

**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; Apologia Lutheran Mission, Deer Park, WI; Peace L.C., Ironwood, MI; Pure Blessings Lutheran Church, Brandon, 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; St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Mission, UAC, Ormond Beach, 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. Lutheran Church, Rogers, AR

**Rev. Daniel Mensing**

Faith Lutheran Church, Tualatin, OR

**Rev. Mark Mueller**

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

**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



APRIL 1—MAY 4, 2024

A PUBLICATION OF  
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF NORTH  
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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)

April 7	Quasimodogeniti (Easter 1)	ASBH 30
April 8 (M)	Festival of the Annunciation	ASBH 84
April 14	Misericordias Domini (Easter 2)	ASBH 31
April 19 (F)	Festival—Philip Melancthon	ASBH 85
April 21	Jubilate (Easter 3)	ASBH 32
April 25 (R)	Festival—St. Mark, Evangelist	ASBH 86
April 28	Cantate (Easter 4)	ASBH 33
May 1 (W)	Festival—St. Philip and St. James, Apostles	ASBH 87
May 2 (R)	Festival—St. Athanasius	ASBH 88

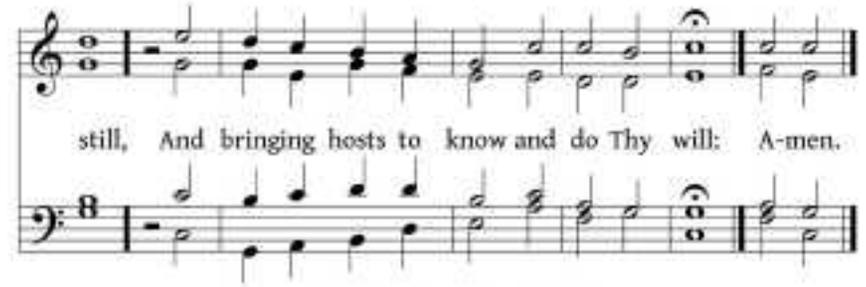
### 2024 Synod and Colloquium

The synod and colloquium will be one week later than usual (liturgically-speaking) on account of this year's eclipse, which has made it impossible to schedule anything in Texas while eclipse-related tourism is going on.

The synod and colloquium will begin with **Vespers** on **Monday, April 15**, and is presently scheduled to conclude with **Matins** on **Friday, April 19** (Festival of Philip Melancthon, Confessor). Approximately one day will be given to the Colloquium; the majority of our time will be devoted to work on the *Augustana Service Book and Hymnal* and other diocesan matters (including St. Ignatius Seminary). Copies of the draft hymnal will be sent to attending clergy prior to the synod; copies will be mailed to non-attending following the synod and colloquium.

At present, the Synod will begin with the Monday Vespers; **Colloquium will be Thursday, April 18**. (There is a possibility that any remaining synodical work not concluded on Wednesday, April 17 would be addressed on Friday morning.)

(When making **hotel arrangements**, please be aware that the hotel across the street from the **Super 8**, which has been a Comfort Inn & Suites—among other things over the years—is now freshly remodeled as a **Fairfield Inn**. **Super 8**, **La Quinta**, **Holiday Inn**, and **Fairfield Inn** are generally the preferred hotels in Hillsboro.)



2. Soon may that fire from heav'n be lent us,  
That swift from land to land its flame may leap!  
Soon, Lord, that priceless boon be sent us  
Of faithful servants, fit for Thee to reap  
The harvest of the soul,—look down and view  
How great the harvest, but the lab'ers few.

3. Lord, to our earnest pray'r now hearken,  
The pray'r we offer at Thy Son's command;  
For, lo! while storms around us darken,  
Thy children's hearts are stirr'd in ev'ry land,  
To cry for help, with fervent soul, to Thee;  
O hear us, Lord, and speak: "Thus let it be!"

4. O speedily that help be granted!  
Send forth evangelists, in spirit strong,  
Armed with Thy Word, a host undaunted,  
Bold to attack the rule of ancient wrong,  
And let them all the earth for Thee reclaim,  
To be Thy kingdom and to know Thy name!

5. Grant that for which Thy people calleth!  
Send down Thy promised Spirit, Lord, in might,  
Before whom ev'ry barrier falleth,  
And let it thus at ev'ning-time be light;  
O! rend the heav'ns, and make Thy presence felt,  
The chains that bind us at Thy touch would melt.

6. Let Zion's paths lie waste no longer,  
Remove the hindrances that there have lain,  
And let Thy Word go forth to conquer;  
Destroy false doctrine, root out notions vain,  
Set free from hirelings, let the Church and school  
Bloom as a garden 'neath Thy prosp'ring rule.

Festival of St. Athanasius

88. Wake, Spirit, Who in Times Now Olden

Carl Heinrich von Bogatzky, 1750, cento  
Tr., Catherine Winkworth, 1863, alt.

Crassellius  
"Darmstadt Gesangbuch," 1698  
Halle, 1704

1. Wake, Spir - it, who in times now old - en Didst  
fire the watchmen of the Chur - ch's youth, And them 'gainst  
ev - ry foe em - bol - den, To wit - ness day and night th'e -  
ter - nal truth, Whose voic - es thro' the world are ring - ing

The image shows a musical score for the hymn "Wake, Spirit, Who in Times Now Olden". It consists of four systems of music, each with a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The music is in 4/4 time and G major. The lyrics are: "1. Wake, Spir - it, who in times now old - en Didst fire the watchmen of the Chur - ch's youth, And them 'gainst ev - ry foe em - bol - den, To wit - ness day and night th'e - ter - nal truth, Whose voic - es thro' the world are ring - ing".

# Lesson from the Book of Concord Easter Sunday

## Chapter IX.

### Of the Descent of Christ to Hell.

There has also been a controversy among some theologians, who have subscribed to the Augsburg Confession concerning the following article: When, and in what manner, the Lord Christ, according to our simple Christian faith, descended to hell, whether this was done before or after His death? Also, whether it occurred according to the soul alone, or according to the divinity alone, or in body and soul, spiritually and bodily? Also, whether this article belongs to the passion or to the glorious victory and triumph of Christ?

