



The Lutheran Herald



October 2010
(For Trinity 17-21)

The Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America



Grace and peace to you in Christ Jesus!

This month Christ's Church will observe the 493rd anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther's posting of his 95 Theses. This date has come to carry the significance of being our "Reformation Day"—obviously—and although June 25 (the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession) may carry a more thoroughly "reformational" content and purpose than the 1517 theses did, still the date is worthy of remembrance and commemoration, especially since it infuriates the unionists and syncretists who grow pale at the notion of division over doctrine. (Besides, just because we observe October 31 does not mean we have to ignore June 25, right?)

Meanwhile, the Lutheran poseurs—when not clucking their tongues at old brother Martin who dared to part company with the Roman Church after 'only' three years—are busy trying to drape their latest elected functionaries in Luther costumes, and talking about it not being 'too late' to reform their 'beloved synod.' It would be far better to spend five minutes with God's Word and the correct exposition of that word contained in the Book of Concord (1580) than to waste five weeks debating with such fellows over the merits of their latest savior of the synod. Thus, we offer you, dear reader, the opportunity to once again turn to God's Word, and eschew the bloviations of the blogosphere.

The devotions for this issue of *The Lutheran Herald* were written by Pr. Jeffrey Ahonen, Pr. Michael Henson, Pr. Eric Stefanski, and the undersigned.

***Yours in Christ,
Bishop James Heiser***

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Some of the members and guests present for the service. (They wouldn't all fit in the photo!)



Pr. Hudson and Bp. Heiser, after the service.

DEDICATION OF CHRIST EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH
RICHMOND, MISSOURI
27 AUGUST A.D. 2010



A view of Christ Lutheran, prior to the dedication service.



FROM THE PROPERs FOR TRINITY 17

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 14:1-11 (NKJV)

Now it happened, as He went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, that they watched Him closely. And behold, there was a certain man before Him who had dropsy. And Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" But they kept silent. And He took him and healed him, and let him go. Then He answered them, saying, "Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?" And they could not answer Him regarding these things. So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: "When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The COLLECT

Lord, we beseech Thee, grant Thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil and with pure hearts and minds to follow Thee, the only God; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth, and reigneth, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

“For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and say to the poor man, ‘You stand there,’ or, ‘Sit here at my footstool,’ have you not shown partiality among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?” (v. 2–4) Such partiality has a pernicious influence on the Church. The lure of worldly wealth remains so strong that it is not hard for us to imagine a situation such as that which St. James describes. The world holds the poor in contempt and respects wealth and power, and there are often many in the Church who desire to be respectable in the eyes of the world. Those who teach the false doctrines of ‘Prosperity’ encourage such partiality in the Church by declaring those who have worldly wealth to be more blessed by the Lord. How quickly Christians forget Jesus’ words regarding Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19–31).

Neither wealth nor poverty save us—and there have been many times in the history of the Church when men have made an idol of prosperity *and* poverty (remember, for example, the imagined greater holiness of those who have actually made a vow of poverty on the pretense of greater sanctity). Judging the poverty—or wealth—of others is a deadly spiritual danger, for beneath such judgment rests a contempt for the will of the Lord, who allots to men various stations in life.

“For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” (v. 13) The Lord has had mercy upon us, having accomplished our redemption through His suffering and death for us upon the cross. The One who ate with tax collectors and sinners has redeemed us from death and condemnation.

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.” This verse is not for wives only; it is for all. For this verse does not solely speak to the right relationship between a wife and her husband, but also to the proper relationship upon which it is modeled – that of the Bride of Christ and her Lord, Christ Himself.

Even as The Head is one with His body, so the Lord Christ is one flesh with His bride, and acts in love to care for her—even to save her. This Husband saved His wife from death by fulfilling the impossible demands that God’s Law placed upon her—upon us—and sacrificing Himself for the guilt of all transgressions. His Head was crowned with shame upon the cross so that His body might be honored through His resurrection. His glorious bride is now attended now by the Bridegroom’s ministers—His status as the Husband being expressed through His establishment of an exclusively male pastorate – while they continually wash her gown and make it white in Holy Baptism and feed her the wedding feast of the Lamb in His Holy Supper. Then, The Bride—and we her members—serve her Lord in humble, grateful, and loving submission to the One Who submitted Himself unto death for her.

