

SATURDAY, AUGUST 6: 1 KINGS 14:1-31

TRINITY 10

This chapter is a tale of two rulers. Jeroboam's son's death points to the greater judgment levied through the prophet, "the LORD shall raise him up a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam that day." Not only will Jeroboam's line cease, but Israel will be carried off into exile for their blatant idolatry. However, Rehoboam and the Judahites are not any better. "Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done." This sin, which begat other grotesque sins, was punished by the Lord. He used Shishak, king of Egypt, as the rod of His wrath against Judah and Rehoboam. He humbled Rehoboam by taking Solomon's golden shields, which were then replaced with bronze shields, showing the diminished prosperity already visible under Rehoboam.

Yet Rehoboam's line was not cut off as Jeroboam's was. In this, the Lord demonstrates His mercy toward sinners, and His faithfulness to His promise to David to always have a man on the throne. The Lord does not cut off Rehoboam's line because that would violate His gospel promise to His servant David. So we too, though we deserve nothing good from the hand of God because of our sins, can take heart in God's treatment of Rehoboam. The Lord does not cast off His promises because of our sinfulness. The promise of the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation remain sure and certain despite our sin. This ought to always enliven our sagging spirits! God will not abandon His promise in the Gospel.

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your great mercy shown to us in that You do not take back Your promise in the gospel to forgive our sins. Amen.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD

TRINITY 6—TRINITY 10
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Where yesterday's Gospel spoke about not showing anger, our reading portrays David showing respect for King Saul, who was seeking to take his life. If anyone had a right to be angry, it was David. But rather than showing anger, he showed he was no threat; instead he shamed him in front of his men, which produced reconciliation.

Oh how difficult it is not to show anger or resentment to a brother who has attacked our person. Due to our sinfulness our first desire is to retaliate mentally or physically. However, because of God's relationship with us through our baptism, we are enabled to put down that sinful human nature as David did, who was enabled to see the ways of the Lord as an actual part of life when he said, "Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?"

For us it takes getting used to the ways of the Lord being part of our life. That means reading, learning, and inwardly digesting the Word of God, where the Spirit of God can make a lasting impression upon our heart, mind, and soul. Then we see and believe that the ways of the Lord are not only pleasing in the sight of the Lord, but also a way of life. This means daily making the sign of the cross and placing ourselves in the care of our heavenly Father who does not hold our sins against us when we fail, but strengthens us to live in repentance and the power of His Spirit to guide our ways.

Prayer: Oh, that the Lord would guide my ways to keep His statutes still! Oh, that my God would grant me grace to know and do His will! Amen. (TLH 416:1)

"I am a prophet, as thou art." With these words, the false prophet hooks his prey and destroys him. This nameless prophet disobeyed the Word the Lord had spoken directly against him by entering into this man's house to eat and drink. While this may seem harsh, this was written for our learning. From this we are to learn to hold fast to the Word which God has revealed to us, and trust no other word, even if it comes from one saying, "I am a prophet."

Many claim to have direct revelations from God the Holy Ghost, and by such preaching they lead many astray. Their teaching, having supposedly come directly from God, always violates the Word of God and usually makes the gospel into law, diminishing Christ's glory and obscuring the righteousness of faith. Others, saying, "I am a prophet, as thou art," claim that it is entirely possible, and even God-pleasing, to "mark and avoid" false teachers while remaining in church fellowship with them, thus not really avoiding them at all. Still others preach a gospel of physical prosperity and material blessing in the name of Jesus, and shun the cross and suffering which Christ promises to all who believe. All of these false teachings come from men who say, "I am a prophet," that is, "I am a pastor."

The Christian must be ever-vigilant against those who would distort the revealed Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, especially when someone claims "I am a prophet," yet teaches contrary to the Holy Scriptures. This text shows us the grave consequences for not abiding by the revealed Word of God.

Lord God, as You have graciously given us your Holy Word, so mercifully keep us steadfastly faithful in Your revealed Word. Amen.

Rehoboam's arrogance antagonized Israel into leaving. Yet Jeroboam assumed Israel would quickly forget his arrogance and return to Rehoboam because he had the temple and the divinely-ordained worship of God in Jerusalem. At the beginning of his reign Jeroboam fell into the same sin Solomon did. Jeroboam had been given the Word of the Lord which promised him the kingdom in chapter 11. But he did not place his trust in God's promise, and sought to fortify his reign through idolatry. In this, Jeroboam led all of Israel into grave sin. Even in this, God preserved a small remnant (1 Kings 19:18; Tobit 1:3-6). Jeroboam forsook the promise and fell headlong into idolatry.

