

“For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?”

There’s a bumper sticker I’ve seen. It says, “God said it, I believe it, that settles it.” The middle part of that is not necessary. If God said it, that settles it, whether you believe it or not! It’s an important point, and our behavior confesses what we believe. It’s not as though God won’t be true unless we win the next debate! We are to confess the truth, and leave the matter in God’s hands, whether the person who hears our confession is converted or not.

God is faithful. There is nothing our personal failures, or even the abject unbelief of most people, will ever do to change that. His Law stands: the soul that sins will die, and all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The Law shows us this plainly, that every mouth be silenced, and the whole world held accountable to God.

But God’s Holy Gospel also stands! Jesus’ death for the sin of the world delivers salvation to all who believe and are Baptized. As we remain “repentant believing ones,” do not imagine that your sins will overthrow His grace to you in Christ Jesus. As you remain repentant, you remain forgiven. Thanks be to God, your eternal life depends not on you, but on Jesus!

“Dear heavenly Father, ever grant me Your Holy Spirit, that through repentant faith in Christ Jesus, I may ever remain ‘called, gathered, enlightened, sanctified, and kept with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.’ Amen.”

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



TRINITY 1—TRINITY 4
(JUNE 7—JULY 4 2015)

A PUBLICATION OF
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF
NORTH AMERICA

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The First Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE XXIV.

Falsely are our churches accused of Abolishing the Mass; for the Mass is retained on our part, and celebrated with the highest reverence. All the usual ceremonies are also preserved, save that the parts sung in Latin are interspersed here and there with German hymns, which have been added to teach the people. For ceremonies are needed to this end alone, that the unlearned be taught. And not only has Paul commanded to use in the Church a language understood by the people [1 Cor. 14: 2, 9], but it has also be so ordained by man's law.

The people are accustomed to partake of the Sacrament together, if any be fit for it, and this also increases the reverence and devotion of public worship. For none are admitted except they be first proved. The people are also advised concerning the dignity and use of the Sacrament, how great consolation it brings anxious consciences, that they may learn to believe God, and to expect and ask of Him all that is good. This worship pleases God; such use of the Sacrament nourishes true devotion toward God. It does not, therefore, appear that the Mass is more devoutly celebrated among our adversaries, than among us.

But it is evident that for a long time, it has been the public and most grievous complaint of all good men, that Masses have been basely profaned and applied to purposes of lucre. For it is unknown how far this abuse obtains in all the churches, by what manner of men Masses are said only for fees or stipends, and how many celebrate them contrary to the Canons. But Paul severely threatens those who deal unworthily with the Eucharist, when he says [1 Cor. 11:27]: "Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." When, therefore, our priests were admonished concerning this sin, Private Masses were discontinued among us, as scarcely any Private Masses were celebrated except for lucre's sake.

Neither were the bishops ignorant of these abuses, and if they had corrected them in time, there would now be less dissension. Heretofore, by their own negligence, they suffered many corruptions to creep into the Church. Now, when it is too late, they begin to complain of the troubles of the Church, seeing that this disturbance has been occasioned simply by those abuses, which were so manifest that they could be borne no longer. Great dissensions have arisen concerning the Mass, concerning the Sacrament. Perhaps the world is being punished for such long-continued profanations of the Mass, as have been tolerated in the churches for so many centuries, by the very men who were both able and in duty bound to correct them. For, in the Ten Commandments, it is written (Exodus 20), "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain." But since the world began, nothing that God ever ordained seems to have been so abused for filthy lucre as the Mass.

There was also added the opinion which infinitely increased Private Masses, namely, that Christ, by His passion, had made satisfaction for original sin, and insti-

FRIDAY, JULY 3: ROMANS 2:1-29

TRINITY 4

"For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law."

People sometimes ask, "Wouldn't it be unfair of God to send people to hell if they never had a chance?" But in asking this question, they are trying (often unintentionally) to make the Gospel a kind of Law, as though it were a game that, if you play by "the rules," everybody has a chance to win.

