

After reading today's lesson, there seems to be a great deal of talk about good works: I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, etc. Well... there is. The problem people run into with this text is misunderstanding the role of good works in regards to salvation. The fallback mode for sinful mankind is to think salvation is the result of good works. But a careful observation of this text shows quite the contrary.

One need only go back to the beginning to see that good works are the result of salvation rather than resulting in salvation. The scene begins with separation of the sheep from the goats, the righteous people from the unrighteous people. The sheep are unaware of the good works that they have performed. Why? Because faith sets its eyes on Jesus, as the writer to the Hebrews wrote: looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2a).

The unrighteous, like the righteous, ask the same question, "When did we...?" However, the difference is simple: But without faith it is impossible to please Him (Heb. 11:6a). Since unbelief does not look to Jesus, it has no concern for others for the essence of unbelief is self-centeredness.

Our assurance as Christians is that we have nothing to fear when Judgment Day comes for the Judge is also our Savior.

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

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



'LUTHER PREACHING CHRIST CRUCIFIED'
FROM THE ALTARPIECE AT ST. MARY'S CHURCH IN WITTENBERG

OCTOBER 31–NOVEMBER 26, 2022

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

The Calendar

The Lutheran Hymnal (1941): TLH; 2022 Supplement: ASBH

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

November 6 All Saints (Observed)/Trinity 25 ASBH 106 or TLH 465/ASBH 63

November 11 (F) St. Martin of Tours, Bishop and Confessor

November 13 Trinity 26 TLH 36/ASBH 64

November 20 Trinity 27 TLH 67/ASBH 65

November 27 Advent 1 TLH 95/ASBH 1

November 30 (W) St. Andrew, Apostle TLH 270/ASBH 109

ST. IGNATIUS SEMINARY UPDATE—The Fall Quarter for the Third Year of the program of studies at St. Ignatius seminary ends on November 11. Classes for the Winter Quarter will run from November 28–December 16; with a Christmas Break from December 17 through January 1, with the remainder of the Quarter lasting from January 2–February 17. Classes for the Winter Quarter:

E006—The Gospel of St. John (3 hrs.)

P005—Homiletics 2 (3 hrs.)

S009—Apologetics 1 (3 hrs.)

P009—Parish Administration (1 hr.)

PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE FOR SYNOD AND COLLOQUIUM—

As discussed at the most recent synod, the 2023 Synod and Colloquium will take place after the conclusion of the Seminary's Summer Intensives. The Synod and Colloquium will take place during the week of Monday, June 26th through Friday, June 30th. The first order of business will be the examination of the seminary candidates; based on our previous experience with the examination of Pr. Scheck, we anticipate that this will require approximately 4 hours per candidate. After the examination of the candidates, there will be all of the regular work of the Synod (including work on the Church Order) and at least a day of Colloquium. Therefore, all clergy of the diocese should make plans with the understanding that the Synod will begin at 1 P.M. on June 26th.

We also understand that Salem Lutheran Church will host the meeting of The Augustana Ministerium at the conclusion of our Colloquium and Synod. At this point, it would appear that this would take place on Friday morning (June 30).

Further details will be included in the December issue of *The Lutheran Herald*.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 25 HEBREWS 12:22–29

TRINITY 27

To truly understand who we are as Christians, we must be reminded, and reminded, and reminded again that all that is ours as Christians has been given to us... given to us by God. Our very ability to serve God “with reverence and godly fear” comes to us out of His grace and mercy. God has made us part of “the general assembly” of His kingdom because God has called us to faith in Christ. That is why it also gives us the warning “see that you do not refuse Him who speaks.”

This “reverence and godly fear” ought to be at the forefront of how one approaches God on Sunday morning in worship. The continual call of God is that one is to repent and believe the Gospel of forgiveness of sins for Jesus' sake. No amount of how much one claims to sincerely love God can replace what He calls people to do: repent and believe the Gospel.