When we neglect God's promises in the gospel we quickly fall into all kinds of idolatry as well. Jeroboam had God's promise that he was to rule the kingdom of Israel, yet Jeroboam did not cling to that promise. He trusted his instincts and human reason. When we begin to doubt God's promise to provide daily bread, we race after it, fret over it, and quickly become discontent and covetous. If we neglect the hearing of God's Word of law and gospel, we easily begin to fall to the temptation of trusting in our own righteousness and goodness, rather than Christ's righteousness. We become falsely self-assured. The Christian is daily tempted to all sorts of idolatry, for the devil does not want us to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Yet even as the Lord preserved a remnant of faithful Israelites, so the Lord preserves us against these temptations.

Heavenly Father, preserve us in Your Word and all Your gracious promises to us in Christ Jesus our Lord, and cleanse us from the idolatry of our hearts. Amen.

Today we find out that going away from the voice of God leads one to place their faith and trust in other voices, which allows a person to find out things that are not wanted.

Samuel had died and was no longer able to give guidance during Saul's reign. Rather than trusting God for what to do next, Saul sought guidance from a medium to bring up the person of Samuel. The spirit told Saul, "Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord..." Saul would lose the kingdom to David, and he would fall at the hands of the Philistines.

Many people like Saul do not take the Word of the Lord seriously as an actual voice of the Lord speaking to mankind His will for their lives. Instead, the Word of the Lord is seen as a book of suggestions for a good moral life, or else a book that only is one among many to be used for self-preservation or psychological insights. Of course, others are willing to place it into the category of cultural reading that needs to be on someone's bucket list.

As followers of Christ in these last days, we hold the Word of God as inerrant and infallible. It is without lies or contradictions because God the Father is the only author, from beginning to conclusion, and by it our lives are blessed with peace, hope, and love, with all we need to support this body and life, both spiritually and physically. Life may not be what we would always like, or what makes sense, but God our Father has promised to be with us always, to the very end of the age.

Prayer: I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus, trusting only Thee; trusting Thee for full Salvation, great and free. Amen. (TLH428:1)

In today's reading we have the privilege of seeing how the Word of the Lord is once more fulfilled for all to witness that our Heavenly Father is truthful. Our text has Saul witnessing first hand how the Lord's Word spoken by Samuel of his upcoming death was truthful as the Philistines had already killed his three sons, and were following hard to take Saul's life.

While this was indeed a sad day for Israel, we need to read such accounts and be reminded that all of the words of the prophets, evangelists, and apostles have been fulfilled as truthful except for the last promise. The kingdom of God comes through the Son of David, Jesus Christ, and He shall come again to reign in all His glory, where there is no more sin, death, or power of the devil with which to contend.

Believers look forward to that day when all the agony disappears and we are spared from the effects of those who reject the Word of the Lord, causing us disappointment and heartache. That is why, as we wait for Christ's return, a believer's greatest joy this side of Heaven is receiving the body and blood of Jesus Christ at Holy Communion. There we have a foretaste of that great feast to come, and unity with other like-minded members of the family of God as we wait for that day.

Prayer: I'm but a stranger here, Heaven is my home; Earth is a desert drear, Heaven is my home. Danger and sorrow stand round me on every hand; Heaven is my fatherland, Heaven is my home. Amen. (TLH 660:1)

The Lord tells Jeroboam, "I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever." The reason the Lord afflicts David's descendants is because of Solomon's idolatry. Solomon's "wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father." Solomon gave his heart to the service and worship of false gods. His heart "was not perfect with the Lord his God," which means that he lost the righteousness of faith by seeking favor from false deities. For this the Lord would afflict David's seed so that they might repent and return to faith in the true God of Israel.

The prophet who tells this to Jeroboam subtly prophesies Christ in these words as well. Christ is THE seed of David. Whereas, the kings of Judah would be afflicted for their own sins and that affliction was to lead them to repentance and faith, THE seed of David would be afflicted for the sins of the entire world. Christ would bear God's punishment for the idolatries of every man, woman, and child, "but not for ever," meaning that His suffering would cease when He was dead and buried and finally resurrected from the dead.

Though we daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment and wrath from God, the Gospel teaches us to look to Christ as the propitiation for our sins. Faith believes Christ's atoning death is "for me," and as one believes, so it is for him. There "is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" by faith.

Lord God, heavenly Father, thank You for afflicting Christ, the seed of David, for my sake, and giving to me all the benefits His death and resurrection by faith. Amen.

