

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

Rt. Rev. James Heiser

Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

Rev. Jeffrey Ahonen

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

Rev. Ernest Bernet

Discipleship L. C., Mineral Wells, TX

Rev. David Carver

St. Paul L. C., Taylorsville, NC

Rev. Jerald Dulas

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

Rev. Douglas Handrich

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

Rev. Kent Heimbigner

Charity Lutheran Church, Burleson, TX

Rev. Michael Henson

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

Rev. Daniel Mensing

Faith Lutheran Church, Beaverton, OR

Rev. Randy Moll

Good Shepherd L.C., Rogers, AR

Rev. Mark Mueller

Redeemer L. C., Cambridge, MN

Rev. John Rutowicz

St. Boniface Lutheran Church, Niles, MI

Rev. Paul Rydecki

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

Rev. Josiah Scheck

Christ Lutheran Church, Richmond, MO

Rev. Eric Stefanski

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

Rev. Joshua Sullivan

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

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

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Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

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Rev. Dcn. Anthony Oncken

Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

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Navotas City, Philippines

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Iglesia Confesional de Colombia
Medellin, Colombia

**IGLESIA LUTERANA MISIONERA DE
TARAPOTO-PERÚ**

Tarapoto, Perú

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



FEBRUARY 6—MARCH 5, 2022

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

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)

February 6	Transfiguration	“O Wondrous Type...” (ELH 253)
February 9 (W)	<i>St. Cyril of Alexandria, Bishop, Confessor and Doctor</i>	
February 13	Septuagesima	TLH 377
February 18 (F)	<i>Martin Luther, Confessor and Doctor</i>	
February 20	Sexagesima	TLH 500
February 24 (R)	<i>St. Matthias, Apostle</i>	
February 27	Quinquagesima	TLH 375
March 2 (W)	Ash Wednesday	TLH 152

ST. IGNATIUS SEMINARY UPDATE—The Winter quarter will conclude on February 18. The Spring quarter begins 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.)

Greek Readings will be taught as arranged with the instructor. *Creation and Redemption* will be Tuesdays and Thursday from 10 to 11:30 A.M. *Reformation* will be on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 to 10 A.M., and on Wednesday from 9:30 to 10:30 A.M. *Isaiah* will be on Mondays and Fridays from 9:00 to 10:30 A.M.

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, as seminarians are expected to attend the diocesan meeting, as are all clergy of the diocese.

SYNOD AND COLLOQUIUM—The schedule remains unchanged; with Colloquium on April 26–27, and Synod on April 27–28. Attendance is expected for all clergy; exceptions should be requested of the bishop no later than March 1.

Doctrine and Practice

The ‘Gesima’ Sundays

#19

“The names *Septuagesima*, *Sexagesima* and *Quinquagesima* point forward to Easter, these Sundays falling within the seventh and the sixth decades and upon the fiftieth day before that great feast. The Propers of the three Sundays provide a transition from the joyousness of the Christmas and Epiphany cycles to the stern penitential season of Lent. Momentous historical events originally led to the choice of the Lessons and the composition of the Collects for these days. This accounts for the strongly individual character of these Sundays.

In 568 Pope John III appointed these Sundays as days of supplication in view of the perils threatened by the invading Lombards. Fear of impending disaster and trust in God are alternately expressed in the Introits and Graduals and in the earnest petitions of the Collects for these Sundays. The prayers and other Propers were retained in the Liturgy after the long-continued threats of invasion had ended, and have now received a spiritual interpretation.

... These Sundays have marked individuality and a Lentenlike intensity of spirit. This is announced thematically in the Introit for *Septuagesima*, which speaks of being ‘mercifully delivered’ and ‘defended in all adversity.’ The Epistle and the Gospel sound the warning that although many be called, few are chosen. The Gospel extols God’s goodness but the Epistle exhorts us to self-discipline and endeavor; an intimation of the approaching Lententide. In keeping with this, the Hallelujahs of the Graduals are replaced, beginning with this Sunday, by ‘tracts’ which continue in use throughout Lent.”

—Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 450-451

GESIMA—

Beginning with *Septuagesima*, the Sunday Canticle for Matins is the *Benedictus* (in place of the *Te Deum*); the *Te Deum* should not be used for Matins on ferial days throughout this season and Lent. As noted above, the Tract takes the place of the Hallelujah in the Gradual.

Violet is the liturgical color for the Gesimas in this diocese. Pastors and deacons are encouraged to refer to the Diocesan Ceremonial.