In this picture of the Church the wife find the pattern to follow in carrying out her blessed duties as a servant of her husband—even as the husband will find his example of gracious lordship and headship in Christ Himself. Unlike Christ, the husband will stumble in his role, and is called to seek forgiveness from his wife and from the one who she models, Christ’s Church; the wife is similarly directed to seek the forgiving grace of her lord and her Lord. Finding such forgiveness in abundance in Christ and His Church, the groom and bride are strengthened to live as all wedded couples would wish: happily ever after.

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.” The proper expression of a Christian’s fellowship with God and with Christian brethren matters greatly to God. This is because fellowship is a public witness to the inner faith that the God has worked by His Word within the heart of the Christian, and a testimony to the fellowship that God has created with Himself—and among brethren—by His grace.

For the individual Christian, this fellowship with God is expressed with fear, love, and trust in Him above all things, in accordance with the commandments of God that express and guide a right relationship with Him. Having fellowship with the God Who is light requires one to have no fellowship with the darkness of sin (1 John 1:5-6).

The individual Christian also expresses another level of fellowship when he acknowledges that the one Lord creates but one faith, and thus forms but one body—the Body of Christ—with one Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:4-6). Individual Christians in one geographical locale express this fellowship with one another by gathering into a congregation that testifies publically to the unity in faith through her public teaching and confession. These local congregations of the faithful then recognize and publicly acknowledge doctrinal and confessional fellowship between congregations, organizing themselves into dioceses and the like, wherever there is agreement in the Gospel and all of its articles (FC SD X). The proper expression of fellowship also requires public acknowledgement of those with whom fellowship cannot be recognized – particularly, as the Apostle Paul admonishes, where apostates and heretics manifest the works of darkness that are opposed to Christ and His enlightening truth. Such teachers and confessors are to be exposed and publicly marked, so that their false teaching may be avoided, the resultant spiritual destruction averted, and the pure Light of Life -- Christ Jesus -- shine brightly upon His people.

Today’s reading is one which Papists have often thrown in the face of those who confess the Scriptural teaching that we are saved by grace through faith. “See,” they say, “James teaches that a ‘man is justified by works, and not by faith only.’ How dare you Lutherans teach salvation by faith alone?”

Now, God’s Word clearly teaches us: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Eph. 2:8–9) We teach, based on the Word, that we are saved by *grace*—that is, as an undeserved gift from God—and the instrument created by the Holy Spirit which takes hold of this gracious salvation is faith. Faith—in the sense of trusting in, believing in, Christ Jesus as our Redeemer—is something which the Holy Spirit creates through the means of grace: faith is “the gift of God”.

What causes so much confusion is St. James’ use of the term “faith” in a difference sense from that in which it is used elsewhere in Scripture, for James speaks of faith simply as knowledge of the facts of salvation. Thus he wrote: “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” (2:19) Although the demons ‘know the facts’ about how the Lord has accomplished our salvation, they most certainly do not have faith in the sense in which St. Paul uses the term: trust in Christ Jesus.

When we speak of faith, therefore, we are not speaking merely of an knowledge of the facts, but a trust worked by the Holy Spirit that believes Christ Jesus has saved us. As we teach in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession: “Therefore, *by faith alone we obtain remission of sins*, when we comfort our hearts with confidence in the mercy promised for Christ’s sake.” (IV:80)

THE HOLY GOSPEL St. Matthew 22:31–46 (NKJV)

“But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” And when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at His teaching.

But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?”

Jesus said to him, “ ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ “This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” They said to Him, “The Son of David.”

He said to them, “How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool”’? If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his Son?” And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.

The 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 the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

This verse should be viewed as a stern warning, because that is what it is. It is a warning that God has His limit; His Spirit will not remain where He is willfully resisted. God exemplified this in His treatment of His people Israel; “they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them” (Isaiah 63:10). The Spirit is grieved when God’s people “willfully turn away again from the holy commandment . . . and garnish again the habitation of the heart for the devil” (FC SD XII.42). That this happens particularly when the baptized Christian acts against conscience and allows sin to rule in him (FC SD II.69) is what The Reverend Doctor Martin Luther had in mind when he warned that to go against conscience is neither right nor safe.

