

OVERVIEW OF THE “COMMON SERVICE”—PART I & II Pastor Scheck (Christ Ev. Lutheran Church)

I. THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE GERMAN LUTHERAN LITURGY.

Martin Luther wrote two Lutheran orders of service—one German, one Latin. Afterward, Johannes Bugenhagen, Justus Jonas, and Martin Chemnitz adapted these two for the places where they were called as superintendents, proportioned according to local custom and how much Latin they desired to retain.

Thus, the foundation of the Lutheran liturgy is the work of these four men, built on the same two liturgies.

II. THE FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA.

In 1748, the first organized Lutheran church body in North America was founded. They called it The Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium in North America. From the beginning, they wanted all North American Lutherans to be united in both doctrine and liturgy. This is a quote from their “founding father”, Henry Muhlenberg:

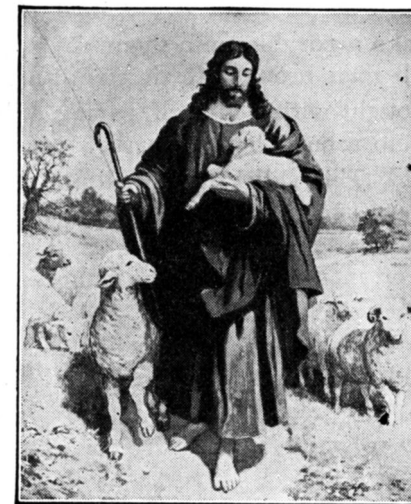
It would be a most desirable and advantageous thing if all the Evangelical Lutheran congregations in the North American States were united with one another, if they all used the same order of service, the same hymnbook, and in good and evil days would show an active sympathy and fraternally correspond with one another.

For their hymnal, they simply copied the one they had used back in their territory of Germany. Later Lutheran bodies would translate it into English for their own purposes, and it was, arguably, the best American Lutheran liturgy until 1888. Their hymnal fell short for two reasons: it was still in German, and it was not universally Lutheran, but from one Lutheran territory. (When I say it “fell short”, I do not mean it was wrong or unscriptural, but that it did not accomplish their desire of uniting all American Lutherans).

The take away from this is that it is the sincere desire of all true Lutherans that our commonality of doctrine should be reflected in a commonality of ceremony. However, something more universally applicable was necessary.

(to be continued...)

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



*“Rejoice with Me, for I have found My sheep
which was lost!”*

(FROM THE GOSPEL FOR TRINITY 3)

JULY 3–30, 2022

**A PUBLICATION OF
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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)

July 3	Trinity 3	TLH 319
July 10	Trinity 4	ELH 98
July 17	Trinity 5	TLH 548
July 22 (F)	St. Mary Magdalene	
July 24	Trinity 6	TLH 287
July 25 (M)	St. James the Elder, Apostle	
July 29 (F)	St. Olaf, King and Martyr	

ST. IGNATIUS SEMINARY UPDATE—The Summer Intensives begin on June 6. The classes this quarter are as follows:

E009—Greek Readings 4 (1 hr.)

P003—Liturgics Practicum II (1 hr.)

S006—Eschatology (1 hr.)

H005—Renaissance (2 hrs.)

E007—Galatians (2 hrs.)

S007—Office of the Ministry and Ecclesiology (3 hrs.)

Seminary Intensives will run through July 8. The Fall Quarter begins September 5.

SUMMER VISITATION SCHEDULE—Bishop Heiser will be conducting many of his visitations between July 6 and July 18.

July 6	Pr. Moll & Dcn. Jackson	Good Shepherd (Rogers, AR)
July 8	Pr. Stefanski	Holy Trinity (Harrison, AR)
July 10	Pr. Scheck	Christ (Richmond, MO)
July 13	Pr. Henson & Dcn. Harroun	Trinity (Herrin, IL)
July 14	Pr. Handrich	Holy Cross (Peoria, IL)
July 15	Pr. Rutowicz	St. Boniface (Niles, MI)
July 17	Pr. Ahonen	Good Shepherd (Tony, WI)
July 18	Pr. Mueller	Redeemer (Cambridge, MN)

SATURDAY, JULY 30: MARK 9:43–50 6TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

The Old Adam is persistent. In our Christian lives it can often feel like we take two steps forward and three steps back. The struggle between the new man in Christ and the Old Adam is a real one, which can take a heavy toll on our conscience.