Left to ourselves and our feelings we find ourselves left with only ourselves and our feelings. Absent of God and His mercy, all that we think, say, and do is worthless before Him for the sincerity God desires of us He must first give to us in Christ.

Only when the Holy Ghost brings us to repent of our sins and to trust in God's forgiveness, are we able to approach God in “reverence and godly fear.”

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

The so-called “worship wars” in the Lutheran Church, the struggles between the advocates of Contemporary Worship and advocates of Liturgical Worship, have been going on for decades. If we listened at all to the words of our Lord through the Prophet Zephaniah, I think we ought to ask ourselves, “What is ‘pure language’?” From today’s Scripture reading it is quite apparent that “pure language” is important to our Lord and that it is instrumental for helping us “to serve Him with one accord.”

So is “pure language” something we wait for our Lord to restore or something we ought to pursue when it comes to worship on Sunday morning? I would think the answer would be obvious, but, obviously, it is not.

The purveyors of Contemporary Worship have put the emphasis on the people rather than on God thus the language of Contemporary Worship is people-centered. Just listen to many Contemporary Christian songs. “I” and “Me” are the primary subject of the song. On the other hand, Liturgical Worship is centered on Christ and what He has done. One need only begin at the beginning of the service to hear the difference: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. We are taken to the very throne of our God who has called us to be His children and has given us His name in Holy Baptism.

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

2022 Supplement Now Available

Work on the *Supplement* is now completed, and copies will soon be available for shipment. It is intended to ‘supplement’ those hymnals which are already in use (*TLH*, *LW*, and *LSB*), while being part of the longer term project, *The Augustana Service Book and Hymnal (ASBH)*.

The *Supplement* has the latest version of the diocesan “Common Service,” as well as the Calendar and all Propers for Sundays, Feasts, and Festivals of the Church Year.

The *Supplement* has 77 of the estimated 109 Office Hymns that will be in the *ASBH*. (In addition to Office Hymns, it is anticipated that an additional 300–350 will be included in *ASBH*.)

Also, Orders of Baptism for Infants and Adults, Orders of Private Confession and Absolution and Corporate Confession, as well as Examination and Confirmation are included.

The text of the Athanasian Creed (taken from the 1854 Henkel translation of the *Book of Concord*) and the 1912 translation of Luther’s Small Catechism are included, since these serve as baseline texts for further work by the bishop and the diocesan Liturgical and Catechetical Committees.

Special thanks to Dcn. Oncken, whose work setting the hymns was invaluable to the entire project. We also extend thanks to Seminar-ians Ben and Jacob Henson, who were of tremendous help with several aspects of the project.

The price for *Supplement 2022* is \$15 per copy for congregations and members of congregations affiliated with the diocese. (Laity are encouraged to speak with their pastors to order copies.) Please note: The cost will be substantially higher on Amazon (or through other outlets), so pastors and laymen affiliated with the diocese are encouraged to contact the bishop directly to receive copies at the \$15 price.



Lesson from the Book of Concord The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity

Chapter XI.

OF GOD'S ETERNAL FOREKNOWLEDGE 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 offense 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."

For centuries, Christians have had questions about the end of the world. Why does it seem like every generation hears of "wars and rumors of wars... famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places" but every generation finds itself still here, anxiously waiting for the Lord's return? The answer may not be what we want to hear, but it remains God's answer: "The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

Over the centuries, "false prophets" have come and gone. They were, are, and will continue to be wrong about the Gospel because they are, after all, "false prophets." As they work to "deceive many," God's promise is that He is at work in you "both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

So God's answer to our questions about the end of time is found in Luther's explanation to the First Commandment: We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things. We are called by God to simply take Him at His word, which word assures His people of every generation that they are His for Jesus' sake. Through His gift of faith His people know in no uncertain terms that He will come again to take them home.