The Law is simple: be perfect. And no one is. The Ten Commandments show *us* this. But even for those who do not believe, just ask them: "Do you have *any* standards? Do you have a moral code at *all*?" Most will say they do. Then ask them, "Okay, going by that, have you ever failed your own code?" And, of course, they have. "As many as have sinned without law will also perish without law."

The Gospel is no game. It is God's declaration to a world full of justly condemned people that He has sent His Son to die and rise again, that "whosoever believeth shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Grant this, Lord, unto us all!

"O God, before you I plead guilty of all sins. I have justly deserved Your temporal and eternal punishment. For the sake of Jesus Christ my Savior, forgive me, and fill me with such joy of Your salvation that I would gladly speak this precious good news to others. Amen."

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”

Do you know where the word “Gospel” comes from? It combines the Old English “god” (which means “good”) with the word “spel,” which was a message. The Gospel is the good message that Jesus Christ has died on the cross to atone for the sin of the world. His blood indeed atones for the sin of the whole world, not just the sin of a select few.

Nevertheless, the Gospel is the power of God to salvation *for everyone who believes*. It is important not to “get the cart before the horse.” The Gospel is not a word that “all are justified, now believe it!” Rather, it is the good news that through faith in Christ, we are justified. And in that Gospel, there is power. The message that Jesus died on the cross for the sin of the world, combined with the command to repent and believe it, those words have power to convert unbelieving hearts and turn them to faith in Christ Jesus!

It’s not about our oratory, our delivery, our winsome attitude, or the clever chit chat we use to break the ice before speaking of Jesus. It is the Gospel of Jesus itself that has the power to change people. God grant us all due spiritual boldness to speak the Gospel of Jesus to a lost and dying world!

“O LORD, thank you for those who spoke the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ to me. I pray, grant me your Holy Spirit, that I may be bold to speak it on to others. Amen.”

tuted the Mass wherein an offering should be made for daily sins, venial and mortal. From this has arisen the common opinion that the Mass taketh away the sins of the living and the dead, by the outward act. Then they began to dispute whether one Mass said for many were worth as much as special Masses for individuals, and this brought forth that infinite multitude of Masses. Concerning these opinions our teachers have given warning, that they depart from the Holy Scriptures and diminish the glory of the passion of Christ. For Christ’s passion was an oblation and satisfaction, not for original guilt only, but also for all sins, as it is written to the Hebrews (10:10), “We are sanctified through the offering of Jesus Christ, once for all.” Also, 10:14: “By one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.” Scripture also teaches that we are justified before God through faith in Christ, when we believe that our sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake. Now if the Mass take away the sins of the living and the dead by the outward act, justification comes of the work of Masses, and not of faith, which Scripture does not allow.

But Christ commands us [Luke 22:19]: “This do in remembrance of Me”; therefore the Mass was instituted that the faith of those who use the Sacrament should remember what benefit it receives through Christ, and cheer and comfort the anxious conscience. For, to remember Christ, is to remember His benefits, and to realize that they are truly offered unto us. Nor is it enough only to remember the history, for this the Jew and the ungodly also can remember. Wherefore the Mass is to be used to this end, that there the Sacrament [Communion] may be administered to them that have need of consolation; as Ambrose says: “Because I always sin, I am always bound to take the medicine.”

Now, forasmuch as the Mass is such a giving of the Sacrament, we hold one communion every holyday, and also other days, when any desire the Sacrament it is given to such as ask for it. And this custom is not new in the Church; for the Fathers before Gregory make no mention of any private Mass, but of the common Mass they speak very much. Chrysostom says that the priest stands daily at the altar, inviting some to the Communion and keeping back others. And it appears from the ancient Canons, that someone celebrated the Mass from whom all the other presbyters and deacons receive the Body of the Lord, for thus the words of the Nicene Canon says: “Let the deacons, according to their order, receive the Holy Communion after the presbyters, from the bishop or from a presbyter.” And Paul [1 Cor. 11:33] commands concerning the Communion: “Tarry for one another,” so that there may be a common participation.