Solomon's reign was typified by wisdom and wealth. The Queen of Sheba marveled at Solomon's wisdom and the prosperity of his people, even his servants. Solomon's reign was so prosperous that silver "was accounted as nothing in the days of Solomon." Kings of the earth brought tribute to Solomon, and "all the earth sought Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart." For as prosperous as his days were, they are not glory days for which we should pine. The reign and prosperity of Solomon is a picture of the kingdom of God brought by Christ.

Christ's reign is not one of physical prosperity and worldly wealth, as the false preachers of the prosperity gospel would have us believe. Christ's reign is one of wisdom and spiritual prosperity. By His sinless life and innocent, bitter suffering and death, Christ acquires a boundless and infinite treasure. This treasure is spiritual, so that rust and moth will not destroy and thieves will not break in and steal. It is the forgiveness of every sin of ours. It is the precious promise that we have a God who is reconciled to us. It is the wisdom which believes God is for us, and not against us. This is the treasure Christ acquires, and then applies to sinners when they believe the promise of the gospel. Faith receives these blessings and makes us more prosperous than Solomon. Jesus is our priceless treasure, which far exceeds all precious metals and all worldly wisdom.

Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for the promise of the gospel by which You shower upon us poor sinners all the blessings Christ won on the cross. Teach us daily to treasure these gifts, storing them up and pondering them in our hearts; in Jesus name, Amen.

In our reading for today we find several items that might seem confusing, or else unusual. For example, how ironic it is that Saul lost his kingdom because he failed to annihilate the Amalekites, and now one who said he was an Amalekite died because he claimed to have destroyed Saul. Or, how about David, who refuses to lift a hand against Saul, the Lord's anointed, but then takes the life of a man who did as Saul commanded him to do?

What is clear is how David understood the idea expressed in Paul's words in Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable . . . and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things." As David mourned the death of Jonathan and Saul, nothing is mentioned of Saul's sin, only his honorable life's accomplishments. If ancestors remember Saul the way David portrayed him, they will most certainly let their minds dwell on what is honorable, right, pure, lovely, and of good repute.

Herein lies our lesson. These days there is a whole lot of emphasis on the wrongs which others have committed against us. We think we have to dredge them all up, understand them fully, and then dwell upon them. Here David would differ with us on this point. If we have not forgiven others for the wrongs they have done against us, then we should do so, and then forget them. Just imagine God holding our sins against us? Ought we not dwell on His mercy, and speak well of others?

Prayer: All that I was, my sin, my guilt, my death, was all mine own; all that I am I owe to Thee, my gracious God alone. (TLH 378:1)

Today's reading shows King David coming into power as ruler over Israel and Judah. Even the people rejoiced that David was King over all the land, as they reminded him that the Lord had said, "You shall shepherd My people and rule Israel."

David is blessed with the defeat of the Philistines, who jealously brought out war again at the news of David's anointing. It was as simple as David asking God for guidance before going to war, "Is it Your will that I win?"

People today view following in the ways of the Lord too binding, or else too old fashion. Many are repelled by God's Word because they do not get what they believe they should receive. Too many people want power, reputation, and wealth, but are not willing to believe that God answers those requests with simple things, granting a long lasting marriage, a devoted spouse, obedient children, or a job that puts a roof over the family and bread on the table.

The key is not believing we will be rewarded by God if I do this or that, but simply having a humble, repentant heart and soul while seeking to do God's will. This comes from living by grace, through faith, and trusting in God to give you what you need, not just what you want.

Prayer: "Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His word I do hope." Amen. (Psalms 130:2-5)

Having completed the temple, the Lord warns Solomon against idolatry. Should Solomon and his children forsake the Lord and serve idols, they will be cut off from the land of Canaan and the temple will be cast out of God's sight. But both Solomon and most of his royal descendants would do just that. Their idolatry led to the destruction of the temple and Israel's expulsion from the land at the hand of the Babylonians. However, take note that God does not withdraw His mercy entirely from His people. The promise to David, "There shall not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel," will not be taken away. Though the Lord punished Israel for her idolatry, He did not snatch away the promise of the Messiah.

In yesterday's gospel lesson Jesus wept over Jerusalem because her destruction was near. Just as in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, God's people forsook the true God who revealed Himself in Jesus, the Son of David. In 70 A.D. the temple was again destroyed. Jews were expelled from the land, but the Messiah was not taken away, nor was the promise that all who believe in Him shall have the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation.

So it is today. In spite of our great unworthiness, the Lord does not snatch His promises from us, especially the promise of the heir of David who would eternally reign. When we sin the faithful Son of David is our advocate and propitiation for all our sins. The Lord does not take His promises away, but always holds out Christ for us, so that faith may be sustained and sins forgiven.

