

**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. Martin Jackson**

Lamb of God Ev. L. C. Rogers, AR

**Rev. Daniel Mensing**

Faith Lutheran Church, Beaverton, OR

**Rev. Mark Mueller**

Redeemer L. C., Cambridge, MN

**Rev. John Rutowicz**

St. Boniface Lutheran Church, Niles, MI

**Rev. Josiah Scheck**

Christ Lutheran Church, Richmond, MO

**Rev. Eric Stefanski**

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

**Rev. Timothy Tolar**

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

**Rev. Brandon Warr**

St. Patrick Lutheran Church, Chipley, FL

**Rev. Dcn. Gary Harroun**

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

**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



**INSTALLATION OF PASTOR MARTIN JACKSON, LAMB OF GOD EV. LUTHERAN  
CHURCH (ROGERS, ARKANSAS), 2 JUNE 2023**  
(L to R: Dcn. Oncken, Bp. Heiser, Pr. Jackson, Pr. Stefanski)

**JULY 3—AUGUST 5, 2023**

**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)

2023 COLLOQUIUM AND SYNOD OF THE ELDONA: JUNE 26–29

June 29 (R) St. Peter and St. Paul, Apostles TLH 466

CONFERENCE OF THE AUGUSTANA MINISTERIUM: JUNE 30

ELDONA FAMILY CAMP at SALEM LUTHERAN CHURCH: JUNE 30–JULY 4

July 2 Festival of the Visitation/Trinity 4 TLH 275

July 9 Trinity 5 ASBH 43

July 16 Trinity 6 ASBH 44

July 22 (S) St. Mary Magdalene

July 23 Trinity 7 ASBH 45

July 25 (T) St. James the Elder, Apostle

July 29 (S) St. Olaf, King and Martyr

July 30 Trinity 8 ASBH 46



June 16 was the final day of classes at St. Ignatius, bringing the triennium of instruction to its conclusion. The remaining academic undertaking for both seminarians is the defense of their theses, which will take place at the upcoming diocesan synod.

3–4 P.M.

4–5 P.M.

6 P.M.

7 P.M.

### Friday, June 30

9 A.M.

9:15 A.M.

11 A.M.

5 P.M.

6 P.M.

### Saturday, July 1

9 A.M.

9:30–10:30

10:30–11:30

11:30–noon

noon–1 P.M.

1–2 P.M.

2–3

3–3:30

3:30

### Sunday, July 2

9:30–10 A.M.

10–11:30 A.M.

Noon–1 P.M.

1–2 P.M.

2–3:30 P.M.

3:30–4 P.M.

4–4:45

5:30

### Monday, July 3

9 A.M.

9:30–11

11–noon

noon–1 P.M.

1 P.M.

afternoon

“The Eschatology of the Mormon Church”

—Heimbigner

“Paradigmatically Lutheran in the Reception (and the non-Reception) of Texts”—Stefanski

Potluck at Salem

Divine Service/Call Service

Morning Suffrages

Business meeting of the Augustana Ministerium

Lunch

Vespers (Heimbigner)

Pizza @ Salem for Family Camp, followed by Games

Matins (Warr)

Bishop’s Introduction

Reverent Worship in Borrowed Space (Dulas)

Break

Lunch

Bivocational Ministry (Handrich)

New Media and Missions (Warr)

Break

Vespers (Stefanski)

Matins for Festival of the Presentation

Divine Service with Ordinations

Lunch/Potluck

Catechesis in the Scattered Church (Stefanski)

“Church in a Box” (Rutowicz)

Break

Vespers (Rev. Ben Henson)

Dinner in the Park

Matins (Rev. Jacob Henson)

Diocesan Connections (Heiser)

Break

Cookout at Church

Vespers (Mensing) and Close of Synod (Heiser)

Trip to the Ranger Museum

## 2023 Synod and Colloquium of the ELDoNA

### Monday, June 26

1 P.M.–2 P.M.	Welcome/Registration
2–2:30 P.M.	Opening
2:30–5:30 P.M.	Examination of the Seminarians
5:30–6 P.M.	Vespers (Dulas)
<i>after Vespers</i>	Dinner in Hillsboro

### Tuesday, June 27

8:30 A.M.	Matins (Handrich)
9–9:30	Breakfast
9:30–12:30	Examination of the Seminarians
12:30–1:30	Lunch
1:30–4:30	Examination of the Seminarians
4:30–5	Meeting of the diocesan clergy
5–5:45	Vespers (Rutowicz)
<i>after Vespers</i>	Dinner in Waco

### Wednesday, June 28

8:30 A.M.	Matins (Oncken)
9–9:30	Breakfast
9:30–10:30	Episcopal Address
10:30–11	Treasurer's report and Business meeting
11–11:15	Lutheran Herald
11:15–noon	St. Ignatius Seminary
noon–1 P.M.	Lunch
1–5	Hymnal/Missal Discussions
5–5:45	Vespers (Jackson)
5:45–6	Confessional Service
<i>after service</i>	Dinner at Salem; meeting of the Hymnal Committees

### Thursday, June 29

8:30–9 A.M.	Matins (Ahonon)
9–noon	“Rumination and Requiem—Reflections on the Lutheran Confessional Synod on the 29 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its Founding”—Heiser
noon–1 P.M.	Lunch
1–2	“Retrospect on the Baltic Crusades, or, ‘Hello, Sir, do you have a moment to talk about Jesus Christ?’ —Rutowicz
2–3	“An Examination of Augustine’s Distinctions of Grace and the Role of the Will in Conversion” —Mensing

## Lesson from the Book of Concord The Fourth Sunday after Trinity

### THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT.

Thou shalt not bear false witness.