Our Lord knows this and warns us that the fight to resist the temptation of the flesh is not easy. Therefore, our Lord uses shocking imagery in our reading today. He wants us to know how serious this fight is going to be! He wants us to be prepared for the battle that comes with rejecting sin; the process which comes about by the Holy Ghost in our sanctification. The Old Adam must daily, by contrition and repentance, drown in a baptismal flood so the new man in Christ would also daily arise.

Even more, we are not called to win this fight in our own strength. Since we are dead to sin and buried with Christ in baptism (Romans 6:2-13), Christ brings the victory over sin and the Old Adam. Therefore, let us trust Him.

Prayer: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Being a follower of Jesus means living a life of peril and hardship. The Church is attacked by both fleshly and spiritual forces. Our Lord warns His disciples to beware of the leaven of false teachers, but the disciples do not understand at first. The Old Adam often tries to confuse us as well, and to take our eyes off the clear Word of God. The Lord encourages His disciples to look beyond their physical needs and to focus on the provision that only He can provide.

As a king and a martyr, St. Olaf had to overcome many threats to his people and the Church he sought to help establish in Norway, defeating the paganism which had a hold on the culture of his day. Even on the battlefield, as Olaf succumbed to his wounds, his dying words were, “God help me.”

We face many threats, and yet the Lord fights for us. In this we can have hope, that we do not face the trials alone, but are guided by the Triune God in His Word.

Prayer: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; 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 Visitation Articles unanimously approved at the 2015 Synod sets forth the matters which the bishop evaluates during his visitations:

1. The bishop shall require of each pastor and deacon of the diocese to give an account of his teaching. Namely, whether he instructs the church entrusted to his care in the chief articles of our holy Christian faith according to the prophetic and apostolic Scripture as well as the Book of Concord (1580).
2. Further, whether he administers the holy Sacraments and other ceremonies according to the received hymnals and agendas, and particularly whether he makes available occasions for private confession and absolution.
3. Further, the means whereby he instructs the catechumens in the faith.
4. Further, the holy days which he observes throughout the year.
5. Further, whether and with what diligence he visits the sick and dying, comforts them, administers the sacrament to them.
6. Further, the clergy shall give an account of their daily and regular private studies, and, if the clergyman turns out to be an idler, diligently admonish him to pursue his studies, and then explore the matter with him further in subsequent visitations.

What the Bishop shall do following completion of his Visitation:

If a pastor or deacon is found negligent in his teaching or otherwise reprehensible in his adherence to the confession of the Church, the bishop shall, depending on the nature of the case, examine and question him concerning his confession, hear one or more sermons by him, either in his own church or in that of the bishop, in order better to observe his diligence or negligence, his gifts or deficiencies, and find a basis for correcting and instructing him.

In the case of a pastor or deacon who has a curious opinion on some matter, the bishop shall demand a written confession of faith from him and discuss it with him in the friendliest possible way. And if the clergyman refuses to be instructed, that circumstance, together with his written confession and an account of the discussion with him concerning it and the answers he gave, shall be reported in detail in writing and become the basis for further investigation according to the means set forth in the diocesan charter.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Third Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE XII. Of Repentance.

In the twelfth article they [the Romanists] approve of the first part, in which we set forth that, to those who have fallen since baptism, the remission of sins can be imparted at whatever time, and as often as they are converted. ...

Let any one of the adversaries come forth and tell us when the remission of sins takes place. O good God, what darkness there is! They doubt whether it be in attrition or in contrition that remission of sins occurs. And if it occur on account of contrition, what need is there of absolution, what does the power of the keys effect, if sin have been already remitted? Here indeed they also labor much more, and wickedly detract from the power of the keys. ... For if the power of the keys do not console us before God, what then will pacify the conscience?

Moreover, the power of the keys administers and presents the Gospel through absolution, which is the true voice of the Gospel. Thus we also comprise absolution, when we speak of faith, because “faith cometh by hearing” (Rom. 10:17). For when the Gospel is heard, and the absolution is heard, the conscience is encouraged, and receives consolation. And because God truly quickens through the Word, the keys truly remit sins before God, according to Luke 10:16: “He that heareth you heareth Me.” Wherefore the voice of the one absolving must be believed not otherwise than we would believe a voice from heaven. And absolution properly can be called a sacrament of repentance, as also the more learned scholastic theologians speak. ... Thus faith is conceived and strengthened through absolution, through the hearing of the Gospel, through the use of the sacraments, so that it may not succumb while it struggles with the terrors of sin and death. This theory of repentance is plain and clear, and increases the worth of the power of the keys and of the sacraments and illumines the benefit of Christ, and teaches us to avail ourselves of Christ as Mediator and Propitiator.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §1, 5, 7, 39–41, 42–43

THURSDAY, JULY 28: MATTHEW 21:28–32 6TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

From the beginning of His Ministry, our Lord Jesus Christ called sinners to repentance. Jesus emphasizes our need for repentance in the parable of the two sons. This parable shows the value our Lord places on repentance over and against the tendency to justify yourself.

