution. But this testament is not a burden. Rather, it is the joyous treasure of heaven, which we have inherited through our Lord’s death. He who receives this blessed inheritance in faith has what He promises: the forgiveness of sins, for “without shedding of blood there is no remission.”

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“We... give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart.” St. Paul gives permission to the Corinthians to boast of him and the other Apostles against false brethren. The orthodox Lutheran Church does the same thing, for we confess in the Nicene Creed, “I believe one holy Christian and Apostolic Church.”

What does it mean to confess that the Church is “Apostolic”? It means that the true doctrine of the true Church has not changed since the Lord Jesus Christ handed it down to the Apostles. When we confess the Nicene Creed, we confess that we believe and teach that same true doctrine which the Apostles taught.

What does it mean to “boast” in the Apostles? We boast in the Apostles when we confess their doctrine against those who teach otherwise—who, as St. Paul puts it, “boast in appearance and not in heart.”

Who are these? Anyone who confesses any doctrine which did not come from the Apostles—such as the pope, church fathers, modern preachers, or one’s own dreams—trusts in lies and has an empty boast. If these are set against the doctrine of the Apostles, they are empty and false.

We boast in this: the Lutheran doctrine is the doctrine of the Apostles, which is derived from the writings of the Apostles themselves—namely, the Holy Scriptures.

Prayer: We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore both in body and soul; 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 Palmarum (Palm) Sunday

Article III.

Also they [the Lutherans] teach, that the Word, that is, the Son of God, did take man's nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, so that there are Two Natures, the divine and the human, inseparably conjoined in one Person, one Christ, true God and true man, who was born of the Virgin Mary, truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, that He might reconcile the Father unto us, and be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but for all actual sins of men. He also descended into hell, and truly rose again the third day; afterward He ascended into Heaven, that He might sit on the right hand of the Father, and forever reign, and have dominion over all creatures, and sanctify them that believe in Him, by sending the Holy Ghost into their hearts, to rule, comfort and quicken them, and to defend them against the devil and the power of sin. The same Christ shall openly come again to judge the quick and the dead, etc., according to the Apostles' Creed.

—The Augsburg Confession

These Greeks show up in Jerusalem wanting to see Jesus. This event brings to Jesus' mind the very purpose for which He had come. Many thoughts and emotions came flooding into Jesus' mind at that point. And they weren't thoughts that had been long forgotten; they were just brought into sharp focus by the arrival of these Greeks. Jesus was in Jerusalem because His "hour" had come. And significantly, this "hour" that had come upon Him had a great deal to do with those Greeks. Jesus would soon die to atone for the sins of the world, including those Greeks. The relationship between God and His people was about to drastically change. The Greeks' coming (like the wise men at Jesus' birth) is a prelude to the transition of God's kingdom from the Jews to the Gentiles.

The people of God would no longer look for connections through biological descent, but through faith; faith in Jesus. Faith in Jesus was the connection to the kingdom of God. These Greeks wanted to "see" Jesus. And when our Gospel text says "see," it means more than the idea that these Greeks wanted Philip to point out Jesus in the crowd. They wanted to meet Jesus. They wanted to talk to Him, to hear Him, to understand Him, to know Him.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who amid so many adversities do fail through our own infirmities, may be restored through the Passion and intercession of Thine only-begotten Son; who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

Of course, our Lord’s words here are true in their most strait-forward sense, that one should see one’s life in this world as of little importance compared to eternal life with Christ. Willingness to lose one’s life in this world for Christ confirms one’s saving faith in Christ and one’s place in heaven. This also works on another level. We know the One who is the Truth, and so, we must be willing to lose everything for the Truth.