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

—The Large Catechism, §274–275

Our Lord Jesus tells us that in order to be sons of our Father in heaven, we must love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us. Sadly, this is an impossibility for us; just as it is impossible to “be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” There was only one Son of the heavenly Father who was perfect, who was without sin, who loved His enemies, blessed those who cursed Him, did good to those who hated Him, and prayed for all those who spitefully used Him and persecuted Him. This Son was the Only-begotten Son of the heavenly Father who came down from heaven to bear our flesh.

Through our faith in this perfect, sinless, and holy Son of the heavenly Father, we are made sons of the Father. On account of faith the heavenly Father adopts us as sons. Through the working of the Holy Ghost, who created this faith in us, we are now sanctified, forgiven, renewed, and preserved steadfast through faith in the Son of God. Through His work we shall be made perfect. This work has been begun in us through the waters of Holy Baptism. It shall be brought to completion in the Day of the Lord when He calls all men from their graves, and gives eternal salvation to all those who clung to His perfect fulfillment of the Law and His sacrifice for us on the tree of the holy cross.

Prayer: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance, that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” Here we have another passage that can easily be misunderstood by simply overlooking one word, “believing.” Whenever the temptation comes to think that God will grant our desires if we pray hard enough or long enough or whatever enough, we do well to remember this portion of the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” This is the essence of “believing,” the essence of fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things.

As God’s beloved children, we are called upon to always seek Him and His ways. In doing so, we come to understand what Luther wrote about this petition: “The good and gracious will of God is done indeed without our prayer; but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also.” If you have faith and do not doubt, your prayers are always answered, but always answered in accordance with God’s will.

The fig tree, as with all of creation, was given to man. Fruit trees are supposed to bear fruit so that man may eat. This one didn’t, and thus was cursed. God, in His mercy, has taken us from being cursed, dead branches, and grafted us onto the living Vine so that we might bear the fruit of forgiveness and life. We need not fear God’s wrath, for we have been baptized into Christ.

Prayer: Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and to do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Woe! ... Woe! ... Woe! ... Woe! ... Woah! Time to stop and listen carefully to Jesus' words. Jesus reveals the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. With each "Woe," Jesus bears down on them, as it were. Each time, Jesus shows how the Pharisees' outward actions were simply a cover for their inward deficiency. While such outward appearances may have fooled some of the people, none of them fooled God, and Jesus was letting them know that.

Jesus' first "Woe" shows the underlying problem of the Pharisees. They did not understand that God was a God of mercy and grace. They were so caught up in trying to keep the Law they missed its point. God will never be pleased with sinners' efforts at keeping the Law. Sinners, by definition, do not keep the Law. Sinners are sinners. It is through God's mercy that sinners see the answer to their problem of being sinners.

Today's lesson shows not only the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, but gives an insight as to how easy it is to be a hypocrite. We can find ourselves rooting for Jesus as He dishes it out, but forgetting that we are no better than the Pharisees. "Woe to you!" With that "Woe!" ringing in our ears, the collect for last Sunday is fitting. Indeed, without God's mercy and grace, we are totally lost and can do no good thing.

Prayer: Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and to do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In this chapter of his Epistle to the Church at Rome, St. Paul tells us how much the Lord Jesus loves His creation. What does He do for His creation? "Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be the Lord of both the dead and the living." In other words, our Lord Jesus suffered, died, and rose again so that He might be the Lord of all.

Between His death and resurrection our Lord descended into Hell. He allowed Himself to be killed by His enemies, and when He went down to Hell He showed His victory and the condemnation of sin, for He was killed as an innocent man. Now those who were held in bondage to the devil have been freed from bondage. By this He has become the Lord of those who were held in bondage by Satan. Through faith in the work of the Christ, mankind can lay claim to the gift that the Lord Jesus won for us.

Sadly, many people reject the Lord Jesus and return to the former bondage under the devil into which they were born. They refuse to be free from their chains. This is why St. Paul exhorts us to use every means at our disposal to call the erring brothers out of their bondage to have as their Lord the One who died for all mankind and won our freedom.

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

WEDNESDAY, JULY 5: MATTHEW 18:15–20 4<sup>TH</sup> S. A. TRINITY

If an erring brother refuses to listen to even the Church, let him be as a heathen and tax collector. These words of our Lord Jesus were recorded by the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew, who himself was a tax collector. He knew full well what it was to be a sinner, and more importantly, what it meant to be a repentant sinner, who was granted the gift of forgiveness. Those who refuse to repent should have their sins bound on earth so that they may become like St. Matthew the tax collector; one who turned from his sin and sought the grace of the Lord God found in the works and merits of the Christ.