But since this article ... cannot be comprehended by the senses or by the reason, but must be grasped alone by faith, it is our unanimous advice that there should be no disputation concerning it, but that it should be believed and taught only in the simplest manner; according as Dr. Luther of blessed memory, in his sermon at Torgau in the year 1533, has, in a very Christian manner, explained this article, separated from it all useless, unnecessary questions, and admonished all godly Christians to Christian simplicity of faith.

For it is sufficient that we know that Christ descended to hell, destroyed hell for all believers, and delivered them from the power of death and of the devil, from eternal condemnation [and even] from the jaws of hell. But how this occurred, we should reserve until the other world, where not only this point, but also still others, will be revealed which we here simply believe and cannot comprehend with our blind reason.

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome

“Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.”

Two despondent disciples walk toward Emmaus. Jesus joins them, but they don't recognize Him, not until they enter the house, and Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, and gives it to them. That's when “they knew Him.”

A great many Christians long for connection to the blessed things of our salvation accomplished by our Lord during Holy Week, so they watch movies on the topic, or listen to special Easter-oriented Christian music. Those things may benefit Christian knowledge and even stir godly emotion, but the Lord Himself has given us true connection in the Word and Sacraments of His Church. In the Lord's Supper, we receive what Christ instituted on Maundy Thursday, what Christ sacrificed on Good Friday, and what rose from the dead on Easter morning. God grant us to rejoice in the forgiveness of sins and the promise of our resurrection, bestowed on us in Holy Communion.

Collect: Almighty God, Who, through Thine Only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life: We humbly beseech Thee, that, as Thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Thou, Lord, didst win the bat - tle That they might  
 And grant the grace to know Thee, The Way, the  
 For these, passed on be - fore us, Sa - vior! we  
 Till all the ran - somed num - ber Fall down be -

con - querors be. Their crowns of liv - ing  
 Truth, the Life; To wrest - le with temp -  
 Thee a - dore, And, walk - ing in their  
 fore the Throne, And hon - or, pow'r, and

glo - ry Are lit with rays from Thee.  
 ta - tions Till vic - tors in the strife.  
 foot - steps, Would serve Thee more and more.  
 glo - ry A - scribe to God a - lone. A - men.

Festival of St. Philip and St. James

87. From All Thy Saints in Warfare, For All Thy Saints at Rest

The Sarum Hymnal, 1868

Ach Gott vom Himmelreiche  
"Musae Sioniae," VII, 1609

1. From all Thy Saints in war - fare,  
2. All praise for Thine A - po - stle,  
3. A - po - stles, Pro - phets, Mar - tyrs,  
Δ4. Then praise we God the Fa - ther,

For all Thy Saints at rest, To Thee, O  
Blest guide to Greek and Jew, And him sur -  
And all the sa - cred throng, Who wear the  
And praise we God the Son, And God the

bles - ed Je - sus, All prais - es be ad - dressed.  
named Thy bro - ther; Keep us Thy breth - ren true,  
spot - less rai - ment, Who raise the cease - less song;  
Ho - ly Spi - rit, E - ter - nal Three in One;

TUESDAY, APRIL 2: LUKE 24:36-47

EASTERTIDE

“Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations.”

Jesus “opened their understanding” so His disciples could understand that the whole point of the Old Testament was that He must suffer and die and rise on the third day. Only Jesus can open our minds to understand that. A right understanding of Scripture is itself a gift of the Lord.

Rightly understanding God’s Word, the disciples are to preach “repentance and remission of sins.” We Lutherans would say “Law and Gospel.” The Christian message is the Law, which shows us our sin and our need for repentance, and then also the Gospel, showing us that we have remission of sins on account of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Especially in a season of election campaigns, many try to “hijack” Jesus in the service of their political (or some other) agenda. God grant us a right understanding of Scripture, that we accept no ‘imitation Jesuses’. Rather, God grant us faithfully to receive His message, and so to repent of our sins and embrace the salvation that is ours on account of Christ Jesus, our risen Lord.

Collect: Almighty God, Who, through Thine Only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life: We humbly beseech Thee, that, as Thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’”

When Jesus first called him, Peter recognized the Lord by a miraculous catch of fish. Now the miracle is repeated. John tells Peter, “It is the Lord.” And, we are told, this is now the third time the risen Christ has appeared to the disciples.

They had seen Him twice before. They knew He was risen. And yet Peter says, “I’m going fishing.” What does one do, once one comes to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Very often, the answer is, “go back to the same job you were doing before.” Many of the tasks of our everyday life do not change in terms of outward appearance. But our mindset in doing those tasks changes. We do our labors as unto the Lord, grateful both for our eternal salvation and for our lives in this world. We do those tasks knowing that our Lord has His use of them, and of us in doing them. And so Peter and the disciples going fishing becomes a tremendous example of Christian vocation for us.

Collect: Almighty God, Who, through Thine Only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life: We humbly beseech Thee, that, as Thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Thou, Lord, didst win the bat - tle That they might  
 May we in all our weak - ness Find strength from  
 For these, passed on be - fore — us, Sa - vior! we  
 Till all the ran - somed num - ber Fall down be -

con - querors be. Their crowns of liv - ing  
 Thee sup - plied, And all, as fruit - ful  
 Thee a - dore, And, walk - ing in their  
 fore the Throne, And hon - or, pow'r, and

glo - ry Are lit with rays from Thee.  
 branch - es, In Thee, the Vine a - bide.  
 foot - steps, Would serve Thee more and more.  
 glo - ry A - scribe to God a - lone. A - men.

Festival of St. Mark

86. From All Thy Saints in Warfare, For All Thy Saints at Rest

The Sarum Hymnal, 1868

Ach Gott vom Himmelreiche  
"Musae Sioniae," VII, 1609

1. From all Thy Saints in war - fare,  
2. For him, O Lord, we praise - Thee,  
3. A - po - stles, Pro - phets, Mar - tyrs,  
Δ4. Then praise we God the Fa - ther,

For all Thy Saints at rest, To Thee, O  
The weak by grace made strong, Whose la - bors  
And all the sa - cred throng, Who wear the  
And praise we God the Son, And God the

bles - ed Je - sus, All prais - es be ad - dressed.  
and whose Gos - pel En - rich our tri - umph - song,  
spot - less ral - ment, Who raise the cease - less song;  
Ho - ly Spi - rit, E - ter - nal Three in One;

THURSDAY, APRIL 4: MATTHEW 28:1-8

EASTERTIDE

"You seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said."

