

# THE LUTHERAN HERALD



**EXAUDI-TRINITY 1  
(JUNE 1-28, 2014)**

**A PUBLICATION OF  
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF  
NORTH AMERICA**

**THE HOLY GOSPEL**                      **St. John 15:26-16:4 (NKJV)**

“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

“These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.”

**THE COLLECT**

God, who by the humiliation of Thy Son did raise up the fallen world, grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou has delivered from the danger of everlasting death do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

“Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan.” (Joshua 3:17)

The Children of Israel had long wandered in the wilderness. Repeatedly they had sinned against the Lord, and He sent various punishments to chastise them and call them to repentance. At long last they were entering into the promised land. By the hand of God they miraculously passed through the water. It was a miraculous passage made possible by the real presence of the Lord, the Ark of the Covenant, which was with them.

When John the Baptist came preaching and baptizing at the Jordan River, it was no accidental eccentricity. He was calling Israel out of the Promised Land, back into the wilderness, making them admit that they had not yet “arrived.” He was making them pass through the water all over again in preparation for the real presence of the Lord to come among them in the person of Jesus Christ!

Christ has come, died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, and is raised again for our justification. How was this delivered to us? We were buried with Christ and raised to newness of life as we passed through the waters of Holy Baptism and entered into the promised land of the Church. Dear ones in Christ, rejoice, for in your Baptism the new man daily comes forth and arises, who will live before God in righteousness and purity forever in the Promised Land of eternal life.

“So the men answered her, ‘Our lives for yours, if none of you tell this business of ours. And it shall be, when the Lord has given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with you.’” (Joshua 2:14)

Rahab was a prostitute. Can you imagine? Israelite spies are “scoping out” the city, and when the locals get wise to the fact that they are being spied on, the Israelite spies duck into the local house of ill repute to hide! That is not how a good Bible story is supposed to go, is it?

Exactly how proper do you have to be to be saved? Rahab believed, such as she was able. She believed that the Lord was with Israel, not with her world as she knew it. So, in faith she turns to the “church” of the Old Testament, the church that is hiding out in her house, and faithfully clings to the salvation that is to be found only in the church.

Her faith is rewarded. She even becomes an ancestor of Christ! What a comfort that is to us. No matter what we have done, no matter what ugly (yet true) accusation Satan makes against us, our hope is not in our virtuous life. Our help is in the Name of the Lord Jesus, whose death and resurrection takes away the sin of the world, and opens to us the way to inherit the Promised Land of life everlasting.

## Lesson from the Book of Concord Exaudi Sunday

### IX. Of Excommunication.

The greater excommunication [i.e., execution or banishment], as the Pope calls it, we regard only as a civil penalty, and not pertaining to us ministers of the Church. But the less [i.e., the so-called ‘lesser excommunication’] is true Christian excommunication, which prohibits manifest and obstinate sinners from the sacrament and other communion of the Church until they are reformed and avoid sin. And ministers ought not to confound this ecclesiastical punishment or excommunication with civil penalties.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III

*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].)*

Simply saying “I have sinned” does not cause the gates of Heaven to swing open to you. It is not the mere speaking of the proper words that makes a true confession. This is why Moses pronounces God’s enduring judgment against the evil members of the congregation of Israel, even though they have spoken the words “We have sinned!” While these words spoke truth, the people did not speak truly. For it is not just the words that make a true confession, but the spirit in which the words are spoken.

The words of confession are true words of power when spoken in truth by the Spirit of Truth. The true Christian does not merely speak the words, but speaks the truth by the power of God’s Holy Spirit, who dwells within the heart of each believer. “I have sinned. I am heartily sorry for my sins, and sincerely repent of them. I earnestly desire to amend my sinful life, for so Your Holy Spirit leads me. For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who died for all sins and was raised to justify all who believe in Him, be gracious and merciful to me!” Such words, inspired in us by God Himself, open the very heart of God to pour out forgiveness, life, and salvation upon His true children. In Holy Baptism, at the Holy Supper, and in Holy Absolution He says, “I forgive you all your sins. Sin no more. Depart in peace!”

