

SATURDAY, JUNE 2: ACTS 8:1-40 THE FEAST OF THE HOLY TRINITY

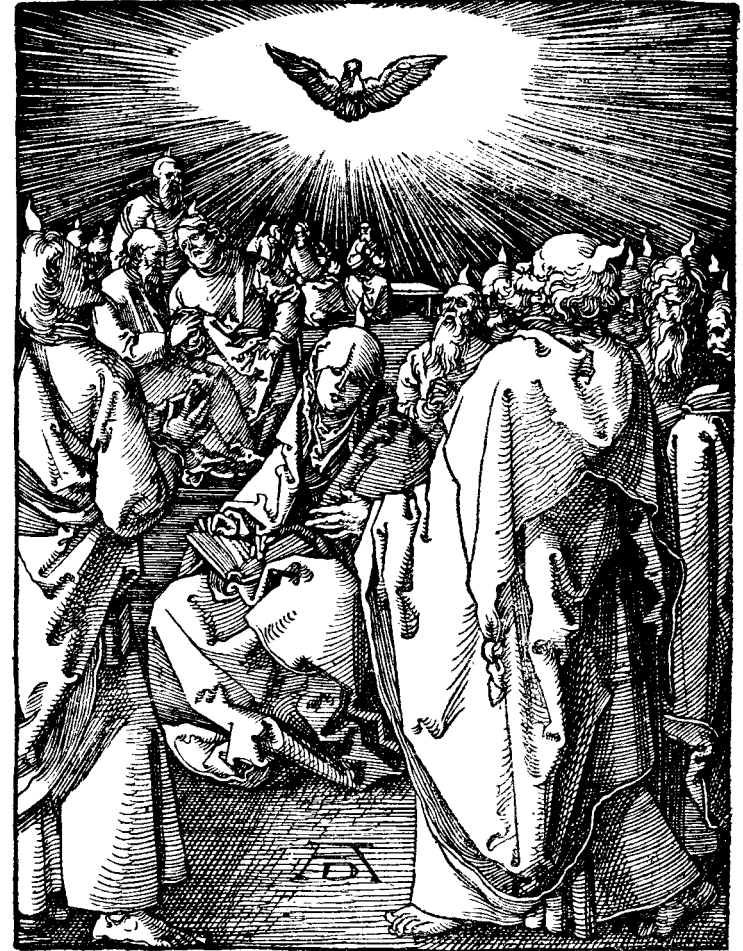
The work of God's Word is not just found in a few phrases or acts. He begins with simple ideas, or simple means like Baptism, but He doesn't stop after using those things. They are a beginning. The whole counsel of God and all that He commands us to observe is a profound body of wisdom to which He would have us devote our entire lives.

Even though we are certainly blessed and taught salvation in the name of Jesus Christ, He also commanded that we should be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Likewise, we should confess with the Ethiopian that we believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but we should also confess our understanding of the almighty Father and the Holy Ghost as well.

Such things are parts of the whole doctrine that our Lord teaches us to learn and keep in our lives. We should always hunger and thirst for the blessings of His truth, and as we are filled with them we are also made able to share those blessings with others! There is no end or limit to the blessings we can receive and share according to His holy Word and Sacraments.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who hast given unto us, Thy servants, grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity, we beseech Thee that Thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith and evermore defend us from all adversities; who livest and reignest, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



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The Calendar

May 1 (M)	St. Philip and St. James, Apostles
May 6	5th S. after Easter
May 10 (R)	Festival of the Ascension
May 13	Exaudi
May 20	Pentecost
May 27	Feast of the Holy Trinity

2018 Synod and Seminary Graduation

This year's Diocesan Synod will take place at Salem Lutheran Church (Malone, Texas) during the week of June 25–29. (The 2018 Colloquium was held in January in Fort Wayne, Indiana.)

