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affiliated congregations and missions**

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Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

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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)

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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. Mark Mueller

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Rev. John Rutowicz

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Christ Lutheran Church, Richmond, MO

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

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

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Rev. Dcn. Gary Harroun

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Dcn. Jacob Henson

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Rev. Dcn. Anthony Oncken

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Rev. Daniel Mensing

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



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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)

Please note that hymn numbers for Festival Days reflect the enumeration of drafts of ASBH supplied at the most recent synods.

August 31	Trinity 11	ASBH 49
September 7	Trinity 12	ASBH 50
September 14	Trinity 13	ASBH 51
September 21	Trinity 14/St. Matthew	ASBH 52
<i>September 24 (W) Wednesday in Ember Week</i>		
<i>September 26 (F) Friday in Ember Week</i>		
<i>September 27 (S) Saturday in Ember Week</i>		
September 28	Trinity 15	ASBH 53
<i>September 29 (M) St. Michael and All Angels</i>		
		ASBH 103

St. Ignatius Lutheran Seminary

Fall Quarter begins September 1 and will run from until November 17. (There will be a two week break from September 27 to October 12.

Fall Quarter classes are: Christology (3 hrs.); Synoptic Gospels (3 hrs.); Ecumenical Councils (2 hrs.); Greek Readings (hr.); and Readings in the Church Fathers (1 hr.).

St. Ignatius currently has two students, Duncan Geldenhuys (Australia) and Jonathan Teo Zin Han (Singapore). The specific dates for the 2025–2026 Academic calendar will be available in the next issue of *The Lutheran Herald*.



NEW BOOK BY BISHOP HEISER

A Time to Stand is the long-awaited companion to *A Time for Every Purpose Under Heaven*, offering a profound meditation on Christian faithfulness in an age of collapse. Where the earlier volume traced the sacred architecture of time and history, this new work asks how the Church must now live—rooted, enduring, and unflinching—in a world that no longer remembers its foundations.

Drawing upon Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and the witness of classical and Christian thought, Bishop James D. Heiser offers a clarion call to the Church: not to reclaim cultural dominance, but to remain faithfully present amid ruins. With chapters addressing the loss of meaning, the failure of institutions, the dangers of ideological reaction, and the hope rooted in Christ's return, *A Time to Stand* is not a manual for political renewal—it is a summons to spiritual clarity.

ISBN 979-8317229979 • 200 Pages • \$14.95

EPISCOPAL VISITATIONS

Bishop Heiser had his visitation with Pr. **Heimbigner** and the saints of Charity Lutheran Church (Burleson, TX) on Sunday, **August 3**, and with Pr. **Tolar** and the saints of St. Luke parish (Kenai and Homer, AK) **August 22–24**. He is scheduled to have his visitation with Pr. **Jackson** and the saints of Lamb of God Lutheran Church (Rogers, AR) and Pr. **Stefanski** and the saints of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (Harrison, AR) the weekend of **August 29–September 1**.

Later this month, the bishop will conduct visitations of Pr. **Scheck** and the saints of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church (Richmond, MO) **September 20–21** and Pr. **Henson** and Dcn. **Harroun** and the saints of Trinity Lutheran Church (Herrin, IL) **September 23–24**.

In these verses, St. Paul teaches us that we should be content to continue in the social order in which we find ourselves. The term “calling” that is used here translates to “vocation” from Latin, which we recognize as a more specific term for the work that we do here on earth, whether that be recognized as a secular occupation or not. Such roles include slave and free, but also father, mother, child, clergy, and ruler, among others. The important thing here is that we have these roles because God placed us in them. That is why they are callings, because, as it says in verse 17, God has called us to be in them.

God has arranged for us to fulfill these roles in our lives, and because of this we should respect and honor these roles. St. Paul’s lesson here is that we should not despise these roles simply because we would rather do something else. What all God-given vocations have in common is that Scripture tells us how to fulfill them in a God-pleasing way. To fulfill these roles is to “walk around in” the good works that God has prepared beforehand for us to walk in, as St. Paul testifies in his epistle to the Ephesians (2:10).

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy succor, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

Article XI.

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

Article XII.

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

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

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

—Augsburg Confession

Jesus calls flawed men. He calls men with imperfect pasts. Jesus' teaching is revolutionary in the ancient world. Sinners, and all who were at the bottom of society, were not to be pitied or valued. But Jesus makes a point of valuing the broken and imperfect.

