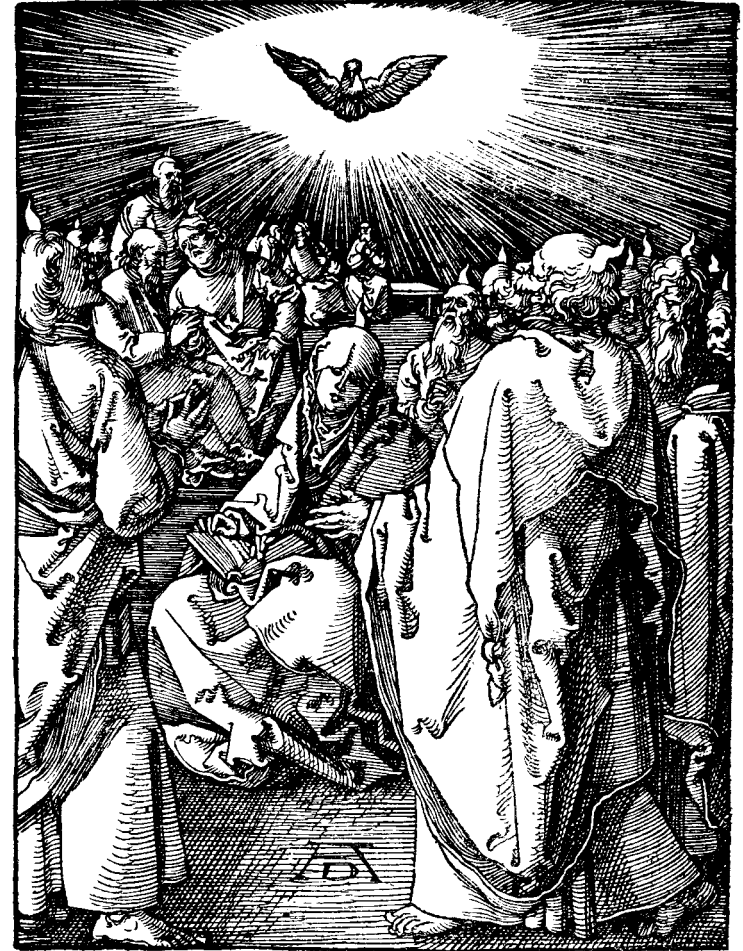


The Lord called St. Paul and company to preach the Gospel to the people in Macedonia. The testimony of Lydia shows that God worked in her according to His Holy Spirit. He made her able to hear, believe, and obey the things that Paul taught. She manifested humility, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord..." This faithfulness stands in contrast to the incident in the following verses where St. Paul cast a spirit out of a girl who was making a twisted confession that was not according to God's Spirit.

God shows us in the Trinity what love and holy service looks like. The Son does the will of the Father, the Spirit is sent to help others and testify about the Son's work, and the Father directs us to hear His beloved Son. Paul and the other faithful servants of the Church did not come to just bring idle words and sentiments about loving the Lord. They baptized and taught the people in connection with prayer and true worship. These saints were taught to observe the works of service to the Lord, for which St. Paul would later be condemned by sinners. Thanks be to God that He still sends His Gospel and Sacraments through His Church so that we continue to be blessed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

Collect: Almighty and Everlasting God, Who hast given unto us, Thy servants, grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity: We beseech Thee, that Thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith, and evermore defend us from all adversities; Who livest and reignest, One God, world without end. Amen.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



MAY 5-JUNE 1, 2024

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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)

May 5	Rogate (Easter 5)	ASBH 34
May 6–8	Rogation Days	
May 9 (R)	The Ascension of our Lord	ASBH 35
May 12	Exaudi	ASBH 36
May 19	Pentecost	ASBH 37
(W)	Ember Wednesday in Pentecost	
(F)	Ember Friday in Pentecost	
(S)	Ember Saturday in Pentecost	
May 26	Feast of the Holy Trinity	ASBH 38

Report on the 2024 Synod and Colloquium

The 2024 Synod and Colloquium was a very important week in the history of the diocese. As several congregations mark the 20th anniversary of their exit from the heterodox synod with which they were previously affiliated, the significance of the ELDoNA and its stand for faithful doctrine and practice were present in the teaching and work undertaken at Salem during the week of April 15–19.

Following the annual episcopal address, plans were made for visitations, mission support, and a new term of study at St. Ignatius Lutheran Theological Seminary. The ongoing work on *The Lutheran Herald* was also discussed. Pastor Martin Jackson spent time with pastors and deacons helping them to learn to use the new diocesan online resources which will help our clergy work together and access a wider variety of confessional resources.