It is the day of the Lord's resurrection. The Marys go to His tomb, where an angel has rolled the stone away and sat on it. Do notice the tenses of the verbs: He *was* crucified, past tense. He *is* risen, present tense for a past event. He *has* risen, He *is still* risen, and He *is going to stay* risen, "as He said." He told you it would be so, and now, it is so.

They are instructed to go tell His disciples the good news. They are not therefore pastors, and nowhere in the New Testament do they make any such pretense. But they are a long way from being unimportant! We can all speak that good news to others. We are all entrusted with speaking the words, "Christ is risen!"

At Christmas, we still see scenes with Jesus in a manger, but we know He is not in the manger anymore. Year round, we see crucifixes, crosses with Jesus' body on them, but we know He is no longer on the cross. These are reminders of all the things He *has done*, past tense, for our salvation. Our great joy is to know and confess, "Christ *is* risen!"

Collect: Almighty God, Who, through Thine Only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life: We humbly beseech Thee, that, as Thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; 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 said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to Him, ‘Rabboni!’”

A grieving Mary Magdalene is standing outside the tomb of Jesus. Jesus had cast demons out of her, essentially giving her life back. Of course, that had led her to follow Him, and she doubtless heard and learned much about the salvation and eternal life He brings. Can you imagine her grief at Jesus’ death? And can you imagine the depth of the comfort of hearing Him call her name?

We too are born sinful, unclean, and by nature in league with the devil. It may not have looked as dramatic as demonic possession, but we were just as lost. Yet in Isaiah 43:1, we hear God promise, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine.” This applies all the more to the people of God in the New Testament! In Holy Baptism we have the same comfort Mary Magdalene received. God has called us by name, and placed His Name on us. Jesus’ gifts of forgiveness and eternal life are ours, now and forever.

Collect: Almighty God, Who, through Thine Only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life: We humbly beseech Thee, that, as Thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.



Festival of Philip Melanchthon  
85. Renew Me, O Eternal Light

Erneure mich, o ew'ges Licht  
Johann F. Ruopp, 1714, cento  
Tr., August Crull, †1923

Herr Jesu Christ, mein's  
"Hymnodus Sacer"  
Leipzig, 1625

1. Re - new me, O — e - ter - nal Light,  
2. De - stroy in me — the lust of sin;  
3. Cre - ate in me — a new heart, Lord,  
4. Grant that I on - ly Thee may love

And let my heart and soul be bright,  
From all im - pure - ness make me clean.  
That glad - ly I — o - bey Thy Word.  
And seek those things which are a - bove

Il - lu - mined with — the light of grace  
Oh, grant me pow'r and strength, my God,  
And naught but what Thou wilt, de - sire;  
Till I be - hold — Thee face to face,

SATURDAY, APRIL 6: MATTHEW 28:16–20

EASTERTIDE

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.”

Jesus meets His disciples on a mountain. Good things happen on mountains, but this one is in Galilee; Galilee “of the Gentiles.” No room for confidence in the mountain. The eleven disciples are there, but there should be twelve. No room for confidence in the number. We are told that “they worshiped Him, but some doubted.” No room even for confidence in the disciples’ confidence.

Then Jesus speaks. All authority in heaven and on earth are His. There, and there alone, is what faith latches on to: Jesus, and that which proceeds from Him. His words charge the Eleven with the making of disciples, defined as Baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and “teaching them to observe all things” that He has imparted to us. When all other sources of spiritual security fail, Jesus holds, and so does His Baptism and His teaching. God grant us therefore to discard all false sources of security, and instead faithfully to cling to Jesus, His Baptism, and His teaching.

Collect: Almighty God, Who, through Thine Only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life: We humbly beseech Thee, that, as Thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; 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

## Quasimodogeniti Sunday

### Article V.

That we may obtain this faith, the Office of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who worketh faith where and when it pleaseth God in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justified those who believe that they are received into favor for Christ's sake.

They condemn the Anabaptists and others, who think that the Holy Ghost cometh to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works.

### Article XXV.

Confession in our churches is not abolished; for it is not usual to give the Body of the Lord, except to them that have been previously examined and absolved. And the people are most carefully taught concerning the faith and assurance of absolution, about which, before this time, there was profound silence. Our people are taught that they should highly prize the absolution, as being the voice of God, and pronounced by His command. The power of the Keys is commended, and we show what great consolation it brings to anxious consciences; that God requires faith to believe such absolution as a voice sounding from Heaven, and that such faith in Christ truly obtains and receives the forgiveness of sins.

Aforetime, satisfactions were immoderately extolled; of faith and the merit of Christ, and the righteousness of faith, no mention was made; wherefore, on this point, our churches are by no means to be blamed. For this even our adversaries must needs concede to us, that the doctrine concerning repentance has been most diligently treated and laid open by our teachers.

But of Confession, they teach, that an enumeration of sins is not necessary, and that consciences be not burdened with anxiety to enumerate all sins, for it is impossible to recount all sins, as the Psalm testifies [19:13]: "Who can understand his errors?" Also Jeremiah [17:9]: "The heart is deceitful, who can know it?" But if no sins were forgiven, except those that are recounted, consciences could never find peace; for very many sins they neither see, nor can remember.

—The Augsburg Confession

SATURDAY, MAY 4: ACTS 16:25–36

CANTATE

"Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house."

The Scriptures are often said to be so complex that a theologian will ever cease to study them, and yet so simple that a child can understand them. When the Philippian jailer asked what he must do to be saved, the Apostle Paul gave a simple, one-sentence answer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

There are many who feel a tinge of fear when confessing Christ in the world. Maybe you are afraid to say the wrong thing and jeopardize an opportunity for someone to believe. The good news is that *you* can't give faith; that is God's job. You also don't need to be fanciful in speech in order to simply say what the Bible says.

This is why the blessed Dr. Luther wrote his Small Catechism, so that the simple truths of the Christian Faith may be communicated in a straight-forward way, and you may easily remember the overarching teachings of all the Scriptures. As you grow in this Word of God, so will your faith and love for Christ, and your confession of this faith will be stronger.

Collect: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will: Grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest, and desire what Thou dost promise; that, among the manifold changes of this world, our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem! For the Lord has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem.”

