

**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 (Emeritus)

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

Rev. Kent Heimbigner

Charity Lutheran Church, Burleson, TX

Rev. Benjamin Henson

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

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. Jacob Henson

St. Henry Lutheran Mission (WI and MI), especially Apologia Lutheran Mission, Deer Park, WI

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



DIOCESAN CLERGY IN ATTENDANCE FOR THE ORDINATIONS OF REVS. BENJAMIN AND JACOB HENSON AT THE SYNOD AND COLLOQUIUM (SALEM LUTHERAN CHURCH [MALONE, TEXAS]), 2 JULY 2023



AUGUST 7—SEPTEMBER 2, 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)

August 6	Trinity 9	ASBH 47
August 10 (R)	St. Laurence, Deacon and Martyr	
August 13	Trinity 10	ASBH 48
August 20	Trinity 11	ASBH 49
August 24 (R)	St. Bartholomew, Apostle	
August 27	Trinity 12	ASBH 50
August 29 (T)	The Beheading of St. John the Baptist	
September 3	Trinity 13	ASBH 51



Parish observes 10th Anniversary

On July 16, St. Peter & St. Paul Ev. Lutheran Church (Simpsonville, SC) observed her tenth anniversary as a congregation. Bishop Heiser, Pastor Dulas, and Deacon Smithey all participated in the Divine Service. In the past decade, the congregation has become a parish spanning four states with, in addition to the church in Simpsonville, mission points in Tennessee, Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida are served by Pr. Dulas and Dcn. Smithey.

INSTALLATION OF PASTOR BENJAMIN HENSON AND DEACON JACOB HENSON—Pastor Henson will be installed as Pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Peoria, IL on Saturday, September 29 at 10 A.M. Deacon Henson will be installed as Deacon of St. Henry Lutheran Mission at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Tony,

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 2: ISA. 62:6–12 12TH S. A. TRINITY

“Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Surely your salvation is coming; Behold, His reward is with Him, And His work before Him.’”

Once again, to the children of Israel in exile, the Lord speaks through Isaiah a word of hope. “Your salvation is coming.” Salvation came when the Savior came. The sufferings borne by the children of Israel in exile became a picture of the ultimate suffering borne by our Lord Jesus Christ, as He sacrificed Himself on the cross to pay for the sin of the world, and thus satisfy the perfect justice of God.

In Christ, Israel was reduced to One. In calling the Twelve, Jesus was revealing a New Israel. Many who were not Jews received this salvation; sadly many of those who were the Old Israel rejected it. Indeed, as Simeon prophesied, “this child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel.” And so it was that some children of the promise rejected it, while others who were not heirs of the promise were nevertheless grafted into this New Israel, the holy Christian Church.

The salvation that Isaiah said “is coming” has now come. The Lord be with us, and keep us in true, humble, repentant faith in our Savior Christ Jesus until the day that we receive “His reward” of the resurrection of our bodies, and everlasting life in heaven.

Prayer: Almighty and Merciful God, of Whose only gift it cometh that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service: Grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; 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 Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, ‘Son of David, have mercy on us!’”

Two blind men cry out to Jesus. Prayer is speaking to God, so, since Jesus is God, we may rightly say that these men were praying! And what is their prayer? “Son of David, have mercy on us!” They did not pray, “Lord, heal us,” although likely they hoped for this. In their initial prayer, they do not tell Jesus what to do. They simply invoke His mercy.

We do the same thing every Sunday, right after the confession and absolution. Our biggest problem is our sin problem, so we come before God in humble repentance and get that issue addressed first. But then we pray, “Lord, have mercy upon us; Christ, have mercy upon us; Lord, have mercy upon us.” With our great big sin issue taken care of, we now implore God to regard in His mercy all our other struggles, whether that’s blindness, or other health problems, or finances, or relationships, or whatever. We do not tell the Lord what to do. We implore Him to look in mercy upon us and all our struggles. He will be merciful, and whatever form that mercy takes, it will be enough.