Lord God, forgive the idolatry of our hearts. Strengthen our hearts that we may daily fear, love, and trust in You above all things. Amen.

Doctrine and Practice

The Tenth Sunday after Trinity

#44

“One wonders at times how a popular fancy can attach itself to a certain Sunday and its appointments, especially in the face of so much evidence against it. For example, this Sunday, the Tenth after Trinity with its Gospel of the Prophecy of Jerusalem’s Destruction has popularly been explained as thus arranged because Jerusalem was twice destroyed on a date reckoned to be the tenth of August! Now if this Sunday always fell on or near the tenth of August, there might be some little reason for this, but seldom is this the case.

“On the other hand, the Sunday ranges one step farther in progressive teaching. With last Sunday holding up the Unjust Steward as a warning and ‘commending’ his worldly wisdom that the Christian might learn thereby to be as keenly awake to eternal opportunities, one can quickly and surely find outstanding key-words for today: ‘Knowest not the time of thy visitation’ ... ‘The things which belong unto thy peace’ (Gospel). Perhaps one will think this mere repetition, since the Gospel tells of Jerusalem’s failure to know the time of her visitation, shows her failure in her stewardship, as one sees her desecrating the Temple of Jehovah and His worship—they had ‘wisdom,’ but the wrong king; as one sees her fickleness, her rejection of her Lord. But to this is added one more thing. Because of this all comes her doom! Relentless, terrible, utterly destroying! To them doom—to us warning.

“How pointedly the Collect harmonizes: God’s covenant with Israel, His own, held forth to them ‘gracious promises’ and made them ‘partakers of His heavenly treasure,’ both now and to be! But how constantly He had been called upon to show them His ‘mercy and pity,’ and were not these evidences of His ‘almighty power?’ ... and ‘last of all ... His Son!’ But Israel had spurned ‘His grace’ and refused ‘to run the way of His commandments’ ... Knew not the things which belong unto her peace! ...

“Today we learn the full consequences of refusing to know the time of our visitation; call it gift, privilege, opportunity, stewardship, what one will ... it is to acknowledge and receive Jesus as Lord; and to use the gifts of grace to His glory! As one thinks of the dangers of the professing Christian, and how terrible the consequences of deliberately following the known wrong way, one will find the Introit full of comfort and instilling courage.”

P. Z. Strodach, *The Church Year*, p. 209–210.

SATURDAY, JULY 9: 2 SAMUEL 6:1-23

TRINITY 6

Our final reading for this 6th week after Trinity reveals to David that God’s word is true and just, even though we might not understand the ways of the Lord. God had first revealed to Moses that anyone who touches the Ark of the Covenant would die because no man is worthy to come into contact with the holy things of God. David was angry because the Lord had struck down Uzzah when it appeared that he was just making sure the Ark did not fall after the oxen had stumbled.

Have you ever questioned the actions of God almighty? Have you ever wondered why God allows this certain event to take place, and yet prevents another unexpected occasion to occur? Like David, maybe it has taken us some time to pass for us to realize, “Who are we to question the Lord?” or “Who are we to judge the actions of the Lord?” and then to repent!

So it was when the Ark had traveled 6 feet that David sacrificed oxen and fatted sheep, which is a sign of repentance and realizing the grace of our Lord God can not be compared with anything. And so he rejoiced by dancing in the streets, and the horns were blaring as the Ark was brought to its intended resting place.

As we have for a brief moment examined a time in the life of David, may we realize that the great men in the Old Testament were just like you and me today. We too are always in need of being in the presence of God where our Lord may bless us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, think on me and purge away my sin; from earth-born passions set me free and make me pure within. Amen. (TLH 320:1)

It has been said, “Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.” Impersonators make their living imitating famous people. Most often the impersonator uses familiar words and phrases associated with the famous person he is imitating. Listen to an exceptionally good impersonator on the radio and you would swear it was the actual person.

So, what is the appropriate way to worship the Lord? “Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.” We are told that David delivered a beautiful psalm of praise to God. David’s psalm to the Lord begins with a simple call to the people to “give thanks to the Lord,” to “call upon His name,” to “make known His deeds among the people,” and to “sing to Him.” Sound familiar? “Call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.” Luther’s words from the explanation to the Second Commandment echo David’s psalm.

Both David and Luther would have us imitate what the Lord has already told us. That is what we do in the Divine Service. Many of the lines we speak or sing responsively during the Divine Service are direct quotes from Scripture. By using God’s own words, those particular words, phrases, and sentences from Scripture, we become, in a sense, impersonators. However, when we “impersonate” God by speaking His Word the voices all sound different, but it is still actually God speaking to us through His Word. “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). When God’s word is spoken by us, God speaks to us, and that’s exactly how God would have us worship Him.

