

and since we cannot join in free and broad laxity on the one hand, nor resort to wholesale condemnation on the other, we must expect criticism and dissatisfaction with us from both sides, and must be satisfied patiently to bear the scorn that comes to those who try to be loving as well as just.

[TO BE CONTINUED IN THE MAY ISSUE]

—from *The Confessional Principle and the Confessions of The Lutheran Church as Embodying the Evangelical Confession of the Christian Church*, by Theodore E. Schmauk and C. Theodore Benze, (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911), p. 902–904

UPCOMING EVENTS:

The diocese will have its **annual synod and colloquium** May 11 through 13. This year we will be at Salem Lutheran Church in Malone, Texas. Attendance is expected of all pastors and deacons of the diocese; members of congregations served by ELDoNA pastors are also encouraged to attend. The diocese invites the pastors and laity of our sister synod, the Association of Confessional Lutheran Churches (ACLIC) to attend, as well. The colloquium will run from Wednesday afternoon on May 11 through approximately noon on the 12th. The synod will meet from noon on May 12 through the end of the day on Friday, May 13. For more information, please contact Bishop Heiser at 254-533-2330 or by email (hunnius@mac.com).

Also, on June 5th, Salem Lutheran Church of Malone, Texas will celebrate its **125th anniversary**. All pastors and laity of the diocese and ACLIC are invited to join us for this celebration. Salem's deacon, Anthony Oncken, will be our preacher for this occasion. For more information, please call Salem at 254-533-2330.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



APRIL 2011
(OCULI—EASTER)

The Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America

Grace and peace to you in Christ Jesus!

In the excerpt from Schmauk's great work, *The Confessional Principle*, which you find in this issue of *The Lutheran Herald* is a quote which I believe is worthy of careful consideration. Schmauk speaks of those who compromise the faith for the sake of outward cooperation as those are casting away a precious treasure:

This treasure is the pure doctrine of salvation. With those to whom the purity of the Faith, the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, means much, we will walk up to the point where both conclude we must part. But with those to whom the purity of the Faith means little, or less than all; less than friendship, blood, practical success, the spirit of the age, and similar considerations, we are always in danger. Our chief treasure they do not so highly regard, and we cannot entrust it to them with the feeling that it is safe. They place other things on a par with this treasure, or above it, and this is a case where no man can have two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other.

The Word is compromised in so many circles, and so blatantly, in our generation that even in this blessed season of repentance, and at the time of the Feast of the Resurrection, there are many who deny the Truth of the Resurrection, and of Jesus' atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

Yet still the Word goes forth into the midst of the world, and the Holy Spirit gathers the remnant from those who hear the Word of God and keep it. As I write this brief message to you, I am with Pastor Tolar and his wife, conducting my visitation of the saints in Homer and Kenai, Alaska. By the grace of God, there are many opportunities for the Word to be heard, and for the remnant to be gathered by the Lord. We do not know how many have occasion to read each month's devotions, but we rejoice that the Word is available for all who will hear it. This month's devotions were written by Pastors Douglas Handrich, Michael Henson, Mark Mueller and Tim Tolar and Deacon Jerry Dulas.

In Christ,
Rt. Rev. James D. Heiser
Bishop, the ELDoNA

this is a case where no man can have two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Since then we believe we exist for the pure Gospel principle, and all other things are subordinate, not even our best friends outside (and still less our enemies) can ask us to commit ourselves to association with any people, plan, teachings, or temperament which would derogate from our doctrine; or which would convey the impression to the wayfaring man that we have loosened our hold and relaxed our standard of the truth.¹

If this be true, we are in a position to lay a rule for cooperation on the part of the Church, viz., the Church can cooperate in all matters in which it can openly apply its principles or Confession as a basis; and only in these. The Church must not ignore the issues of the day, or excuse herself from this responsibility, because she differs from a common Protestantism as to the end or the means; but she must bear her share of the public burden in some measure, and must find a way to do it.

And this temper of the sympathetic mind but the strong grasp and honest heart, the temper which is true at once to faith and to charity, is the only one of service in dealing with the most difficult problem of modern Protestantism, and of a common Christianity—a problem, be it remembered, which we did not create and which God Himself will have a hand in solving.

Since we may not rush into either extreme, but are obliged to see good wherever it may be found, and to see evil wherever it may be found;

1 Wherever we can work with a common Christianity, or with a common Lutheranism, with the assurance that no harm, immediate or remote, will come to our one great purpose of testimony to the truth, or to our integrity of conscience, we are ready to do so with joy; but wherever we are in doubt as to such a happy issue,—and we must be our own judges,—it is right and reasonable for us to decline to run any risk of exposing our highest good to danger, for the sake of attaining a lower and less important good; and no one in his fair and honest heart can blame us for failing to join in such a common movement.

