

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

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Rev. Jeffrey Ahonen

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Rev. Douglas Handrich (Emeritus)

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

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Rev. Michael Henson

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Rev. Daniel Mensing

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Redeemer Lutheran Church, 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

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

Rev. Brandon Warr

St. Patrick Lutheran Church, Chipley, FL

Rev. Dcn. Gary Harroun

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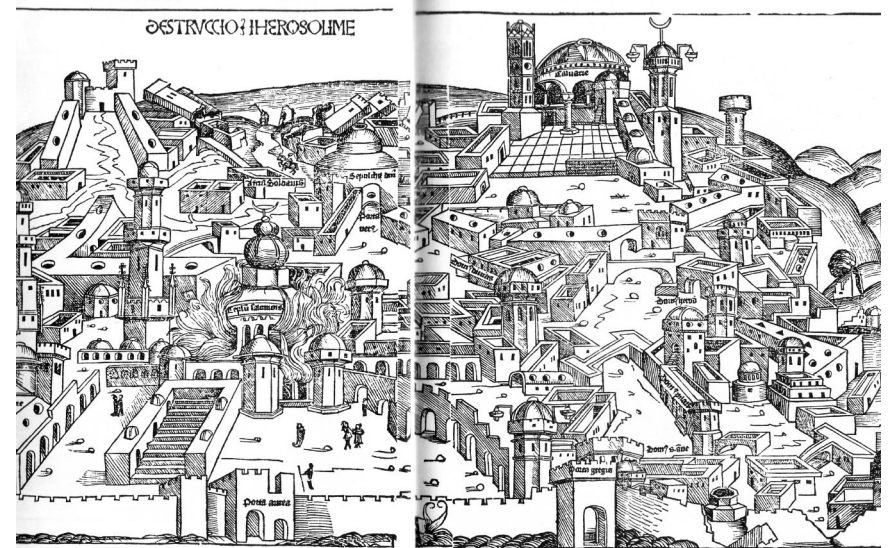
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THE LUTHERAN HERALD



The Destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

NOVEMBER 5—DECEMBER 2, 2023

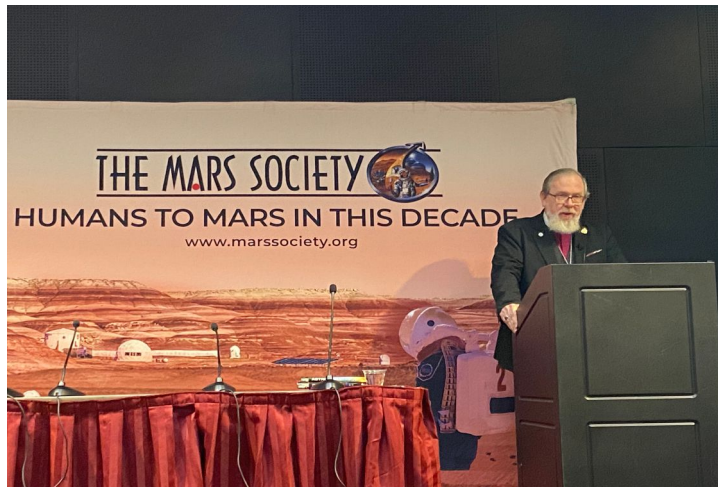
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The Calendar

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

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

November 5	Trinity 22	ASBH 60
November 12	Trinity 25	ASBH 63
November 19	Trinity 26	ASBH 64
November 26	Trinity 27	ASBH 65
November 30 (R)	Festival of St. Andrew, Apostle	ASBH 109



Bp. Heiser addressing the 2023 Convention of the Mars Society

Bishop delivers Plenary Address to Annual Mars Society Convention

This year's convention of the International Mars Society met at the Arizona State University–Tempe from the fourth to the eighth of October. This year, Bishop Heiser delivered a paper to a plenary session of the society on the topic, “Is the effort to settle Mars a ‘dangerous religion’?—An evaluation of the settlement ‘myth.’” In recent years, Leftists and Neo-pagans have attacked discussions and efforts for space exploration and settlement because they claimed such efforts are rooted in Western civilization and “Christian Imperialism.” Heiser addressed some of their key arguments, while also examining the roots of the scientific revolution in medieval Christian theology. Approximately 300 were present for the presentation, with another 1,500 watching online. A founding member of the Mars Society, Bp. Heiser serves on the Board of Directors and Steering Committee.

