Clergy of the ELDoNA, affiliated congregations and missions

Rt. Rev. James Heiser
Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

Rev. Jeffrey Ahonen
Good Shepherd L.C., Tony, WI; Apologia Lutheran Mission, Deer Park, WI; Peace L.C., Ironwood, MI; Pure Blessings Lutheran Church, Brandon, WI

Rev. Jerald Dulas
Sts. Peter & Paul L. C., Simpsonville, SC; All Saints Lutheran Mission, Myrtle Beach, SC; St. Michael & All Angels Lutheran Mission, Martinez, GA; St. Bartholomew Lutheran Mission, Fort Myers, FL; St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Mission, UAC, Ormond Beach, FL

Rev. Douglas Handrich (Emeritus)
Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

Rev. Kent Heimbigner
Charity Lutheran Church, Burleson, TX

Rev. Benjamin Henson
Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

Rev. Jacob Henson
Apologia Lutheran Church, Deer Park, WI

Rev. Michael Henson
Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Martin Jackson
Lamb of God Ev. Lutheran Church, Rogers, AR

Rev. Mark Mueller
Redeemer Lutheran Church, Cambridge, MN

Rev. John Rutowicz
St. Boniface Lutheran Church, Niles, MI

Rev. Josiah Scheck
Christ Lutheran Church, Richmond, MO

Rev. Eric Stefanski
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Harrison, AR; Emmanuel Lutheran Mission, Conway, AR

Rev. Timothy Tolar
St. Luke Lutheran Church, Kenai, AK
Homer Lutheran Mission, Homer, AK

Rev. Brandon Warr
St. Patrick Lutheran Church, Chipley, FL

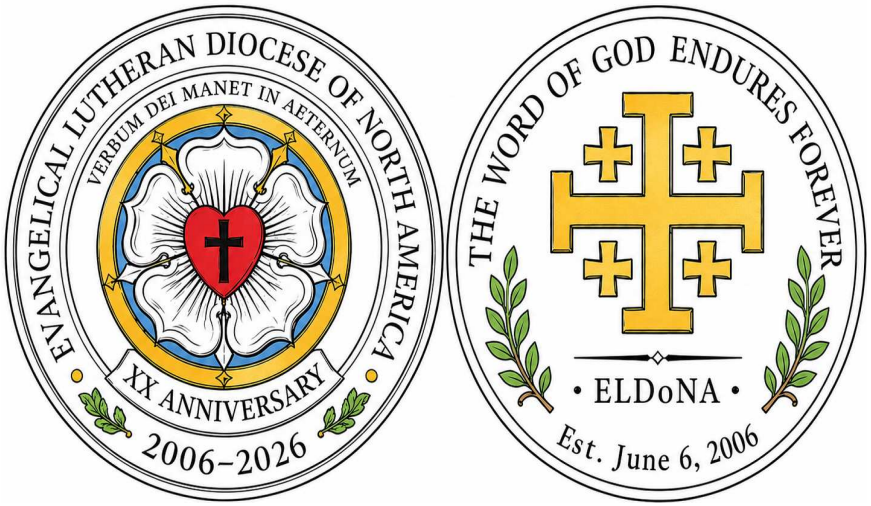
Rev. Dcn. Gary Harroun
Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Dcn. Anthony Oncken
Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

Rev. Dcn. Floyd Smithey
Sts. Peter & Paul Lutheran Church, Simpsonville, SC; St. James Lutheran Mission, Knoxville, TN

Rev. Daniel Mensing

The Lutheran Herald



August 3–September 5 , 2026

A Publication of
The Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America

The Calendar

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

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

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

August 2	Trinity 9	ASBH 47
August 9	Trinity 10	ASBH 48
August 10 (M)	St. Lawrence, Deacon & Martyr	ASBH 98
August 15 (S)	St. Mary Theotokos	ASBH 99
August 16	Trinity 11	ASBH 49
AUGUST 21 IS THE LAST DAY OF SUMMER QUARTER OF ST. IGNATIUS		
August 23	Trinity 12	ASBH 50
August 24 (M)	St. Bartholomew, Apostle	ASBH 100
August 29 (S)	Beheading of St. John the Baptist	ASBH 101
August 30	Trinity 13	ASBH 51

St. Ignatius Lutheran Seminary

Summer intensives began June 15. (Intensives will run Monday–Friday, 2 hours per day.) The classes offered for the Summer intensives are as follows:

Summer: (10 hours)

P003—Liturgics Practicum II (1 hr.)	June 15–19
H005—Renaissance (2 hrs.)	June 22–July 3
E007—Galatians (2 hrs.)	July 6–17
S006—Eschatology (1 hr.)	July 20–24
E009—Greek Readings 4 (1 hr.)	July 27–31
S007—Office of the Ministry & Ecclesiology (3 hrs.)	August 10–28

Fall Quarter begins September 7:

P004—Homiletics 1 (3 hrs.)	Mon.-Wed.-Fri.
S008—Sacramental Theology (3 hrs.)	Mon.-Wed.-Fri
H005—Post Reformation (3 hrs.)	Tuesday-Thursday
P007—Confession and Absolution (1 hr.)	Thursday

St. Ignatius currently has two students, Duncan Geldenhuys (Australia) and Jonathan Teo Zin Han (Singapore).