We do attach the greatest importance to every Word of God; but we do not attach the greatest importance, except as a matter of high ideal, effective work, and wise expediency, to unity of ecclesiastical organization. Our unwillingness to cooperate with others, if it be an honest and conscientious thing, is not to be taken as a sign of dead orthodoxy, but as a sign of a living faith; it is not to be regarded as an evidence of a narrow outlook, but as a willingness to stand by one's convictions; it is not to be branded as a love of denomination or of Church above Christ, but is to be respected as an unswerving loyalty to Christ and His truth as we see it.

“THE CONFESSIONAL PRINCIPLE OF THE BOOK OF CONCORD AND CHRISTIAN COOPERATION.”

THE ATTITUDE OF THE CONFESSIONAL
PRINCIPLE TOWARD THOSE WHO ARE
WITHOUT THE LUTHERAN CHURCH.



The Lutheran Church bears an open and loving and helpful, not a closed attitude toward those without, i. e., toward those seeking the truth, or those upholding honest convictions in the fear of God and with uncorrupt will. It is the nature of our Church to be patient, suffering all things, having pleasure in approval rather than condemnation; in concord rather than in discord. The first of our Confessions—that of Augsburg,—and the last—the Form of Concord—in substance and in tone, and our own history, are set in evidence on that point. We are willing and anxious to co-operate for the saving of souls and the upbuilding of Christ's kingdom with all of God's children wheresoever they be found.

Yet we are prevented from co-operating if thereby an injury is done to our conscience; or if we thereby compromise an iota of our prized and precious Faith, for which we have been called into existence; a treasure which is blood-bought, and above all price; and for which thousands of confessors have laid down home, friends, worldly success and life.

This treasure is the pure doctrine of salvation. With those to whom the purity of the Faith, the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, means much, we will walk up to the point where both conclude we must part. But with those to whom the purity of the Faith means little, or less than all; less than friendship, blood, practical success, the spirit of the age, and similar considerations, we are always in danger. Our chief treasure they do not so highly regard, and we cannot entrust it to them with the feeling that it is safe. They place other things on a par with this treasure, or above it, and

From the Propers for the Third Sunday In Lent (Oculi)

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 11:14–28 (NKJV)

And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled. But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.” Others, testing Him, sought from Him a sign from heaven. But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils. He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters. When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”

And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, “Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!” But He said, “More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

The COLLECT

We beseech Thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of Thy humble servants and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to be our defense against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Then Jesus said to the chief priests, captains of the temple, and the elders who had come to Him, “Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not try to seize Me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

“Swords and clubs” would hardly have been enough, if you were taking on God. That is, when God has His “power switch” turned on. But we’re now deep into Jesus’ passion, and nearing the end of His state of humiliation. It’s a time when Jesus “shut down His power”, and let the powers of darkness have their way. It was an integral part of Jesus’ “passive obedience”, which was necessary to earn our salvation.

There are two parts to what we call “justification”. Simply, justification means that God declares all sinners righteous by the active and passive obedience of Jesus Christ. Such obedience to the Father’s will forms the backbone of our salvation. Without it, your pastor’s declaration of forgiveness would be hollow; there’d be no substance behind the words. Without Jesus’ active and passive work, we would have nothing.

So today, we see Jesus earning our salvation passively, allowing Himself to suffer all, even death, to pay for the great stockpile of sins past, present, and future. Let us stand in wonder at our God—Who not only wields His power when He needs to, but also withdraws it—when it serves to earn our salvation.

Mary tells the disciple Jesus was raised from the dead and they “did not believe.” The two disciples on the road to Emmaus had seen their risen Lord, they tell the others, and the others “did not believe them.” Of all the people in the world, it is “the eleven” who refuse to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. Is it any wonder that Jesus rebukes them?

Of all the disciple, “the eleven” were the closest to Jesus. The finest theologian instructed them. They had seen Jesus perform miracle upon miracle. They had even seen Jesus raise people from the dead! What they were saying in effect was, “Even though Jesus told us He would rise from the dead, He didn’t! He is dead.”

How could they not believe? Maybe Jesus just didn’t do enough to teach them. That’s it! It’s Jesus’ fault... or so many would think. Isn’t that always how people approach matters such as these? “It’s God’s fault.”

But clearly unbelief is man’s own doing. “The eleven” were taught by the best pastor to ever walk the earth. Yet they chose not to believe. Your pastor, like me, is nothing when compared to Jesus. So, don’t be too hard on him if, at times, he doesn’t seem to be doing so well at convincing people about the truth of Jesus. It is not his job to convince others. That belongs to the Holy Spirit. His job is to be faithful in preaching the word “in season and out of season.” Be thankful to God that you have a faithful pastor and pray that God would keep him faithful.