Doctrine and Practice

Judgment Day

#10

The End Will Come Unexpectedly and Suddenly. “God told Noah that He would grant the world 120 years in which to repent. This warning Noah diligently proclaimed, saying: God is angry and in 120 years will drown the entire world. Ah, how they must have wagged their tongues and put him down for a fool! The more he proclaimed and terrified, the more they said: Do you not see that God gives us food and drink? If He wanted to destroy us, He would not give us peace, security, and good things. So they let him preach and cry out, while they laughed. ... So the Sodomites caroused. And Lot told his sons-in-law: The Lord will overthrow this place. But they, too, laughed and asked him whether he was mad and demented. Why should the Lord be angry when He gave them time and opportunity to eat, drink, build, and marry? And they said: Why, you uncouth teacher, you impotent fool! He even announced the day and the hour to them. But after he had left, Sodom lay in hell.

So it will be at the Last Day, when the people in the world cannot get enough of eating, drinking, marrying, building, planting, worrying about their livelihood, scraping and scrambling. Under those conditions they should be frightened. But they will mock and ridicule us and go on with their eating and drinking. And then, when they think the final Day is a hundred years away, they shall in a moment stand before the Last Judgment.”

The Best Preparation for the End. “No one is better prepared for Judgment Day than the person who longs to be without sin.”

The Judge is Our Savior. “How can Judgment Day and dying be terrible to such a heart? Who will harm the man when the great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, to whom the Day of Judgment belongs, is on his side and stands before him with all His glory, greatness, majesty, and might? None other will hold court on the Day of Judgment than He who gave Himself for us. He will certainly not deny Himself but will declare that He gave Himself for your sins, as you believe. What, then, will sin do when the Judge declares that He Himself has taken it away? Who will accuse you? Who will judge the Judge? Who will overcome Him? He avails more than innumerable worlds with all their sins.”

—Martin Luther, from *What Luther Says*

The Augsburg Confession, article IV, states, “...we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us.” The account of the sheep and the goats, which presents the Scriptural teaching that judgment day will consider man’s works, does not disagree with “the main article of Christianity.”

Until the end comes, believers and unbelievers are mixed together like the wheat and weeds, or sheep and goats. We can’t tell with certainty who has faith and who doesn’t. However, this doesn’t mean that God does not know. Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own” (John 10:14). On the Last Day, even before any works are mentioned, the Son of Man separates His believing sheep from the unbelieving goats (v.32-33). The outward works which are mentioned are simply the visible evidence of each one’s faith in Christ. These believers showed love to other believers—even the least important ones. Most importantly, not one sin of a believer is ever brought up, because they are forgiven.

The lack of works for unbelievers is proof that they did not have faith. “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6). Those who rejected Christ also didn’t show love to the least of Christ’s believers in the Church.

Collect: Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us, we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

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

The Fifth Petition.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

This point now pertains to our poor miserable life, which, although we have and believe the Word of God, and do and suffer His will, and are supported by His gifts and blessings, is nevertheless not without sin. For we stumble daily and transgress because we live in the world, among men who do us great wrong and give cause for impatience, anger, revenge, etc. And besides we have Satan at our back, who attacks us on every side, and fights (as we have heard) against all the foregoing petitions, so that it is not possible to stand always firm in such a persistent conflict.