As we begin the reading from today, we are told that the “waste places” are called forth to sing in joy to the Lord, for He has redeemed His people. As we discussed earlier in the week, God’s mercy is often tied closely with His justice. The waste places of Jerusalem here refer to the ruins of the city, themselves being regarded as mourning on account of the downfall of the city.

We can see this also in the sting of the Law, as the Holy Ghost convicts us of sin and shows us that no one can keep God’s Law in perfection. No one can earn righteousness by the works of the Law. And yet the Law is the schoolmaster that leads to the Good News that God has redeemed us through faith in Christ Jesus.

This is why the waste places of Jerusalem can sing. The same Jerusalem that fell and endured God’s justice is also the same Jerusalem that will be redeemed by God, not because of their own righteousness, but because of the righteousness that is given by faith alone.

Collect: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will: Grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest, and desire what Thou dost promise; that, among the manifold changes of this world, our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; 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 these words, which God inspired through the prophet Ezekiel, our Lord reminds us of our state before Him. The nation of Israel constantly rebelled against God and His Law, despite numerous promises to obey Him. And yet they were unable to follow God or obey Him through their own strength and merit. All they deserved was death and destruction. Further, their rebellion was so obnoxious that it was causing the other nations to profane the Lord’s name!

Not for their sake (that is, not because of their merit or worthiness), but for God’s own Holy Name’s sake, He will sanctify Israel; that is, make them holy. Out of pure mercy and love, He promises to gather them from their exile in foreign countries, and place within them a new heart and new spirit. And God did fulfill His promise to bring them back from their exile in Babylon.

As we read about God Himself sprinkling “clean water” on them, to cleanse them from their sin, how can we not also think of our own baptism, where God did the same for us? For in baptism we see God’s own power, cleansing us through the water He has blessed for the forgiveness of our sins.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord’s Resurrection, may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In this passage, the Apostle Paul connects baptism to circumcision. In the Old Testament, circumcision was the God-given sign of the covenant He had established with the people of Israel. Similarly, Christ claims us as Christians in our baptism. But there are important differences—circumcision belonged to the Old Testament. It was designed to point to the coming of Christ, but when Christ came, He fulfilled that Law and we are no longer bound to that covenant. Baptism will continue until the end of time, because of Christ's command.

Baptism is powerful—Paul ties it directly to our faith, because just as God the Father raised Christ from the dead in His resurrection, even so He brings life to us through faith in Christ, which He works in us through baptism. This righteousness which comes to us in Word and Sacrament—including baptism—is directly opposed to righteousness by the Law and works. Such faith is reliance not on our own worthiness, but trusts that Christ has fulfilled all of those requirements for us. It is Christ's obedience to the Law that God sees when He looks at us, and the faith that He works in us through Word and Sacrament connects us to Him forever. This is the “circumcision made without hands.”

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord's Resurrection, may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.”

Christians are joined together in the Church as one body; the Body of Christ. We are to help one another, forgive one another, and share the joy of Christ in thankful adoration of God. However, the Church is still made up of poor sinners, justified by faith, and therefore we are constantly under threat from the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

St. Athanasius experienced such assaults against the faithful as the false teachings of the Arians crept up in the fourth century. Many churches lost their bishops, who became swayed by such false teaching. Athanasius sought to comfort these faithful Christians who no longer had a faithful bishop by encouraging them with pastoral letters, putting on love for these abandoned brothers and sisters in the faith as he encouraged them to remain steadfast.

Such is the life of the Church. A life lived in Christ cannot help but have love for the brethren who are members of the communion of saints. When you or your fellow brethren experience the assaults of the enemy, love them as you both look to Christ in faith. As the elect of God, you put on love for one another because God has loved you in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Collect: O God, who didst give Saint Athanasius as a faithful teacher of the saving truth in a time of great trial, grant Thy people zeal for Thy Word and faithful teachers for Thy Church, that they may stand steadfast against all error, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who livest and reignest with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“As He spoke these words, many believed in Him.”

It is tempting in our day, as in many previous generations, to lighten or water-down the Gospel message. Many “church gurus” tell us that we have to make the Church palatable to a modern audience. However, this is not how our Lord preached, nor is it how the Lord instructed His ministers to preach.

In our reading today, we see Jesus confront the unbelief of the Jews by simply saying what He has said from the beginning: “Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning. I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him.”

When faced with unbelief, the Lord continued to preach His Word because He is the Word and He is the Truth. It is by His Word that many believe in Him and are given the gift of faith. It is the same Word that St. Phillip and St. James preached. It is the same Word that has been given to all Christians in every generation. It is the same Word that endures forever. Therefore, do not be afraid of unbelief in the world, but let the Word stand and do the work that has been appointed to save souls.

Collect: O Almighty God, Whom to know is everlasting life: Grant us perfectly to know Thy Son Jesus Christ to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life; that following His steps we may steadfastly walk in the way that leadeth to eternal life; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Our devotions so far this week have focused on the power of baptism, and what it does for us. Today, St. Peter reminds us of another aspect of our baptism, being “born again.” Being born again in baptism enables and empowers us to live with God-pleasing love for each other, as brethren, with a “pure heart.” Again, we are reminded that this is not of us (that is, “not of corruptible seed”), but through the Word of God.

We see and we can appreciate the things of this world, but they are temporary. As glorious and beautiful as the flowers we see appearing in spring are, we know that their beauty will fail and that those flowers will once again fall. The Word of the Lord, however, lives and abides forever. This is the incorruptible seed which is planted in us through the work of God’s ministry, and through God’s ministers. It is through this work that God nourishes and grows His Church, and this is what Christ promised would continue until He comes again in glory to judge the living and the dead. So, let us live out our lives on earth with sincere love for each other as we await His return!

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord’s Resurrection, may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In the days immediately after Easter, we rightly focus on the miracle of Christ's resurrection and what that resurrection means for all of us. In the resurrection, we see the power of the Son of God from all eternity as He conquers death itself, and demonstrates for all time that His sacrifice is sufficient payment for all of our sins. We see Him prepare to ascend to the right hand of God the Father.

And what does He do before that? One of the things He made a point to do was to commit the work of the ministry to His apostles. Jesus Christ Himself caused quite a stir when He forgave the sins of a paralytic man (Mark 2:1–12). Now the risen Christ Himself commits the ministry of Law and Gospel, repentance and the forgiveness of sins, to His apostles. That ministry is still done by God's will and command today, as all of our pastors and deacons preach, absolve, baptize, and administer the Lord's Supper. This ministry does not consist in the wisdom of men. The Word of God is committed to men to carry out the word and will of the Almighty Son of God, in His name and according to His instruction.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord's Resurrection, may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God."