How important is God's Word? One need only look at today's reading to find out.

The disciple had no more than returned to Jerusalem from Emmaus when Jesus appears, again. The Emmaus disciples were telling the others what had happened when in pops Jesus. They had just seen Jesus, yet, when He appears again they, along with the other disciples, were "terrified and frightened." Before we come down too hard on the disciples, maybe we need to step into their sandals for a moment.

A great deal had taken place. Jesus had been betrayed by one of their own and denied by another. He had been arrested, beaten, and crucified. He had been taken from the Cross and buried in a tomb with an armed guard. The women who had gone to give His body a proper burial were greeted by angels and returned claiming to have seen Jesus. Two disciples had just returned from Emmaus having just seen Jesus. I am sure their heads were spinning.

The spinning stops when Jesus "opened their minds, that they might understand the scriptures." Unknown by the disciples, it would only be a matter of 40 days and they would no longer see Jesus. Just as the Scripture had sustained their Lord while He was with them, so Scripture would sustain them after He ascended. Everything they needed for life would be found in one place, Scripture. They were to go and preach what was recorded in Scripture. The essence of Scripture is simply "repentance for forgiveness of sins;" forgiveness found only in Christ.

Pilate, therefore, wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them. But they shouted, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Then he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has He done?"

As yesterday's devotion focused on the passive obedience of Jesus, today's meditation is about His active obedience. Pilate can find no fault in Jesus, so he cries out ". . . *what evil has He done?*" Indeed, Pilate was right. There is no fault to be found in Jesus.

His faultless life also serves our salvation. First, as man, Jesus is able to serve as our substitute. "*But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons*" (Gal. 4:4-5). But it's not as though Jesus "pulled rank" as God, using His deity to buffer the temptations of the devil. As stated in yesterday's devotion, Jesus is in His state of humiliation—not fully exercising His divine nature. "*For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin*" (Heb. 4:15). But as we know, Jesus also had to be God, even though rarely manifesting those attributes. For only a God could be without sin, as Jesus is.

So we see Jesus in a two-fold way. We see the Man who took on human flesh to be our replacement under the Law—and to suffer and die. We see also the God who lived a perfect life—and whose death paid for the world's sins. What a Redeemer!

From the Propers for the Fourth Sunday In Lent (Laetare)

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. John 6:1–15 (NKJV)

After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near.

Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.

Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little."

One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?"

Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted.

So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost." Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.

The Collect

Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Thursday, April 28: St. Luke 24:1–12

Easter Thursday

Confused and bewildered. That about sums up how every person in the first twelve verses of Luke 24 felt.

First it was the women. They knew what to expect. Jesus had died. Now they could pay their final respects and give their Lord's body the proper care it deserved. All they need is for someone to roll away the stone. Well, that part was already done but the body is nowhere to be found. That's baffling enough, but who would have taken the body? And why? If that isn't enough, two angels appear in radiant white robes. OK? Maybe we need to add fear to confused and bewildered.

One of the angels tells them the Good News of Jesus' Resurrection. It was just as Jesus had told them. He would die then rise again. Bingo! It all makes sense and they run to tell the eleven. But upon hearing the women, the Good News is shrugged off as just, well, nonsense. Peter runs to the tomb to check it out, but he leaves "wondering to himself at that which had come to pass." Confused and bewildered, that about sums it up for Peter and the disciples. But the confusion and bewilderment will vanish when our Lord appears later that evening.

All too often we find ourselves confused and bewildered. Life doesn't always seem to make sense. We know that Christ suffered and died for our sins and rose again, but when problems arise, it is easy to forget the Good News. Yet our Lord doesn't forget us any more than He forgot the women or the disciples for He is faithful even when we aren't.

What a devoted woman! While it is still dark, she goes to the tomb of her friend, Jesus. She noticed that the stone is blocking the entrance to the tomb is gone. She hurries back to tell Peter and the other disciple what she knows to be a situation worse than she first thought. It was terrible enough that her Lord was crucified, but now “they have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they laid him.”

They run back and Peter “saw, and believed,” but then returned to his own home, leaving behind Mary...weeping. Maybe he said something to Mary about what he believed or maybe he was too excited and forgot to say anything to her. What we do see is a woman who is very devoted to her Lord who will not leave the empty tomb.

It would be a rather lousy Easter for Mary if the story ended here. But it doesn't. The angels tell her the Good News of Jesus' Resurrection. Then like icing on the cake, Jesus tells her Himself. Mary hears the voice of Jesus calling her name.

Whether the other disciple told Mary what he believed about Jesus' Resurrection or if he forgot, one thing is sure about God. He will make sure people will hear the Good News. If people do not hear it the first time, He will send more messengers to speak the Good News. If you or I forget to tell others, Jesus doesn't. He will make sure the job of proclaiming the Good News will get done.