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9)

God had raised up Joshua to lead His people into the promised land. Joshua himself is a picture of Christ. “Joshua” and “Jesus” are even the same name, in two different languages. But the task before him was formidable. How does one lead a bunch of desert nomads into battle against people who live in fortified cities, are more numerous, and have better weaponry and military training?

The answer is as simple as it is easy to overlook. Joshua was not to trust in numbers, strength, tactics, or weaponry. Joshua was to trust in the Word of the Lord alone. “Have I not commanded you?” When, in the beginning, the Word of the Lord commanded there be light, light just happened! Now, the Word of the Lord commands victory, and victory will happen. It also commanded Joshua to be “strong and of good courage.” Just as at the beginning, the Word of the Lord created what it named, strength and good courage.

Do not be afraid. Yes, there is much that might cause us to fear: financial insecurity, relationship matters, the condition of our nation, even our own death. But we too have the “be not afraid” Word of the Lord. We too have His “be strong and of good courage” Word. Most of all, in Christ, we have the Word of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. In life and in death, you are the Lord’s. Be not afraid.

“Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.” (Proverbs 31:30)

Oh, how often I heard these words as a young man! Oh, how often I thought, “Why not all of it? Why not the fear of the Lord, plus a good share of that beauty and charm stuff?” Of course, the point of the Scripture is to raise the issue of priorities, and the point of my youthful questions was to avoid that point!

It is important, especially for our single people, to prioritize the fear of the Lord in the people they date (or court) and eventually marry. There is nothing wrong with a “Wow! Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!” reaction. We should find our spouses desirable. But our homes are to be outposts of the Kingdom of God on earth. Our homes are mission fields, and our children are those we are to bring to the Lord. Prioritize the fear of the Lord!

Moreover, these words apply to the Holy Christian Church, the Bride of Christ, and to each of our congregations as miniatures thereof. It does not matter so much if we meet in nice sanctuaries with pews, or in a garage on folding chairs. It matters that we fear the Lord, that we repent of our sins, trust in Christ’s atonement for our forgiveness, gladly hear and learn His Word, and receive His saving gifts. God grant us His Holy Spirit, that we may trust in the Lord Christ with all our hearts.

Indeed, every member of the Holy Christian Church is holy, and the Lord is with each one. By virtue of the outpouring of Holy Baptism, the hearing of Holy Absolution, and the feasting upon the Holy Supper, each Christian is forgiven, saved from everlasting death, and given new life as a child of God in Christ. To be declared holy by God means is to be set apart by Him and sanctified for His purposes. One of those purposes is for each Christian to serve as a living temple in which the Lord Himself graciously dwells in order to bless, in many ways, the Christian and the Christian’s neighbor. Korah and his fellow rebels spoke truly of each true Christian therefore in saying, “All the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them.” However, Korah and his company drew a false conclusion and rebelled against those whom God had appointed to bless them.

God calls His children “a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9),” but He does not call every prince to stand as a pastor or minister before His fellow princes in God’s Church. It is Christ alone who calls a groomsman of His own choosing to attend to His bride. Christ issues this call through the voice of His Church to a man with whom the Lord dwells, a man who is qualified by proper training to be apt to teach the whole counsel of God, and who is recognized by the Church and her ministers as a faithful steward of the Word and Sacraments, as the Lord chooses.

All things in the House of the Lord serve as memorials of God's faithfulness. Following Korah's rebellion, which God ended with a terrifying display of His wrath against sin, the bronze censers used for the rebels' unholy purposes were reclaimed out of the ashes. God commanded that these censers be used for a holy purpose again. They were hammered into a covering for the altar of the tabernacle. The bronze covering on the altar would be a memorial of God's unchanging condemnation of sin. At the same time, the altar itself—the place of sacrifice—was a memorial to God's promise of forgiveness for the sake of the sacrifice that God would one day make for the sins of all people. For the sake of the Sacrificial Lamb, God's only-begotten Son, Christ Jesus, those who believe would "not become like Korah and his companions," but would receive forgiveness and life everlasting!