Lies are the poison of this world. Innumerable evils follow in the wake of the lie. One is tempted to think that little lies do not matter, but little lies build up over time. With the adding of little lies and the repeating of them, the spread of the lies causes them to grow and strengthen. Christians often think of the courage of the martyrs who faced torture and horrible deaths. They were brave. But there is another bravery. It is the courage to lose everything rather than concede to the small lie. It is the courage to lose wealth, position, reputation, security, even one’s life, for the Truth. If you are willing to lose all for the Truth, the One who is the Truth will reward you openly. Don’t worry about security or reputation here. Store up treasure in heaven.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, grant us grace so to pass through this holy time of our Lord’s Passion that we may obtain the pardon of our sins; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Jesus says, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” Why was Jesus so eager to eat a meal with these twelve men? Eating a meal is one of the most intimate things that we do with other people. To invite someone over to your home for a meal is not just sharing food, but a sign of unity and friendship. That other person is being brought into an event that most other people do not share with you. And when you share food and drink you are sharing life. You share the wealth that you have, the resources. And you give that person the things that nurture and strengthen his or her natural life. It is a very significant thing.

Jesus wants to share that with His disciples. Yet, this meal is even more than that. When a friend invites you to eat with them, they are, in a sense, taking you into their family. This is what the meal is for the disciples, as well. They are being invited into God’s family. They are special. They are not just anyone; they are the family of God. And that family unity is expressed around the table, eating and drinking. Jesus eagerly desired that unity with His disciples. And He eagerly desires that with us. Through the Eucharist we are dining at God’s table, not just as guests, but as family. There is a unity about it; a unity in the family of God.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds are continually afflicted, may mercifully be relieved by the Passion of Thine only-begotten Son, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Foot washing is not something that we really understand. This was an oriental custom. Washing the feet was neither a Jewish ceremonial law, nor was it a tradition of the Pharisees. It was just a custom in the east, a custom of politeness and propriety. If someone came to supper at another person's house, the first thing they would do would be to remove their sandals. And usually a slave, at that point, would wash the guest's feet before he entered to the meal.

As Jesus and His disciples are reclining at their supper they were all reclining there with dirty feet. This must have become apparent to all who were there but, no one volunteered to take up the job. Unfortunately, as we can recall throughout the Gospels, the disciples are constantly competing for the position of greatest importance. Even though Jesus had taught them this lesson before, He now teaches them again, and this time as an object lesson. Jesus Himself shows them what greatness is. Jesus, who has all the power, authority, and honor of heaven and earth, shows them that greatness is expressed in self-sacrificial love. The role that the disciples loath to take, Jesus takes up gladly. If Jesus, who is the Lord of all, can take up the role of the slave, who are we that we think ourselves above that role?

Prayer: O Lord God, who hast left unto us in a wonderful Sacrament a memorial of Thy Passion, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so use this Sacrament of Thy body and blood that the fruits of Thy redemption may continually be manifest in us; Thou, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Many people just sort of vaguely assume Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was uniquely horrible. While Jesus' death was horrible, was it unique in a physical sense? Crucifixion was a method of execution designed to maintain control over subject peoples. It was a way to terrify conquered peoples. The message was: "Don't rebel against Roman law, or this could happen to you."

Crucifixion was used as a way to provide a particularly slow and painful death. Hence the term "excruciating," which literally means "out of crucifying." Crucifixion was gruesome, humiliating, and public. Death could result from any number of causes, including blood loss, sepsis, or even dehydration. When the victims' legs were shattered to speed up death (simply for the convenience of the executioners), death could result from embolism or complications from shock. These were all horrible ways to die.

Jesus' type of death was not physically unique. Nor was it uniquely physically painful. It was, of course, terribly painful, but no different than other crucifixion victims. Jesus is paying the penalty for sin. He is our substitute on the cross. This is known as "substitutionary atonement." This is what makes Christ's work mean something to us. This event isn't just some tragic event that happened two millennia ago. It isn't just an inspiring story from antiquity. It is God's work of reconciling the world to Himself. This is what the crucifixion means for us.