Therefore, there is here again great need to call upon God and to pray: “Dear Father, forgive us our trespasses.” Not as though He did not without, and even before, our prayer forgive sin (for He has given us the Gospel, in which is pure forgiveness) before we prayed or even thought about it. But this is to the intent that we may recognize and accept such forgiveness. For since the flesh in which we daily live is of such a nature that it neither believes nor trusts God, and is ever active in evil lusts and devices, that we sin daily in word and deed, in sins of omission and commission, by which peace of conscience is destroyed, so that it is afraid of the wrath and displeasure of God, and thus loses the comfort and consolation of the Gospel, it is an unceasing necessity that we have recourse to this petition, and obtain therein consolation wherewith to again comfort the conscience.

But this should serve to break our pride and keep us humble. For He has reserves this prerogative to Himself, that if anyone boasts of his godliness and despises others, he may regard himself in the light of this prayer, and thus he will find that he is no better than others, and that in the presence of God all must lower their plumes, and be glad merely that they can attain forgiveness. And let no one think that as long as we live here he can reach such position that he will not need such forgiveness. In short, if God does not forgive without intermission, we are lost.

—The Large Catechism, §85-91

Earlier in this chapter of Mark, Jesus told the Parable of the Sower. After He told the parable He said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” Today’s Scripture reading has Jesus following up with another parable after which He concludes with similar words, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”

So who has “ears to hear”? Quite simply, that person is the one who has faith in Jesus. And how do you know for sure that you are one with “ears to hear”? God’s Word says this in Romans 10:17: So then faith comes by hearing, and HEARING by the Word of God (emphasis added). The Word of God you have heard and are hearing is the very instrument that God uses to create hearing. His Word is the means through which God creates. “In the beginning...” God spoke His creation into existence. “Let there be light,” and there was light, etc.

So it is with the blessed sacraments. God’s Word creates what He says is there. Water connected to His Word bestows the forgiveness of sins in Holy Baptism. God’s Word connected to bread and wine in Holy Communion brings Christ’s very Body and Blood to communicants for the forgiveness of their sins. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear that our sins are forgiven for Jesus sake!

Collect: O God, our Refuge and Strength, who art the Author of all godliness, be ready, we beseech Thee, to hear the devout prayers of Thy Church, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

God remembered His covenant promise with Abraham and brought His Old Testament people out of slavery in Egypt. They were brought to Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. Mount Sinai was not their final destination, as if the giving of the Law was the reason for their exodus. The Law “was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made” (Gal 3:19). The Law revealed the knowledge of man’s sin so that they would look forward to the promise of forgiveness in Jesus. Galatians 3:24 says, “Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” The Law which works repentance comes first, but the goal is the salvation which comes through faith in the Gospel.

Mount Zion, not Mount Sinai, is the final destination for God’s people. Mount Zion is the name of the mountain on which Jerusalem is built. And Jerusalem is the place where our Savior shed His blood to atone for the whole world. And yet, we must look further, “to the living God’s city, heavenly Jerusalem.” Our goal is the heavenly inheritance, a kingdom which is received through faith in the promise of “Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant.” Everything in this world can be shaken by the accusations of the Law, but through the Gospel we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken.

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

In his book the prophet Zephaniah proclaims that Judah and Jerusalem will be destroyed, and unrepentant Israel will be carried away into captivity in Babylon. However, for those who come to repentance “before the day of the Lord’s anger comes,” there will be grace. “You will be hidden” from the judgment (Zeph. 2:3, the theme of Zephaniah’s book).

For those who seek the Lord and His righteousness, the Lord says, “Wait for Me.” Yes, there is great wickedness all around. And yes, God uses a more wicked nation than Israel to punish Israel. Although there will be disastrous consequences for the whole nation, the believers should not despair. They should wait for the Lord’s timing. God has not forgotten His faithful people. He will punish the evildoers and those who oppress His Church. Zephaniah announces that a day is coming in which God will punish all who have rejected his Word. On that judgment day God will gather the nations, and justice will prevail.