The major work of the diocese in synod was taking important steps toward completion of the *Augustana Service Book and Hymnal*, the first component of the Diocesan Church Order. All liturgies needed for the hymnal have been completed; in addition to the Divine Service, Matins, Vespers, and the Litany Office, the following liturgies are included:

- The Order of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism for Infants
- The Order of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism for Adults
- The Order for Private Confession and Absolution
- The Order of the Confessional Service
- Examination and Confirmation
- The Order of Marriage (Congregation Participating)

FRIDAY, MAY 31: GALATIANS 4:1–7

TRINITY

In Christ, by the power of His Holy Spirit, we are no longer slaves. We are children of His household. But we all still serve! A good member of God's house and kingdom obeys in humility and discipline. We teach children to serve and obey, not so they can become vain masters, but so they grow up to serve and work in greater ways. A petulant child is worse than a slave, because a good servant does what needs to be done, whereas a rebellious child seeks his own will.

Deuteronomy 6 reminded us that the faithful are to teach their children the commands of the Lord, and keep His name and truth in all parts of the household. We have a great blessing in the Table of Duties in Luther's Small Catechism, where the Word of the Lord is emphasized according to particular vocations. Servants and masters alike are to be faithful to God's wisdom and discipline. Masters are still servants to those over whom they have headship, just as the Lord serves His beloved Church. But those who despise serving and submitting to the Lord are not children of His house. They choose to be of the world that hates Him and His teaching. In Christ we are true heirs of His kingdom, and if His Spirit is in us, we truly love Him and obey His commands.

Collect: Almighty and Everlasting God, Who hast given unto us, Thy servants, grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity: We beseech Thee, that Thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith, and evermore defend us from all adversities; Who livest and reignest, One God, world without end. Amen.

When the Lord places His name on us, the world's contempt for God will come upon us as well. As our Lord Jesus explains, it's not that they hate us; they hate correction, they hate truth about sin, and they hate being servants. For generations, Satan has been teaching sinners that they are like God, therefore they shouldn't have to submit to the Lord, His commands, or anything else.

God calls us to be His children, but that also means that we are still subject to our Lord and Master. We are to serve, and love, and obey. He gives us His Spirit, the Helper, and He makes us part of that work of helping His kingdom. Freedom from sin does not mean we are free to do what is right in our own eyes. Freedom from damnation does not mean we are free to disobey His Law and teachings.

If we love Him more than the world, we will gladly serve and obey. If we love His truth, we will love others as He has loved us and do as He commands. The world encourages self-will and dishonesty. It encourages spite and resentment toward God's truth and commands. But even as the world hates Him, He loves the world and works through us to do what is good and loving to help turn sinners from their rebellion and death!

Collect: Almighty and Everlasting God, Who hast given unto us, Thy servants, grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity: We beseech Thee, that Thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith, and evermore defend us from all adversities; Who livest and reignest, One God, world without end. Amen.



Clergy in Attendance at the 2024 Synod and Colloquium

The Commendation of the Dying
 The Order for the Burial of the Dead
 The Order for Ordination of a Pastor or Deacon
 The Order for the Installation of a Pastor or Deacon

All propers for Sundays, Feasts and Festivals of the Church Year are complete; the texts of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, Small Catechism, Passion History, and History of the Destruction of Jerusalem are included.

All office hymns (110 of them!) have been selected, and a total of approximately 210–220 additional hymns will be included in the hymnal for a total of approximately 320 hymns, and all of the hymnody will be faithful (avoiding the problem of all 20th century hymnals, in which approximately 25–35% of hymns have been unsuitable, and in many cases, unfaithful). When all parts of the book are considered, the projected finished volume will be 1024 pages (roughly the same size as the most recent LC—MS hymnal). At present, work has begun on compiling the information needed for various indexes for the hymns. The very encouraging news is that this unmatched resource will only cost approximately \$20 per copy, with publication late this year.

Five papers were presented during the Colloquium, and eight clergymen preached during the course of the Synod and Colloquium (including all of the graduates of St. Ignatius Seminary). The members of Salem Lutheran Church made everyone feel welcome (as always!) and, of course, also very well fed.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Rogate Sunday

Chapter IX.

Article XXI. Of the Invocation of Saints.