DIOCESAN CEREMONIAL—There have been several requests for copies of the diocesan ceremonial since this year's family camp. It may be ordered from Amazon for $20 (the full title is *Ceremonial for the 2022 Supplement: Augustana Service Book and Hymnal* ISBN 979-8362209568). The more economical option of $15/copy with free U.S. shipping is directly from the bishop, either during his visitation, or by contacting him directly (hunnius@me.com).

New from Repristination Press:

***Chronicle of the Years 1593, 1594, and the Beginning of 1595,* by David Chytraeus**. In this remarkable chronicle, David Chytraeus—historian, theologian, student of Melanchthon, and co-author of the Formula of Concord—turns his attention to the great events of 1593, 1594, and the opening months of 1595. Chytraeus surveys the political, military, and confessional upheavals of his age with astonishing breadth and accuracy. The *Chronicle* follows the French Wars of Religion and the struggle over Henry IV's succession; the maneuvers of Spain, Rome, and the Catholic League; the Swedish coronation crisis of Sigismund III and the defense of the Augsburg Confession at Uppsala; the Dutch struggle against Spanish rule; the siege and surrender of Groningen; early Arctic exploration in search of a northern trade route to Asia; and the renewed Ottoman-Habsburg war on the Hungarian frontier, including Sisak, Petrinja, Raab/Győr, Komárom, and the alliance with Transylvania. ISBN 979-8185034873 • $18.

***Chronicon Carionis: Part One: Universal History from Creation to the Advent of Christ*, by Philip Melanchthon**. Chronicon Carionis: Part One presents Philip Melanchthon's sweeping universal history from the creation of the world to the advent of Christ and the establishment of Roman power under Augustus. In this first part, Melanchthon leads the reader from Genesis through the patriarchs, the Flood, the Table of Nations, Israel, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, the Maccabees, Herod, Julius Caesar, and Augustus. Along the way he reads classical history, sacred chronology, and biblical prophecy together, especially through Daniel's vision of the four monarchies.
ISBN 979-8182220248 • $30 (paperback), $45 (hardcover)

Saturday, September 5: Habakkuk 1:12—2:4 13th S. a. Trinity

The wicked always try to devour the righteous. They rage and seek to destroy the righteous. Mankind is like the fish, caught in the nets of wickedness. They are like creeping things that have no ruler over them. Mankind falls prey to the wicked. They are prey to their own wickedness. Evil leaves mankind naked, wounded, and half dead. This is what our sin does to us. It leaves us at the mercy of the devil, the world, and our flesh. And these things show us no mercy.

This is why the righteous shall live by faith in the Lord God. The Lord is from everlasting. Those who place their trust in Him will not die, for He will not allow us to die. He will destroy our enemies—the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh—and give us forgiveness, life, and salvation.

The Prophet Habakkuk is writing about the deliverance of the Lord God from the Babylonians. The wickedness and unbelief of the Jews led to their eventual exile. The Lord God would not leave them in exile, but would restore the kingdom to them again. St. Paul in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11 brings to revelation that this promise is really about the Christ. Faith in Him is the reason that the righteous shall live. He is the One who defeats all our enemies so they can no longer devour the righteous, and the righteous can live forever.

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.

PRAYER REQUEST—Pastor Tim and Stacey Tolar. Stacey is undergoing treatment for cancer.

VISITATION SCHEDULE—Bishop Heiser set his visitation schedule after conferring with pastors at the 2026 synod. The bishop will conducting his annual visitation at Holy Cross Lutheran Church (Peoria, IL) on August 14–15, and at Christ Lutheran Church (Richmond, MO) on August 16. During this time it is his hope and expectation to meet with Pastor Ben Henson and Pr. Em. Handrich, Pastor Rutowicz, Pastor Scheck and Rev. Mensing, as well as be present for services at Holy Cross and Christ Lutheran Church.

His next scheduled visits will be in Minnesota and Wisconsin the weekend of September 4–6.

MISSION ASSISTANCE—At the 2026 synod, it was resolved to send support for St. Mary's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Navotas CASEA in the Philippines ($ 750.) and for the Confessional Lutheran Church of Colombia ($2400.). It was the hope that congregations and individuals within the diocese could help reach these targets. Those who would be willing to help with this support are encouraged to send their mission assitance to the diocese care of the diocesan treasurer, Rev. Michael Henson, Trinity Lutheran Church, 1000 North Park Avenue, Herrin, Illinois 62948.

DIOCESAN ANNIVERSARY MEDAL—The twentieth anniversary medal is still available. Bishop Heiser will have them with him during the visitations for $20.

Lesson from the Book of Concord
The Ninth Sunday after Trinity

The Seventh Commandment. Thou shalt not steal.

