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

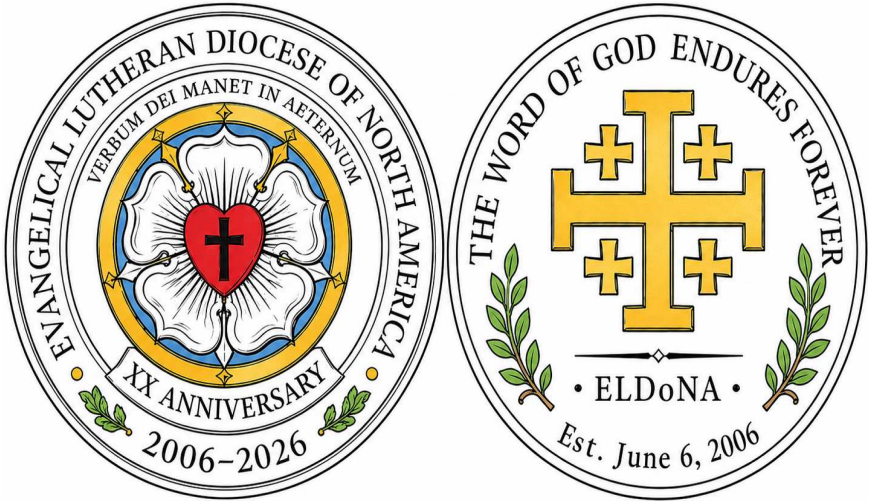
Rev. Dcn. Gary Harroun
Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

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



October 5–31, 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.

October 4	Trinity 18	ASBH 56
October 11	Trinity 19	ASBH 57
October 17 (S)	St. Ignatius of Antioch, Martyr	ASBH 104
October 18	Trinity 20/St. Luke, Evangelist	ASBH 58/105
October 25	Trinity 21/Reformation	ASBH 59
October 28 (W)	St. Simon & St. Jude, Apostles	ASBH 106
October 31 (S)	Festival of the Reformation	ASBH 107

St. Ignatius Lutheran Seminary

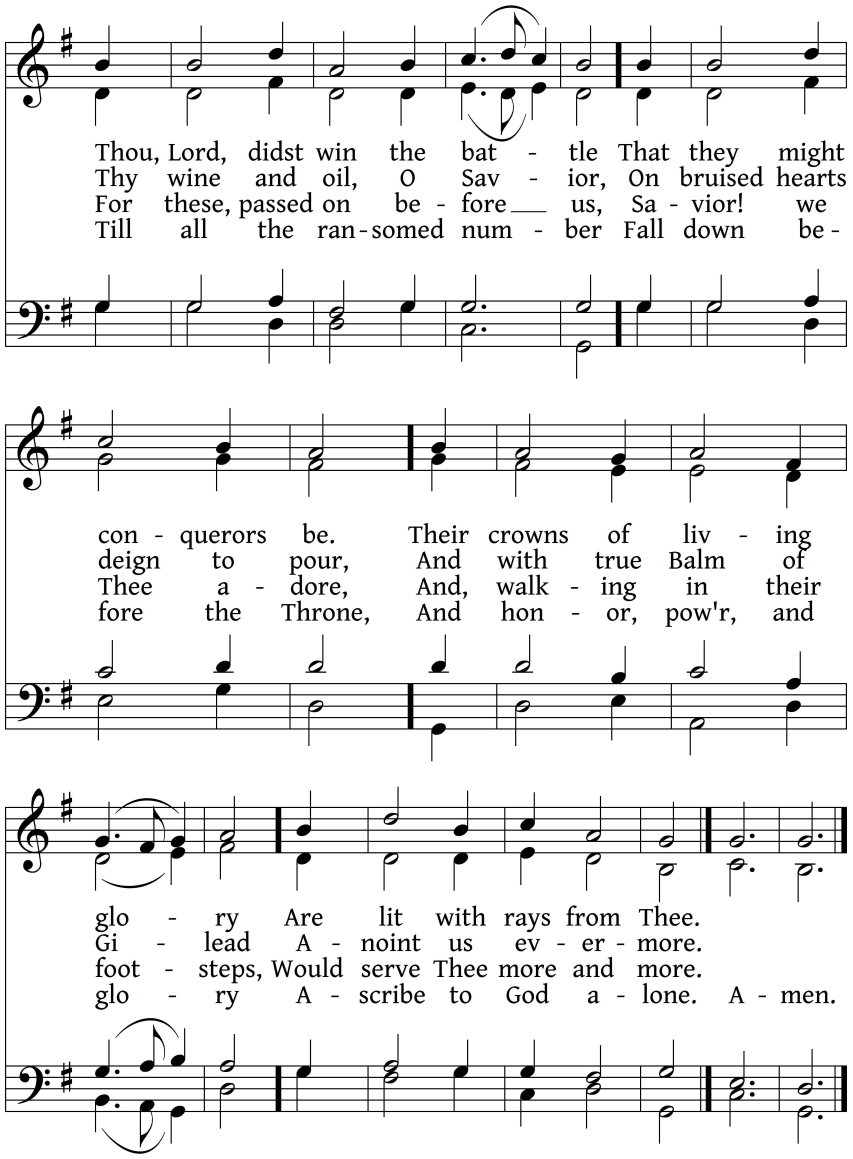
The Fall Quarter of Year Three of the St. Ignatius calendar began on Monday, September 7. The Fall Quarter is as follows:

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).

Visitation Schedule

Bishop Heiser has completed his vistations of half the diocese; visitations will continue in October and November. His visitation of Pastor Henson, Deacon Harroun and Trinity Lutheran Church (Herrin, IL) is October 4, and of Dcn. Smithey and St. James Lutheran Mission (Knoxville, TN) is October 5.