Although the Colloquium and Synod usually occur during the same week, they were divided this week to accommodate the Seminary schedule, so that the clergy of the diocese would gather after the seminarian's conclusion of his studies to conduct his theological colloquy. Josiah Scheck's colloquy is presently scheduled to take place on Tuesday, June 26. The seminary graduation is scheduled for Wednesday evening, June 27.

FRIDAY, JUNE 1: ACTS 7:1-60

THE FEAST OF THE HOLY TRINITY

Stephen showed that he did not despise the Word of God or teach falsely about it. His preaching and teaching about Jesus Christ was not about changing the truth; it was about Christ fulfilling God's truth!

Stephen preached the Law of God against the false teachers, condemning them of resisting the Holy Spirit and destroying the holy men that the Lord sent to them. The Jews responded by killing Stephen, but even as they committed this evil against God's servant, he also cried out that the Gospel of God's mercy might be upon them. "Lord, do not charge them with this sin."

All of us are guilty of sins that brought about Jesus Christ's death. He died for all of us. And because of His innocent sacrifice we are not charged with our sins. The will of God and the message of His servants is that all people should repent of their sins and betrayal against the Lord's Law and let the Holy Spirit create faith in them to see God's glory in Christ! Jesus was charged with our sins, and He laid down His life to pay for them and take away the sins of the world.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who hast given unto us, Thy servants, grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity, we beseech Thee that Thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith and evermore defend us from all adversities; who livest and reignest, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.”

The false teachers rejected the truth of what Stephen was preaching and teaching, so they dishonestly appealed to man’s love of outward glory and customs in order to condemn Stephen. Satan has used this means of attack many times throughout the history of God’s Church. People are taught to value buildings, institutions, or customs more than the true doctrine of God’s Word.

Like gold and silver, buildings and traditions are only truly valuable if they serve the truth of God’s glory in Christ crucified. The purpose of sacred places and rites is to proclaim the Lord’s wisdom. If they cannot faithfully serve this purpose they need to be destroyed or changed. The truth of God’s Word does not change, but the things He uses to teach it to us does, as the history of His faithful people illustrates. We are to repent of our transgressions, believe in His grace shown to us in Jesus Christ, and observe all that He commands. Everything else can pass away if it doesn’t serve these things that He works in us.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who hast given unto us, Thy servants, grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity, we beseech Thee that Thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith and evermore defend us from all adversities; who livest and reignest, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

On Misericordias Domini Sunday several weeks ago, we heard Jesus’ warning concerning both the wolves and the hirelings. In these verses, we learn more concerning the true Shepherd, who is Christ, and those whom this Shepherd sends to watch over His flock. Jesus’ words direct our thoughts to the text of 1 Peter 5, where St. Peter admonishes the pastors: “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” It is with good cause that these words of St. Peter are used at ordinations: they are a solemn reminder to clergy and laity alike concerning the nature of this divinely-given vocation. It is the Lord who calls men to the ministry, and it is He who will judge and reward their stewardship of this solemn responsibility.

In today’s reading from John 10, the Lord begins by sounding a warning against all those who would enter without call and ordination to the holy office: such self-chosen men are those who climb up “some other way” into the sheepfold. They may give a great appearance of holiness, but lacking the public call, they are those who are actually thieves and robbers. Ultimately, they will reveal their true character because of the false teaching which will come in with their false ministry, and no matter how they have sought to deflect from their illegitimacy, the sheep will recognize that the voice which they hear is not that of the Good Shepherd. The sheep do not follow the voice of strangers; faith created and sustained by the Holy Spirit through the faithful preaching of the Gospel is drawn to that which is steadfast to that faithful Word.