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

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

—The Large Catechism, ¶223–225, 227

The Jews gathered in Jerusalem could see the man Jesus. They even knew where He was from: He is Jesus of Nazareth. They knew His father and mother, His brothers and sisters. They had just heard Him defend His doctrine in the previous section of chapter 7. They knew that there were those who sought to kill Him, and yet, He continued to speak freely and openly. They are confused. How can this man be the Messiah? Is that why the rulers have not killed Him yet, because they know something that others do not? The confusion exists because they have not learned yet that the Lord Jesus is both God and man.

They could see the man, but the thing revealing His divinity was His preaching. The heavenly Father sent Him to do His will. The Jews thought they knew Him, but they did not, for they knew not the heavenly Father. They do not know that the Lord Jesus is both God and man. This would be revealed in His death. For only God who is man can lay down His life and take it up again. Only He can die and be raised again from the dead. In this He fulfills the will of the One who sent Him. He atones for the sins of the whole world, so that all those who believe on Him might have everlasting life.

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.

Thursday, September 3: Philemon 1–25 13th S. a. Trinity

St. Paul's short epistle to Philemon addresses a certain slave called Onesimus. He was a servant of Philemon who stole from his master and ran away. He ended up in Rome, where he met St. Paul. By the Lord God's grace, Onesimus converted. Then St. Paul encouraged Onesimus to return to Philemon so that he may fulfill his vocation as servant. This epistle is placed in the hands of Onesimus to deliver to Philemon. The runaway, thieving slave is tasked with delivering a message to his former master.

We learn in this epistle how one who has erred is to be restored. Even though Onesimus has converted and is repentant of his crimes, he is still obligated to fulfill his vocation. Philemon may be tempted to treat Onesimus as the world would treat him, but St. Paul pleads to Philemon to not receive this runaway slave as the world would. Rather, he should treat him with the same grace and mercy that he would show Paul if he were to come to him. He is to receive Onesimus as a brother in Christ, not just as a servant.

This is how we should treat those who have wronged us, especially when they have repented of their error. We should receive them as a dear brother in Christ, no longer holding their sin against him. As our Lord showed us mercy, even though we were unworthy, we are to show mercy to one another.

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.

Monday, August 3: Luke 12:32–48 9th Sunday a. Trinity

In today's comforting words, our Lord Jesus speaks directly to anxious hearts. The Father delights to bestow upon us the eternal kingdom—not as wages earned, but as pure gift, received from His grace alone. This is the heart of the Gospel: Christ has won for us what we could never achieve. Therefore, Jesus calls us to loosen our grip on earthly treasures. Our hearts follow our treasure. When we cling to perishable goods, fear rules us. But when we trust the Father's provision and serve our neighbor in love, our hearts rest secure in Christ. This is not a new law to earn salvation, but the fruit of faith—liberated generosity, flowing from the One who gave everything for us on the cross.

The Master will return unexpectedly. Blessed are the watchful servants whom He finds faithful, giving food to the household at the proper time. The wise manager lives in daily readiness; not in anxious striving, but in joyful stewardship. He knows his Lord is coming soon, yet serves with patience and diligence, trusting that the timing belongs to God.

Let us beware the unfaithful servant who, supposing the Master delayed, beats the others and lives for himself. Yet even here the Gospel shines: our readiness is not perfection, but repentance and faith in the returning Savior who serves us.

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

Tuesday, August 4: Luke 6:32–36 9th Sunday a. Trinity

Our Lord Jesus cuts through our natural self-interest with the sharp edge of His holy Law. We prefer the comfortable circle of reciprocity—loving the lovable, doing good to those who return the favor. Yet this is no better than the way of the world. The Law exposes our selfish hearts and calls us higher. "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful." Here shines the radiant Gospel: our heavenly Father does not love us because we first loved Him. While we were enemies—ungrateful and evil—Christ died for us. In Baptism He has made us sons of the Most High; not by our merit, but by His boundless mercy.

This mercy transforms us. Freed from the burden of earning love, we can now reflect the Father's kindness. Loving enemies is not a new demand to justify ourselves before God—Christ has already done that—but the fruit of faith. In daily life, it means forgiving the unforgivable, helping the undeserving, and showing compassion without calculation.

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

Wednesday, September 2: James 2:14–26 13th S. a. Trinity

James in his epistle continues the thought that Moses gave us yesterday. Faith without works is dead. A heart unconcerned for its fellowman is a wicked heart. One cannot say he has faith if he is unconcerned about his neighbor. For faith, by the inworking of the Holy Ghost, creates this desire to help one's neighbor. Faith produces works. It produces works of love for our neighbors. It produces works of caring for the needy. A heart of faith will readily do good, because that is its very nature.

It will not seek the praise of men when doing works. It will not keep a tab on how these works are viewed by other people, or a record of what it has done. The works flow naturally on account of the faith gifted by the Holy Ghost, for it is the Holy Ghost that works in us.