Prayer: Almighty God, we beseech Thee graciously to behold this Thy family, for which our Lord Jesus Christ was contented to be betrayed and given up into the hands of wicked men and to suffer death upon the cross; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The stolen body hypothesis has been in circulation among the Jews since the first days of the Christian Church. Even as early as the writing of Matthew's Gospel, the Jews were spreading this story. The Pharisees themselves started it when they said to Pilate, "...lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away." A medieval Jewish anti-Christian work called the *Toledot Yeshu* perpetuated this slander for centuries.

We see in the next chapter of Matthew's Gospel how the chief priests were the first author's of this slander when they bribed the guards and said, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.'" This two thousand year old conspiracy is disproved simply by pointing to the Apostles' actions. What turned these scared and confused disciples into evangelists that could not be stopped, even with threats of death? Eusebius and others tell us of the martyrdom of most of the Apostles. Do men who perpetrated a hoax go willingly to gruesome deaths over something they know to be a lie? No! They believed that they would be resurrected, just as they witnessed Jesus' resurrection.

Prayer: O God, who didst enlighten this most holy night with the glory of the Lord's resurrection, preserve in all Thy people the spirit of adoption which Thou hast given, so that, renewed in body and soul, they may perform unto Thee a pure service; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Easter Sunday

Chapter IX.

Of the Descent of Christ to Hell.

There has also been a controversy among some theologians, who have subscribed to the Augsburg Confession concerning the following article: When, and in what manner, the Lord Christ, according to our simple Christian faith, descended to hell, whether this was done before or after His death? Also, whether it occurred according to the soul alone, or according to the divinity alone, or in body and soul, spiritually and bodily? Also, whether this article belongs to the passion or to the glorious victory and triumph of Christ?

But since this article ... cannot be comprehended by the senses or by the reason, but must be grasped alone by faith, it is our unanimous advice that there should be no disputation concerning it, but that it should be believed and taught only in the simplest manner; according as Dr. Luther of blessed memory, in his sermon at Torgau in the year 1533, has, in a very Christian manner, explained this article, separated from it all useless, unnecessary questions, and admonished all godly Christians to Christian simplicity of faith.

For it is sufficient that we know that Christ descended to hell, destroyed hell for all believers, and delivered them from the power of death and of the devil, from eternal condemnation [and even] from the jaws of hell. But how this occurred, we should reserve until the other world, where not only this point, but also still others, will be revealed which we here simply believe and cannot comprehend with our blind reason.

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome

The Emmaus disciples said, “We were hoping that it was he who was going to redeem Israel.” Now that Jesus was crucified, they had given up on the possibility that Jesus was the Messiah. Sad and dejected, they were going home to confess their misguided judgment.

We must admit that some of their words speak the truth—without the resurrection of Jesus Christ there is no Christianity at all. St. Paul says, “And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins... And if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable” (1 Corinthians 15:17,19). They got that part right. If Christ was dead, they just as well should go home.

However, the Lord had sent angels to the women to announce His resurrection and new life. Peter and John had confirmed their story. These Emmaus disciples were not receiving the Word which creates faith. If Jesus had risen from the dead—and He had done just that—then He is the One who redeemed Israel, His Church of believers. They should have believed the women and disciples.

Luke 24 reports that their eyes were first being “restrained,” and then how later they “were opened and they knew Him.” Apart from the Word and Sacraments, we will be unable to know our Redeemer; but through the teaching of the Holy Scriptures and in the breaking of the bread, we learn to believe that Christ made satisfaction for our sins.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord’s resurrection may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Yesterday, Jesus retrieved the Emmaus disciples, who had given up on their Redeemer, despite an angelic announcement. After Jesus had vanished from their sight they said, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32). Earlier the text says, “He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (v.27). In today’s account, it says the same thing with different words: “And he opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.”

This repetition is necessary for us, so that we might never tire of hearing the old, old story. The suffering of the Christ and His resurrection from the dead was prophesied long ago in “the Law of Moses (the first five books of the Old Testament) and the Prophets and the Psalms.” Of course Jesus taught the Word of God during His three-year ministry, but take careful note of what we find Him doing repeatedly after His resurrection. He didn’t stop teaching the Word. He continued to show the necessity of His death and resurrection.