We pray: O Lord, open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise. Amen.

The holy Gospel is a very different teaching from the law. The law which was written on the heart of man can be known apart from the Holy Scriptures. Even the Gentiles know that God requires certain behavior and forbids other behavior. But the Holy Gospel “is not according to man.” St. Paul says, “For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.” The Gospel is not made known apart from God’s revelation in the Holy Scriptures.

It pleased our heavenly Father to reveal to us His plan of salvation. Our Lord Jesus Christ “gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.” This message of forgiveness through faith in Christ is the only Gospel message. It is God’s will that we come to faith in His Son for salvation.

Should another message of good news with the addition of human understanding be preached, it would not be God’s revelation, but a perversion of the gospel of Christ. A different Gospel will not save.

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank You for the revelation of Your good news in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Throughout St. Paul's entire letter, he had never directly addressed those false teachers who had infiltrated the congregation. These deceitful workers had misled some, and caused them to fall into sin. Nevertheless, St. Paul still considered the Corinthians holy believers, who simply needed correction. St. Paul's desire was to expose these infiltrators' schemes by means of his letters. His desire was that the congregation would remove these men who were tearing down the true faith.

Similarly, we have been led astray by the unholy trinity of sin, death, and the devil. We are duped into sin often and need to be recalled through confession and repentance. Thankfully, we do not fall from faith with every sin. Yet we should not become complacent in our fight against sin. St. Paul told the Corinthians, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves."

Each day baptized believers die to sin and rise to their new life in Christ. "Do you not know that Jesus Christ is in you?" Each day as we hear the Holy Scriptures we examine and test ourselves by the words of the prophets and apostles. St. Paul says, "We speak before God in Christ. But we do all things, beloved, for your edification."

We pray: Heavenly Father, build up Your beloved believers through daily confession and repentance. Amen.

Sometimes words can be confusing because a single word can have various meanings. A word familiar to all of us is the word "church." Ask the Lutheran question, "What does this mean?" and we can get different answers. We drive by a building and recognize it as a church. Sunday morning comes and we go to church, which can have a dual meaning of simply going to the building, but also means attending the Divine Service. Then there are the times we talk about church when we are refer to a particular congregation: He is a member of St. Paul's Lutheran Church.

The same thing is going on in today's reading. David realized that he was living in a beautiful house while the Ark of God dwelt in a tent. David desired to build an appropriate house for the Ark of God. This house would be a temple. But God does not want David to build Him a temple. Instead, God turns the tables and makes a solemn promise to David. God will make David a house. But this house would not be of cedar or stone. This house would be a dynasty with an everlasting kingdom.

We know the one who sits upon the throne of this everlasting kingdom. He is Christ our Lord. He is of the house and lineage of David. What we need to remember from our reading for today is that God's promise to David was not only about the Messiah, but also about us. A kingdom has a king and his people. We have been given the privilege of being a part of this everlasting kingdom. By virtue of our baptisms we have been baptized into Christ and have been adopted into His Royal Family that has no end.

We pray: Thy kingdom come. Amen.

David was the man specially chosen by God to be king. The nations surrounding Israel were aware of David's God, for David's enemies had been thwarted at every turn. But now David's sin brought shame to the nation and gave "great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme."

Though the eternal consequences of David's sin were gone because God had "put away" David's sin, David would never be allowed to forget what he had done. From that time forward, David's house would have perpetual trouble because "the sword shall never depart from [David's] house." In addition, David would always have the memory of the death of his child who was conceived in adultery.

As a pastor, I have had the occasion to minister to parents of a sick child. Mom and Dad both said, "I would take my child's place in a heartbeat." It was that sort of agony that plagued David. It wasn't the child's fault. David pleaded with God to spare the child, but as we know, the child died. David did all he could. He went without food and cried his eyes out. But the Word of the Lord must be allowed to stand.

The child died, yet the child was spared. The child would not have to endure living in a household where the sword was ever present. The child would not have to bear the burden of answering for the sins of his father because of the circumstances surrounding his conception. Indeed, at first glance it would appear that God wasn't fair by allowing the death of the child. But as David attests, this child went on to eternal life with God, because David would one day "go to him."

We pray: Lord, forgive us our trespasses. Amen.

Through his preaching and teaching St. Paul brought the Corinthians to faith in Christ. In this he considered himself the matchmaker for a wedding made in heaven. "For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." Jesus Christ is the bridegroom and the church is the bride.