However, God’s people will be spared (or as Zephaniah says, they will be hidden). On that judgment day God will bring them redemption on account of their faith in Jesus, the promised Messiah. Their redemption will result in everlasting blessings and rejoicing. The present false teaching will be replaced with “a pure language” (correct doctrine). God’s people “will call on the name of the Lord.” And they will be united “with one accord” in one holy Christian Church to serve their Lord Jesus Christ in thanksgiving.

Collect: Almighty God, by Whose grace Thine Apostle Saint Andrew obeyed the call of Thy Son Jesus Christ, grant unto us also grace to follow Him in heart and life; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Today’s reading is part of King Solomon’s speech at the dedication of the Temple. One would think that the king would pray to God for protection *from* enemies. Yet, Solomon prays that God would “deliver them to the enemy” when God’s people sin against Him. Buried within his prayer is Solomon’s realization that a far greater enemy of the people exists outside the bounds of earthly lands and peoples. The true enemy of God’s people is the devil. The peoples of this sinful world who rage against God’s people are simply tools of the devil to inflict pain and suffering upon all people. But more importantly, enemies are also God’s tools.

God uses earthly enemies to carry out Fatherly chastisement, in order to drive His people to repent of their sins against Him, saying, “We have sinned and done wrong, we have committed wickedness.” Sometimes the realization of our sins takes time. God, our Father, is patient with us. He does not give us what we deserve at that moment—temporal and eternal death—but rather is long-suffering. He awaits the time when His Holy Spirit restores us through contrition and repentance, that we may know the God of all grace who forgives our sins for Jesus’ sake.

Collect: O God, our Refuge and Strength, who art the Author of all godliness, be ready, we beseech Thee, to hear the devout prayers of Thy Church, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

God's Word clearly says that He shows mercy to those who "love Him and keep His commandments." And if that isn't enough for us to do, He also says, "Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them." And finally, we are to "listen to these judgments [of God], and keep and do them." Whoa! and Wow! God's Law is overwhelming to sinful ears!

We can so quickly find ourselves sitting in a stupor wondering, "Now what do I do?", having just as quickly forgotten the answer, "Flee to Jesus." It is exactly at this time—the time when you realize you haven't listened to God's judgments and you can't keep and do them—that we need to remember the words from Monday's reading, "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

"The Lord your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers." That covenant extends all the way back to the Garden of Eden, when God promised Adam and Eve that He would send a Savior. They, and all the faithful to follow, flee to Jesus, the promised Messiah. In Jesus you find the fulfillment of God's Law for you!

Collect: O God, our Refuge and Strength, who art the Author of all godliness, be ready, we beseech Thee, to hear the devout prayers of Thy Church, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Our God provided our creation through the means of our parents. He provides for us by means of food, drink, clothing, etc. He protects and defends us through the government. However, God will not always make use of this world's created means. In the new heaven and earth—as described in yesterday's reading—the former things will have passed away. There will be neither sun, nor moon. "In the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage" (Matt 22:30).

In today's text, Jesus explains that the glorious Jerusalem temple would be destroyed before the end comes. Once the Promised Christ, who was the final sacrifice for sins, had offered Himself for our sins (Heb. 7:26-27), there was no longer any need for a temple or Old Testament priests offering up daily sacrifices.

They did not understand that the final age of the Church, ushered in after Christ's resurrection and ascension, would need to come before the Last Day comes. That Church-age would be both a time of lawlessness (departure from the Word) and faithfulness. Outside the Church "the love of many would grow cold." Inside the Church, where there is faith in Christ, the Church in love will preach "the gospel...in all the world as a witness to all the nations." And then, the end will come. Those holding in faith to Christ's forgiveness will endure to the end and be saved.