Forasmuch, therefore, as the Mass with us has the example of the Church taken from the Scripture and the Fathers, we are confident that it cannot be disapproved, especially since the public ceremonies are retained for the most part, like those hitherto in use; only the number of Masses differs, which, because of very great and manifest abuses, doubtless might be profitably reduced. For in olden times, even in churches most frequented, the Mass was not celebrated every day, as the Tripartite History (Book 9, chapt. 33) testifies: “Again in Alexandria, every Wednesday and Friday, the Scriptures are read, and the doctors expound them, and all things are done, except only the celebration of the Eucharist.”

—The Augsburg Confession

Ananias had every reason to fear the Lord's command to visit Saul. Saul was greatly feared by the new Christian community. Saul, a Pharisee and a follower of the Jewish teacher Gamaliel, was zealously rounding up Christians and taking them back to Jerusalem to be put to death. So it was no wonder that Ananias said, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem."

In his fear, he questioned God's command to him. But the Lord said, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel." The Lord said, "Go," so Ananias, probably with fear and trepidation, went and spoke to Saul, who was converted by the Holy Spirit working through the Word. Ananias and the man who would soon be known as St. Paul were both given a vivid example that the Lord's will is done.

In Luther's explanation of the Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," Luther says, "The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also. God's will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God's Name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die. This is His good and gracious will."

Lord, as You did with Ananias and Paul, cause us to believe that You are working all things to the good of Your church, Your people. Amen.

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world."

What an honor! Can you imagine having someone say to us that they thank God that our faith is spoken of throughout the world? Not that we desire the praises of men, but what Christian wouldn't want to be so faithful, and so useful to God, that people all over the world knew of it?

The wrong way to take this would be to measure our faithfulness by opinion polls. The right way would simply be to draw such inspiration from these ancient Roman Christians that we, too, seek to be as faithful as we can possibly be.

We have the best news anyone could ever hear: sin is forgiven and eternal life obtained through faith in Jesus Christ on account of all that He has done for us. We have no reason to be overly invested in the things of this world, and we have every reason to give ourselves over fully to speaking the words and doing the deeds with which Christ has entrusted us. Therefore, let us be faithful. And if that gives us a reputation, praise be to God!

"LORD God, grant me your Holy Spirit, that in word and deed I may so faithfully confess Christ that others take notice of it, and give glory and honor to your Holy Name on account of it. Amen."

“But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.”

Paul was being grilled on account of his faith in Christ Jesus. Christianity was considered a “sect” of Judaism at the time. But Christ wasn’t popular with the Jewish leaders of His day, so little wonder that Christianity didn’t enjoy a very positive reputation either.

Those who questioned Paul were skeptical. But there’s a world of difference between skepticism and complete rejection. They express their desire to hear more. Confident of the truth he believed, Paul looked forward to the opportunity to confess his faith in Christ Jesus.

How much has changed, really? Christianity is spoken against throughout the world, Lutherans are spoken against throughout Christianity, and our ELDoNA is spoken against by many Lutherans! But still, God grant us grace as He did to St. Paul to keep our cool. If people will give us a hearing, let us confess our Holy Faith clearly and unambiguously. We believe that we are justified by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. In Him, we have the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting!

“HEAVENLY FATHER, as you have been graciously patient with me, so grant me also grace, that I may patiently confess Christ Jesus to others. Send your Holy Spirit to work in them repentance unto life through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.”

Today we have another example of the Lord’s will being done in the meeting He arranged between Peter and Cornelius. Peter had been praying and had a vision wherein God told him to rethink his ideas about what and who was “clean and unclean.” Meanwhile, the Gentile centurion, Cornelius, had been praying to God, and the Lord told him, “your prayer has been heard...Send for...Peter...he will speak to you.” Cornelius immediately sent for Peter and told him, “we are present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.”