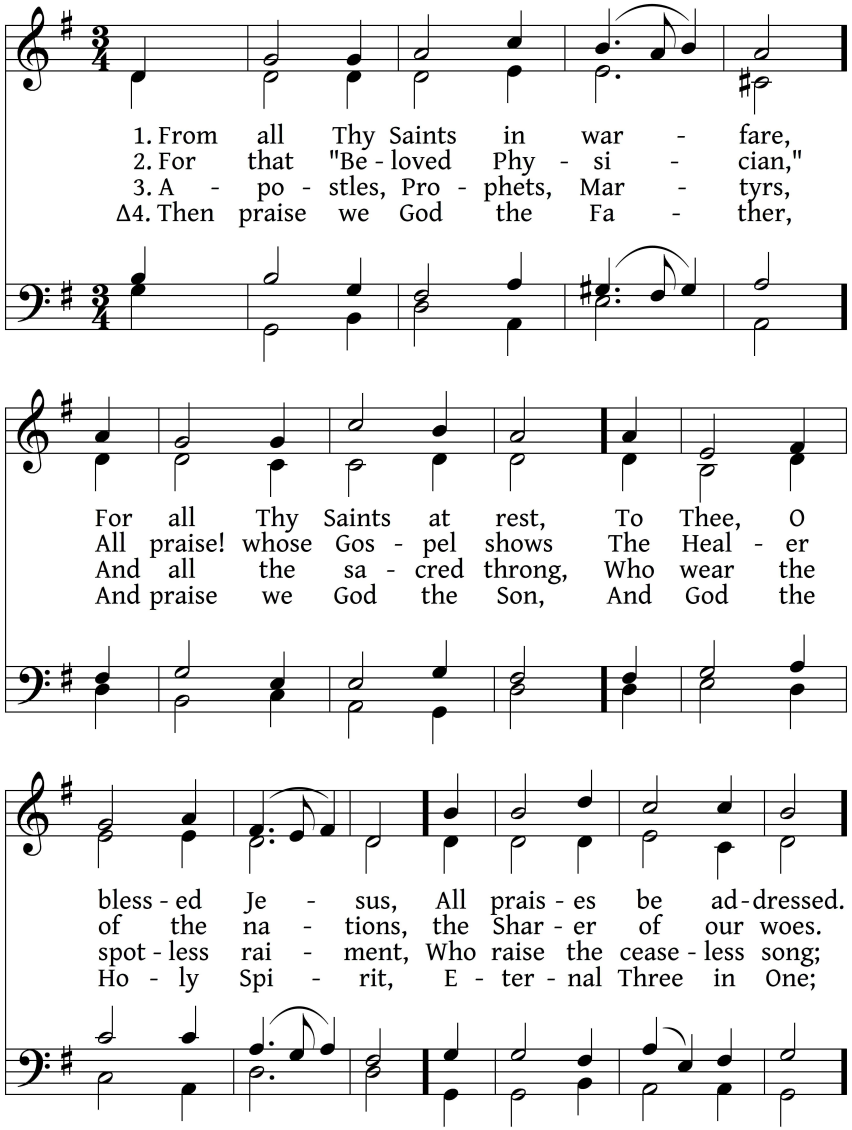


Festival of St. Luke

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

The Sarum Hymnal, 1868

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



Lesson from the Book of Concord
The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity

Chapter V. Of the Law and the Gospel.
Statement of the Controversy.

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

Affirmative.

Pure Doctrine of God's Word.

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

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

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

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

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

6. But if the Law and the Gospel be contrasted with one another, as Moses himself is called a teacher of the Law, and Christ a preacher of the Gospel, we believe, teach and confess that the Gospel is not a preaching of repentance or reproof, but properly nothing else than a preaching of

consolation, and a joyful message which does not reprove or terrify, but against the terrors of the Law consoles consciences, points alone to the merits of Christ, and again comforts them by the precious preaching of the grace and favor of God, obtained through Christ's merit.

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

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

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

Negative.

Contrary Doctrine which is Rejected.

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

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome

Johannes Bugenhagen preached the sermon at Luther's funeral. He referred to Luther as the "angel flying in the midst of heaven" and preaching "the everlasting gospel" to the world. In one sense, this passage is about Luther. The word "angel" means *messenger*. Luther was certainly a messenger of the Gospel. The angel represents all those who have preached or taught the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the New Testament age.

The message of God's Law and God's Gospel is the message that all men need to hear. It is the message that all men need until the very end of the world. The Church's messengers must preach this pure Gospel to the world in every generation. When this pure Gospel is covered and hidden under false doctrine, God's faithful messengers must clearly denounce the lies and distortions. Both the office of the messenger and the everlasting message are established by God, and will endure until the return of our Lord. The Lutheran Reformation was not just an accident of history. God purposefully ordains men and events to bring His "everlasting gospel… to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people."

Collect: Almighty God, merciful Father, who madest the light to shine out of darkness, we thank Thee that Thou hast shown mercy unto us and our fathers, and by means of Thy servant Martin Luther hast restored the pure light of Thy Gospel: Keep us, we beseech Thee, in sound doctrine, that we may steadfastly believe and worthily follow Thy saving Word, and finally, by its holy comfort, depart in peace and joy; 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, October 30: Isaiah 30:15–19 21st Sunday a. Trinity

Various types of Christian triumphalism have plagued the Church throughout the centuries. The ushering in of the 'millennial kingdom' through human efforts has always been a temptation for men. We often think that if we are just a little more pious, or if we can rid the world of the impious, the kingdom of God is just around the corner. But this never works.