We pray: O God, from whom all good things do come, grant to us, Thy humble servants, that by Thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be right and by Thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Jesus reiterates that which we heard in yesterday's Gospel: those who do not enter by the door are thieves and robbers. But Christ Jesus is the Door. There are many who try to break in and steal; they are those who have sought by their own words, their own works, their own doctrine to establish a way of salvation. But all such wickedness is not of Christ, and does not lead to life. Christ Jesus, who made atonement for our sin, is the One in whom we have the forgiveness of sins, because of the faith which the Holy Spirit creates in us through the means of grace. There are many who keep trying to find another way 'in'—and their treachery is manifest. As Jesus declares: "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

Faithful teaching and preaching holds Christ Jesus before the congregation, and proclaims that all our righteousness is but filthy rags. Thus, for example, the 'prosperity gospel' of the televangelists and the 'works of supererogation' of the Papists try to redefine righteousness and seek something other than the peace which the Lord gives through His Word. Faithful teaching and preaching proclaims Christ's doctrine, the way to everlasting life.

We pray: O God, from whom all good things do come, grant to us, Thy humble servants, that by Thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be right and by Thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Christianity is not just about being a "good person." It is about the truth. It is about hearing what the Maker of all things has to say about the reality of our lives. This reality is that we are sinners who need to repent, and that God raised up His Son Jesus Christ to teach us repentance for our sins and give us forgiveness by His innocent death. God's Holy Spirit enlightens us to this reality of the way, the truth, and the life that is ours in Jesus.

But if we think we do not need to repent of a sin and that we can get away with it, we are lying to ourselves, and to God. It can be easy to lie to other people and uphold an appearance that we are good, but when God speaks His truth to us according to His Word and Spirit, outward appearances cannot protect us from the reality of His judgment.

The Lord knows what we truly do and think, so our attempts to lie to Him are simply foolish and damaging to ourselves. It is by His grace through Christ Jesus that He tries to teach us His truth, call us to repentance, and enable us to walk according to His commands.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who hast given unto us, Thy servants, grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity, we beseech Thee that Thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith and evermore defend us from all adversities; who livest and reignest, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

TUESDAY, MAY 29: ACTS 4:1-37 THE FEAST OF THE HOLY TRINITY

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

We preach salvation in Christ crucified. We are not forgiven by giving money, or doing the right works, or being philosophical or anything else. We are forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ as He was sacrificed on the cross.

It is important that we do not go along with false teachers who confuse the issue. God has revealed Himself through His only begotten Son, and that Son gave His life to take away the sins of the world. If anyone denies His Word or resists the teaching of His Holy Spirit, then they deny God.

We must be clear and honest about what God says in His Scriptures. That is why discipline and orthodox teaching are so important in the Church. If God’s Word is compromised or made unclear, then the very message of forgiveness, life, and salvation is compromised! If we truly want to help others and show them love, then we must be clear that no one comes to the Father apart from Jesus Christ and the Spirit by which He creates true faith.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who hast given unto us, Thy servants, grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity, we beseech Thee that Thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith and evermore defend us from all adversities; who livest and reignest, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 9: MAT. 28:16–20 FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

The eleven apostles had been called to be witnesses to the resurrection, and thus were commanded: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you”. (KJV) Teaching and baptizing are joined together, whether one is first baptized and then taught, as is the case with infants, or taught and then baptized, as is the case with adult converts. The holy ministry does not see a separation between the Word and Sacraments, but instead beholds them both as the good gifts of the Triune God given for the creation and sustenance of our faith. This instruction which the Lord gives to the holy apostles defines the labors of the office of the ministry to this day. It is true that the apostles had a universal call, while pastors have a local call, but the good gifts which the Lord imparts to His flock through His servants remain the same. The Shepherd feeds the flock through the ministrations of His called servants. Teaching, baptizing, and continuing to teach remains the work to which the Lord calls His pastors: their labors are not something which they choose for themselves, and their ministry is not something which the Church can redefine. The Lord calls to that which He establishes and sustains, and He is present always as His Word is proclaimed and His Sacraments are administered, for He has proclaimed: “... lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

We pray: O God, from whom all good things do come, grant to us, Thy humble servants, that by Thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be right and by Thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Ascension of our Lord to the right hand of the Father does not in any way indicate that our Lord is somehow absent from His Church. As St. Mark records concerning the ministry of the apostles: “And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs.” The Lord is never absent when His Word is taught in its truth and purity and His Sacraments are administered according to His institution. Because the Lord continues to be present with His Church, St. Luke explains that all that was written in his Gospel was an account of what “Jesus began both to do and teach” (Acts 1:1)—that which is written in Acts concerning the ministry of the apostles is a continuation of what the Lord is doing and teaching in His Church.

