

SATURDAY, AUGUST 4: GAL. 1:1-24

9<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY A. TRINITY

The grace of God, by which our sins are forgiven, is how we are reconciled to Him, whereas peace is what we feel after we are reconciled. This reconciliation is won solely by the works and merits of Christ. We are reconciled by the work of God alone. He came down from Heaven. He fulfilled the Law for us. He suffered our punishment on the tree of the holy cross. He was condemned, we are reconciled to God, and therefore have peace with Him.

Therefore, men should not claim the credit for themselves when they perform any good work, since the very Son of God in the Gospel said that He sought not His own glory. Nor had He come to do His own will, but the will of Him who sent him! This will and glory of the Father St. Paul now mimics, that he also, by the example of the Lord who sent him, may indicate that he seeks not his own glory or the performance of his own will in the preaching of the gospel, just as he says a little later, “if I were to please men, I should not be a servant of Christ.”

St. Paul is writing to the Galatians to remind them that salvation is not found in their works, but in the works and merits of the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

We pray: Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

# THE LUTHERAN HERALD



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## *The Calendar*

July 1	Trinity 5
July 2 (M)	The Visitation
July 8	Trinity 6
July 15	Trinity 7
July 22	Trinity 8
July 25 (W)	St. James the Elder, Apostle
July 29	Trinity 9/St. Olaf, Martyr

### ***2018 Synod and Seminary Graduation***

The highlight of this year's Synod was the examination and graduation of the first candidate from St. Ignatius Lutheran Theological Seminary. Candidate Josiah Scheck's examination on June 26 lasted approximately three and a half hours, and included a defense of his thesis, the preaching of a model sermon, presentation of a confirmation lesson, and examination by the pastors of the diocese on a wide range of topics.

The graduation took place on the 27<sup>th</sup>, following the Divine Service. In addition to receiving his diploma from the seminary, Candidate (now Pastor-Elect) Scheck received his call to serve as Pastor of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church in Richmond, Missouri, where Pastor C.D. Hudson is preparing to retire later this year after more than 23 years of faithful service in the holy office.

Thirteen members of the diocese were in attendance, and welcomed Pastor-Elect Scheck as a fourteenth member. (In addition, there were four excused absences.) Information regarding Pastor-Elect Scheck's ordination and installation will be available soon.



**Pastor-Elect Scheck, Bishop Heiser & Pastor Hudson**

## **FRIDAY, AUGUST 3: 2 COR. 12:19-13:13 9<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY A. TRINITY**

St. Paul is praying that he and his colleagues will be humbled by seeing the Corinthians so well behaved that he will not need to rebuke them.

Christians are often accused by those outside the Church that we are hypocrites, because we are still sinners. Our Lord never promised that we would stop sinning. As long as we bear this flesh we will continue to sin. Our Lord Jesus promised that He would remove the sting of death from us by His own death and give to us the rewards that He won—forgiveness, life, and salvation. However, even though our sins are not credited to us, that does not give us a license to do whatever our evil will desires.

The joy referred to here by St. Paul will come when the Corinthians mend their ways and stop living as they did before they came to the faith. At that point it will be possible for them to mature in faith. Faith is increased as we come through trials, temptations, and tribulations. But even before we mend our ways and mature in faith, there will be the consolation of the promises expressed in the Gospel, enabling us to abandon the pleasures of the present life in favor of hope for world to come.

We pray: Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.”

Satan invented heresies and schisms to undermine the faith of Christians, to pervert truth and break true fellowship and unity. Unable to keep those who believe on the Lord Jesus in the dark ways of our former unbelieving and sinful error, he draws us into a new maze of deceit. He snatches men away from the Church itself, and just when they think they have drawn near to the light and escaped the night of the world, he plunges them unawares into a new darkness.

Though they do not stand by the Gospel of Christ, that we are justified by faith in the works of Christ alone, they call themselves Christians. Though they are walking in darkness, they think they are in the light, through the deceitful flattery of the adversary who, as St. Paul said, transforms himself into an angel of light and adorns his ministers as ministers of righteousness. They call night day, death salvation, despair hope, unbelief faith, antichrist Christ, and cunningly obscure truth by their lies. That is what happens, my friends, when we do not return to the Fount of Truth, when we are not looking to the Head and keeping the doctrine taught from Heaven. If we lose sight of the One True Savior of mankind, the Lord Jesus Christ, we are left to salvation through our own means, which is no salvation at all.