God says, "In returning and rest you shall be saved." "Returning" is repentance, returning to the grace of our baptism, returning to the Lord's Word of promise. "Rest" is grace. God does the work for us. We cannot attain the kingdom of God by our efforts. Zealousness is not the way to God. Repentant receiving of His gifts is the way to the kingdom.

Our sinful flesh doesn't like being patient and quiet. We don't like to admit it is hopeless and there is nothing we can do to fix the world. We always have a plan, a technique, a seven-step program. God tells us that we will accomplish nothing unless we rely on Him and wait on His time. What God ordains is always best. If it is ordained for us to act, God will have us act. If it is ordained for us to wait quietly, we pray and trust. God will bring about His victory in His time.

Collect: Lord, we beseech Thee to keep Thy household, the Church, in continual godliness; that through Thy protection it may be free from all adversities and devoutly given to serve Thee in good works, to the glory of Thy Name; 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, October 5: John 15:1–17 18th Sunday a. Trinity

Christians are called by Christ to bear fruit. The bearing of fruit—good works—is not optional. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Ephesians 2:10). But we can easily forget how this happens. Jesus makes this quite clear in Matthew 3:8, "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance." Because we are baptized into Christ, each of us becomes a branch of Christ. As baptized Christians we are to remember Baptism's significance: It signifies that the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts. So as with faith itself, God works through the Holy Spirit as He "prunes" us, by bringing us to repent of our sins.

So now what? After you have repented, you might be wondering, "Where are the good works I am supposed to do?" Such concern is a good thing. It is a sign that God is at work in you. However, His answer may surprise you: "Live your life." Forgiven by Christ, your life is able to be "good". Many things in our Christian lives are accomplished when we are unaware of the good works, the "fruits worthy of repentance." Holding the hand of a sick relative, giving a drink to a toddler, a mother making dinner, all these seemingly ordinary tasks are extraordinary in the sight of God when they are the result of faith lived out in the forgiveness of sins.

Collect: O God, forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee, mercifully grant that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; 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, October 6: Deuteronomy 10:12–21 18th S. a. Trinity

As God's people we are "to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him." When Luther wrote his explanations to the Ten Commandments, of the First Commandment he wrote, "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." Every explanation to follow begins with, "We should fear and love God…" Keeping the Commandments is what God requires, and we are to do so out of fear and love toward Him. Yet, the very Commandments He requires us to keep, we do not.

It's not as though God doesn't know that. Out of His boundless grace, that which God requires of us He also gives to us in Christ. Christ fears, loves, and trusts in God the Father, *His* Father, above all things, even unto death on the Cross. His life becomes your life through Holy Baptism, as does His death to sin becomes your death to sin. His Spirit, given you in Holy Baptism, leads you to "walk in all His ways," that is, He leads you to repent of your sins and trust in His forgiveness. This is what separates Christianity from the religions of the world. They would have you fear, love, and trust in yourself to be good enough. God gives you everything you need for eternal life in Christ. "He is your praise, and He is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen."

Collect: O God, forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee, mercifully grant that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; 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, October 29: 2 Chronicles 29:1–11 21st S. a. Trinity

Hezekiah was the godly son of the godless Ahaz. Ahaz had led Judah into sin and corruption. Hezekiah rooted out the idolatry that was allowed to flourish under his father, and he restored adherence and devotion to the Word of God.

The first thing Hezekiah did was to clean up and reform the worship of the temple. It was the house of the Lord, the place of His dwelling. This is like the altar and font in our churches, the place of God's dwelling. Worship and doctrine are closely connected. The Lutheran reform of doctrine came with reform of worship. For example, the elimination of Eucharistic prayers corresponded to the Lutheran understanding of the mass as God's service to us, rather than a re-sacrificing or re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice to God. Liturgics should be in harmony with doctrine. One should worship the way one believes. Lutherans believe in maintaining liturgical traditions that do not contradict God's Word, but eliminating anti-scriptural accretions. For example, burning incense was part of the temple worship. It was also a long-standing tradition in the Church, so we continue to burn incense in worship. But when the Medieval church began to deviate from the Lord's command to eat and drink during the Lord's Supper, the Lutherans restored the chalice to the laity. Our Lord said "take, eat" and "take, drink." We have no right to change His commands.

Collect: Lord, we beseech Thee to keep Thy household, the Church, in continual godliness; that through Thy protection it may be free from all adversities and devoutly given to serve Thee in good works, to the glory of Thy Name; 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, October 28: John 15:17–21 Sts. Simon & Jude

The world is divided into believers and unbelievers. This is the most significant category distinction. There are many category distinctions, but this is the most important, because being in Jesus separates us out from the world. We are snatched out of the world by Jesus. It's as if we were living among spiritual zombies and Jesus came and changed us fundamentally, so that even though we looked like everyone else, we are completely different.

We should expect to be hated, ostracized, and excluded because we are different; we are an indictment to others. Our existence points a finger at the unbeliever's sin. We don't have to actively address his sin. Our existence, by definition, points to the unbeliever's alienation from God. The more of Jesus they see in us, the more they will hate us. And this also applies to doctrine. Jesus' "word" is His doctrine, His teaching. They hate His doctrine because they hate Him. Our "word," the Church's "word," is His doctrine.

The world will hate our/His doctrine, and not keep it, because it is one with Him. They cannot love the doctrine of the One they do not know and, in fact, hate. We, however, show that we love Him and belong to Him when we keep His doctrine.

Collect: O Almighty God, who has 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.