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

There is a great deal packed into these seven verses. There are comforting words such as “no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying... no more pain.” All of these are certainly worth looking forward to. But then there are these words, “He who overcomes shall inherit all things.” How is one to overcome the sorrow, the crying, and the pain? How does one overcome death?

We overcome all these things through the One who has overcome them all. Through faith in Christ and His forgiveness of sins, we are united to Him. He suffered the pain and sorrow of our sins through His death on the Cross. United with Him through Holy Baptism, His death to sin is now counted as our very own and His resurrection is His promise that one day, on the Last Day, He will raise us to eternal life with Him.

There will be no sorrow or crying for “the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind” (Is. 65:17). Indeed, eternity with Christ shall be as He promised, “I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress” (Is. 65:19).

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

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 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 [concerning God’s predestination] 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 willfully 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.).

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome, §1–12

The Word of the Lord came to Zechariah twice. The first time was a call to repentance. The second time the Word let Zechariah know that He (the Word) knew what was going on in Jerusalem.

Then the Word of the Lord spoke comforting words to Zechariah: “I am zealous for Jerusalem...I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy, My House shall be built in it...and a surveyor’s line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem.” Jerusalem and God’s Temple would be a place of God’s mercy and also a place of God’s justice.

Why is this a reformation text?

Because, the Creator loves His Creation. He knows when those whom He created separate themselves from Him in sin and unbelief. He gives mercy and forgiveness to sinners who repent of their sin and return to Him in faith. He reforms those whom He has formed. Is that not Reformation?

Then there is the matter of God’s justice. Christ’s Holy precious blood is just. Without faith in that blood, there is only condemnation. But God is merciful to sinners who repent and believe in His Son. That is God’s justice and mercy—that is justification.

Indulgences won’t justify. Two types of justification based on twisted words added together won’t justify. Only faith in Christ and his blood justifies. That was reformation (and justification) for Zechariah. That was reformation (and justification) for Martin Luther. And *that* is reformation (and justification) for us.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve Thee with a quiet mind, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

It wasn’t but a couple of months ago that another prediction of the end of the world was made and... well... it didn’t happen. One of the more famous predictions of the end of the world dates back to 1970 and the book “The Late Great Planet Earth.” The author’s prediction was that the world would come to an end sometime before December 31, 1988. As you see, you have to be quite old to remember the end of the world.

While one can joke about such predictions, the fact that the world is coming to an end is not a joke. That is why our Lord admonishes us, “Take heed, watch, and pray; for you do not know when the time is.” Wow! OK! So how am I to do this? Am I literally to stay awake and never sleep? How am I to “watch” with my eyes closed?

It is important to remember the words of St. Paul, “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7) and “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). You “watch” for Jesus the same way you see Him now. You “watch” for Him and see Him with your ears. When you listen to God’s Word your Crucified and Risen Lord is right there with you preparing you for His return.

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Last Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE XVII.

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

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

—The Augsburg Confession

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 1: MATTHEW 21:28–44

ALL SAINTS

Do words mean things? When you and I say words—they may or may not mean certain things. But when Jesus says words—when the Word Made Flesh says Words—the Words do mean certain things. And this short verse from Matthew 21 says words that mean things not only in this world but also in the world to come.

First off, Jesus says the words here, He wants us to know this. And what He says is this: “Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men.” Every means every. There are no sins that cannot be forgiven. But there is an exception. Except the sins and blasphemies against the Holy Spirit. What does this mean? It means that for one to reject the work of the Holy Spirit is to reject the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus goes on to explain that even those who might reject Him, Jesus, will be forgiven. They will be forgiven even as some of His apostles, family, and early church leaders did before His resurrection and ascension. But anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven—because of his unbelief. And why would that be? Because the Holy Spirit is always pointing to Jesus as our Savior. The Holy Spirit has bound Himself to Word and Sacrament to form and strengthen our faith in Christ, the Son of God and the Son of the Virgin Mary.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve Thee with a quiet mind, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Everything that Jesus did was to lead people to faith in Him so that their sins would be forgiven. Even his travels through the cities and villages of the area were motivated by His desire that the sins of the world would be atoned for and forgiven through faith in Him.