Cornelius here sets an example for all of us: he wants to hear all that God has commanded. In fact, he had called together his relatives and close friends to hear as well. He is ready and eager to listen to God’s Word and to share it with others.

How eager are we to hear God speak to us? How often do we make excuses for not reading and hearing God’s Word? How often are we easily persuaded to forgo Divine Service for some more “interesting activity”? Our sinful nature is always working to cause us to neglect God and His Word. However, the Holy Spirit is also at work in us, drawing us to Christ and His Word.

In Hebrews 10:24-25 we read, “Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

We pray: Thank You, Lord, that He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. Amen.

The growing pains of the newly formed Christian Church are apparent in our reading for today. Some in the Church didn't think Gentiles should be allowed to join them. They questioned Peter about his visit to Cornelius, and his acceptance of Cornelius and his household into the Church. Peter had committed the offense of visiting and eating with unclean, uncircumcised Gentiles.

Peter is required to defend his actions. He recounts to them the vision he had received from God and repeats God's Words to him, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." He continues with the arrival of the men sent from Cornelius and that "the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing."

This unusual situation was very difficult for the Christians to believe. That is made clear by the fact that this sequence of events is repeated at least three times in Acts 10-11.

Peter's questioners are finally convinced by his report that, "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If therefore God gave them the same gift as he gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"

This is a truth that we often overlook: when the Holy Spirit works, God's will is done. What a comfort that is for us as we live in an uncertain world. We can always pray "Thy will be done" and rest in the certain knowledge that God's will is always best.

Lord, Thy will be done in us and through us. Amen.

"For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you'."

Things looked bad. Paul was on a boat with a couple hundred other people, headed for Rome. They were caught in a storm. Then, Paul received this message from an angel. The ship would be run aground, but there would be no loss of life. And indeed, so it came to pass.

Does it ever seem to you like an awful lot of irritations crop up in life? Of course, by definition, they are "irritations" because we allow ourselves to get "irritated" by them. And that goes back to the problem of praying "Thy will be done" prayers, but retaining a "my will be done" attitude.

God works through things that seem irritating to us. They provide unexpected opportunities to confess Christ and show forth His grace and forgiveness in ways we do not foresee. So today, as you say the Lord's Prayer, pray "Thy will be done," and with the help of the Holy Spirit, endeavor to mean it. As you are in Christ, God comfort you with those reassuring words, "Do not be afraid."

"HEAVENLY FATHER, grant me this day to trust Your gracious guiding of my life, when things go the way I planned, and when they don't. Your will be done, through Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen."

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Fourth Sunday after Trinity

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT.

Thou shalt not bear false witness.

Thus you see, in short, it is forbidden to speak any evil of our neighbor, and yet the civil government, preachers, father and mother are excepted, that this commandment may be so understood that evil be not unreprieved. Just therefore as, according to the Fifth Commandment, no one is to be injured in body, and yet the executioner is excepted, who, by virtue of his office, does his neighbor no good, but only evil and harm, and nevertheless does not sin against God's commandment, because God has, on His own account instituted that office; for He has reserved punishment for His own good pleasure, as He has threatened in the First Commandment,—just so also, although no one has a right in his own person to judge and condemn another, yet if they to whose office it belongs refuse to do it, they sin as well as he who should do so without such office. For here necessity requires one to speak of the evil, to make accusation, to investigate and testify; and it is not different from the case of a physician who is sometimes compelled to handle and examine a patient in parts otherwise not to be examined. Just so governments, father and mother, brothers and sisters, and other good friends, are under obligation to each other to reprove evil wherever it is needful and profitable.

—The Large Catechism, §274–275

THURSDAY, JUNE 11: ACTS 12:1-25

TRINITY 1

Our reading for today records an event which astonished everyone. King Herod has determined to harass the Church. James is arrested and put to death, the first one of the Apostles to be martyred. Herod, seeing that this pleased the Jews, also arrested Peter and determined to put him to death after the Passover.