Not your righteousness, but the Lord's righteousness. These are the words that sum up this text, as well as our situation. As we penitently prepare for the Lord's Passion during the Lenten Season we are especially called to contemplate the reality of our sinfulness and our Redeemer's righteousness. The Israelites in our text were ever stiff-necked and rebellious, and we are likewise always straining against the Spirit which is bestowed upon us purely by grace through the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

How often do you provoke the Lord your God to anger with your sins of commission and omission? We do not worship literal golden calves, but how many other idols do we have? Popularity, wealth, possessions, sports, etc can all become idols not unlike the golden calf in the wilderness. Luther said whatever is first in your heart has in fact become your god because it has the place that should be reserved exclusively for the Lord. For “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”

Through Christ and His righteousness we too are led through this wilderness of sin and into the promised land of our Lord's kingdom. Lent is a time to stand on the bank of the spiritual Jordan and contemplate what tremendous joys await us on the other side, not because of our righteousness but because of His righteousness graciously poured upon us in baptism.

Today's text contains the command that Jesus Christ declares is the most important of all: "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul...." This most important of statements is masterfully referenced by Martin Luther in his Small Catechism when he opens the explanation of each of the Ten Commandments with "We should fear and love God"...and so in this penitential season of Lent we fear and love God because of the tremendous sacrifice He has made on our behalf.

The Lord has chosen us in His omniscient nature before the beginning of time to be His elect that we might have the rare privilege to walk in all His ways; to love and serve Him with all our heart and soul. Through the Passion of Christ we are ransomed from under the law and become recipients of God's promised inheritance purely by His grace—a grace that looks past our many failings and rebellious stiff-necked nature to see only the atoning death of the Son of God on a cross for the sins of the world.

May we always be fully cognizant of this great gift bestowed on us, but especially so as we prepare our hearts and minds for the coming Passiontide when the Son of God shall suffer the greatest of humiliation and die for our salvation.

What a difference between having Jesus as Savior and not having Him as Savior. One need only look at the guards reaction when the angel "rolled back the stone from the door" to Jesus' grave. Though the earth stopped quaking, the guards continued to shake. Then they "became as dead men."

But God had graciously given faith to these women and the angel reaffirmed what Jesus had told His followers: He would die and rise again on the third day. Upon leaving the tomb, the women come face-to-face with their risen Lord and they worshipped Him. Then they hear those most comforting words, "Do not be afraid." Jesus repeats the instructions He had given the women through the angel. They were to go to Galilee and tell the disciples they would see Him, too.

The guards, on the other hand, were still afraid. They were given the duty of guarding the tomb and now would be found derelict which meant certain death for them. So they looked for comfort but in the wrong place. Unlike the women, they were told to keep the mouths shut about the truth of what happened at the tomb and were paid to propagate a lie, and not a very good one at that.

We have been given the opportunity to speak the truth. Though we are "dead men" according to our sinful nature, God has made us alive in Christ through the forgiveness of our sins. Because we are forgiven His word applies to us, too, "Do not be afraid."

Whenever troubles arise in our lives, there is that part of us that longs for Jesus to ride in on His white horse, as it were, and save us from what is troubling us. Maybe the problem is sickness or financial woes or family discord, whatever the problem we simply want Jesus to take it away... NOW!

Two disciples were returning to Emmaus after what most assuredly was a troubling week. Everything started out just great. Jesus rode into Jerusalem with the resounding voices of the multitude shouting, “Hosanna! Son of David!”, but the situation quickly degenerated to, “Crucify Him!” The Emmaus disciples had lamented: “We trusted that it was He who would redeem Israel.” Instead, Jesus was crucified. How little they understood what Christ had done. What they had seen with their own eyes was interfering with what they had heard with their ears. All they could think about was that Jesus was dead. Even though they had heard from “certain women” that Jesus had risen from the dead, they were “slow of heart to believe.”

We, too, are often like those Emmaus disciples. The troubles we see in our lives can keep our ears from hearing that He died and rose again for us. But Christ is patient with us just as he was with those Emmaus disciples. He continues to gently speak to us and assure us that He is indeed raised from the dead. And if He can conquer death, nothing can or will get in the way of His love for us. He will gently come and reassure us that our faith is not in vain.

This chapter speaks volumes to we who are blessed to live in the United States of America, for no nation on earth enjoys the gracious combination of abundant natural resources, personal freedom, and wealth that we do. While these wonderful gifts of God are meant to be enjoyed by His people, they can also become a snare and a trap which will take us away from our Lord and Savior.