The twenty-first article they [the Roman Catholics] absolutely condemn, because we do not require the invocation of saints. Nor on any topic do they rhetoricate with more prolixity. Nevertheless they do not effect anything else than that the saints should be honored; likewise that the saints who live should pray for others; as though indeed the invocation of dead saints were in addition necessary. They cite Cyprian, because he asked Cornelius while yet alive to pray for his brothers when departing. By this example they approve the invocation of the dead. They quote also Jerome against Vigilantius: "On this field," they say, "eleven hundred years ago, Jerome overcame Vigilantius." Thus the adversaries triumph, as though the war were already ended. Nor do they, in their stupidity, see that in Jerome against Vigilantius there is not a syllable concerning invocation. He speaks concerning honors to the saints, not concerning the invocation. Neither have the rest of the ancient writers before Gregory made mention of invocation. Certainly this invocation, with these opinions which the adversaries now teach concerning the application of merits, has not the testimony of the ancient writers.

Our Confession [the Augsburg Confession] approves honors to the saints. For here a threefold honor is to be approved. The first is thanksgiving. For we ought to give thanks to God because He has shown examples of mercy; because He has shown that He wishes to save men; because He has given teachers or other gifts to the Church. And these gifts, as they are the greatest, should be amplified, and the saints themselves should be praised, who have faithfully used these gifts, just as Christ praises faithful business-men (Matt. 25:21, 23). The second service is the strengthening of our faith; when we see the denial forgiven Peter, we also are encouraged to believe the more that grace truly superabounds over sin (Rom. 5:20). The third honor is the imitation first of faith, then of the other virtues, which everyone should imitate according to his calling. These true honors the adversaries do not require. They dispute only concerning invocation, which, even though it would have no danger, nevertheless is not necessary.

Besides, we also grant that the angels pray for us. For there is a testimony in Zach. 1:12: "O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem?" Although concerning the saints we concede that just as when alive they pray for the Church universal in general, so in heaven they pray for the Church in general, albeit no testimony concerning the dead praying is extant in the Scriptures,

WEDNESDAY, MAY 29: ISAIAH 6:1-13

TRINITY

Our hearts, souls, strength, eyes, and ears do not make us able to understand God's holy things. We have no right to boast in our own understanding, nor do we have the right to ignore or try correcting the Lord. Only by His Spirit are we able to see, hear, believe, love, and obey. The sacred Law and Gospel of God's teaching is how He blesses us and makes us His faithful people.

Our worship in the New Testament Church also retains the song of the angels, singing, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" In addition to connecting our prayers and observance of His Holy Supper with the faithful Old Testament Church, this heavenly song reminds us that it is God's supreme glory that brings us into His household, to His table. Our own choices, decisions, knowledge, or works do not make us loved by Him. He blesses us according to His gracious promise, fulfilled in Jesus Christ!

Like the prophet, we should be humbly mindful of our unclean lips and the unholy company of rebels and liars. But we also hear from our Lord that He sanctifies and cleanses us. He washes us in Baptism, He feeds us with the Holy Supper, and He teaches us to love, obey, speak, and work according to His Word.

Collect: Almighty and Everlasting God, Who hast given unto us, Thy servants, grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity: We beseech Thee, that Thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith, and evermore defend us from all adversities; Who livest and reignest, One God, world without end. Amen.

This blessing that was taught to Aaron holds a tremendous amount of meaning and symbolism. The three-fold mention of the Lord's name points forward to the fuller revelation of the Holy Trinity in the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. The sons of Aaron were to bless the children of Israel with this holy name as part of their faithful worship. Placing the name of God on them with the promise of His blessings also foreshadows the blessing of Baptism, where His name and all the blessings of Christ crucified are placed on those who are made children of God. The pastors of His Church are commanded to wash them and bless them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who brings all such holy blessings upon His people.

Our forefathers in the faith rightly maintained this Old Testament blessing in the worship of the New Testament Church. It shows that we are still of the one, historic faith that God teaches throughout His Holy Scriptures. The things that were taught to Moses and Aaron were good and holy, but they have been brought to greater clarity and broader application of His blessings through the fulfillment of Christ Jesus and the ongoing work of His Holy Spirit!

Collect: Almighty and Everlasting God, Who hast given unto us, Thy servants, grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity: We beseech Thee, that Thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith, and evermore defend us from all adversities; Who livest and reignest, One God, world without end. Amen.

except the dream taken from the second book of Maccabees (15:14).