Prayer: Almighty and Merciful God, of Whose only gift it cometh that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service: Grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

WI on Friday, August 4. Pictures from the installations will be in the next issue of the Herald.



2023 Family Camp

Because of the timing for the synod, the diocesan family camp took place in conjunction with the synod this year. Approximately 45 were in attendance from several congregations of the diocese. It was a wonderful occasion for worship, study, and a great deal of fun!



Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity

The Seventh Commandment. Thou shalt not steal.

After our person and wife or husband, temporal property is the nearest good. That also God wishes to have secure, and has commanded that no one shall damage or injure his neighbor in his possessions. For to steal is nothing else than to get another's property wrongfully into our possession. This comprehends all kinds of advantage in all kinds of trade to the disadvantage of our neighbor. This is indeed such a widespread and common crime, but so little regarded and observed, that it exceeds all measure, so that if all thieves—who nevertheless do not wish to be considered such—were to be hanged to the gallows, the world would soon be desolate and would be without both executioners and gallows. For as we have just said to steal is not only to rob our neighbors' coffers and pockets, but to be too far-reaching in the market, in all stores and shops, wine- and beer-cellars, workshops, and in short whenever we trade or take or give money, goods or work.

As, for instance, to explain this somewhat roughly for the common mass of people, so that it may be seen how godly we are: When a man-servant or maid-servant does not serve faithfully, and does damage, or at least allows it to occur when it could be prevented, or otherwise from indolence, idleness or malice neglects the goods entrusted to him, to the spite and vexation of master and mistress. And when this is done purposely (for I do not speak of unavoidable casualties), you can dispose of thirty, forty dollars a year, which if another had taken secretly he would be hung by the rope. But you even bid defiance and make your boast of it, and no one dare call you a thief! ... Likewise also in the market and in common trade this course prevails to the greatest extent, where one openly defrauds another with defective goods, false measures, weights, coins, and by taking advantage by expert arts and uncommon transactions or dexterous inventions, in short by getting the best of the bargain and wantonly oppressing and distressing him. And who indeed can even recount or imagine it all?

—The Large Catechism, ¶223–225, 227

THURSDAY, AUGUST 31: ISAIAH 35:5–10 12TH S. A. TRINITY

“A highway shall be there, and a road, And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, But it shall be for others.”

Isaiah speaks to the faithful in exile. He spoke the Law, warning Israel that God's judgment was coming and that they would go into exile. But he also speaks words of comfort to those thus punished and driven to repentance. He tells of deliverance from these days of bondage, but then goes beyond that. This deliverance from bondage in Babylon becomes a picture of the still greater deliverance that the faithful will have from the fallenness of this world.

The Lord, through Isaiah, speaks of “the Highway of Holiness,” the way of entry into eternal life. He says “the unclean shall not pass over it.” However, are we not all unclean sinners? Can we “clean up” enough to qualify? By nature, no. The prophet clarifies: “The redeemed shall walk there.” Admission to the Highway of Holiness comes not by our own works of self cleansing (Isaiah has harsh words for those who would think this way!). Rather, it is the redeeming work of God that gets us there. This redemption is ours by way of Him who “was wounded for our transgressions” and “bruised for our iniquities,” even Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of Israel and the Savior of the Nations.

Prayer: Almighty and Merciful God, of Whose only gift it cometh that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service: Grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

“These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding, And those who complained will learn doctrine.”

We often speak of “doctrine and practice.” Bad doctrine leads to bad practice. The children of Israel believed a false, “*ex opere operato*” doctrine: they had the idea that God would never let Jerusalem fall because the temple and the ark of the covenant were there. So, they thought they were free to sin and live unrighteously. They were wrong.

In exile, they went the other way, thinking, “God punished us for breaking His rules, so now we must become sticklers for obeying the rules.” They became lovers of rules. That was wrong too. In both cases, what was missing was a love for God that genuinely wanted to be pleasing to Him.