The truth is that no one can justify himself. Yet, many who heard our Lord’s message believed they could obey the Laws of Moses, as well as rules of their own traditions, in order to earn righteousness. However, Jesus makes it clear that the tax collectors and harlots would enter the Kingdom before the others. Not because tax collectors and harlots are righteous; far from it! They enter the Kingdom because they are moved to repentance.

These sinners know they cannot work in the master’s garden on their own strength. They know they had once refused the Master. But, by grace, they are called to repentance and go into the vineyard for the work of the Lord. In this we recognize our own sin and repent, trusting in Christ alone for righteousness.

Prayer: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 27: MATTHEW 15:1–9 6TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Traditions are woven into the fabric of our lives, from holidays to family gatherings. The Lutheran Church has seen traditions as helpful. It has even devoted parts of our Confessions to the use of traditions, notably Article X of the Formula of Concord.

Our Lord discusses traditions as well, but from a different perspective. Instead of traditions that are meant to instruct in God's Word, the Pharisees and scribes uphold traditions that distract from—or even contradict—God's Word. Jesus then explains that the outward traditions of these groups are in vain, as He quotes the prophet Isaiah.

Even today, we see churches who boast of ancient traditions without the substance of their teaching being rooted in God's Word. The church of Rome, of the East, and even of general Protestants all have traditions which either re-interpret or distract from God's Word.

If a tradition is worth retaining in the Church, it should inevitably lead us back to God's Word and not away from it. Tradition should elevate Christ and encourage our faith, instead of being a vehicle for self-righteous flattery.

Prayer: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

MONDAY, JULY 4: LUKE 15:11–32 3RD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Our Lord's parable of the prodigal son illustrates the humility that His Spirit creates through faith, especially in contrast with sinful self-importance. God speaks clearly in giving us this well-known picture of His grace, but people still often misunderstand it. The father in the story gives and loves and forgives. The younger son is foolish and self-destructive, but he repents in great earnestness when he not only recognizes the lowliness of his condition, but that he has brought it upon himself. The older son did not sinfully wander and waste like the younger son, but he fails to show the good characteristics his father and brother did—their understanding of sin and grace.

Too often we act like the older brother, even after we say things like "I repent," or "I'm a poor, miserable sinner." Our sinful hearts make us think we are entitled to things according to our expectations. The son that was truly humble was willing to take what might come from his father's graces, even if it meant being a servant, and that is the example of faith that Christ is teaching us!

The Pharisees and scribes had complained against Jesus for His gracious behavior. Even as He taught in parables, our Lord was trying to be gracious to these quarrelsome false teachers! The truth of God's Law and Gospel needs to be received and applied according to His merciful will, not according to man's prideful desires.

Prayer: O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

TUESDAY, JULY 5: MARK 10:13–16 3RD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

As we are brought to the Kingdom of God by His Spirit through faith, we are taught to say “our Father...” Thus, throughout Scripture the Lord uses the image of children and fathers to teach us about His benevolent will toward man. Deuteronomy 6:7 commands that fathers should diligently teach God’s Word to their children. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus compares the good gifts of earthly fathers to the greater gifts of the Heavenly Father (Matthew 7:11). John 8 shows our Savior trying to correct the misconceptions of the faithless Jews about Abraham as He also teaches them about the one true Father.

In the Small Catechism, Luther shows that the beginning of the Lord’s Prayer is the clear application of our Lords’ words in today’s reading. Where there is good relationship between children and fathers, the children “entreat their affectionate parents” with all cheerfulness and confidence. Christ shows us that the children of God’s Kingdom have that same humble joy and trust toward our Lord, even as we also fear and love Him!

The devil and world encourage our flesh’s petulance and self-will. Yet, even in worldly matters it is clear that children (and adults!) who act with such lack of humility are not on a good path. For this reason, faithful parents and masters also discipline those under their care, following Christ’s example who both blesses His little ones and also corrects and trains them in the way of His righteousness.

Prayer: O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

TUESDAY, JULY 26: MARK 16:14–18 6TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

The Lord Jesus does not leave the Church without a reason to believe. After His resurrection the Lord tells His disciples what signs would follow the Apostles during the building of the Church. These signs are given to show the Apostles have come from Christ Himself, and we see these events fulfilled in the book of Acts.