For those who do grieve and subsequently lose the Holy Spirit, there is yet hope – in the God Who mercifully continues to preach repentance and forgiveness to the world. “Through this means, namely, the preaching and hearing of His Word, God works, and breaks our hearts, and draws man, so that through the preaching of the Law he comes to know his sins and God's wrath, and experiences in his heart true terrors, contrition, and sorrow, and through the preaching and consideration of the holy Gospel concerning the gracious forgiveness of sins in Christ a spark of faith is kindled in him, which accepts the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, and comforts itself with the promise of the Gospel, and thus the Holy Ghost (who works all this) is sent into the heart” (FC SD II.54). God restore His Spirit to all in whom He is currently absent, and retain His Spirit in all within whom He currently dwells, unto life everlasting!

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, . . .” Many English translations of the Holy Scriptures miss the comma that belongs between the phrase “for the equipping of the saints” and “the work of the ministry,” which has led to misunderstanding, confusion, and even heterodox practice of the doctrine of the ministry. Without that punctuation mark, the verse seems to read as if this equipping of the saints is for the express purpose of making everyone a minister. Yet not everyone is a minister, and not every activity of the saints is a ministry, as the Churches of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession believe, teach, and confess: “That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake” (AC V).

Indeed, God the Holy Trinity intends a punctuation mark in Ephesians 4:12, in order to define a threefold purpose to His calling, ordaining, and sending to His Church His servants of the Word—apostles, prophets, and evangelists in days of old and pastor-teachers today: 1) for equipping the saints with saving faith and living love; 2) for carrying out the the work of the Word and Sacrament ministry through which this faith is created and such love is inspired, and 3) for edifying the whole Body of Christ—Pastor and People together—through the blessings that come from carrying out their respective God-given vocations. In such ways Christ truly gives gifts to men—even unto us!

“And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.” (v. 6) Given the horrible power of sin at work so often in human speech, we must consider the horrible damage done by bearing false witness against the neighbor. As Luther teaches in the Large Catechism: “Besides body, wife or husband, and temporal possessions, we have yet another treasure, namely, personal honor and good report, with which we cannot dispense. For it is intolerable to live among men in open shame and general contempt.” (I:255)

It is intolerable that the ‘fires’ of the tongue are so often used to ‘torch’ the good names of other people, even our brothers and sisters in Christ. “With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God,” (v. 9) St. James admonishes—an acknowledgment that the very ones who so misuse the gift of God are those who worship Him. Using the gift of God—speech—to revile one who has been made in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27, James 3:9) is perverse.

Reflecting daily on the misuse of the gift of speech, we are enabled, by the work of the Holy Spirit, to put our tongues to better use in repenting of our sin against God and our neighbor. Considering how we have failed to protect our neighbors’ reputation, we know we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. Thus it is right that we pray the Collect, for without the aid of the Holy Spirit to direct and rule our hearts—and tongues—we would neither confess our sins nor confess our faith in the One who has delivered us from death, Christ Jesus, our Lord.

“You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” (4:3–4)

In His Sermon on the Mount, the Lord taught His Church to pray, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” before we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” It is after He thus taught us to pray that He then declared, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” (Matt. 6:24) That which is being taught in the Sermon on the Mount and in St. James’ words is the same article of faith: the sinful desires of men lead men to seek their own will rather than God’s will, and this corrupts the prayers of men. Lusting for wealth, men seek mammon, not the Lord, and instead try to manipulate Him to receive what they truly desire: the fleeting riches of this world. They want the Lord to aid them in making friends of the world.

We could not free ourselves from the idolatry to mammon; but the Lord atoned for our sin, and by His death made atonement for our transgression. Thus Jesus prayed in the garden, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.” (Luke 22:42) Jesus perfectly fulfilled the will of the Father to redeem those who have often sinfully sought their own will. When James writes, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up,” (4:10) we know it is the Holy Spirit who works such a change of heart through the Word, that we would repent, believing in the One who perfectly filled the Father’s will for us and for our salvation.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

The Reverend Doctor Martin Luther aimed to teach the proper understanding of these verses when he famously stated, “We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.”

