

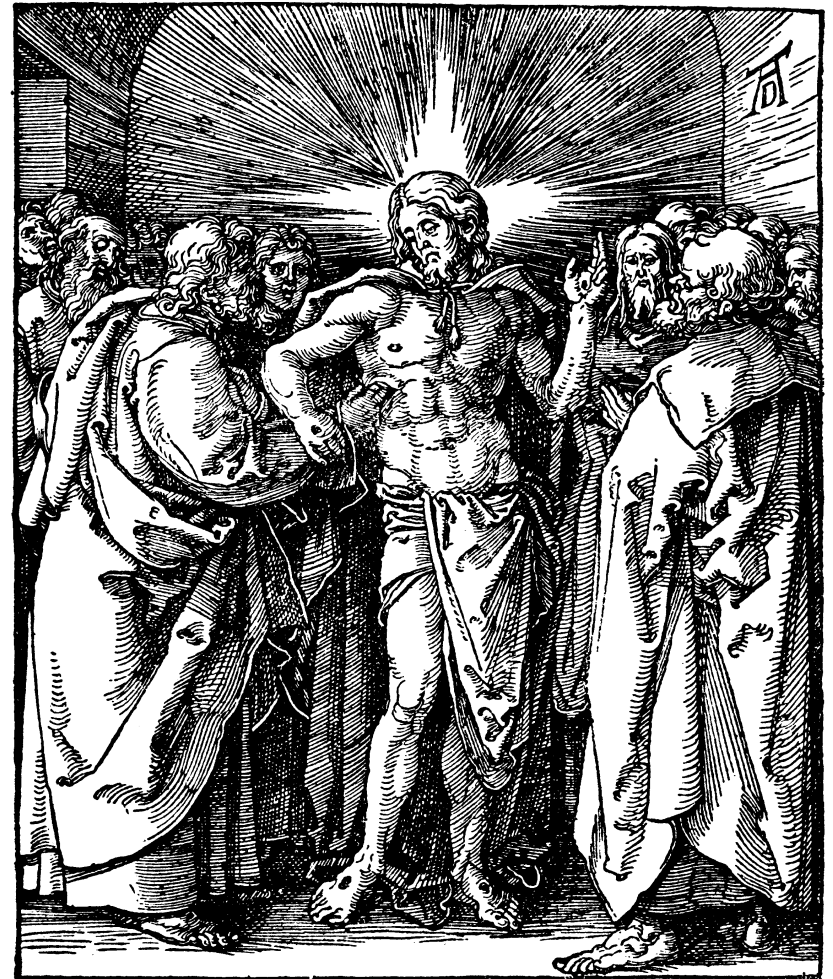
The Lord gives comfort to His patient remnant throughout the brief ages of this world: "... they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me." Throughout the generations of those who awaiting the coming of the Christ, the Word thus strengthened the saints of God, and for those who now await the return of the Christ in glory, the Word continues to grant such continued consolations: "... they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me." But thus says the Lord:

"Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away,
And the prey of the terrible be delivered;
For I will contend with him who contends with you,
And I will save your children.
I will feed those who oppress you with their own flesh,
And they shall be drunk with their own blood as with
sweet wine.
All flesh shall know
That I, the Lord, *am* your Savior,
And your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."

The Lord, who is our Savior and Redeemer, is the Mighty One of Jacob promised from of old to be our salvation. No deliverance from death and sin could be found in the works of men, but the deliverance which the Christ has accomplished frees all those who believe from captivity to the evil one.

Prayer: O God, who makes the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



QUASIMODOGENITI—CANTATE
(APRIL 4—APRIL 30, 2016)

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NORTH AMERICA**

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Quasimodogeniti Sunday

Article V.

That we may obtain this faith, the Office of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who worketh faith where and when it pleaseth God in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justified those who believe that they are received into favor for Christ's sake.

They condemn the Anabaptists and others, who think that the Holy Ghost cometh to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works.

Article XXV.

Confession in our churches is not abolished; for it is not usual to give the Body of the Lord, except to them that have been previously examined and absolved. And the people are most carefully taught concerning the faith and assurance of absolution, about which, before this time, there was profound silence. Our people are taught that they should highly prize the absolution, as being the voice of God, and pronounced by His command. The power of the Keys is commended, and we show what great consolation it brings to anxious consciences; that God requires faith to believe such absolution as a voice sounding from Heaven, and that such faith in Christ truly obtains and receives the forgiveness of sins.