Moreover, even supposing that the saints certainly pray for the Church, yet it does not follow that they are to be invoked. Although our Confession affirms only this, that Scripture does not teach the invocation of the saints, or that we are to ask the saints for aid. But since neither a command, nor a promise, nor an example can be produced from the Scriptures concerning the invocation of saints, it follows that conscience can have nothing concerning this invocation that is certain. And since prayer ought to be made from faith, how do we know that God approves this invocation? Whence do we know without the testimony of Scripture that the saints perceive the prayers of each one? Some plainly ascribe divinity to the saints, viz. that they discern the silent thoughts of the minds in us. They dispute concerning morning and evening knowledge, perhaps because they doubt whether they hear us in the morning or the evening. They invent these things not in order to treat the saints with honor, but to defend lucrative services. Nothing can be produced by the adversaries against this reasoning, that, since invocation does not have a testimony from God's Word, it cannot be affirmed that the saints perceive our invocation, or that they especially perceive that God approves it. Wherefore the adversaries ought not to force us to an uncertain matter, because a prayer without faith is not prayer. For as they cite the example of the Church, it is evident that this is a new custom in the Church; for although the old prayers make mention of the saints, yet they do not invoke the saints. Although also this new invocation in the Church is dissimilar to the invocation of individuals.

Again, the adversaries not only require invocation in the worship of the saints, but also apply the merits of the saints for others, and make of the saints not only intercessors, but also propitiators. This is in no way to be endured. For here the honor belonging only to Christ is altogether transferred to the saints. For they make them mediators and propitiators, and although they make a distinction between mediators of intercession and mediators of redemption, yet they plainly make out of the saints mediators of redemption.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §1–14

In today's reading, Paul instructs young pastor Timothy in the discipline of prayer. The words he chooses are significant. "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

"Supplications" is used to indicate our needs as we come before God. "Prayers" is a general term that encompasses all our communication to God. "Intercessions" is the encouragement to not only pray for others, but the privilege given to us to address our Father in heaven directly. "Thanksgiving" is self-explanatory. In balance with our asking, we must always remember to give thanks to God for all His blessings and to receive His answers to our prayers with thankful hearts.

Note also that our prayers be made for all people. Christians are to be outgoing, loving our enemies as well as our brothers and sisters. We're to pray for everyone, for God desires all to be saved.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, O almighty God, that we, who in our affliction put our trust in Thy mercy, may ever be defended by Thy protection against all adversity; through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In John's Gospel, our Lord Jesus was teaching His disciples about the Father and the works of God, and He said to them, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). This is the very same idea as our Lord's words in Deuteronomy 6. To show that we love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength is to hear what He says and actually do it!

This is not works-righteousness. As our Savior says clearly, obeying His commands shows that we already love Him! God binds Himself to us in Baptism and places His name on us. His Spirit creates love in us and continues to teach us so that we can grow in the works and discipline that serve His kingdom. That is why He also commands His people to fill their households with His name and His teaching. Our families and homes are to manifest His love and His works.

False teachers encourage people to love in word and sentiment, but then they dismiss the importance of obedience. They twist God's Word and despise His commands, misapplying the error of works-righteousness to the proper good works that He commands us to observe. If we say we love the Lord, but refuse to do as He commands, then we are liars. If we are of His household, we love and obey His teachings.

Collect: Almighty and Everlasting God, Who hast given unto us, Thy servants, grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity: We beseech Thee, that Thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith, and evermore defend us from all adversities; Who livest and reignest, One God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Trinity Sunday

ARTICLE I.

Our Churches, with common consent, do teach, that the decree of the Council of Nicaea concerning the Unity of the Divine Essence and concerning the Three Persons, is true and to be believed without any doubting; that is to say, there is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God: eternal, without body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible; and yet that there are three Persons, of the same essence and power, who also are co-eternal, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. And the term “person” they use as the fathers have used it, to signify, not a part or quality in another, but that which subsists of itself.

They condemn all heresies which have sprung up against this article, as the Manichaeans who assumed two principles [gods], one Good, the other Evil; also the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Mohammedans, and all such. They condemn also the Samosatenes, old and new, who contending that there is but one Person, sophistically and impiously argue that the Word and the Holy Ghost are not distinct Persons, but that “Word” signifies a spoken word, and “Spirit” [Ghost] signifies motion created in things.

—The Augsburg Confession

TUESDAY, MAY 7: ROMANS 8:24–28

ROGATION DAY

Romans 8:28 is a favorite passage of many. It is also one of the most misused. “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” This passage has become a kind of religious “happy pill.” It often serves as a quick fix to numb the problem. We’re trying to take away the pain and give ourselves, or someone we know, a little respite.