In Christ,
Bishop Heiser

OFFERINGS TO SUPPORT ST. IGNATIUS AND THE DIOCESE—

With the Ember Days of Lent (week of *Invocavit*) quickly approaching, it is asked that congregations of the diocese consider door offerings or other support for the budgeted needs of the diocese and seminary. While the diocese has sufficient financial resources to meet budgeted expenses, regular support has not always kept pace with the ongoing budgeted needs. Individual gifts or congregational support for the diocese or the seminary may always be sent to the diocesan treasurer (please indicate where you would like your support to go; e.g., diocese, seminary, etc.), with checks made to “ELDoNA”:

Rev. Michael Henson
c/o Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church
1000 North Park Ave.
Herrin, IL 62948

Thank you for your support of the work of the diocese!

2022 DIOCESAN FAMILY CAMP—The deadline for deposits is rapidly approaching for this year’s Diocesan Family Camp. St. Patrick Ev. Lutheran Church (Chipley, Florida) will be our host this year, with having a Divine Service at St. Patrick’s with the remainder of the camp taking place at Surfside Christian Retreat Center in Panama City Beach (where we will also be staying). The cost is \$156 for the week, plus \$30 for food, per person. A deposit of \$100 per person is needed by March 5; the remainder is due on arrival. Payment of deposits should be made to “St. Patrick Ev. Lutheran Church” and sent to the congregation:

St. Patrick Lutheran Church, UAC (ELDoNA)
1705 Pioneer Rd.
Chipley, FL 32428

Transfiguration 15. O Wondrous Type, O Vision Fair

Anon., Latin, 15th Century

L. M.
German, 1543

1. O won - drous type, O vi - sion fair
2. From age to age the tale de - clare,
3. The law and pro - phets there have place,
4. With shi - ning face and bright ar - ray,
5. And Chris - tian hearts are raised on high
6. O Fa - ther, with th'e - ter - nal Son

Of glo - ry that the Church shall share,
How with the three dis - ci - ples there,
The cho - sen wit - ness - es of grace;
Christ deigns to man - i - fest to - day
By that great vi - sion's mys - ter - y,
And Ho - ly Spi - rit, ev - er One,

Which Christ up - on the moun - tain shows,
Where Mo - ses and E - li - as meet,
The Fa - ther's voice from out the cloud
What glo - ry shall to faith be giv'n
For which in thank - ful strains we raise
Vouch - safe to bring us by Thy grace

Where bright - er than the sun He glows!
 The Lord holds con - verse high and sweet.
 Pro - claims His on - ly Son a - loud.
 When we en - joy our God in heav'n.
 On this glad day the voice of praise.
 To see Thy glo - ry face to face. A - men.

“Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear.” This quote from today’s reading beautifully depicts how God deals with you. Through God’s Law the Holy Spirit functions as the “wise rebuker.” As painful as it is for your sinful flesh to hear God accuse you of sin, the same Holy Spirit works within you to give you “an obedient ear” to heed His call to repentance.

This is the God who feeds His enemies and gives them water to drink. He patiently waits with the desire for them to turn to Him for forgiveness. But as Scripture tells us, many are hard of heart and refuse God’s gracious invitation to turn from their sinful lives. They will spend eternity knowing that it was God who gave them food and drink while living on earth. They will also spend eternity knowing they had turned their backs on Him.

The Church for centuries has drawn our attention to our need for repentance. Every day during this season of Lent you are moving closer and closer to Good Friday, where you see what God has done for you through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. There God’s Law meets His Gospel; the perfect life of Christ given in perfect sacrifice for you.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Perverse: “turned away from what is right or good.” This is an accurate description of sin. One who turns away from God, obviously, is turning away from good. As Jesus said, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God” (Mark 10:18). When Christians view themselves in the light of God’s Law, all we find is perversion.

All of the foul things listed in today’s reading apply to us, as well as to those we would quickly want to label as “perverse.” No help is found in God’s Law, because God’s Law always accuses. Fortunately, God has another aspect of His Word, the Gospel, by which He would have all people to be saved. In the Gospel the believer hears God’s voice of forgiveness for a conscience smitten by His Law. This Word turns the person’s eyes away from the sin that lingers to the Christ who suffered and died to pay the price for those sins, and rose again from the dead.

Every day the Christian lives with a battle that rages on inside because we are simultaneously sinner and saint. Thanks be to God for giving His people the Holy Spirit in Baptism. Every day the Holy Spirit moves us to confess our sins and takes us to Christ and His forgiveness. The overarching point to remember is that when the Law convicts you of sin, don’t run from God. Instead, run to Jesus, confess your sins, and trust in His forgiveness.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; 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 Transfiguration Sunday

Article III.

Also they 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

They lived on the plain—there were no mountains where they could worship on the high places. They had no stones to build with, but they had lots of clay. So, they made fire-tempered bricks to build a structure that reached above the clouds. They wanted to worship in the heavens by their own efforts, on their own terms. They did not want to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth as God had blessed them to do; they wanted to remain where they were, and make a name for themselves by working their way to heaven. God would not have it. He confused the people’s speech. Not being able to talk to each other, they scattered on the earth.

