

**Clergy of the ELDoNA,
affiliated congregations and missions**

Rt. Rev. James Heiser

Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

Rev. Jeffrey Ahonen

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

Rev. Jerald Dulas

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

Rev. Douglas Handrich

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

Rev. Kent Heimbigner

Charity Lutheran Church, Burleson, TX

Rev. Michael Henson

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Daniel Mensing

Faith Lutheran Church, Beaverton, OR

Rev. Randy Moll

Good Shepherd L.C., Rogers, AR

Rev. Mark Mueller

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Rev. Timothy Tolar

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

Rev. Brandon Warr

St. Patrick Lutheran Church, Chipley, FL

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Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Dcn. Martin Jackson

Good Shepherd L. C. Rogers, AR

Rev. Dcn. Anthony Oncken

Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

Rev. Dcn. Floyd Smithey

Sts. Peter & Paul Lutheran Church, Simpsonville, SC; St. James Lutheran Mission, Knoxville, TN

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



Presentation of Jesus Christ at the Temple, Hans Holbein the Elder (1501)

JANUARY 30—MARCH 4, 2023

**A PUBLICATION OF
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AMERICA**

The Calendar

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

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

January 29	Transfiguration	ASBH 15
February 2 (R)	Festival of the Presentation	ASBH 77
February 5	Septuagesima	ASBH 16
February 8 (W)	St. Cyril of Alexandria (Transf.)	
February 12	Sexagesima	ASBH 17
February 18 (S)	Martin Luther, Confessor and Doctor	
February 19	Quinquagesima	ASBH 18
February 22 (W)	Ash Wednesday (Divine Service)	ASBH 19
February 26	Lent 1—Invocavit	ASBH 20
March 1 (W)	Wednesday of Ember Week in Lent	
March 3 (F)	Friday of Ember Week in Lent	
March 4 (S)	Saturday of Ember Week in Lent	

ST. IGNATIUS SEMINARY UPDATE—Classes for the Winter Quarter conclude February 17. The Spring Quarter Spring Quarter will be February 27–March 31; and resume after the Holy Week/Easter break with classes from April 17–May 19. Classes for the Spring Quarter:

P008—Ministry to the Homebound, Sick and Dying (1 hr.) Oncken

H006—Pietism, Rationalism, Modernism and Postmodernism (3 hrs.) Heiser

H010—Readings in Lutheran Orthodoxy (1 hr.) Heiser

S010—Apologetics 2 (3 hrs.) Heimbigner

E008—Romans (2 hrs.) Stefanski

UPDATE ON THE ASBH SUPPLEMENT—The Organist/Liturgist spiral bound resources for the *ASBH Supplement* have shipped. As regards distribution of the *Supplement*, nearly 400 copies have been ordered for use in the diocese. The Marriage Rite is now completed, with work nearing completion on the Ordination rite.

The first “ASBH Supplement Response Form” is found at the end of this issue of *The Lutheran Herald*. The form is deliberately short, and limited to a few questions to encourage timely replies. Later response forms will address other topics pertinent to the ongoing project. Congregations may “bundle” their replies; in fairness to all who use the form, we ask that each person complete only one form. Also, we will only receive forms identifying the individual who is responding.

ASBH SUPPLEMENT RESPONSE FORM #1

Name: _____

Congregation: _____

Approximate number of times I have participated in the P. 7 liturgy:

Approximate number of *ASBH Supplement* hymns I have used in Divine Service: _____

In addition to the *Supplement*, the congregation I attend also uses this hymnal: _____

Lutheran hymnals I have used prior to this *Supplement*:

Additional hymns from other Lutheran hymnals I believe would be beneficial to include in *ASBH*:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____

Response Forms should be mailed to:

Salem Lutheran Church

718 HCR 3424 E

Malone, TX 76660

“For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart.”

Those who do not know the peace of God in Christ Jesus have much to fear in this life. Though they oftentimes put on a good show—making many think they have it all together—the truth is that they do not even have sure confidence in what tomorrow will bring. The uncertainty of life weighs heavy on the heart, and without the knowledge of God, it can seem that life is meaningless. Here today, and gone tomorrow. Nothing is really worth doing without the purposes of God.