However, those who misunderstand the Scriptures try to rob the Church of joy and they teach that this passage is intended to be applied to all Christians, even after the apostolic age. In this way, the enemy seeks to rob us of the simple truth that these signs and their fulfillment, which followed the Apostles, give us reason to believe the Apostles were sent by Jesus as His ambassadors to the world for the special work of establishing the Christian Church.

The simple truth revealed in God’s Word always gives hope and reason to believe. The twisting of Scripture will always lead to confusion. May the Church always trust in the simple truth that the Lord has given in His Word.

Prayer: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Today is the festival of St. James. Being the brother of our Lord, St. James had the opportunity to grow up with Jesus, and yet we are told in St. John's Gospel that the Lord's brothers hesitated to believe until after the Resurrection (John 7:5). In contrast, our reading today gives us the testimony of the Holy Trinity at the Lord's baptism.

All three persons of the Godhead are present, and the Father is heard declaring Jesus to be His beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased. Not only does this passage give us a clear defense of the doctrine of the Trinity, but it also shows us the love shared between the persons of the Triune Godhead.

This shows us how to reflect love within our own families. As St. James learned to trust his own Brother, so we should trust this same Jesus who is the image of the invisible God. Just as the Father acknowledges His beloved Son, so also Christian parents should show forth the love of God to their children.

Prayer: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Faithful repentance and humility bow before God's mighty Word, honestly confessing, "Woe is me, I am sinful and unclean!" Obstinate sinners, though, rebuff God's commands, declaring why such correction shouldn't apply to them. They blame the messenger, change the subject, or simply reject anything that sounds like "law," demanding a vain "love" that accepts all their desires. Yet, God Himself came preaching the truth of the Law and the Gospel alike. He called sinners to repentance and did mighty works showing the love He gives to those who trust in Him, treasuring His teaching, to those whose obedience declares the reception of His Kingly invitation.

St. John repeats our Lord's truth: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:8-10). Furthermore, our Savior's stringent words leave no room for the obstinate to dismiss His servants: "...he who rejects you rejects Me..." Those who would ignore the true correction of one offering faithful discipline are dangerously in league with those who ignored Christ Himself. Our Lord's discipline is a gracious gift, and the humility His Spirit works in us through it makes us ready to hear His love and forgiveness!

Prayer: O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Our Lord is not teaching that we should break His laws; He is teaching that we should understand His laws and why they were given. The Pharisees focused only on appearances. They wanted to do what seemed right to them, and they wanted it to appear good and righteous to others; but they lacked faith in the coming Messiah, failing to seek God's true righteousness. All of our Savior's teaching in the Gospels (and throughout Scripture), He shows that we are to keep His commands. He also teaches us to be honest, confessing ourselves sinners who continually fail to keep them, needing His grace to help us, His righteousness standing in the place of our failure.

God's Law is a blessing. Discipline, correction, sacrifice, and the Sabbath's rest in His Word are all blessed instructions given so we may grow in His righteousness and, thereby, in service. As always, we know we cannot earn forgiveness or salvation through any effort of ours: the Son is the only one who saves us from sin and death. Yet, He still gives us commands and times of rest so we can walk in His will, which is focused on loving and serving all. Through such opportunities, our lives show others the very things we trust in for salvation. Thus, our Lord goes on to heal and to speak about healing on the Sabbath. His mercy is what makes obedience and sacrifice meaningful, not man's efforts or appearances.

Prayer: O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Sixth Sunday after Trinity

The Fifth Commandment Thou shalt not kill.

We have not completed the discussion of both spiritual and temporal government, that is, divine and paternal authority and obedience. But here we go forth from our own house to our neighbor's, to learn how we should live with respect to one another, everyone for himself toward his neighbor. Therefore God and government are not included in this commandment, nor the power which they have to kill. For God has delegated His authority to governments to punish evil-doers instead of parents, who aforesaid (as we read in Moses) were required to bring their children to judgment and sentence them to death. Therefore this prohibition pertains to individuals and not to government.

This commandment is now easy enough, and is often treated, because we hear it annually in the Gospel of St. Matthew (5:21sq.), where Christ Himself explains and sums it up—namely, that we must not kill, either with hand, heart, mouth, signs, gestures, help or counsel. Therefore it is forbidden to everyone to be angry, except those (as we said) who are in the place of God, that is, parents and government. For it is proper for God, and for everyone who stands in His stead, to be angry, to reprove and punish, even on account of those who transgress this and the other commandments.