We wonder about them, but do we ‘temper our own clay’—harden our hearts—and try to work our way into heaven? Let it not be so! Let us not trust in our own works; let us be faithful to God’s Word and Sacraments. Let us be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth with faith in His promises and blessings given through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Prayer: O God, who in the glorious transfiguration of Thine only-begotten Son hast confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the fathers, and who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons, mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; 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.

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But we don’t. There are all too many times we get angry, over big stuff, as well as over the smallest of things. We sit and stew without an ounce of forgiveness emanating from our souls. Sometimes our Lord lets us stew for a while. He lets us sit and ruminate until we see our real problem. “When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,’ and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.” (Psalm 32:4-5)

Love of neighbor begins with God loving and forgiving us. The Holy Spirit brings us to repentance before God, and to receive His forgiveness. The love of Christ for us compelled Him to do whatever was necessary to save us. We know what that “necessary” thing was. He had to die on the cross in order to pay the price of our sins. By this we are saved. We can begin to love others because the love of Christ moves us to do so.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

What makes Ash Wednesday so special? Aren't we to confess our sins every day? Isn't that the lasting effect of Holy Baptism, in that the Holy Spirit brings us daily repentance? So why do we even need Ash Wednesday? The Divine Service and the historic liturgy of the Church help us understand the significance of Ash Wednesday.

When we think of the Church year, what usually stands out are those special days like Christmas and Easter. But when one really looks at every Divine Service one sees the totality of Christ and His work. The Divine Service is about the entire Christ, from the promise made in the Garden of Eden to the promise of Christ's return at the end of time. Every Sunday is all about Christ and about His all. The difference from Sunday to Sunday and other special days on the Church calendar is simply a matter of emphasis, which takes us back to Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday is that special time to heighten our awareness of our need for repentance, our need to turn from our sinful ways to our God who is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness."

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing Thou hast made and dost forgive the sins of all those who are penitent, create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Want to know what you are going to look like when Jesus raises you from the dead? You need not fret about it. Jesus tells you. "Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

And you may say, "But I am not righteous. I have no righteousness." And you are correct. Indeed, you have no righteousness of your own, on your own. But God has created faith in Christ's righteousness in you by the work of the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament. By faith in Christ's righteousness you assume His righteousness. By His power you believe in Christ, and your faith in Him is credited to you as righteousness.

During the week after Transfiguration we see Jesus shining like the sun. By this we get a vivid image of the way we will look when He comes again. Christ will put his righteousness on you who believe in Him. We will thus be like Him. Only those who are clothed like Him can enter the doorway to heaven, to God's eternal feast. We will shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of our Father!

Prayer: O God, who in the glorious transfiguration of Thine only-begotten Son hast confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the fathers, and who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons, mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; 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.

Chilling words are these from Jesus: “I do not know you, where you are from.”

Do you claim that you have come to faith in Jesus by your own efforts? This is hardly possible. Your works, done without faith in Christ, are only sinful. Where are you from? Is your heart ruled by the devil, the world, and your flesh? If so, then Jesus does not know you. Or is your heart contrite and soft, concerned with your sin? Do you confess your sins and receive Christ’s absolution through your God-sent pastor? Do you remember your Baptism? Do you believe that Christ is present in His Body and Blood at His Holy Table?

Is your only hope for forgiveness and everlasting life based on your faith in your Savior Jesus Christ? That is how He knows you! And since He knows you, He will save you through your faith in Him. Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. You believe God in Christ and it will be credited to you as righteousness.

Prayer: O God, who in the glorious transfiguration of Thine only-begotten Son hast confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the fathers, and who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons, mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; 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 said in today’s reading, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.” A person can quickly think, “Oh great! This is supposed to be uplifting? I don’t keep Jesus’ commandments. So now what?” That is how you should feel when confronted by God’s Law. Nobody keeps God’s commandments. So how are you supposed to “love” Jesus when you can’t even do what He expects?

“We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). And how did God show us His love? “But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). God’s call to sinners is to turn to Him for mercy and forgiveness, which are the result of Christ’s death on the cross. Christ tells us, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me” (John 14:1). To believe in Christ is to trust you are forgiven all your sins. Jesus’ perfect life is now counted as your very own, for through faith you are united to Him. God now sees you as perfect, holy, and righteous because you are in Christ.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask.” And so it is even today with many preachers. They do not think of God as Savior, but more as a personal butler. For them God exists to give you whatever you ask for, so long as you know how to do the asking. This false teaching is known as “name it and claim it.”