Our Lord makes something from nothing. He takes a despised tax collector and makes him an apostle. This Christian valuing of all human life was a jarring perspective in the ancient world. And it wasn't just in the Greek and Roman world. The scribes and Pharisees had a similar legalistic and unmerciful worldview. Practically speaking, there was no hope of redemption for sinners, in their minds. Sinners were spiritually sick, and the scribes would let them die in that sickness. After all, it was one's own choice to be a sinner.

In contrast, Jesus finds the spiritually sick and heals them. Mercy is a particularly Christian virtue. Self-righteous people don't really want forgiveness. They have their own righteousness. Men can either have Jesus' righteousness or their own. They can take whichever one they want before the Father's judgment. But only Jesus Christ's righteousness saves us from condemnation and hell.

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

In our Lord's list of beatitudes, or blessings, we see that we may experience consequences for seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. In particular, when men hate us, exclude us, revile us, and cast us out for the Son of Man's sake, that can often be because we consider the Word of God more important than the opinions of those men. Jesus says that the student is not greater than the teacher, and if we are the students of Christ, and of the faithful Old Testament prophets, it should not surprise us if we are treated like Christ and the faithful Old Testament prophets were treated. Many of them suffered terribly, or were even killed.

At the same time, if we are rich, or full, because we sought earthly things first, or all men speak well of us because we compromised God's truth, we should be worried. Jesus often warns us that the wicked will receive temporal goods, but eternal woes. May the Lord help us rather to be faithful to Him, and to look forward to eternal life with our beloved Lord and Savior, instead of seeking the praise and glory of this world.

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy succor, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

St. Paul warns us against using religious pretexts to withdraw from the world and from our responsibilities in it according to the vocations that God has provided. We call these “pretexts” here because St. Paul says that there are some Thessalonians who are “busybodies”, and that even though they could work for their own support, they would rather be supported by others.

We know that it is God-pleasing for us to be employers, employees, husbands, wives, and so on, as we live our lives as Christians, because our Lord and the Apostles encourage us to do these things. Even though Paul and his companions had the right to demand support for their work in preaching and teaching, they continued to earn their own way so as to set an example for the Thessalonians.

Further, being a “busybody” in this way could prevent others who did not have the means or ability to support themselves from getting it. St. Paul praises charity towards those who need it, as, for example, he praises the Macedonian and Achaian churches for contributing to help the poor in the church in Jerusalem (Romans 15:26).

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy succor, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

What distinguishes the righteous from the unrighteous? Jesus is the only difference. Jesus is the light of the world, and those who live their lives in faith, who live their lives in Christ, walk in the light of life and truth. Jesus also said that for judgment He had come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind (verse 39). The difference between people in this world is whether or not they admit they are blind.

Once we admit that we are helpless and hopeless in this world, the way is open for the light of Christ to enter our souls. But, to those who arrogantly believe that they are wise and they understand, to them the light of Christ cannot come. They, by their willful self-righteousness, are confirmed in their darkness, and they plunge deeper and deeper into that darkness.

Jesus is the light of the world, the One who opens blind eyes and confirms the self-righteous in their blindness. This same Messiah says to all, “Trust in Me for your standing before the Father, and I will give you eyes to see.”

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

This woman understood forgiveness. In verse 38 we see this woman kissing Jesus' feet and anointing them with oil. These are not just acts of gratitude, but worship. It is very possible that she heard Jesus speak previously about repentance and forgiveness, and it deeply affected her.

But Simon the Pharisee's reaction in verse 39 is different. He has determined that Jesus is not a prophet because of His interaction with a sinner. Simon does not understand forgiveness. Simon is trapped in the Law, and so, cannot love much. The woman surpasses him in love because she understands forgiveness. A person's love for God is the *result* of forgiveness, not the *cause* of forgiveness.

A "woman in the city who was a sinner" comes to the One who takes the punishment of a sinner for her and gives her His righteousness. She loves much because she knows how very much she has been forgiven. If one cannot feel one's sins, one cannot understand forgiveness. Repentance, forgiveness, and love of God are tied together.