God orders our days. So much so that He came to live a perfect life in order to secure our eternity through His death and resurrection. When we know that our days are in the hands of the Lord we have peace. We know that the same God who loved us enough to die for us, even while we were still sinners, cares for us in every earthly need, just as the first article of the Creed teaches.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee, look down graciously upon Thy people, and mercifully turn away from them the scourges of Thy wrath, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Transfiguration Sunday

Article III.

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

—The Augsburg Confession

Sinful men said among themselves, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.” On the Mount of Transfiguration, heaven came down to earth, and the Son of God spoke with Moses and Elijah, in the presence of Peter, James, and John. Men who typified the faithful, heaven-sent teachers of the Old and New Testaments were gathered around their Incarnate Lord, and from thence Moses and Elijah returned to heaven, even as Peter, James, and John prepared to minister to the saints when the Lord had risen from the dead.

Sinful men built a tower, that they might make a name for themselves. They did not remain united in the land of Shinar, but were scattered over the face of the whole earth, the Lord having “confused the language of all the earth”. The Apostles went forth to proclaim the unchanging Word of the Triune God, so that men of every tribe, tongue, and nation would be gathered into the one Church with the hope of dwelling forever with the Lord.

Prayer: O God, Who in the glorious Transfiguration of Thine Only-begotten Son, hast confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the fathers, and Who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons: Mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory, and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

“I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say.”

Many people believe that the hard passages of Scripture are those pertaining to prophecy or the intricate details of the lives of the authors in the New Testament. Those are oftentimes difficult passages to interpret, but I suggest that those are not the *hard* passages of Scripture.

What is hard are the passages that tell us things that our Old Adam doesn't like to hear. The Old Adam doesn't like to hear that he contributes nothing to salvation, or that he should flee idolatry. Our Old Adam doesn't like the idea of enduring temptation and resisting the devil.

But the Apostle Paul in this passage also gives us consolation. Because you are in Christ Jesus by grace alone and through faith alone, you can withstand the temptation with the aid and assistance of God the Holy Ghost. This is why the Apostle can call his readers wise, because they have been given wisdom in Christ. Therefore, we can receive the hard passages of Scripture, knowing that the Lord will see us through to grow in sanctification and to have peace in our Savior.

Prayer: O Lord, be gracious to Thy people, and as Thou makest them devoted to Thee, in thy mercy comfort them with Thy kind assistance, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore, he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.”

We may not find ourselves in a situation where we are exiled to serve under a pagan king in our lifetime. We may never have the miracle of gaining strength and muscle by only eating vegetables and water. However, the reaction that Daniel has, and the miracle God gives in this passage of Scripture, teach us a valuable lesson about serving God rather than men.

We do live in a society that prioritizes worldly ambitions and striving over the tasks of the Lord and His Church. Far be it from Christians to defile themselves with worldly delicacies of sin. We combat the world by placing confident faith in Christ Jesus, because He will keep us strong. Rather than eating the world’s sinful delicacies, we feast on the true food of His Word and Sacraments. When the world tells us that those things will make us weak, we believe God rather than men, knowing the true food which strengthens faith.

Prayer: O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer, and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us, 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 presence in the world of the “tares” — “those who practice lawlessness” — is a source of pain and persecution for the Lord’s saints. The “sons of the kingdom” are afflicted by the “sons of the wicked one” every day. Tares are a darnel weed, which is largely indistinguishable from wheat, at first. By the time you can tell the difference, it’s hard to ‘weed out’ without harming the wheat. That’s the point.

The field is the world, and in the world, the works of ‘tares’ and ‘wheat’ may seem quite similar (at least as pertains to civil righteousness), but they are heading for different ends. The lawlessness of the ‘tares’ is hidden for a time, but when it is revealed, it troubles the sons of the kingdom. The Lord assures us that there will be a just division in the end, and that the sons of the kingdom will abide with the Lord forever, even as the sons of the wicked one will be judged.

Prayer: O God, Who in the glorious Transfiguration of Thine Only-begotten Son, hast confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the fathers, and Who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons: Mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory, and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

We hear the word of the Lord: “And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last.” The image of the narrow gate warns the Church of the peril confronts those trying to live with one foot in the kingdom of God and one foot in the world, with a question: “Are you going in, or not?” “When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open for us,’ and He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know you, where you are from,’ then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’ But He will say, ‘I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’” They took the grace of God for granted, and, when the time came, did not enter in because they did not believe.