Let’s be clear: pain and tragedy are not good. There is nothing good about a child dying or a spouse contracting cancer. And it hurts when someone hears words that pretend or imply that such trials are good. But God is there to work the bumps and the potholes. He often doesn’t eliminate them, but He does use them. God certainly knows we’ve made a shambles of things. We’ve inherited a mess and we’ve contributed to the mess. But for the Christian, even walking through the minefield of life can be a tool in the hands of an omniscient and omnipotent God. He knows what is coming and He knows how best to use it.

He knows there’s going to be sickness, pain, and death. Those things are unavoidable. But with God, there’s no such thing as a surprise. Everything God sees is an opportunity to shepherd His chosen. He’s like the guy who searches through trash cans and junkyards and sees something nobody else can. God does indeed work all things together for the good of His chosen.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, O almighty God, that we, who in our affliction put our trust in Thy mercy, may ever be defended by Thy protection against all adversity; through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son. Amen.

Jesus is facing the shadow of the cross when He prays this prayer. The disciples are subdued and terrified. They've sensed that something is wrong; they think Jesus might be leaving them. And now, He's telling them plainly; their hearts are wrenched with fear and anxiety. But in this prayer, there's not one word from Jesus that reflects fear or weakness.

We often understand this prayer as being rather gloomy. But it is not, for this prayer is uttered by One who's just affirmed He has overcome the world (John 16:33) and the prayer starts with that conviction. Jesus is looking toward the cross in a mood of hope and fulfillment. This prayer anticipates the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, and looks forward to the ongoing work of His disciples and those who would follow them. Therefore, Jesus is praying for all of us.

Note the content of Jesus' prayer. He doesn't pray that we be taken out of the world, but that we be protected from the world. Jesus prays that His disciples would be guarded in God's name, guarded in the Word, guarded from the Evil One. God's name and His Word are the only shield and weapon we have to hold off the devil, the world, and our own sinful selves. But just as we dare not minimize the ways of Satan, let us also not minimize what Christ brings to bear for us: the Mighty Fortress who is our God, our trusty Shield and Weapon—a God who prays for His people.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, O almighty God, that we, who in our affliction put our trust in Thy mercy, may ever be defended by Thy protection against all adversity; through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son. Amen.

The Holy Ghost has established the Church in all corners of the world. In every tribe, people, nation, language, and tongue, the one true Church is found. All the world has been born in sin. The whole world is born in corruption. Much of the world remains in their corruption. They remain in their unbelief, clinging to their will and way, and desiring to satisfy the evil lusts of their own sinful flesh.

But the Holy Ghost has called us out of the world of unbelievers to be a part of the holy Christian Church. This Church is made up of poor, miserable sinners who know their sin, confess their sin, and rejoice that through the absolution they receive the forgiveness of their sins.

This is why our Lord Jesus has sent to us His Holy Ghost. He has sent Him to call us out of the darkness of this world into the light of the Gospel. This He does that He might on the Last Day take us away from the pain and misery of this life to His eternal Kingdom in heaven. There we will be free once and for all from the bonds of sin and shame. There we will join with the saints and angels of heaven, and rejoice in the sacrifice of the Lamb forever. The Holy Ghost has been poured out abundantly among us, so that He might lead us into the eternal, heavenly home.

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee, deign to pour forth into our minds the Holy Ghost, by whose wisdom we were created, and by whose providence we are guided, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Lord Jesus Christ had come down from heaven to fulfill the Law and redeem His people by His suffering and death on the cross. Having appeased the wrath of the heavenly Father, He ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of the Father until He comes again on the Last Day. Until that day, He has sent to us His Holy Ghost to create and sustain faith and life in all those who receive the Lord Jesus and His gifts in faith.

To offer the gift of the Holy Ghost, who creates the faith we need to cling to our Lord and Savior, He has also established the Office of the Holy Ministry. He has sent apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers. These men are tasked with giving the means of grace to the people of the Lord God in order that through those means the Holy Ghost might be poured out on the Church abundantly.

Through these men distributing the means of grace, those who listen to this Word are no longer tossed about to and fro by the false teachings of the world. The Church is kept in the one true faith until the Son of God, our Lord Jesus, returns again to take us from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven. This is the work that the Holy Ghost does for us poor sinners, so that by the faith He creates in us we may have eternal life.

Collect: O Merciful God, we beseech Thee that Thy Church, which was gathered together by the Holy Ghost, may nowise be troubled by hostile attack; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The apostles were fully aware they were seeing Jesus ascend into heaven. He was going to where He was before, and it was equally clear that He would be what He was before. In other words, Jesus would resume the full use of His divine powers, which were His by nature and by right. But the disciples did not have such a crude notion of heaven as to think Jesus' being with the Father meant He would be confined to a specific and definite place. For in His state of exaltation, He would be present everywhere. He brings His blessing of forgiveness wherever and whenever His Word is truthfully preached and His Sacraments are rightly given.