The twin truths of saving faith and loving works must remain in balance against each other, without either one towering over the other, lest the entirety of Truth – Christ Himself – disappear from the Church, to the eternal detriment of sinners in need of His justification and His sanctification.

It is for this reason that the Churches of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession have been bold to believe, teach, and confess the article of new obedience, which professes the twin truths of Ephesians 2:8-10 thusly: “Also they teach that this faith is bound to bring forth good fruits, and that it is necessary to do good works commanded by God, because of God’s will, but that we should not rely on those works to merit justification before God. For remission of sins and justification is apprehended by faith, as also the voice of Christ attests: When ye shall have done all these things, say: We are unprofitable servants. Luke 17:10. The same is also taught by the Fathers. For Ambrose says: It is ordained of God that he who believes in Christ is saved, freely receiving remission of sins, without works, by faith alone” (AC VI). God grant us ever such faith -- and the good works that come with such faith – unto the end.

“ . . . He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. . . .”

Although false teachers will try to convince you otherwise, the Apostle Paul teaches you that the hour of decision concerning your eternal destiny is long past. That decision took place long before you came into existence through your conception; it happened even before the birth of the Earth. Even before God began His work of creating the Heavens and the Earth, God established your permanent place in it – and that place is in Christ, in His grace, in the one true faith.

As the Church confesses in the Formula of Concord, this doctrine of election provides “the excellent, glorious consolation that God was so greatly concerned about the conversion, righteousness, and salvation of every Christian, and so faithfully purposed it that before the foundation of the world was laid, He deliberated concerning it, and in His purpose ordained how He would bring me thereto, and preserve me therein” (FC SD XI.45) – and that is by Jesus. “This Christ calls to Himself all sinners and promises them rest, and He is in earnest that all men should come to Him and suffer themselves to be helped, to whom He offers Himself in His Word, and wishes them to hear it and not to stop their ears or despise the Word. Moreover, He promises the power and working of the Holy Ghost, and divine assistance for perseverance and eternal salvation” (FC Ep XI.8). Let no man burden your conscience regarding the making of a decision for Christ and thereby rob you of the peace of knowing that God in Christ has chosen you – even from eternity!

“Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.” (v. 19–20)

Sin is a matter of life and death; thus St. Paul teaches us of the end of those bound by the slavery of sin: “For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.” (Rom. 6:20–21) The grave spiritual danger which continues to confront the Christian is that he might wander away from the faith and return to the ways of death.

Often when Christians speak of the dangers of temptation and falling from the faith, the concern is expressed primarily in terms of sins of the ‘second table’ of the Law: murder, adultery, theft, etc. But temptations to sins against the ‘first table’ are no less real, and no less dangerous to the sinner. False doctrine is not to be taken lightly. St. James thus speaks of those “among you”—that is, of the Church—who “wander from the truth”. Whatever the nature of their transgression, they have fallen from the faith and are in danger of being eternally lost and their fellow Christians are also placed in peril by trying to restore them to the truth; as St. Paul wrote to the Galatians: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” (Gal. 6:1)

That we are brought to faith, and that any might be brought to repentance and restored, is the gift of God: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 6:23) Thanks be to God that the Holy Spirit is ever working through His holy Word!

The words which the Holy Spirit inspired St. Peter to write are certainly not popular in modern society because we are living in an age in which the most fundamental aspects of human nature are routinely denied. That many people are now trying to change the definition of fundamental terms such as ‘family’ and ‘marriage’ should not surprise us, since this is simply the latest phase in an effort to redefine ‘man’ and ‘woman.’

God’s Word consistently maintains that the image of husband and wife given in Genesis 2 and 3 is the model for all marriage. And, in today’s reading, St. Peter offers the example of Abraham and Sarah as an embodiment of that relationship: “For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughter you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.” (1 Pet. 3:6) To be a ‘daughter of Sarah’ is akin to being a ‘son of Abraham’—it is a way of saying that one is of the *faith* of Abraham and Sarah. A godly wife does not try to manipulate her husband through adornments; instead, her adornment is within a heart which trusts in God and therefore submits to the husband which the Lord has given to her.