Such a heart was in our Lord Jesus. He came down from heaven and took upon Himself our flesh so that He might redeem us from sin and death. He did it by offering His own life. Our life was precious to Him. Moses and James are telling us to have the same heart that was in Christ Jesus; He trusted perfectly in His Father. Let us cling to Him in repentant faith, and with a cheerful heart love our neighbor as Christ has loved us.

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.

There are some who use the plight of the poor for their own political advantage. It is often done to extort money from the citizenry. More taxes are needed for more government programs. They say this is the compassionate thing to do. Are we to help the poor? By all means! However, care for the poor is not something that should be wrung from people under the guise of governmental compassion. It is to be done cheerfully and willingly, from a heart truly concerned for one's fellowman.

The point Moses is making in today's reading is that one should be concerned about how one's own heart views the poor. If one does not have concern for the poor, he should examine his own heart. Moses warns against having "a wicked thought in your heart." The Hebrew word literally means "worthless." A worthless heart is one that is only concerned about itself. The politician decrying the plight of the poor is often more worried about his vote count, not the poor. Our Lord God would rather have us freely change our hearts, by the help of the Holy Ghost, so that we desire to care for others willingly. This is the same heart that is in our Lord God, for He willingly does all for us poor sinners. He concerns Himself with our welfare, even to the point of offering up His own life for us.

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.

In our text Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of religious showmanship. Outward piety that devours widows' houses while seeking honor from men is empty. The Law reveals our own temptation to appear righteous before others while our hearts remain self-serving.

Then Jesus sits opposite the treasury and watches. Many rich people give large sums out of their abundance. But a poor widow comes and drops in two small copper coins—everything she had; all she had to live on. "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them." This is not a call to sacrificial giving as a means of earning favor with God. Such a reading would turn the Gospel into Law. Rather, the widow points us to Christ. He gave everything—His very life—for us who were destitute in sin. On the cross, Jesus offered and poured out Himself on our behalf, becoming sin so that we might become the righteousness of God.

Those redeemed by His total gift are freed to give generously—not to impress, but in faith. Whether little or much, our tithes, offerings, service, and love flow from hearts trusting the Father's provision. May we, like the widow, give ourselves wholly to the One who gave all for us.

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

Thursday, August 6: John 5:39–47 9th Sunday a. Trinity

The first two verses of today's text present piercing words with which Jesus confronts the religious leaders, and us. The Scriptures are not an end in themselves. The Law and the Prophets, Moses and the Psalms, all testify of Him. To study them apart from Christ is to miss their very heart.

The Law accuses: "There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me." Natural 'religion' seeks glory from idols and clings to self-righteousness. We search the Bible for rules to master or promises to claim, yet refuse the Giver of life. How often do we prefer teachers who come in their own name?

But the Gospel breaks through. Jesus has come in His Father's name. He does not receive glory from men, but gives eternal life freely to all who come to Him. The entire Scriptures point to this crucified and risen Lord, who bore the accusation of the Law in our place. Let us not merely search the pages, but come to Jesus, the living Word. In Him alone is life—full and free. May the Holy Spirit open our hearts to receive Him through the very Scriptures that testify of His glory.

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

Monday, August 31: Leviticus 18:1–5 13th Sunday a. Trinity

In this eighteenth chapter of Leviticus, the phrase, "I am the Lord your God" is used three times. Once at the beginning, once at the end, and then again at the end of today's reading, in verse 5. In addition, the phrase, "I am the Lord" is used three other times throughout this chapter. This is used to indicate that what the Lord is saying should be given the hearer's full attention. The sexual sins in this chapter are abominable to the Lord God. Indeed, the Lord states in verse 24 that these sins, which are committed by the Canaanites, are the reason they will be driven out by Israel.

The people of Israel will also become defiled if they commit these same sins. The Lord casts out such people from His presence. He used His name six times in this chapter to indicate this is the case. As the reading for today says, if a man keeps His statutes and His judgments, he shall live by them. This is done only through the help of the Holy Ghost, on account of faith in the One who obeyed the Law perfectly. As the Gospel from yesterday showed, mankind cannot keep the Law perfectly. He needs the One who fulfills that Law on his behalf. That Mediator, that Good Samaritan, is found in the Lord Jesus. He is the One who cleanses and heals us from our defilement and sin.

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.

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

Friday, August 7: Luke 12:54–59 9th Sunday a. Trinity

Jesus rebukes the crowd's spiritual blindness. We, like those in our text, read weather signs and daily news, yet miss the urgent signs of the kingdom: the Messiah has come, repentance is proclaimed, and judgment draws near.

The Law presses urgently: "Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way." We stand accused before the holy God. Our sins demand payment to the last penny. No excuses, no delay—reconciliation must happen now, before the door shuts.

Yet in Christ, the Gospel rings clear. Jesus is the One who settled our case on the cross. He took our place before the Judge, paid our debt in full with His precious blood, and reconciled us to the Father. There is no prison left for those who flee to Him in faith.