The Lord has ascended and abides with His Church. The right hand of God is everywhere; therefore, the Lord being present at the right hand of God means that He is everywhere. And He has assured us that we graciously receive Him where He has promised we will always find Him: in His Word and Sacrament.

We pray: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe Thine only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens, so may we also in heart and mind thither ascend and with Him continually dwell; who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you...”

The Small Catechism teaches us that in the Apostles’ Creed we confess Jesus Christ has “purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.”

Our righteousness and salvation is not a matter of buying indulgences, making offerings to the Church, or giving charity to the needy. The Gospel of everlasting life in Christ crucified is more valuable than anything else in this life. It is vanity for us to think that our money or works could be exchanged for God’s blessings. Nor should we desire any of those things more than His blessings for us in Jesus.

All the things that we have in this present life are to be used to glorify our Lord Jesus. We do not buy forgiveness with offerings, but we do give them to help the Church and her pastors focus on the preaching and teaching that proclaim Christ crucified. Our eternal life does not depend on a strong, healthy body, but if the Lord blesses us with one, we should use that strength to love and serve Him and our neighbors. The blessings we have now should remind us, and everyone else, that the greater blessings are found in Jesus Christ!

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who hast given unto us, Thy servants, grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity, we beseech Thee that Thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith and evermore defend us from all adversities; who livest and reignest, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Trinity Sunday

FRIDAY, MAY 11: LUKE 24:50–53

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

ARTICLE I.

Our Churches, with common consent, do teach, that the decree of the Council of Nicaea concerning the Unity of the Divine Essence and concerning the Three Persons, is true and to be believed without any doubting; that is to say, there is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God: eternal, without body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible; and yet that there are three Persons, of the same essence and power, who also are co-eternal, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. And the term “person” they use as the fathers have used it, to signify, not a part or quality in another, but that which subsists of itself.

They condemn all heresies which have sprung up against this article, as the Manichaeans who assumed two principles [gods], one Good, the other Evil; also the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Mohammedans, and all such. They condemn also the Samosatenes, old and new, who contending that there is but one Person, sophistically and impiously argue that the Word and the Holy Ghost are not distinct Persons, but that “Word” signifies a spoken word, and “Spirit” [Ghost] signifies motion created in things.

—The Augsburg Confession

The disciples who had once remained hidden for fear of the Jews now do not hesitate to worship the Christ in the midst of the temple. Not long before, as we were again reminded in the Gospel readings for Jubilate and Cantate, there was dread among the disciples when they heard that Jesus would be departing from them. They mourned during the days when Jesus lay in the tomb, but His ascension to the right hand of God caused them to return to Jerusalem with great joy. The apostles—sent to proclaim the death and resurrection of the Christ—would not fear persecution or death as they were preaching the Word of the Lord. They knew that the Christ is very God of very God, and thus they worshipped Him. There is no terror at the Lord’s ascension, nor any dread that He was now somehow far distant from His Church. Instructed by the Lord, and strengthened in their faith through the Word, they returned to their vocation, and awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

We pray: O God, from whom all good things do come, grant to us, Thy humble servants, that by Thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be right and by Thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The selections from the Book of Concord for the Sundays of the Church Year are from H. E. Jacobs’ translation of the Book of Concord, and are taken from the table of suggested lessons for Sundays and Festivals of the Church. (The table of appropriate lessons was originally found in Pipping’s Christliches Concordienbuch [Leipzig, 1734].)

As the Church gathered in Jerusalem, we see the unity in the faith which the Lord had established among His saints: “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.” They now believed aright concerning the Christ, and thus received one another as brethren in the Lord.