The Lord, through Isaiah, promises that those who erred will come to understand; those who complained will learn doctrine. Jesus has given us that doctrine: it is the doctrine of the Gospel—repentance and the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ. God grant us to believe it, to love Him for it, and so to strive with all our might to be pleasing to Him.

Prayer: Almighty and Merciful God, of Whose only gift it cometh that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service: Grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; 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 First Commandment: “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.” Luther explains in the Large Catechism, “A god signifies a being to whom we should look for all good, and to whom we should have recourse in every necessity; so that, to have a god, is nothing else but to rely on and to believe in him cordially... Upon whatever, then, I say, you depend and have your heart fixed, that is properly your god” (Large Catechism).

In today’s text the words “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” describe the First Commandment. That which is your treasure is in fact your god. For the Christian, the stuff of this world is just that, temporal. We need not worry about God’s provisions, because He provides for us. We use the earthly blessings which He gives us, but they are not our treasure. Jesus speaks of “a treasure in the heavens that does not fail.” Way before we came to know that our treasure is in heaven, and before we sought to serve the Triune God with our life, our heavenly Father sent us His Son to turn us from our sin and save us. ASBH #39, stanza 4, says, “He sent His dearest Treasure That our weak hearts may see His good and gracious will.” Our salvation was earned by Christ, and it is the Father’s good pleasure to give it to us to be received by faith.

Prayer: Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and, that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Let's be clear. You cannot earn salvation. Good behavior does not earn the reward of eternal life. Every one of us is an unworthy sinner who is saved solely by the perfect life and death of our Savior, Jesus Christ. However, the Triune God does encourage good behavior by promising various kinds of rewards, both in this world and the next. For example, obedience to the Fourth Commandment offers the promise that "it may go well with you and you may enjoy long life on the earth."

In today's text Jesus negates even the possibility of a believer getting "credit" with doing a good work for three kinds of behavior. Loving those who love you is not a good work. Doing good to those who do good to you is not a good work. Lending to those who lend back to you is not a good work. Those three behaviors are simply the self-serving transactions of unbelievers.

Jesus explains that believers are called to imitate God, who "is kind to the unthankful and evil." When we love and do good to our enemies and lend without expecting a return, those are good works. That kind of action would be to our "credit." That is, our God would call it a good work. That kind of selfless action is prompted by the Holy Spirit. We are called to continue to be merciful, just as we continue to receive the mercy of God.

Prayer: Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and, that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

"O Lord, by these things men live; And in all these things is the life of my spirit; So You will restore me and make me live."

Hezekiah is sick unto death, prays to the Lord, and the Lord delivers him and extends his life. His prayer is a "deliver us from evil" kind of prayer; a prayer for deliverance from "every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation." The Lord answered by delivering him from this evil of body. He did not die until later, but he did die.

John the Baptist was in prison. This was his temporal reward for faithful preaching (none of this "best life now" nonsense). He was about faithfulness, not about comfortable living. But he never got out of prison. He was beheaded. Does this mean God did not hear his prayers? Quite to the contrary. God gave King Hezekiah a small, temporary deliverance from evil. He gave John the Baptist the ultimate, great big deliverance from evil, by grace, through faith in Christ.

The Lord be with you, strengthen you for faithful service to Him, and deliver you from the evils of this day and all days, until the day that He gives you the ultimate deliverance from evil, and takes you from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven.

Prayer: O Lord, as Thou didst give unto Thy Forerunner and martyr to proclaim Thy Word before princes and not be ashamed, we pray that Thou wouldst grant to Thy saints a zeal for a faithful confession in all times of persecution, Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

“Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction.”

Jesus is on His way to the home of Jairus, a synagogue ruler. People think Jairus is important! On the way, Jesus is touched by a woman with a “flow of blood” for 12 years. She is not important, in the estimation of her world. Her blood issue is not only a physical problem, but it made her ceremonially unclean. No Israelite would touch her, and she was ineligible to participate in the worship life of Israel.