Jesus also made sure that we knew why that was necessary. Our sins brought God’s wrath, so His death was to make atonement for our sins. His resurrection revealed the forgiveness of sins that He had purchased. Jesus’ death and resurrection is the basis for the threat of the Law and the promise of the Gospel. The proper understanding of the Scriptures leads us to “repentance and remission of sins.”

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord’s resurrection may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Jesus' appearance by the sea (which includes the large catch of fish and the breakfast served by Jesus) is His third appearance following the two upper-room appearances in chapter 20. However, there were other appearances of Jesus after His resurrection (e.g., Mary Magdalene in John 20:11-18). St. John lets us know his reason for calling it the third with the words "to His disciples." At His first two appearances He institutes holy absolution and commissions the Apostles to forgive sins.

Although there would be nothing wrong with an Apostle doing a little fishing, Jesus uses this post-Easter appearance to drive home the fact that He will provide for the Apostles—without the need for their human contribution. They will be fishers of men, and He will give them their daily bread (and fish). They don't eat any of the 153 large fish which they caught because of the Word of God. Those are for others. Jesus feeds them breakfast with His own fish and bread. Not only do they know that "it was the Lord," they are being taught to trust Him as they are given their Apostolic Office.

We, too, need to trust Jesus Sunday after Sunday. Not only does He give us our daily bread, but He has properly prepared the Apostles so that we can trust in their God-given, God-inspired, inerrant words. Our risen Lord and Savior is still providing for our preservation in the faith by His own Word. Whatever fruits He produces in us is for the benefit of others.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord's resurrection may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In the game of hide-and-seek, the goal is to find someone.

The angel knows exactly why the women have come to the tomb that Easter Sunday morning. They are seeking a dead, crucified Jesus. However, the angel also knows that they will not find Him. Even a moderator's clues that you might be getting warmer or colder in your search will not work. No, they can seek, but they will not find! The angel says, "He is not here; for He is risen." They can see where Jesus formerly was—His body laid on the cold stone shelf cut into the tomb's wall. He was, indeed, dead! That is true. And that substitutionary death means life for us. However, the divine purpose and goal, for which the women went to the tomb, was so that they would not find Him. The women were supposed to come up empty in their seeking. There will be a time in which Jesus will appear to Mary, Peter, the Emmaus disciples, the eleven, etc. However, they will not find Him by their seeking. They will see Him because the risen Jesus will reveal Himself to them!

Our Lord sent His Church to make disciples by baptizing and teaching. He promised, "and lo, I am with you always." Now that Jesus has risen and ascended, we have His promise, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7).

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Even though His ascension will not occur for 40 days, Jesus speaks of it in His first post-resurrection appearance to Mary Magdalene. Mary is clinging to Him, thinking that by her grasp they will not be separated again. First of all, Jesus' words assure her that He has "not yet ascended." Jesus will continue to appear to her and the disciples over the next 40 days. They will receive His teaching, examine His wounds, and receive His commission to make disciples of all nations.

Second, Mary must also learn that the ascension of Jesus is the inevitable result of His resurrection. Jesus has left behind His state of humiliation. Those days of traveling with Jesus during His three-year ministry have come to completion. Jesus' death and resurrection have secured the atonement of all sinners. Believers have now become brothers with Jesus and share in His inheritance. Through Christ's work we now share with Jesus in our Father and God.

In addition, once the risen Jesus has ascended, He promises to be with Mary always wherever the Church is baptizing and teaching (Matthew 28:20). This mystical presence of Christ with His Church is not only a great source of comfort for us, but through it He promises to shower upon us blessings. Ephesians 4:8, "Therefore He says: 'When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.'"

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The great commission of Matthew 28:16-20 to make disciples by baptizing and teaching has been misused by some to justify all manner of lay exercise of the pastoral office. Lutherans should know better.