How do we know the disciples really believed this? It is because of their reaction. Before, they had assumed the worst. They were defeatists. But now, they react as 'seasoned' veterans of the faith. And why not? They had a full 40 days under their belt after the resurrection. God can work miracles in 40 days, or 5 minutes.

“And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God.” The disciples rejoiced. They knew that Jesus' triumph was their triumph. It is ours, as well. Our salvation and earthly sojourn, even our struggles, are all mapped out and secure in Christ.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, almighty God, that like as we do believe Thy Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens, so may we also in heart and mind ascend, and with Him continually dwell; who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The doctrine of election has been a point of debate for a long time, even among Lutherans. But the text is clear. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will...”

God has chosen His people—predestined them to salvation—even before the creation of the world. This can only be understood in a Gospel sense. It is not meant to imply that we can boast in God’s election, then live as we please. God has chosen us personally before time, that we may be called to faith in time. In other words, our election is made manifest by bringing us to faith through God’s appointed Means of Grace, His Word and Sacraments. We are then empowered to live as God’s people.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, almighty God, that like as we do believe Thy Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens, so may we also in heart and mind ascend, and with Him continually dwell; who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In yesterday’s reading, the people of Samaria did not receive the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost until the laying on of hands by Sts. Peter and John. Today, this happened while St. Peter was preaching. “While Peter was still speaking these words ... they heard them speak with tongues.” That the Church would be a Church of all nations was already established through the faith of the people of Samaria, who received the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost after the laying on of hands. Here the Holy Ghost reveals also through Cornelius and his family that the Church would be established among the Gentiles. He gives them His miraculous gift of speaking in tongues to show that the Church was to be established also among the Gentiles, just as it had been revealed to St. Peter in a dream.

The Holy Ghost, having already established His presence among the Gentiles by the use of His miraculous gift of speaking in tongues, now leads those who came from Jerusalem to baptize them “in the name of the Lord.” They were now considered to be a part of the one true Church on earth. The Church would now be a Church of all nations, who clung in faith to their Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ; the One into whom they had been baptized.

Collect: O God, who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people, by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit: Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

After the martyrdom of St. Stephen—which encapsulated the rejection of the Jews that Jesus of Nazareth was the Lord and Christ—the Book of Acts begins to show the spread of the Gospel into all the world. This expansion of the Church begins with Samaria, the people who were closest to the Jews. Philip the Deacon had begun the work of bringing the Gospel to the Samaritans. They had been baptized by him in the “name of the Lord Jesus.” But they had not as of yet shown the signs that usually accompanied the out-pouring of the Holy Ghost at Holy Baptism.

The Church sends two representatives from the Apostles. They happen to be two of the leaders of the Church, Sts. Peter and John. This served to establish, first of all, that there would be *one* Church. There was not going to be a Church of the Samaritans and one of the Jews, but one Church of all nations. By sending Sts. Peter and John to Samaria, this would also establish that the miraculous signs of the Holy Ghost and preaching of the Gospel would now occur in Samaria. These signs would confirm that the Holy Ghost was indeed active in the Church of Samaria as it was in Jerusalem. This established that the Church would be made up of all nations, both Jews and Gentiles alike.

Collect: O Lord, may the Comforter, who proceedeth from Thee, enlighten our minds, we beseech Thee, and guide us into all truth, even as Thy Son hath promised, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

It has been said there is nothing easier than becoming a Christian, and nothing harder than remaining one. All of us know people who have succumbed to the ways of the world. We are also aware that we ourselves are bombarded with temptation to slip from the faith. That is why Paul admonishes us with these words: “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.”

How do we remain secure in God’s arms? Remain in God’s Word and His Church, that we may receive the divine fuel that is necessary to sustain us in the true Faith. Jesus Himself said: “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32). Always take to heart the important words your pastor says as he dismisses you from the Communion rail: “This true Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you in the true faith unto life everlasting.”