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

“World without end” is included in the termination of most of our collects. This phrase translates the literal phrase “unto the ages of ages.” Just as the phrase “King of kings” describes Jesus as the greatest (superlative) of all kings, the phrase “ages of ages” is speaking of that “age” which is greater than any age. That age (to the superlative degree) is the eternal age, which will be of endless duration. In that new age, there will be a new heaven and a new earth. You can describe it with the terms “...for ever and ever” (Phil. 4:20 NKJV), or “...world without end” (Eph 3:21 KJV). It’s still the same thing.

“For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now” (Romans 8:22). When the Lord returns He will “make all things new.” The weight of sin will be lifted. Just as our bodies will be raised without the sinful nature with which we fight daily, so also the new heaven and new earth will be without the effects of sin. Not just the removal of thorns and thistles, but also the removal of tears, sorrow, and death. There is no comparison between our old home now and the new habitation for the righteous through faith in Christ. St. Paul professes that he has “a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (Philippians 1:23).

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

At the time of the writing of today’s devotion, war had broken out between the Israelis and Palestinians. All sorts of atrocities had been reported and this war may still be going on as you read this.

What needs to be restated clearly is that the present-day nation of Israel is not to be seen as God’s “Chosen People.” Too many Christians think that the modern nation of Israel holds that special place in the eyes of God. People have forgotten St. Paul’s words to the Galatians, especially chapter 3: “So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.”

The question for Christians who think Israel is still a holy people in the eyes of God is simply, “Why, then, did Christ predict the destruction of Jerusalem?” The answer: “Because Israel had rejected the Christ.”

The world that surrounds us is filled with unbelievers who carry out the atrocities we see in the news. What is taking place around us is exactly what Jesus was talking about, “wars and commotions.” So Jesus also offers up words of comfort, “do not be afraid.” Let us not get so caught up in what we see going on around us, “wars and commotions,” that we forget that we belong to Jesus through faith in Him. Let us also pray that those who do not have faith in Jesus Christ may repent and believe, so that they may truly be God’s Chosen People.

Collect: O God, our Refuge and Strength, who art the Author of all godliness, be ready, we beseech Thee, to hear the devout prayers of Thy Church, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“Now the man from whom the demons had departed begged Him that he might be with Him.” This man had suffered for a long time at the hands of demons and Jesus had now released him. It is quite understandable that this man wanted to be with Jesus. He saw what Jesus had done, and may well have feared what might happen to him if Jesus left.

But isn't that the point? There is a fear, a righteous fear, of Jesus departing from us. As the Holy Spirit works within us each day to confess our sins and trust in Christ, He also leads us to see what life is without Christ. He leads us to see the hopelessness and helplessness of life without Christ, which moves us to cling all the more to Christ.

The irony of it all is that the very fear of losing Christ draws us closer to Him. The fear of Jesus not being with us leads us to hear, “Lo, I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20). The fact that God can use our very fears and doubts for our own good only goes to prove what St. Paul wrote, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

Collect: O God, our Refuge and Strength, who art the Author of all godliness, be ready, we beseech Thee, to hear the devout prayers of Thy Church, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Our Lord Jesus has completed His task of atoning for the sins of the world. Having risen from the dead, He who had all authority in heaven and earth instituted the pastoral office with the authority to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching. After Jesus ascended and “went away,” these servants of Christ have been placed in the Office of the Keys to manage the house of God, Christ's Church. The closing key is the Law, which condemns the sins of unrepentant sinners. The opening key is the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins, preached to repentant sinners. John 20:23, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” The ministers of Christ are the doorkeepers, declaring God's will according to His holy Word.

Until our Lord returns, the Church is directed to “Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is” (Mark 13:33). God has commanded us to pray, and He has promised to hear us. Luther says, “Consequently nothing is so necessary as to call upon God incessantly and drum into His ears our prayer that He may give, preserve, and increase in us faith and obedience to the Ten Commandments and remove all that stands in our way and hinders us from fulfilling them” (Large Catechism).

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Last Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE XVII.