As the Apostle Paul discusses how sinners are reconciled to God through faith in Christ Jesus, there seems to be a supposed conundrum in these verses. In verse 19, the Apostle says that God was in Christ reconciling the world and not counting their trespasses against them. Then, in the very next verse, the Apostle calls on those reading his words to be reconciled to God. Is this a contradiction? Certainly not. Some have asserted that Paul here discusses two different justifications, but that does not fit with what the Apostles teach in the rest of Scripture. The truth is that the Apostle Paul is discussing the effects of both the Atonement and Justification.

In the Atonement, Christ bore the sins of the world and accomplished what the Father gave Him to do. In Justification, sinners are reconciled to the Father by faith in Jesus Christ, and the Atonement is applied to them. This is why we as Baptized believers have become new creations in Christ. His Atonement is applied to us when we are Justified by faith alone.

Collect: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will: Grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest, and desire what Thou dost promise; that, among the manifold changes of this world, our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“...they will take them captive whose captives they were, and rule over their oppressors.”

In order to understand God’s mercy, one must first consider God’s justice. We cannot have one without the other. In fact, the mercy of God is shown in God’s justice. His love for His people, for His Church, caused Him to bring the judgment of destruction upon Babylon.

This is not only a lesson for the people of Israel that Isaiah writes about at their point in history, but it applies also to the true Israel, the Church. The Lord has chosen His people in Holy Baptism and has kept them in the fellowship of the communion of saints by the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when the Gospel is preached and believed, we are no longer captives to the world, the flesh, or the enemy.

By this faith, given as a gift, we are called to repay evil with good, which will heap coals over the head of our enemies (Romans 12:20). The believer has rule over the oppressor, because the enemy has no rule over the Church. Therefore, walk in the truth of Christ, knowing that God has chosen you in Christ by Baptism, and every believer belongs to the true Israel, that is the Church.

Collect: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will: Grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest, and desire what Thou dost promise; that, among the manifold changes of this world, our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Baptism is powerful and effective. Many of us came to faith when we were baptized as infants. Baptism has the power to do that, because it is done at Christ’s command and with His words. So we see God at work in our baptism, working the forgiveness of sins in us as He has promised.

Baptism is also a very powerful symbol, in part because of its real power to cause us to be born again from above, and in part because of the similarity with Christ’s own death and resurrection. So we might ask ourselves the question: should we sin more, so that God can be even more gracious to us? The answer, of course, is definitely “no.” Just as Christ truly died for our sins on the cross, and just as Christ truly rose again in triumph from the dead, in the very same way, our old Adam has been put to death. Christ died to save us from sin, not *for* sin. It would be a grievous error to run headlong into deliberate, willful sin. Rather, we live our lives to God. We still have the Old Adam with us, but we strive against it with the help of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord’s Resurrection, may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

SATURDAY, APRIL 13: HEBREWS 13:7–21 QUASIMODOGENITI

In a world that seems to take a perverse glee in how rapidly “everything” is “changing,” it is good to have things that we can rely on not changing. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.” His Word has not changed, and will not. His will and intention towards us has not changed—He still wants all men to come to repentance and believe in Him.

The hope that we long for as Christians is not necessarily a secure and peaceful life in this world. Some of us may be blessed in that regard, but God has not promised that to us. If Jesus Himself suffered outside the gates of Jerusalem, we, as His followers, should not also be ashamed of the world’s reproach. While we may have great blessings in this world, we must understand that they may not last, and that they must not become stumbling blocks for us as we await our final redemption. Rather, we look forward to the New Jerusalem that will be established only when Christ returns in glory to judge the living and the dead, and takes us to be with Him forever.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord’s Resurrection, may, by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

of repentance or reproof, but properly nothing else than a preaching of consolation, and a joyful message which does not reprove or terrify, but against the terrors of the Law consoles consciences, points alone to the merits of Christ, and again comforts them by the precious preaching of the grace and favor of God, obtained through Christ’s merit.

7. As to the revelation of sin, because the veil of Moses hangs before the eyes of all men as long as they hear the bare preaching of the Law, and nothing concerning Christ, and therefore do not learn from the Law to perceive their sins aright, but either become presumptuous hypocrites as the Pharisees, or despair as did Judas; Christ takes the Law into His hands, and explains it spiritually (Matt. 5:21 sqq.; Rom. 7:14). And thus the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all sinners (Rom. 1:18), how great it is; by this means they are instructed in the Law, and then from it first learn to know aright their sins—a knowledge to which Moses never could coerce them.

Therefore, although the preaching of the suffering and death of Christ, the Son of God, is an earnest and terrible proclamation and declaration of God’s wrath, whereby men are for the first time led aright to the Law, after the veil of Moses has been removed from them, so that they first know aright how great things God in His Law requires of us, nothing of which we can observe, and therefore should seek all our righteousness in Christ—

8. Yet, as long as all this (namely, Christ’s suffering and death) proclaims God’s wrath and terrifies man, it is still not properly the preaching of the Gospel, but the preaching of Moses and the Law, and therefore a “strange work” of Christ, whereby He attains His proper office, i.e. to preach grace, console and quicken, which is properly the preaching of the Gospel.

**Negative.**

*Contrary Doctrine which is Rejected.*

Therefore we reject and regard incorrect and injurious the dogma that the Gospel is properly a preaching of repentance or reproof, and not alone a preaching of grace. For thereby the Gospel is again converted into a law, the merit of Christ and the Holy Scriptures obscured, Christians robbed of true consolation, and the door opened again to the Papacy.

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome

# Lesson from the Book of Concord

## Cantate Sunday

### Chapter V. Of the Law and the Gospel.

#### Statement of the Controversy.

Whether the preaching of the Holy Gospel be properly not only a preaching of grace, which announces the forgiveness of sins, but also a preaching of repentance and censure, rebuking unbelief, which is rebuked not in the Law, but alone through the Gospel.