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, almighty God, that like as we do believe Thy Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens, so may we also in heart and mind ascend, and with Him continually dwell; who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Exaudi Sunday

IX. Of Excommunication.

The greater excommunication [i.e., execution or banishment], as the Pope calls it, we regard only as a civil penalty, and not pertaining to us ministers of the Church. But the less [i.e., the so-called 'lesser excommunication'] is true Christian excommunication, which prohibits manifest and obstinate sinners from the sacrament and other communion of the Church until they are reformed and avoid sin. And ministers ought not to confound this ecclesiastical punishment or excommunication with civil penalties.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III

The selections from the Book of Concord for the Sundays of the Church Year are from H. E. Jacobs' translation of the Book of Concord, and are taken from the table of suggested lessons for Sundays and Festivals of the Church. (The table of appropriate lessons was originally found in Pipping's Christliches Concordienbuch [Leipzig, 1734].)

TUESDAY, MAY 21: JOHN 3:16–21 TUESDAY A. PENTECOST

He who believes on the Son of God, the Lord Jesus, the Christ, has eternal life with Him in heaven. This is the promise that our Lord makes to Nicodemus at night when he comes to Him to learn about who He is. This reading from the third chapter of St. John is specifically placed in this Octave of the Feast of Pentecost for our hearing. For faith—belief—is not something we drum up in ourselves. It is given to us by the Holy Ghost through the Means of Grace. Faith is not our work, but the Lord God's.

We will hear more about this on the Feast of the Holy Trinity, where our Lord Jesus teaches Nicodemus about the importance of being baptized. The Holy Ghost, through the means of Holy Baptism, makes those who are born of the flesh to be born of the Spirit. To be born of the Spirit means that one trusts fully in the Lord God. To believe on the Lord God means that he is not condemned with the rest of the unbelieving world. He rather has been gifted with eternal life in the Lord Jesus, with all the other saints who have clung to Him in faith. This is why we teach that one of the gifts of the Sacraments is eternal life. We receive this gift through faith, given through means.

Collect: O God, who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people, by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit: Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

That the Holy Ghost is poured out implies that it does not require worthiness on our part. The action of pouring out is not concerned with where that which is poured out falls. This is how abundant the Lord Jesus is with the out-pouring of the Holy Ghost. He is poured out through the pure preaching of the Word of God. He is poured out upon us through the washing of regeneration found in Holy Baptism. He is poured out upon those who confess their sins and receive absolution from the pastor as from the Lord God Himself. He is also poured out abundantly in the Lord's Supper. This abundant out-pouring of the Holy Ghost was promised through the prophets so that all those who received Him might be gifted with faith.

St. Peter, in his sermon on Pentecost, connects this giving of the Holy Ghost with the atonement of our Lord Jesus. For before the atonement, this gifting of the Holy Ghost was only a promise. Now that it is fulfilled and our Lord Jesus sits on the right hand of the Father, the Holy Ghost is freely given to us by the Christ. By the Lord's crucifixion He is affirmed as Lord and Christ, and He now sends out abundantly the gift of the Holy Ghost, so that all who receive Him through His means are given faith to cling to the peace found in the Lord Jesus.

Collect: O God, who didst give Thy Holy Spirit to Thine Apostles: Grant unto Thy people the performance of their petitions, so that on us to whom Thou hast given faith, Thou mayest also bestow peace; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Unity is an important thing. At least, Jesus thinks that it is important enough to pray for. Jesus wants not only His twelve Apostles to be unified, but also all those who come into the Church after them. He is greatly concerned about the unity of the Christian Church; He prays, "that all of them may be one," that is, that all Christians may be one.

This was obviously very important to Jesus, and it should be very important to us as well. Certainly, when Jesus prayed this prayer for the unity of all believers, He did not mean just organizational structures. Jesus would never pray for unity among the believers despite truth. Unity must be built on something more stable and solid than flimsy human organizational structures. Unity must be built on something more stable and solid than the shifting sands of human likes and dislikes.

What is that solid thing? What is that element that builds real unity among believers? It is the Word of God. The Word of God creates unity like nothing else can, because it is above all of us. It is the thing to which all of us must bow our heads and submit our demands. The Word of God does not depend on us for its existence. It doesn't need us. It is above us, and we are bound to it.

Collect: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee, and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; 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 Egyptians are not the “children of God”, or so we might think. But here we see that they are. The people who saw Moses bring plagues upon them will see Another, who will bring blessings upon them. God “will send them a Savior and a Mighty One, and He will deliver them.” Then God explicitly says, “Blessed is Egypt My people.” And He says the same of Assyria.

The people of God were never meant to be from a single earthly tribe. This speaks ultimately of their coming to Christ. The Buffalo Synod seminary professor, Herbert Carl Leupold, said: “More is involved in the matter of the fulfillment of this passage than what has thus far been indicated. Only as the gospel came to the land of Egypt and land of the Near East did these things become realities. In those early centuries the church, especially in the land of Egypt, made notable contributions to the glory of the Savior’s name, even as did the church of the whole area of North Africa.”