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

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

—The Augsburg Confession

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 11: GENESIS 50:15–23 ST. MARTIN

Today's reading reminds us that God often works in ways that don't make sense to us when we are going through rough times. One only needs to look back upon the story of Joseph and how his jealous brothers sold him into slavery, and then told their father that Joseph was killed by a wild animal. For years Joseph's father, Jacob, thought his son was dead, while at the same time Joseph found himself enslaved to the Egyptians. It is a dire story that had an outcome only God could orchestrate: "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."

With that thought in mind, I would ask you to consider someone you may not have given much, if any, thought to when you read today's lesson. That person is Jacob. While it is easy for us to understand the suffering Joseph endured, we can just as easily forget the suffering Jacob endured all those many years when he thought his most favored son was dead, and all the time Jacob didn't get to spend with Joseph. The pangs Jacob felt all those years were finally relieved when he heard that Joseph was alive. Of all that had happened to Jacob and Joseph, "God meant it for good."

Collect: O God, our Refuge and Strength, who art the Author of all godliness, be ready, we beseech Thee, to hear the devout prayers of Thy Church, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; 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 Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity

XIV. Of Monastic Vows.

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

—Smalcald Articles, Part III

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 25: HEB. 10:26–31 26TH S. A. TRINITY

Some false teachers claim that, once a person has come to faith in Jesus, he cannot fall away. His salvation is completely assured (they say) and there is no possibility for apostasy. This teaching of ‘eternal security’ or ‘once saved, always saved’ is contrary to the Scriptures. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews warns us that “if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin.” In other words, if a Christian falls into deliberate and persistent sin, he will lose his faith. The forgiveness which Christ won on the cross will no longer benefit him, because he has “counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing.”

We should never become secure in ourselves, thinking that it is impossible for us to stumble into mortal sin. St. Paul warns us: “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall,” (1 Corinthians 10:12). Instead of boasting in our own strength, we should place our confidence in Christ. Through His strength alone we are made secure in the hope of eternal life. To those who acknowledge their weakness and daily confess their sins, God says: “Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)

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

Sometimes particular sins committed by men have no direct consequences in this life. For a long time, God may allow iniquity to go unpunished. Such was the case for the rich man clothed in purple, who in his lifetime received good things, although he treated his neighbor Lazarus badly (Luke 16:25). At other times, particular sins of men have direct consequences. Such was the case for King David, who received the death of his newborn son and adversity in his household as punishments for his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah (2 Samuel 12:11-14). Finally, sometimes men suffer afflictions even when no particular sin is being punished. Such was the case for the blind man in John 9: "His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.'"

Jesus does not say which of the three cases applies to the Galileans. Instead He says: "unless you repent you will all likewise perish." When horrible events occur or natural disasters strike, our reaction should not be "Who sinned?"; but "Lord have mercy upon us." All the evils of this world are the result of sin, whether sin in general or particular sins. These events remind us that we all need deliverance. We all need the forgiveness of sins which saves our souls from perishing.

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

Jesus warned in yesterday's Gospel reading that in the Last Days "false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:24). In today's reading, Jesus warns His disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, that is, the doctrine of false teachers.

Jesus' disciples misunderstood His words because their minds were focused on earthly needs like food. They had not planned ahead for their journey and were now facing hunger. But Jesus had already proven that He would provide daily bread by miraculously feeding thousands of people. He would much rather have His disciples plan ahead for their salvation by avoiding false teachers.

In our weakness, we are often distracted by worrying about our earthly needs. We anxiously check the weather, the stock market, the bank account, trying to discern the signs of this world and prepare for disaster. But Jesus wants us to prepare against spiritual danger by fleeing false doctrine and holding fast to true doctrine. Just as He sent Jonah to Nineveh to warn them of the coming destruction and call them to repent of their false belief and sin, so today He sends ministers of the Word to warn us that this world will one day be destroyed and that we should turn away from false doctrine and sin.