But the cause and need of this commandment is that God well knows that the world is evil, and that this life has much unhappiness; therefore He has placed this and the other commandments between the good and the wicked. As now there are many temptations against all the commandments, so the temptation in respect to this is that we must live among many people who do us wrong, that we have cause to be hostile to them.

As when your neighbor sees that you have better possessions from property, and more happiness from God, than he, he is offended, envies you, and speaks no good of you.

Thus by the devil's incitement you will have many enemies who cannot bear to see you have any good, either bodily or spiritual. When we see them it is natural for our hearts in their turn to rage and bleed and take vengeance. Thus there arise cursing and blows, from which follow finally misery and murder. Therefore God like a kind father anticipates, interposes and wishes to have all quarrels settled, that no misfortune come of them, nor one destroy another. And in fine He would hereby defend, liberate and keep in peace everyone against all the crime and violence of everyone else; and has, as it were, placed this commandment as a wall, fortress and refuge about our neighbor, that we do him no bodily harm or injury.

—The Large Catechism, Part I, §180–185

SATURDAY, JULY 23: LUKE 9:18–26 5TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Christ calls His followers to deny ourselves and take up our crosses daily. This means we do not get to dictate our terms of service to God. It means we do not get to pick and choose which burdens are too unpleasant for us to bother with. It means that our discipleship involves the suffering of a cross, not just the fun or easy experiences that seem good in our own eyes.

Our Lord Jesus does promise in Matthew 11 that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. But He also teaches us that we are to be gentle and humble like He is, which means that even as we suffer evil, mockery, and the pains of a cross, we are to be steadfast in the calling that God has laid on us. We are made able to do these things by His power and Spirit!

The crowds of the world say many and varied things about God and His will, but the faithful are made able to confess our Christ and Savior rightly. By His grace we understand His Word and know that Jesus was crucified for our sins. By His Spirit we believe, repent of our sins, and do those good works that He prepares for us according to His will and calling. He makes us able to deny our sinful self and do that which is righteous, trusting that the peace and glory of eternal life is greater than the crosses of this life!

Prayer: O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward Thee that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

FRIDAY, JULY 8: LUKE 16:16–17 3RD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Here we have another example of the false teaching Pharisees trying to justify themselves according to laws and appearances. Our Lord makes clear, again, that the Law of God is good, in spite of their sinful distortion of it. Some false teachers fail in the other extreme, disparaging the Law and the Old Testament as “dated” and no longer relevant. Yet, these remain important facets of God's Word and revelation to us: the Law and the Prophets have not failed or passed away, but they have been fulfilled!

Any failure associated with any component of our Lord's Word is not His failure, but the failure of man.

In conversion and throughout the Christian life, God's Holy Spirit makes us humble and discerning so that we hear what Christ teaches, understanding that there is history and context that came before us. There are experiences and perspectives that are different from what our senses have encountered in our few short decades of earthly life: God is eternal! Our Lord is above all, so His divine perspective is more important than our assumptions. He blesses us by preserving His Law and Prophets for our learning (1 Corinthians 10:11). Through these, He reminds us that His Church is indeed catholic and universal, existing beyond our experiences and culture—an affirmation that He truly does love the world and has been working ceaselessly from the beginning of time to bless us and save us from sin, death, and the devil.

Prayer: O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word.” Our Lord Jesus is not being mean or hateful when He says these things. He is not being unkind when He says, “You are of your father the devil...” He says to them what must be said: He is, as always, teaching, correcting, and calling people to humble repentance.

This world (and even our own flesh!) despises such things. Our society encourages people to think they are strong and clever, but many act like undisciplined children. God would have us be His children, not self-willed, quarrelsome children of the devil. Christ teaches us to pray to our Father in heaven, asking that His will be done, His kingdom come, and that He forgive our sins, even as He makes us able to love and forgive others. This is very different from the lies, selfishness, and even murderous thoughts to which our broken world clings.

God mercifully continues to speak in the world. He continues to send His Word and His Spirit through the work of His Church because He is gracious and loving. Even though the world ignores His Word and believes vain lies, He keeps repeating the Truth. That is how He seeks to wash us, build us up, and make us stronger and holier, according to His love!

Prayer: O God, the Protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that, Thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

This reading from St. Luke shows how our Lord corrects man’s misconceptions about vocation. Sinful man wants to do what seems right in his own eyes. People often want to dictate what they’re willing to do or not do while they ignore the clear vocations that have been given to them according to God’s good order. Such is another example of prideful self-will and satanic rebellion.