We pray: Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In chapter 3, Paul covered the beauty and simplicity of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. To drive the point home, he brings up the case of Abraham--perhaps Israel's most revered man of faith. Surely if anyone could be justified by his works, it would be this man. But however great was Abraham's life in the sight of man, it would do nothing to increase his standing before God. “What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’” In this passage Paul quotes the words of Genesis 15:6 to further substantiate his case.

Paul also addresses the issue of circumcision. Did this somehow play a role in Abraham's righteousness, as many Jews would have believed? “Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised...” Therefore, neither righteous living, nor performance of ritual count anything toward salvation. It has been and will always be salvation by grace alone through faith alone.

We pray: Salvation unto us has come by God's free grace and favor; good works cannot avert our doom, they help and save us never. Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone, who did for all the world atone; He is our one Redeemer. (TLH 377:1)

**TUESDAY, JULY 3: ROMANS 5:1-6:2 5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY**

There are many meanings to the word “love.” We can say “I love ice cream,” or “I love my wife,” or even “I love my job,” even though we can mean that facetiously. There are various types of love in Scripture, and various Greek words are used to denote them. The dearest type is the one associated with God’s love for man: agape. It is the word Paul uses here to denote one-way, unconditional love. God loves without regard of the recipient’s worthiness. Paul brings this out as he describes mankind in the lowest of terms: “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Paul uses three different phrases to describe us: “without strength,” “ungodly,” and “sinners.” We are not only powerless to come to God, we have no desire to do so. We are the opposite of “godly;” we are “ungodly” sinners. By emphasizing the hopelessness of man’s condition, Paul makes us appreciate all the more the all-sufficiency of Christ.

We pray: Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed His blood for me; died that I might live on high, lived that I might never die. As the branch is to the vine, I am His, and He is mine. (TLH 342:1)

**WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 1: 2 COR. 10:1-18 9<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY A. TRINITY**

St. Paul talks about those who argue against the Christian faith with nothing but their own human knowledge. The fundamental error of these men, who prefer the circular argumentation of false human understanding more than keeping to the straight path of divine truth, is that they have nothing but their own tiny, changing, human minds to measure the divine mind. The mind and will of God is infinitely capacious and utterly immutable, a mind that can count uncountable things without passing from one to the next. He only reveals a portion of this unfathomable mind and will in His Holy Scripture, and that is all that we need to know.

However, such men who refuse to believe the Word of God and what our Lord Jesus has done for mankind, to use the words of the Apostle, are “comparing themselves with themselves,” and unfortunately they end by understanding nothing. Of course, every time such philosophers decide to do something, they have to form a new mental resolution because their minds are mutable, and they imagine it is the same with God. Without having a notion of God, they mistake themselves for Him, and instead of measuring God by God, they compare themselves to themselves.

The Holy Scriptures reveal to us what we need to know of God. We have a Savior from sin, death, and the devil in the Lord Jesus Christ. He came down to Earth and took upon Himself our flesh, so that He might redeem us and that we might know Him, our God, rightly.

We pray: Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

St. Paul's purpose was not only for money to be contributed to the poor, but for it to be contributed with great eagerness. Likewise, God appointed in the Second Table of the Commandments to provide not only for the nourishment of our neighbor in need, but also for the benefit of the providers, who learn love and compassion for their fellow man. If St. Paul considered only the interest of the poor, he would have commanded that the money be given, and he would not have needed to ask for the eagerness of the providers.

But now you see the Apostle commending that above all the givers to be joyful. We should give in a cheerful manner and not grudgingly. This is only learned through the teaching of compassion. In this we are taught by our Lord Jesus, who gave all that He had to pay for us poor, miserable sinners. In Him is the perfect picture of love and compassion, and of being a cheerful giver. He gladly and willingly gives us forgiveness, life, and salvation through laying down all that He had, including His life. Now we, who were once poor in spirit, have all the treasures of Heaven. Therefore, having received this great gift, let us learn to give in like manner. "God loves a cheerful giver;" not simply a giver, but the one who does this with pleasure.