The compassion of Jesus is the subject of our text today. Jesus' compassion comes from the gut. The Greek word for compassion defines compassion as coming from the belly; it is a feeling coming from the gut. Jesus' compassion was motivated by the multitudes. They were "weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd." These sheep were in bad shape with no one to give them relief. Now, there were way more sheep than there were shepherds. (There were way more unbelievers than there were believers.) The weary, scattered sheep needed shepherds to take care of them.

So, what did the Word Made Flesh suggest as a remedy? "Therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

And we are told in the following Scriptures that Jesus called some of his disciples and sent them as apostles. Jesus' command to pray that the Lord of the harvest send laborers into his harvest were heard by the Lord of the Harvest. He empowered and then sent these apostles as shepherds to His people.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve Thee with a quiet mind, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The holy writer describes the terrible fate of those who fell into destruction under the Law of Moses. However, there is a worse end for apostates of the Christian faith! It is one thing for a person to die for breaking the Lord's commandments, because that is the natural consequence of sin. It is another and far worse thing when someone who had come to know and believe in Christ as his Savior and who had experienced His sanctifying grace to abandon Him and to reject His work of Redemption.

There was no greater demonstration of God's love for man than the sacrifice of His only-begotten Son. There is no other way to salvation than by faith in that all-sufficient atonement for sin. Thus, there is no greater offense to God than the apostate who considers such a thing as a common trifle. When a person rejects this sacrifice and when he falls away from the faith by which he had been sanctified, he falls into hands of the living God with no Mediator and no Helper, and must bear the judgment of his own sins. May the Lord who has saved us by His grace preserve us in the one, true faith until our end so that we are not afraid to say with Christ, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." (Luke 23:46)

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

Solomon teaches us, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” (Prov. 16:18) Pride can also be the result of witnessing others fall into destruction. It is the temptation of the flesh to think of oneself as better—or at least less sinful—than others. In every age there are people who suffer great tragedies, nations that suffer from terrible disasters, and churches that suffer inwardly from spiritual collapse. When we see these things happen, we naturally conclude that someone’s sins caused these things to happen, and we might even say within ourselves like the self-righteous Pharisee, ““God, I thank You that I am not like other men!” (Luke 18:11).

But Christ teaches us all godly humility by pointing out that unless we repent of our own sins, we will perish as surely as the most grievous sinners. It is easy to point out the sins of others. It is a much harder thing to confess our own. But we must do this if we do not want to suffer the consequences of our misdeeds. We will not be judged for the sins of others but “Each one shall bear his own load.” (Gal. 6:4-5) Thus, St. Paul writes, “Let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.” On the Last Day, let us find our own work built not upon our pride but on the mercy of Christ to us poor sinners!

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

Jesus speaks of fruit trees as compared to men: “For a good tree does not bear bad fruit.” Implied: A good tree bears good fruit. “Nor does a bad tree bear good fruit.” Implied: A bad tree bears bad fruit.

And as to men: A good man with a good heart—a heart full of repentance and faith—produces good. An evil man with an evil heart—a heart full of unbelief in the Christ—produces evil. “For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” Whatever prevails within our hearts eventually comes out—whether belief in Christ with its attendant good or unbelief and its attendant evil.

And then Jesus speaks to what men do with rock compared with what they do with His Word. A man who hears Jesus’ Words and does what they say is like a man who—when building a house—digs deep and lays the foundation of his house on bedrock—so that even when storms and floods come the house remains solid and stable. Compare that to the man who when he hears Jesus’ words does not do what they say—he is like the man who when building his house builds the house without a foundation only to watch the streams and floods wash it away.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve Thee with a quiet mind, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The first time the Lord appeared to Solomon was in a dream. And the Lord said, “Ask what I shall give you.” Solomon asked for wisdom. God granted him wisdom and riches. When Solomon awoke, he went to Jerusalem. He offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord.