The pagans of Egypt and Assyria would eventually come to glorify God. Jesus, as a little boy, blessed Egypt with His presence. They could not have guessed that He would bring so many of them to life, even to our day. There are still ancient Christians in Egypt today.

Collect: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee, and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; 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 Pentecost Sunday

THE THIRD ARTICLE.

Of Sanctification.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; the Resurrection of the body; and the Life everlasting. Amen.

What is meant by this Article?

Answer. I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me through the gospel, enlightened me by His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith; in like manner as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the true faith; in which Christian Church He daily forgives abundantly all my sins, and the sins of all believers, and will raise up me and all the dead at the last day, and will grant everlasting life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.

—The Small Catechism, Part II

People have often talked about knowing God. Philosophers have tried to reason their way to the Father. But God the Father is ultimately *Deus absconditus*, the hidden God. He partly reveals Himself in the Old Testament, but it is mysterious. He is in the burning bush and the pillar of cloud or fire over the tabernacle. But, as it says in Hebrews: "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son." Jesus reveals the Father to us. He reveals the Father's will toward us.

In this passage He says; "I am with the Father." He is alluding to the Holy Trinity. That is why His witness is not alone. He is not alone. The Father corroborates the Son's witness of Himself. When two or three witnesses agree, the thing is established. Here we have Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in perfect agreement. If anyone presumes to know God's will or God's plans by any other way than the Word of Christ, he is speaking nonsense. Jesus is the medium for knowing the Father aright. May we all focus upon the God who reveals Himself to us in His Word.

Collect: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee, and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Ezekiel is very worried about the remnant of Israel. He wonders what will become of the people of Jerusalem. But God tells him, "your brethren, your relatives, your countrymen" are not the inhabitants or rulers of Jerusalem. They are the Israelites who were carried away into exile in Babylon. The Lord has scattered them among the gentiles, but has not cast them off forever.

The exiles will not just rejoin the inhabitants of Jerusalem, they will form the whole house of Israel. There of course is a parallel here to the Church of Christ. It is only with the coming of Christ that the people of God are given a new spirit, a new fleshly heart, rather than the old heart of stone. God gathers His people from all over the world. The people who come from afar to Christ are like the exiles in Babylon. People with no hope are made sons.

The inhabitants of Jerusalem are like the modern, unbelieving Jews. They are the natural heirs, but have abandoned their birthright. How grateful we should be that we have been grafted into Christ. God, in His mercy has brought us back from the land of darkness. How blessed we are that in our baptism God has called us His people.

Collect: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee, and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“...that mortality may be swallowed up by life.” One of the most famous episodes of *The Twilight Zone* was called “Nothing in the Dark.” It depicted an elderly woman who lived alone and was afraid of death. Somehow she was able to tell that death would come in the form of a man, but if she didn’t let him in her house, she would be safe. She had obviously been struggling with who was really just a man and who was Mr. Death. She allows a wounded police officer in as an act of mercy. She nurses him and talks with him for a good while. Toward the end of the episode she realizes he was Death all along. He has her take his hand and says: “You see! No shock, no engulfment, no tearing asunder. What you feared would come like an explosion is like a whisper. What you thought was the end, the beginning.” And then they walked outside hand in hand. The change was imperceptible. Everything was the same, but death was left behind and life went on.

For those in Christ, our reality gently goes on. Our mortality is swallowed up by life. Our loving Savior will not terrify us. He will comfort us.

Collect: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee, and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; 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 passage in the Gospel is a commentary on the prayer Jesus just told His disciples to pray. The Lord’s Prayer is petitionary, that is, it is asking for God to grant certain things. In it we ask for daily bread and to be forgiven our sins. Jesus encourages us not to be timid. He says, “So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you.” It is no wonder that the Lord’s Prayer became an important part of the Divine Liturgy right from the beginning. Jesus commands us to pray this way.

Jesus then makes the comparison to human behavior; an argument from the lesser to the greater. Earthly fathers will give good things to their children. God our Father is infinitely more generous. Jesus also paints the picture of a man coming to his neighbor at midnight, begging for help to show hospitality to a traveler. All of Jesus’ hearers would have thought this absurd. Of course the neighbor would have got out of bed for love’s sake, or at least honor’s sake. Out of mere obligation, the neighbor would have gotten out of bed. He would have to, at least, protect his reputation. How much more would our holy and benevolent God do, who loves us as dear children?

Collect: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee, and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.