Aforetime, satisfactions were immoderately extolled; of faith and the merit of Christ, and the righteousness of faith, no mention was made; wherefore, on this point, our churches are by no means to be blamed. For this even our adversaries must needs concede to us, that the doctrine concerning repentance has been most diligently treated and laid open by our teachers.

But of Confession, they teach, that an enumeration of sins is not necessary, and that consciences be not burdened with anxiety to enumerate all sins, for it is impossible to recount all sins, as the Psalm testifies [19:13]: "Who can understand his errors?" Also Jeremiah [17:9]: "The heart is deceitful, who can know it?" But if no sins were forgiven, except those that are recounted, consciences could never find peace; for very many sins they neither see, nor can remember.

—The Augsburg Confession

FRIDAY, APRIL 29: ZECHARIAH 8:18–23

EASTER 4

In last Sunday's Gospel, we heard Christ's words to His disciples from John 16: "But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you." In a few weeks, the Church will celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, when the Helper, the Holy Spirit, descended on the apostles, and in that day all was as we hear in the words of today's reading:

"Thus says the Lord of hosts:

'Peoples shall yet come,

Inhabitants of many cities;

The inhabitants of one *city* shall go to another, saying,

"Let us continue to go and pray before the Lord,

And seek the Lord of hosts.

I myself will go also."

Yes, many peoples and strong nations

Shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem,

And to pray before the Lord.'

"Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard *that God is with you.*"'"

We read in Acts 2 that on the day of Pentecost: "And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven." Men from every nation thus heard the Word, and so it is to the end of this age: the Lord continues to gather His remnant by the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word.

Prayer: O God, who makes the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The words of today's reading from Jeremiah 8 teach us once again concerning the dreadful spiritual peril which comes from false teaching. The false teachers believe themselves to be wise—and there are many people who agree with them in that assessment. But the Word of the Lord condemns their lies:

“How can you say, ‘We *are* wise,
And the law of the Lord *is* with us’?
Look, the false pen of the scribe certainly works falsehood.
The wise men are ashamed,
They are dismayed and taken.
Behold, they have rejected the word of the Lord;
So what wisdom do they have?”

From television preachers to Internet ‘bloggers,’ there is a mind-numbing cacophony of false teaching which the sinful hearts of men are eager to receive precisely because it proclaims “peace, peace” where there is no peace. The truth isn't defined by how many people a false teacher has in his viewing audience, or how many “likes” a Facebook post might receive. Anyone who proclaims a justification apart from faith proclaims a false peace. But for those who sorrow over their sins and who find their consolation in the Christ, such saints of God know a peace which no one can take from them, for the faith which the Lord has created and sustained in their hearts clings to Christ alone.

Prayer: O God, who makes the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Jonah did not want God to forgive the Ninevites (see 4:2). Like the older brother of the prodigal son who would not enter into the feast (Luke 15), Jonah did not want to admit the Gentile Ninevites into fellowship with the Jews.

The Jews had been graced with God's salvation freely and without merit. They were supposed to be the bearers of this salvation to the Gentiles--a light for revelation to the Gentiles. As they had freely received, so they could freely give. Nevertheless, many of them didn't understand God's purpose. They feared that letting Gentiles into Christ's church would be the end of the Jewish nation, and with it the end of the temple, circumcision, distinctions of foods, etc. They were partly right. When the reality comes the shadow goes away. The fulfillment of the Old Testament was a Christ-created New Testament church without the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. In the New Testament church there would be neither circumcised nor uncircumcised. What mattered was faith in Jesus Christ.

It took Peter's vision from God (Acts 10) and the accompanying signs to get the Apostles to change their idea of “preaching the word to no one but the Jews only” (Acts 11:19). Just as Jonah knew his disobedience deserved death, so have our sins angered God. No matter how that Word came to you, it is by grace you have been saved. Through the Word we were brought to repentance and then to righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ.

We pray: O Lord, we give You thanks for rescuing us from what our sins have deserved. Give us new hearts to freely give, even as we have received. Amen.

Yes, Jonah sinned by trying to flee from God and refusing to go to Nineveh. And, yes, Jonah pronounced his own rightly deserved punishment, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea.” After all, the wages of sin is death. Nevertheless, this doesn’t mean that Jonah was an unbeliever. The believer doesn’t lose his faith with every instance of sin.

Jonah’s prayer from the fish’s belly is an amazing faith-filled prayer asking for God’s merciful deliverance from his presently well-deserved affliction. Once the law had done its work, Jonah realized his sin. “I have been cast out of Your sight.”