But there was something missing from the Church, on account of the apostasy of Judas. It was thus that St. Peter called the attention of the Church to the need, that another take his “office,” or as it was rendered in the KJV, his “bishopric,” for the reference is to his episkopen; that is, Judas’ office as an ‘overseer’ of the flock. Peter identifies the criteria for determining another man who might be called to such a role of ‘overseer,’ but neither the rest of the apostles nor the Church as a whole could choose an apostle. It was thus that they cast lots to see what the will of the Lord was in this circumstance, and the lot fell to St. Matthias.

The days of the apostolate are now concluded, but the divinely established office of the holy ministry, which is charged by the Lord with teaching the prophetic and apostolic doctrine, remains. And the Lord of the Church calls men to this holy office so that the needs of His saints would be met through the means which the Lord has established: His holy Word and Sacraments.

We pray: O God, from whom all good things do come, grant to us, Thy humble servants, that by Thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be right and by Thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

By the words “they may know You” our Lord Jesus Christ establishes the means by which eternal life is obtained. Eternal life comes through faith in the heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ. To know the Father is to believe on Him as the eternal Father. To know the Son is to believe on Him as the eternal Redeemer of mankind. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is the only true God. To know the Triune God is to believe on the Triune God as the only true God who made the world, redeemed the world, and sanctifies all those in the world who believe in Him.

The glory of the Son is His death on the tree of the holy cross. The Son does the will of the Father by offering up His life as a ransom for the sins of the whole world. He atones for the sins of the whole world, and then rises again on the third day so that all who believe on Him know that the Father accepted the sacrifice of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

In His death and resurrection the Lord Jesus is revealed as the One sent by the Father to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil. In Him, by knowing and believing in Him (and the other Persons of the Holy Trinity), we have eternal life.

We pray: O God, who taught the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, bring us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

FRIDAY, MAY 25: JOHN 15:1-25 WHITSUNDAY--FEAST OF PENTECOST

Our Lord Jesus is the true vine. The vine must be pruned by the Father so that it may bear more fruit. In this our Lord speaks of His death on the holy cross. On the cross He takes upon Himself our sin, and the sin of the whole world, so that every sin that He bears may be pruned away by our heavenly Father. All of our sins have been burned away on the altar of the holy cross.

Those who cling to the true vine in faith are grafted into the true vine. They become the vine's branches. Those who do not have faith wither and die in unbelief. They are cast into the eternal fires of Hell.

The faithful bear the fruit of the true vine; they do His works, obey His Law, hear His Word, and receive His Sacraments. The branches love the true vine, and the true vine loves the branches. Therefore, the vinedresser does not cut them off; He does not prune them away.

This love is shown in that our Lord Jesus, the true vine, lays down His life. There is no greater example of love than to give your life for someone else. Love by its very nature is about sacrifice. Love is never self-serving. It does not think only about what it is getting out of the relationship. Our Lord manifests this love as He lays down His life for the world which rejects Him.

We pray: O God, who taught the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, bring us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

MONDAY, MAY 14: JOHN 10:17-21 EXAUDI--SUNDAY A. THE ASCENSION

The believing, baptized children of God (according to the New Man, born from above) flock to this message of Christ laying down His life. For it is only through His fully atoning merits that true life is offered.

Is this message acceptable to the world, our sinful flesh, and the devil? Of course not. The world, sinful flesh, and the devil despise Christ and His works. Thus division does come about. There will always be those who want to be righteous by works. But there will also be, by God's grace, those who are righteous through faith! Thanks be to God that He does not leave us blind to His truth, but creates (and sustains) eyes of faith to behold His glorious scars as marvelous in our sight!

It is Christ and His fully atoning merits that are delivered through His Word and Sacraments. Through such means of grace He is the author and perfecter of faith, ever calling us as His own to feed us with the Bread of Life and send us out to contend with the world, our flesh, and the devil. It is Christ's laying down of His life that creates proper faith and love of neighbor—as we pray in the Post-Communion Collect, "...we beseech Thee that of Thy mercy Thou wouldst strengthen us through the same in faith toward Thee and and in fervent love toward one another..."