Today we also remember St. Mary Magdalene. False teachers throughout history have tried to twist and redefine her role in the Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ. They say she was married to Jesus, or that she was an Apostle, or even that she replaced Jesus. Such distortions are not according to the Kingdom of God.

The Word of our Lord is clear about St. Mary’s role. She was blessed by the Lord as He cast out her demons. She was one of the first to see Him after His resurrection, and she had the special honor of reporting this and the things He said to her to the disciples (John 20:18). Mary Magdalene was a faithful helper and witness. This calling is the high honor that God Himself has bestowed on her, and it is unfortunate that vain false teachers have tried to make her into something else. Let us also thank the Lord for the blessings and vocations He has given us, and may He keep us in faithfulness and truth!

Prayer: O gracious God, who didst work repentance and faith in the heart of St. Mary, so lead us by the working of Thy Holy Spirit that we may walk before Thee in repentance all our days and have consolation through the absolution which Thou dost grant to be proclaimed unto Thy Church, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

THURSDAY, JULY 21: LUKE 9:51–56 5TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

“The Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.” Satanic influence and man’s corruption lead us into temptation and destruction. The people failed to receive Jesus, so He went to another place. They still had time to repent and believe, and Christ graciously did not call down fire and death on them. James and John wanted to bring destruction to the village, but the Lord rebuked those two disciples instead.

Our Lord Jesus desires that people repent and be saved, but He also shows that judgment, rebuke, and condemnation will happen at their appropriate times. Sinful man does not understand all the appropriate times and contexts, but God teaches the right understanding in His Church. The Church proclaims Law and Gospel, as He has taught us. Discipline and correction are not to be despised, but applied according to the vocations that He has established, as God’s Word teaches in many places. Grace and forgiveness are likewise to be proclaimed, according to His commands, in the right time and application.

Even though Peter, James, and John were sinful men, the Lord taught and corrected them, and still He gave them the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, to also correct and absolve (John 20:22-23). In their rashness, James and John were speaking according to a different spirit, but in the right time our merciful Lord sends them according to His Spirit so they may apply Law and Gospel in the right way.

Prayer: O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man’s understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward Thee that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Fourth Sunday after Trinity

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT.

Thou shalt not bear false witness.

Thus you see, in short, it is forbidden to speak any evil of our neighbor, and yet the civil government, preachers, father and mother are excepted, that this commandment may be so understood that evil be not unreproved. Just therefore as, according to the Fifth Commandment, no one is to be injured in body, and yet the executioner is excepted, who, by virtue of his office, does his neighbor no good, but only evil and harm, and nevertheless does not sin against God’s commandment, because God has, on His own account instituted that office; for He has reserved punishment for His own good pleasure, as He has threatened in the First Commandment,—just so also, although no one has a right in his own person to judge and condemn another, yet if they to whose office it belongs refuse to do it, they sin as well as he who should do so without such office. For here necessity requires one to speak of the evil, to make accusation, to investigate and testify; and it is not different from the case of a physician who is sometimes compelled to handle and examine a patient in parts otherwise not to be examined. Just so governments, father and mother, brothers and sisters, and other good friends, are under obligation to each other to reprove evil wherever it is needful and profitable.

—The Large Catechism, §274–275

MONDAY, JULY 11: MATTHEW 5:43–48 4TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

From our vantage point, when we hear Jesus say, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect,” our first inclination is to hear God’s Law in all its fury showing us what we are not. That is, we are not perfect. While we reside in this world, the “be perfect” will always accuse us of sin. There is no getting around the Law’s accusation. Quite simply, we are not perfect. One only needs to think of something as simple as the eraser on a pencil to see that we are less than perfect. Were we perfect, there would be no need for the eraser.

But we should think of Jesus’ words in another way, the way of the Gospel. Out of God’s grace and mercy, and through the faith He has bestowed on us, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” United to Christ through Holy Baptism, His perfection is counted as your very own. He sends the Holy Spirit to guide you each and every day of your life to repent of not being perfect, and He brings comfort in the forgiveness of sins. Now, for Jesus’ sake, in the eyes of God the Father in heaven, you are “perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” What God declares of you in Holy Absolution is true. Forgiven of all your sins for Jesus’ sake, you are perfect.

Prayer: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 20: MATTHEW 16:13–26 5TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Peter is blessed by God to understand and confess that Jesus is the Christ. However, a few verses later Jesus gives a firm and clear rebuke to Peter when he doesn’t confess according to God’s revelation, but speaks vain things that bear a satanic character.