Later Jonah says, “When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD” (2:7). The Gospel words about a gracious and merciful Lord who answers prayer and rescues return to Jonah. Despite the acknowledgement of his sin, he says, “Yet I will look again toward your holy temple” (verse 4). Jonah no longer flees from God, but reaches out in prayer for deliverance to the very God from which he was fleeing.

You, too, have deserved “his wrath and displeasure, temporal and eternal damnation.” Yet, if you hope to be saved, in whom then do you trust? “In my dear Lord Jesus Christ. ... He died for me and shed His blood for me on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.” The fruit produced by repentance is none other than the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Jonah admits that salvation is a free gift from God, which he will now willingly take to the Ninevites.

We pray: Almighty God, let me never forsake Your mercy. When I am disobedient, turn me back to You, the God of my salvation. Amen.

Today’s reading is a continuation from God’s Word which we considered yesterday, and it is the Lord’s consolation to His remnant which witnessed the judgment of the Lord on the unbelieving. For the sake of the elect, there would be a limit to the destruction:

“As the new wine is found in the cluster,
And *one* says, ‘Do not destroy it,
For a blessing *is* in it,’
So will I do for My servants’ sake,
That I may not destroy them all.”

God’s mercy toward those who hear and believe by the working of the Holy Spirit is not an indication of God somehow wavering in His judgment on those who do not believe:

“But you *are* those who forsake the Lord,
Who forget My holy mountain,
Who prepare a table for Gad,
And who furnish a drink offering for Meni.
Therefore I will number you for the sword,
And you shall all bow down to the slaughter;
Because, when I called, you did not answer;
When I spoke, you did not hear,
But did evil before My eyes,
And chose *that* in which I do not delight.”

The proclamation of such judgment is a strong statement of Law, so that those who hear would be called to repentance. And the consolations of the Gospel always abide for those who repent and believe in the Christ. The Lord’s promises remained steadfast and sure—promises to the house of David which were fulfilled in the Christ, whose blood was shed, so that all who believe in Him would have the forgiveness of sins.

Prayer: O God, who makes the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

At the end of Isaiah 64, we read the lament of the remnant among the Lord's people:

Your holy cities are a wilderness,
 Zion is a wilderness,
 Jerusalem a desolation.
 Our holy and beautiful temple,
 Where our fathers praised You,
 Is burned up with fire;
 And all our pleasant things are laid waste.
 Will You restrain Yourself because of these *things*, O Lord?
 Will You hold Your peace, and afflict us very severely?

The sins of the nation had brought down this calamity on Zion, and the remnant cried out to the Lord. It is thus that we read in Isaiah 65:

“I was sought by *those who* did not ask *for Me*;
 I was found by *those who* did not seek Me.
 I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’
 To a nation *that* was not called by My name.”

It was not that the people had been abandoned by the Lord; rather, they turned away from the Lord who sought them, and they chose instead to worship idols. Thus the Lord refers to them as those “Who have burned incense on the mountains and blasphemed Me on the hills; therefore I will measure their former work into their bosom.”

In the midst of calamities, the promises of the Lord to those who believe are steadfast and sure. We have our consolation in the Word, and when the judgment of the Lord is poured out on the world, we cling to the assurances which He has given to us through His Word and Sacraments.

Prayer: O God, who makes the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The LORD gave Jonah the particular message which He wanted him to preach. It was a threatening message of law and judgment against the city of Nineveh. Although Jonah surely included others words from the Lord, the theme of the message was “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”

The Ninevites were repentant for their sins and cried out to the LORD. The contrite response of the king and the people is quite surprising to us, but not to Jonah. You might remember that Jonah didn't want the Ninevites to be forgiven, so he fled from the Lord. Jonah knew that if God was sending him to preach to them, there was the chance that they would actually listen and God would forgive them. The Ninevites also discerned that this God might forgive. Why would He warn us if He wasn't willing to forgive? Why would He give a delay of 40 days if He weren't allowing time for the punishment to be averted?

By their prayers, we see their trust in the merciful actions of the God who said they deserved death and disaster. This Word-created faith produced the fruits of repentance. They turned from their evil way and from the violence of their hands.

We have deserved death and destruction, but the words of the Prophets and Apostles have led us to confess our sins and receive forgiveness in Jesus Christ, our Savior. Through faith in God's Son, the punishment of the law has been averted. We have the hope of eternal life.

We pray: Lord God, we thank You for Your message which has turned us from our sin and created faith in Your Son. Amen.