And so it is that we rightly pray the Collect for the Week as well: Almighty, everlasting God, make us always to have a devout will toward You and to serve Your majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

TUESDAY, MAY 15: JOHN 10:22-31 EXAUDI--SUNDAY A. THE ASCENSION

The unbelief of the Jews can certainly come across as foolish. Yet those who hear the Shepherd's voice continue to struggle with their sinful, unbelieving flesh as well. Consider what we believe, teach, and confess in the Small Catechism regarding the total depravity of our flesh and who exactly creates and sustains faith: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and preserved me in the true faith; just as He calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and preserves it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."

Thankfully, the Lord brings us to pray "Thy will be done," bringing us to pray against our flesh, and for His sustenance. We confess: "How is [God's will] done? When God breaks and hinders every evil plan and will (like the will of the devil, the world and our flesh) that would keep us from hallowing God's name and prevent His kingdom from coming; and when He strengthens and keeps us steadfast in His Word and faith, until the end. This is His good and gracious will."

Rejoice that the Lord keeps telling us plainly through His means of Word and Sacrament that He is the Christ. And through such a feeding of faith He sustains His sheep, while creating godly desires. "Thy will be done" indeed!

We pray: Almighty, everlasting God, make us always to have a devout will toward You and to serve Your majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THURS., MAY 24: JOHN 14:1-22 WHITSUNDAY--FEAST OF PENTECOST

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me." Immediately before our Lord Jesus speaks these words he had just told Peter that he would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed. This is in the midst of the Lord telling His disciples that He was about to be betrayed and killed. It is understandable that the Apostles were a bit unsettled by our Lord's words.

Our Lord, however, does not leave them in their angst. He gives them Himself as God. Believing in the Lord Jesus would mean absolutely nothing if He were not God. It would be no different than believing in any other man on this planet as the means of salvation. But, our Lord Jesus is true God. Therefore, trusting in Him eases our troubled hearts.

He goes to prepare a place for His disciples, and us, in Heaven. He offers up His life as a ransom for all the betrayal and denying that His disciples are about to commit. It is on account of the disobedience of us that our Lord offers up His life as a ransom for us. And in so doing He prepares a place for us in Heaven.

He opened the door to Heaven at His resurrection, when He made clear that the Father had accepted the sacrifice of His Son on our behalf. Now the door to the grave is open, and so is the gate of Heaven for all those who trust on the Lord Jesus.

We pray: O God, who taught the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, bring us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

WED., MAY 23: ACTS 2:37-47 WHITSUNDAY--FEAST OF PENTECOST

The Feast of Pentecost for the Jews was a festival to give thanks to the Lord for the firstfruits of the harvest. It was the middle feast of the three feasts set forth by Moses when all the Jews were to “appear before the Lord” (Ex. 23; Ex. 34). It came fifty days after the Feast of Unleavened bread, which happened at the time of the Passover. The last feast was the Feast of Ingathering, which was celebrated at the end of the year.

It is appropriate that, while the Jews were in Jerusalem giving thanks for the beginning of the harvest with the firstfruits that they had gathered, the Holy Ghost is poured out onto the first Jews to be converted to Christianity. Three thousand souls were added to the Christian Church that day; three thousand new converts. These were the firstfruits of the Christian Church.

They did the same thing that we do today, they were baptized, continued steadfastly in the Word, and celebrated their fellowship in the breaking of the bread of our Lord Jesus. They ate and drank His Body and Blood given in bread and wine for the remission of their sins.

Through these means the Church continued to grow. It grows in the same way today. Wherever two or three are gathered to hear God’s Word preached in its truth and purity, and the Sacraments are administered according to Christ’s institution, the Holy Ghost is there being poured out to add to the Church.