The Lutheran Confessions cite this passage in two places. First, Matthew 28:19 is the proof text for Holy Baptism in the Small Catechism. Holy Baptism is water and the words, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” used according to Christ’s command.

In the second passage, found in the Treatise rejecting the power and primacy of the Pope, the Lutherans explain that Peter is not the first pope, through whom everyone must seek the Church. Line 30 reads, “This commission Peter holds in common with the rest of the apostles.” In addition, the treatise explains that “...Christ gave the apostles only spiritual power, that is, the command to preach the Gospel, proclaim the forgiveness of sins, administer the sacraments, and excommunicate the godless without physical violence. He did not give them the power of the sword or the right to establish, take possession of, or transfer the kingdoms of the world. For Christ said, ‘Go therefore and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you’ (Matt. 28:19, 20), and also, ‘As the Father has sent me, even so I send you’ (John 20:21)” (line 31). Christ’s commission gives us the confidence that God uses His called and ordained minister to create and strengthen our faith and give us salvation.

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Lesson from the Book of Concord Quasimodogeniti Sunday

Article V.

That we may obtain this faith, the Office of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who worketh faith where and when it pleaseth God in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justified those who believe that they are received into favor for Christ's sake.

They condemn the Anabaptists and others, who think that the Holy Ghost cometh to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works.

Article XXV.

Confession in our churches is not abolished; for it is not usual to give the Body of the Lord, except to them that have been previously examined and absolved. And the people are most carefully taught concerning the faith and assurance of absolution, about which, before this time, there was profound silence. Our people are taught that they should highly prize the absolution, as being the voice of God, and pronounced by His command. The power of the Keys is commended, and we show what great consolation it brings to anxious consciences; that God requires faith to believe such absolution as a voice sounding from Heaven, and that such faith in Christ truly obtains and receives the forgiveness of sins.

Aforetime, satisfactions were immoderately extolled; of faith and the merit of Christ, and the righteousness of faith, no mention was made; wherefore, on this point, our churches are by no means to be blamed. For this even our adversaries must needs concede to us, that the doctrine concerning repentance has been most diligently treated and laid open by our teachers.

But of Confession, they teach, that an enumeration of sins is not necessary, and that consciences be not burdened with anxiety to enumerate all sins, for it is impossible to recount all sins, as the Psalm testifies [19:13]: "Who can understand his errors?" Also Jeremiah [17:9]: "The heart is deceitful, who can know it?" But if no sins were forgiven, except those that are recounted, consciences could never find peace; for very many sins they neither see, nor can remember.

—The Augsburg Confession

Sometimes we feel the incredible pressure of expectations—our own, those of our families, those of our co-workers. And it can be very easy to feel that we can never measure up to those expectations.

This prophecy to the nation of Israel makes it clear—God is doing something for them (and for us!). He is not doing it because they (or we) deserve it; He is doing it for the sake of His own name. For surely if He left it to us, we would be lost. But we can trust Him to fulfill His promise. The Israelites were living far from the lands and people they knew and loved, among strangers and foreigners. They were in exile because God had warned them to repent of their sins and return to Him, but they had not. Imagine the joy you would feel as an Israelite to hear that God would call you back from exile, and sprinkle you with clean water!

In the same way, He has called us His own in the mighty waters of baptism. He has cleansed us from the filth of our sinful natures and inclinations, and invites us to live a new life of holiness before Him. Let us follow Him with joy!

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord's resurrection may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruit thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

How hard is it to fathom that the infinite, eternal God would take on frail human flesh and live as one of us? He did this not out of boredom, or as a game, or a matter of curiosity, but because we needed Him to do it. When we look at what God demands of us in the Law, we know how far short of it we really fall. The Law tells us we must, and we grumble and complain, and then do not follow it. The Law says we must not, and those are the things we want to do most, because they are “fun,” or because others would think less of us if we did not.