The second time the Lord appeared to Solomon was in a dream also. The Lord had heard Solomon’s prayers for blessing on the temple he was building. The Lord answered Solomon’s prayers by placing His Name (God’s Name) on the temple.

With the blessing of Solomon’s temple and the placing of God’s Name and eyes and heart on and in the temple, God gave a blessing and a warning. If Solomon followed in his father David’s ways, then God would bless Israel and allow Israel a king. But, if Israel turned to other gods, then the Lord would cut off their kings and kingdom and destroy the temple. History proves this warning to have been fulfilled.

God led other nations to destroy Israel and Judah. The temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. It was rebuilt in a modest fashion by Zerubabel around 530 BC. King Herod began to rebuild that temple about 46 BC. It was finished about the time of Jesus’ crucifixion. Finally, it was destroyed in 70 AD by the Romans. No longer needed, a new temple had been erected to God in the flesh of the God-Man Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve Thee with a quiet mind, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Christian is at the same time a sinner and a saint. He is a sinner according to the works of the flesh but sanctified through the forgiveness of sins. He is carnal according to the corruption of the Old Adam but renewed by the Spirit according to the New Man. He is at war within himself between these two great influences—neither wholly one nor the other. While our justification is perfect since it is based on the perfect righteousness of Christ, our lives of sanctification are always lacking.

And so, like the Apostle Paul we must always be striving toward the example which Christ has left for us. Christ went to such great lengths to rescue us from our sins and to sanctify us by His blood; He has apprehended us by His Spirit to bring us to the world to come. With that in mind, we must first lay hold onto His perfect righteousness for our justification. And as God has forgiven us for Jesus’ sake, we too should put off our past sins and push forward in godly living. Insofar as we are renewed in the spirit of our minds, we must work with the Spirit against our flesh. By the grace of God and with the help of like-minded brethren, we will finally achieve the goal of our salvation to the glory of God the Father.

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

Christians are not given the option to bring forth good works in their lives—it is God’s will that we live according to His commandments. The Apostle James staunchly defends the importance of good works, teaching us that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20) But St. Paul also warns us against putting our confidence in our works as though they merited anything before God.

Writing about his Jewish pedigree, Paul argues that if anyone could boast in his works and his zeal for the Law, he certainly could. But he counts all those things as nothing when compared to the righteousness of faith. True confidence before God cannot come from the works of the Law but only by faith in Christ and His righteousness! It is Christ’s obedience, His death and resurrection that avails for our salvation. By faith alone, without works, His righteousness is counted to us.

If we were to rely on our own works and acts of penance for eternal life, then the cross of Christ would mean nothing. We should abandon the false hope that these things provide and look only to the Son of God. While we Christians must be careful to maintain good works in this life, we should always remember that our justification is not found in the works of the Law but only through our perfect and ever-living Savior.

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

“Behold, you despisers, marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you.”

Paul quoted the above words from the first chapter of Habakkuk verse 5. Habakkuk had asked the Lord for help from those who rejected him and persecuted him as God’s prophet. God heard his prayers. God would send the Chaldeans to handle Habakkuk’s persecutors.

Paul gave it to them straight up. He used these same words to get the attention of those who were the sons of Abraham, the Jews. Why? Because they rejected the prophets but even worse they persecuted and crucified the One whom God sent to save them from their sins! They killed him and laid him in a tomb, but God raised Him from the dead!

Paul was concerned for the Jews who had killed Jesus in total unbelief of who He was. The Jews rejected God’s Son. We know that Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. So it is that God works his work of condemnation on those who will not believe. God works His Work of faith and salvation in those who believe in His Son, the One He has sent.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve Thee with a quiet mind, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity

XIV. Of Monastic Vows.

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

—Smalcald Articles, Part III

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15: 1 PETER 4:1–7

TRINITY 26

Christ’s sacrifice on the cross served not only to affect our salvation, but it also serves as the source and example of our sanctification. St. Paul writes that “our old man was crucified with [Christ], that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin” (Rom. 6:6). Paul’s life, too, is an example in this way that, as he spent the first part of his life persecuting the Church, he spent his ministry serving it, even at his own peril. We should share this mindset: We have spent enough of our lives being influenced by our flesh and the way of the world.