We are called to repent and believe; living in our Baptism, we confess our sins and have our hope in Christ Jesus, by whose stripes we are healed. Adopted as sons of God in Christ Jesus, we repent of our worldly-mindedness, and have our consolation and peace in the One who is our Redeemer.

Prayer: O God, Who in the glorious Transfiguration of Thine Only-begotten Son, hast confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the fathers, and Who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons: Mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory, and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

“Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Just as the unbelieving world has a warped definition of authority, they also have an even worse definition of commands—especially those given by God. Atheists will protest that God set up Adam and Eve to fail. In contrast to the unbeliever’s folly, we see that the Lord God designs the garden as a paradise, and allows Man to tend to it and enjoy it. It follows then that the Lord’s command to not eat from the tree is given out of love, not a deceitful setup job.

Sinners often do not take responsibility for sinful actions. But when the Holy Spirit convicts a sinner of sin, there are no more excuses; no hiding. When we are convicted of sin and are charged with the responsibility of our own foolishness, we have an advocate who took our sin: Jesus Christ. He has not set us up to fail; He has caused us to be redeemed with His precious blood, through trusting in Him.

Prayer: Mercifully hear our prayer, we beseech Thee, O Lord, and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty against all of our enemies, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region.”

This passage from St. Luke’s Gospel harmonizes with the passage from St. Matthew, which is read on the First Sunday in Lent. It is important that we read and understand these passages every year during Lent. It is our Lord Jesus Christ who wins the battle over sin, death, and the devil for you.

The Scripture tells us that Jesus was like us in every way, except without sin. Therefore, we can bring our temptations to Him, because He has endured the sorrows of such in our place. The final verses of our reading today culminate at the beginning of our Lord’s ministry on earth as the news of Him spreads.

The news of Christ is the Gospel, literally meaning good news! This is why we pray with confidence that He would defend us from them that rise up against us. He is close to the broken-hearted and those who suffer. We have suffered the weight of our temptation and sin, therefore we must put our trust in Christ to save us out of all temptation.

Prayer: O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer, and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Lord spoke in parables, fulfilling the word of the prophet, “I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.” On this festival day, we behold a thing which was kept secret until the hour appointed for its revelation, as the Christ Child was brought to His temple, and received by Simeon with great joy. Gathered in the temple that day, the Church was very small in the eyes of men. Still, the Christ had come, and in the fulness of time made atonement for the sins of the world, so that all who believe in Him would have their sins forgiven and have the hope of eternal life.

There were many who heard our Lord’s parables, but as they did not receive them in faith, they had no concern for what the parables meant. So, too, when our Lord was presented at the temple, there may have been many that day who saw Mary and Joseph and the Christ Child, but it was Simeon and Anna who rightly perceived His visitation. By faith, we receive the Lord as He comes to us in Word and Sacrament, and are strengthened in our faith.

Prayer: Almighty and Everliving God, we humbly beseech Thy Majesty, that as Thine Only-Begotten Son was this day presented in the Temple in the substance of our flesh, so we may be presented unto Thee with pure and clean hearts; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The parable of the dragnet is similar to that of the wheat and the tares, in that it teaches us that while all the fish in the sea and all the plants of the field may be gathered up together, there will be a sorting which takes place so that that which is pleasing to the Lord will be retained, even as the rest is rejected and consigned to the flames.

It is in the context of such an instruction concerning the judgment of the unbelieving that we hear of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price. For those who hear and, by the work of the Holy Spirit, believe the Gospel, that which has been made known to them is beyond comparison with any worldly treasure. The children of God gladly sacrifice the things of this world for the sake of Christ, and when they are tempted to live according to the concerns of the world, the Word of God calls them to again repent and return to the way of life.

Prayer: O God, Who in the glorious Transfiguration of Thine Only-begotten Son, hast confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the fathers, and Who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons: Mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory, and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

“But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.”

We live in a post-authority culture. Many people are either skeptical of authority, or outright reject it. The problem is the world’s faulty definition of authority. Many define authority simply as having power. Like the disciples arguing about who is the greatest, so also this world argues about which person gets to put more of their boot to someone else’s head.