We pray: Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

After establishing the foundation of our relationship with God--contrasting the futility of man with the sufficiency of Christ--Paul now describes our new relationship with God: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace." Sin, which was once the dominant feature of man's nature, is no longer his ruling master. Christ now dwells within us; we are spiritual members of His body, the Church. The mirror of the law, which condemned us in our sin, now serves as a cheerful guide to show us how we are to live as God's children.

Normally we think of the law as a grim necessity, rules that must be kept to avoid punishment. And indeed, this kind of law does exist--the laws of society that apply to all people--that chaos and anarchy be avoided. But this is not the Christian's motivation. Paul says we are "not under law, but under grace." Our motivation comes from the Spirit who dwells within us, and our desire is to please God, not just to avoid his wrath.

We pray: Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee; take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise. (TLH 400:1)

From verse 7 onward, Paul uses the first person singular. This is significant because the chapter is dedicated to the source of man's problem: man himself. Paul doesn't accuse anyone else but himself, but by implication, all are included. He knows what it is like to be tempted, and to give in to temptation. He describes the process: "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died."

Through a clever use of words, Paul describes our natural and original state: contentment with sin. This is our condition from conception. Without outside intervention, we would remain ignorant of our damnable condition. But once the law is applied, our conscience is roused and we become aware of our sin. What we once thought to be life was really death. We were "dead men walking." Even after the new man arrives--the man of faith--there continues to be a need for the law, since the old man is never fully put away in this life.

We pray: Dear Father in heaven, thank You for the gift of the law, which exposes our sinful nature. May we always see ourselves as the sinners we are, that repentance may be realized, and forgiveness sought. In Jesus' name, Amen.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor."

Who could know all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden in the divine nature of Christ, which He chose for our sakes to conceal under the poverty of His human nature? When He took upon Himself our mortality, He revealed himself in humility and poverty, but He promised us eternal riches through His death and subsequent exaltation. When He died He did not lose the rewards, as if His life were taken from Him. He freely gave His life for us, and gives us now the eternal gifts He paid for on the tree of the holy cross with His blood.

How great is the multitude of His gifts which remain hidden to those who reject Him! But to those who believe on and hope in Him these great eternal gifts have been revealed and enjoyed. On account of our sinful nature we understand only part of that great gift until we are made perfect in Heaven. To make us worthy of this perfect gift our Lord Jesus, equal to the Father in the form of God, became like us in the form of a servant and assumed our flesh into the Godhead so that we might be remade into the likeness of God with new and glorious bodies in Heaven (see Philippians 2:5-8). What a great gift!

We pray: Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

**SATURDAY, JULY 28: 2 COR. 6:11-7:16 8<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY A. TRINITY**

Picture a wagon being pulled by two animals that are yoked together side by side, except that, instead of two strong horses, you have one that is big and strong and another that is small and sick. Or worse, you have a horse on one side and a goat on the other! Such animals are unequally yoked together, and they will soon stumble and bring everything crashing down.

Paul instructs the Corinthians, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers... Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord.” This isn’t a command for believers never to associate with unbelievers in the world. It’s a command for believers not to participate in the moral filthiness of unbelievers, as if they were the same. What’s more, it’s a command for believers not to work together with unbelievers to pull the wagon of the Christian Church. In other words, those who believe the true doctrine of Christ should not work together in the Church with those who support false teaching.

Centuries ago the Lutheran Church understood these words of St. Paul as a command for them to disassociate themselves from the Papacy, which rejected the pure teaching of the Gospel. Even in matters of adiaphora, like ceremonies and rites in the Church, our Lutheran forefathers were careful not to give the impression that they were still working together with the Romanists or that they were “pulling the wagon” together with them.

It is for the same reason that Lutherans today who are faithful to the Scriptures and their Confessions must disassociate themselves from any synod or church body that rejects any part of God’s Word.

We pray: Father, You have called us by grace and cleansed us through faith. Keep us steadfast in Your Word and the clear confession of it. Amen.

**FRIDAY, JULY 6: ROMANS 2:1-29 5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY**

Paul has just finished indicting the “really bad” sinners: “those” Gentiles. While all he said is true, that those who ignore their God-given conscience are guilty, he has now set the table to indict those who are supposed to know better: “Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.” Man tends to judge sin as blatant or subtle, severe or minor. But by God’s standards, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). If this is not recognized, if we do not see ourselves as equally deserving of God’s wrath and punishment, then our fate is sealed: “But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God...”