Wednesday, October 7: Deu. 30:11–20 18th S. a. Trinity

So here we are, some twenty chapters later in the book of Deuteronomy and what do we hear from God but the same message. He clearly expounds His perfect Law, as well as His perfect Gospel. He sets before the people "life and good" vs. "death and evil." Follow His ways and you live, do not follow them, and you will die.

Since the fall into sin, God's message has not changed. Whether throughout the text of Deuteronomy, or throughout the entire Bible, the same message rings out loud and clear. Centuries later and shortly before His Ascension, Jesus made it clear what the Apostles' message should be, that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations. It's the same message!

If the message has been so clear throughout countless generations, who then is to blame for going the wrong way? If God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, where is the problem? The answer is found in sinful man and is not God's fault. God gives faith to "cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days." He is the One who gives the ability "to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments."

Collect: O God, forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee, mercifully grant that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In his epistle, John refers to the people to whom he is writing as "my children." Some are reluctant to call one's pastor "father." A sort of "that's too Roman Catholic" impulse takes over while overlooking how St. John sees the people he cares about.

Pastors have been given a tremendous responsibility by God. "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account" (Hebrews 13:17). Caring for souls is no small matter for a pastor. It is carried out through the application of God's Law and His Gospel. The sticky part, which may be very difficult for the pastor, is when he must apply the Law to open and manifest sinners. The pastor's God-given duty is to speak the truth of God's Law. There is no middle ground to be had, lest the pastor becomes "lukewarm" in dealing with sin, somehow explaining it away rather than confronting the sin. The prayer of the pastor in such situations is that the erring person repents, so that the pastor may bring the Gospel of forgiveness to the repentant sinner.

Pastors hold the same Office of the Holy Ministry as did St. Paul, who wrote, "as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory" (1 Thessalonians 2:11–12).

Collect: O God, forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee, mercifully grant that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

"…so that through them I may test Israel…" God was going to allow various Canaanite tribes to remain in the land in order to chastise Israel for her faithlessness. While there is an aspect of reward and punishment in these actions, God's ultimate purpose was not punishment, but correction.

Peace and safety seem to be breeding grounds for faithlessness. It seems to be a general truth that men who are comfortable don't feel a need for God. Rich men going through needle eyes, and men under pressure are more likely to seek God. At least, this seems to be true among God's children. We are always falling back into sin and corruption. God uses adversity to test us, and bring us to repentance. This has always been the case. Luther knew that men naturally sink back into the mire of their sinful nature without the constant correction of God. Even today, we see Christians falling away while we live in the wealthiest and most comfortable society in the history of the world. We should not be surprised when God sends adversity so that we may be brought back to faithfulness.

God is ultimately merciful. He uses all things to lead us back to Him. Our God isn't a God of legalism. He is a God of mercy.

Collect: Lord, we beseech Thee to keep Thy household, the Church, in continual godliness; that through Thy protection it may be free from all adversities and devoutly given to serve Thee in good works, to the glory of Thy Name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Peter will sin and return to the Lord. It should always be a comfort to us that even Peter fell into grave sin, but also repented and was restored. One can always repent. No matter how far one has fallen, if one listens to the prompting of the Holy Ghost and repents, our heavenly Father is eager to forgive and restore. We are not alone as sinners. Even someone as important as St. Peter fell into sin. But God used him to strengthen the other disciples when he was restored.

Peter is a leader. Jesus said that "Satan has asked for you." "You" here is plural, meaning all the disciples. Then Jesus says that "I have prayed for you." "You" here is singular, meaning Peter. Even though Peter commits a grave sin by denying Jesus three times, he is still restored to leadership, as well as peace with God. Men and churches can fall into grave sin. But they can still be restored through repentance and faith. This happens repeatedly through the history of the Church. It happened especially during the Reformation, when the visible Church had fallen into deep corruption, but was returned to the purity of the Gospel.

Leaders like Martin Luther were also sinners. He admitted that freely. Men are not leaders because they are sinless. The best leaders know their sinfulness and rely on God's grace and forgiveness.

Collect: Lord, we beseech Thee to keep Thy household, the Church, in continual godliness; that through Thy protection it may be free from all adversities and devoutly given to serve Thee in good works, to the glory of Thy Name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Many are familiar with James' words, "Faith without works is dead." Today, James continues that thought by mentioning "good conduct… done in the meekness of wisdom." In today's reading, James would also have us understand that, underlying his desire for Christians to do good works, another problem can be found: pride.

One need only listen to the reason behind why some people help others. Often the sole reason for helping others boils down to, "It makes me feel good." The person's reasoning for helping others was personal, to "feel good." In other words, it was self-seeking. Accompanying "feeling good," there may also be some boasting for self-seeking reasons.

What we as Christians need to understand is that those same wrong feelings accompany our good works. Pride, self-seeking, and "all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). As good as we may think we are, we easily forget who is the real source of the good works we perform: Christ. Our works are only good because God has given us faith to believe that our "filthy rags" are forgiven in and through Christ. "But without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Hebrews 11:6). It is God who has graciously given us faith so that our lives are indeed pleasing to Him.

Collect: O God, forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee, mercifully grant that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; 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, October 10: Proverbs 14:21–31 18th S. a. Trinity

"He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honors Him has mercy on the needy." What we learned from James in yesterday's devotion continues on today. Having "mercy on the needy" wasn't some new idea that James conjured up. It has been the way God would have His people live out their lives because of the forgiveness of sins. Old Testament, New Testament, the message remains the same: "Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful" (Luke 6:36).