The good news for us poor, miserable sinners is that, just as an impenitent's sins are bound, the sins forgiven to the repentant are loosed. Not only are they loosed on earth by the Minister, but they are loosed in heaven. Christ Himself, who is in the midst of wherever two or three are gathered in His Name, is there declaring the sentence proclaimed. To this end, that the one bound is justly bound, the Lord Jesus lays out a pattern to graciously bring the erring brother back into repentance. No one may be puffed up with pride at his sins, but rather should look with humility to the Lord Jesus who suffered and died for the sins of all.

Prayer: Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance, that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 3: MATTHEW 12:46–50 8<sup>TH</sup> S. A. TRINITY

“For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.” This is such a wonderful statement of Jesus that can easily be turned on its head and leave one doubting where one stands with God. The word “does” can easily bring to mind works of the Law. When one thinks, “I need to be doing the will of the Father,” a doubt will most certainly arise: “Have I?”

So what is the “will of My Father” of which Jesus is speaking? In John 6:39 Jesus speaks of His Father's will: “This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.” The comfort we have as Christians is knowing God's plan for us is *goodness*. The Gospel, not the Law, brings us the comfort of knowing that God's plan of salvation is His good work in us and through us.

Our ability to do “the will of the Father” comes through the working of the Holy Ghost in our lives. Every day, He brings us to repentance and forgiveness of sins. Indeed, “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” When the doubt arises, “Have I? Have I done the will of God the Father?” we can say, “Yes! Through Christ my Lord and Savior!”

Prayer: Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and to do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Jesus understood His role and His work as God Incarnate. He came into the world to be the perfect Man of God. He humbled Himself to be subservient to the Father as a true and living man. “I can of Myself do nothing.” He lived in this world being fully cognizant of His dependence on His Father. Anything less—that is, if Jesus were to turn stones into bread in order to fill His stomach—He would have abrogated His duty to His Father.

The Trinity Season focuses on the work of Christ in and through His Church. It is important for us as Christians to be fully cognizant of our dependence on Christ! “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Jesus can “do nothing” without the Father, and we can do nothing without Him.

We also know full well that, as Christians living in a sinful world, we can and do grow tired as we face the onslaught of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. But Jesus gives us the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost beckons us with the Words of Jesus, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Prayer: Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and to do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Sadducees, who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead, find St. Peter and St. John speaking to the people about the resurrection of the dead. These Apostles had just healed a man who was born lame, who sat at the gate called “Beautiful” and asked for alms daily. The people recognized this man as the one who sat daily and begged, and they were naturally curious about what this meant. This opened the way for the preaching of St. Peter and St. John about the resurrection.

Even though the Apostles were arrested by the Sadducees, many people saw the events and heard the words of the Gospel, that salvation was found in the Lord Jesus alone. Many believed on Him, and the number of those believing grew to about five thousand. The unbelief of the Sadducees—of the rulers, elders, scribes, Annas, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander—could not prevent those who heard about the Lord Jesus from believing that He truly had risen from the dead.

His resurrection meant that the faithful also would rise from the dead to new life. Salvation from death is what faith in the Lord Jesus brings to all those who cling to Him in that faith. This is the One whom the heavenly Father has established, for mankind to find salvation. Let us give thanks to the Lord God for His precious gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

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

Just as we heard Sunday, our Lord Jesus commands us to be merciful as our heavenly Father is merciful. What then does our Father's mercy look like? The practice of mercy embraces two parts. First, we do not seek vengeance against those who have wronged us. Instead, we show compassion to them. This is what the mercy of the heavenly Father is like. For He does not treat us the way we deserve to be treated. How do we deserve to be treated? We are deserving of His eternal wrath and displeasure. We deserve to be judged guilty of the sins and iniquities that we commit. We are deserving of death.

Our heavenly Father instead shows us compassion. Instead of condemning this sinful world, He sent His Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus, in mankind's flesh to fulfill the Law and pay the penalty of our sins. He meted out His eternal wrath and displeasure upon the only One who was not deserving of it. Now all those who cling in faith to this beloved Son of the heavenly Father are adopted to be sons of the heavenly Father. Sons, justified by faith, obey their Father's will. He desires for us to show the same mercy toward those who sin against us as He has shown us. Through this act of mercy men are drawn to faith in the Lord God.

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

Yesterday we heard Jesus say, "...these sayings of Mine..." Today, Jesus says, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me." So which is it? First of all, we need to be careful that we do not think Jesus doesn't know what He is saying.

We do well to go back to the Athanasian Creed to understand that Jesus is not contradicting Himself: "Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood; Who, although He be God and Man, yet He is not two, but one Christ: One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking the manhood into God; One altogether; not by confusion of Substance, but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ." So when Jesus says, "these sayings of Mine," He isn't lying. He is God, and God's Word is His Word. Yet, when Jesus says, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me," He isn't lying either, because according to His humanity Jesus, true Man, is delivering the Word that has been given to Him by His Father.