Our Lord rebukes this notion by explaining that those who are in authority ought to model Christ and His service rather than seek their own power or gains. Despite this, the sting of rebellion in the Old Adam weighs heavy on many of us, wanting to resist even Godly authority at every turn. Like Peter, we are tempted to deny such authority because of the world, the flesh, and the devil. But our Lord saves us and causes our faith not to fail. When we return to Him in faith, He can teach us to strengthen one another and rightly submit to His authority, and to those whom He has given us, just as we ought.

Prayer: O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer, and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us, 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 Invocavit Sunday

Article XXI.

Of the Worship of Saints, they teach, that the memory of saints may be set before us, that we may follow their faith and good works, according to our calling, as the Emperor may follow the example of David in making war to drive away the Turk from his country. For both are kings. But the Scripture teaches not the invocation of saints, or to ask help of saints, since it sets before us Christ, as the only Mediator, Propitiation, High-Priest and Intercessor. He is to be prayed to, and hath promised that He will hear our prayer; and this worship He approves above all, to wit, that in all afflictions He be called upon [1 John 2:1]: “If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father,” etc.

—the Augsburg Confession

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4: 2 COR. 1:12–22

TRANSFIGURATION

“For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you. For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand.” The word which St. Paul wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit is a great consolation to the people of God: while men are double minded in their words and ways, with Jesus, “all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us”. Human reason wants ambiguity where God’s word speaks clearly—this is because men are evil and want the Lord to wink at their sins. Men want ambiguity—to say “Yes” and “No”—because they want a flexibility which is ungodly. The Word presents the sins of men as they are and proclaims the only hope of salvation, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. That which the Lord makes known is a wisdom beyond the imagination of men, but it is expressed “in simplicity and godly sincerity” so that we need not fear that the Lord has nuanced His Word in such a way that ambiguity has been introduced.

Prayer: O God, Who in the glorious Transfiguration of Thine Only-begotten Son, hast confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the fathers, and Who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons: Mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory, and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Septuagesima Sunday

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

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

AFFIRMATIVE

The Pure and True Doctrine concerning this Article.

1. First of all, the distinction between foreknowledge and predestination, that is, between God's foreknowledge and His eternal election, ought to be accurately observed.
2. For the foreknowledge of God is nothing else than that God knows all things before they happen, as it is written (Dan. 2:28): "There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days."
3. This foreknowledge is occupied alike with the godly and the wicked; but it is not the cause of evil or of sin, so that men do what is wrong (which originally arises from the devil and the wicked, perverse will of man); nor the cause of their ruin, for which they themselves are responsible; but only regulates it, and fixes to it a limit how long it should last, and that everything, notwithstanding that in itself it is evil, should serve His elect for their salvation.
4. The predestination or eternal election of God, however, is occupied only with the godly, beloved children of God, and this is a cause of their salvation, which He also provides as well as disposes what belongs thereto. Upon this [predestination of God] our salvation is founded so firmly that the gates of hell cannot overcome it (John 10:28; Matt. 16:18).
5. This is not to be investigated in the secret counsel of God, but to be sought in the Word of God, where it is also revealed.
6. But the Word of God leads us to Christ, who is the Book of Life, in whom all are written and elected that are to be saved, as it is written (Eph. 1:4): "He hath chosen us in Him" [Christ] "before the foundation of the world."
7. Thus Christ calls to Himself all sinners and promises them rest, and He is anxious that all men should come to Him and permit Him to help them. To them He offers Himself in His Word, and wishes them to hear it, and not to stop their ears or despise the Word. He promises besides the power and efficiency of the Holy Ghost, and divine assistance for perseverance and eternal salvation.
8. Therefore we should judge concerning this our election to eternal life neither 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

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25: PROVERBS 25:8–22 QUINQUAGESIMA

This passage contains a number of sayings that are directly attributed to Solomon himself. It is interesting how much they show about the human heart, and how, in some ways, very little has changed in the three thousand or so years since this was written.

These sayings are not so much about what to do or not do, as how and when to do them. Rather than suggesting that Christians cannot or should not use the court system, Solomon here says that this should not be the first option. We should try to work things out privately before that. In many ways, these sayings show us the same things as we have been encouraged to reflect on this week. Love for our neighbor will prevent us from taking advantage of their hospitality (v17). Understanding when someone is in grief or distress may keep us from bringing levity in a situation where it is not wanted (v20). Doing good for those who hate us, such as giving them food and drink, can show that we have a good heart and good intentions, and this may help smooth things over (v22).