The things in the House of the Lord today also stand as memorials of God's faithfulness to His people. The crucifix testifies to the wrath of God against sin, and His mercy upon us in the One who bore our sin for us. The font is a memorial to the flood of God's wrath against sin, and His gracious washing away of all sin from us. The pulpit is like the front of the boat from which Jesus proclaimed Law and Gospel, repentance and faith. The altar still stands as memorial of His sacrifice for us, from which He now gives His flesh and blood for the forgiveness of your sins and life everlasting!

"Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar." (Proverbs 30:5-6)

We know how dangerous it is to take away from God's Word. He did not speak one pointless word to us. Some truths of Scripture seem more important than others, but all of it points us to Christ. All of it is important; none of it is "safe" to omit.

We know it is not safe to add a whole book to the Bible, but what about just helping God out a little bit? Repentance plus circumcision? Repentance plus tithing? Repentance plus spiritual gifts? Repentance plus psychological or corporate insights? Why not?

The problem, of course, is not the godly use of human wisdom. The problem comes when we pretend our human wisdom carries the authority of "thus saith the Lord." Whenever we add something to Jesus, we end up with less of Jesus. We treat Him as a Jesus who is not enough all by Himself, a Jesus who needs an invented "add on" before the salvation program will work. Dear ones in Christ, trust the Word of the Lord alone. Add nothing, subtract nothing. The Word of the Lord gives you Christ, and with Him comes completely reliable forgiveness and salvation.

“As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.” (Proverbs 27:17)

How does one sharpen an iron blade? One way to do it is to rub it on another piece of iron. So our Lord imparts wisdom to us in the book of Proverbs. He uses “iron sharpening iron” as an illustration of how we can sharpen one another in our proficiency with what the New Testament calls the “Sword of the Spirit,” which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17).

Some Christians use this verse foolishly as an excuse to justify an argumentative spirit. This, of course, is not the point of the Proverb; we should seek not the “joy” of bickering, but only to help one another speak the Word of God more clearly.

In speaking the Word of God clearly we can be of great service to each other. This is yet another reason to attend church and Bible classes, and not to limit your contact with the Word of God to home devotions. We know the salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the good news that He died and rose again for the forgiveness of our sins. God grant us, then, to be a gift to fellow believers and to let them be a gift to us as we seek together to speak clearly the Word of Christ’s salvation to a world in desperate need of it.

Between death and life stands one man. The wrath of God against sin is advancing upon the people, bringing the death that each one deserves because of his sin against God. The man who stands between the living and the dead is God’s priest. God hears the prayer, sees the atonement offered on behalf of the faithful, and His wrath is appeased; the plague of death is over.

By this depiction of Aaron, God gives to us a clear depiction of the life, and the death, of Jesus. In between death and life stands the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. Even as the wrath of God the Father is advancing against the sin of the world, the Son of God enters our world as man. Christ Jesus is the Great High Priest, offering the sacrifice that atones for the sins of all men; that atonement is Himself, laying down His life as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He suffers the full wrath of His Father—even the death we deserved—to end the plague of death. All who believe in Him who was crucified—and is risen!—may dare to stand before Almighty God, laying claim to God’s mercy upon the faithful for the sake of the atoning sacrifice of His own Son. God has seen the atonement offered by our Great High Priest, and His wrath against you is appeased. You now stand among the living forevermore!

“Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.” (1 Corinthians 4:2) This requires fidelity to God’s directives in all matters, great and small, at all times and in all places. God provides a clear, though painful lesson to Moses and to Aaron—and to us—about faithfulness in today’s reading. Although the Lord previously instructed Moses to strike a rock with his rod to produce water for His people in the desert, this time God instructed him to only speak the Word. Moses, however, took matters into his own hands and struck the rock. This small act of disobedience was no small thing in God’s sight (no sin ever is), and both Moses and Aaron received a harsh judgment: neither would enter the land to which God was bringing His people. Truly, being found faithful in all things matters to God.