Let us, instead, live unto Christ for the sake of the Gospel. The world thinks it strange that we do not indulge desires of our flesh, but live for the life of the world to come. We know that this world and all its passions and lusts will eventually be destroyed, while “he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:17) It is not an easy thing to resist the temptations of the devil, the world, and our flesh—it is a day-to-day battle! And so, St. Peter urges us to “arm ourselves” with the mind of Christ. Paul, too, tells us to dress in the armor of God so that we may fight the good fight of faith and stand on the Last Day sharing in Christ’s victory.

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

The goods which the Lord has given to us to invest and to grow are not physical goods but spiritual goods of the Spirit. When Christ ascended to heaven, He commissioned His Church to preach the Gospel, to administer the Sacraments, and to love one another as He loved them. We are to use these spiritual goods wisely so that we grow in grace and in the knowledge of salvation. Dr. Luther teaches in his Small Catechism that our motivation to serve the Lord comes from fear, love, and trust. While the fear of God curbs our flesh, it only motivates us so far. If we were only motivated by fear, then our service would be coerced; eventually we would begin to resent God. Not only would we not make good investment of His spiritual blessings, but out of spite we would deliberately hide our gifts and grieve the Spirit.

True, God-pleasing service must come from the love we have for our God—love which is wrought by faith. God promises grace and every blessing to those who love Him and keep His commandments. He rewards with grace those who use His talents for the extension and growth of His kingdom. Knowing that we must all give account for our service at the end of this life, let us show forth the richness of that grace by our works of love!

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

In the previous chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, our Lord Jesus fed four thousand men. This sign was very similar to the way the Lord God sustained the people of Israel during their forty-year wilderness wandering by giving them manna to eat. This should have certainly pointed them to the fact the Lord Jesus is truly the Son of God, the Messiah. But it was not enough for the Pharisees and Sadducees, who instead demanded a sign from Heaven from the Lord Jesus. They were able to discern the weather from the signs in the heavens, but they were unable to see Who the Lord Jesus was while He stood before them working the works only One Who is God in the Flesh could do!

Thus, it was evident that Jesus is the true Savior of mankind. Yet, the greater sign of the true Savior had already been given in the sign of Jonah. Our Lord Jesus was in the belly of the tomb for three days after He suffered and died on the tree of the holy cross for the sins of the whole world, just as Jonah had been in the belly of the fish. On the third day our Lord rose again from the dead. He destroyed the power of death. It is to this sign alone that we cling in faith. For through faith in this sign we receive forgiveness, life, and salvation.

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

The Prophet Isaiah prophesies for us today concerning all those who will come from afar to cling to the Lord Jesus in faith. This prophecy of Isaiah is a picture of the true Church. It is a picture of all the saints: all those who cling in faith solely to the works and merits of the Christ. It is a picture of all those who have endured the pains and sorrows of this life and have obtained an eternal crown in Heaven. The streets of Heaven will be filled with the joyful singing and rejoicing of the saints who have come out of the afflictions of this life!

These afflictions could lead us to say with Zion, in the reading from Isaiah, that the Lord has forgotten us. But the Lord Jesus can never forget us poor sinners: He has us inscribed on the palms of His hands! He bears the marks of His crucifixion as a reminder to us of His great love for us. As a mother would not forget the child she carried in her womb, and nursed at her breast, the Lord Jesus can never forget us. For in the waters of Holy Baptism we have been buried with Him in His death, and having been born of the Spirit, wear the white robes of His righteousness through faith.

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

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

CHAPTER III, ARTICLE VI.