Showing mercy can prove to be a tall order, especially when a person hasn't shown mercy to you. We are called upon to love even those who hate us. How in the world are we going to do that? Well, it starts with Christ. We do well to ask ourselves, "Did Christ die for us because we somehow deserved it?" That is hardly the image St. Paul paints in Romans: "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:10).

Christ died for His enemies, for you and for me. Enemies don't deserve what Christ did on the Cross. And yet, He did it! Our merciful God does what no human being can really begin to comprehend, from the unfathomable depth of His mercy. And He continues to show His mercy as His faithful people show mercy to others.

Collect: O God, forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee, mercifully grant that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

neither would the preeminence of man's works be superseded by the mercy of God, if justification, which is wrought through grace, were due to the merits going before, so as to be, not the free gift of a donor, but the reward due to a laborer."

But, although this doctrine is despised by the inexperienced, nevertheless, God-fearing and anxious consciences find by experience that it brings the greatest consolation, because consciences cannot be pacified through any works, but only by faith, when they are sure that, for Christ's sake, they have a gracious God. As Paul teaches [Rom. 5:11]: "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." This whole doctrine is to be referred to that conflict of the terrified conscience; neither can it be understood apart from that conflict. Therefore inexperienced and profane men judge ill concerning this matter, who dream that Christian righteousness is nothing but the civil righteousness of natural reason.

Heretofore consciences were plagued with the doctrine of works, nor did they hear any consolation from the Gospel. Some persons were driven by conscience into the desert, into monasteries, hoping there to merit grace by a monastic life. Some also devised other works whereby to merit grace and make satisfaction for sins. There was very great need to treat of and renew this doctrine of faith in Christ, to the end that anxious consciences should not be without consolation, but that they might know that grace and forgiveness of sins and justification are apprehended by faith in Christ.

Men are also admonished that here the term "faith" doth not signify merely the knowledge of the history, such as in the ungodly and in the devil, but signifieth a faith which believes, not merely the history, but also the effect of the history—namely, this article of the forgiveness of sins, to wit, that we have grace, righteousness, and forgiveness of sins, through Christ.

Now he that knoweth that he has a Father reconciled to him through Christ, since he truly knows God, knows also that God careth for him, and calls upon God; in a word, he is not without God, as the heathen. For devils and the ungodly are not able to believe this article of the forgiveness of sins. Hence, they hate God as an enemy; call not upon Him; and expect no good from Him. Augustine also admonishes his readers concerning the word "faith," and teaches that the term "faith" is accepted in the Scriptures, not for knowledge such as in the ungodly, but for confidence which consoles and encourages the terrified mind.

Furthermore, it is taught on our part, that it is necessary to do good works, not that we should trust to merit grace by them, but because it is the will of God. —The Augsburg Confession, §1–27

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

Article XX.

Our teachers are falsely accused of forbidding Good Works. For their published writings on the Ten Commandments, and others of like import, bear witness that they have taught to good purpose concerning all estates and duties of life, as to what estates of life and what works in every calling be pleasing to God. Concerning these things preachers heretofore taught but little, and urged only childish and needless works, as particular holy days, particular fasts, brotherhoods, pilgrimages, services in honor of saints, the use of rosaries, monasticism, and such like. Since our adversaries have been admonished of these things they are now unlearning them, and do not preach these unprofitable works as heretofore. Besides they begin to mention faith, of which there was heretofore marvellous silence. They teach that we are justified not by works only, but they conjoin faith and works, and say that we are justified by faith and works. This doctrine is more tolerable than the former one, and can afford more consolation than their old doctrine.

Forasmuch, therefore, as the doctrine concerning faith, which ought to be the chief one in the Church, has lain so long unknown, as all must needs grant that there was the deepest silence in their sermons concerning the righteousness of faith, while only the doctrine of works was treated in the churches, our teachers have instructed the churches concerning faith as follows:

First, that our works cannot reconcile God or merit forgiveness of sins, grace and justification, but that we obtain this only by faith, when we believe that we are received into favor for Christ's sake, who alone has been set forth the Mediator and Propitiation [1 Tim. 2:5], in order that the Father may be reconciled through Him. Whoever, therefore, trusts that by works he merits grace, despises the merit and grace of Christ, and seeks a way to God without Christ, by human strength, although Christ said of Himself: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" [John 14:6].

This doctrine concerning faith is everywhere treated by Paul [Eph. 2:8]: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works," etc.

And lest anyone should craftily say that a new interpretation of Paul has been devised by us, this entire matter is supported by the testimonies of the Fathers. For Augustine, in many volumes, defends grace and the righteousness of faith, over against the merits of works. And Ambrose, in his *De Vocatione Gentium*, and elsewhere, teaches to like effect. For in his *De Vocatione Gentium* he says as follows: "Redemption by the Blood of Christ would become of little value,

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Also they teach, that men cannot be Justified before God by their own strength, merits or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, hath made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight. Rom. 3 and 4.

—Augsburg Confession

Monday, October 12: Colossians 3:1–10 19th S. a. Trinity

What "you were raised with Christ" means was explained by St. Paul in the previous chapter of Colossians. He says that we were "buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him" (Colossians 2:12). Baptism, however, is not confined to the past. There is a baptized life that must be lived if we are to keep enjoying its blessings. St. Paul instructs us to "seek those things which are above, where Christ is." This does not mean going up on a mountain to meditate about the divine. Christ has taken the "things above" and brought them down to earth for us to receive; for example, forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and eternal life.

Christ has made pastors the stewards of these gifts, to distribute here on earth in Word and Sacrament. The crowds in yesterday's Gospel were right to marvel. God has not kept forgiveness of sins locked away in heaven. He has given such authority to men! And when we receive the Word and Sacraments, we set our mind on things above.