The LORD is teaching Jonah the meaning of the fifth petition, “And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Jonah was sent to bring the threat of punishment, and then the gracious promise of forgiveness, to his enemies. Like all of us, the Prophet Jonah needed God’s grace to come to faith, and he, further, needed God’s grace to remain in true faith.

Grace is “the free goodness of God, His favor, His benevolence, and His mercy, by which not according to our works and worthiness but out of sheer mercy, for the sake of Christ, God receives into grace sinners who are repentant and flee in faith to the Mediator, and He accepts them into eternal life with their sins forgiven and the righteousness of Christ imputed to them” (Loci Theologici, Chemnitz, p.523).

“Although we may have the Word of God, though we may believe, do his will or suffer it to be done, and nourish ourselves with the gifts and blessings of God, yet this life does not proceed without sin; for we still daily digress much, and exceed proper bounds, while we live in this world among people, who cause us a great deal of sorrow, and give us occasion for impatience, wrath, and revenge. And besides this, we are pursued by the devil...” (Large Catechism, III, 86-87). The need for God’s continual forgiveness breaks our pride and keeps us humble.

We pray: Gracious and merciful God, who is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and who relents from doing harm, take away my pride and anger so that, saved by grace, I may freely forgive others. Amen.

The Lord declared through the prophet: “And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.” In this Easter season, our thoughts are, as always, on that Pierced One who made atonement for the sins of the world through His death so that all who believe in Him have full forgiveness of all their sins. In the resurrection of this Pierced One we have the hope that we, too, shall be raised from the dead. By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, St. John points to the fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy in the piercing of the side of Jesus: ‘But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, ‘Not *one* of His bones shall be broken.’ And again another Scripture says, ‘They shall look on Him whom they pierced.’”

Mourning was replaced by rejoicing when Christ rose from the grave. Christ, the only-begotten of the Father, is the now the firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18). “This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood.” (1 John 5:6) In Baptism we are baptized into Christ, and in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, we eat and drink His holy Body and Blood. He was pierced on account of our transgression, and by His stripes we are healed, for we have our hope in Him.

Prayer: O God, who makes the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

repentance or reproof, but properly nothing else than a preaching of consolation, and a joyful message which does not reprove or terrify, but against the terrors of the Law consoles consciences, points alone to the merits of Christ, and again comforts them by the precious preaching of the grace and favor of God, obtained through Christ's merit.

7. As to the revelation of sin, because the veil of Moses hangs before the eyes of all men as long as they hear the bare preaching of the Law, and nothing concerning Christ, and therefore do not learn from the Law to perceive their sins aright, but either become presumptuous hypocrites as the Pharisees, or despair as did Judas; Christ takes the Law into His hands, and explains it spiritually (Matt. 5:21 sqq.; Rom. 7:14). And thus the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all sinners (Rom. 1:18), how great it is; by this means they are instructed in the Law, and then from it first learn to know aright their sins—a knowledge to which Moses never could coerce them.

Therefore, although the preaching of the suffering and death of Christ, the Son of God, is an earnest and terrible proclamation and declaration of God's wrath, whereby men are for the first time led aright to the Law, after the veil of Moses has been removed from them, so that they first know aright how great things God in His Law requires of us, nothing of which we can observe, and therefore should seek all our righteousness in Christ—

8. Yet, as long as all this (namely, Christ's suffering and death) proclaims God's wrath and terrifies man, it is still not properly the preaching of the Gospel, but the preaching of Moses and the Law, and therefore a "strange work" of Christ, whereby He attains His proper office, i.e. to preach grace, console and quicken, which is properly the preaching of the Gospel.

Negative.

Contrary Doctrine which is Rejected.

Therefore we reject and regard incorrect and injurious the dogma that the Gospel is properly a preaching of repentance or reproof, and not alone a preaching of grace. For thereby the Gospel is again converted into a law, the merit of Christ and the Holy Scriptures obscured, Christians robbed of true consolation, and the door opened again to the Papacy.

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome

Isaiah's prayer in verse 2—for God to be gracious to Israel so that by His Arm they are saved from trouble—comes to fulfilment with verses 3-4. St. Matthew records a Friday night earthquake (Matthew 27:51-53) and a Sunday morning earthquake (Matthew 28:2-4). The "noise" (Isaiah 43:3) of these tumultuous commotions at Christ's death and resurrection announced the deliverance which the people sought. Sin, death and the devil were defeated. We know that "the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many" (Matthew 27:52-53). The "plunder" of verse 4 is the gathering of the believers from among the Gentile nations so that they are brought into God's Kingdom, the church.