#### Affirmative.

*Pure Doctrine of God's Word.*

1. We believe, teach and confess that the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is to be maintained in the Church as an especially brilliant light, whereby, according to the admonition of St. Paul, the Word of God may be rightly divided.

2. We believe, teach and confess that the Law is properly a divine doctrine, which teaches what is right and pleasing to God, and reproves everything that is sin and contrary to God's will.

3. Therefore everything that reproves sin is and belongs to the preaching of the Law.

4. But the Gospel is properly such a doctrine as teaches what man who has not observed the Law, and therefore is condemned by it, should believe, viz. that Christ has expiated and made satisfaction for all sins, and, without any merit of theirs [no merit of the sinner intervening], has obtained and acquired forgiveness of sins, righteousness that avails before God, and eternal life.

5. But since the term "Gospel" is not used in one and the same sense in the Holy Scriptures, on account of which this dissension originally arose, we believe, teach and confess that if by the term "Gospel" the entire doctrine of Christ be understood, which He proposed in His ministry, as also did His apostles (in which sense it is employed, Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21), it is correctly said and written that the Gospel is a preaching of repentance and of the forgiveness of sins.

6. But if the Law and the Gospel be contrasted with one another, as Moses himself is called a teacher of the Law, and Christ a preacher of the Gospel, we believe, teach and confess that the Gospel is not a preaching

# Lesson from the Book of Concord

## Misericordias Domini Sunday

### Article XIV.

Of Ecclesiastical Order, [the Lutherans] teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.

### Article XV.

Of Rites and Usages in the Church, they teach, that those ought to be observed which may be observed without sin, and which are profitable unto tranquility and good order in the Church, as particular holydays, festivals, and the like.

Nevertheless, concerning such things, let men be admonished that consciences are not to be burdened, as though such observance was necessary to salvation. They are admonished also that human traditions instituted to propitiate God, to merit grace and to make satisfaction for sins, are opposed to the Gospel and the doctrine of faith. Wherefore vows and traditions concerning meats and days, etc., instituted to merit grace and to make satisfaction for sins, are useless and contrary to the Gospel.—The Augsburg Confession

### Article IV. Of the Papacy.

That the Pope is not, according to divine law or according to the Word of God, the head of all Christendom (for this name belongs to Jesus Christ solely and alone), but is only the bishop and pastor of the Church at Rome, and of those who voluntarily or through a human creature (that is a political magistrate) attach themselves to him, not to be under him as a lord, but with him as brethren and associates, as Christians; as the ancient councils and the age of St. Cyprian show.

But today none of the bishops venture to address the Pope as brother; but they must call him most gracious lord, even though they be kings or emperors. Such arrogance we neither will, can, nor ought with a good conscience to approve. Let him, however, who will do it, do so without us. —The Smalcald Articles, Part II, .§1–2

The Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep, but the robbers and wicked false leaders take the sheep as resources to be used for their own wills. Our Lord shows us again and again throughout the Gospel story, especially in His Passion story, that He patiently loves all and works to help all.

The hypocrites kept trying to argue with Him and manipulate events so that Jesus would either shut up or go away. But our Lord lived so that He could be where He needed to be and teach what He needed to teach. As the multitudes gathered about Him to hear His teaching, He gave them divine wisdom, pointing them to the Word of commandments and promises. But when the bad shepherds twisted Scripture and resisted Him, His love was spoken in warnings and serious calls to repentant humility.

Our Lord and Shepherd gave His life to help and save us, but He does not submit to our foolish wills. He guides us, teaches us, and provides for us from His life according to His holy will, which is the will of the Father. He does not give man what we want; He gives us what is holy and needed for our greatest blessings and life.

Collect: God, Who by the humiliation of Thy Son, didst raise up the fallen world: Grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou hast delivered from the danger of everlasting death, do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever, One God, world without end. Amen.

In theology, we distinguish between the “Church Militant” and the “Church Triumphant”. These are not two separate churches, but two parts of the one, holy, Christian, and apostolic Church (Nicene Creed). The “Church Militant” is that part made up of the saints still living in the world, because they are constantly at war (militant) with the devil and his children. The “Church Triumphant” means the saints who are now in heaven, because they have triumphed over the devil and are now beyond his reach.

St. John has a vision of the Church Triumphant. And what he sees looks a lot like a Church Service: they are wearing special clothes, they are surrounding God’s throne, worshiping Him with a confession of faith, and God Himself is in their midst. So, in the Divine Service, Christians gather around the altar of God, they sing and confess their faith before God, God Himself is with them by means of the Word and sacraments, and—in confession of this—Christians often dress up. All this is on purpose. Because there is one Church, with members both in heaven and on earth, the Divine Service on earth reflects the worship happening in heaven.

Collect: Almighty God, Who showest to them that be in error the light of Thy truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness: Grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ’s Religion that they may eschew those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Physical death is not the death that matters most. Spiritual death—disbelief in the Lord Jesus Christ—is. This is why Jesus says, “this sickness is not unto death.” Lazarus died once and was raised to life, and we assume he later died again. Moreover, by raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus caused the Jews to hate him (John 12:10). So, when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, this was either a sick joke, or He had something better in mind than life on this earth. This is exactly what Jesus says two verses after our text: “I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe” (John 11:15).

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead not to give Lazarus a better life at that time, but to give us a reason to believe in the final Resurrection of the dead, on the Last Day. We confess in the Athanasian Creed, “at [Christ’s] coming all men shall rise again with their bodies and shall give an account of their own works.” By raising Lazarus, Jesus proves that He can do so, and that the Resurrection will be a true bodily resurrection. On that day, those who believe in Him will never die again.

Collect: Almighty God, Who showest to them that be in error the light of Thy truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness: Grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ’s Religion that they may eschew those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In spite of Peter’s self-assured declaration that “I will lay down my life for Your sake,” he fell to sin as our Lord warned him: “Jesus answered him, ‘Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.’” (John 13:37-38).

But the Lord called on Peter to affirm his faith in humble repentance three times. Christ Jesus also declared that Peter was clearly charged with the Apostolic Ministry as He said, “Feed My lambs ... Tend My sheep ... Feed My sheep ... Follow Me.” In spite of Peter’s sins, our Lord used Him to shepherd His flock. Peter was not a hireling, but a man who had fallen in his sins and was restored by God’s correction and mercy. The other false shepherds of the Jews remained in their rejection of the Christ, in their blasphemy, and in their self-will. They continued to be robbers and enemies of the Lord’s flock.