Indeed, God Himself is faithful in all matters, great and small, at all times and in all places. He is faithful to His promise of forgiveness and eternal life for the sake of His Christ to each one who believes. Our faithfulness is God’s own faithful work within us by His Holy Word and His Holy Spirit. Like Moses and Aaron, we abide in the faith through His enduring faithfulness to us, trusting in His forgiveness when we transgress our duties, and believing His promise that each of His faithful ones will be “gathered to his people” in the end and dwell with Him in the Promised Land of Heaven forever. Thanks be to God for His enduring faithfulness toward us!

**THE HOLY GOSPEL****St. Luke 16:19-31 (NKJV)**

There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.”

But Abraham said, “Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.”

Then he said, “I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.”

Abraham said to him, “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.”

And he said, “No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.”

But he said to him, “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.”

**THE COLLECT**

O God, the Strength of all them that put their trust in Thee, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without Thee, grant us the help of Thy grace that in keeping Thy commandments we may please Thee both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

All during this week we have heard words that encourage fleeing from our enemies and running toward God. And there is certainly nothing wrong with that advice. But we face another temptation in doing this: self-righteousness. We can become so proud of our self, that we look down on others who are not doing “as well.” We may have successfully fled from those who cause us trouble, but we should never gloat that we have repented and they have not. If we do become prideful, we are no better off than they are. Verses 17-18: “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; lest the LORD see it, and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him.” Beware of God’s wrath that now may be directed our way.

It is a slippery slope. On the one hand, we can fall into the trap of sliding away from the sanctified life. This happens when we minimize sin and ignore our God-informed conscience. On the other side, when we repent of sinful attitudes and actions, we can begin to feel pretty good about ourselves. We think we are beginning to “figure this out,” that we have finally “arrived.” But in reality, we are only falling off the other side of the horse.

The Christian life is a cycle of sin, confession, forgiveness, godly living, sin, confession, forgiveness, etc. Thanks be to God that our salvation does not depend on how well we struggle, but on how well Christ has struggled, and won.

The trip was lengthy and God’s people had become greatly discouraged on this journey. They should not have been so discouraged, for God went before them, revealing His presence among His people daily in the pillars of cloud and fire. God prevented their clothing and sandals from wearing out. He provided them with food and water in the midst of the dreary desert. He protected them from the warring tribes that they encountered along the way. Shamefully, though, the Israelites lashed out in frustration against Moses, and against God Himself. They lacked trust in God to deliver them from death in the wilderness. God then began to give them exactly what they envisioned: death.

God’s fiery serpents were directed at the turning of their self-pity into repentance over their sins. God used bronze metal to fashion another memorial, both to His wrath against sin and His mercy toward the faithful penitent sinner. The bronze serpent proclaimed that the fiery serpents were a manifestation of God’s anger, but that His wrath is appeased through faith in the sacrifice of God’s Christ, who would be lifted up upon a cross. Even as God’s people had to look with faith upon the serpent on the pole to see God’s salvation coming through it, so also God’s people use the eyes of faith to see the Crucified Christ, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). Look upon Him, Faithful Israel, and live forever!

**THE GOSPEL**

**St. John 14:23-31 (NKJV)**

Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.

“These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. You have heard Me say to you, ‘I am going away and coming back to you.’ If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’ for My Father is greater than I.

“And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me. But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. Arise, let us go from here.”

**THE COLLECT**

O God, who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgement in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who with Thee and the Holy Ghost, lives and reigns, ever one God, world without end.

We have learned much this week about staying away from foolishness, which is hurtful to our soul. Many times it is easy to spot. For instance, we know from the Ten Commandments that we should not steal, lie, or use God’s name wrongly. They all sound very straightforward. But one of our verses today tells us to watch out for something neutral. Verse 5: “Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven.” Riches themselves are not sinful, but they can easily become a problem. It is easy for us to get caught up in that vortex, putting riches as a priority where they have no right to stand. Once that happens, it becomes a 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment issue. Things that are neutral can easily become a false god if their place as servant is not kept in check. We need to constantly be on our guard, as Satan uses whatever he can to wrest God from being first place in our lives.