Likewise, the husband is called to uphold a self-sacrificial love toward his wife. The need for “understanding” which St. Peter sets forth here is also supplemented by what St. Paul says of husbands living in a way which is self-sacrificial for the sake of their wives: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,” (Eph. 5:25). In marriage, husband and wife will find they often fail to uphold their respective roles, and will daily repent of their failure to uphold that which they owe to one another. Thus they build up one another in faith in the One who has redeemed them both.

THE GOSPEL

St. John 4:46-54 (NKJV)

So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine.

And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

Then Jesus said to him, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.”

The nobleman said to Him, “Sir, come down before my child dies!”

Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your son lives.” So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.

And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, “Your son lives!” Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, “Your son lives.” And he himself believed, and his whole household.

This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.

THE 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 lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Adam and Eve created completely “good” by God, walked with God in perfect communion (Gen. 3:8). After the fall into sin, they were ashamed of God’s naked creation and hid from Him. Their own works-righteous clothing of fig leaves could not conceal their guilt. God promised His Son to crush the Serpent’s head. With that deposit, guaranteeing what was to come, He clothed them by the sacrificed blood-shed skins of an animal (Gen. 3:21), foretelling the sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

As long as we live in this original-sin-stained-human-nature, we groan and are burdened. Though we have come to believe in Jesus Christ and live by faith in God’s Son, we are not free from this body of sin. “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature” (Rom. 7:18). Christians are constantly fighting against the desires of our sinful nature. We live by faith, not by sight. We die to sin through daily confession, and rise again to new life through faith in daily absolution (Eph. 4:22-24). We receive the (Pastoral) Ministry of reconciliation and the minister (pastor), as Christ’s ambassador, sent to reconcile us to God through the message of Jesus Christ.

Through the resurrection of the dead, we will be freed from the battles of this world. We will be “clothed with our heavenly dwelling” (2 Cor. 5:4). The deposit will reach fulfillment when we appear before Christ’s judgment seat, dressed in Christ’s white robes of forgiveness. The old has gone, the new has come.

St. Peter teaches the Church that Baptism is an antitype of the Flood. This means that the Lord’s preservation of Noah and his family—“a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water”—is something which points forward to something far greater, and that is Baptism: “...not for the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God...” The Flood drowned the sinful world so that the Church would emerge from the safety of the ark. But the children of Noah quickly demonstrated that the power of sin was not yet at an end. Only the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus would bring the everlasting victory.

The washing away of sin in Baptism is greater than the Flood for it joins us to Jesus’ death and resurrection, giving to us the forgiveness of our sins. Being baptized into Jesus, we thus “sanctify the Lord God in [our] hearts,” and thus are always “ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience...” The world reviled the Christ, and it hates those who are joined to Him by water and the Word. Confronted by such hatred, we are tempted to flinch, and even tempted to deny the Word, as St. Peter himself denied the Lord three times before repenting with great sorrow.

St. Peter reminds us that we are by no means alone; we have an Advocate with the Father, and our consciences are clean before the Father because of what He has accomplished for our redemption. For it is Christ Jesus who “has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.” (v. 22) Confronting the world, then, has no terror for us, for Jesus has already defeated our foe, having drowned our old Adam in the baptismal waters of the font.

A common mistake in modern American churches is to use the term “elder” to refer to what we once knew as the lay office of *Küster* (which is more like a sexton or sacristan). This has led to confusion—and a great deal of mischief—regarding the office of the holy ministry. Suffice to say that when the Scriptures speak of “elders” (or “Presbyters”) the reference is to the office of the holy ministry, not a lay office of recent origin—no matter how helpful that office has been in assisting pastors.

Despite the modern confusion of terminology, the Church has understood that St. Peter is speaking in this passage of the office of the holy ministry. In fact, the verses we are considering today are often spoken at a pastor’s ordination or installation. And the entirety of this passage emphasizes the fundamental unity of the pastoral office under Christ.

Thus, although he is also an apostle, St. Peter deigns to speak of his relationship with those whose office it is to teach the apostolic doctrine; he calls himself “a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ”. (v. 1) In fact, St. Peter interchangeably speaks of the work of Presbyters as the labor of a shepherd (or, in Latin, “Pastor”) and serving as an overseer (or Bishop). There are several important differences between St. Peter’s call and the call to the pastoral office: St. Peter’s calling as an apostle was immediately from the Lord, whereas pastors are called mediately through the Church; and St. Peter’s call was to the entire Church, while pastors are called to a particular altar and pulpit. Nevertheless, both calls are divine, and the Word and Sacrament entrusted to both are from the Lord of the Church. And such a call is to service—service to Christ for the sake of the Church, giving to the Lord’s saints the Sacraments and preaching to them the Holy Word.