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

Our reading for today is Matthew's recording of the Lord's Prayer. In particular, we may notice that one of the first things we pray for in that prayer, long before we pray for our "daily bread," is that the Lord's name be hallowed and that His kingdom come. Certainly the name of God is holy, or hallowed, but what does it mean for His kingdom to come? We should not let our familiarity with these words allow us to gloss over them, or fail to understand what they really mean.

We may wonder how this comes to pass. In the words of Luther's Small Catechism, he answers: "When our heavenly Father grants us his Holy Spirit, so that we through his grace believe his blessed Word, and live a godly life in time and in eternity."

Our Father makes clear His will is that all should repent of their sins, believe in Jesus Christ, and therefore be saved. He grants us the Holy Spirit to bring this about, to create and sustain that saving faith in us.

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy succor, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Today we see Mary, the sister that Jesus praises, show us how to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” And our Lord praises her for doing this.

On this occasion, Martha had been busy (something to which we can all relate). She had been taking care of everyone else. She believed that Mary should have been helping her, too. And perhaps, on an ordinary day, she would be right.

But on this occasion, Mary had the opportunity to sit at Jesus’ feet and learn from Him, because she understood the importance of the one thing that she truly needed: God’s kingdom and His righteousness, that is, the forgiveness of her sins. Mary knew that there would still be work to do after Jesus left, but this time, she prioritized sitting at Jesus’ feet and listening to Him. Martha was not wrong in wanting to serve, but on this occasion she should have prioritized this opportunity to hear her Lord speak.

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy succor, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

What is God’s will for your life? One might hear that question from some preachers in the context of which car to purchase, what career to pursue, etc. But the question should be seen from a broader perspective. What is God’s will for you? It is for you to participate in the life of Christ; to be molded by Christ; to be joyful, prayerful, and thankful in Christ.

Patience, in verse 14, is of course a virtue. We must bear with the weak. Verse 15 is an elaboration on patience. Accept a mean comment or action by a brother with calmness and understanding. Pray for his well-being. Resentfulness is not Christian. Patience is the opposite of arrogance and resentment. Rejoice in the face of meanness and persecution.

“Pray without ceasing.” This doesn’t mean being constantly at one’s prayer desk. We must work and live life. It means praying anytime we can lift up our hearts and speak our thoughts into His ear. Praying can be one’s inner dialog with God. In this, and in all things, let us conform ourselves to God’s will for our lives.

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

Strive not to be great as a lord and master. Strive to be great as a minister and servant. The disciples had a flawed understanding of what the Messiah's kingdom would be like. They think of worldly greatness. But Jesus says that the first shall be last. Being "last" is not always a punishment for bad behavior. Being "last" is sometimes the goal to which one should aspire. The greatest is he who is the servant; it is the mind-set that makes others important over oneself.

Jesus uses a child as an example. The child is not meant in a metaphorical way, as in a child in the faith or a new Christian. Jesus means receiving an actual child. Children are of low status in society, so they are perfect examples of lowliness and humility. Serving the child is serving Jesus and the Father. No greater service can be rendered. Status and glory in Christ's kingdom are very different from the world. Service is counted as greatness. Humility is counted as status.

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

Today we honor a most unusual saint—St. Michael the Archangel, and with him the rest of the angelic host. Michael is one of the few angels who are named in Scripture. Besides being named in this reading, he is also mentioned by name in the book of Daniel, where he is called a prince, even a "great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people," referring to the nation of Israel (Daniel 10:13, 21, and 12:1). St. Michael also disputes with Satan concerning the body of Moses in Jude 9.

From this we understand that God, in addition to providing for and sustaining our bodies in this life, also gives us these angels, these spiritual beings, with the charge to serve us and protect us. Scripture teaches us that they fight and oppose the devil and his evil angels on our behalf. St. Michael and the angels serve God by protecting us, the inheritors of salvation (Hebrews 1:14).

Collect: O Everlasting God, who hast ordained and constituted the services of angels and men in a wonderful order: Mercifully grant that, as Thy holy angels always do Thee service in Heaven, so by Thy appointment they may succor and defend us on earth; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

does all without our merit of pure love and goodness, as a friendly Father, who cares for us that no evil befall us. But to speak more of this pertains to the other two parts of this article, where we say: “Father Almighty.”

Hence we must infer and conclude, since everything which we have and are, and whatever is in heaven and upon the earth, are daily given and preserved to us by God, that it is our duty to love, praise and thank Him without ceasing; and in short to serve Him with all these things, as He has enjoined in the Ten Commandments.