She touches Jesus. He bears the sin of the world, so, in a sense, her (and our) uncleanness is all transferred to Him. But more importantly for her (and us), His cleanness is transferred to us. Jesus is not irritated by the distraction; it becomes part of His faithful service that day. And He says to her, “your faith has made you well,” which means, “your faith has saved you.”

God grant you this day, by repentant faith, to transfer all your uncleanness to Jesus, and to receive His cleanness. And as a bearer of Jesus’ cleanness, God have His use of whatever “distractions” He may drop in your lap today.

Prayer: Almighty and Merciful God, of Whose only gift it cometh that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service: Grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; 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 warns us to beware of the faithless acts of the scribes. Outwardly they pray, but they do it only to impress others. Their works are not done out of love for God, but to receive the praise and goodies of men. They cover up their sinful desires and actions with outward religion.

The poor widow places two mites in the treasury. Worldly wisdom doesn’t understand the good works of believers. They judge that the poor widow should have kept that money for herself. They judge that such a small amount was insignificant and worthless. Jesus, however, judges differently. He doesn’t judge by what He sees, but looks to the source of her action, which is her faith in God!

Jesus encourages believers to perform the fruits of faith. Our God has given to us our daily bread and an eternal inheritance received by faith. When we realize that God has provided for us both in body and soul, then we will give to others in thankfulness to God like this widow. Our Lutheran Confessions say that we should not just imitate the works of the saints, but imitate their faith (Apology XXI, 6-7). The memory of this widow is set before us that we might give thanks to our merciful God for her example, for the strengthening of our faith, and finally that we might imitate first her faith and then her virtuous act.

Prayer: Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and, that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; 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 Jewish leaders do not have the love of God in them. They were seeking to kill Jesus, God's Son, for two reasons. First, they wrongly claimed that He had broken the Sabbath. Second, they rightly understood that Jesus made Himself equal with God when He said that God was His Father (John 5:16-18). Thus, their claim to actually "search the Scriptures" and to be following them was bogus. Though they act as if they were zealous to keep the teaching of the prophet Moses, they were lying. They seek to honor the traditions of men, but not the words of God. Moses would have accused them of hypocrisy and unbelief, for Moses believed God's promises and wrote about Jesus, the Savior who would come.

The Scriptures contain both Law and Gospel. The Commandments of God show us our failure to keep the Law and reveal our sinfulness. The Gospel promises show us the love of God, who sent His Son to secure the substitutionary atonement for the forgiveness of our sins. Those who do not believe in the Gospel message do not have the forgiveness of sins. Jesus said that those who reject Him "do not have the love of God in you."

Jesus affirms the premise that the teachings of the Scriptures present the promise of eternal life. When we honestly search the Scriptures, we will discover that the prophets and apostles are in full agreement. Through faith in Jesus Christ we receive eternal life.

Prayer: Quench in us, we beseech Thee, O Lord, the flame of vice, even as Thou didst enable blessed Laurence to overcome his fire of sufferings; 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 Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

Article XX. Of Good Works.

In the twentieth article they [the Roman Catholics] lay down these words, viz. that they reject and condemn our statement that men do not merit the remission of sins by good works. This article they clearly declare that they reject and condemn. What is to be said on a subject so manifest? Here the framers of the Confutation [the Papists' answer to the Augsburg Confession] openly show by what spirit they are led. For what in the Church is more certain than that the remission of sins occurs freely for Christ's sake, that Christ and not our works is the propitiation for sins, as Peter says (Acts 10:43): "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth on him shall receive remission of sins"? To this Church of the prophets we would rather assent that to these abandoned writers of the Confutation, who so impudently blaspheme Christ. For although there were writers who held after the remission of sins men are just before God, not by faith, but by works themselves, yet they did not hold this, viz. that the remission of sins itself occurs on account of our works, and not freely for Christ's sake.