2 Corinthians 3:12-13, “Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away.”

Your pastor’s preaching and teaching is unlike Moses. Your pastor does not water down the Law, or cut its brightness by means of a veil. There are times in which the pastor will use the full glory of the Law to convict you, so that you may learn to know your sins aright (1 Jn. 1:8). However, when the Law has shown us our sins and revealed God’s wrath and condemnation, then it is time for the pastor to cast the Law aside. The pastor will direct your attention solely to the Gospel message of forgiveness through faith in God’s Son. Through Jesus Christ, “we do not lose heart” (4:1). There was certainly a glory in the holy Law of God, but the glory that came with the Gospel of forgiveness purchased by the holy Son of God far surpassed the Law’s glory.

“Therefore the Spirit of Christ must not only comfort, but also through the office of the Law *reprove the world of sin*, John 16, 8, and thus must do in the New Testament, as the prophet says, Is. 28, 21, that is, He must do *the work of another* (reprove), in order that He may afterwards do His own work, which is to comfort and preach of grace” (See FC, SD, Sec. V, 10-11).

The Kingdom of God, also called Christ's Church, is built upon the appointed pastoral Ministry of the apostles and prophets by which the confession and teaching of Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). God promises to be present in this appointed Ministry of confessing Christ.

The Lutheran Confessions (Treatise, 25-27) correctly explain, "However, as to the declaration: *Upon this rock I will build My Church*, certainly the Church has not been built upon the authority of man, but upon the ministry of the confession which Peter made, in which he proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He accordingly addresses him as a minister: *Upon this rock, i.e., upon this ministry*. Therefore he addresses him as a minister of this office in which this confession and doctrine is to be in operation and says: *Upon this rock, i.e., this preaching and ministry*. Furthermore, the ministry of the New Testament is not bound to places and persons as the Levitical ministry, but it is dispersed throughout the whole world, and is there where God gives His gifts, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers; neither does this ministry avail on account of the authority of any person, but on account of the Word given by Christ. Nor does the person of a teacher add anything to this word and office; it matters not who is preaching and teaching it; if there are hearts who receive and cling to it, to them it is done as they hear and believe."

THE HOLY GOSPEL **St. Matthew 9:1-8 (NKJV)**

So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city. Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed.

When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you."

And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, "This Man blasphemes!"

But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins; then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."

And he arose and departed to his house. Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.

The 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 lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The Holy Spirit establishes from the outset what St. John is: an eyewitness of the life, death, and resurrection of the Christ. Eyewitness and ‘earwitness’—as the seeing, the handling, of God in the Flesh was for the sake of hearing His message. John saw what Jesus did and heard what He taught and knew from the *unity* of those two things that what Jesus said was true; Whatever He promised, He guaranteed and made effective by His actions.

That your joy may be full, the Spirit has St. John write as one who was not deceived, one who did not rely on hearsay, but who saw and heard how Jesus brought you into fellowship with the Triune God by fulfilling the Law and offering Himself in your place on the cross. If we “walk in darkness” — if it is our intent to go about as if this God did not exist or as if we had not separated ourselves from Him by our sin— then we have no real fellowship with Him, or with each other. If we “walk in the light,” though, seeing clearly that we deserve nothing but death and Hell because of our sins, but that God the Son came to make us acceptable to the Father, then we find that the very sins we must confess each day are nothing other than the sins from which the blood of Jesus has already cleansed us. Thus, we have no reason to make God a liar, and every reason to confess our sins and receive His Absolution.

Faith in Christ cannot be seen. Thus the individual believer, who has faith in Christ, is not to be visibly pointed out. Furthermore, the Church, which is made up of believers in Jesus Christ, is not visibly manifest. Jesus speaks in parables in order to make clear the distinctions between those who falsely claim to be believers, and those who truly have faith in Christ.