Let us interpret this present time rightly. Repent and believe the Good News. The Savior who bore God's wrath now offers peace. Settle with Him today—He has already settled everything for you. Walk in the freedom of forgiven sinners, eager for His return.

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

Saturday, August 8: Luke 16:10–13 9th Sunday a. Trinity

"One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much."

Our Lord teaches us the principle of stewardship. Faithfulness matters in the small, everyday things of life—our time, words, possessions, and duties. God entrusts us with earthly goods not as owners, but as managers accountable to Him.

Yet Jesus presses deeper: "If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?" The Law exposes our divided hearts. We cannot serve both God and money. Mammon demands ultimate loyalty, promising security and joy it cannot deliver. Our natural covetousness makes us unfaithful stewards, hoarding for self while neglecting neighbor and God.

Here the Gospel liberates us. Christ, the faithful Servant, became poor for our sake. He managed His life perfectly—obedient even unto death on the cross—earning true riches: forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life, which He freely gives to us by grace through faith. In Him, we are no longer slaves to mammon but joyful sons and daughters of the Father. Therefore, use earthly wealth wisely: to support the Gospel, relieve the needy, and provide for your household. Let faithfulness flow from gratitude, not fear. "You cannot serve God and money"—but in Christ, you are freed to serve God alone.

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

Saturday, August 29: Mark 6:17–29 Beheading of John the Baptist

John the Baptist was the faithful Forerunner of our Lord Jesus Christ. He preached fearlessly to the people of his day to repent of their sins and to be baptized. He explicitly pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

He was also faithful in preaching against Herod, even though it might (and eventually did) cost him his life. Herod had taken his brother Philip's wife, Herodias, and John had told Herod that marrying his brother's wife was wrong. Herodias and her daughter, understanding Herod's weakness, manipulated him into promising to execute John the Baptist.

John could have relented; he could have soft-pedaled preaching the Law so as not to anger or offend Herod or his court. But if he had done so, he would not have been faithful to the calling that his Lord had given him. And if he had shirked his duty in that way, he would not have been testifying, as previous prophets had, that as believers we are aliens and strangers here. His life was to show that our hope is not to have an easy and comfortable life on earth, but a blessed everlasting life together with our Lord and Savior. May God give us the same courage if we are tested in the same way John was.

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

Friday, August 28: Matthew 9:27–35 12th Sunday a. Trinity

Jesus performed many miracles of healing during His earthly ministry. He restored sight to the blind, He made the deaf hear, and He restored speech to the mute. Despite seeing these miracles with their own eyes, many who were eyewitnesses of these miracles refused to believe that Jesus was who He said He was; specifically, the Son of God. Despite His warning not to talk about it, two blind men that Jesus healed were so excited they could not keep silent, and the news spread.

In the second miracle recorded in our reading for today, Jesus even casts out a demon. The multitudes who observed it understood that it was a case of demonic possession, and so did the Pharisees. But the Pharisees insisted that Jesus was only able to do this by the "ruler of demons," that is, Satan.

This is a very sad reminder to us that we need God's help, through the Holy Spirit, to properly see and understand His grace and mercy. Thanks be to the Lord, He has promised that His Holy Spirit will work through His Word! May we be counted with the blind men who called upon their Lord as the "Son of David" and believed that He had the power to heal them, and not with the Pharisees, who saw Jesus doing great miracles out of compassion and despised Him for it.

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.

Lesson from the Book of Concord
The Tenth Sunday after Trinity

Of Chapters and Cloisters.

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

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

—Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article III

Monday, August 10: John 12:24–26 St. Laurence

Jesus, our grain of wheat, was born without sin. He lived a perfectly righteous life of love toward His heavenly Father and toward us. However, if He had never suffered and died, then He alone would have eternal life, and we would have perished. However, the Grain of wheat was planted so that it might produce much grain. Through his perfect life, suffering, and death He secured the price of atonement for the world's sin. Through faith in Him we receive His righteousness and eternal life.

Now that we have been saved by Him, we, too, will follow Jesus and live a life of service to others. We are not to love this earthly life with an inordinate attachment to its happiness and treasures. 1 Corinthians 7:29-31: "But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away."

We use God's earthly gifts, but our attention and attachment are directed toward our Savior and His gift of eternal life. Similarly, we use earthly blessings and spiritual gifts not for ourselves alone, but in service to our neighbor. 1 Corinthians 12:7 says that our gifts are "for the profit of all."

Collect: Quench in us, we beseech Thee, O Lord, the flame of vice, even as Thou didst enable blessed Laurence to overcome his fire of sufferings; through our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Thursday, August 27: Isaiah 35:5–10 12th Sunday a. Trinity

These verses for today's devotion immediately follow this statement from the Prophet Isaiah: "Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you." We might be tempted to think that the verses of our devotion are some kind of poetic statement since they seem so fantastic. Can the blind see? Can the deaf hear? Can the lame leap? And can the mute sing?