Those who have been raised with Christ also strive to avoid sin. Whenever they notice in themselves a sinful thought, word, or deed, they ought not give it any space to thrive. They should immediately put it to death by repenting of it, seeking forgiveness for it, and refusing to continue in it. Until Christ appears on the Last Day, this is how the baptized set their minds on things above.

Collect: O almighty and most merciful God, of Thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech Thee, from all things that may hurt us, that we, being ready, both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that Thou wouldst have done; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Saturday, October 24: Acts 13:26-41 20th Sunday a. Trinity

Paul's sermon was addressed to the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles living in Pisidian Antioch (a city in modern day Turkey). He preached how God had fulfilled the Scriptures in sending His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus lived a perfectly righteous life—therefore the Jews in Jerusalem "found no cause for death in Him"—but they crucified Him on a tree, according to the Scriptures. Jesus died and was laid in a tomb; but "God raised Him from the dead." The Father glorified His Son and exalted Him to the right hand. From this place of authority, Jesus distributes the merits of His death and resurrection. Within His Church, He forgives sins and justifies all those who believe in Him.

Everything in this sermon is applicable to us. To us also "the word of this salvation has been sent." For us, God has fulfilled the Scriptures. It doesn't matter where we live, where we grew up, or who our ancestors are. Jesus died and rose again so that "through Him is preached to us the forgiveness of sins and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses."

Just as the promise applies to us, so also does the warning. If we despise Christ like the Jews in Jerusalem did—or even like the Jews in Pisidian Antioch—we will perish. Only through Christ can we be justified from our sins. Therefore, Paul exhorts us to believe in Christ, so that we may receive the "sure mercies of David."

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve Thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Friday, October 23: 1 Kings 9:1–9 20th Sunday a. Trinity

The twenty cities which King Hiram called "Cabul" (i.e. "good for nothing") were located in the land of Galilee. We don't know exactly which cities these were, but the historian Josephus indicates they were near the city of Tyre—that is, in northern Galilee. At the time of Christ, there was another city in Galilee which was also called "Cabul." In John chapter 1, the disciple Nathanael said: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (v. 46).

Something good did come out of Nazareth: Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Mary. He was born in Bethlehem, but He was raised in Galilee and spent most of His ministry there. Although Jerusalem was the place of God's house and where He promised His presence, the Jews rejected God's Son, and so He preached elsewhere. The Gospel came, first, to Galilee; then to northern cities like Tyre and Sidon; finally it spread to all the Gentile lands, because Israel "forsook the Lord their God, who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt."

King Hiram's assessment wasn't wrong. The cities of Galilee were "good for nothing;" they were inhabited by a "good for nothing" people. But that is true of *every* place on earth. The earth is inhabited by sinners who are unable to please God: "There is none righteous, no not one" (Romans 3:10). But Jesus came to save sinners. When He saw that we were "Cabul," He offered Himself on a cross as the punishment for our sins. Indeed, He makes us pleasing to God the Father through His righteousness, which He gives us by faith.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve Thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Tuesday, October 13: 2 The. 3:5–12 19th Sunday a. Trinity

This reading begins with a prayer that the Lord would "direct our hearts into the love of God." This is absolutely necessary, because our hearts by nature are not inclined to love God or receive His love toward us. In Baptism, however, we are given the Holy Spirit, who enables our hearts to trust in God's love for us, and to love Him in return.

Jesus says, "If anyone loves Me, He will keep My Word" (John 14:23). He who loves God will walk orderly, according to the tradition which was handed down by Jesus to His apostles and recorded by them in Holy Scripture. If a Christian refuses to do this, then St. Paul instructs other believers to warn that brother, even by withdrawing from his fellowship.

In this particular context, Paul is referring to those who avoid working and act like leeches upon their brethren. How much more, then, should this be the case when a brother walks disorderly in more serious matters of doctrine and practice? It is right to stop communing with those who stubbornly do this. "Yet," St. Paul says, "do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (2 Thessalonians 3:15). The purpose of closed communion is not to condemn, but to direct hearts back to the love of God.

Collect: O almighty and most merciful God, of Thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech Thee, from all things that may hurt us, that we, being ready, both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that Thou wouldst have done; 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, October 14: Hosea 14:1–9 19th Sunday a. Trinity

In this reading our sins are described as 'stumbling'. God created the human body to walk. Yet even the most agile and physically fit person sometimes stumbles and falls. Our sinful state before Baptism, however, can hardly be called a 'stumble'. It is not as though we were walking along just fine in God's Law and then made a small misstep and fell into sin.

It would be much more appropriate to compare ourselves to the paralytic of Sunday's Gospel, who had absolutely no ability whatsoever to stand, much less walk. By nature, we were unable to stand righteous before God or walk in His ways, not even for a moment. But Jesus raised us from the paralysis of sins by announcing to us in Baptism, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you" (Matthew 9:2). With these words, He lifted us up and made us stand in His righteousness before God. And He also makes us to walk. We do not stand motionless in our justification. We begin to walk in His Law of love.

This does not mean that we will never stumble. We will, for we are still sinners. But Hosea warns us not to stay on the ground. He instructs us to return to the Lord our God and say to Him, "Take away all iniquity; Receive us graciously." For His Son's sake, God will time and time again lift us up and cheer our hearts with His absolution.

Collect: O almighty and most merciful God, of Thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech Thee, from all things that may hurt us, that we, being ready, both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that Thou wouldst have done; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Thursday, October 22: Luke 6:43–49 20th Sunday a. Trinity

This example of good and bad trees is applied generally to all people. Our Lord explains that a person who is a bad tree cannot bear good fruit, and a person who is a good tree cannot bear bad fruit. The fruit is consistent with the tree.