Here we could say much if we would attempt to show how few there are that believe this article. For we all pass over it, hear it, and say it, but neither see nor consider what the words teach us. For if we believed it with the heart, we would also act accordingly, and not stalk about proudly, bid defiance and boast as though we had life, riches, power and honor, etc. all of ourselves, so that others must fear and serve us, as is the practice of the unhappy, perverted world, which is immured in darkness, and abuses all the good things and gifts of God only for its own pride, avarice, lust and luxury, and never once regards God, so as to thank Him or acknowledge Him as Lord and Creator.

Therefore, if we only believed it, this article must humble and terrify us all. For we sin daily with eyes, ears, hands, body and soul, money and possessions, and with everything we have, as especially do those who even fight against the Word of God. Yet Christians have this advantage, that they acknowledge themselves in duty bound to serve God for all these things, and to be obedient to Him.

We ought, therefore, daily to practice this article, to remember and consider in all that we see, and in all good that falls to our lot, and wherever we escape from calamity or danger, that it is God who gives and does all these things; that therein we perceive and see His paternal heart and His transcendent love toward us. Thereby the heart would be aroused and kindled to be thankful for all such good things, and to employ them to the honor and praise of God. Thus we have most briefly presented the meaning of this article, as much as it is at first necessary for the most simple to learn, both as to what we have and receive from God, and what we owe in return, which is a most excellent object of knowledge, but a far greater treasure. For here we see how the Father has given Himself to us, together with all creatures, and has most richly provided for us in this life, besides that He has overwhelmed us with unspeakable, eternal treasures in His Son and the Holy Ghost...

—The Large Catechism

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 6: PHILIPPIANS 1:19–30 11TH S. A. TRINITY

To suffer for Christ is a charism, a spiritual gift given by God. “To you it has been granted on behalf of Christ... to suffer for His sake.” This concept is one of the most powerful ideas in Christianity. From the apostles themselves, through the early Christian martyrs, to modern day martyrs who lose their lives at the hands of Islamic jihadists, Christians have been willing to give their lives for Christ, and even see it as a blessing and a gift.

In Acts 5:41, after the apostles were beaten and threatened by the Sanhedrin, they rejoiced “that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” The early Christian martyrs often went to their deaths singing and rejoicing. They saw it as a great favor that they were judged worthy to suffer like their Savior, Jesus. Until we understand and feel that mentality that the martyrs had, we can’t fully understand St. Paul’s statement, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” To learn to no longer value life in this world so much is a hard lesson, but it is a divine lesson.

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

Article XX. Of Good Works.

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

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

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

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE I.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

This represents and sets forth most briefly the essence, will, action and work of God the Father. Since the Ten Commandments have taught that we have no other gods, it is natural to ask the question: What kind of a being is God? What does He do? How shall we praise, represent or describe Him, that He may be known? ... So that the Creed is nothing else than the answer and confession of Christians, arranged with respect to the First Commandment. As if you were to ask a little child: My dear, what sort of a God have you? What do you know of Him? He could say: First, indeed, my God is God the Father, who has created heaven and earth; besides Him I believe in nothing else as God; for there is no one else who could create heaven and earth.

But for the learned, and those who have acquired some scriptural knowledge, these three articles may be extended and divided into as many parts as there are words. But now for young scholars let it suffice to indicate the most necessary points, namely, as we have said, that this article refers to the Creation: that we emphasize the words: CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH. But what is the force of this or what do you mean by these words: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker, etc. Answer: I believe and mean to say that I am a creature of God; that is, that He has given and constantly preserves to me my body, soul and life, members great and small, all my senses, reason and understanding, food and drink, shelter and support, wife and child, domestics, house and possessions, etc. Besides, He causes all creatures to serve for the necessities and uses of life—sun, moon and stars in the firmament, day and night, air, fire, water, earth and whatever it bears and produces, bird and fish, beasts, grain and all kinds of produce, and whatever else there is of bodily and temporal goods, good government, peace, security. So that we learn in this article that none of us has his life of himself, or anything that is here enumerated or can be enumerated, neither can he of himself preserve them, however small and unimportant a thing it might be, for all is comprehended in the word: CREATOR.