Yet our Lord made these very things happen during His earthly ministry. And when John the Baptist's disciples come to Jesus to ask if He is really the Messiah (Matthew 11), He cites the words of these verses to indicate that He is indeed the Coming One, as John himself had testified on numerous occasions.

Our Lord's miracles were signs to indicate that He was—and still is, and forever shall be—the Son of God. God made many promises to His people, to help them recognize who the Messiah would be when He came to them. He fulfilled those promises to them in Christ, and we can trust in Him to fulfill His promises to us. The most important promise God makes to us is to forgive the sins of those who repent and trust in Him to forgive those sins, for the sake of Christ.

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.

Tuesday, August 11: Jeremiah 7:1–7 10th Sunday a. Trinity

The Prophet Jeremiah had repeatedly sought to bring the people to repentance for their sinful wickedness. Prior to his forced removal to Egypt, Jeremiah prophesied these words against Israel in a final attempt to turn them from their sin. They thought that they could continue to live sinful and wicked lives while appeasing God by their church attendance and sacrifices. They trusted in the presence of God's Temple in Jerusalem for the assurance that they would not be overcome by their enemies. The previous sentence almost sounds correct—speaking of trust and God's Temple—but it is not.

Similarly, you might hear pastors say that we ought to trust in our Baptism. That is right and good—we should! However, Holy Baptism is water and the Word. The promises of God connected with Baptism are "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). We do not intentionally continue to sin while trusting that our Baptism will save us. That is not really trusting in Baptism. Baptism does not give permission to sin. Baptism presents the words of gospel forgiveness for the repentant. When the Law points out our sin, we don't say, "I don't need to repent, I'm baptized." Instead, we say, "I'm sorry for my sin. I'm baptized. I trust in God's promise to forgive my sin in Holy Baptism."

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

Wednesday, August 26: Isaiah 29:18–24 12th S. a. Trinity

For some, it is a trendy thing to speak of an "Old Testament God" who is all wrath and judgment, and oppose that idea to a "New Testament God" who is exclusively loving and gracious. But this view of God is incorrect. God promises and demonstrates His grace and mercy extensively in the Old Testament; and He also expresses His wrath in the New Testament, such as when Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem.

In these verses from the Prophet Isaiah, God promises restoration to His people—not because they deserve it, but because God is merciful and gracious. Israel, as a nation, had sinned, but God still loved His people. Through His Word, God clearly recognizes and condemns the sin of Israel. So it is for us—we too have sinned, but through the life and death of His Son, Jesus Christ, God satisfied His justice. He creates faith in His people so that we can receive His forgiveness. He forgave the sins of His people Israel, not because they deserved mercy, but because He Himself is merciful. He forgives our sins for His own sake, in the same way and for the same reason. Not even the normal limitations of being deaf or being blind will be enough to prevent God from causing people to hear, and to see, and to experience His mercy upon them.

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.

Wednesday, August 12: 1 Corinthians 3:11–17 10th S. a. Trinity

Through the preaching of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, St. Paul brought the Corinthian congregation into existence. He used the Law to expose their false trust and idolatry. Then Paul laid a new foundation, which is faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. When we say that Jesus Christ is the foundation, we mean that the teachings of the holy Christian Church has justification through faith in Jesus Christ alone as its central teaching. The communion of saints is those who are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

After St. Paul, there were others in the pastoral office who led the Corinthian congregation. Of course, these ministers didn't lay a new foundation. If it is the Christian Church, then there can be no other foundation than Jesus Christ. So ministers build on the 'already-having-been-laid' foundation. True teachings built on (consistent with) justification by grace through faith alone will be upheld on the Last Day. Those teachings which are not will be burned up.

Both corporately and individually, believers in Christ are called "the temple of God." The Holy Spirit dwells in the Church and in individual believers in order to declare and make them holy. A minister who does not build on Christ, but drives out the Holy Spirit through teachings of another foundation, will be destroyed.

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

Tuesday, August 25: Isaiah 38:9–22 12th Sunday a. Trinity

God does not always explain His reasoning to His creatures. Hezekiah was a righteous king of Judah; one of the best, if not *the* best, to follow in David's line. And yet God told him that he would die young. However, Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, and God granted him an extra fifteen years of life. These verses are the prayer of thanksgiving that Hezekiah sang when God cured him of his illness.

Hezekiah would indeed live another fifteen years, but even with the extra fifteen years, he died relatively young. We might think, what could a man like Hezekiah have done with another twenty years? Yet we must remember that our times are in God's hands; He will call us to Himself when He is ready to do so. The hope that we have as believers in Christ is not necessarily for a long and easy life, but for a life faithful to the callings that God has given us, for as long as God grants us time to live. Hezekiah spent his time re-establishing the worship of the True God, and eliminating superstition. Hezekiah's recovery is also a powerful lesson for us in the power of prayer—because God did hear Hezekiah's prayer and granted him fifteen more years. May we fill our days with time well-spent in service to God and to each other.

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.