Therefore the blasphemy of ascribing Christ's honor to our works is not to be endured. These theologians are now entirely without shame, if they dare to bring such an opinion into the Church. Nor do we doubt that his most excellent imperial majesty and very many of the princes will not allow this passage of the Confutation to remain, if they be admonished of it. On this topic we could cite infinite testimonies from Scripture and from the Fathers. But above we have quoted a sufficient number on this subject. And there is no need to testimonies for one who knows why Christ has been given for us, who knows that Christ is the propitiation for our sins. Isaiah says (53:6): "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." The adversaries on the other hand teach that God hath laid our iniquities not on Christ, but on our works. Neither are we disposed to mention here the sort of works which they teach. We see that a horrible decree has been prepared against us, which would terrify us still more if we were contending concerning doubtful or trifling subjects. Now since our consciences understand that by the adversaries the manifest truth is condemned, whose defense is necessary for the Church, and increases the glory of Christ; we easily despise the terrors of the world, and patiently will bear whatever is to be suffered for the glory of Christ and the advantage of the Church.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §78–82

St. Paul believes in Christ and knows that he is going to heaven, therefore, he has “a desire to depart and be with Christ.” However, by remaining in the flesh, the fruit of his ministry will be of great advantage for the Philippians. St. Paul has a win-win situation. If, as a result of his imprisonment he dies, then he will be with Christ. If he lives through this trial, then he will use his freedom to serve the spiritual progress of the Philippians. Of most importance to St. Paul is not the final outcome, but the process. St. Paul’s primary concern is that in the process “Christ will be magnified,” whether by his death or by his life.

Our Lord has given us great freedom in our life choices. In those decisions regarding the benefit for ourselves or others, consider how Christ would be magnified. In addition, St. Paul knows that the believer should be prepared to suffer for Jesus’ sake. Therefore, “let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Before the coming of the Christ, John the Baptist was sent to prepare God’s people. John was sent by God with a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Those who properly discerned that they were sinners who had earned God’s wrath came to receive this gift of salvation. They believed and became God’s children by the washing of rebirth and renewal.

Through the Holy Scriptures, we have come to discern the time. Now is the time of God’s grace. Our Savior Jesus Christ has provided for all the world an atonement for their sins. Our heavenly Father continues to send out His servants to announce the good news—repent and believe! Through faith in Jesus Christ there is life, salvation, and a release from the punishment of sin. A final day of judgment is coming in which all of us will appear before God’s throne. On the last day (or the day of our death), the door of grace will be shut to those who have resisted Him.

We dare not wait. Now is the time of God’s grace. Today is the day of salvation. Let His Holy Spirit create and sustain faith in you. By His power, let us make every effort to pray, praise, and give thanks. Come and receive the Lord’s provisions of Word and Sacrament often. Pray unceasingly. Continue to commend yourself to the God, who cares for you.

Prayer: Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and, that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Sinful human beings will inevitably over-value earthly riches. Our sinful desires and the worldly praise for mammon deceive us into thinking that earthly riches are the genuine and true riches. They are not. They cannot deliver to us the abundant life which we receive only through faith in Christ.

First of all, our earthly wealth belongs to another. We are only the stewards of God's gifts. Everything that we have He has given us. He has given us our body and soul, eyes, ears, and all our members—even our own life is not our own. Second, our earthly wealth is the means God uses to provide for us while living here. That earthly wealth is intended to serve us, not us it. When we falsely trust in earthly wealth to preserve, save, and deliver us, we have changed God's instrument into our idol. You cannot serve God and mammon. Third, the true riches—the genuine article—is to hold to God who gives us our spiritual and heavenly wealth. Through the Gospel our heavenly Father freely gives us the forgiveness of sins secured by Jesus, His Son. To His believing children God has committed the true riches.

The right valuation is to consider God to be trustworthy in providing the abundant life of forgiveness, life, and salvation. Then, we will use the earthly wealth which God has entrusted to us to preserve earthly life and extend the kingdom of God.