True men still deliver God's Word to His people. When the called and ordained servant of the Word, the pastor, brings God's Word to you in all its truth and purity, he comes with the authority that God the Father gave to His Incarnate Son.

Prayer: Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and to do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.



Jesus speaks of “these sayings of Mine.” What, in particular, are “these sayings”? Earlier in this chapter of John’s Gospel, Jesus spoke about judging, being judged, having a plank in your eye while trying to remove a speck from your neighbor’s eye, casting pearls before swine, and so on. All of Jesus’ “sayings” revolve around repentance and forgiveness.

There are many “preachers” today who claim they are teaching Jesus’ sayings, yet they are truly those who “practice lawlessness.” How do they do this? They do this by failing to preach as Jesus directed: “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). While the Law echoes throughout their sermons with refrains of “You need to do this... Once you do this... This is how to do...,” their preaching is a law of “you do it.” In other words, it is a faith built on *self*, a faith built on sand.

However, when a person is brought to repentance by the working of the Holy Ghost, and that person trusts in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, that person “hears these sayings of Mine, and does them.” God has put the faithful on the firm foundation of Christ. In Christ, the Christian will withstand the onslaught of the devil in this world, and will spend eternity with Christ.

Prayer: Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and to do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

This text provides us with an example of what we heard yesterday about being merciful. The scribes and Pharisees did not care about the Law of Moses. In truth, they did not even care about this woman’s sin. They only sought to trap the Lord Jesus. If He said to let her go, they would have said the Lord did not care about the Law or justice. If He said to stone her, they would have accused Him concerning His preaching about forgiveness. But our Lord does not take the bait. He stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger. The finger that wrote the Law of Moses now wrote on the ground.

He is also the One who commands us to be merciful, to not seek out vengeance toward other sinners, and to show compassion on them. The Lord Jesus told them that he who was without sin should cast the first stone, and this led to their being convicted in their own hearts of their sinfulness. A person who sees his sin properly cannot condemn someone for the sins that the other person is also committing. Forgiveness can only truly be offered by the One who was without sin. He shows mercy to this woman by not condemning her. But He also calls her to repentance, telling her to go and sin no more. Let us live lives of mercy, humbly remembering that we have forgiveness in Christ alone.

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

## Lesson from the Book of Concord The Fifth Sunday after Trinity

### **X. Of Ordination and the Call.**

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

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

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article X

## Lesson from the Book of Concord The Eighth Sunday after Trinity

### **Article 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 that a monastic vow is on an equality with baptism. This is blasphemy against God.

### **Article XV. Of Human Traditions**

The declaration of the Papists that human traditions serve for the remission of sins, or merit salvation, is altogether unchristian and condemned, as Christ says (Matt. 15:9): "In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." And Titus 1:14: "That turn from the truth." Also their declaration that it is a mortal sin if one do not observe these statutes, is not right.

These are the articles on which I must stand; and if God so will I shall stand even to my death. And I do not know how to change or to concede anything in them. If anyone else will concede anything, he will do it at the expense of his conscience.

Lastly, the Pope's bundle of impostures still remains, concerning foolish and childish articles, as the dedication of churches, the baptism of bells, the baptism of the altar-stone, with its godfathers to pray and offer gifts. Such baptism is administered to the reproach and mockery of holy baptism, and should not be tolerated. Afterwards, concerning the consecration of wax tapers, palm-branches, cakes, spices, oats, etc., which nevertheless cannot be called consecrations, but are nothing but mockery and fraud. There are infinite other such deceptions, which we commit to their god, and which may be adored by them, until they are weary of them. We will not be confused by them.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III

When King Olaf became lighted by the Gospel, his whole body became full of light. Before, he would have worshiped the Norse gods and lived as other Vikings, being the ‘king’ of a region, sort of like today’s warlords of Somalia or other places. When he was brought to faith in Christ while resting in France, though, he returned to Norway with a new purpose. He wanted the whole country united as one, and united in this one God who had actually, provably, done something for His creatures. This God sent His Son to die in battle to save His people and to rise from the dead so they could never die. Would that all who lead or rule might have such clear understanding, faith, and purpose!

We pray each week in the General Prayer for “all in authority, especially” our “President and Congress...Governor and Legislature...and all our Judges and Magistrates.” (“Magistrates” in this usage includes all that carry out the legitimate functions of lawful government, from police officers to bureaucratic workers, and from criminal and civil attorneys to those serving in the Armed Forces.) We are praying that they may fulfill God’s desires by carrying out their duties, and that they may have His blessing of health and prosperity, so that they might acknowledge Him and rejoice in having the vocation of protecting and promoting the vocations of others by their faithful service.

Prayer: O Lord, grant steadfastness in a faithful confession to those among the magistracy whom Thou hast gathered into Thy holy Church, and direct the hearts of the faithful to support them in their vocation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Caiaphas is sweating over his own guilt. Note he says “you... intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!” Perhaps the words of Matthew 27:25 were in the back of these men’s minds, “Let his blood be on us and on our children!”