But Christ took on our flesh to fulfill the Law for us, taking upon Himself the death sentence that we had all earned. In doing so, and in calling us to faith in Him, He has done two things: He has taken away the sting and threat of death and eternal damnation, and He has freed us to live our lives in thankfulness and gratitude to Him. When we look to the cross, we see the magnitude of His sacrifice, and we rejoice to live anew in Him.

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There is an old saying that in the United States, one hundred years is a long time, and in Europe, a hundred miles is a long distance. The saying is glib, but there seems to be some truth to it. Look at all of the things that have changed in the last sixty or seventy years. How can we imagine something that is not subject to the ravages of time?

And yet, this is exactly what God promises us about His Word. All around us, and even in our bodies, we see the ravages of time. Glory fades, accomplishments are forgotten. But what about God's Word? God's Word has been faithfully proclaimed since the days of Adam, the first prophet. God's Word is faithfully proclaimed today, and God's Word will be proclaimed up until the very moment that Christ returns in glory to give His believers their crown of life. We see the fruit of that Word in our mutual love for, and support of, our fellow believers in that Word. We seek out opportunities to show our love and thankfulness! And we thank God that He has preserved His Word, and will preserve it until the end of time.

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Our verses for today present a remarkable contrast between fear and boldness. The disciples are huddled together, hiding out in fear of what the Jewish rulers and powers might do to them. And our risen Lord appears to them, showing the terrible wounds He endured on the cross, to prove that it was really Him. And He calls them to be his Apostles, who would boldly go forth into the world to preach His Word.

Our Lord does not condone or excuse their fear, but He gives them a commission: He formally institutes the Office of the Ministry by giving them the authority to forgive and retain sins. This authority is from Jesus Himself. In His words, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you,” and in breathing on them and invoking the Holy Spirit, we see the love and provenance of God in giving the Ministry to the Church. That Ministry continues today, and it strengthens and builds Christ’s Church. According to Christ’s commission, sinful men preach Law and Gospel, and administer the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. May we ever be found to be faithful stewards of that Ministry—faithful and bold teachers of the Church, and faithful and diligent hearers of God’s Word.

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Many of us were baptized as infants, so we may feel that event is strange and remote. But we must remember that our baptism is a powerful thing! Most importantly, God has promised the forgiveness of sins through His Word and the washing of water. And we can also see powerful symbolism in the transition from death to life.

Just as Jesus Christ died for our sins and was gloriously resurrected to life, so too should our old sinful natures die in baptism. But the focus here is not our death, but our new life! For we are by nature slaves to sin, but through baptism God claims us as His own and gives us new life to live for Him. We read in our Small Catechism, in the fourth chief part: “It signifies that the old man in us is to be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance, and die with all sins and evil lusts; so that daily there may come forth and arise a new man, forever living before God in righteousness and purity.”

So baptism has power, but let us also consider this symbolism. Thanks be to God that He has forgiven our sins, so that we may live before God in righteousness and purity!

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It is very easy for us as people to set up “us” versus “them” comparisons. In some ways it is helpful—we have to differentiate between truth and error, for example, because God calls us to be faithful to his Word.

But not all distinctions matter in the same way. In Christ, our individual human identities are unimportant compared to the fact that we belong to Christ and are heirs of eternal life. And this is because of our baptism! The Galatians were losing sight of what it really meant to be “Abraham’s seed”—they wanted to seek God’s favor through obedience to the Law. But not even Abraham, who was a great believer, was justified by the Law—rather, he trusted God’s promises and it was credited to Him as righteousness. In the very same way, we trust God’s promises to forgive our sins for the sake of Christ’s suffering and death, which He signs and seals with baptism. And we eagerly await the day when we can join Abraham and all of the others who trusted in God’s promises of forgiveness for their sins. That trust in God’s Gospel promise is what makes us one in Christ, not obedience to the ceremonial Law, or external similarities like being Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, male or female. Christ lived and died for all, and so the Gospel is for all.

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

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