We, like the Jews of Paul’s day, have been given a great advantage. We are privileged to have the totality of God’s Word, and years and years of immersion in that Word. God has given us His Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion that we may be strengthened in the true faith unto life everlasting. Let us take full advantage and heed these words of Jesus: “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48).

We pray: Dear Lord, help us to remain steadfast in Your Word, that our faith may be strong and we may be counted among the elect. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Everyone and every thing on this earth belong to God. He made it and He sustains it. This includes, as today's reading indicates, civil authority. Romans 13 is merely a detailed aspect of the Fourth Commandment, which directs us to honor our authorities. This is quite a statement coming from Paul, since the civil government to which he was subject was not only pagan, but incredibly harsh. And yet, Paul says: "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves." The "judgment" to which Paul refers is two-fold. First, breaking civil law will yield punishment from the governing authorities. Nobody knew that better than the citizens of Rome! But more importantly, violation of civil law is an affront against God, who stands behind all civil authority (Fourth Commandment).

Of course, there is a limit to our civil obedience. If that obedience puts us in conflict with God, we must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). Let us give thanks for the freedom we enjoy in this country, and pray that God will preserve our right to worship Him and proclaim His Name without fear.

We pray: God bless our native land! Firm may she ever stand thro' storm and night! When the wild tempests rave, Ruler of wind and wave do Thou our country save by Thy great might. (TLH 577:1)

From Paul's words it seems that the Corinthians were a bit unhappy with him for changes he had made in his plans. He wasn't doing or saying all the things they wanted him to. So he finds himself here, as in other epistles, defending his ministry to those who should have needed no such defense, for they owed their very salvation to him as the instrument God used to bring them to faith. They were "an epistle of Christ, ministered by us."

Paul explains what all true ministers are, and what God's people should expect them to be: the fragrance of Christ, "diffusing the fragrance of His knowledge in every place." Ministers are to represent Christ accurately before the world, teaching the Law sternly and preaching the Gospel boldly. They are to sound like Jesus, act like Jesus, love like Jesus, and proclaim the truth of Jesus. This is the very thing Paul did everywhere he went, and as the book of Acts reveals repeatedly, to some his message was the aroma of life leading to life, whereas to many his message was the aroma of death leading to death. If Paul had peddled the Christian religion by adulterating it, making it more palatable to people by preaching what they wanted to hear, he would have pleased more people. But then he wouldn't have been a Christian minister.

Insist that, in all things, your pastor speak nothing but the truth of Christ. Expect it of him. And thank God if He has given you a pastor who is not a peddler.

We pray: O Father in heaven, help all Your servants to speak the truth with sincerity, and make us ever ready to hear it and to rejoice in it. Amen.

Comfort abounds in the Bible. But it isn't the comfort that the world seeks. It's comfort from God that is experienced even in the midst of trial and tribulation.

Paul certainly knew tribulation. Hatred followed him from city to city after he preached the Gospel. He was delivered from death time and again (until finally he wasn't). The Lord assured him often that he would suffer much for the Gospel. He had no prospects for a comfortable life.

And yet he had the comfort of a Father who had accepted him--though he was entirely unworthy of it--only for the sake of the afflictions of his Savior, who loved him and loved him still. He had the comfort of the Lord's many assurances that his labor was not in vain. He also had the comfort that his afflictions, painful as they were for him, were helping his fellow Christians to hear and remain faithful to the Gospel. And so there was comfort for all in the midst of the afflictions of all.

Our Confessions (Apology, Article VI) cite Paul's words today to help us see a divine purpose behind our afflictions: "Saints are subject to death, and all general afflictions... And although these afflictions are for the most part the punishments of sin, yet in the godly they have a better end, namely, to exercise them, that they may learn amidst trials to seek God's aid, to acknowledge the distrust of their own hearts, etc., as Paul says of himself, 2 Cor. 1:9: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead."

We pray: Father of mercies, comfort us in all our tribulations, and help us ever to seek Your powerful aid. Amen.

"Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls"

Unrepentant people are often quick to cite the words "judge not" in the hopes of excusing their behavior. St. Paul gives very helpful instruction about not judging, but those who would justify themselves are a lot less likely to refer to his words.