We pray: O God, who taught the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, bring us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

WED., MAY 16: JOHN 10:32-42 EXAUDI--SUNDAY A. THE ASCENSION

The Jews seek to execute Jesus because they say He speaks blasphemy as a man, making Himself God. But He is God and has shown so by His works. The Jews, however, ignore His works and the Word of God which tells them to look for the Messiah, even though they claim faithfulness to the Word as they believe they have a right to kill Him. The irony is that they put themselves in the place of God, judging and condemning Jesus by their own blasphemous human understanding.

Luther’s explanation of the First Commandment has us believe, teach, and confess that we should fear, love, and trust in God above all things. But, as we remain in sinful flesh, our old nature continually brings us to center on ourselves, thus every man is always putting himself in the place of God.

Another truth of God’s Word regarding our flesh is explained in Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation of 1518. Thesis 7 states: “The works of righteousness would be mortal sins if they would not be feared as mortal sins by the righteous themselves out of pious fear of God.” Luther is saying that, because our fallen flesh is so inclined to trust in any works done in the flesh, we need to fear even our good works.

Thanks be to God that He brings His believing, baptized children to drown the old Adam’s self-centered trust so that the New Man rejoices in Jesus’ words, and trusts alone in Christ’s fully meritorious works for us!

We pray: Almighty, everlasting God, make us always to have a devout will toward You and to serve Your majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THURSDAY, MAY 17: JOHN 11:1-27 EXAUDI--SUNDAY A. THE ASCENSION

We are so blessed to have the New Testament Holy Scripture as we hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it. Of course we are thankful for the Old Testament as well—for all of Holy Scripture points to Christ. But the New Testament brings further understanding. As the saying goes, "...in the old the New is concealed, in the New the old is revealed."

Thanks to the Holy Spirit we have insights that those who walked with Jesus did not have. For example, when Jesus says "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it," we by faith have a deeper understanding of what Jesus meant. But imagine those who were actually with Him back then. They hear these words of Jesus, but then find out that Lazarus dies anyhow. Talk about struggling with doubt! Talk about needing on-the-spot catechesis!

Thanks be to God for inspiring His Word to be written and for His living and active Spirit continuing to work through His means of Word and Sacrament, bringing us to the assurance of being partakers in Him who is the resurrection! By grace alone—because of the fully atoning merits of Christ Jesus alone—through faith alone, the death of all God's saints has been, and ever will be, to His glory!

We pray: Almighty, everlasting God, make us always to have a devout will toward You and to serve Your majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

TUES, MAY 22: ACTS 2:14-36 WHITSUNDAY--FEAST OF PENTECOST

In yesterday's reading Cornelius, a Gentile, was converted by the Word of God. In today's, the Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost are preached the Word of God. They are preached both the Law and the Gospel.

The Law was that they had killed the One sent from the Father to be the Messiah. They took Him by "lawless hands," had Him crucified and put to death, even though His works revealed Him to be the Messiah. The miracles, wonders, and signs done by Him all bore witness that He was the Messiah of God. But the Jews rejected their Messiah and had Him killed.

The Gospel was that all of this was foretold in the prophets. The Messiah was born to suffer and die for the people and rise again from the dead on the third day. The eleven, and all the other disciples, had bore witness to this fact. He appeared to them over the course of forty days. And now, ten days later, the Holy Ghost was poured out onto the Apostles so that they were able to expound the Holy Scriptures to the Jews in Jerusalem. It was a final witness that the Lord Jesus was indeed the Messiah. His Holy Spirit filled St. Peter and the rest of the Apostles as a witness to the fact that He was the Messiah, and now reigns in Heaven seated at the right hand of God the Father, with His enemies as His footstool.

We pray: O God, who didst give Thy Holy Spirit to Thine Apostles, grant to Thy people the performance of their petitions, so that on us, to whom Thou hast given faith, Thou mayest bestow also peace; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

MONDAY, MAY 21: ACTS 10:42-48A WHITSUNDAY--FEAST OF PENTECOST

We see in the conversion of Cornelius just how effective the Word of God is. We are told that while St. Peter “was still speaking” the Holy Ghost fell upon all those who heard the Word of God. What this means is that the Holy Ghost was working through the preaching of St. Peter while he was speaking. Before he even finished what he was saying, the hearts of those who heard what our Lord Jesus Christ had done were granted faith to cling to Him for forgiveness and salvation.