Peter was kept in prison under heavy guard, chained between two soldiers, with other guards outside the door. The Church was in constant prayer for him. The night before Herod was to carry out his plan Peter was asleep and suddenly an angel stood by him, and a bright light shone around him. The angel struck Peter in the side and the chains fell off of him. Peter, being roused from sleep, had to be told what to do. Peter had no idea what was going on; it was as though he was dreaming. He just did what the angel told him to do. The prison doors opened and he followed the angel out. The angel led him to the street and left him. Peter now realized he was awake and this was real, and was astonished.

He went to the house of Mary, where the Christians were gathered in prayer for him. He knocked on the door, but when the servant girl heard who it was she couldn't believe it and didn't open to him. When the people finally opened the gate and saw that it was Peter, they were astonished.

The next morning Herod and the soldiers were also astonished that Peter was gone! How could he escape?

Are we astonished when God answers our prayers? Regardless of what it looks like, or what the situation is, God's will is done, whether we expect it or not.

Lord, we believe, help Thou our unbelief. Amen.

In our reading for today St. Paul is talking to both Jews and Gentiles. He recounts to his hearers the Old Testament prophecies and promises about the Messiah who was to come. Then he explained how Jesus Christ had fulfilled all those prophecies and promises. He uses the Word of God to teach both groups about Jesus. He says, “but He whom God raised up saw no corruption. Therefore, let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

Here St. Paul clearly says that “everyone who believes is justified.” This justification is received only through God-given belief in the atonement won for us on the Cross.

In this text there is no talk of universalism or universal justification; there is only talk of belief in the fulfillment of the promises of Christ’s resurrection, which frees us from the law of Moses.

It is true that some who heard Paul speak refused to believe and rose up in opposition to Paul’s teaching. But it is also true that when the Gentiles heard this Good News, “they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed,” that is, those to whom the Holy Spirit, working through the Word, had given faith were declared justified by God.

Through the Word, in Baptism we who have been brought into this faith are also glad, and glorify the word of the Lord. We too, having been given faith, have been appointed to eternal life.

Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word. Amen.

Paul recounts His experience on the Damascus road and we hear more of Jesus’ words to Paul. Paul had been blinded by the vision of Christ and as we hear in Acts 9, his sight is only restored in Holy Baptism. In this speech Jesus tells Paul that he is being sent to the Gentiles to “open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.” Paul, who was blinded by Christ and restored through the means of grace, is sent to do the same for the Gentiles. There is the darkness of living under the weight of sin and its guilt before God and man. Paul is to enlighten their eyes with the same means of grace that restored His physical sight.

The Gospel forgives your sins when it is spoken to you in the Absolution from your pastor, in the water and word of Holy Baptism, and when you partake of Christ’s Body and Blood in the Sacrament. In these means Christ still works to enlighten your darkness, to free you from the dread bondage of the sins that hold you, and to break the power of Satan over you. In these means, Christ forgives you all your sins so that you are blameless in His sight and heirs of an eternal inheritance which does not perish, rust, or fade.

O God, grant us Thy mercy that we might always hold fast to the means of grace. Break Satan’s power over us, remove our guilt and shame, and restore us to the joy of everlasting life whenever we confess our sins and receive your perfect absolution. Amen.

Paul stands before the judgment seat of Festus. His accusers cannot prove their accusations. Paul is even able to confess to Festus that “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all.” How can Paul speak in such a manner, with confidence and steadfastness?

Paul is able to stand before the judgment seat of man because He has stood before the mercy seat of God and been declared “not guilty.” Paul is a sinner. He calls himself the chief of sinners and still struggles with sin in his flesh. Yet he said in a previous chapter, “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1). He writes in 2 Timothy 1:3, “I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did.” Paul has a clean conscience before God and man not because he is holier than others, not because he tries really hard to overcome sin and root it out, and not because he is without sin in his own eyes. Rather his sin has been removed from his conscience and covered by the blood of Jesus. He has been baptized by Ananias, Christ’s called servant, and in that baptism He was washed and made new. By faith in Christ’s merits Paul is declared righteous. This gives him the courage to stand before the judgment seat of man, as it gives all who believe in Christ’s merits courage to approach God our Father and stand before our fellow man.