However, the actions of some "false apostles, deceitful workers" were seeking to tear apart what God had joined together. St. Paul did not regard their action as an unimportant thing. As the called man of God, the ambassador of Christ, St. Paul was jealous because these infiltrators were messing with Christ's bride. He saw their deceitful action as similar to the way "the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness." Yes, it must be said that it is satanic to try to separate Christ and His church. These who falsely claimed to be apostles were of a different spirit, a different gospel, and were seeking to present another Jesus to Christ's bride.

You should want your pastor to follow the lead of St. Paul, to be as diligent and protective of your congregation. You want him to betroth you to one husband, Christ. He should allow no other teaching to lead you astray. Adam didn't speak up in the garden, but you want Christ's minister to provide and protect as he proclaims Christ's message.

We pray: Heavenly Father, send faithful men to lead Your congregations to Christ alone. Amen.

Watching the bird feeder attract the various birds in our area, we frequently get out a bird book for identification. “That’s a blue bird.” “No, I think it is an indigo bunting...” There are certain identifying marks which determine, and the book settles all our disputes.

There were some who had infiltrated the Christian congregation at Corinth and were despising the Apostle Paul, contradicting his teaching. These false teachers were “measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves.” The Holy Scriptures are the final rule and guide for judging all teachings. The Scriptures teach us about the law which shows us our sins, and the Gospel which presents the forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus Christ. When St. Paul speaks about his authority in the apostolic office, he explains that he has the Lord’s commendation. Not only does St. Paul’s teaching agree with the Old Testament prophets, but he has been sent by Jesus Himself to preach the Gospel of Christ to the Gentiles. St. Paul had not overextended himself into another man’s sphere when he originally brought the Gospel to them.

We are to hold to the Word of God alone, trusting in Christ for full salvation. We have been sent a man who holds the pastoral office and has been given Christ’s authority for the edification of the body of Christ. We, too, are to judge our pastor by the prophetic and apostolic Word of God. Pastor, people, and Apostle Paul—we should all agree. “Just as he is Christ’s, even so we are Christ’s.”

We pray: O Lord, we give You thanks for the clear teaching of Your Word preached by the pastoral office. Amen.

Thus says the Lord God of Israel, “Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house” (2 Samuel 12:10).

Between yesterday’s reading and today’s reading “the sword” struck the House of David. After the incestuous rape of Tamar by her half-brother Amnon, Absalom sees an opportunity to rid himself of the one who stood between him and his father’s throne. Amnon was heir to the throne and Absalom, Tamar’s full-brother, takes revenge and has Amnon killed.

Because he had taken revenge rather than allowing King David to exert his authority, Absalom flees. After time had past, intercession is made on his behalf of Absalom. He is allowed to return to his home. However, the stigma of what Absalom had done remained as Absalom was not allowed to see his father, so Absalom coerces a king’s servant to arrange for Absalom to see the king. Absalom bows before David and David kisses him.

Our reading for today picks up at this point. Much like the parable of the prodigal son, Absalom is fully restored in the eyes of the people. However, he immediately begins undermining the authority of his father, King David, which reminds us, “...the sword shall never depart.” Absalom steals the hearts of the people in an attempt to steal the throne of his father, and his plan comes to fruition.

After all that David had done for Absalom, David must now flee for his life having been betrayed by the son he kissed.

We pray: Lord, Your Son was betrayed but did not flee. He went to the cross to pay the price for our sins. Thank You for forgiving our sins for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Thus says the Lord God of Israel, “Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house” (2 Samuel 12:10).

Troubles never cease for David. All of Israel knows what is going on between David and Absalom. David cannot escape the memory of his adultery with Bathsheba, and David is being cursed by his own people. Yet David does not curse God, nor take action against the man cursing him. David simply trusts in the God who forgave his sins and hopes to be repaid with good in light of all his present sufferings.

The web of deceit becomes ever more entangled. David’s troubles are compounded when his rogue son, Absalom, follows the advice of Ahithophel, Bathsheba’s grandfather. The Lord had warned David: “Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun’” (2 Samuel 12:11). Absalom does this evil in the sight of all Israel, thumbing his nose at his father in the hope of garnering even more support from the people in order to overthrow his father.

“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:12). Though we live as God’s forgiven people we often must suffer the effects of our own sins or the sins of others. We are not spared from the trials and tribulations of this world. We, like David, can only cling to the One who has overcome this world.