Although we tend to want specific deliverance from individual troubles, our Lord knows what is best. He provides a general victory over all troubles through the work of His Son. He provides forgiveness from sins so that we possess Christ's righteousness. He gives faith, which was described in the Old Testament as "the fear of the Lord." Through faith in Christ everything else to which we clung can pass away, we have Jesus as our treasure. No matter what trouble comes our way, we have the stability of Christ's victory. His resurrection victory is our strength. Because He lives, I will not die but live.

We pray: O Risen Lord, our Arm every morning, strengthen our faith in You so that in the midst of the tumultuous changes of this life our life may have the stability of Your righteousness and justice. Amen.

The time of restrained joy in the observance of Lent has given way to unbridled bliss in the celebration of Easter. The Old Testament believers had the promises of a Savior, but they didn't know all of the details which we know about the fulfillment. We know the suffering, death and resurrection of the God-Man, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Prophet Isaiah records our heavenly Father's patience during the Old Testament as He waits for just the right time to send His Son. "I have held My peace a long time, I have been still and restrained Myself" (Isaiah 42:14). In chapter 42, the Prophet Isaiah foretells the arrival of the victory of Jesus Christ, saying that the time has come.

Our Savior has done a two-fold work of judgment and mercy. With the picture language of "lay waste" and "dry up," we have Jesus bringing law and judgment to those unbelievers who have rejected God. Those who trusted in other gods "shall be greatly ashamed." Our Lord will also bring mercy and deliverance to his believers who have been oppressed by their enemies. Isaiah declares that God "will not forsake them." We know this two-fold work as the preaching of the Law, which reveals sin, and the Gospel, which promises the free gift of eternal through faith in God's Son.

In response to this new work of Jesus Christ, as a mighty man prevailing over sin, death and the devil, all the people throughout the earth are directed to "Sing to the LORD a new song."

We pray: Heavenly Father, we praise You for sending Your Son to prevail against our enemies. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Cantate Sunday

Chapter V. Of the Law and the Gospel.

Statement of the Controversy.

Whether the preaching of the Holy Gospel be properly not only a preaching of grace, which announces the forgiveness of sins, but also a preaching of repentance and censure, rebuking unbelief, which is rebuked not in the Law, but alone through the Gospel.

Affirmative.

Pure Doctrine of God's Word.

1. We believe, teach and confess that the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is to be maintained in the Church as an especially brilliant light, whereby, according to the admonition of St. Paul, the Word of God may be rightly divided.

2. We believe, teach and confess that the Law is properly a divine doctrine, which teaches what is right and pleasing to God, and reproves everything that is sin and contrary to God's will.

3. Therefore everything that reproves sin is and belongs to the preaching of the Law.

4. But the Gospel is properly such a doctrine as teaches what man who has not observed the Law, and therefore is condemned by it, should believe, viz. that Christ has expiated and made satisfaction for all sins, and, without any merit of theirs [no merit of the sinner intervening], has obtained and acquired forgiveness of sins, righteousness that avails before God, and eternal life.

5. But since the term "Gospel" is not used in one and the same sense in the Holy Scriptures, on account of which this dissension originally arose, we believe, teach and confess that if by the term "Gospel" the entire doctrine of Christ be understood, which He proposed in His ministry, as also did His apostles (in which sense it is employed, Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21), it is correctly said and written that the Gospel is a preaching of repentance and of the forgiveness of sins.

6. But if the Law and the Gospel be contrasted with one another, as Moses himself is called a teacher of the Law, and Christ a preacher of the Gospel, we believe, teach and confess that the Gospel is not a preaching of

“So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter’--that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD for the potter.”

The shepherds who were entrusted to feed God’s people had faithlessly neglected their duties. They sought their own wealth and glory, and they abused the people with false teachings and abandoned them. We see this evil come to its most poignant level in the chief priests and others who betrayed Christ unto death, negotiated for the price of thirty pieces of silver in the Gospel stories.

The Lord Himself has always been the Good Shepherd, as we are taught in Psalm 23. Throughout the Old Testament, God sought to gather His people as a holy flock, blessed by green pastures and still waters of His truth and righteousness. But people are stubborn and rebellious, and the shepherds He sent often neglected their duty. In Christ He came as the fulfillment of His promises to shepherd His people, but rather than be fed and cared for, they resisted Him and even sought to kill Him.

All these things happened as He foretold. Our Lord knew how all these things would happen. But thanks be to God that He still did, and continues to do, all those things that manifest His mercy and righteousness, working together for our benefit as we are called from all nations into His one holy flock in Christ Jesus, the true Good Shepherd.