But when it comes to the truth of God’s Word, there is a sense in which “name it and claim it” holds true. The Ten Commandments clearly tell us what God expects of people. “Name” any commandment and people can only truly “claim” they have failed to keep it, and miserably so. Although the disciples had been with Jesus for several years, James and John still didn’t understand why Jesus came. He came to die. The “cup” Jesus would endure would be the cup of God’s wrath. He would die so that we may live. In Holy Baptism your sins were washed away. But where did they go? They went away from you and onto Christ, who bore them on the cross. There, on the cross, He dies the death we rightly deserve.

This is how Christ came “to serve.” He came “to give His life a ransom for many,” which far exceeds the service of a mere butler who simply serves to fulfill earthly desires. Instead, Jesus gives to us that which we truly need for eternal life, forgiveness of sins.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; 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 little bitty seed is hidden in the immense dirt covering of the earth. As the seed germinates and the tree grows in size, so does the number of birds nesting and hiding in that tree. A small bit of yeast is hidden in a large amount of meal to make bread. Though the amount of yeast is minuscule compared to the rest of the meal, the yeast begins its work, gas bubbles are produced, and the bread begins to rise.

Jesus uses parables and paradoxes to teach God’s truth. The results of paradoxes are never what you expect, and God’s good and holy works can come from small, hidden—almost unnoticeable—beginnings. So it was that a virgin’s Son was born in Bethlehem. A tiny town in the midst of an immense earth would be the place where God would send His Son to bless His Church on earth. Thus it was that the One killed by the Jews for blasphemy would be the One sent to save them, and the world, from sin. God’s greatness is found in His little things, and in His grand things. But God is always great. And always, God is good.

Prayer: O God, who in the glorious transfiguration of Thine only-begotten Son hast confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the fathers, and who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons, mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; 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 tells us of a man who found a hidden treasure in a field. He hides that treasure, goes and sells everything he owns, and buys that field. Then, Jesus tells us that there was a merchant who in the course of his work found a beautiful pearl of great price. In order to own that valuable pearl the merchant went and sold everything he owned.

Jesus also tells of a dragnet being thrown into the sea that yields both good and bad things. The good things were kept, while the bad things were thrown away. At the end of the age the angels will come forth and separate the wicked from the righteous. The bad will be cast into the fiery furnace; the just—those justified through faith in Christ by God’s grace—will go to everlasting life.

The things of God, old and new, are great treasures. These things—the Old and New Testaments, the Law, the Gospel, the Sacraments—are the treasures that save sinners like you and me. Thanks be to God for His many gifts to us!

Prayer: O God, who in the glorious transfiguration of Thine only-begotten Son hast confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the fathers, and who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons, mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; 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 Quinquagesima Sunday

Chapter II, Article IV.

[B. What is Justifying Faith?]

The adversaries [Roman Catholics] feign that faith is only a knowledge of history, and, therefore, [they] teach that it can coexist with mortal sin. Hence, they say nothing concerning faith, by which Paul so frequently says that men are justified, because those who are accounted righteous before God do not live in mortal sin. But that faith which justifies, is not merely a knowledge of history, but it is to assent to the promise of God, in which, for Christ’s sake, the remission of sins and justification are freely offered. [It is certainty or the certain trust in the heart, when, with my whole heart, I regard the promises of God as certain and true, through which there are offered me, without my merit, the forgiveness of sins, grace and all salvation, through Christ the Mediator.] And, that no one may suppose that it is mere knowledge, we will add further: it is to wish and to receive the offered promise of the remission of sins and of justification. And the distinction between this faith and the righteousness of the Law, can be easily discerned. Faith is the divine service, which receives the benefits offered by God; the righteousness of the Law is the divine service which offers to God our merits. By faith, God wishes Himself so to be honored, that we may receive from Him those things which He promises and offers.

But that faith signifies, not only a knowledge of history, but the faith which assents to the promise, Paul openly testifies, when he says (Rom. 4:16): “Therefore it is of faith, to the end the promise might be sure.” For he judges, that the promise cannot be received, unless by faith. Wherefore, he compares them correlatively, and connects promise and faith. Although it will be easy to decide what faith is, if we consider the Creed, where this article certainly stands: “The forgiveness of sins.” Therefore, it is not enough to believe that Christ was born, suffered, was raised again, unless we add also this article, which is the final cause of the history: “The forgiveness of sins.” To this article, the rest must be referred, viz. that, for Christ’s sake, and not for the sake of our merits, forgiveness of sins is given us. For what need would there be, that Christ be given for our sins, if for our sins our merits can give satisfaction?

—Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §48–52

We should not think that because we Christians are partakers of the Gospel the Law has become meaningless. When the Lord established His covenant with the people of Israel at Sinai, it was done in earnest. He meant what He said, both the blessings and the curses. St. Paul affirms the veracity of God's words: "The Law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12).

The Law is God's holy standard of what His people are supposed to do and what they are not to do. It teaches us what sin is. The strict sentence of Moses determines that all people are sinners and incapable of earning salvation by following God's commandments. Thanks be to God, then, that we are not saved by the Law but by His grace in Christ! Ultimately, the purpose of the Law was to drive us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. While sinful man could not keep the Covenant of the Law, Christ did. He perfectly kept the Commandments in thoughts, desires, words, and deeds. And by imputing His righteousness to us by faith, He fulfills in us what the Law requires.

Now, having brought us to Mt. Zion rather than to Mt. Sinai, the Lord still commands us to hear His voice, to walk in His ways, and to trust in Him for our deliverance. "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it" (Hebrews 4:1).

Prayer: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

"Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."

Auto warranties and guarantees change often, from 20,000 miles, to 50,000 miles, to 100,000 miles, now to 200,000 miles. But when God makes a promise or guarantee it does not change. God's guarantees last forever.

The Apostle Paul tells of a guarantee given by God to the Baptized. This guarantee has been sealed in us by God. This guarantee is the gift of His own Holy Spirit. He does this to create and maintain the faith that saves within us. Thanks be to God for the Holy Spirit who has bound Himself to the Word, to the Word joined to water, and to the Word joined to bread and wine. This God who is Triune is the only true and living God. There is no other God! His promises are guaranteed to last forever. Praise be to God, for His Word endures forever!

Prayer: O God, who in the glorious transfiguration of Thine only-begotten Son hast confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the fathers, and who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons, mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; 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 Septuagesima Sunday

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 25: ISAIAH 45:11–19

SEXAGESIMA

CHAPTER XI. OF GOD'S ETERNAL FOREKNOWLEDGE [PRE-DESTINATION] AND ELECTION.

Concerning this article no public dissension has occurred among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession. But since it is a consolatory article, if treated properly, and by this means the introduction in the future of a controversy likely to cause offence may be avoided, it is also explained in this writing.

AFFIRMATIVE

The Pure and True Doctrine concerning this Article.

1. First of all, the distinction between foreknowledge and predestination, that is, between God's foreknowledge and His eternal election, ought to be accurately observed.

2. For the foreknowledge of God is nothing else than that God knows all things before they happen, as it is written (Dan. 2:28): "There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days."

3. This foreknowledge is occupied alike with the godly and the wicked; but it is not the cause of evil or of sin, so that men do what is wrong (which originally arises from the devil and the wicked, perverse will of man); nor the cause of their ruin, for which they themselves are responsible; but only regulates it, and fixes to it a limit how long it should last, and that everything, notwithstanding that in itself it is evil, should serve His elect for their salvation.

4. The predestination or eternal election of God, however, is occupied only with the godly, beloved children of God, and this is a cause of their salvation, which He also provides as well as disposes what belongs thereto. Upon this [predestination of God] our salvation is founded so firmly that the gates of hell cannot overcome it (John 10:28; Matt. 16:18).

5. This is not to be investigated in the secret counsel of God, but to be sought in the Word of God, where it is also revealed.

6. But the Word of God leads us to Christ, who is the Book of Life, in whom all are written and elected that are to be saved, as it is written (Eph. 1:4): "He hath chosen us in Him" [Christ] "before the foundation of the world."

7. Thus Christ calls to Himself all sinners and promises them rest, and He is anxious that all men should come to Him and permit Him to help them. To them He offers Himself in His Word, and wishes them to hear it, and not to stop their ears or despise the Word. He promises besides the power and efficiency of the Holy Ghost, and divine assistance for perseverance and eternal salvation.

8. Therefore we should judge concerning this our election to eternal life neither

All of God's works are done in earnest. From our creation to our preservation, from our redemption to our final salvation, the Lord is determined to accomplish His holy will. He has not done any of these things in vain, but is determined to be recognized as our Creator and Savior. His primary will is that people see these things and believe in Him as the one true and only God of Heaven and Earth. This is why it is so offensive to Him when people worship false idols—they give praise, thanks, and glory to the creature rather than the creator, and reject the Lord's free salvation.

Those who trust in false gods shall be ashamed, but those who trust in the Lord shall be saved. Because God has done so much for us in true earnestness, sincerely desiring our eternal welfare, He expects that we earnestly seek after Him. We who have been brought out of spiritual darkness and ignorance into the light of God's Word should be determined to continue in that light and truth.