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

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

Thieves steal. They take away the possessions of others. But our Lord Jesus is not simply talking about earthly cutpurses. The thief that all men should beware of is the devil. He seeks to rob us of our greatest possession: salvation found in Jesus Christ alone. The thief of the devil has certainly stolen away the Word of God from many people in this world. He has robbed them of faith in the Christ by allowing them to believe falsehoods about the Word, or to deny it altogether.

The devil also sneaks around us Christians like a thief. He desires to rob us of our faith. He deceives us by leading us to believe that our sins are either nothing to worry about, or gets us believing that our sins are so great there can be no forgiveness for us. This is why our Lord in His compassion has left to us His faithful and wise servants who give us our spiritual food in due season. We receive this spiritual food through their preaching. They preach into our ears that we have the perfect works of the Christ. They preach to us that our sins have been paid for in full in our Lord's crucifixion. Through his faithful preachers He guards and protects us from the thievery of the devil, so that He may be welcome us into our eternal home on the Last Day.

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

How can we find grace unless the Lord God goes with us? There can be no grace, no mercy for those who do not walk in the way of the Lord by faith. Those who are His are separated out, just as He sets us apart by clothing us with His righteous works and merits in Holy Baptism from the rest of the unbelieving world. In Holy Baptism He has placed His holy Name upon us. We remember that Name at the beginning of every Divine Service when the minister blesses us with the Invocation. He blesses us with the Name that declares that we are the people of the Lord God. We bear His Name just as we bear His works and merits through faith.

He calls us by this Name and we remember that He goes with us. We remember that He has gathered us out of all the nations to be His people. He has placed His Name upon us so that He will be our God. He has also come to us in our own flesh. He has clothed Himself in our flesh, so that He might clothe us in His righteousness; so that we might be His people, and we might go wherever He goes through faith. When we go with the Lord God, we find His grace and mercy always attend us: we are granted forgiveness and eternal life in Heaven.

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

On Sunday, we heard the verses leading up to this reading from St. Matthew. The tribulation of those days to which the reading is referring is the abomination of desolation. After the destruction of the true Temple, the body of the Lord Jesus on the cross, the generation of the New Testament Church will come. We are living in that generation; the generation when the Word of God will go forth into all the world. Many will come from the four winds to cling in faith to the works and merits of the Lord Jesus.

This generation of the New Testament Church will have its close when our Lord Jesus comes again on the Last Day. The unbelievers will mourn and all those who cling to the Lord Jesus in faith will rejoice, for everyone will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory. The sign of the Son of Man will appear in Heaven: the cross of our Lord's sacrifice for the sins of mankind. This sign is proclaimed to all the world through the Church. Our Lord's crucifixion for the sins of mankind preached into all the world is the ongoing sign that our Lord is coming soon. We are justified by faith in the forgiveness He won for us by His cross. He will come again on the Last Day to take us to our eternal home.

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

Of that day and hour, of the Last Day, no one knows. We know neither the day of our death, nor the Day of our Lord's second coming...but this is for our benefit! For, in not knowing the day and hour of our death or the Lord's return, we live each day clinging in faith to our Lord God. We are blessed to be vigilant and watchful, looking forward with eager expectation for our Lord to take us to our eternal home in Heaven. It prevents the temptation to live most of our lives in debauchery and sin and then try to change our behavior at the last moment.

Many people live their lives in unbelief, denying that Day. Thus, they live in unrepentant, manifest sins. People who live only for this day, to please only themselves, not only find it too difficult to stop pleasing only themselves, but even refuse the Son Who was pleasing to the Father for them. Therefore, those living in unbelief will not be taken to Heaven when our Lord comes, but will be left to face the torments of Hell for all eternity, even though He had already suffered these for them.

Today we celebrate the Festival of St. Martin of Tours, for whom Luther was named, and whose life of faith serves as an example to us on how to live each day in vigilance and watchfulness for our Lord's return.

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