We pray: Lord God, forgive our wickedness and rebellion, and make us truly humble and thankful for Your goodness and mercy. Make us to dwell in Your house forever in Jesus Christ. Amen.

The house of Israel was exiled during Micah’s lifetime, for he prophesied “in the day of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah” (Micah 1:1). This occurred during Ahaz’s reign in Judea (see 2 Kings 17). The Israelites were justly punished for their sin of combining the worship of the true God with the worship of idols. For those in Israel that would repent, Micah prophesies the end of their captivity. “I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob, I will surely gather the remnant of Israel.” Those who repent, seeking mercy from the Lord, will receive it and be gathered back into the true Israel of God, the holy church. Though Israel never reentered the land, the Lord kept a faithful remnant of all who believed the promise of the gospel.

The remnant of faithful Israelites were to place their confidence in “the one who breaks open” and “will come up before them.” This is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. He breaks open the sealed door of death by rising from the grave on the third day. He “will come up before them” so that many might witness His resurrection and believe in gospel. By breaking death’s strong bands and appearing to over five hundred witness (1 Corinthians 15:6), Christ destroys death’s power and gathers a remnant, His true church, consisting of all who believe the promise of the Gospel. He continues this in every age of the world through the proclamation of His Gospel, that He is the Good Shepherd who has laid down His life, and taken it back up, for the sake of His sheep.

Lord God, make us faithful hearers of the promise of the Gospel, so that we daily seek mercy and forgiveness in the One who breaks open the door of death. Amen.

Often the Lord feeds His people with “the break of adversity and the water of affliction.” At times this is experienced as temptation from the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh. At other times the Lord tests one’s faith through life circumstances such as lack. He allows temptation and tests faith so that He might strengthen the believer’s faith and purify it from misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice.

In every adversity, be it temptation from the devil or testing from the Lord, the Lord promises to be gracious to those who cry to Him in faith. You have this promise of God, “He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you.”

Though the Lord wound, He promises to heal. Though He kill, He promises to make alive. It is as we sing, “Though a heavy cross I’m bearing and my heart feels the smart, shall I be despairing? God, my Helper, who does send it, well doth know all my woe, and how best to end it” (TLH 523:2). The Christian trusts that the Lord will bring relief from every temptation and rest from every cross of testing. Instead of feeding you with the “bread of adversity” He promises “bread of the increase of the earth.” Instead of making you drink “the water of affliction” your Good Shepherd points you to the “rivers and streams of water” on “every high mountain” and “on every high hill. By this the Lord means that He will graciously care for your every need of body and soul.

Almighty God, graft into our hearts such a love for Your name, that temptation and trial may not discourage our faith, but strengthen our confidence in Your gracious promises. Amen.

God speaks comfort to us in His Word when He assures us that He cares for His people. We live in a world that is difficult and unsettled, regardless of the time and place. Men will always be at war with God and with each other until the end of the age. The outward peace and prosperity that comes to various kingdoms and societies is truly a blessing from the Lord, but it is not the greater peace that we have with His kingdom and presence.

Our Lord Jesus tells us in Matthew 6 to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (verse 33). In Him, we have all our provision and the things that truly make for peace. We naturally are concerned about what will happen in the place we live: Will we be safe? Will there be enough food? But God assures us that He will take care of His people. He gives us good things and protection in this present life, but even if such things are taken from us, He has also provided for the greatest thing in our spiritual life. He has given us forgiveness, reconciled us to Himself, and promised us life everlasting in paradise and the resurrection through Jesus Christ crucified.

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, keep us safe and content in the surety of Your Word. By Your Spirit, build our thanks for the good things You give us now, and trust in the greater things that will be revealed in the life of the world to come in the full glory of Your Son, our Lord, Christ Jesus. Amen.

Today's reading presents us with another example of God working through men and earthly kingdoms to point towards His establishment of His greater kingdom in Jesus Christ. A temple would stand in Jerusalem, but the greater temple would come in His own flesh and blood.

Stories such as these remind us that God is not a mere fable or idea. Our God is the one who created all reality, physical, spiritual, and mental. He works through all these aspects of reality as well. He calls on people to do the work that He commands. He grants men authority to govern others and uphold order. He teaches us and provides for us in body and spirit. He also takes the evil that men do and uses it to bring about good. The chief example of that is how He used the evil of the Jews who tried to destroy Him to bring about the flesh-and-blood fulfillment of our atonement.