So how do we combat this nasty temptation? Verse 12: “Apply your heart to instruction, and your ears to words of knowledge.” Listen and take to heart the instruction of God’s Word. Fill your mind with the pure knowledge that He alone can give. Immerse yourself in Holy Scripture on a daily basis. Be eager to enter God’s House on Sunday. Fill yourself with these good things, and there will not be room for riches or any other false god to enter.

Ear, head, heart; they are all in today's reading. But why are they there, and what do they have in common? Verse 17 sets the stage: "Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to my knowledge . . ." It all starts with the ear. Without it we cannot receive outside input. And without outside input there only exists "dead men's bones and all uncleanness" (Matthew 23:27). But we can not just listen to anything. Our readings earlier in the week cautioned us to stay away from foolish input. Rather, as verse 17 puts it, we are to "hear the words of the wise." And what are "wise" words? They are simply words from Scripture. For only Scriptural words can make us wise unto salvation (see 2 Timothy 3:15).

Through such input we become knowledgeable about our sinful condition and our redemption in Jesus Christ. But ears and minds are not enough. For even the devil knows the Bible, but does not take it to heart (see James 2:19). There must be faith. Again from verse 17, "apply your heart to my knowledge."

We need all three, ear, head, and heart. And once the Word is absorbed, it needs to come out in the right way: "For it is a pleasant thing if you keep them within you; let them all be fixed upon your lips . . ." The Gospel is too great a gift to keep to ourselves. We should all be dying (and living) to get the Word out. God grant us a hunger to hear, and willing lips to speak.

Today's text introduces us to the sad figure Balaam. This man whom Balak tried to engage in cursing Israel is one of the most mysterious and complex characters of Old Testament history. His nationality cannot be determined with certainty, and Balaam's religious convictions are even more mystifying. On the one hand he acknowledged and obeyed the Lord, but he also persisted in heretical pagan practices. This non-Israelite went so far as to speak of the Lord as "my God," but in spite of his professed recognition of the true God, he succumbed to his desire for rich rewards and repeatedly sought a way to comply with his benefactor's nefarious request regarding Israel.

The tension between Balaam's self-determination and the will of God is a good example of the complexity of human perversity, as well as the dangers of mixing orthodoxy with heresy. His story is a warning against trying to serve both the true God and false idols or one's own wicked desires.

Balaam also serves as an example of the omnipotence of the Lord, for when he attempted to ply his trade as a clairvoyant or psychic to give Balak an advantage over Israel, God put true words of prophecy on his lips that delivered the opposite.

Our text also presents the value of Scripture interpreting Scripture when the New Testament books of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter, Jude, and Revelation refer to the story of Balaam as a warning against the sins of avarice and idolatry.

God's anger was kindled against Balaam because he still harbored the secret desire to manipulate the permission of God to go with the representatives of Balak for his own sinful gain. In order to convince Balaam that his impure motives were known, the Lord manifested His anger in a most dramatic way: "the Angel of the Lord" is typically understood as a physical manifestation of God Himself, as opposed to "an angel of the Lord" who is a messenger sent by the Lord.

The fact that only Balaam's beast of burden was at first enabled to see the heavenly vision was a manifestation of Balaam's self-imposed blindness toward God and His will. We are also told "the princes of Moab" and the "two servants" apparently remained unaware of the Angel of the Lord even after Balaam was graciously allowed to see Him. Balaam confessed that the Lord, who tests the heart and the mind (see Jeremiah 11:20), had known that he had not changed his intention to use the Lord's permission to go with them to gratify his lust for wealth.

Balaam exhibits some form of knowledge regarding the Lord when he confesses "I have sinned," but it is not necessarily faith. Even the devil knows of God, but does not have faith in God as Redeemer and Lord. This "head knowledge" seems to be all that Balaam possesses, being sadly devoid of the gracious gift of faith. This text points to the tremendous value of faith in the Lord as compared to simple knowledge of a God.

In today's reading, we see a couple of verses that focus on children. One of them is verse 11: "Even a child is known by his deeds, whether what he does is pure and right." What do we see in this verse? Accountability. So many people want to excuse children from accountability, which has led to all kinds of trouble later on in their lives. Even certain Christian denominations are reluctant to hold children responsible for their actions until they reach the "age of accountability." But Scripture sings a different song. In Psalm 51:5 we read: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." Therefore, the Bible says we are accountable even from the time of conception, as we are all inheritors of the sin of our parents.