Prayer: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

If the holy writer could scarcely summarize the great deeds of the faithful in the time that he had, this writer certainly cannot do it in this devotion. The Church has an awe-inspiring wealth of examples in the lives of the saints of God to motivate us in our own lives. At times, our perception of the Christian life is very narrow and limited to our own experiences. But when we review the testimony and witness of those who have gone before, we are encouraged in our faith, renewed in our hope, and strengthened in our resolve to soldier on in our pilgrimage to the Kingdom of Heaven.

The writer says in the next chapter, “Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2). We should think of these faithful examples whenever we come together to worship, knowing that the saints above and we below are part of one communion, and that with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven we laud and magnify the glorious name of our God.

Prayer: Almighty God, who into the place of the traitor Judas didst choose Thy faithful servant Matthias, grant that Thy Church, ever being preserved from false apostles, may continually abide in the doctrine of Thy true Apostles; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

from reason nor from the Law of God, which would lead either into a dissipated, dissolute epicurean life, or into despair, and would excite in the heart of men pernicious thoughts (and such thoughts cannot be effectually guarded against as long as they follow their own reason), so that they think to themselves: “If God has elected me to salvation, I cannot be condemned, although I do whatever I will.” And again: “If I am not elected to eternal life, it matters not what good I do; for my efforts are nevertheless all in vain.”

9. But the true judgment concerning predestination must be learned alone from the Holy Gospel concerning Christ, in which it is clearly testified that “God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all,” and that “He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (Rom. 11:32; Ez. 18:23; 33:11; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 2:2).

10. To him, therefore, who is really concerned about the revealed will of God, and proceeds according to the order which St. Paul has observed in the Epistle to the Romans, who first directs men to repentance, knowledge of sins, to faith in Christ, to divine obedience, before he speaks of the mystery of the eternal election of God, this doctrine is useful and consolatory.

11. That, however, “many are called, few are chosen,” does not mean that God is unwilling that all should be saved, but the reason is that they either do not at all hear God’s Word, but wilfully despise it, close their ears and harden their hearts, and in this manner foreclose the ordinary way to the Holy Ghost, so that He cannot effect His work in them, or when it is heard, they consider it of no account, and do not heed it. For this [that they perish] not God or His election, but their wickedness is responsible (2 Pet. 2:1 sqq.; Luke 11:49, 52; Heb. 12:25 sq.).

12. Moreover, a Christian should apply himself to the article concerning the eternal election of God, so far as it has been revealed in God’s Word, which presents Christ to us as the Book of Life, which, by the preaching of the holy Gospel, He opens and spreads out to us, as it is written (Rom. 8:30): “Whom He did predestinate, them He also called.” In Him, therefore, we should seek the eternal election of the Father, who, in His eternal divine counsel, determined that He would save no one except those who acknowledge His Son, Christ, and truly believe on Him. Other thoughts are to be entirely banished, as they proceed not from God, but from the suggestion of Satan, whereby he attempts to weaken or to entirely remove from us the glorious consolation which we have in this salutary doctrine, viz. that we know that out of pure grace, without any merit of our own, we have been elected in Christ to eternal life, and that no one can pluck us out of His hand; as He has promised this gracious election not only with mere words, but has also certified it with an oath, and sealed it with the holy sacraments, where we can call to mind in our most severe temptations, and from them comfort ourselves, and thereby quench the fiery darts of the devil.

On account of our sins we are justly condemned. The impenitent, when they hear the force of the Law—that they are deserving of eternal death and damnation—bolster up themselves in their impenitence. Such was the actions of the nations of Canaan after hearing that Israel completely destroyed Jericho and Ai. They gathered their armies together as one to fight against the Israelites. They would all end up being destroyed.

There are also those who are like the Gibeonites who say all the right words, but their lives tell a different story. The Gibeonites sought to craftily obtain the mercy of the Lord. The Israelites, believing their words and not knowing it was a lie, readily offered an alliance. Even though the deception worked, it would not stay hidden forever. They would eventually receive the consequences of their actions and would become servants of the Israelites.

The truly penitent however, hearing the rebuke of the Law, readily confess that they are indeed worthy of punishment, and petition the Lord for grace and mercy. They come before the Lord and admit that they are indeed poor, miserable sinners, even as we do each time we gather in the Divine Service. The ministers of Christ pronounce forgiveness to us on account of what our Lord Jesus has done for us by His perfect life and sacrificial death on the cross.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name; 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 Apostles had a great task ahead of them when Jesus sent them out to preach the Kingdom of Heaven. They were put in a vulnerable situation, as sheep among wolves, not giving any thought for their own well-being, but only for the work of the Ministry. This task would prove to be a test of their faith, their service, and their determination. To pass this test they would have to seek strength and courage—not from themselves, but from God.