We pray: Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

St. Paul gives us the model for encouraging Christian action. St. Paul will have no law-focused motivation or offerings of guilt from the Corinthians. He says, “so let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver.” St. Paul is not trying to stiff arm these believers into parting with their money. He speaks of their previous “willingness” to send a gift to help out the churches. Since they expressed this desire, he lets them know that he will be sending Titus to get this “previously promised” gift. By giving them time to get it ready, it will be “a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.”

Christian action is to come from a heart which knows that God has provided, and is providing for, all things. The law shows us our failure to fear and love God. Out of fear we refuse to give of ourselves and our possessions to love our neighbor. The gospel message teaches about the love of God, whose Son atoned for all sin. We come to understand that God’s love toward us is abounding, unending, and indescribably generous. Through faith in Christ we are declared righteous. Furthermore, God increases the fruits of your righteousness (see verse 10). That is, we live lives of thanksgiving. Yet even this thanksgiving is God’s working through us.

We pray: Almighty God, who works in us both a confession of the Gospel of Christ and a generous sharing of our gifts with others, lead us to sow generously that we may reap an abundant life of thanksgiving. Amen.

The grace of God has provided for us salvation in Jesus Christ. We say that we are saved by grace through faith, and that is true! St. Paul reminds us that God's grace is not done working. The grace that sent us His Son is also the grace that worked faith in our hearts so that we believe. That same grace continues to work in us so that we desire to love our neighbor. That same grace is moving us to help those who are less fortunate.

St. Paul speaks of "the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia." St. Paul is sending Titus so that the Macedonians who had determined to give a gift of charity would "complete this grace." Finally, he says, "see that you abound in this grace also." The saving grace of God which had enriched the Corinthians in so many ways—faith, speech, knowledge, diligence, and love—was now moving them to make good on their desire to help the other Christians in Jerusalem.

God is working in us as well. The God of grace, whose Son provided for us an external righteousness by which we are saved, is now working in us to bring forth in us an abundance of the gifts of grace. His grace is not only creating new desires in us, but it is also leading us to act upon these desires. His grace reaches its intended completion when it brings forth abundant fruits.

We pray: O Lord, may Your Son's lavish gift of salvation lead us to give of our abundance according to your grace. Amen.

Thus says the Lord God of Israel, "Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house" (2 Samuel 12:10).

It is all coming to a head. The armies of David must contend with the armies of Absalom. What began as an act of adultery on the part of David eventually resulted in a family battle of epic proportions. The blood of twenty thousand men who rebelled against the king covered the countryside, yet David wishes to deal compassionately with Absalom by instructing his military leaders: "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom."

After all that Absalom had brought upon his father, David wished no harm to come to his son. However, when Absalom encountered David's men, he thought they would deal with him as he would with them if he were given the chance. He fled and got caught in the branches of a tree, and eventually was killed by one who was commanded not to harm him.

Though David's woes were compounded, the Lord remained with David. Was David's love for Absalom ill-placed? Why deal gently with a traitor, even more when the traitor is your son? The reason is found in the words of David's greater Son: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:43-45).

Our Father in Heaven has dealt graciously with us, His people. His Spirit leads us to daily repent of our rebellion against Him.

We pray: Lord, have mercy. Amen.

After the usurper of the throne, Absalom, was killed and David was restored to the kingship, he was met on his way to Jerusalem by two men who wronged him personally. Both had wronged him with their tongue. One, Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathon, used a fair tongue to deceive David and receive the possessions of his master (2 Sam. 16:4). The other, Shimei, another member of Saul's family, cursed King David as he was fleeing Jerusalem (2 Sam. 16:5).

Both these men are in the first party of Israelites to greet King David as he returned to Jerusalem so that they might show their allegiance to the king. Shimei, even more so, in that he prostrated himself before David and admitted his cursing was wrong.

The wisdom of the world would dictate that King David had every right to exact revenge on Shimei. This was voiced by Abishai, who suggested Shimei should be put to death. However, King David was inclined to show mercy to Shimei. God had forgiven his sin, and now he showed mercy in forgiving those who sinned against him. The right thing to do when people wrong us is to be merciful as our Father is merciful.

We pray: Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

We should all learn to pray like King Solomon. In our daily vocations, whether that be father, mother, son, daughter, pastor, layman, employer, employee, or whatever it may be, we should acknowledge that we cannot fulfill that vocation unless we recognize that our ability to do so comes from the Lord God.

King Solomon understood that the Lord God had placed him into his office of king. He further understood that unless the Lord God had a hand in helping him in his vocation He would fail. Therefore, when the Lord God tells King Solomon to ask for whatever he will, he asks for wisdom to rule God's people. This the Lord God happily grants.