“To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the [Pastoral] ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, He gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where He pleases, in those who hear the Gospel” (AC V). “The church is the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly” (AC VI). The kingdom is like a mustard seed, three measures of meal, a Sower sowing seed, a treasure, a merchant, and a net. We can’t see faith, but we can objectively judge the things that create faith—the purely preached Word and rightly administered Sacraments.

Having been taught by Jesus the meanings of the parables, the occupant of the pastoral office brings forth the true Christian teaching—of salvation by grace through faith in Christ—out of the New Testament, as well as the Old Testament. If a man of God brings another Gospel, other than Jesus Christ crucified, do not receive him. Jesus said, “These are Scriptures that testify about Me” (Jn. 5:39).

Whenever Jesus says “The kingdom of God,” we need to know that He is not speaking about heaven, but about the workings of His holy Christian church on earth. The Smalcald Articles say, “Thank God, a seven-year-old child knows what the church is, namely, holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd. So children pray, ‘I believe in one holy Christian church...it consists of the Word of God and true faith’” (SA, Part III, Art. XII).

The church is built on the work of Jesus Christ, and Him alone. Faith in Jesus Christ places one into Christ’s church (Jn. 20:31). When we look for assurance of salvation in places other than in the objective work of Christ’s salvation, we are building another kingdom, “which will be left to you desolate” (v. 35). Even statistical analysis of the probability of salvation based on the number saved, will not give assurance. There is only one comforting answer, “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door...” (v.24); “All the prophets testify about Him...” (Acts 10:43). The Pharisees rejected Jesus, and thus also rejected the kingdom of God.

John 3:36 states, “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” When your faith is being shaken, come to God holding on to Jesus Christ, because, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

In summary, John says: “I give you the Law...but I give you the Gospel...and the only reason you keep the Law at all is because you have the Gospel...and, indeed, it is not you, but the Gospel—that is, Christ for you and in you—that keeps the Law and overcomes the wicked one.”

John writes so that you won’t sin, yet, immediately, knowing that you *will* sin, He reminds you that you have an Advocate with the Father, even Jesus whose atoning blood keeps the Father’s eyes off of your sin. He invites you not to love the world, since it is passing away, but to love God and His will, which has given you whatever of this world may be enjoyed without sin and whose will is to keep and preserve you by His Word. In Him, you have already overcome the wicked one, because He has overcome him for you and “your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake.”

Even from infancy this is true of the Christian: He has washed the darkness from you in Holy Baptism and placed you among your brethren, the Sons of Light, those who love one another because they know that all the desires of the flesh that cause dissension, anger, and envy here will soon pass away, but all who abide in the One who alone did God’s will, keeping the Commandments perfectly, are counted as doers of that will, as well, and, thus, will abide forever.

“His commandments are not burdensome.” “They’re not? Then why can’t I *keep* them? Do I really not love God?”

According to your flesh, no, you cannot truly “fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” Sin still clings to it and weighs it down. That is the key, though: it is not the *commandments* that are burdensome, but your sinful flesh that reacts against them.

Think about this from the perspective of the New Man for a moment, though, working from verse one, as the Holy Spirit had John write it, instead of getting bogged down in verse three. You believe that Jesus is the Christ—the One anointed by God to redeem mankind, the One who is both God and Man, since no mere man can redeem his brother (Psalm 49:7). This being the case, you love the God who begot you again by water and the Word. Therefore, it is clear that you also love those who have the same father as you do; They are your spiritual ‘flesh and blood’, as it were. How do you love them and show love to them? By acting towards God and towards them in the way that His Word indicates. And when you fall short? Reckon that, as always, your flesh has done what is natural to it, and trust that such sin, too, has been atoned for by the Christ and taken away from you...which causes you again to love both your Father and your brethren in Christ.

“Hearken!” (“Listen up!”) Jesus is directing our attention so that we receive His teaching in a profitable way. Jesus says, “Take heed (Consider carefully) what you hear” (v.24). The Word of God can be misused. The Large Catechism says, “This (3rd) commandment is violated...also by that multitude of others who listen to God’s Word as they would to any other entertainment, who only from force of habit go to hear preaching and depart again with as little knowledge of the Word at the end of the year as at the beginning...for we permit ourselves to be preached to and admonished but we listen without serious concern” (3rd Commandment, 96-97).