The world hates Christ and does not want to be reminded of Him. Wicked men, even in our day, try to drown out the words of God because their conscience cannot take the truth of His Word. They will always threaten Christians to keep them silent. But like St. Peter, “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

There is a new religion sweeping over the Western world. It means to sweep away all other religions before it with its radical diversity and sexual perversion. Its adherents demand that Christians be quiet. We can never give in to such evil. Our God is greater than all other gods. Also note there is no reaction to the Apostles’ mentioning of the Holy Spirit. Everyone in this conversation assumes that this is alright and does not contradict the unity of God. Ancient Jews did not necessarily have a problem with the Trinity. They simply denied that Jesus could be part of it.

Prayer: O God, Who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man’s understanding: Pour into our hearts such love toward Thee, that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Jesus talks about “hating” your family and carrying a cross, counting the cost and forsaking everything. “Hating” here means not loving your family *more* than loving Jesus. Unless you do these things, you are not worthy to be His disciple. This is hard stuff, not for the faint of heart.

It is not easy to be abandoned or hated by our family and friends, but this is part of being the Church Militant. And there is no option. There is no other kind of faithful Church on earth than the Church Militant. Part of bearing our cross is to be a fool in the world’s eyes and to speak openly and, if necessary, militantly about the faith.

The family that you give up here in this world will be replaced a million times over in God’s family when you sit down at that wedding feast in heaven. You will have brothers and sisters closer to you than you ever experienced on earth. You will be loved and honored there as you have never been here. But, the road that leads to that heavenly kingdom is the road of suffering. It is that narrow way that leads to Golgotha, the mount of crucifixion. It is the way of loss and humiliation, but thankfully Jesus walked that road before us.

Prayer: O God, Who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man’s understanding: Pour into our hearts such love toward Thee, that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

All those newly brought to life through faith are included in Jesus’ use of “little ones” in today’s reading. These words follow Jesus’ upbraiding of the Pharisees for loving money and power. They abused God’s Law to control people outwardly, while Jesus was bringing sinners new life inwardly, which would lead to *true* holiness of living. Jesus tells of the rich man and poor Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) to demonstrate what the Pharisees’ merciless religion looks like in practice. As the self-satisfied rich man had no concern for Lazarus, the Pharisees did not believe what Moses and the Prophets said, and they tried to trip up the faith of the sinners given new life in Jesus.

What both the young and those new in the faith need most is that which those who are strong in the faith cling to: the appreciation for and the assurance of the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. That comes by deepening their understanding of God’s Word. Such is not done by revising the Law so they think they are keeping it by outward improvement, as the Pharisees sought. Instead, by seeing the seriousness of every deviation from God’s perfect will, and how that can only be atoned for by the death of Jesus Christ, desire for forgiveness through the body and blood of Jesus is instilled, with a result of holy and merciful living. (Cf. The Exhortation, ASBH p. 21)

Prayer: O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things and to give us those things which be profitable for 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.

Driving through various parts of the country during the spring and summer, it's interesting to compare the various stages in which we find crops—or even gardens—growing. It is easiest to see the differences driving north and south, of course, where we know the growing season is going to have different lengths, but the differences driving east and west can be significant, and sometimes puzzling, as well. Was there a late freeze in one place, or too much rain to plant at the normal time, or has one place received more precipitation, or less, since then? Was it, maybe, a difference in the brand of seed or of fertilizer? Even with all our advances in agricultural science, there's often no clear answer.

That's how life is in your faithful congregation, too. You know the good seed of God's Word is being sown from the pulpit and at the altar; you know it's being fertilized at home, too, by your reading the Word and the Small Catechism and your singing of the hymns. But sometimes you wonder why one family's 'plants' seem taller than another's, or why one parish expands while another recedes. These words of Jesus are a comfort at such times, as He reminds us that His Word will always produce its crop. We simply continue in the sowing, and the Holy Spirit will continue to create faith where and when He pleases (Augsburg Confession, Article V).

Prayer: O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things and to give us those things which be profitable for 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 most important doctrine in the theology of the Roman Catholic Church is the doctrine of papal supremacy. That is, that the bishops of Rome have universal jurisdictional authority over the entire church on earth. Of course, no one outside the Roman Catholic Church agrees with this teaching, primarily because there isn't a shred of biblical support for it. The one passage that Rome uses to try to defend it is Matthew 16:18-19. They try to argue that the "rock" in this passage refers to Peter and to all subsequent bishops of Rome.

Not only does this require reading into the text a fantasy about the bishops of Rome, but there has been no agreement in the ancient Church on who the "rock" is. The "Christological" interpretation has been supported by St. Augustine. He said that the πέτρα (petra) of this passage referred to Christ, not Peter. St. Ambrose of Milan championed the "faith/rock" interpretation. He did not see Peter the man as the πέτρα (petra) of Matthew 16. In agreement with Ambrose is St. John Chrysostom, who clearly and repeatedly refers to the πέτρα (petra) of Matthew 16:18 as Peter's *confession of faith*, not the man himself. Lutherans are on very solid ground when we look to faith in Christ as the foundation of the Church, and not the papacy. Quite a few of the early Church fathers agree with us.