St. Paul is teaching the same idea that our Lord gives us in His instruction. Paul makes it clear that the judgments of one sinful man against another have little value, yet at the same time we are still subject to the judgment of our Master. It is not that we are never to be judged for our wickedness, but we are to remember that the Lord judges us according to His holy wisdom. However, with His righteous judgment also comes His divine desire to save us from that sin.

We all stand judged guilty on account of our sins. Out of love our brothers and sisters in the faith can admonish us for our offenses, or others can try to beat us and manipulate us with our offenses. Our true Master calls us to repent, and to believe and remember that those sins are forgiven in the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. He edifies us and makes us able to walk in righteous faith and true works of love.

We pray: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

**TUESDAY, JULY 10: ROMANS 15:4-33 6<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY**

The “true religion” is the message of forgiveness in Jesus Christ crucified and new life in His righteous commands. False teachers twist religion to be about the works of man, not focused on the work of God in Christ. They say religion is about man’s love, or sincerity, or doing the right things, or keeping the right traditions. Such religion does not actually help or serve others; it serves the pride of those who would focus on themselves.

The teachings, practices, and customs of the faithful Christian Church are focused on making men and women from all nations, all backgrounds, into true disciples who believe and confess the life they have in Jesus Christ. We believe that we are judged guilty by God’s righteous Law, that we are forgiven on account of Christ’s death on the cross, and that we are to observe all that Christ commands in the Scriptures, doing these works in love for God and our neighbors.

Love or works that are focused on man’s notions are a different “gospel” and are a different religion. Man’s nature is already inclined to serve the self. Religions that encourage self-indulgence, self-importance, and self-sufficiency do not benefit us; they pull us apart. True love and true works of benevolence come from God. In the truth of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost alone we are truly blest!

We pray: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

**WEDNESDAY, JULY 25: 1 COR. 15:58-16:24 8<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY A. TRINITY**

Although our readings this week pass over most of 1 Corinthians 15, it is that chapter’s resurrection assurance that moves the apostle to say, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

Since Christ has defeated death for us and promised eternal life to us, nothing we do here on earth is lost. No work is pointless. No sacrifice will be forgotten. No labor for the kingdom of God will go unrewarded. St. John refers to this in Revelation 14:13, “‘Write: ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.’”

What does Paul include here among such works? Weekly offerings set aside to help the saints. Hospitality shown to fellow Christians. Honor, respect, and submission shown to ministers of Christ. Constancy in faith and doctrine. Bravery in the face of opposition or affliction. Love that touches all we do. Such things will never perish, for Christ’s members will never perish.

What will perish are the deeds of those who do not love the Lord Jesus. “If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed.” This seems like a striking way for Paul to close his epistle to the Corinthians, but it is a fitting reminder that our labors are only pleasing to the Lord through faith in Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. Those who reject the friendship-love of Jesus should and will be condemned.

We pray: O risen Lord Jesus, establish the work of our hands, that all our doings in life may please You now and forever. Amen.

**TUESDAY, JULY 24: 1 CORINTHIANS 14:1-40 8<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY A. TRINITY**

It is clear from St. Paul's words that God has a goal for the Church's assemblies: the edification of the whole Church. God also desires that such edification take place in a certain way: decently and in order. Edification is not the same thing as enjoyment or entertainment. It targets the mind and the will, not the emotions. It means to build the congregation up in knowledge, in faith, and in love. That's what the Divine Service is for.

How does edification take place? By speaking God's Word so as to convince and convict all who hear. That means that Law and Gospel must fill our services. That applies to the preacher's preaching. It applies to the words of the prayers that are offered and to the words of the songs that are sung. They must be understandable. They must be clear. And they must build up the assembly in knowledge, in faith, and in love.

As for carrying out this edification "decently and in order," this is the reason why our Lutheran churches retain the structure of the ancient Liturgy, so that the public ministry of Word and Sacrament may be carried out decently and in a time-tested order. As we confess in the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV: "Falsely are our churches accused of abolishing the Mass; for the Mass is retained among us, and celebrated with the highest reverence. Nearly all the usual ceremonies are also preserved, save that the parts sung in Latin are interspersed here and there with German hymns, which have been added to teach the people. For ceremonies are needed to this end alone that the unlearned be taught what they need to know of Christ."