In their vocations as called and ordained ministers of the Word, pastors today must still have this kind of determination and trust in the gracious provision of the Lord, putting their service to God and to His Church before their own welfare. St. Paul writes to Timothy, “To this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe” (1 Timothy 4:10).

God provides for His servants through the Church. Many pastors have sacrificed much in their service to the Church; it is only fitting that the Church in turn supports them. The service that Christ’s ministers offer and give to the hearers is supposed to be reciprocated and given back to them by the hearers. Those who hear the peace of the Gospel and believe it in true faith, if they are really driven according to the New Man by the Spirit of God, will want to help support its ministry.

Prayer: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

When a farmer sows his seed he does not know what will spring up. Yet, in his determination, he still tends his fields. When you give charitably to others you have no way of knowing how beneficial your donation will be. Parents who plan to have a child cannot know whether their child will be born healthy or with complications. Even when we give witness of our faith to others, we do not know whether people will receive it in faith or reject it in unbelief. But, if we wait until we know the outcome, we would never act. Instead, we should trust the gracious will of God to work all things out for good.

The farmer sows his seed in hope for a good harvest. We do good to our neighbor in the hope of helping him overcome evil. Parents still beget children in the hope of raising them in the Christian faith. Regardless of our positions in life, we Christians are encouraged to move forward in life and fulfill the calling that we have in Christ. We should not let the circumstances of the world or the turbulent culture in which we live deter us from doing the will of God. Instead, we remember what St. Paul writes to the Colossians, “Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23-24).

Prayer: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Church is often compared to a vineyard. Sunday’s Gospel reading was the parable of the landowner who went early to the marketplace to gather laborers to work in his vineyard. This was a picture of the Lord and His Church. Today’s reading from the prophet Isaiah also compares the Church to a vineyard. This vineyard is cared for by the “Well-Beloved One”. He works diligently for His vineyard. Our Lord works diligently for His Bride, the Church.

He dug a fence and encamps all around the ones who fear Him; who trust in Him (Psalm 34:7). He placed in the Church the tower of the teachings of the Prophets and Apostles. The Ministers of the Lord are ready to defend and protect the Church by continuing to preach and teach the truth of the Word of God against all false teachings. They remove the weeds and stones of false doctrine that prevent its growth and maturity.

Even with all of the Lord’s work, the vineyard is still plagued by sin and unbelief. This was a prophecy against Israel who had forsaken the Lord and His teachings. This serves today as a warning against those who would cling to the false idols of this world, and cling to false teachings in the Church. Such churches produce bad grapes. Our Lord desires that the Church produces good grapes, that His works would be taught in their truth and purity.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name; 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 have here today a wonderful pericope on the relationship of the Lord to the penitent sinner. Those who cling in faith to the Lord are affirmed to have been chosen by God to be His people. The Lord had already made clear that He had chosen the people of Israel to be His. He had sent Moses to deliver them from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. He rescued them from the armies of Pharaoh by providing dry land to walk through the midst of the Red Sea. He preserved them in the wilderness for forty years by providing water, quail, and manna.

He had also given them His Law—His Ten Commandments—on Mount Sinai, written with His own hand and presented to them by Moses. The Commandments showed how the Lord promised to protect those who feared, loved, and trusted in Him above all gods. The people of Israel, after forty years of wandering in the wilderness, were now ready to take possession of the promised land of Canaan. It was here, when Moses gave his final speech, that the Israelites confessed their faith in the Lord. He would be their God, and they would be His people.

This is how it is for us in the Church. We confess our faith in the Lord when we confess that we are unable to save ourselves by our own works. Through His grace and mercy He claims us as His own people.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name; 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 Lord Jesus always delighted to do the will of His heavenly Father. Whether hearing and studying the Holy Scriptures as a child, teaching and preaching to the multitudes, or even suffering at the hands of His enemies, Christ was not ashamed of His Father. He knew that when He had gone through His bitter Passion He would be justified before all people at the Resurrection. His face was set with divine determination to fulfill His Father's will and accomplish our Redemption.

Likewise, if we trust in the name of the Lord, and rely upon our God and the Gospel of His love for us, we do not need to feel ashamed of our lot in life. Our spiritual enemies may ridicule us and persecute us for following God's Word, but they cannot undo what Christ has done for us, nor overturn the victory of the cross. The fortitude of Christ is found in the faith of His people, and His vindication is the cause of our justification.

Isaiah's words are mirrored in St. Paul's to the Romans, "If God is for us, who can be against us? ... It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." (Romans 8:31-34) May our ears always be open to hear the Gospel of Christ, our tongues tuned to proclaim His Word, and our hearts kindled with a bold faith!

Prayer: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Sexagesima Sunday

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17: JOSHUA 24:14–25 SEPTUAGESIMA

Article VII.