Prayer: Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and, that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

“He who dies with the most toys wins.” Yes, the phrase is intended to be somewhat facetious. Nevertheless, it illustrates the point that being the greatest or being first all depends on how you define greatness or “firstness”. We know that the disciples were arguing about “who would be the greatest,” but we don't know what their criteria was in order to claim greatness for themselves, or to dethrone the greatness of another. Their reasons were probably worldly.

Jesus does not chastise them for the desire to “be first.” He teaches them that the spiritual criteria for greatness is service. As regards salvation before God, we can offer Him nothing of value—even our good works are as sinful rags. We are saved by Jesus, the greatest Servant of all, who came not to be served, but to serve us, and give up His life for our forgiveness and salvation.

As we regard our neighbor, we are to be a “servant of all.” Now that we are saved, our neighbor—even the little child in our midst—needs our service.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

At the end of 1 Thessalonians, St. Paul has a boatload of commands for his hearers to perform. In verse 14 he says to warn, comfort, uphold, and be patient. In verse 15 he says to see and pursue. In verses 16-18, rejoice, pray, and give thanks. In verses 19-20, do not quench and do not despise. In verses 21-22, he says to test, hold fast, and abstain. Luther also put a boatload of commands at the end of the Morning Prayer in the Small Catechism. He wrote, "Then go joyfully to your work, singing a hymn, like that of the Ten Commandments..."

Some think that since we profess to be Christians saved by the Gospel, we would be against the Law, or, at least, de-emphasize it. In reality, those who trust in the free gift of salvation are the only ones who are able to stomach the fuller strength of the Law. We know that we cannot keep the Law, but our failure does not lead us to despair, because we trust in the promise of salvation for those who believe. We pray for forgiveness and mercy, and for the strength to please God.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of 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 Tenth Sunday after Trinity

Of Chapters and Cloisters.

That chapters and cloisters were formerly founded with the good intention to educate learned men and chaste and modest women, and ought again to be turned to such use, in order that pastors, preachers, and other ministers of the Churches may be had, and likewise other necessary persons for the administration of the government in cities and governments, and well-educated maidens for mothers and housekeepers, etc.

If they [i.e., chapters and cloisters] will not serve this purpose, it is better that they should be abandoned or altogether destroyed, rather than continued with their blasphemous services invented by men as something better than the ordinary Christian life and the offices and callings appointed by God. For all this also is contrary to the first chief article concerning the redemption made through Jesus Christ. In addition, that they also (as all other human inventions) have not been commanded, are needless and useless, and besides afford occasion for dangerous and vain labor, such services the prophets call Aven, i.e. pain and labor.

—Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article III

MONDAY, AUGUST 14: MATTHEW 11:16–24 10TH S. A. TRINITY

“But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying: ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, and you did not lament.’”

John the Baptist’s audience had every opportunity to hear and heed God’s call to repentance, but they rejected God’s pleas. Jesus compares them to little children who refuse to play, regardless of the game. No approach would suit their fancy, and so they pouted.

The same can be said of people from any generation who stubbornly refuse the message given by God’s prophets and pastors. But instead of mocking the message, they find ways to mock the messenger, no matter who it may be—even John and Jesus. In the end, “wisdom is justified.” Ultimately, the wisdom of God’s Word will be proved right.

Certainly no one could point to any of Jesus’ actions as sinful, as He is Wisdom personified. He lived a perfect life, not only to vindicate His message, but to serve as our perfect replacement. May we forever stand on the rock who is Christ, and proclaim His timeless message of repentance and forgiveness.

Prayer: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; 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, AUGUST 23: LUKE 7:36–50 11TH S. A. TRINITY

The world thinks that those who need to be forgiven least are the more holy. In this way, they use God’s forgiveness to brag of their own sanctity, and consequently, only a little love or gratitude is shown. This was the case of Simon the Pharisee. But Jesus points out to him that the woman who so reverently washed His feet, kissing them and wiping them with her tears, thereby showed tremendous love for her Savior. Why? For the same reason that Simon despised her. She had sinned much.