We pray: Father, bless all our gatherings around Word and Sacrament, that Your holy Church may be truly edified. Amen.

**WEDNESDAY, JULY 11: ROMANS 16:1-27 6<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY A. TRINITY**

"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. . . . And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen."

False teachers say that they desire peace and that those who reject or condemn their errors are causing needless division. They cry out "Peace! Peace!" but they ignore what the true God of peace has to say in His holy Word.

Divisions are not evil. They are the result of evil. Our Lord's entire ministry exemplified His desire to heal the divisions and offenses cause by sin, but He also clearly taught that those who taught contrary to His doctrine were wrong. He condemned Satan's lies and crushed the power that Satan exercised through the false shepherds and wicked men who were harming God's people. Such divisions and force against evil is, in fact, God's way of bringing peace.

God's grace in Jesus Christ is sufficient for us. We lack peace and unity in this world because evil will cause divisions. We are not to ignore evil in order to encourage fake peace. We are to recognize sin and cling to the truth of God's righteousness. The peace of His forgiveness in Christ is sufficient until the end of this age.

We pray: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

False teachers abuse this verse too. They plead that those who would mark error be quiet and not cause divisions. But the dishonest shepherds are trying to foster a unity that is not based on the true commands of Jesus Christ. The mind and judgment of these sinful men are set on human institutions, not on the one holy Church that faithfully preaches Christ crucified.

To preach Christ crucified is to preach all that God taught leading up to His atoning death, and all that God continues to teach in His Church, which continues in all that Christ Jesus commanded His Apostles. He sends His Holy Spirit to bring us to know and remember His truth. False teachers defile the name of our Lord and break the Second Commandment by saying their false teachings are in the name of Jesus Christ, or in the name of His love. We are not called to peace and unity in such blasphemous lies. We are called to be of one mind that is humbled before the cross of Christ and shaped by the Holy Spirit through repentance and faithful worship.

We pray: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

We all seek a purpose and a place in life, to be part of something bigger than ourselves. All of that is exactly what is given us in Holy Baptism. “We were all baptized into one body,” the Body of Christ, the Holy Christian Church. Thus all the baptized are part of something bigger. And we are not insignificant parts, but integral parts, as St. Paul teaches in today’s reading, members of Christ’s body with a purpose and a place, divinely appointed and arranged for each one.

The Corinthian Christians all yearned to speak in tongues, but Paul likens that to all having the same function in the body, which would be useless. No, he says. God appoints different people to different purposes. Some are openly honorable, like the ministers of the Church, or, in apostolic times, like those who performed miracles or spoke in tongues. But other members, who do not appear so honorable, are given their own function in the Body of Christ as well as their own honor.

The pastor, for example, is seen by all and should be respected by all because of his office. But the quiet laywoman who struggles through pain to get to church, or the handyman who keeps the building from falling apart may be highly praised and regarded by their pastor and fellow members. And the elderly widow who needs constant help at her home receives that help from her fellow members and is thus honored in her weakness. In any case, as St. Paul reveals in 1 Corinthians 13, love must be at the heart of every Christian’s function in the one Body of Christ.

We pray: Lord, we thank You for making us members of Your Son’s Body. Help us to serve You faithfully and to appreciate our fellow members. Amen.

**SATURDAY, JULY 21: 1 COR. 11:1-22      7<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY A. TRINITY**

The Corinthians have had a miserable track record, but they have seemed to respond to Paul's instruction when he has given it. "Keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you." These "traditions" that St. Paul handed over to them were the teachings of the Gospel and the worship practices.

The first point we should remember here is that the Gospel was passed down to the churches orally at this time. The Corinthian church may have had no writings other than this letter. They had no New Testament like ours today. At most they would have had only a couple of New Testament books. The "traditions" that St. Paul is passing on to them are good, and directly from Christ. This is the good meaning of tradition, as opposed to the "traditions of men."

Secondly, this is instructive when we ask the question, "Are there instructions for us regarding worship, or private prayer, etc., in the Bible?" Perhaps not in detail, but there were already worship rubrics (so to speak) even in apostolic times. The Bible gives ideas, if not outright instructions, about things like communion frequency, the nature of confession, instructions on closed or open communion, etc. These are the traditions that should be held on to.