We can easily see how this applies to non-Christians. An unbeliever cannot bear good fruit, because the Scriptures say: "whatever is not from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). But how does this passage apply to Christians? We know that baptized Christians still sin: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

Remember that Christians are simultaneously saints and sinners. In a sense, we are both "good trees" and "bad trees." The good tree is the New Man worked by the Holy Spirit. The bad tree is the Old Adam which clings to our flesh. When the Old Tree brings forth evil "out of the evil treasure of his heart," we repent of it. We recognize that those thoughts, words, and deeds, are not consistent with our calling as Christians. Then, we ask God to make us, again, into a new tree: "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psalm 51:10). We trust in forgiveness of sins through our Savior Jesus Christ, and we strive, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to bear fruit consistent with the heart of the New Man.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve Thee with a quiet mind; 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, October 21: Matthew 9:35–38 20th S. a. Trinity

The "harvest" spoken of in the lesson is the multitude of people who were receiving the Word of God. When Jesus preached in all the cities and villages of Galilee, He found that the people were starving for it. They were "like sheep having no shepherd," because their appointed shepherds (the priests and Pharisees) were not doing their jobs. Instead of preaching God's Word, these teachers were wearying the people with the commandments of men (Matthew 15:9).

By calling His Father the "Lord of the Harvest," Jesus credits every harvest to God alone. While prophets, apostles, and pastors certainly play a part in the harvest, their role is only as God's instruments. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:6, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." Therefore, God alone is responsible for the faith which is produced in believers. No person can make himself "good ground" for the Word of God. No pastor can cause the Word to bear fruit. God alone prepares the field; He sows the seed; He waters it; and, when the plant comes up, He tends it and reaps its fruit.

But note how our Lord takes care of His harvest. He does it through instruments. He calls laborers (i.e., pastors) and He sends them into the harvest, so that no one is left weary or scattered. Rest assured that the Lord will always provide for His harvest, but don't forget how He has chosen to do that. God sows, waters, tends, and reaps through the ministry of the Word and the labors of His chosen servants.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve Thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Thursday, October 15: Hebrews 10:1–10 19th S. a. Trinity

What we see in today's reading is not limited to the ceremonial law. Even the moral law, as summarized by the Ten Commandments, cannot make us perfect. Instead, it is a continual reminder of sins, year by year, day by day. We men can not make those sins go away by our sacrifices. But the Son of God became a man to do the will of His Father. He became flesh and blood and offered it upon the cross, once for all. He atoned for the sins of the world. He took away the demands of the ceremonial law and its required sacrifices, and He established the Gospel, founded upon His own self-sacrifice.

This is what stands behind His power and authority to forgive sins. He is no mere man. He is God in the flesh, who paid the price for all sin with His own precious blood. He has every right to announce the forgiveness of sins to those who believe in Him and are baptized. And He has every right to raise their bodies on the Last Day, permanently purified from all sin and weakness.

Collect: O almighty and most merciful God, of Thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech Thee, from all things that may hurt us, that we, being ready, both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that Thou wouldst have done; 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, October 16: 1 Corinthians 13:9–12 19th S. a. Trinity

Babies lack what is called "object permanence." This means that whenever something leaves their sight, it is like that thing stopped existing for them. This is why they are so distraught when their mother leaves the room and so excited when their father uncovers his face while playing "peekaboo". They have to see it to believe it.

We all suffer something similar when it comes to God and His Word. We fall into sin as if we had never heard the Ten Commandments before. We worry and fret the moment that we do not see the daily bread that God has promised us. We lose hope in the face of trials, as if the salvation that Christ won for us never existed. We are more foolish than little babies, so quickly forgetting the truth that we once knew.

But we have a loving and patient heavenly Father, who will not grow weary of our foolishness. In His Word and Sacraments He shows His face to us over and over again, and in this way He builds a stronger memory for our faith. Sometimes His face is hidden, and in those moments He trains us to put away childish things and trust in His promises, even when we cannot outwardly perceive them.

Collect: O almighty and most merciful God, of Thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech Thee, from all things that may hurt us, that we, being ready, both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that Thou wouldst have done; 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, October 20: Matthew 21:28–44 20th S. a. Trinity

In the parable of the two sons, both of the sons sinned. The first son disrespected his father and, for a while, disobeyed him by not going into the vineyard. The second son played the hypocrite. He was respectful to his father's face, but he also disobeyed and refused to go into the vineyard.

The important difference between these two sons is not the kind of sin that each committed, but their repentance. The first son repented after he sinned, and he went into the vineyard. The second son never repented, and therefore never stepped foot in the vineyard. Jesus demonstrates the contrast in verse 32: "tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him."

The difference between those who enter the kingdom of God and those who fail to enter is not the *kinds* of sins that each has committed. Some have committed grievous sins out in the open; others have kept their sins private. The important difference between the sons of God and the sons of this world is whether there is repentance and faith. Those who repent of their sins and trust in their Savior have already entered the kingdom of God. They are true sons who possess the inheritance of heaven! But those who do not repent will be destroyed. Though they act as if they are righteous and obedient in this life, they will not enter the kingdom of God, because they reject its Chief Cornerstone.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve Thee with a quiet mind; 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, October 19: Zechariah 1:1–16 20th S. a. Trinity

Zechariah preached in the land of Judah after the Babylonian Captivity. By that time, many Jews had already returned to Jerusalem and were rebuilding the temple. Still, Zechariah's primary message is "return!" While their bodies were physically in the right place, their hearts were not. They desired to serve God faithfully, but, in their weakness, they gave in to the will of men. They even paused the temple building project out of fear of their enemies.