The Sowing Parable tells us about four different kinds of people. Although all of them “hear the Word,” only those in the last group “hear the Word, receive *it*, and bring forth fruit” (v.20). The first group listens superficially. In the second group, the Word is used to create mere emotional gladness. Affliction and persecution take away whatever good the Word had created. The third group hears the Word, but does not use that Word to put to death her sinful lusts, and trust in Christ alone. Unable to serve two masters, the fruitfulness of the Word is choked by allowing sin to continue to rule.

God rightly uses the Law to expose our sin and lost condition (Rom. 3:20). God uses the Gospel to create saving faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:16). Only true faith is able to love it’s neighbor (Gal. 5:22-23).

THE GOSPEL**St. Matthew 22:1-14 (NKJV)**

And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: “The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.”’” But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them.

But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.

The 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 lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

‘Mortal sin’ is a phrase used not only in the Roman Church: our Lutheran Confessions also speak of it. In The Defense (Apology) of the Augsburg Confession, Article V, we read: “the faith which receives remission of sins in a heart terrified and fleeing from sin does not remain in those who obey their desires, neither does it coexist with mortal sin.” (23)

The sin that leads to death, then, for which there is no forgiveness, is such fleeing from forgiveness instead of fleeing from sin. As long as one refuses forgiveness, even though God showers it all around him every day through His Gospel and Sacraments, there is no escape from eternal death. (The sins that the Christian commits every day are not such a sin, because, verse eighteen, God considers one who trusts in Christ to have no sin.)

One of Satan’s deadliest ploys is to deceive men into embracing their sin and casting aside forgiveness; he tries to make such a thing seem very ‘Christian’ by declaring that God’s loving us while we are sinners means that He accepts our sinning (or even made us with a love for a particular sin). Yet, as Luther makes clear in his Theses for the Heidelberg Disputation, *any* sin (or even any good work!) can become a mortal sin to us if we love it or trust in it more than in God and His freely given forgiveness in Christ. John’s final admonition not to have idols, then, is another call to confess our sin and trust in Christ alone.

John writes as “The Elder”—that is, not only as an Apostle, but specifically as the shepherd of a local flock. He writes to “The Elect Lady” and brings greetings from “the children of your elect sister”; thus, he writes to his readers in such a way as to declare them to be what God sees them to be: the very Bride of Christ.

By so doing, John teaches that each congregation is the Bride of Christ in that place; she is not simply “a part” of the “larger body of Christ,” but *is* the Bride of Christ, the very Body of Christ, one flesh with Her Groom. John teaches the same thing that we see in Matthew 18: wherever two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus, He is with them; wherever He gathers us through Baptism, the Word, and His Holy Supper, no matter how many or how few we are, we are assembled as the beloved Bride of God the Son.

John warns those who belong to Christ not to accept any substitutes for Him: anyone who does not proclaim the full truth of God the Son coming in the flesh and what He then accomplished is not of Christ, but is an antichrist—one who sets himself and his own thoughts in the place of Christ and His Word concerning salvation through His blood. Having fellowship with any who come short of confessing His truth fully is sharing in their false confession and loosening our hold on what He has won for us. Lord, prevent this and keep us as Your Bride!

John does not promise his beloved Gaius a life of health and wealth, but prays for him, that he may prosper physically as he prospers spiritually. He prays that all would go well with him, that he would continue to live in the light of the grace that God has bestowed upon him, that he should have no spiritual need for earthly trial, but would always walk in the truth.

These prayers are seen to be necessary to the rest of this epistle: Gaius is admonished not to combat the evil that others do against Christ and His Word by using their methods. Diotrophes, rejecting God’s Word as written by John, both speaks maliciously against the Apostle (just as many during the Exodus spoke evil of Moses) and strikes out against the believers within the congregation. Such is always the pattern among the smooth talkers and those who appear most charitable and loving to those outside the Church: their attacks upon those with whom their parish membership indicates they are in fellowship seem to know no bounds.

Gaius is to imitate what is good and to be faithful in what he does, so John writes him this short word of encouragement and promises soon to be with him. John follows the example of our Lord, who has left us the short Word of the New Testament with the promise that He will shortly come to deliver us. The comfort of that promise causes us to walk in the truth, to the joy of our pastor and of our Lord.