Consider especially that this outpouring of the Holy Ghost occurs when St. Peter is talking about the remission of sins. The Law had already done its work of convicting them of their sins. They knew there was no salvation in the keeping of the Law, for they, like we, could not keep the Law perfectly. There was always one more sin to confess, one more transgression that they could not prevent.

So, the Lord in a dream to Cornelius tells him to call upon Peter. Likewise, St. Peter also is told in a dream to go to Cornelius. Therefore, the Lord makes His desire known, that the promise of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus was for all mankind, and not just the Jews. He even confirms this further by having the Holy Ghost fill the hearers before St. Peter is finished with his sermon, or before they were baptized. This is how effective the Word of God is.

We pray: O God, who taught the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, bring us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

FRIDAY, MAY 18: JOHN 11:28-44 EXAUDI--SUNDAY A THE ASCENSION

Jesus does all of His actions to reveal God’s mercy to the world through Himself. He is God, and through His divinity He obviously knows all things. He knew Lazarus was going to die, so He could have been there beforehand. Yet Jesus delays not just a minute, or an hour after Lazarus’ death, but four days, all for the merciful sake of creating belief.

Then He prays to the Father out loud. Why? “Because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.” He has the power to raise Lazarus out of the tomb without even speaking, but what does He do? “He cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come forth!’” Again, He did this for the sake of everyone to hear His Word, that they may believe.

As if he looked like a mummy, Lazarus “came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth.” Sin had certainly carried itself to its conclusion—death. Yet listen to what the Word made flesh says to the inescapable wrappings of the Law: “Loose Him, and let Him go.” Similar blessed words of Christ (the loosening key of Holy Absolution) were given to the Office of the Holy Ministry as well, giving another means to which sinners can flee through faith for refuge. True freedom comes only by grace through faith in Christ’s fully atoning merits—and such faith is imputed as righteousness!

We pray: Almighty, everlasting God, make us always to have a devout will toward You and to serve Your majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

There were Jews who were brought to believe in Jesus, and there were Jews who outright hated Him and plotted to kill Him. In this day and age of political correctness—when fence riding attitudes are fostered for safety sake—it wouldn't be acceptable to that mindset to say those who are indifferent toward Jesus actually hate Him, but there is no fence riding with Christ. If there is not faith, then sinful flesh is winning out.

One of the greatest mysteries to human reason is how God uses the enemies of faith to strengthen the people of the faith. All things are for His good purpose. This very text reveals God's plan of using the evil of the Jews for the greatest good man has ever known! The death of Jesus merited the full atonement for the sins of the world, and it gives forgiveness and everlasting life to all who believe!

The Jews had no idea they were being used by God to manifest His theology of the cross. This is the message that is foolishness to those who are perishing; but to us the message of Jesus pouring out His blood for the sake of our justification is the power of God!

We pray: Almighty, everlasting God, make us always to have a devout will toward You and to serve Your majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Pentecost Sunday

THE THIRD ARTICLE.

Of Sanctification.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; the Resurrection of the body; and the Life everlasting. Amen.

What is meant by this Article?

Answer. I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me through the gospel, enlightened me by His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith; in like manner as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the true faith; in which Christian Church He daily forgives abundantly all my sins, and the sins of all believers, and will raise up me and all the dead at the last day, and will grant everlasting life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.

—The Small Catechism, Part II

The selections from the Book of Concord for the Sundays of the Church Year are from H. E. Jacobs' translation of the Book of Concord, and are taken from the table of suggested lessons for Sundays and Festivals of the Church. (The table of appropriate lessons was originally found in Pipping's Christliches Concordienbuch [Leipzig, 1734].)