Prayer: O God, Who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding: Pour into our hearts such love toward Thee, that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

There is a broadness and depth to God's grace. God knows how frail and weak we are. Jesus puts up with the unbeliever. He is tolerant of the unbeliever. He gives the unbeliever chance after chance. He does not immediately bring judgment upon the unbeliever. He wants to let him have many chances. And even with the believer, Christ is patient. We are all full of ignorance, error, and even unfaithfulness. The earth does not open up and consume us.

Jesus loves the one who returns to Him after sin. Our Lord wants us to be long-suffering with our brothers and sisters just as He is with us. Let us not be quick to bring judgment down upon our brothers. God will bring all things about in His own time. So many saints of old were full of error and did things we would never do, but they confessed Christ; they loved Him, and in their frailty, they followed Him. They didn't need to be perfect. They just needed to trust Christ for their life. The Son of Man came to save men. He will overlook as much weakness as He can to save men. The grace of our Lord is great.

Prayer: O God, Who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding: Pour into our hearts such love toward Thee, that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Jesus chides the hypocrisy of the Pharisees even further. They were so concerned with the outward keeping of the Law that they couldn't see what the Law's primary purpose was. They would have great arguments about how to make its precepts more able to be followed by them in a way they could prove they had been following. God's distinguishing between animals for them to eat and sacrifice, as well as which ones to avoid, was no more physically necessary than the command for Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden. The thing eaten wouldn't necessarily defile a person, but that which springs from the heart would.

Our culture has become very invested in the heart. Except for a short and ever-diminishing list of gross crimes, whatever a person wants or feels is automatically considered good. Yet, the God who created mankind and called His creation good tells us what the reality of the fallen world is: "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." There is no equivocation in Jesus' words. While these things may manifest themselves in differing degrees of sinful words and actions, they are all the product of every fallen human's heart. Only being the Father's planting, being firmly rooted by faith in Christ Jesus, are we not plucked up, but kept for the joy of Heaven.

Prayer: O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things and to give us those things which be profitable for 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.

Continuing yesterday's theme of true righteousness versus hypocrisy, we see what brings joy to the holy angels. It's not those who see their 'socially acceptable' sinning as too insignificant to separate them from God, but it is the lost sheep the Shepherd must carry back. St. Paul might ask, as he does at the beginning and end of Romans 6, "What shall we say then?" Should we wander and stray, so that we might have such a glorious restoration? Of course not! Rather, we should be constantly aware of our flesh's desire to run away from Christ's flock, the verdant pasture, and still waters by which our Good Shepherd leads us. Then, we will both rejoice in the salvation of others and always ourselves be turned toward the restoration so mercifully received through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

As we celebrate the festival of St. James, we recall that he was one of the three often separated out by Jesus to bear witness to certain events, like His Transfiguration and His praying in Gethsemane. James would readily confess his sinful weakness in those events, being afraid at the former and failing to watch and pray at the latter. It is by such confessing, so that we hear and trust in Christ's Absolution, that our Lord keeps us as the sheep of His flock.

Prayer: O Almighty God, Who hast built Thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Head Cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable unto Thee; 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 kingdom of God comes before all other attachments. It must be this way. Think of all those who have had to break with families who were of another religion, or whose families were hostile to Christ. Should they give up Christ to please father and mother? Of course not! They must walk the way of faith, even when it means leaving family behind. The fact is, we have no permanent home here. We don't even have a home as humble as a hole or a nest.

Nothing is ultimately ours in this world. We give up wealth and status for the riches of heaven. We may have to give up earthly family for the family of God. Christianity is a radical religion. It re-orders the hierarchy of values. The ancestors and the descendants must take second place. Family and tribe must be in the second spot. God's kingdom runs counter to man's expectations. But God must occupy such a place in our hearts, or He is not God. Once we understand this, then we can say to Him: "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go."

Prayer: O God, Who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding: Pour into our hearts such love toward Thee, that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

It is often much harder to fight the interior battle, the battle of your mind and heart, than it is to fight battles in the world outside yourself. It often takes more courage to admit to yourself your own failures, inconsistencies, and ignorance, than it is to fight popes and emperors. The man who can say to himself; “I’m lazy,” or “I’m obsessive,” is a man who allows the Holy Spirit to work in him.

Jesus tells us that unless we have faith like little children we cannot enter the kingdom of God. One aspect of child-like faith is accepting that we are ignorant and vulnerable. Children may be just as willful as adults, but they generally don’t have our over-inflated egos. Children aren’t trying to defend their status in the eyes of the world. They don’t see themselves as wise. They know that there is a lot out there about which they are ignorant. Our lives as Christians ought to be modeled after children in this respect, that we are always examining ourselves, checking to see if we don’t really know what we think we know. We need to check to see if we perhaps are not “off base” in our thinking or feeling. This is a life-long work. It often takes a lifetime to really examine all our assumptions and beliefs to see if they are in line with God’s will.