We pray: Lord, help us to keep the traditions as You have delivered them to us. Amen.

**FRIDAY, JULY 13: 1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-16      6<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY A. TRINITY**

"For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

Obviously St. Paul does not mean that he or the Church would just say the words "Jesus Christ crucified" over and over like a parrot. Nor does it mean that all other topics would be minimized or ignored and all matters of preaching and teaching would be only about the moment when Christ was crucified. St. Paul makes the point that all the Church's doctrine and practice should be faithfully connected to and focused on the Gospel of our forgiveness in Jesus Christ's atoning death.

All that Christ taught and commanded to the Apostles is for the purpose of making all people disciples who are focused on the cross. Simply put, all of our Lord's Words from Genesis to His death on the cross were pointing forward to that event, and all His teaching since the crucifixion points back to it. Jesus Christ crucified is the true focus of God's righteousness for us.

False teachers are characterized by their efforts to shift the focus away from Christ crucified. Permissive "love" is not more important than repentance and faith in the Gospel. Man's works or false unity are not an equal or greater focus than the work of God's Word and Spirit to make us one in His kingdom, which is defined according to Jesus Christ crucified.

We pray: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?”

False teachers would have us believe that there is no “rod” of discipline for people of the Church. They proclaim a false love that minimizes Christ’s commands for us to observe the Ten Commandments and His other guides for doing works of righteous love. The false shepherds twist the Gospel of Christ crucified into a different gospel, which ignores sin and panders to man’s pride by calling unrepentant sinners righteous.

The rod and staff of the Good Shepherd are holy comforts that did not pass away when Jesus Christ was crucified. The righteous admonition and discipline that comes from God’s Law are good and wise, and these things are meant to direct us to repentance and faith in the forgiveness that comes from our Lord Jesus on the cross!

Our sinful flesh tells us that comfort now is more important than the welfare of our spirit. But the Word and Spirit of our Lord continue to come to us so that the sinful flesh may be suppressed, even destroyed, and our spirit saved in the life that truly matters. Our abundant life in the kingdom of God through Jesus Christ is a far greater blessing than any comforts of the flesh in this age.

We pray: Lord of all power and might, who art the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of Thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Paul reaffirms the concept of Christian freedom. Christians are to live as free as possible, except when their freedom causes sin in themselves or others. Sitting and dining in a pagan temple is going too far. That is treating one altar like another and mixing religions, as if all were the same. But food that has no obvious connection to false worship is quite alright. It was common for meat sacrificed in the temples to be offered for sale in the marketplace without any distinguishing marks. Sacrificed meat would not have been obviously different from non-sacrificed meat.

Christians were to be radically different from the Jews who had to investigate the origin of all types of food. Jews maintained kosher dietary laws and separated clean from unclean foods. Christians were to be consciously distinct from the Jews in that they could eat anything. So Paul basically says, “Don’t ask fussy questions about where things come from.”

Perhaps a modern example would be not to bother about whether or not the Mormons own the Marriott hotel chain or Coca-Cola, just use the products in good conscience. No one believes you are advocating Mormonism by staying in a Marriott hotel, but don’t go and worship at a Mormon temple. Christians are under no obligation to follow the Old Testament ceremonial law or Jewish traditions. If they wish to accept a pagan’s social invitation, they are free to do so. The Christian has freedom in the Gospel to associate with sinners and unbelievers without fear of corruption.

We pray: Lord help us to rightly discern when to use our freedom. Amen.

St. Paul became “as a Jew” in order to win as many of them as possible. He tried to cause as little unnecessary offence to them as possible in his preaching and actions. He had Timothy circumcised because of the Jews (Acts 16:3). He also purified himself in the temple in Jerusalem with four other Jewish men in order to show that he was not trying to destroy the Jews or their viable customs (Acts 21:20-26).

There was a window of openness (relatively speaking) in the first decades after the resurrection of Jesus that some Jews might see converting to Christianity as simply the logical conclusion to their being Jews. Once Judaism started to be seen by the Jews themselves, and even the Roman government, as different and opposed to Christianity, it became much more difficult for Christians to get a hearing among the Jews. It was a new level of hardness that has continued to this day. Painfully few Jews have converted to Christianity after the first century.