We must continue to speak as our Lord teaches us in His Word. Correction is for our help and blessing; it brings us to greener pastures. We are not perfect little lambs on our own. We are sinners who need the Good Shepherd and His servants to help us abide where His gracious kingdom is found, in His faithful Church.

Collect: God, Who by the humiliation of Thy Son, didst raise up the fallen world: Grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou hast delivered from the danger of everlasting death, do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever, One God, world without end. Amen.

David was also a man who had fallen into sin and rejection of the Lord, but was restored and continued to be an appointed servant over God's flock. The imagery of Ezekiel's words shows that God's people live in a place that is full of danger and wickedness. It is God's grace that will deliver His people from the perilous places, not the righteousness of the flock.

The idea of God as the Good Shepherd is not new to Christ's ministry. The Gospel of the Lord's loving shepherd-like protection and guidance has been a theme throughout the Scriptures, as the popularity of Psalm 23 reminds us. This image has always emphasized that we must be humble before our Maker, because we act as foolish and unruly as animals from our sin.

In the first garden, man and woman were charged with taking care of the animals, but our first parents rejected God and failed in their callings. From the beginning, our Lord has shown His mercy by restoring failed servants and putting them back in their right place to continue the work prepared for them. That continues to be the message of the Church! We sin, we fall, but our Good Shepherd calls us to repent, guides us in correction, forgives our sins, and puts us back to our given roles as people of His holy kingdom!

Collect: God, Who by the humiliation of Thy Son, didst raise up the fallen world: Grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou hast delivered from the danger of everlasting death, do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever, One God, world without end. Amen.

Anything that God creates, the devil wants to tear down. From the beginning God made man and woman to be different—not just biologically—and to have different vocations according to their nature. Even before the fall into sin, Adam was the head and master of Eve, and Eve was the helper and support of Adam. Scripture shows this because Adam was created first (1 Tim. 2:13), and because God rebukes Adam since he “heeded the voice of [his] wife” (Gen. 3:17) instead of protecting her from sin, as was his duty. The differences between man and woman exist by nature, so that, even outside of marriage, a man and a woman are not interchangeable. One is not “greater” than the other, but they are different and complementary, because God created them as two parts of the same human kind. But the devil teaches the world that men and women are interchangeable, for he knows that this lie will lead to the destruction of human lives.

The bigger issue is this: the distinction between the sexes is a symbol of Christ and the Church. These are not interchangeable. Christ serves the Church as her head, and the Church is taught to serve according to her proper calling. This is why the apostles and evangelists are all men: they are symbols of the Christ, who serves His Church through them.

Collect: O Almighty God, Who hast instructed Thy holy Church with the heavenly doctrine of Thy Evangelists: give us grace, that being not like children carried away with every blast of vain doctrine, we may be established in the Truth of Thy holy Gospel; 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 text is about the true Christian Church which, in the Old Testament, centered on the temple worship in Jerusalem. Now that the Christ has appeared, the Church is found wherever the Gospel is faithfully taught and the sacraments faithfully administered (Augsburg Confession, IV). We must not think that there was one church of the Old Testament and another of the New Testament, for there is one true Church, one true God, and one promise of salvation by the forgiveness of sins through the Christ. This Church is the place where God's gifts are distributed to man. If you want God's comfort, you must find it in the true Christian Church, where the Gospel is rightly preached.

All true Christians love the Church. The unfortunate reality of our time is that many true Christians live far away from a faithful congregation and cannot attend the Divine Service as they want. Nonetheless, because they love the Church, they pray and endure. Though many other churches are closer, they are unwilling to compromise their doctrine merely for the sake of convenience. The true Church is their mother, in Christ, and they love her for His sake.

Collect: Almighty God, Who showest to them that be in error the light of Thy truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness: Grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's Religion that they may eschew those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

This image of the Good Shepherd seeking out the one that strays from the ninety nine is about God's love. However, it is not about validating the expectations of the one who foolishly wanders off in sin. Sometimes people test God (and His servants) by thinking they can walk in some reckless, undisciplined way, and then expect the Lord's mercy to follow them and fix the mess according to their assumptions.

Our Lord promises to love us and take care of us, but He will do it on *His* terms, not ours! There are plenty of other illustrations and warnings in Scripture that tell us we should stay with His flock, walk in the ways of righteousness, follow Him, and seek to be where He is. He also teaches us that His will is always good and wise. When we selfishly wander off in our sin, we do not have the right to take God's Words of love and dictate back to Him how it should play out on our terms.

His lambs hear His voice, abide in the pastures of His Church, and feed on His Word and Sacraments. When we sin, His Spirit calls us back with repentance and absolution. But the Good Shepherd blesses us and keeps us according to His holy will, not ours.

Collect: God, Who by the humiliation of Thy Son, didst raise up the fallen world: Grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou hast delivered from the danger of everlasting death, do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever, One God, world without end. Amen.

God's Church has always had to contend with lying false shepherds. Satan came to Eve and Adam in order to lead them away from the life and truth that God prepared for them in the garden. Rebellious and wicked leaders plagued the people of Israel through the Old Testament. Hypocrites filled the ranks of the priests and teachers during the time of Christ's Gospel ministry. And by the time of the Reformation, the leaders of Christendom had damaged and scattered God's flock so badly that the Gospel was barely heard.

Our churches remember Philip Melanchthon on this day because he was one of the saints through whom God blessed His flock once again. The faithful teachers of the Reformation period brought the focus back to the one Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and to the true Gospel of salvation through faith in His merits, His life, and His atonement for the sins of the world.

Wicked men and foolish teachers will continue to be a problem for the Church in this world, but our Lord will continue to guide us through His Word and the faithful teachers that He provides. We lambs cannot save ourselves, but He does teach us that our efforts need to be directed to clinging to His truth and blessings in the Church. We are to hear His voice, and abide where He leads us!

Collect: O God, who didst give Philip Melanchthon as a teacher unto Thy Church, grant zeal unto Thy people for the study of Thy holy Word, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Natural man is dead in sin and is not capable of receiving the Gospel. He is like an old wineskin which cannot hold the new wine of the Gospel. The Pharisees were trapped in their old misunderstandings about the Law of Moses and, therefore, they could not understand the Gospel. So it is with everyone who tries to save himself by works; he cannot believe, because he is still trapped in his sin.