In any case, we should show generosity when we can, instead of repaying hate and spite in kind. May God give us the will to follow this advice, and the curiosity and desire to keep returning to His Word for more!

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

St. Matthias was the one who was chosen by lot to replace Judas Iscariot, who committed suicide in despondence over his betrayal of Jesus Christ. Scripture does not say anything more about Matthias than that he was numbered with the other Apostles.

This passage seems to apply more to Judas, who serves as a warning to us. Judas showed many signs of his eventual betrayal of Christ. As the disciples' treasurer, he used to steal from their common funds (John 12:6). He betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Who knows what lies and false witness he must have spoken in that process? And yet, we must remember that Christ died for Judas, and for us. The sins that Judas committed were great, but so are the sins we commit. The difference is that Judas despaired, while we acknowledge the sins that we have done, repent of them, and pray the Holy Ghost to amend our lives to do better.

Meanwhile, the despair of Judas did not prevent the preaching of God's Word. The Lord caused Matthias to be chosen to replace Judas, and we give thanks for the faithful ministry that Matthias gave in Judas' stead.

Prayer: O Almighty God, Who by Thy Son Jesus Christ, didst give to Thy holy Apostles many excellent gifts, and com-mandest them earnestly to feed Thy flock: Make, we beseech Thee, all Pastors diligently to follow the same, that they may receive the crown of everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

cannot be condemned, although I do whatever I will." And again: "If I am not elected to eternal life, it matters not what good I do; for my efforts are nevertheless all in vain."

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

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

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

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

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome, §1–13

In today's reading we hear that Moses had died and that God had chosen Joshua to replace Moses. The time had come for the Israelites to enter the land God had promised them, with Joshua leading them. God told Joshua to meditate in the "Book of the Law" which God had given to Moses. The phrase "Book of the Law" can be confusing because the word Law, *torah* in Hebrew, means more than just the Law in a narrow sense. The *torah* is everything God has decreed in His Word, which includes both Law and Gospel.

This is where today's reading takes on an interesting twist. Scripture tells us that "the law came through Moses" (John 1:17). We also know that the Law cannot deliver people from the devil, who holds them in the bondage of sin. Likewise, Moses, through whom God brought His Law to the people, would not be leading the people into the promised land.

John 1:17 continues, "...but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." In Hebrew, the name Joshua means "the Lord is Salvation." In Greek, and into English, the name is translated as *Jesus*. By the grace of God, Joshua would lead them to the promised land. Likewise, one day Jesus Christ will take us to the eternal Promised Land.

We can thank God that we are kept wise unto salvation as the Holy Spirit works in us through the "Book of the Law," as He leads us to daily confess our sins and to trust in Jesus' forgiveness.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Savior. Amen.

In the midst of controversy, we can sometimes seek to complicate things more than they need to be. Such controversies often appeal to our pride, since we can convince ourselves that we understand subtleties that others do not and so feel superior to them.

The Galatians were troubled by false teachers who were telling them that they had to obey the Old Testament Law. The controversy specifically concerned circumcision, but it could have been anything else. Paul wrote this letter to masterfully explain how circumcision, itself, never saved anyone. The only thing that avails before God's throne of justice is the shed blood of Christ, whom Abraham believed in, just as we do. The only difference is that Abraham trusted that Jesus would come, and we trust that He has come.

So, as far as meriting God's justice, circumcision makes no difference; nor does anything else that we do. However, those who trust in the free grace that God offers us in Christ will also show that same spirit of love and forgiveness to others. In that sense, the Law is not complicated: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Easy words to remember; harder to practice. Lord, help us to love our neighbors as ourselves!

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

Today is the beginning of the Lenten season. This special season is marked by the theme of repentance. While Scripture does not specifically command us to observe this particular season, it is a good reminder of the repentance that should be a hallmark of the Christian life. We strive to follow the Word of Christ, but we fall short. We pray for forgiveness and, by the power of the Holy Ghost, to do better in the future.