Prayer: O God, Who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man’s understanding; Pour into our hearts such love toward Thee, that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Today’s reading was used at a conference about 15 years ago to embarrass users of Internet pornography to stop doing so from the fear that “there is nothing covered that will not be revealed” (v. 2). The audience consisted mainly of pastors and older laity, whose computer use consisted almost exclusively of sending email, preparing sermons, and, perhaps, playing solitaire. Other topics concerning “the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” were probably more pertinent. Most in attendance belonged to a church body in which the confession of Christ was often compromised for fear of losing health insurance, or other considerations of mammon, so there was a lot of hypocrisy that could have been addressed.

How much greater is the impact of what Jesus emphasizes: that those who might harm the health plan or even kill your body cannot cast you into hell. Indeed, He says that you are so beloved of God for Jesus’ sake that your Father even keeps track of how many hairs you have on your head. Even if your head is no longer as ‘feathery’ as it once was, you are still of more value than many sparrows! Exchanging wickedness for works that confess the New Man’s righteousness in Christ does not come from fear of discovery and punishment, but from cherishing our Father so that we run to Him to confess our sins and live out our joy in His absolution!

Prayer: O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things and to give us those things which be profitable for 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

## The Seventh Sunday after Trinity

### Article XXVI.

It has been the general persuasion, not of the people alone, but also of such as teach in the churches, that making Distinction of Meats, and like traditions of men, are works profitable to merit grace, and able to make satisfactions for sins. And that the world so thought, appears from this, that new ceremonies, new orders, new holydays, and new fastings were daily instituted, and the teachers in the churches did exact these works as a service necessary to merit grace, and did greatly terrify men's consciences, if they should omit any of these things. From this persuasion concerning traditions, much detriment has resulted in the Church.

First, the doctrine of grace and of the righteousness of faith has been obscured by it, which is the chief part of the Gospel, and ought to stand out, as the most prominent in the Church, that the merit of Christ may be well known, and that faith, which believes that sins are forgiven for Christ's sake may be exalted far above works. Wherefore Paul also lays the greatest stress on this article, putting aside the law and human traditions, in order to show that the righteousness of the Christian is another than such works, to wit, the faith which believes that sins are freely forgiven for Christ's sake. But this doctrine of Paul has been almost wholly smothered by traditions, which have produced an opinion that, by making distinctions in meats and like services, we must merit grace and righteousness. In treating of repentance, there was no mention made of faith; all that was done was to set forth those works of satisfaction, and in these all repentance seemed to consist.

Secondly, these traditions have obscured the commandments of God; because traditions were placed far above the commandment of God. Christianity was thought to consist wholly in the observance of certain holydays, fasts and vestures. These observances had won for themselves the exalted title of being the spiritual life and the perfect life. Meanwhile the commandments of God, according to each one's calling, were without honor, namely, that the father brought up his family, that the mother bore children, that the Prince governed the Commonwealth,—these were accounted works that were worldly and imperfect, and far below those glittering observances. And this error greatly tormented devout consciences, which grieved that they were bound by an imperfect state of life, as in marriage, in the office of magistrate, or in other civil ministrations; on the other hand, they admired the monks and such like, and falsely imagined that the observances of such men were more acceptable to God. ...

Wherefore our teachers must not be looked upon as having taken up this matter rashly, or from hatred of the bishops, as some falsely suspect. There was great need to warn the churches of these errors, which had arisen from misunderstanding the traditions. —The Augsburg Confession, §1–11, 18–19

# Lesson from the Book of Concord

## The Sixth Sunday after Trinity

### The Fifth Commandment

#### Thou shalt not kill.

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

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

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

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

Thus by the devil's incitement you will have many enemies who cannot bear to see you have any good, either bodily or spiritual. When we see them it is natural for our hearts in their turn to rage and bleed and take vengeance. Thus there arise cursing and blows, from which follow finally misery and murder. Therefore God like a kind father anticipates, interposes and wishes to have all quarrels settled, that no misfortune come of them, nor one destroy another. And in fine He would hereby defend, liberate and keep in peace everyone against all the crime and violence of everyone else; and has, as it were, placed this commandment as a wall, fortress and refuge about our neighbor, that we do him no bodily harm or injury. —The Large Catechism, Part I, §180–185

This beautiful text introduces and announces Jesus Christ as the long-promised Messiah through a wonderful manifestation of the Holy Trinity: the heavenly Father speaks from His heavenly throne, the Holy Spirit descends visibly in the image of a dove, and the only-begotten, incarnate Son is baptized. It also marks the official beginning of Jesus' public ministry as that promised Messiah. This ushers in His Gospel ministry that will "fulfill all righteousness" as announced by the Father, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

This statement of the Father leaves no question about who Jesus is, and it destroys any blasphemous claims that question or deny Christ's divinity residing within the personage of the Son of Mary, the man Jesus. In the Gospel of Saint Luke (4:18), we hear Jesus Himself proclaim that He has been anointed by the Holy Spirit for this Gospel ministry. It is a holy ministry that is to "preach the gospel to the poor; ...to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed." The Church has historically believed Jesus was approximately thirty years old (Luke 3:23) at this point, and had spent most of His previous life in and around Nazareth.