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

The physical Zion, the city of Jerusalem, was destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Roman army. The Jews had thought that since they had the temple, God would never forsake them, even if they crucified His beloved Son. But by rejecting Jesus Christ, the Jews also rejected all of the promises that God made concerning Zion. So God abandoned Zion to the “abomination of desolation.”

The beautiful and comforting promises made through the prophet Isaiah apply to the true, spiritual Zion, that is, the faithful Christian Church. The Church is where the Lord has mercy upon us and comforts us with the forgiveness of sins. To worldly eyes, it often seems like the Church has been forgotten by her Lord and is about to be destroyed by her persecutors. The number of Christians is shrinking rapidly and our enemies are becoming more brazen in their attacks against us. But Christ says that He cares more for His Church than a mother does for her baby. Unlike the physical city of Jerusalem, the Church will never be destroyed or forsaken. Christ has promised that even the gates of Hell will not prevail against her (Matt. 16:18). He will protect her until His Second Coming, when He will complete His victory over her enemies.

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

Regarding our justification, there is nothing left to be accomplished. We who are united with Christ have already attained the forgiveness of sins; we are declared righteous by God on account of the righteousness which is from God by faith (Philippians 3:9).

However, our sanctification or holiness of living is incomplete. None of us has attained perfection or sinlessness. For the duration of this life we will continue to struggle against our sinful nature. Only on the Last Day will our bodies be sanctified from sin, when God transforms our lowly body and conforms it to Jesus’ glorious body (Philippians 3:21).

Until then, we press on, being conformed to Christ’s death and resurrection (Philippians 3:10, Romans 6:5). Every day, we put to death our sinful nature by confessing our sins, and rise with Christ by laying hold of His merits. When we walk according to this pattern, we will surely receive the prize of eternal life which God has won for us.

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

When Paul says “Beware of dogs,” he is warning the saints in Philippi particularly about the Judaizers, or the circumcision party. This Christian sect was widespread during the ministry of the apostles and caused a great deal of trouble in the churches which Paul had planted. In short, the Judaizers’ theology was ‘faith in Jesus’ plus ‘adherence to the Mosaic ceremonial law.’ They claimed: “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved,” (Acts 15:1).

The true teaching of the Scriptures is that we are saved by faith alone. Paul says: “we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” The party that faithfully understands circumcision worships God by trusting only in Jesus Christ. Men cannot please God simply by performing outward actions. Faith alone in the heart pleases God. Faith boasts nothing of itself, but places all confidence in the saving work of Christ.

We are the circumcision—the true children of Abraham—because like Abraham, we reject all our works as rubbish so that we may gain Christ and the righteousness which He freely gives us by faith.

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

By bringing the Israelites up through the Red Sea and out of Egypt, God had separated them from the rest of the nations. They were set apart as His chosen people. As a result, all of the other nations feared and hated them. Moses was afraid of what might happen if the Lord would abandon His people. Without His continuing presence and protection, they would be easy prey for their enemies.

In our baptism, God separated us from the rest of the nations. We became His chosen people and are now united with Christ. But since the world hates Christ, the world also hates us and wants to destroy us. Without the ongoing presence of our Lord, we would be helpless prey. But God has promised, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” God is present with us in His Word and Sacraments, which will not pass away until heaven and earth pass away.

When that Last Day comes, Christ will once again separate us from the heathen, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Then, on account of His merits, we will be welcomed into eternal rest with our Lord.

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

Over the next three days our readings will connect the Gospel for Trinity 25 (Matt. 24:15-28) to the Gospel for Trinity 26 (Matt. 25:31-46). Here Jesus describes the events that will occur on the Last Day. Brief eclipses and meteor showers happen already from time to time as reminders that the end is near, but at Christ's Second Coming, the sun, moon, and stars will completely fail.