But even with good outward practice, it is possible to “go through the motions”; that is, to participate in the external observance, but not to truly repent. Thus, the words of the prophet: “Rend your heart, and not your garments.” The prophet also tells us why we should truly repent: our God is gracious, and merciful. He is slow to anger; He relents from doing harm. God spared Noah and his family in the flood; He spared the great city of Nineveh. Because of the grace He has shown in Christ Jesus, He will forgive your sins and my sins as well!

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

In yesterday’s reading we heard about Joshua leading God’s people into the promised land. God had “dug” them out from under Egyptian slavery and “planted” them in the land He had promised. He had conquered their enemies in order to keep His people from pagan idolatry. Yet, after all God had done for His people, all too many turned away from Him and sought other gods. Instead of goodness and mercy, God finds injustice, so He allows His people to be taken captive by pagans.

All of this happened to God’s people as the nation of Israel. Allowing them to be taken captive was God’s effort to move them to repent and to seek Him, the only source of goodness to be found in this world. What we as individual Christians need to understand is that God allows certain circumstances in life to take us captive. As your pastor prays in the General Prayer, “All who are in trouble, want, sickness, anguish of labor, peril of death, or any other adversity... that they may receive and acknowledge their afflictions as manifestation of Thy fatherly will.” His “fatherly will” is to bring you to repentance and to trust in Him for the forgiveness of your sins for Jesus’ sake.

As the General Prayer implores of God, “...remember not the sins of our youth nor our many transgressions”; God directs our eyes away from our sin, and onto our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Savior. Amen.

All the Israelites had to do was “observe these statutes and judgments.” Those were some big shoes to fill. How in the world were such sinful people supposed to fulfill these demands from God? That was the problem St. Paul also saw in himself when he wrote to the Romans, stating, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find” (Romans 7:18).

What Paul understood about himself helps us to understand how the Israelites were to “observe these statutes and judgments.” They would do so as God had just told them, in heart and in soul. Paul understood that through faith in Christ he could please God. Through faith in God’s promised Savior, an Israelite could please God.

In the Sacrament of Holy Baptism we have been given the Holy Spirit to lead us into daily repentance and forgiveness, to His gift of faith. Likewise, in the daily sacrifices the Old Testament faithful Israelites trusted in God’s forgiveness offered in connection with those sacrifices. Only through faith in God’s promised forgiveness could they with heart and soul fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Savior. Amen.

The old saying, “Talk is cheap,” usually means that people can say anything they want, agree to anything, or reject anything, to get along or fit in with the need at hand, but to see what people really believe, we should look at how they act.

There is an essential connection here: the words of Jesus are the words of God the Father Himself. There is no difference, or wedge, between what Jesus says and what the Father says. Rather, Jesus came specifically to explain God the Father as no one else ever has or could. John testifies (John 1:18): “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.”

So how can it be that we who love Jesus could be found to not work and live according to His Word? As long as we live in the body of sin, we cannot attain that perfection. But someday, whether by His glorious appearing or by a blessed death while trusting in His mercy for the forgiveness of our sins, we will spend a blessed eternity with our Lord and Savior. May He keep us faithful until then, as He has promised!

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

We see so much of ourselves in the request of James and John to sit on the right and left of Jesus when he comes into His glory. As apostles, those two could lay better claim to deserving that than any of us today could. And yet, Jesus' response to them shows how far off-track they really are. We often talk about using Christ as an example of how we should think, talk, and live, and this passage is one of the best to show exactly what we mean by that.

If Jesus Christ Himself, who was and is true God in human flesh, not only says, but shows, how we should aspire to be servants, how can we not follow that example? We also see how gently he corrects James and John for their pride. We see also how Jesus not only said these words, he put them into practice: on the night in which He was betrayed, He washed His disciples' feet, showing them, and us, that it is better to serve than to be served.

Lord, guard us from our own pride and desire to rule, and help us to pray rather for a spirit of humility and service, as You Yourself have shown us!

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

The conversation between Joshua and the people of Israel is quite interesting, to say the least. Joshua implores the people to put away false gods, and they were quick to respond with "far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods." And yet, after all their claims that they would follow the true God, Joshua had to tell them, "put away the foreign gods which are among you." While the people of Israel claimed they wanted to follow God, they were still clinging to false gods. As today's reading shows, it is one thing to claim to be a follower of God, but quite another to follow through on the claim.