Peter probably meant well. He probably felt that he had pious reasons for contradicting the Lord. His counterpoint did not sound wicked or hateful. But Christ said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to Me...” In spite of Peter’s good intentions, he failed to be humble, he failed to remember what the Lord had told him, and he failed to understand the difference between the will of God and the will of man. These are all failings that Satan teaches and encourages; hence the wording of our Lord’s rebuke.

When our Lord tells us to take up our crosses and lose our life for God’s sake, He is teaching us to be humbled by the Holy Spirit and love His righteousness more than our own thoughts and desires. Such things are not easy, and not pleasant. The Lord has every right to rebuke us for our vain thoughts and words. He knows well that our crosses involve suffering, conflict, and even death, as He experienced such things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes. But our true life is found in Him, and He will raise us up according to His gracious will and holy glory!

Prayer: O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man’s understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward Thee that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

TUESDAY, JULY 19: LUKE 14:25–35 5TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Our Lord uses parables to teach that we must hate those who we would normally love the most. It is not that we are to desire evil for them, or for anyone: He is teaching that we have to love God above all other people. Just as Peter was not teaching general rebellion and disobedience in Acts 5, our Lord Jesus is not teaching general contempt for our families. God teaches us to love and work according to His will above all.

Christ loved the scribes, Pharisees, and high priests, but He did not love them so much that He would submit to their vanity. Jesus loved the Father more than the brothers and sisters that He came to save. Pride and self-will makes this hard for people to understand. Sinners want to be loved and cherished even above others. However, the love and “hate” that our Lord teaches is greater than the corrupted notions of esteem that Satan encourages. If we obey Christ and love God more than even our closest loved ones, then we do that which is good and righteous for everyone.

The conflict that comes from Christ’s teachings on love and hate is indeed a cross that we must bear. Sometimes people don’t understand the difference between their desires and the good order of God’s clear will and callings. But even as He loved His enemies, we are also taught to do His will and endure the hate of those who resist it.

Prayer: O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man’s understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward Thee that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

TUESDAY, JULY 12: ROMANS 14:7–17 4TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

As Christians we are to understand that it is important to know whose we are, rather than just who we are. As noted in yesterday’s devotion, Jesus’ command that you “be perfect” does not bode well for us if we are to focus on who we are. We are not perfect. We really don’t have anything to show for ourselves except our sins. To really know oneself is to confess, “I am a sinner.”

True joy is to be found in knowing whose we are. We have been redeemed by Jesus, “not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death” (see Luther’s Small Catechism). We are His possession. The words “His possession” can strike a nerve within us. We tend to cringe at the idea of being owned by someone, of being a servant, or worse, a slave to someone. We only need to recall the horrifying history of slavery in this world. But the fact remains, we are not our own. Adam and Eve did not come into being of their own accord. God created them. When they fell into sin the whole of creation was corrupted. Upon Adam and Eve’s fall into sin, Satan laid claim to them; a claim from which they could not release themselves. They were under new ownership.

Thanks be to Jesus who has redeemed us from sin, death, and the power of the devil!

Prayer: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In some circles, mentioning Matthew 18 has become shorthand for how to deal with your fellow Christian when you have a problem. For many, it is a simple step-by-step guide that you follow, and if you reach the end and things aren't resolved, well, you've taken all the steps and it's over... Or is it?

There is a bit of irony found in today's reading from Matthew 18. Jesus tells His disciples, "But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector." Matthew, the author of today's reading, was a tax collector prior to becoming a disciple and later an Apostle and Evangelist of Christ. One can only imagine how these words of Jesus must have impacted Matthew. It is like Jesus saying, "If someone sins against you, Matthew, and does not repent, treat him like I treated you, Matthew."

And how does Jesus deal with the "heathen and tax collectors" of this world? He continues to call them to repentance. In today's reading, Jesus would encourage us to continue reaching out to the one who has sinned against us so that he may know the forgiveness of sins found only in the Gospel.

Prayer: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; 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 high priests were trying to shift blame. They wanted the Apostles to submit to their self-important opinions, so they twisted the focus of the debate. Satan continues to teach this trick, and sinners continue to use it.

Our Lord Jesus Christ came preaching repentance, faith, and obedience, but prideful sinners hated this message. Rather than be humbled, they played wicked games and eventually sought to kill Jesus. None of us has the right to think he or she is better than the wicked high priests, but our Lord gives us this Word so that we can hear and be humbled according to His grace! Peter and the other Apostles were sinners too, but they heard the teaching of Christ and they submitted to His will, not the self-will of corrupted men.