Our land of milk and honey has the same potential to distract and deceive that the land of Canaan held for the Israelites in today's text. Moses warns the people that there will be temptations to follow other gods which are not gods: wealth, power, sexuality, etc. These same temptations prowl about in our land being expertly used by the devil to draw souls away from Christ and into hell. We too need to be reminded to keep God's words before our eyes morning and evening, to speak of them among ourselves and to allow them to direct our steps.

How many hours do we spend with the TV, computer, or radio compared to the amount of time devoted to studying our Lord's commands, statutes, and precepts for our lives? The Lord has graciously recorded and preserved throughout history His words of life for our daily edification and blessing. There should be nothing in this life that takes precedence over our time spent with our loving Lord Who is long-suffering toward our constant neglect and rebellion toward Him and His gracious forgiveness of our sins.

Thursday, April 7: Deuteronomy 28:1–14 Laetare, 4th S. in Lent

The verses of chapter 28 that make up today's text are full of promise and abundant blessing from God. This is true because God's Word shows a perfect way, a way of righteousness and holiness, a way that ultimately leads to eternal blessedness in His kingdom. If the people will simply follow the Lord's clear instructions contained in His holy Word they will enjoy great abundance and prosperity related to everything they put their hand to.

There is just one problem: our sinfulness caused by original sin as well as our personal sin that prevents us from ever having the slimmest hope of fulfilling God's Word in this life. Because of our sin we instead reap the wages of our fallen flesh: death. This has been every human being's reality since the Fall, and during Lent we are called to especially meditate on this sad reality and its dreadful consequences. Consequences that require the death of the Son of God. Guilt which we have justly earned that must be carried by our Savior. Penalties that must be paid in full by Jesus Christ.

For if He does not pay the penalty, bear the guilt, and die for them...we shall be eternally condemned. What we could never do, He has perfectly accomplished by living His earthly life in conformance with every single statute of God, and then willingly going to the cross to pay the price of our failure to live our lives according to those same statutes. During Lent we especially remember that our brokenness became His burden so that His righteousness could become our justification: The Just dying for the sake of the unjust.

From the Propers for the Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord (Easter)

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. Mark 16:1–8 (NKJV)

Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away; for it was very large.

And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples; and Peter; that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you."

So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

The COLLECT

Almighty God, who through Thine only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, hast overcome death and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life, we humbly beseech Thee that as Thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

“Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.” On this last day of the Triduum we hear of our Lord’s burial. He was wrapped in strips of linen that had been mixed with myrrh and aloes, according to the custom of the Jews. These strips of linen are reflected in the linen cloths that are used at every Holy Communion. The Fair Linen, the Corporal, the Purificators, even the Lavabo towel are all made of linen to serve as a reminder of our Lord’s burial clothes and that in that death we have won for us eternal life.

The Altar also is a reminder of our Lord’s death, this why it takes the form and shape of a tomb. It is sometimes even referred to as a Tomb Altar. The Reformed prefer altars that are shaped like tables, because they don’t believe that the Lord’s Supper actually gives any gifts; it is simply a meal of remembrance. For us Lutherans we believe that we receive the very Body and Blood of our Lord given in bread and wine; the very Body that was wrapped in linen cloths and laid in a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. And we believe that by receiving the consecrated bread and wine, we are actually receiving our Lord’s Body and Blood, and thereby we are also receiving the gifts that our Lord promised we would receive—forgiveness of sins, eternal life, salvation.

In today’s text we are shown the horrible consequences of unrepentant rebellion against God and His Word. Those who insist on rejecting our Lord’s Word and will for our lives would do well to meditate on these verses, but we too need to keep our focus on His statutes.

Though we are promised and receive justification through grace in the name of Jesus Christ, that reality should not be used as an excuse for disregarding God’s precepts for our earthly walk. Sometime we can become callous or lazy regarding what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. The reason Christ tells His disciples to be watchful is because He knows how seductive and treacherous the world can be when used by the devil to draw believers away from their Lord and Savior.

The Apostle Paul assures us that “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,” so we cannot ignore God’s Word that directs us to live a certain way just because Jesus has paid the price for our guilt in ignoring that Word of God. The Psalmist assures us “a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

In this Lententide let us humble ourselves and conform our sinful will to His righteous will as presented in His Word. Let us come humbly before our Lord striving to live His Word, but comforted by the fact that when we fail to live as we should our Savior Lord covers our sin with His righteous life and atoning death.

This is a beautiful gospel-filled text relating how Moses is brought to the top of Mount Nebo to be shown the entire Promised Land before he is released from the burden of his earthly sojourn. Moses had led the people for 40 years, bearing many burdens due to his shepherding of the Lord's people just as the Lord's called overseer bear much in the Office of the Holy Ministry today.