If a wineskin will not hold wine, it is thrown away. But that is not how God treats man. "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked," says the Lord to Ezekiel, "but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Eze. 33:11). Sinful man cannot receive the Gospel, but God makes man new so that he can. This takes place through the preaching of the Word and the sacrament of Baptism, which St. Paul calls "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). In this way, salvation belongs wholly to the work and grace of God.

Collect: Almighty God, Who showest to them that be in error the light of Thy truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness: Grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's Religion that they may eschew those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Law has three uses: 1) it indicates punishment for wickedness, 2) it reveals sin, and 3) it teaches. We call these the “curb”, the “mirror”, and the “guide”. The last use, or the Law as “guide”, especially applies to Christians because, even after being renewed in Baptism, the sinful flesh remains, and Christians require teaching and discipline to live as God demands. Job is a believer, but he has spoken presumptuously before God and requires correction. In the moment, Job is rightly terrified, but when the correction is over God blesses him more abundantly than before.

Paradoxically, Christians should be comforted by the third use of the Law because, as the book of Hebrews teaches, “If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons” (Heb. 12:7). God wants what is best for His children. He is, therefore, unwilling to let them remain in error and sin. Like with Job, God would much rather give blessing than chastisement. He gives each in His own timing. Chiefly, God corrects Christians through public preaching. Every sermon contains both the Law and the Gospel. The Law chastises and teaches; the Gospel promises the great blessing of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Christ.

Collect: Almighty God, Who showest to them that be in error the light of Thy truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness: Grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ’s Religion that they may eschew those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

We are like sheep, but we are not the same as the beasts of the field. Our Lord uses images of the shepherd and the flock to teach us about His heavenly things that are otherwise beyond our understanding. Vain men despise being “sheep” because they want to follow their own ways, ignoring the voice of the Lord. But such men forget that the dangers of leaving God’s flock are worse than anything a mere animal has to worry about.

The Great Shepherd is also the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, because the danger facing one who is lost from the Church is eternal death of condemnation in hell. We are God’s special creation, and He has always desired that we should be saved from the sin and death of wandering from His truth. He calls us and gathers us to His flock because that is where we find fullness of life, not just as sheep, but as true sons and daughters of His heavenly kingdom!

Collect: God, Who by the humiliation of Thy Son, didst raise up the fallen world: Grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou hast delivered from the danger of everlasting death, do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever, One God, world without end. Amen.

# Lesson from the Book of Concord

## Jubilate Sunday

### **The Third Petition. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.**

Thus far we have prayed that God's name be honored by us, and that His kingdom prevail among us; in which two points is comprehended all that pertains to the honor of God and to our salvation, that we come into the ownership of God and all His possessions. But the great need is, that we cling firmly to them, and do not suffer ourselves to be torn therefrom. For as in a good government it is not only necessary that there be those who build and govern well, but also those who make defense, afford protection and maintain it in security; so here also, although we have prayed for the things of the greatest need, viz. for the Gospel, faith and the Holy Ghost, that He may govern and redeem us from the power of the devil, we must also pray that His will be done. For if we are to abide therein, there will be wonderful encounters, so that, on account of them, we must suffer many thrusts and blows from everything that ventures to oppose and prevent the fulfillment of the two petitions that precede.

For no one believes how the devil opposes and exerts all his powers against them, and cannot suffer that anyone teach or believe aright. And it hurts him beyond measure to suffer his lies and abominations, that have been honored under the most specious pretexts of the divine Name, to be exposed, and that he be disgraced, and besides be driven out of the heart, and suffer such a breach to be made in his kingdom. Therefore, with all his power and might he chafes and rages as a fierce enemy, and marshals all his subjects, and enlists the world and our own flesh as his allies. For our flesh is in itself indolent and inclined to evil, even though we have accepted and believe the Word of God. The world, too, is perverse and wicked; this he incites against us in various ways, and kindles and adds fuel, that he may hinder and drive us back, cause us to fall and again bring us under his power. That is all his will, mind and thought, for which he strives day and night, and never rests a moment, but employs all arts, malicious devices, ways and means which he can invent.

We therefore who would be Christians must surely reckon upon having the devil with all his angels, together with the world, as our enemies, who will bring every possible misfortune and grief upon us. For where

the Word of God is preached, accepted or believed, and produces fruit, there the holy cross cannot be wanting. And let no one think that he shall have peace; but he must risk whatever he has upon earth—possessions, honor, house and estate, wife and child, body and life. That hurts indeed our flesh and the old Adam. For the test is to be steadfast and to suffer with patience whatever afflictions befall us, and to yield whatever is taken from us.

Therefore there is just as much need, as in everything else, that we pray without ceasing: "Dear Father, Thy will be done, not the will of the devil and of our enemies, nor of anything that would persecute and destroy Thy holy Word, or hinder Thy kingdom; and grant that we may bear with patience and may overcome in whatever it be our lot to suffer on account of this Thy will, so that our poor flesh may not yield or fall away from weakness or indolence."

In these three petitions we find expressed in the simplest manner the need which pertains to God Himself, yet all for our sakes. For whatever we pray concerns only us, namely, as we have said, that the will of God, which must be done without us, may also be done in us. For as His name must be hallowed and His kingdom come without our prayer, so also His will must be done and succeed, although the devil with all his adherents raise a tumult and rage in fury, and undertake to utterly exterminate the Gospel. But for our own sake we must pray that, even against their fury, His will be also done without hindrance in us, that they may accomplish nothing, and we remain firm against all violence and persecution, and submit to the will of God.

Such prayer must indeed be our protection and defense now, to repel and overcome all that the devil, pope, bishops, tyrants and heretics can do against our Gospel. Let them rage all together and attempt their utmost, and deliberate and resolve how they may destroy and exterminate us, that their will and counsel may prevail. One or two Christians with this petition alone shall be our wall against them, upon which they shall dash themselves to pieces. This consolation and confidence we have, that the will and purpose of the devil and of all our enemies must fail and come to naught, however proud, secure and powerful they know themselves to be. For if their will were not broken and frustrated, the kingdom of God could not abide upon the earth or His name be hallowed.

—The Large Catechism, the Lord's Prayer