“To those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law.” These are probably the Gentile God-fearers, that is, those who were not racially Jewish, but to some extent became religiously Jewish. They were believers in the true God and followed to a greater or lesser extent the Jewish regulations, but they always had a sort of second-class status. These people were attracted to Christianity in greater numbers because of Christianity’s universal message, that is, it was not tied to one group of people.

We pray: Lord, help us to be servants to all men. Amen.

The slogan “All things are lawful for me”--or alternately translated, “All things are in my power,” or “I am free to do anything”--seems to have arisen from pagan Greek philosophy. The Corinthians saw themselves as enlightened, and as such, not bound by the taboos of common people. Enlightened freedom was what they took pride in, and may have thought that what they did with their bodies did not affect their spiritual existence.

This seems like an almost proto-Gnostic concept. They may have also thought that St. Paul agreed with them in this attitude; after all, was he not the great apostle of freedom from the rules of the Jewish law? But, of course, Christian freedom from the law is not the same as freedom to sin.

“But all things are not helpful.” Not everything builds up the body of Christ, the Church. These Corinthians had a very individualistic outlook on life, not at all thinking about the good of the Church or the fact that they are causing offense and defaming the Lord. Instead of pushing the envelope of individual freedom, they should out of love discipline themselves for the Church’s sake.

“But I will not be brought under the power of any.” Sin is a tyrant. It has a way of gaining power over us when we give ourselves to it. 2 Peter 2:19 says, “For by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.” Those who call Christ “Lord” are to serve Him, not their passions. While we are free from the law, we are not to make ourselves slaves to sin.

We pray: Lord, help us to be self-disciplined. Amen.

It is possible that there was a faction in the Corinthian church that had ascetic tendencies, that is, they wanted to live in monastic-like devotion. They may have thought that in order to devote themselves to Christ they had to break all their current relationships (break engagements, divorce current spouses). Verses 17-24 are a slight digression from talking about specific marital issues. Paul enunciates the general principle that affects many of these specific issues, that is, the Christian should be content with whatever situation he or she is in when they come to faith and should not necessarily try to get out of it. The believer's situation in life has no bearing on his standing before God.

This contentment that Paul teaches here flies right in the face of the modern "prosperity teaching." Some prosperity preachers see affluence as a sign of God's call and blessing. Paul, however, tells the believers to be content as slaves if necessary. Jews who came to faith should not get operations to try to conceal their circumcision. Such operations had become popular as Israel was subjected to cultural pressure from its Greek-speaking environment, and Jewish men wanted to compete in the gymnasium without embarrassment. And certainly the Gentiles should not feel that they are second class in God's eyes if they are not circumcised.

Contentment is of primary importance, but freedom is good, so if it is offered, take it. It is better for the Christian to remain free of oaths and obligations in the unbelieving world. (Young men should keep this in mind when thinking about joining the military.)

We pray: Lord, help us to be content with our lives. Amen.

Today we often run into problems with Christians taking issue with each other and one party claiming to be "offended" by the actions of the other party. When does the discussion in chapter 8 apply, and when is it abused? Remember the context. The weak in this situation are tempted to engage in activities that might lead them to ruin themselves, cause them to sin against conscience because they are too weak to resist the activity. A typical modern example is alcohol abuse. Christians are free to enjoy alcohol in moderation. It is one of God's good gifts to us. However, if a group of Christians is in the company of a brother who has difficulty in abusing alcohol and difficulty in resisting the temptation to abuse it in festive situations, his fellow Christians have a responsibility to forego their enjoyment of alcohol for his sake. This is a proper application of this chapter.

An abuse of this principle is when a person who has no problem with abusing alcohol becomes angry and disapproving of the freedom of his Christian brothers and sisters, and advocates a false abstinence piety. Some, without biblical warrant, expect all others to be teetotallers. They claim that they are "offended" by the activities of other Christians in this regard. But it is not the same sort of "offence" that this chapter is talking about. These Pharisaical Christians are in no danger of abusing alcohol because of another's use of it. They merely want to impose their extra-biblical, subjective rules on others. In such cases the Christian should assert his or her Christian liberty.

We pray: Lord, help us to be sensitive to others, but also strong in holding on to our freedom. Amen.