Monday, August 24: Luke 22:24–30 St. Bartholomew

When we think of the Apostles, which names are we most likely to remember? Paul, certainly. Probably Peter, and also John. Matthew, perhaps, who was also an Evangelist. Bartholomew, though, is less well-known. Scripture does not say as much about what he said and did as it does some of these other Apostles. Bartholomew did not write a book of the New Testament that bears his name.

Yet, St. Bartholomew is greatly honored. He is one of the Twelve, whom Jesus chose to become His disciples and His Apostles, to preach the Good News about life and the forgiveness of sins in His name to the whole world. Like the other Apostles, Bartholomew was called to travel through the world, preaching repentance and salvation in the name of Jesus Christ. In worldly terms, we would probably not say that he is the greatest of the Apostles. God does not always call Christians to be the greatest or the best known; in fact, in these very verses He says that we should *serve* each other. He also calls us to be faithful to the callings that He gives us, and to trust Him to care about the results. Bartholomew was faithful to His Lord, to the point of death, and as such we can learn from his example.

Collect: O Almighty God, who hast built Thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Head Cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine that we may be made a holy temple acceptable unto Thee; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Thursday, August 13: Matthew 23:34–39 10th S. a. Trinity

Yesterday's devotion ended with the warning that "if anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him." You would think that warning would lead God's people to reject false prophets and listen to those true prophets who teach faith in Jesus Christ. Yet in today's reading, Jesus says that He sent them true "prophets, wise men, and scribes," but they did not listen to them. God was trying to gather people into His holy Christian Church, but they were not willing. They rejected these true prophets, and even treated them poorly.

Yesterday, St. Paul spoke of the reward and punishment for the ministers—both himself and other pastors. Today, Jesus speaks of the rewards and punishments for the hearers. Those who believe the true teaching from true ministers will be saved. Those who reject the true teachings from true ministers will not be saved. In another place Jesus says, "He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me" (Luke 10:16). There are only two options. For those who don't receive Jesus, He says, "Your house is left to you desolate." You don't have Christ's righteousness or the Holy Spirit. For those who are gathered through faith in Christ, they will welcome Jesus' coming and say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"

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

Friday, August 14: Lamentations 1:1–12 10th S. a. Trinity

Lamentations 1:8 says, "Jerusalem has sinned gravely." The context for these Biblical laments which speak about the destruction of Jerusalem is most surely the rejection of God's Son. The Father sent His beloved Son, but the religious leaders of the nation rejected Him and had Him crucified. Because of their sin against the love of the heavenly Father, the city will be destroyed. After several years of mercy, in which God tried to convert His people to the Savior, the city was destroyed in 70 A.D.

The expression of a lamentation does not yet let us know if there is repentance and a return to God or not. In verse 12 it says, "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow…" It could be a groaning simply over the punishment. Or it could be an expression of godly contrition and sorrow over sin.

On account of the Lord's mercy, God is calling us to return to "the pleasant things" and "the things of old." That return is through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. The Father inflicted His Son "in the day of His fierce anger," so that we might be set free from the punishment for our sin. 2 Corinthians 7:9-10: "Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance… For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death."

Collect: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy Commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. 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

Saturday, August 22: Philippians 1:19–30 11th S. a. Trinity

How poignant are these words of St Paul. "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you."

Many before us have faced, and many after us will face, the crossroads of death. At the time of this writing, my daughter with three young children is at such a crossroad. As a strong believer in Christ, she knows with all certainty where her eternal future lies. As a sufferer from cancer, she longs for her physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual struggles to end. But as a mother of three, she agonizes over her children's future. This is a time of great agony for all involved. Even the most devout of Christians struggle under such weight, as did St Paul. But it is also a time for trust in God's loving and mighty hand. Only He knows how such a drama should unfold, and therefore we pray that His will be done and that all His elect sheep be shepherded into His fold.

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.

Saturday, August 15: Luke 1:41–50 St. Mary Theotokos

When the angel told Mary that her elderly cousin was in her sixth month of pregnancy, she took that opportunity to visit Elizabeth and assist her. Through the 'preaching', or rather leaping, of John the Baptist in her womb, Elizabeth was informed of the presence of the likewise unborn Savior so that she rejoiced in this gracious gift from God.

First of all, Elizabeth recognizes that she is unworthy of this visit, as can be seen by her rhetorical question, "But why is this granted to me?" She knows that there is nothing within her which would merit this gracious visitation. Second, Elizabeth correctly praises Mary because of the undeserved gift which was given to her to become the mother of the Savior. Mary is the *Theotokos*—the God-bearer. Third, Elizabeth praises Jesus as the "blessed…fruit of your womb." Jesus is the Blessed One, sent to take away the sins of the world; "Holy is His name."

St. Mary's response to Elizabeth's words is found in the Magnificat. She rejoices in the Lord and gives Him all the credit and praise. When someone preaches Jesus, your Savior, to you, you become blessed through faith in His unmerited forgiveness.