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

Today's text once again presents the challenge of understanding the eternal spiritual realm within the context of our short earthly existence. The verses are heavy with extreme imagery to drive home the eternal mystery of God and His heavenly kingdom to creatures who know (outside of grace and faith) only this world and its fleshly realities. It is not that the Lord necessarily intends anyone to sever appendages and gouge out organs to avoid sin, because Scripture is clear that what makes a man unclean is his heart and what comes out of him because of this unfathomably dark and treacherous organ (Jeremiah 17:9). We need to focus also on the end of this text, where salt is presented as a quality of the true believer. No Levitical sacrifice was offered to God without being seasoned with salt, which was a purifying element that fought decay and putrefaction.

All the verses in this text are meant to help us understand that the Christian will face trials and tribulations in this life. Some from the world, self, and the devil; others from God to test and sanctify us in the faith. The statement of being "seasoned" points out that the trials and tests of this earthly life are a tool and mechanism to strengthen and sharpen the faith which will make the believer a sanctified, holy offering and servant of the Lord.

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

Today's text focuses on Jesus' dismay at the inability of His disciples to understand His teachings that offer forgiveness and salvation to those who hear and perceive the Holy Word of God. The disciples' confusion is a common problem experienced by man, for we live and move throughout our lives in a temporal reality that is linear and time based. On the other hand, God and His eternal kingdom exist in a timeless, dimensionless reality of omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence that is extremely difficult, at best (sometimes even impossible), for us to comprehend.

It is only by the gracious mercy of our Lord that we are blessed to have the eternal revealed to us through His holy, inerrant Word and the Holy Spirit. All the parables are given to accomplish this revelation, by presenting the heavenly and spiritual eternal realm through images and descriptions of temporal, earthly, transitory human experiences on earth. Only by God's grace, through faith given and nourished by the Lord's holy Means of Grace, do any of us have the tiniest hope of understanding what is lovingly revealed of the perfect will of God in the Holy Bible.

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

The event presented in today's text from the Gospel of Saint Mark is divinely proclaimed in greater detail in the Gospels of Saints Matthew, Luke, and John, as well as in the book of Acts. This text presents a synopsis of what is normally referred to as "the Great Commission," in which Jesus Christ commissions His disciples to go into the world baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit while proclaiming all His teachings.

The Church has historically looked to this command of Jesus to His Apostles as part of the divine institution of the Office of the Holy Ministry, which delivers the precious, holy Means of Grace to His Elect. It is also the Church's impetus for outreach and missions to the lost of this fallen, sin-filled world who are outside the holy Body of Christ. This synopsis presents the wonderful reality that delivers the holy Word and Sacraments (Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord's Supper) to us by His grace.

Some of the manuscripts of the Gospel according to Saint Mark do not contain the verses recorded in 16:9-20, so there is some debate among scholars about them. But we verify this text utilizing the orthodox Lutheran practice of Scripture interpreting Scripture. Wherever the holy text is unclear due to our fallen nature it is to be clarified, proved, or expounded upon by other Scripture that speaks in similar terms, words, and forms.

Prayer: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Verses five through nine present Jesus' harsh condemnation of the common practice of the religious leaders, holding the "traditions of the elders" to an equal authority and value as the Holy Scriptures. Sadly, this behavior is not unheard of in our age as many point people to modern authors of loose, sometimes heretical, writings about Christian living, faith and hope, etc. These should never take the place of the clear divine Word of God graciously provided in the Holy Bible. Dr. Martin Luther and our other fathers in the faith are clear that Holy Scripture is to be the only rule and norm for life and faith, so there is no excuse for any Lutheran to ever fall into this diabolical trap our Lord so vehemently warns against.

After the Babylonian captivity, the Jewish rabbis began to make meticulous rules and regulations governing the daily life of the people. These were interpretations and applications (commentaries, so to speak) of the law of Moses, handed down from generation to generation. In Jesus' day this "tradition of the elders" was in oral form. It was not until 200 A.D. that it was codified into what became known as the *Mishnah*. Jesus clearly points out how the Pharisees and scribes were using these human opinions to contradict and ignore the Fourth—and probably also the First and Second—Commandment of God in Exodus.

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

John the Baptist pointed and preached of Christ as the long-promised Messiah who delivers forgiveness of sins through His holy Passion and Resurrection. John was sent to proclaim true righteousness: "For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him." John's preaching was the way from God that offered salvation.

Such preaching also gives a damning condemnation of all those who refuse to humbly submit to God's chosen path of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ as the holy Lamb of God. Through the peace of God won by Jesus Christ on the cross and bestowed upon all who look to Him as their Redeemer and Lord, one is forgiven his sin and covered with Christ's robe of righteousness. This covers every sin, and allows the redeemed to stand before our loving heavenly Father as His holy and righteous children, washed clean in the waters of Jesus' baptism.

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