Satan and this world have insidiously taught rebellion to everyone. Even some Christians think that it is acceptable to disobey heads and masters because they have their own "reasons." Peter's example and preaching shows us that we must obey God when the commands of men are clearly evil, but otherwise we are still to obey men according to God's order. In Matthew 23 our Lord teaches His disciples to observe and do what the scribes and Pharisees command, even though they are hypocrites. Man's weakness does not nullify God's vocations and good order. Instead, He uses all such situations to teach humility and faithfulness for all who seek God's will and truth according to His Spirit!

Prayer: O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward Thee that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Fifth Sunday after Trinity

X. Of Ordination and the Call.

If the bishops were true bishops, and would devote themselves to the Church and the Gospel, they might be allowed, for the sake of love and unity, and not from necessity, to ordain and confirm us and our preachers; nevertheless, under the condition that all masks and phantoms of unchristian nature and display be laid aside. Yet because they neither are nor wish to be true bishops, but worldly lords and princes, who will neither preach, nor teach, nor baptize, nor administer the Lord's Supper, nor perform any work or office of the Church, but persecute and condemn those who being called discharge this duty; for their sake the Church ought not to remain without ministers.

Therefore, as the ancient example of the Church and the Fathers teach us, we ourselves will and ought to ordain suitable persons to this office; and (even according to their own laws) they have not the right to forbid or prevent us. For their laws say that those ordained even by heretics should be regarded and remain as ordained, as St. Jerome writes of the Church at Alexandria, that at first was governed in common by the bishops through the priests and preachers.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article X

THURSDAY, JULY 14: ACTS 4:1–12 4TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Several weeks ago, on May 15, 2022 to be exact, the Church celebrated Cantate - The Fourth Sunday after Easter. We heard Jesus tell His disciples that He would go away and send “the Helper”, the Holy Spirit. In today’s reading from Acts we hear of the Holy Spirit in action, “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit...”

What followed when Peter was “filled with the Holy Spirit”? Did Peter begin to gyrate, as we sometimes see people do who claim to be “filled with the Holy Spirit”? Did being “filled with the Holy Spirit” cause Peter to collapse because he was smitten?

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit said...” He “said”! Now, when Peter was “filled with the Holy Spirit,” did he begin to speak incoherently, claiming he was speaking in tongues? No! What did Peter say? He spoke exactly as Jesus said in the Cantate Gospel from John 16. “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13).

Guided by the Holy Spirit, Peter spoke the truth of Jesus Christ, who was crucified and risen from the dead. Where is one to look for salvation? Peter made it quite clear, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Prayer: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” The question is: What is the correct measure to use? There are basically two measures, man’s word and God’s Word. For much of the world, the standard is man’s word. But how reliable is man’s word?

Let’s take an example, slavery and segregation. For decades, man’s word in the United States was that slavery and segregation were just fine. Later, slavery was abolished, but segregation was still just fine. In 1896 the Supreme Court upheld segregation in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. It wasn’t until later, in 1954, that segregation was then found to be unconstitutional. Man’s word is not sure and certain. We make mistakes that need to be fixed.

“Can the blind lead the blind?” Without God’s Word we are indeed blind. We are blind to the seriousness of our sin and how desperately we need a Savior. Only when the Holy Spirit opens our eyes through the Law to see how sinful we are, and through the Gospel to see our gracious Savior, do we then possess the correct “measure”. Listening to God’s Word, we do not “judge”. Instead, we let God’s Word, not man’s word, speak its judgment and condemnation. Listening to God’s Word of forgiveness spoken to us, we find ourselves enabled to be merciful and willing to forgive others.

Prayer: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; 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, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act.” The scribes and Pharisees are once again trying to catch Jesus off guard so they could accuse Him of doing something wrong. Under Roman law, Jews did not have the authority to execute someone; Jesus would have broken the law by telling them to go ahead and stone the woman.

However, there is a problem for the scribes and Pharisees. They wished to uphold the Law, but they forgot something, or more accurately, they forgot someone. Where is the man who was “in the very act” with this woman? Leviticus 20:10 clearly states that both the man and the woman were subject to stoning. Yet, what the man had done seemed unimportant to the scribes and Pharisees. The hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees is glaring. They failed to uphold the very law they were trying to impose against this woman.

But that still leaves the adulterous woman. What are we to make of Jesus’ statement, “Neither do I condemn you”? There are two points to be made. One, as a matter of law, witnesses were required to testify against the law breaker. But there was no one to testify against her, for all of them had left. Two, Jesus is not condoning what she did. Jesus clearly calls it sin and tells her, “go and sin no more.”

Prayer: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.