However, there is a temptation to ask the Lord God to grant our petition to complete our vocation, and then do as we please anyway. King Solomon eventually stopped using his wisdom to accomplish God's will, and was pulled away to worship false gods by his many wives.

We could be the wisest person on the planet and still all of our plans would fail if the Lord God does not will them to happen. Therefore, we need to remember to not only pray for God's help in fulfilling our vocations, but also remember that we cannot accomplish anything that is good without His constant help and support.

We pray: Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

King Hezekiah was dealing with the disuse of the Temple. The doors were shut. What a glaring testimony to what we poor, miserable sinners do towards our Lord, and in regard to our prayer and study of His Word! Our busy lives too often take precedence over the furthering of our faith in the Triune God. We neglect to pray and we neglect to read His Word. We neglect to speak about Him in our daily lives, and not just with the outside world, but sometimes within our own families.

As much as we need to repent of our failures to further our faith in God, the condition in King Hezekiah's day was much worse. The people had forsaken God completely. But, as much as they were to blame, even more to blame were their leaders. King Hezekiah re-established the work of the priests and their offering up of sacrifices for the sins and atonement of the people.

We need to be aware of what our pastors teach and where they are leading us. They should be giving us the Lord Jesus and what He has done for us to win forgiveness, life, and salvation, and not giving us a laundry list of good works to do to impress God or our neighbor. They should be exhorting us to prayer and a righteous life, lived in contrition and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and who will open the doors of God's dwelling place and lead us into Heaven.

We pray: Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

We learn from several instances in Holy Scripture that our Lord allows bad things to happen in order that He might bring about some even greater good. Here we are told that Satan is allowed to “[stand] up against Israel, and [move] David to number Israel.”

King David is allowed to be tempted by Satan. He is tempted to give in to his pride and with the census consider how great of a king he is and all he has accomplished. He is even given a warning through the voice of Joab, who asks him, “Why should [you] be a cause of guilt in Israel?” But King David persisted in his sin and brought a punishment to Israel, which led David to realize his sin, and repent.

However, this sin is not without consequence. David must choose his punishment and a plague is sent upon Israel, and seventy thousand perished.

But, to what end? What good does our Lord God bring about through this destruction? Certainly He teaches King David (and us) not to be puffed up in pride, for pride comes before a fall. However, something even greater is happening in these verses, for the threshing floor that King David buys from Ornan the Jebusite will eventually become the place where Solomon builds the Temple. Therefore, it is a foreshadowing of the True Temple, our Lord Jesus Christ, and His sacrifice for us to buy us back from the plague of sin and death.

We pray: Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Previously King David was filled with pride. But now, having been shown what his pride did to himself and his kingdom, we see a king who is not about doing for himself, but about doing for the good of his kingdom. To this end, he plans the construction of the Temple which his son Solomon would build.

This Temple would be a testimony to not only all of Israel, but to all the nations. Here the Lord God would receive the sacrifices that would atone for the people's sins, and through the contrition of the people and faith in God's mercy, He would forgive His people all their iniquities.

This Temple would also stand as a physical reminder of the promise that the Lord God made to King David, that "a Son shall be born to you" and "He shall build a house for My Name, and He shall be My Son, and I will be His Father; and I will establish the throne of His kingdom over Israel forever."

This Son would be the True Temple, the true mercy seat, to which all those who in contrition could cling in faith and receive forgiveness of their sins. In Jesus Christ the sins of the whole world have been atoned for, and in Him the true faithful Israel, the Christian Church, would be established by the work of His Holy Ghost through the means of grace.

We pray: Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In King David's speech we not only learn what sort of man and king David is, but we also learn what sort of Messiah our Lord God would send us.

King David was of the tribe of Judah, but Judah was not the oldest of Jacob's sons. Still, the Lord chose him to be ruler over his brothers. Even Jesse's family was not the family of the firstborn of Judah, for Shelah was born before Perez (who was actually fourth born). Still, Jesse's family is set apart within the tribe of Judah. Further, David was the youngest of Jesse's eight sons, yet he was chosen to be the ruler over all Judah and Israel.

So we see that King David, even though he should be considered the lowest among his family, is exalted above them all. So too is our Lord Jesus Christ, for He is born to a lowly handmaiden, and is cared for by a humble carpenter. Our Lord was not raised in Jerusalem—the dwelling place of kings—nor in Bethlehem—the dwelling place of His ancestors—but in Galilee in the Northern Kingdom. And this was in the part of the Northern Kingdom which was considered the least among the tribes, for it was the first to be led into exile.

However, even though our Lord followed in his earthly fathers' footsteps and was least among men, He was destined to be the ruler of all, offering up His life to save us from all our sins.

We pray: Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.