Besides this we also confess that God the Father has not only given us all that we have and see before our eyes, but daily preserves and defends against all evil and misfortune, averts all sort of danger and calamity; and that He

The term “leprosy,” as it is used in Scripture, covers a wide range of skin diseases. Whatever form it takes, it was always hideous and painful, made worse by the classification of the victim as “ceremonially unclean.” In this account of Jesus’ healing such a man, we can learn much about our relationship with God. First, note how the man approaches Jesus; he comes humbly on his knees. Second, he asks, not demands, that Jesus heal him. These should be our qualities as well when we approach God with our needs. We should acknowledge Him as the one true God, and present our temporal requests conditionally, knowing that God, in His wisdom, will decide how best to respond.

Now see the attitude of Jesus. The text says He was “moved with compassion.” Jesus is the embodiment of love and compassion, so we can always assume He will answer in our best interest. Next, we learn that He “stretched out His hand and touched him.” Jesus ignored the “unclean” nature of the man, using touch to take away the man’s disease. Jesus “touches” us even today with His divine words of forgiveness, and most personally with His true Body and Blood in the Lord’s Supper.

Collect: Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

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

Jesus is headed to the home of Jairus, a synagogue ruler, who is considered important. On the way, a woman with a “flow of blood” for 12 years touches Him. She is not important, in the estimation of her world. Her blood issue is not only a physical problem, it made her ceremonially unclean. No Israelite would touch her, and she was ineligible to participate in the worship life of Israel.

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

God grant us this day, by repentant faith, to transfer all our uncleanness to Jesus, and to receive His cleanness. And as bearers of Jesus’ cleanness, may God have His use of whatever “distractions” He may permit to cross our path this day.

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

“Indeed it was for my own peace that I had great bitterness; but You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back.”

King Hezekiah had been told to set his house in order; the Lord was bringing his days to an end. He wept bitterly and prayed, and the Lord had mercy, prolonging his days another 15 years. There is more to the story, but for our devotion today, notice: upon hearing this assurance, the king praises the Lord with the song in our text.

What does he say? “It was for my own peace that I had great bitterness.” It is a hard lesson to learn, and for many of us, one we must learn over and over again. We pray for comfort, healing, an emotionally and financially secure life. Yet what is it that the Lord has used to grow you, mature you, forge you into a more mature Christian? Is it not the hard times? Thus we learn to give thanks for the hardships as well as the pleasures of life. Especially as New Testament believers, we can rejoice in the hard times, that we are being conformed to the image of Christ, who bore all things for us and for our salvation.

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

St. Paul writes his letter to the Church at Philippi while being a prisoner in Rome. Surely the Philippian Christians would have been shaken knowing the most prominent and productive apostle was now in chains. What would become of Paul? What would become of them? Was the future of Christianity now in peril?

Therefore, Paul’s chief concern is to assure his readers that he is not only alive and well, but more importantly, his mission to preach the Gospel has actually been enhanced by his imprisonment. He had favorable contact with the palace guards, known as the Praetorian Guard, which was an elite imperial detachment. His story had also become known among the citizens of Rome, many of whom realized Paul was being wrongly imprisoned. This emboldened the Christians who heard about the positive reception the Gospel had received.

Paul is living proof of his words written earlier to the Christians in Rome. “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

Collect: Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Note the nature of the Gospel in action for the Church at Thessalonica: "...knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance..." The Gospel, by definition, is all God's doing. The doctrine of election gives us assurance that God, from all eternity, has chosen us to be His own before time even began. We were then called in time by the power of His divine Word. Our God used means by sending His Son to win salvation, and now uses His Means of Grace to deliver salvation to His chosen.

Certainly, the doctrine of election has been misused. We dare not fall into the trap of saying, "I'm chosen, therefore I cannot be lost." Rather, it is meant for those who doubt their faith, saying, "How can God save a wretch like me?" As with all Scripture, there is a time for Law and a time for Gospel. Let this doctrine of comfort be used in its proper time and place to give consolation to the downtrodden.

Collect: Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

"These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding, and those who complained will learn doctrine."

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

In exile, they went the other way: they thought, "God punished us for breaking His rules, so let us be sure to keep them all." They became like the Pharisees, lovers of rules. That was wrong too. In both cases, what was missing was a love for God that genuinely wanted to be pleasing to Him. The Lord, through Isaiah, promises that those who erred will come to understand; those who complained will learn doctrine. Jesus has given us that doctrine: it is the doctrine of the Gospel, i.e., repentance and the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ. May God grant us to believe it, to love Him for it, and so to strive with all our might to be pleasing to Him.