But Jesus says that "this generation" and "My words" will not pass away. Jesus is speaking about His Church and those who believe in Him. In our baptism we were "regenerated," born of water and the Word. Until the end of the age, there will always be at least some who are baptized and hear the Word of God. There will always be faithful pastors who preach God's Word in its truth and purity. They may not be a short drive away, but God will always provide faithful preachers and faithful hearers. Even in the midst of so much apostasy and the attacks of false teachers, we trust in Christ's promise that He will preserve His Church until He comes again in glory.

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

This teaching is a common sermon in the New Testament. Whenever the apostles exhort Christians to put away sinful behavior, they preach Christ's crucifixion. St. Peter writes: "Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin."

Christ did not have any sin of His own. He took the guilt of our sin and carried it in His own flesh to the cross. He "bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness," (1 Peter 2:24). We no longer bear the guilt and punishment of sin, because Christ has taken it away. We "cease from sin" in that our sins are no longer counted against us. They are washed clean in Holy Baptism (1 Peter 3:21).

The message of the crucifixion teaches us to put away the lusts of our flesh, because we have been united with Jesus' death and resurrection. Just as He was "put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18), so we in our baptism have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires so that we might live in the Spirit (Gal. 5:24-25). Having been made alive in Christ, we strive, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to "cease from sin" and live for the will of God.

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

Many of the disciples thought that Jesus was going to establish an earthly kingdom. They supposed (incorrectly) that He would overthrow the Roman government and reign in glory here on earth (Acts 1:6). Therefore, Jesus told the Parable of the Ten Minas to explain how the kingdom of God's glory would appear. Jesus (the "certain nobleman" of the parable) ascended into heaven to the right hand of the Father to receive the kingdom for us. At the end of the age, He will return and say to all who believe in Him: "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34).

We will not inherit the kingdom because of any work that we do. Everything is given to us by the grace of God. The salvation which we have through Jesus is God's work. Even the good works which we do are not entirely our own. The minas which we produce by trading come from the original mina that God has given us. When Jesus asks what we have earned by trading, we should confess: "Your mina has earned ten/five minas." "We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do." (Luke 17:10)

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

Jesus warns that His Second Coming will be sudden and unexpected. He compares it to the days before the Flood. Yet it is not as though the Flood came as a complete surprise. Noah did not keep God's plan a secret. St. Peter calls Noah a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5). Noah had been publicly preaching Law and Gospel for centuries before the Flood. But the rest of mankind ignored his preaching and continued to sinfully indulge in earthly pleasures.

So it is today. Even though we do not know the specific hour, it is not as though Christ's plan to return at the end of the world is a secret. It has always been part of the Church's public creed: "From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead." God has continued to send preachers of righteousness to warn people of the approaching Judgment. But most men are concerned only with earthly pleasure and mock the idea of Christ's return. May God separate us from those mockers by giving us His Holy Spirit so that we receive the preaching of His Word in repentance and faith. Then we will be prepared for our deliverance from this world, just as Noah and his family were.

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

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18: MAT. 24:43–51 25TH S. A. TRINITY

Being ready for the Christ's Second Coming does not mean cramming in as much earthly pleasure as possible; but neither does it mean selling all of your possessions to become a begging monk. Jesus teaches that wise and faithful servants take care of whatever their master has entrusted to them until his return.

What has been entrusted to you? Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments. Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Are you a pastor, hearer, magistrate, citizen, teacher, or student? God has entrusted to you various degrees of responsibility, wealth, and talent, which He expects you to use faithfully.

One of our most important responsibilities is toward our fellow Christians, our brothers and sisters in Christ. The faithful servant gives each member of his master's family his food in due season. The evil servant beats his fellow servants. Those deeds will be judged on the Last Day. Whatever is done to the least of Christ's brethren is the same as if it were done to Christ Himself. So then, let us love one another as Christ has loved us. Let us use what has been entrusted to us in service to the family of God.

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

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

CHAPTER III, ARTICLE VI.

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

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