In the 5th century, St. Cyril of Alexandria encountered a similar situation with Nestorius. Nestorius claimed to be a Christian while denying that Jesus is God and man in one. Instead, he advocated that in Jesus two distinct and separate beings existed, one being God and the other being man. By doing so, Nestorius denied the very essence of Christianity, that in the incarnation God became man. As the Athanasian Creed confesses of Jesus: "One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking manhood into God. One altogether; not by confusion of the Substance, but by unity of the person."

We can thank God for the confessors like St. Cyril, his holding fast to the truth of the incarnation of Jesus, and his condemning the error of Nestorius.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Savior. Amen.

Only a few verses later, in Judges 8:10, we hear that the Midianites had an army of 135,000 men. It is understandable that Israel, having an army of only 22,000 men, would want to “claim glory for itself” by saying, “My own hand saved me.” Likewise, whenever something good happens in the world it is easy for man’s pride to take over, claiming for himself the glory that truly belongs to God. However, with an army of only 300 men, there would be no question as to how Israel defeated the Midianites. It would be obvious that God alone was the reason for the victory.

We, too, like to take credit for any good that comes into our lives. “I worked hard..., I studied hard..., I sacrificed..., I (fill in the blank)...” “I” can quickly become the focus also when it comes to salvation. There are many Christians who wish to add something about themselves as to why they are saved. “I have tried to be good... I have decided to follow Jesus... I gave up so much to be a Christian...” “I” again becomes the focal point. However, when we are brought to our knees by the Law, our “army” is reduced to ZERO. The only one who stands in holiness before the Father is Jesus. Only Christ can save us through His death on the Cross. His is the victory, and His victory over sin and death is His gift to us.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Savior. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Quinquagesima Sunday

Chapter II, Article IV.

[B. What is Justifying Faith?]

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

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

—Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §48–52

“Obey my voice.”

Twice in the text above the Lord speaks of His mandate to Israel: “obey my voice.” We hear that entirely as Law; if we are told to “obey,” it means we are being commanded to do something. But the word has the force of “listen up!” And as it comes to the Word of the Lord, that is exactly what we are being called to do. We are to “listen up,” not just to the Law, but also to the Gospel.

This has ever and always been the message of all faithful proclaimers of the Word of God. Today we remember and give thanks to God for Martin Luther and the clear teaching of Law and Gospel which was proclaimed through him by the Lord’s powerful working.

Hear God’s Word of Law, behold your sin, and repent. But then also hear God’s Word of Gospel, and behold Jesus Christ, your Savior. Your sins are forgiven, and eternal life is yours, by grace alone, through faith alone, in the saving work of Jesus Christ alone. Our good works, this day and always, are but confessions of the righteousness we now have in Christ Jesus.

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

When we think of prophets sent by God, certain names will quickly come to mind: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, etc. What we can easily forget is that God sent many other prophets who are unnamed by Scripture. Many of these unnamed prophets served God just as faithfully as those whose names God has preserved in Scripture. They, too, were ordained by God to be prophets. They, too, were given God’s Word to proclaim to His people.

Today, God’s people are served by countless pastors throughout the world, some of whose names are well known. But most pastors are known only to the people they serve and to the surrounding community. As faithful servants, they have no need of fame. Instead, they are thankful for the faith God has given to the people entrusted to their care. They proclaim to God’s sheep how God knew them before they were formed in the womb. They proclaim how God chose the saints to be in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4) and how He baptized them into Christ. As God placed His Words into the mouth of Jeremiah, God’s faithful pastors are honored by God to proclaim His Word into the ears of His people, and to place the Body and Blood of Christ into their mouths.

Faithful prophets, faithful Apostles, and faithful pastors were, and are, God’s gift to His people.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Savior. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Sexagesima Sunday

Article VII.

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

Article VIII.

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

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

—The Augsburg Confession

XII.

Of the Church.

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

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article XII
The Book of Concord

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17: ISAIAH 45:11–19

SEXAGESIMA

“But Israel shall be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation; you shall not be ashamed or disgraced forever and ever.”