"Return" is a command of the Law. To "return to God" means to fear, love, and trust in Him above all things. That is something we are unable to do. Martin Luther writes concerning this passage: "The Lord demands that we turn, not because this is something we can accomplish by our own power, but rather that we may acknowledge our own weakness and implore the help of the Spirit, whose prompting can turn us… The Law merely gives the command, but nothing is accomplished; something is accomplished, however, through the Gospel, when the Spirit is added." (Luther's Works, AE 20:9)

We are weak like those people in Jerusalem. The Law commands that we love and trust in God, but we have no power to do this by ourselves. Only when the Holy Spirit is added do we begin to love and trust in God. That Holy Spirit is given through the Gospel. The Gospel preaches that, apart from our works, God has returned to us. Of His mercy alone, He was zealous for us and sent His Son to be our Savior: "I am zealous for Jerusalem… I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy."

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve Thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Saturday, October 17: Romans 8:35–39 St. Ignatius

The saints of the Church are called to struggle according to body and soul. St. Ignatius was a teacher of the Church in spiritual matters and in his bodily actions. But the focus is not the struggles or afflictions themselves. The focus is the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Whether the saints are called to fight with wisdom and sound doctrine against corrupt authorities of this world, or to suffer violence and death according to one's flesh, we faithfully struggle because of Jesus Christ's holy death on the cross, by the power of His Holy Spirit.

The faithful saints and martyrs of the Church are not like the comic book heroes of our time. They were real men and women who lived and worked in ways that were as real as our own interactions with our neighbors now. What they did mattered to others. Through their faith and wisdom God taught hope and perseverance to others. They manifested the things that St. Paul describes in his writing. And their stories remind us that all manner of tribulations point back to the cross of our Savior. St. Ignatius taught the faith of God's love in Christ, and he manifested the victory that comes through Christ's death, even to our own suffering and death.

Collect: Almighty God, behold our weakness and the sorrows of Thy people, and as Thou didst grant the consolation of Thy Holy Spirit to St. Ignatius in his time of affliction for Thy Name's sake, so uphold us in our generation; through our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord
The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity

Chapter XI.
OF GOD'S ETERNAL FOREKNOWLEDGE AND ELECTION.

Concerning this article no public dissension has occurred among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession. But since it is a consolatory article, if treated properly, and by this means the introduction in the future of a controversy likely to cause offense may be avoided, it is also explained in this writing.

AFFIRMATIVE

The Pure and True Doctrine concerning this Article.

1. First of all, the distinction between foreknowledge and predestination, that is, between God's foreknowledge and His eternal election, ought to be accurately observed.

2. For the foreknowledge of God is nothing else than that God knows all things before they happen, as it is written (Dan. 2:28): "There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days."

3. This foreknowledge is occupied alike with the godly and the wicked; but it is not the cause of evil or of sin, so that men do what is wrong (which originally arises from the devil and the wicked, perverse will of man); nor the cause of their ruin, for which they themselves are responsible; but only regulates it, and fixes to it a limit how long it should last, and that everything, notwithstanding that in itself it is evil, should serve His elect for their salvation.

4. The predestination or eternal election of God, however, is occupied only with the godly, beloved children of God, and this is a cause of their salvation, which He also provides as well as disposes what belongs thereto. Upon this [predestination of God] our salvation is founded so firmly that the gates of hell cannot overcome it (John 10:28; Matt. 16:18).

5. This is not to be investigated in the secret counsel of God, but to be sought in the Word of God, where it is also revealed.

6. But the Word of God leads us to Christ, who is the Book of Life, in whom all are written and elected that are to be saved, as it is written (Eph. 1:4): "He hath chosen us in Him" [Christ] "before the foundation of the world."

7. Thus Christ calls to Himself all sinners, and promises them rest, and He is anxious that all men should come to Him and permit Him to help them. To them He offers Himself in His Word, and wishes them to hear it, and not to stop their ears or despise the Word. He promises besides the power and efficiency of the Holy Ghost, and divine assistance for perseverance and eternal salvation.

8. Therefore we should judge concerning this our election to eternal life neither from reason nor from the Law of God, which would lead either into a dissipated, dissolute epicurean life, or into despair, and would excite in the heart of men pernicious thoughts (and such thoughts cannot be effectually guarded against as long as they follow their own reason), so that they think to themselves: "If God has elected me to salvation, I cannot be condemned, although I do whatever I will." And again: "If I am not elected to eternal life, it matters not what good I do; for my efforts are nevertheless all in vain."

9. But the true judgment concerning predestination must be learned alone from the Holy Gospel concerning Christ, in which it is clearly testified that "God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all," and that "He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (Rom. 11:32; Ez. 18:23; 33:11; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 2:2).

10. To him, therefore, who is really concerned about the revealed will of God, and proceeds according to the order which St. Paul has observed in the Epistle to the Romans, who first directs men to repentance, knowledge of sins, to faith in Christ, to divine obedience, before he speaks of the mystery of the eternal election of God, this doctrine [concerning God's predestination] is useful and consolatory.

11. That, however, "many are called, few are chosen," does not mean that God is unwilling that all should be saved, but the reason is that they either do not at all hear God's Word, but wilfully despise it, close their ears and harden their hearts, and in this manner foreclose the ordinary way to the Holy Ghost, so that He cannot effect His work in them, or, when it is heard, they consider it of no account, and do not heed it. For this [that they perish] not God or His election, but their wickedness is responsible (2 Pet. 2:1 sqq.; Luke 11:49, 52; Heb. 12:25 sq.).

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome, §1–12