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

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

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

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

Collect: Almighty and Merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service: Grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Perhaps more than anyone else, St. Paul can live his own words from Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Certainly, Paul must have marveled at the depths of his sin, which were overcome by an even greater measure of God’s grace in Christ. How much more so, then, for the likes of every one of us. Our Lord not only has the power, but also the patience and desire to bring us into His fold.

How can this be effected? Paul tells us in verse 15 of today’s reading: “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” Here is the atonement, in which our hope resides. Christ left His throne on high that He might become our perfect replacement under the Law and give Himself unto death in payment for the world’s sin. This active and passive obedience serves as the cornerstone of our faith—the rock to which we cling.

Collect: Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In today's reading, St. Paul utilizes an illustration that would be easy for his audience to understand. "But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." The stingy farmer cannot expect good results, whereas the farmer who sows in abundance should expect a good harvest. It is interesting that the Greek word for a "bountiful" harvest actually means a harvest of blessing. That is, the sower himself is rewarded for his generous giving.

This idea is common in Scripture. In the book of Proverbs, we read, "Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine" (3:9-10). This is not a material return, but a spiritual one of joy and satisfaction. Christians are not to just give according to some benchmark dictated by Law, but according to a generous heart motivated by the Gospel, as verse 7 of our text describes a "cheerful giver". We do not give begrudgingly under compulsion, but willingly and joyfully, knowing there is no greater joy than being God's agent to sustain and extend His kingdom.

Collect: Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

"When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, 'Son of David, have mercy on us!'"

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

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

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

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

The Lord’s words offer hope to the exiled children of Israel. “Your salvation is coming.” Salvation did come. It came when the Savior came. The sufferings borne by the children of Israel in exile became a picture of the ultimate suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ, as He sacrificed Himself on the cross to pay for the sin of the world and thus satisfy the perfect justice of God.

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

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

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

Jesus is in Jerusalem for one of the annual Jewish festivals. While there, He goes to a pool called Bethesda. The water would stir on occasion, yielding a mysterious and magical quality of healing. But only the first person to enter after the stirring was healed. It’s not surprising that many were poised to be first.

In such a setting, there was a man who had come for 38 years without success. An astonishing question comes from Jesus: “Do you want to be made well?” Jesus was trying to redirect the man from his hopeless competition to the sure and certain healing that can only come from God Himself. Moreover, He moves him from the temporal to the eternal: “See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.” While living with a physical ailment for 38 years was hard enough, what is worse would be perishing eternally with an unhealed soul. May we never be consumed with things temporal that we lose sight of things eternal.

Collect: Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity

I. Of Sin.

Here we must confess, as Paul says in Rom. 5:11, that sin originated from one man Adam, by whose disobedience all men were made sinners, and subject to death and the devil. This is called original or capital sin.

The fruits of this sin are afterwards evil deeds which are forbidden in the Ten Commandments, such as unbelief, false faith, idolatry, to be without the fear of God, arrogance, blindness, and, to speak briefly, not to know or regard God; secondly, to lie, to swear by God's name, not to pray, not to call upon God, not to regard God's Word, to be disobedient to parents, to murder, to be unchaste, to steal, to deceive, etc.

This hereditary sin is so deep a corruption of nature, that no reason can understand it, but it must be believed from the revelation of Scriptures, Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12 sqq.; Ex. 33:3; Gen 3:7 sqq. Wherefore the dogmas of the scholastic doctors [that is, medieval Roman Catholic theologians] are pure errors and obscurations contrary to this article, for by them it is taught:

That since the fall of Adam the natural powers of man have remained entire and incorrupt, and that man by nature has right reason and a good will, as the philosophers teach.

And that man has a free will to do good and omit evil, and, again, to omit good and do evil.

Also that man by his natural powers can observe and do all the commandments of God.

And that, by his natural powers, he can love God above all things, and his neighbor as himself.

Also if a man do as much as is in him, God certainly grants to him His grace.

And if he wish to come to the sacrament, there is no need of a good intention to do good, but it is sufficient if he have not a wicked purpose to commit sin; so entirely good is his nature and so efficacious the sacrament.