All three of them knew this. But only Jesus and the woman understood the significance of her act of love. She had also been forgiven much. The faithful try to show love in proportion to forgiveness. Simon did not consider the grace of God to be so super-abounding as to forgive someone like her.

We cannot truly understand the grace of God if we are pre-occupied with convicting others. We only truly understand God’s grace when we first convict ourselves. How much have we sinned against the Lord? How much have we been forgiven by the Lord? How much, then, should our love be flowing from our hearts in thanks and praise for His superabundant grace!

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“Who sinned that such a thing should happen?” “Who is to blame for this tragedy?” “Why would God let such a thing happen?” These and other such impertinent questions seek to find someone to blame for the tragic circumstances in life, whether that blame is laid on God or our neighbor. But the Lord points out that not every terrible situation is caused by a specific sin. We live in a corrupt creation, and a corrupt creation begets more corruption. The man born blind was no more to blame for his blindness than his parents. Neither was God to blame for it. Instead, Jesus reveals that this man’s tragedy would not serve the cause of sin but the cause of God’s glory.

While He is never the cause of evil, the Lord often uses such calamity to accomplish His good and gracious will. God allowed this man to be born blind so that in time he could help demonstrate the miraculous healing power of God’s incarnate Son. In whatever circumstance of life, we should not waste time finding someone to blame for it, but pray in faith to Him who has the power to work it out for us for our own good, saying, “Thy will be done.”

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Jeremiah was a contemporary of King Josiah, who was one of the few good kings of the Southern Kingdom. Josiah did much to restore the temple, and hoped that worship would return to its proper form. Unfortunately, the reform didn’t seem to go past the structure of the temple for many. Although the temple’s appearance was impressive, the hearts of the people did not match the building’s outward beauty. In fact, the magnificence of the temple became the focal point, not the worship within it. The reform stopped when the building was restored, as the people were satisfied with performing the mere rituals of worship. The temple became an idol in itself. They assumed as long as “God’s House” was well-cared for, God would be pleased with them. They had put the earthly building above the heavenly Builder.

Sadly, we see this being replayed in our day. Congregations will go to almost any length to keep up their church building, even at the cost of doctrine. Talk about “sin” and “God’s Law” is harsh to the ear, and chases needed dollars away. The “necessities” are defined as filling the pews and plates, rather than proclaiming the unadulterated truth of God’s Divine Word. Therefore, let us continue to treasure the Church’s greatest riches: the right administration of God’s Means of Grace.

Prayer: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

How important it is for a building to be erected with straight and strong walls. Any deviation from the vertical seriously affects the ability of a wall to stand. Likewise, the use of improper materials will also greatly hamper its strength. Additionally, the wall's foundation must be strong and true. It matters not what is above if the footing below is not up to proper standards.

St Paul was careful to build on the foundation of Jesus Christ, for He alone is the Rock upon which the Church must be built. Many religions start off wrong, ensuring failure in what is laid above. Others start off right, then branch off from the norm by allowing false doctrine and practice to pollute what was once pure. In today's text, Paul calls this kind of construction using "wood, hay, or straw."

The Reformation was not something new and different. It was a movement to break down the part that had strayed and return to the norm. It is our task to always examine where we are in relation to the Church's one foundation: Jesus Christ her Lord.

Prayer: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; 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 Church is called the Communion of Saints, and yet every single member is by nature a sinner. None of us was called into this sacred fellowship because we were already holy, but because it was the Lord's intention to make us holy. Just as no one goes to see the doctor when he is well, but only when he realizes that he needs treatment, so Christ, the divine Physician, welcomes those who recognize their sinful sickness and come to Him for forgiveness and renewal.

Christians sometimes are called hypocrites when others, who know their past behavior, see their repentance and new-found faith in God's mercy. "As though God would ever accept them!" they imagine against their neighbor. Matthew, the newly minted disciple of the Lord, must have felt the sharp sting of such a barb when the scribes and Pharisees attacked Jesus for eating with the likes of him. But such is the greatness of God's mercy, that He is not ashamed to commune with us miserable sinners.