The prophet promises that Israel will “be saved with an everlasting salvation.” Saved from what? The answer seems obvious enough to us: sin, death, and the devil. But there are plenty who get that wrong. They misunderstand Jesus to be the one that, if you’ll just get with whatever they’re selling as “the Jesus program,” life will turn out peachy. The truth is that Jesus saves by way of the cross, and so we embrace the theology of the cross. We are saved through His suffering, not (in this world) *from* suffering. The road to glory goes through the grave.

The other thing people misunderstand is who Israel is. In Christ Jesus, Israel is reduced to one. Jesus calls the Twelve. The number is no accident; He is establishing in Himself a New Israel. The Israel of God are all those who, through faith, are in Christ. Just as Isaiah promised, we have been saved with an everlasting salvation, the salvation wrought for us by the perfect life, the atoning suffering and death, and the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

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

“And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise.”

The letter to the Hebrews holds forth the examples of many faithful people in the Old Testament, some of whom the Lord used to do great and mighty things. Others were sent to call sinners to repent and return to God in faith, and as a consequence were abused, tortured, and sometimes even killed. And they did it all on faith. They were trusting, but never seeing the promised King, the Prophet like Moses and the one who would crush the serpent’s head. They simply trusted God’s promises. And we are told that we are surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses.

We, on the other hand, have had the joy of seeing those promises fulfilled. Christ has come; He defeated sin, death, and the devil; He ascended into heaven; He lives and reigns forever. We await only the fulfillment of His final promise to come again in glory, raise our bodies from the dead, and give us the fullness of everlasting life. God grant us grace that we take encouragement from the examples of the faithful who have gone before us, lead faithful lives that trust God’s promises, and confess His Gospel mercies to those with whom He brings us into contact.

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

“I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ has fulfilled that which Isaiah prophesied. He who knew no sin, against whom there could be no just condemnation, nevertheless gave Himself over to the worst abuse, degradation, pain, and death so that His “innocent suffering and death” would atone for the sin of the world. All who believe in Him now have His perfect life replacing our sinful record before the judgment seat of God. We are counted, through faith, as sinless, not guilty, holy, and perfect.

We are now entrusted with confessing that which God says we already are. “Repay no one evil for evil” (Romans 12:17). And, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21). Blessed are you when you are thus humiliated, as our Lord Himself says, “rejoice ... great is your reward in heaven” (Matthew 5:11-12). God grant us patience to endure the hostility of others, that we may thus confess Christ and all that He bore in His flesh for our sake.

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

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 14; ECCLESIASTES 11:1–6 SEXAGESIMA

“As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything.”

“The Preacher,” the author of Ecclesiastes, would impart wisdom to his readers. If one wishes to be wise, a critical starting point is to recognize how very much we do not know. We are invited to be humble, but humility is not a common virtue these days. People extol whatever it is that they are proud of. They even proudly sit in judgment of God Himself, declaring whether or not they find Him to be just, or fair, or whatever their evaluative criterion is.

How foolish. God knows all things. For all our advances in science and technology, our great grandchildren could one day laugh at how very little we knew. And how much more so with God! He sits in judgment of us, not we judging Him. His just judgment is that we are sinners. In His mercy, He sent Christ to be made sin for us, that in Him we might receive the gift of His righteousness. We do not fully know the works of God; we cannot. But we know Christ, His mercy, His forgiveness, His victory over death for us. That is reason enough to trust, even when we do not understand.

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

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15; MATTHEW 10:2–16 SEXAGESIMA

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”

Our Lord uses animals as figures of speech as He commands His disciples to preach to the towns of Israel. Sheep are defenseless, harmless, bereft of any capacity for coercion. Wolves are quite the opposite: menacing and very capable of doing harm. And while the disciples will be proclaiming the message of the Lord in that kind of hostile environment, they are to remain sheep-like anyway. The Gospel changes the hearts of men, not the sword.

In conjunction with this, our Lord admonishes them to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. The cunning of the serpent is the stuff of legend, going clear back to the garden of Eden in Genesis. And the innocence of doves is a figure that we retain to this day. What a challenge to try to be both! Like serpents, don't be naive. But unlike serpents, be innocent like doves. Be guilty of no deceit, and uncorrupt in our faith in Jesus Christ. Be sincere in our love for God and our fellow man. And be pure-hearted in our prayerful desire for the salvation of those to whom we speak of our Lord. To this end, the Lord be with us, strengthen us, and have His use of us this day.

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