Also that it is not founded upon Scripture that, for a good work, the Holy Ghost with His grace is necessary.

Such and many other things have arisen from want of understanding and learning concerning both sins and Christ our Saviour, and they are truly heathen dogmas which we cannot endure. For if these dogmas would be right, Christ has died in vain, since there is in man no sin and misery for which He should have died; or He would have died only for the body, not for the soul, inasmuch as the soul is entirely sound, and the body only is subject to death. —The Smalcald Articles

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity

Article XVIII.

Of the Freedom of the Will, they teach, that man's will has some liberty for the attainment of civil righteousness, and for the choice of things subject to reason. Nevertheless, it has no power, without the Holy Ghost, to work the righteousness of God, that is, spiritual righteousness; since the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God [1 Cor. 2:14]; but this righteousness is wrought in the heart when the Holy Ghost is received through the Word. These things are said in as many words by Augustine in his *Hypognosticon*, book iii: "We grant that all men have a certain freedom of will in judging according to [natural] reason; not such freedom, however, whereby it is capable, without God, either to begin, or much less to complete aught in things pertaining to God, but only in works of this life, whether good or evil. 'Good,' I call those works which spring from the good in Nature, that is, to have a will to labor in the field, to eat and drink, to have a friend, to clothe oneself, to build a house, to marry, to keep cattle, to learn diverse useful arts, or whatsoever good pertains to this life, none of which things are without dependence on the providence of God; yea, of Him and through Him they are and have their beginning. 'Evil,' I call such works as have a will to worship an idol, to commit murder," etc.

They condemn the Pelagians and others who teach that, without the Holy Ghost, by the power of nature alone, we are able to love God above all things; also to do the commandments of God as touching "the substance of the act." For, although nature is able in some sort to do the outward work (for it is able to keep the hands from theft and murder), yet it cannot work the inward motions, such as the fear of God, trust in God, chastity, patience, etc.

—The Augsburg Confession

These first five verses of Leviticus 18 are the general preface to a chapter which deals with the sexually immoral behavior of the Egyptians and the Canaanites. The introductory words “I am the Lord your God” place this exhortation within the saving covenant which God had made with the Israelites. These words are a warning to those who have already become God’s people and who trust in His forgiveness and grace. Having become God’s people, they should not follow the immoral and licentious practices of the other nations.

Our present culture’s morality has continued to deteriorate to new lows. The contrast between appropriate Christian behavior, up-building conversation, modest dress, and what we see in the general public is quite far apart. The culture flaunts and parades what St. Paul blushes at in Ephesians 5:12. He says, “For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.”

Our God encourages His people to live sanctified lives by promising both threats and rewards. In Leviticus, God promises that the believer will enjoy true life through His statutes. At the end of chapter 18, God warns that the abominable behaviors will defile a person and result in his being “cut off from among the people” (verse 29). Instead of sexual immorality, God’s forgiven people walk in God’s Word with thanksgiving (Ephesians 5:3-4). We talk and “think about such things” as are pleasing in God’s sight (Philippians 4:8).

Collect: Almighty and Everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain that which Thou dost promise, make us to love that which Thou dost command; 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 parable begins with a man planting a fig tree in the hope of it producing figs. Although the keeper of the vineyard has shown great patience, there will finally come a time in which unfruitful trees will be cut down. Jesus has been preaching to His people for three years, and the reaction to His ministry has been mixed. At the end of today’s text, some “were put to shame,” while others rejoiced in His teaching.

After a long period of sickness, the bent-over woman is healed by Jesus. The reaction of the synagogue ruler presents us with a real-life example of a tree that refuses to produce fruit. Rather than be taught the way of God by the Savior of the world, the man’s only response is that Jesus’ miracle is to be considered forbidden Sabbath-day work. Jesus rightly calls him a hypocrite.

Colossians 1:5-6 says that “word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world ... is bringing forth fruit.” We have received the true Christian teaching concerning repentance and faith in Christ. May that move us to bear abundant fruit. Jesus said, “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples” (John 15:8).

Collect: We beseech Thee, O Lord, that our weakness may be upheld by Thy healing mercy, so that what of itself is falling into ruin may be restored by Thy clemency; 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 Lord commanded us to walk in His ways. Yet, we have stumbled in our Christian walk. Rather than turn away from us in our iniquity, the Lord calls us to return. He knows that we have nothing to offer Him. Without faith, we cannot please Him. Even our “good” deeds are as filthy rags in His sight. We can only plead for mercy.