Lord God, strengthen our faith in your Son’s work so that we might always be bold to stand before our Father in prayer, and our fellow man in confession of Christ. Amen.

In the readings for this week we have seen the Holy Spirit, working through the Word, continue to spread the Church throughout the world, even to the Gentiles. In today’s reading Paul and Barnabas are proclaiming and teaching the Gospel. The results of this faithful preaching and teaching are always the same—some believe in Jesus as the Christ, and some get very angry. This fact was true for Jesus, it was true for the Apostles, it was true for Luther, and it is still true today.

The Word of God causes division when it is rightly taught. Many in the Church today think that somehow the Word of God can be preached without causing division, and that the message of the Word should be softened so as not to offend anyone. However, that would then not really be the Word of God. In Hebrews 4:12 we read, “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit,...and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

You and I have been brought into this faith by the Holy Spirit in the Word and the waters of baptism. In Baptism we were given forgiveness of sins, rescued from death and the devil, and given eternal salvation through the gift of faith. God declares in Mark 16:16, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” Even though the Word of God faces opposition, we continue to faithfully teach the truth and remember that “we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”

Thank you, Lord, that having brought us to faith, You keep us in faith, and deliver us from evil. Amen.

The “men” in this passage were known as “Judaizers.” They were “believers” who fell into the error that for a person to be saved he or she must first become a convert to Judaism and follow all the Old Testament law, and then the Messiah was for you. They really saw Christianity as a “movement” within Judaism, and not the complete and whole and finished revelation of God.

They did not see the law as a signpost pointing to Christ, but the law as righteousness in itself. Circumcision was the outward, visible test of following the law. Failure to keep the law meant no salvation. This was mixing Christ’s work with our work. A mixture of law and gospel.

It seems that it may have been at this point that Peter and even Barnabas were for a very short time convinced by these Judaizers. Galatians 2 says, “I [Paul] withstood him [Peter] to his face, because he was to be blamed...he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.” While law is good in itself, men so often want to twist it into the way of salvation. Even today, many American Evangelicals want to promote a 5-easy-steps-to-please-God type of religion. Whether it is the Prayer of Jabez, or the Purpose Driven Life, or keeping the Sabbath, there is always a trick to making God happy. But the Jerusalem Council clears up any confusion on the subject. God’s favor is obtained through grace.

Lord, may we learn to value your grace and never see the law as a way of life. Amen.

The Jews accuse Paul saying, “For we have found this man a plague.” The plague is something to be avoided at all costs, for if you contract it you will most likely die. What they mean is that Paul and his Gospel are something that brings spiritual sickness and death. How ironic, that by calling Paul a plague, a cause of death, they confirm their unbelief to the world! St. Paul had written to the Corinthian church, we are “to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life” (2 Cor. 2:15-16). To these Jews Paul smelled like death but to God and those who believed his message, Paul had the fragrance of everlasting life.

So it is with the Gospel, Christ, His Christians and His pastors, today. We are avoided like the plague because we smell like death to the world. To the world our odor is offensive because we preach and believe a righteousness that is not our own but given to us by Christ. To God we have the fragrance of ones who have been forgiven all our sins by Christ’s Word and Sacraments. To God we are the aroma of absolution that wafts from hearts set free from sin and guilt. We may very well be viewed as a plague by the world, something diseased and deathly. But to God, all who are in Christ Jesus by faith are a well-pleasing aroma because by faith we no longer smell like our sin but we smell like our savior.

Lord God, grant that we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal. Amen.

Paul has confessed Christ before the Jews, and again they threaten his life. But in the peril of death Christ says to Paul, “Be of good cheer.” Christ assures Paul that he will go on to confess the Gospel in Rome as he has confessed it in Jerusalem. Do not despair. Do not view the situation with fleshly eyes. View the situation through God’s promises to you. He says you will go to Rome. So go to Rome you shall.