Also, they [the Lutherans] teach, that One holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments rightly administered. And to the true unity of the Church, it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: “One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all,” etc. [Eph. 4:5, 6]

Article VIII.

Although the Church properly is the Congregation of Saints and true believers, nevertheless, since, in this life, many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled therewith, it is lawful to use the Sacraments, which are administered by evil men; according to the saying of Christ: “The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat,” etc. [Matt. 23:2]. Both the Sacraments and Word are effectual by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ, notwithstanding they be administered by evil men.

They condemn the Donatists, and such like, who denied it to be lawful to use the ministry of evil men in the Church, and who thought the ministry of evil men to be unprofitable and of none effect.

—The Augsburg Confession

XII.

Of the Church.

We do not acknowledge them [the Roman Catholics] as the Church, and they are not; we also will not listen to those things which, under the name of Church, they either enjoin or forbid. For, thank God, today a child seven years old knows what the Church is, viz. saints, believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd. For the children repeat: “I believe in one holy Christian Church.” This holiness does not consist in an alb, a tonsure, a long gown and other of their ceremonies devised by them beyond Holy Scripture, but consists in the Word of God and true faith.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article XII

The Book of Concord

Just like Moses had done before his death, which we heard yesterday, Joshua also gathers the people of Israel together to admonish them before his death. He admonishes the people to put away their false gods. These gods they have carried with them since Egypt, through forty years of wilderness wandering, through the conquest of Canaan, and even now that they have been planted in the promised land. They still clung to their false gods. They would even adopt the false gods of the Canaanites who still lived among them.

This serves as a picture and warning for us. There are many things in our lives that we trust in for rescue, apart from the one true Lord God. Our money, social status, family life, job security, our favorite sports team, and the like are all things from which we seek comfort in times of trouble and sorrow. We fail to turn to the only source of comfort in this life—to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Like the Israelites, when we are asked, “Who will you serve today?,” we readily say, “The Lord.” But our lives tell a different story, just as the lives of the Israelites did. With this realization, let us confess our sins and forsake our false gods, and cling to the works and merits of the Christ, our Lord Jesus, who grants us forgiveness freely for His name’s sake.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

On this date in 1546 Martin Luther was granted the gift of Heaven. During his life he taught that men should not place trust in their own works. Trusting in one's works for salvation excludes the work of the Lord—the Christ. Men are prone to trusting in themselves. We all want to consider ourselves “good people.” We want to believe our own strengths and abilities are satisfactory. This is certainly what the Israelites would have believed if they had attacked the Midianites with the full force of those who answered the call of Gideon.

The Lord wanted to teach the Israelites to trust solely in Him. Therefore, He reduced their number down to three hundred. There would be no mistaking the Lord's help when three hundred defeated the Midianites, who were as “numerous as locusts” (vs. 12). The Lord had removed all props with which the Israelites could bolster themselves and claim victory by their own doing.

Through the preaching of the Law, the Lord removes all of our props that we use to assure ourselves of our ability to defeat our spiritual enemies. He places the cross of our Lord Jesus before us to show that only His perfect life and sacrifice can atone for our sins and redeem us from sin and death. Let us give thanks that this Gospel has been restored to us through Martin Luther's teachings!

Prayer: O God, who didst give Martin Luther as a faithful teacher of the saving truth in a time of great trial, grant to Thy people zeal for Thy Word and faithful teachers for Thy Church, that they may stand steadfast against all error, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who livest and reignest with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Our Lord God in His call of Jeremiah reflects the words of David from Psalm 139:13-16. Jeremiah was “fearfully and wonderfully made” (vs. 14). Jeremiah's “frame was not hidden from” the Lord God (vs. 15). The Lord had seen the “substance” of Jeremiah while he was still in his mother's womb (vs. 16). Therefore, the Lord God had already planned to use Jeremiah as His prophet to preach to Judah in her last days before being exiled into Babylon.

Born in the days of King Josiah to his father Hilkiyah, a priest in Anathoth of Benjamin, Jeremiah was called by the Lord to preach repentance to Judah. At his calling the Lord makes it clear that they would not listen, saying, “Do not be afraid of their faces.” This was not supposed to deter Jeremiah from proclaiming the truth of God's Word. He would go before kingdoms and nations to proclaim their sins. He would suffer greatly for that preaching.

The impenitent are prone to respond this way to the preaching of the Law. The penitent person, however, humbly proclaims that he is justly punished for his sins. The purpose of Jeremiah's preaching was to lead people to repentance, to lead them to the salvation found in the Lord's mercy. Our ministers lead us to the Christ, in whom we have life and salvation; in whom we find forgiveness.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.