We should not let the accusations of the devil, the world, and our erring conscience make us feel as though God does not love us. Instead, we should console ourselves with the Gospel that He has forgiven us and called us to be His saints in the paradise of heaven.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

Article XI.

Of Confession, they teach, that Private Absolution ought to be retained in the churches, although in confession an enumeration of all sins is not necessary. For it is impossible, according to the Psalm: “Who can understand his errors?” [Psa. 19:12].

Article XII.

Of Repentance, they teach, that for those that have fallen after Baptism, there is remission of sins whenever they are converted; and that the Church ought to impart absolution to those thus returning to repentance.

Now repentance consists properly of these two parts: One is contrition, that is, terrors smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin; the other is faith, which, born of the Gospel, or of absolution, believes that, for Christ’s sake, sins are forgiven, comforts the conscience, and delivers it from terrors. Then good works are bound to follow, which are the fruits of repentance.

They condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that those once justified can lose the Holy Ghost. Also those who contend that some may attain to such perfection in this life that they cannot sin. The Novatians also are condemned, who would not absolve such as had fallen after Baptism, though they returned to repentance. They also are rejected who do not teach that remission of sins cometh through faith, but command us to merit grace through satisfactions of our own.

—Augsburg Confession

THURSDAY, AUGUST 17: MAT. 23:34–39 10TH S. A. TRINITY

In today’s reading Jesus shifts His attention from the leaders to the populace. Even though they have been led astray by false prophets, the people are no less culpable of judgment. God, in His mercy, had sent true prophets, which they chose to ignore or persecute. God’s righteous anger, however, only comes after His heartfelt efforts to bring the people to repentance. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” God courts His Bride, the Church, but does not force her to love Him in return. For the time being, He is simply heartbroken. But in the Judgment, His righteous wrath will be meted out on those who have rejected His love.

How do we ourselves measure up? Have we sometimes allowed ourselves to be wooed by the gods of distraction? Do we take for granted the faithful pastors that God has sent us? Do we “go through the motions” on Sunday morning, without realizing the great privilege God gives us to come into His presence? Let us appreciate anew the great gift of being God’s chosen, that our hearts may be renewed daily in love and service to Him.

Prayer: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Jeremiah reflects on the desolation of Jerusalem. Over the span of four decades, he had seen the hustle and bustle of the great capitol. But in spite of all its physical vibrancy, she was spiritually desolate. Jeremiah had a disappointing and frustrating ministry in this once great city. Her leaders had put their trust in foolish alliances, which backfired against them. God had asked, even begged them to remain allied to Him, but the people went their own way, both politically and spiritually.

This is how sin operates. It first dulls our senses to the truth. Sin encourages us to take our blessings for granted and become smug in our present comfort. Often without realizing, we drift away from the truth and lose the spiritual discipline of worship and prayer. Before long, we become anchored to gods of our own making. "Sin" is no longer "sin", but a personal choice that suits our own fancy. In the end, such a temporal choice leads to eternal destruction. Diligence in our spiritual discipline is the antidote for drifting. An active prayer life and regular participation in God's Means of Grace are the tools He gives us to ward off the Evil One.

Prayer: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; 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 today's reading we see that the reaction of the religious leaders to Peter and John was the same as it was toward Jesus. The miracle they performed was undeniable, and would surely draw more people to them. Therefore, the council's conclusion was to silence the messengers, and the apostles were implored to be silent. But Peter and John put the matter back on them: "But Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.'"

Do we feel the same compulsion to share God's Word to a lost world? Whether we are witnessing laypeople or preaching pastors, we have a message that has changed our own lives, both now and forever. How can we then withhold sharing and proclaiming that saving Word? As another has wisely said: "We're just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread." God grant us the same burning desire we've heard about this week from Jeremiah, Jesus, Paul, and Peter.

Prayer: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.