He told the Jews, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). They were focused on a building, but Christ spoke of the fulfillment of the prophesy in Haggai, "I will fill this temple with glory," and "In this place I will give peace." In the physical reality of Jesus Christ, true God and true man, the Lord revealed His glory and gives us peace. He lived and died as one of us, and through His own righteousness He established His kingdom of grace and forgiveness among us in Christ crucified.

We pray: Lord God, grant us Your Holy Spirit and the power and wisdom of Your Word so that we may accomplish the good work that You would do through us to the glory of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. In His name, Amen.

The Lord chides "backsliding Judah" as being far worse than "backsliding Israel." By this the Lord means to awaken the Judeans from their sin-induced slumber and to startle them with the realization that their idolatries and evils are worse than the Northern Kingdom's had been. Part of their backsliding was turning their ears away from Jeremiah and opening them to the false shepherds who proclaimed peace with God apart from repentance and faith. The Lord preaches this stern law so that He can preach His saving gospel to them. "Return" he says, "and I will not cause My anger to fall on you; for I am merciful" and "I will not remain angry forever." He wants to give them repentance, but they refuse to acknowledge their sin. This will be their undoing, as the Lord will send them into exile.

The Lord is the same yesterday, today, and forever. As He was with Israel and Judah, so He is with humanity in every age of the world. He desires to give repentance to sinners so that they acknowledge their iniquities and transgressions. Like ancient Judah, so many are deceived by the false shepherds who preach peace with God without repentance and faith. To those who receive repentance, sorrow over their sin, and confess it to God in humble contrition, the Lord promises to show mercy. His mercy is demonstrated in Christ, who acquires a perfect righteousness for all and applies that righteousness to all who believe the promise of the Gospel that God will be merciful to them in Christ.

Heavenly Father, grant us godly sorrow over our sins so that we lament them. Grant us also faith to run to Your Son as our mercy seat, the place where You promise to show mercy to the penitent. Amen.

The shepherds of Israel are their pastors, those who teach the faith. These shepherds have sinned grievously against their office by using it to feed themselves and ignoring the Lord's flock. In these verses the Lord gives us an excellent description of the pastor's duties. The Lord ordains them to strengthen the diseased, to heal the sick, to bind up those that are broken, to bring near what has been driven away, and to seek that which is lost.

Pastors in the Old and New Testaments usually cannot literally strengthen the diseased or heal the sick. These are metaphors for the shepherd's true work: the cure of souls. The Lord sends shepherds, in both Testaments, to strengthen those who struggle against temptation, to heal those sick with sin by applying the salve of the gospel, to bind with the absolution those who have been broken by the law, to bring near those whom false teachers have driven away, and to seek out those who are unbelieving with the gospel.

Even today, many shepherds feed themselves, their bottom lines, portfolios, and their egos, fleecing Christ's flock in the process. Most of the time this happens by telling the sheep exactly what their flesh wants to hear.

The Lord promises to shepherd His people Himself. He does in this in Christ Jesus. In His ministry Jesus gives all undershepherds an example of the selfless ministry which He requires of them. As Christians, we ought always pray for our pastor, especially that he remain faithful to the Good Shepherd and find joy in the ministry to which Christ has called him.

Dear Lord, give unto Your church faithful shepherds led by the Good Shepherd. Give to us, Your sheep, ears to hear them and hearts to rejoice in Your ministry through them. Amen.

The Lord's promises to restore the land and glory of His people may appear to be fulfilled in some ways throughout the years, but the true fulfillment will come in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

The whole world of man has become wasted, desolate, and ruined because of sin. The garden of Eden was lost because of Adam and Eve's unfaithfulness. The whole face of the earth was changed in Noah's time because of the wickedness of man. Through the ages, kingdoms have risen and fallen, expanded and been reduced to ruins.

But God's holy people are assured by His Word that He will establish His kingdom and make all things new in Jesus Christ. He calls us to be ashamed of our iniquities and the destruction that they have caused. We are made to remember and repent of our sins in the face of His righteous Truth. But we are also shown His mercy and forgiveness for His own sake, manifest in His Son.

Through Jesus Christ, He restores us, cleansing us from our iniquities. He increases His kingdom through His Spirit and Baptism, enlarging His flock through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of His Spirit in the hearts of people from all nations.

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. Let Your kingdom come unto us also, and grant us Your grace in Christ Jesus to abide in Your Word and dwell with You in the resurrection and life everlasting. Amen.

“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God” (Ezekiel 36:25-28).

Here in the Old Testament prophecy of Ezekiel we see an image of what would be fulfilled in Holy Baptism of the New Testament.