There is one thing which the Lord desires of us. The prophet Hosea says to us, “Take words with you.” These words, which we are to bring, are the teaching of God’s Law and Gospel. God’s Law has taught us that we have sinned and fallen short of God. We confess that the works of our hands are unsaving idols. The Gospel teaches us that it is the Lord only who saves, and in whom we find mercy. He receives us graciously.

The prophet Hosea quotes God, who says, “Your fruit is found in Me.” Thus, we offer to God only what He has given to us. The fruit which the Lord seeks is the fruit which He gives. Those who return to God “offer the sacrifices of our lips.” We offer to God repentant words which recognize our sins, and faith-filled words that the Lord takes away all our iniquities. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, God heals our backsliding.

Who is wise? The one who is taught by God the ways of the Lord.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy Grace may mercifully be relieved; 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 motivation for charity toward our neighbor is the grace and mercy which we have received from God. Verse 15, “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you.” In the New Testament we remember that when we were poor in spirit our God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to provide the forgiveness which we did not deserve.

Deuteronomy 14:28-29 speaks of the tithe of the land’s produce which was to be given to the poor twice every seven years. Deuteronomy 15:1-6 directs that no loan payments were to be required during the seventh year. Today’s text from Deuteronomy 15 is concerned with the believer’s heart, motivation, or desires. Verse 7, “...you shall not harden your heart.” Verse 9, “Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart...” Verse 10, “...your heart should not be grieved when you give to him.”

God is not only concerned about the performance of good works, He also cares about the motivation of the believer’s heart, which should be love of the neighbor and a desire to truly help him. St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:7, “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” To be able to give to others as we have been blessed by God, we need an increase of faith, hope, and charity.

Collect: Almighty and Everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain that which Thou dost promise, make us to love that which Thou dost command; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Because of the unfaithfulness of God's people, judgment had fallen upon the royal house of David. The tabernacle had been decimated, and the people had been taken into exile and scattered among the nations. With Amos 9:11, the prophet declares that God is going to rebuild the fallen house of David and set up an eternal kingdom. Today's text lets us know that when those days come, there will be rich blessings, no more calamities, and unbroken peace.

At the Jerusalem Council mentioned in Acts 15, James quotes Amos 9:11-12 as a proof text that God has received the Gentiles into Christ's Church without circumcision. In other words, those coming days mentioned by the prophet Amos have arrived in the New Testament kingdom of God. With the coming of Jesus Christ, God has set up the holy Christian Church. It is a Church built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone. All who believe in Christ are members.

The redemption which Christ secured has provided the Church with the unequalled blessings of forgiveness and eternal life. The abundant seven-fold fruits of the Holy Spirit will be poured upon faithful Israelites and Gentiles. Those former captives will be brought back into the new faithful people of God. Faith-filled, they will enjoy the peace which passes understanding. The Church will not "be pulled up," as even "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

Collect: We beseech Thee, O Lord, that our weakness may be upheld by Thy healing mercy, so that what of itself is falling into ruin may be restored by Thy clemency; 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 this letter to Philemon, St. Paul 'goes to bat' for the slave Onesimus. Formerly, Onesimus had been an unbelieving slave who had run away from Philemon. As an absent, runaway slave, he was of no use or benefit to Philemon. While St. Paul was in prison he came in contact with this slave and converted him to Christ. St. Paul speaks highly of Onesimus' faithful service to him. Now repentant, this slave is willing to return to his master, and St. Paul politely asks if Philemon would forgive Onesimus and allow him to continue to serve Paul.

Before we came to believe in Christ, we served ourselves and ran away not only from God, but from our vocational duties to serve our neighbor. Even while we were still sinners, our Lord and Savior died for us. God sent someone to convert us to Christ by the Holy Spirit's working through the Word. Through faith in Christ we have returned to God, and our works are acceptable in His eyes. 2 Corinthians 9:8, "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work."

Though we don't know for sure the ways of God, we look for God's guiding hand in all of the circumstances of our life. St. Paul says, "For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother..."

Collect: Almighty and Everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain that which Thou dost promise, make us to love that which Thou dost command; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.