The pastor like Moses though gets to see the Promised Land that awaits his parishioners more clearly than most through his weekly study and preparation in leading the flock of His Lord. This is a rare privilege that every parishioner can share in by simply reading their Bible at home, and/or participating in weekly Bible study and services in the parish. What a joy it is, in this time of penitent reflection, to be allowed to look upon the glory of the promised land of the Kingdom of the Lord! A kingdom that we each can graciously see weekly through the Means of Grace found in Word and Sacrament.

Some may think that this text is more law than gospel, but I challenge them to see anything less than gospel in a Lord Who mercifully allows the sinner to see the Promised Land of God. A gracious Lord Who bears the sins of His people and sends His ministers to deliver His grace-filled mysteries to a people who do not deserve Heaven, but yet are allowed to see it and will ultimately live in God's Kingdom as His heirs.

“But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.” Blood and water—two of the elements present in the blessed Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Therefore, at our Lord's death we are immediately reminded of the benefit that His death holds for us. Our Lord pours out blood and water to give to all those who believe on Him the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation that He won on the holy cross.

Perhaps you are familiar with the woodcut of the Crucifixion by Albrecht Dürer. In this woodcut, the blood and water of our Lord is being poured into a chalice being held by an angel. It is a picture of the Lord's Supper. In the Lord's Supper we receive forgiveness, life and salvation. It is the very Body and Blood of our Lord that was offered up as a sacrifice for our sins on the holy cross that we receive with the bread and wine.

But this great gift to us came at a great price—by our Lord's passion and death. He cried out, *“It is finished”* and *“He gave up His spirit.”* In His death our salvation was completed, there was nothing left to be done; no other work was necessary. It was completed in our Lord Jesus' death. Therefore, He gives up His Spirit, so that we might receive that Holy Spirit through the means of grace, and we might believe and receive forgiveness, life and salvation.

Yesterday, we beheld our Lord Jesus Christ dressed as a king with a purple robe and a crown of thorns. This was a picture of our Lord as the suffering king. Today, we see our King take His place upon His throne—the cross. There is even a declaration above His head which proclaims that He is “*The King of the Jews!*” But thanks be to God that He is not only the King of the Jews, but also all those who are spiritually Jews—those who have been baptized into His death; those who have been made co-heirs of that eternal throne by being placed onto that throne of the cross through Holy Baptism.

In our Holy Baptism we also have been stripped naked of all sin which we inherited from Adam, and which we have added thereto ourselves. And spiritually naked, just like our Lord stood naked on the tree of the cross, we attach ourselves to the same cross that our Lord bore and we are buried in the same grave that He was buried in, and we are raised from the grave of sin and death, and given the white robes of our Lord’s righteousness.

These robes of righteousness are now our Lord’s kingly vestments (and we see a picture of those robes of righteousness in the minister’s vestments). Spiritually we also wear these robes of righteousness. They proclaim that we are co-heirs with our brother Christ; we share His throne of victory with Him. Our nakedness on account of our sin has been covered. Behold the King of the Jews! And behold your salvation in Him alone!

From the Propers for the Fifth Sunday In Lent (Judica)

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. John 8:46–59 (NKJV)

“Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God’s words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.”

Then the Jews answered and said to Him, “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?”

Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges. Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.”

Then the Jews said to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.’ Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Whom do You make Yourself out to be?”

Jesus answered, “If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, ‘I do not know Him,’ I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.”

Then the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?”

Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”

Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

The Collect

We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

1 John 2:5, “But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him.” “The Holy Scriptures possesses divine authority, that is, in all that it says it [the Word] is entitled to the same faith and obedience that is due God” (Christian Dogmatics, I, 307). We cannot say that we obey God, when at the same time we do not obey His Word. We have sinned.

Although the Son of God knows that with the heavenly Father all things are possible, nevertheless Jesus will not seek His own benefit, but prays, “Not what I will, but what You will.” All things are theoretically possible with our omnipotent God, yet the Holy Trinity has not done all things. Furthermore, our God never planned on doing all things. He determined to do certain things. Most importantly, before the creation of the world, the heavenly Father determined to send His Son to die for the sins of the world. In that way our God saves men from destruction and hell. When the fullness of time had come, that message was revealed to us by means of the Prophets and Apostles in the Holy Scriptures. Jesus declares, “But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” God has bound Himself according to His Word to do His holy will.

What good news! It is a divine necessity—Jesus Christ rendered perfect obedience and faith toward the Word of God and His heavenly Father. Trust in your Savior, who shows that He is “the Christ, the Son of the Blessed,” by His obedient fulfilling of the Scripture’s necessity that He drinks the cup of wrath which we deserved.