Just as Israel is restored not for their own sake or worthiness, but for the sake of God’s holy name, we are restored in Baptism. We who were rebellious sinners are brought to the Lord by the power of His Holy Spirit. We are washed from the filthiness of our sin and idolatry by water and the Word. The Lord promises to cause His people to walk in His statutes, and we see the fulfillment of that in Christ’s Word to the Church in Matthew 28: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...” (Matthew 28:19-20).

We pray: Lord, create in us a clean heart, and renew Your Spirit within us so that we may walk in Your holy ways and dwell with You in the resurrection and life everlasting through Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord’s shepherding work can be best described by one verb: feed. The Lord uses this word five times in today’s lesson to describe His gracious work among His people. He searches for His lost sheep. He brings them out of their captivity. He binds up the broken and strengthens the weak. All this He does by feeding the sheep. He makes them to lie down in rich pastures. By feeding His sheep He strengthens them, heals them, and brings back those who have strayed.

The Lord feeds the sheep of His pasture with the green grass of His holy Word. In the word of His gospel He feeds His sheep who are burdened by their sin and wearied by their own unrighteousness. In the promise of His gospel He offers to all His sheep the forgiveness of their sins and His own perfect righteousness to be their own righteousness before God the Father. The Lord feeds His sheep through the preaching of the Gospel, reading and meditating on the Word of God in faith, and through the means of salvation. The Lord desires to be the true shepherd of His people so that they lack no good thing.

He feeds the fat and the strong, those who have trampled on the other sheep, with judgment. Instead of being fed with rich pasture, the sheep who muddied the clear waters for others He feeds with condemnation for their unbelief and wicked deeds. Even this is done to provide for His sheep, “for they shall no longer be a prey.” The Lord feeds His sheep and protects them from every enemy.

Lord Jesus, our Good Shepherd, feed us with Thy Word of promise and strengthen our faith with Thy holy sacrament, that we may be defended from our enemies. Amen.

The Lord gives His people a gracious promise in today's lesson. "I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them—My servant David. He shall feed them and be their Shepherd." Ezekiel writes this prophecy during the Babylonian captivity, many generations after David was dead and buried. He goes on, "I the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them." The Lord isn't promising to resurrect the long dead David. David, the great saint, was still very much a sinner. David returned wouldn't solve Israel's problems. Instead of providing another Davidic heir after the exile, the Lord promises the ultimate shepherd: Himself.

The Lord Himself would shepherd His people and feed them with His Word. To do this He would have to assume human flesh. These words of the Lord through the prophet Ezekiel are a promise of the incarnation of the Son of God. "My servant David" is the one the Lord will establish as shepherd over His people. Yet in yesterday's lesson, the Lord declared He would take it upon Himself to rescue His sheep and feed them. This chapter concludes when the Lord declares that Israel (the church) is the Lord's flock. This is a picture of the incarnation. The Son of God assumes human flesh and says, "I am the Good Shepherd." He demonstrates this by feeding His people with His gospel promise and laying down His life to atone for the sheep's sins, then by taking His life up again to justify all who believe the promise of His gospel. Jesus is our Good Shepherd, God Himself in human flesh, King David's greater son.

Lord Jesus, our Good Shepherd, thank You for assuming our human flesh in order to bear our sin and be our savior. Amen.

The Lord is truly merciful. He takes care of His people throughout the ages with His mighty hand. And it is not a matter of whether or not they ever deserve it: He cares for His people because of His grace and mercy. He desires to bless mankind, but He does so according to His will and His wisdom, not the will of men.

He upholds His people because in them He has chosen to do His works. Through the ages, He has given His Words and His promises to His people. He helps individuals and directs the fate of nations. But again, He does so because of His holy will, not the merit or worthiness of any particular individuals or nations. He works through man so that He can help mankind, according to His infinite wisdom.

His people bore the consequences of man's rebellion and sins. Israel was not innocent, but neither would He ignore the sins of other nations against them. God Himself would come to us through the people of Israel, and bear the consequences of mankind's rebellion and sin. He bore the suffering and death that we heaped upon Him, and by His innocent death He atoned for all our wickedness. But that does not mean He ignores man's obstinate rejection and the violence that comes from the faithless. There are still consequences for those who reject Him and His holy Word and work in Christ. But there is also mercy for His repentant and faithful people

We pray: Lord God, make us truly repentant of our wickedness against You and Your holy will. Grant us true faith in the holy death and resurrection of Christ, our Lord, for the salvation of our souls. Amen.