How does this sin become manifest? "Even a child is known by his deeds . . ." A child does not only cry when he is hungry, wet, or hurt. He also cries when he does not get his way. It is our inborn nature to think solely of self, and that comes out very early in life. We need to be taught how to think outside of self, and toward one another. Enter the Christian parent highlighted in verse 7: "The righteous man walks in his integrity; his children are blessed after him." Through the godly examples of moms and dads children are blessed to walk in their footsteps. Let us pray for all Christian parents to encourage their children to walk in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (see Ephesians 6:4).

In today's text there is much attention given to the topic of foolishness. In verse 7 we read: "Excellent speech is not becoming to a fool, much less lying lips to a prince." Here we see the issue on both ends of the spectrum. The fool shuns wisdom, and the wise shuns foolishness. It sounds simple enough, but how well do we follow it? It is easy for us to place ourselves on the "wise" end, casting aside what is trivial, harmful, and foolish. And certainly, when we allow ourselves to be led by God's Word, we indeed cast aside what may be harmful to our faith. But how often do we really find ourselves on the "wise" end of sanctification? If we take an honest look, and give an honest answer, we would be saddened at how often we play the role of the "fool." The Old Man within us does not hearken to the "excellent speech" of God's Word. The Old Adam does not like being examined by the reality of God's Law that exposes us for the sinners we are.

So what should we do? Stay away from dangerous company. Listen to verse 12: "Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs, rather than a fool in his folly." The consequences of opening ourselves to the advice of the foolish sinful world can be catastrophic. Let us then direct our time and attention to the fruitful task, to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest God's Word. By that we may be filled with the "good stuff," and have no room left for foolishness.

Whether or not Balaam believes does not change the reality that he is forced to acknowledge his inability to achieve that to which God is opposed. That which Balaam had been hired to do, he was unable to do. God kept him from pronouncing a curse on His people, who were unlike the nations of the world. Balaam's request of "let me die the death of the righteous" seems to be a plea to be included among God's chosen. He who had come to curse Israel desired to share in its blessing.

Balak's lack of faith is presented in his attempt to reduce Israel's power by selecting a point where their numbers would be obscured. Men often attempt to manipulate and deceive, but it is not possible to manipulate or deceive the Lord.

The text also reveals that God is not like a man, that He should lie. These words describe the immutable nature of the Lord and the integrity of His Word. In this regard Balaam is a foil for God—constantly shifting, prevaricating, equivocating, changing—a prime example of the distinction between God and man. Finally, Balaam speaks from his desperation. He has no means in his bag of tricks to withstand God's blessing of Israel. Once again Balaam serves as that example of fallen humanity: How often people lament the desperate situation of their sinfulness and need for rescue, but refuse to acknowledge the Lord and His Word as the only solution to their predicament.

The Spirit of God came upon Balaam and his eyes and ears were opened to the revelation of God unlike ever before. This coming by the Spirit is not to be confused with the filling of the Spirit mentioned in Acts 2, or with the anointing of the Spirit in Isaiah 61. This opening statement prepares the hearer for the heightened revelation that is about to come from the unwitting messenger.

The theology of blessing and cursing in the promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12 is now a part of this blessing uttered through Balaam when he proclaims: “Blessed is he who blesses you, and cursed is he who curses you.” In this clearer revelation of the Lord’s Word and will delivered through Balaam we see even Balak acknowledging God’s ruling authority in the whole affair when he declares “the Lord” has kept Balaam from being rewarded. In his disgust with Balaam’s failure to curse Israel, Balak now dismisses him without pay—the ultimate insult to his greed.

The star and scepter addressed in verses 17-19 are perhaps initially fulfilled in David, but we who are the New Testament Israel (the Church) see their more perfect fulfillment in the coming of the Messiah. Israel’s future Redeemer will be like a star and scepter in His royalty and will bring victory over the enemies of His people. That blessed victory is over our ultimate enemies of sin, death, and the devil.