Collect: Almighty God, who didst show favor to the Blessed Virgin Mary, granting unto her to be the mother of Thine only-begotten Son, we beseech Thee that Thou wouldst grant humility and faithfulness unto Thy Church to glorify Thee in the fulfillment of our labors, that we who have been saved by grace through faith in Thy Son might remain steadfast unto the end; through Jesus Christ, 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

There seems to be a competitive nature buried within all of us. Everybody wants to be better than the next guy. Drastically different is the picture of Biblical greatness. To be great as far as Jesus is concerned means to be a servant. This servant attitude should characterize all of our Christian life. To have any other attitude is to be unworthy of the Kingdom of God. And so, if we adopt a worldly view of greatness and success, we will never truly be great.

We gravitate to the 'joy' and 'love' sides of Christianity. We like to skirt the issues of suffering, persecution, and especially death. Many of the so-called churches today do a very good job of avoiding the implications of the cross. But Jesus makes clear to His disciples, and to us, that there's no glory without the cross. No cross, no crown.

Thus we are called to serve, and if necessary, to suffer. As Christ's Bride, the Church, we join Him in His own life and death. Jesus allowed Himself to be given over into the hands of men to be killed and rise again. The Greatest became the least so that the least might become great. Jesus Christ had no love for vain glory; rather, He has a glorious love—a love that gave His own life for the redemption of all.

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. Amen.

Thursday, August 20: 1 Thessalonians 5:14–24 11th S. a. Trinity

With a sense of urgency, St Paul gives eight commands to his readers in just seven verses. Note these are not his own ideas, but are "God's will for you in Christ Jesus." As we read the list, we can see they are roughly divided into two groups, one of attitude and one of action. In the first group, we are told to "rejoice always" and "in everything give thanks." These words are easily understood when life is happy and easy, but very difficult to understand and believe during life's darker moments.

But Scripture affirms what life's faith lessons teach us. During difficult times, we are drawn closer to God (Romans 5:3-5). Our faith is sharpened and refined (1 Peter 1:7). We can also use such experiences to share the hope we have (1 Peter 3:13-15). Because of such positive results, we can be assured that we'll never be separated from our God (Romans 8:39). By our "praying without ceasing," we can, like the psalmist, bring all our thoughts and emotions before the throne of God, knowing He will use all of life's circumstances for our eternal good.

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.

Monday, August 17: Mark 2:13–17 11th Sunday a. Trinity

Jesus is in the process of choosing His disciples. We see that He has a choice between two very distinct groups. On the one hand, there is Matthew, a tax collector, a 'Jew turned ally of Rome.' On the other hand, there are the Pharisees. They are serious and strict men who have spent years studying the Scriptures. If Jesus selects a Pharisee, He has a man who is already disciplined, schooled, and confident. But Jesus goes by the qualifications of Scripture, not of man. He judges the requirement for discipleship by the clear words of Psalm 34: "The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit" (v. 18). And Psalm 51: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (v. 17).

When the text says Jesus "saw" Levi (Matthew), this means much more than when you and I "see" someone. We only see the outside; we judge from what we can visibly see. But when Jesus "sees" a man, He sees infinitely more—right down to the core. His eyes pierce into a man's struggling soul and He effectively says: "Follow Me, for I've come to save you from yourself. From now on, I'll no longer call you sinner, but saint."

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. Amen.

We often look for some cause—something or someone—to blame for various afflictions. Consider how we look at causes and effects in our daily lives. "His car ran off the road; he must've been drinking." Our minds play these games all the time, which is what Jesus' disciples did in today's text. "And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'" This man is blind, therefore he 'must' be guilty of some sin, or at least his parents were guilty. Why else would God let this happen to him?

But we must avoid attempting to explain what God has not chosen to reveal. We do know that all suffering is ultimately caused by sin, either directly or indirectly. In the case of the man born blind, Jesus affirms the man was not directly responsible for his condition. He was merely a descendant—an inheritor—of Adam's sinful flesh. But Jesus would use this man's condition for God's greater good. "Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.'" Jesus can turn any situation into something God-pleasing. In fact, He took the greatest evil—death on a cross—to pay for the world's sin.

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.

If ever there was someone who accepts people for who they are, it is Jesus. He is truly inclusive. He ate with tax collectors and conversed freely with all sorts of 'questionable' people. That attitude stands in contrast with Simon the Pharisee, who appears to have had his own agenda. He appears embarrassed by the presence of the woman who had "lived a sinful life." As she demonstrates her response to Jesus' acceptance, Simon concludes that Jesus has flunked the test before Him. After all, "if this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching Him and what kind of woman she is."

But Jesus came not to win the favor of Simon or any other, but to do God's will—to seek and save the lost. Simon had invited Jesus, but only the "sinful" woman understood the benefit of Jesus' presence. Jesus came not to condemn the world, but to save the world (John 3:17). He came to love and forgive. Her sins were forgiven not because she lavishly poured oil on Jesus' feet, but because, as Jesus said, "your faith has saved you."

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.