“Behold the Man!” When we hear these words we see the image of our beaten and scourged Savior. There He stands before His accusers having been whipped, wearing a purple robe and a crown of thorns. He stands before them in the vestments of a king—even if these adornments are meant as a form of mockery to our Lord. For those who believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, however, see a different image. They see the image of the true King; the Savior Who reigns on high; the Savior Who came into this world to fulfill the Law perfectly and to suffer and die at the hands of evil men, so that our sins might be atoned for and we might be given the reward that our Lord won for us on the tree of the cross.

“Behold the Man!” Behold the punishment that we deserve! Behold the penalty for our sin! Behold the Lord standing in our place! Behold the Lord taking on the punishment that we deserve! Behold our Lord taking it upon Himself to destroy the penalty of our sin! Behold our Savior and our salvation in Him alone!

Our Lord Jesus Christ has been given all power and authority to redeem mankind from their sin. He lays aside that power so that His accuser might have the upper hand and win the day. But their victory is shallow and short-lived, for although our Lord suffers and dies, He rises again on the third day triumphant over sin and death, and now reigns for all believers on the right hand of the Father as Savior.

Yesterday we heard of our Lord's betrayal and arrest at the hands of Judas. Today we hear of our Lord's trial before the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate. This trial is much like the Lord's trial in the desert with Satan. The accusers have already made up their mind Who this Man is and what His punishment will be—death. The accusers have only one problem to solve in order to carry out their motives—they must convince Pontius Pilate to pass a sentence of crucifixion.

We clearly get the impression from the narrative that Pontius Pilate would rather not be in this situation. He would rather not have anything to do with this Man. One almost feels sorry for Pilate. But Pilate is as much to blame for our Lord's suffering and crucifixion as our Lord's accusers, for he has ample opportunity to release our Lord. Unfortunately, Pilate, like so many in this world, is more concerned with his position in the world, than doing the right thing.

Our Lord, just like in the wilderness with the devil, willing endures this suffering at the hands of His accusers, for He is doing it for the salvation of His very own special creation—He is doing it for you and for the entire world, so that He might redeem us and the world from all of our sin. He takes on the suffering and trial; the harassment from accusers, so that they may not have anything any longer with which to accuse you, and you may live free from the penalty of your sin.

“Infamous” would be the correct word to describe the reference to Pontius Pilate in the creeds of the church. While Jesus speaks of the soldiers who crucified Him saying, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do,” Pilate's sinful action is not based on ignorance. Pilate examined Jesus and correctly determined, “I find no fault in this Man.” Pilate knew that the chief priest's charges were “because of envy.” Pilate even made plans to release Jesus. Yet it was Pilate's love of his position and the fear of losing control of his subjects that led him to condemn an innocent man. “So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd... delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified.” Pilate knew the truth, but didn't care. As Pilate Himself said, “What is truth?” What was Pilate's response to Jesus when He refused to respond to the baseless charges? Pilate “marveled.” When he learned that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, Pilate was “more afraid.”

The truth is clear. Jesus was, as Pilate declared, innocent. This King of the Jews suffered under Pontius Pilate and died to satisfy the wrath of God. He died to take away our sins. Do not marvel or fear. Instead, believe in His substitutionary death. Do not obey, but set free your envious desire to sin. “How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ... Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

St. Mark 15:28, “So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘And He was numbered with the transgressors.’” At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus was numbered with transgressors when he stood in line with other sinners to receive “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mk. 1:4). John the Baptist tried to deter him, since Jesus was no sinner. Nevertheless, Jesus convinced John to do it so that it would “fulfill all righteousness,” both mine and yours.

At the end of His ministry, Jesus is crucified between two criminals fulfilling Isaiah 53:12b, “...And He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” Despite the calls to “save Yourself, and come down from the cross,” Jesus remains on the cross until His death that He might save us.

After completing His ministry of reconciling us to the Father, Jesus is no longer numbered with transgressors, but receives burial, “...where no one had ever lain before” (Luke 23:53). There has never been and never will be again the burial of a Righteous One. His body does not see decay (Acts 13:37), but it rests in the tomb until He receives His glorious resurrection.

Through faith in Jesus’ redemption, our sins are forgiven and we receive Christian baptism. In our baptism, we are united with Jesus so that we might be declared righteous and numbered with the sons of God (Gal. 5:24). Trusting in Jesus’ work alone, we refuse any calls to save ourselves by works we might do.

Our Lord is betrayed into the hands of evil men by Judas. It is for this reason that throughout the centuries of the Church Wednesday has become a weekly day of fasting. For it was on the night before our Lord’s betrayal and arrest that Judas agreed for thirty pieces of silver to betray Him. Every Friday is a remembrance of Good Friday—the day our Lord Jesus Christ offered Himself up as the perfect sacrifice for our atonement. Therefore, every Friday during the year is also a weekly day of fasting—a day to reflect upon our Lord’s sacrifice to win for us forgiveness.