It is worth noting that the kings who had allied themselves with Balak do not escape God’s eye, for the Lord searches the heart and mind—and none can hide.

If we confine ourselves to our own little world, we can become very content with our thoughts, words, and actions. Verse 2 of today’s text says: “All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes . . .” It is always easy to “self-justify.” But in the objective mirror of God’s Law we see that God is not content with our thoughts, words, and actions. That is why verse 2 continues, “but the LORD weighs the spirits.” It is only through this independent and flawless perspective that we can rightly diagnose our condition.

This diagnosis leads to exposing ourselves in what we should have done, and what we should not have done. Once we confess these sins of omission and commission, God is quick to forgive. By living according to His will, and confessing when we do not, we follow God’s plan for our lives. As His children we know that He will put all these pieces together--both good and bad--and use them for His good purpose (Romans 8:28).

This does not hold true for those who reject God. The brokenness they must endure, or the earthly prosperity they may experience, will not serve their eternal purpose. Verse 5 of our text says: “Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; though they join forces, none will go unpunished.”

There is much we must endure in this life. We must bear the burdens of living in a broken world. Even harder, we must live with our sinful selves. Let us take consolation that our God is eager to forgive and guide us, and may we be eager to live lives that conform to His holy will.

# Lesson from the Book of Concord Trinity Sunday

FRIDAY, JUNE 13: NUMBERS 27:12-23

PENTECOST

## 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 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].)*

The context of this narrative helps to greatly enhance its message because just prior to this text we read of Zelophehad’s daughters’ request for an inheritance in the land (verses 1-11). This in conjunction with the Lord’s words to Moses about his own exclusion from the land (verses 12-14) is important. In the case of Zelophehad’s daughters, provisions are made for exceptions and irregularities in the inheritance laws, but there is no provision for Moses. His sin at the waters of Meribah at Kadesh (20:1-13) was always before him.

These facts and the Balaam narrative recorded in Numbers 22-24 help drive home how seriously God takes His Word and adherence to it, as well as faith in Him. Moses’ sin was striking the rock with his staff when the Lord had not mentioned any such striking with the staff, but directed him to simply command water to come forth by the power of God’s command.

While our text shows God demands strict adherence to His Word, it also demonstrates His tremendous mercy toward those who look to Him in faith. Though Moses is not permitted to enter the promised land because of his stumbling, he is allowed to see it, as well as have the honor of commissioning his successor who would lead the people across the Jordan.

While the Lord demands faithfulness from His chosen because He is a jealous God, He is far greater in showing abundant mercy and grace. This is clear from the cases referenced above, and especially in the sending of His Son to atone for our many failures to be faithful to Him.

Today's lesson is one of guarding against earthly distractions from God's Word and will. The land that was before the people caused covetousness in the hearts of some, because of its perceived value in their earthly pursuits and its proximity. The prospect of material gain motivated the request by Reuben and Gad. Selfish interests prevailed over their sense of unity as the covenant people. They were inclined to shirk their obligation of faithfulness to God.

Moses warns them against allowing immediate temporal gain and the immediacy of earthly pleasures to cloud their faithful following of God's Word. This is not unlike our constant temptation from the fallen temporal world, our sinful flesh, and the devil. We are easily drawn to covet the things of the world if we do not keep our focus on Jesus Christ. This reality of our sinful nature causes us to fall under the same warning of Moses uttered against Gad and Reuben: your sin will find you out.

In our text the bargain was struck, but not without strong warning of the consequences if the parties failed to live up to their word. We are God's chosen people, His holy assembly, who have been brought into a holy covenant through grace. Our sins have been washed away by the atoning blood of Christ—but we must never underestimate the power of the world, our flesh, and the devil to draw us back into sin. There is only one sure defense against your sin finding you out: faith in Jesus Christ as your Redeemer from sin.

**THE GOSPEL****St. John 3:1-15 (NKJV)**

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"

Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

**THE COLLECT**

Almighty and everlasting God, who has 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 would keep us steadfast in this faith and evermore defend us from all adversities; who lives and reigns, ever one God, world without end.