Throughout this week, the Church reflects upon the words of the Evangelist St. John and his Passion. Therefore, we begin this week of reflection upon our sins which led to our Lord’s cross by seeing Him betrayed into the hands of sinful men. He is betrayed into our hands, for it was on account of our sin that He was betrayed and arrested.

Our Lord is willing arrested, so that the prophecy concerning us might be fulfilled “*of those whom You gave Me, I have lost none.*” These words spoken of the Apostles, apply to you as well, for our Lord suffers at the hands of evil men, so that you might not suffer the evils of hell. He descends into hell, so that He might break the bonds of hell that bound us and all mankind. Therefore, every Sunday is also a day of remembrance for us Christians—it is a day to remember that Christ has defeated death so that we might have eternal life.

From the Propers for the Sixth Sunday In Lent
(Palmarum)

THE HOLY GOSPEL St. Matthew 21:1–9 (NKJV)

Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. “And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.” All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: “Tell the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.” So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them. And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: “Hosanna to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ Hosanna in the highest!”

The Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, who hast sent Thy Son, our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon Him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross that all mankind should follow the example of His great humility, mercifully grant that we may both follow the example of His patience and also be made partakers of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God world without end.

Thursday, April 14: St. John 12:1–19

Judica, 5th S. in Lent

If only we could be like blessed Lazarus! Do I say this because many people believed in Jesus on account of Lazarus? Yes, but there’s even more. St. John 12:10-11 says, “But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.” But they were trying to kill Lazarus! Yep, that’s the other part of being like blessed Lazarus! 1 Peter 4:16 says, “Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.”

But Lazarus didn’t do anything? Oh course, he did. Lazarus was dead and then he heard Jesus’ voice and came out of the tomb. It’s the same for us. We were dead in our transgressions and sins and the world loved us because they were dead in their transgression and sins and we were one of its own (Jn. 15:19a). And then Jesus says, “I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” (John 17:14). We heard the word of truth and were made alive by Jesus. Like Lazarus, just to have us walking around confessing our sin, trusting in Jesus, walking in good works and bearing witness of His salvation is enough to earn the world’s persecution.

Don’t say “If only....” We ARE like Lazarus, for we were united with Jesus in our baptism (Romans 6:5-6). These crosses are not marks of God’s wrath, but tokens of His Love (Heb. 12:6-8, 1 Cor. 11:32, 1 Pet. 4:14).

The request of the Greeks in John 12:21 “to see Jesus” is more than an appeal for a photo opportunity. These God-fearing Gentiles had come to the feast in Jerusalem to worship the One True God. Just as those God-fearing Gentiles from the East—the Wise Men—were searching for Jesus at the beginning of His life and came to worship Him, so even now as His life draws to a close we see God-fearing Gentiles desiring to learn of the heavenly Father from the Promised Son.

The arrival of these believing Gentiles reminds Jesus that His “hour has come!” Through His suffering and death—which is so close—the Jewish Messiah will draw all men to Himself (v.32). The Father glorifying Jesus through His atoning death will bring forth much fruit. Even now, before it happens, these fruit-filled Gentiles are the pre-proof that Jesus will be “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (Lk. 2:32).

You, too, have come to believe in the free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus. Have you ever doubted whether your service of thanksgiving to the Lord is all worth it? Our Christian service includes fighting against the lusts of the sinful mind through self-denial, crucifying the sinful nature through repentance, and giving up your time and money to serve your neighbor. Be assured that it is all worth it! Listen to the comforting Gospel. “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.” Anyone who trusts in Jesus is a son of light, who does not abide in darkness.

Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” The Lutherans objected to the Roman teaching that Jesus had come as a New Lawgiver! The Roman Church teaches that Moses’ laws couldn’t gain us salvation, but obedience to Jesus’ new laws—summarized by love—could. On first glance, John 13:34 appears to support the new lawgiver theory. However, a closer reading of Jesus’ words in their context tells a different story.

Fulfillment of the command to love fellow believers (one another) is a fruit of faith which flows from the gift of Jesus’ love.

How has Jesus loved us? He did something which no one else had done or could do. Jesus kept God’s laws delivered by Moses and laid down His life for our salvation. The words, “Where I am going, you cannot come,” teach us that Jesus is the only one who could merit eternal life by His love and then impart that atoning gift to us. He had perfect trust in and perfect love for His heavenly Father. “Having loved us,” Jesus provided salvation which is received through faith, so that “you shall follow Me afterward” (v.36).

In the Christian Questions with their Answers for those who intend to go to the Sacrament, question 18 asks, “Finally why do you wish to go to the Sacrament? Answer: That I may learn to believe that Christ, out of great love, died for my sin, and also learn from Him to love God and my neighbor.