Jesus speaks these words to you as well, just as He did to Paul, and to many, in the Gospel accounts. Do you face persecution from the world and the false church for your confession of Christ? Jesus says, ‘Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world.’ Do you feel alone and isolated? Your Lord says, ‘Be of good cheer, for lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age.’ Do your sins bother you, vexing your conscience and casting a dark pall over your heart? Your Lord Jesus says, ‘My son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you.’

The same comfort He gave to the disciples, apostles, and Paul, the chief of sinners, your Lord Jesus gives to you in the midst of all trial, cross, and adversity. He desires that you be joyful in Him, trusting not in what you see with your eyes or feel in your heart, but placing your confidence in His word which forgives your sins and promises wonderful things to you. Be of good Cheer! Your Jesus lives!

Heavenly Father, grant us Thy Holy Spirit so that we might always believe we have a gracious God Who loves us, forgives our sins when we confess them, and then lifts us up in joy. Amen.

This is Paul’s second missionary journey. This one is with Silas. In verse 12, the city of Philippi would have been largely inhabited by a Roman populace. There were few Jews in Philippi. There was no synagogue in Philippi because there had to be at least ten Jewish men in order to found one. Here in Philippi we don’t learn of even one, and only a few women. They prayed near running water probably because of ritual washings they would do.

Lydia was probably wealthy. She is also the first convert in Europe. She was not a Jew, nor a convert to Judaism, but one who believed in the one true God like Cornelius did. The trade of dying royal purple (crimson) garments in Thyatira was famous and hence where we get our mental associations between purple and royalty. Conversions can happen in unsuspecting moments and Lydia’s open heart brought salvation to her whole household.

This is the second time in Acts where a household baptism is mentioned. The first was in chapter 10, Cornelius’ household. The household would include any slaves (if there were any) and any children (if there were any). We see this again in verse 33. When the jailer comes to faith, his whole family is baptized. This was not a forced baptism. They believed as well, but the identity of the family, as a unit, superseded individual identity. They asked themselves “what do we believe, rather than what do I believe?”

Lord, help us to unite our faith with our families, so that we may all say “we believe.” Amen.

Athens was a great and glorious city. It had had its greatest days some five hundred years earlier, but it was still marvelous for its art and architecture, its philosophy and literature. It must have been an impressive place to see at that time. But as with any great and beautiful scene, when it is dominated by unbelief and false religion, it leaves a sour taste in one's mouth. Like the national cathedral in Washington, or the Uppsala cathedral in Sweden, or the Berlin Cathedral.

Perhaps Paul toured the great city when he first got there, as any of us would. He saw all the beauty of the city, but noticed that it was virtually smothered in idols. The Roman satirist, Petronius, said, "in Athens it was easier to find a god than a man." Paul was "*greatly distressed*" by what he saw. That is, he abhorred the idolatry he saw. His spirit was stirred to jealousy, jealousy for God's name. He was disturbed and revolted by the lies and the darkness that masqueraded as truth and glory.

Are we ever distressed to see the idolatry in our own cities? Paul did not see the various expressions of religion as equally valid. He didn't look at the Greek Olympian gods as just the Greek way of expressing the essence of truth. Jesus did not take up residence in one of the temples of Athens. Jesus was above every other god. Jesus destroys every other god.

Lord, help us to care enough to be roused to indignity at the idolatry and falseness of our modern world. And, help us to see Jesus as our ultimate answer to that falseness. Amen.

While praying in the temple after His conversion, Paul sees Jesus who says to him, "Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me." Paul understood from the beginning that not everyone would have ears to hear the Gospel. This would not be the Lord's doing, for the Lord "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). Many would reject the Holy Ghost's work in their hearts, others would be content with their idols, while most would want to earn their salvation through their good works. We see this in our age as well.

However, we are not to despair over this fact. When one of the disciples asked Jesus, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" He answered and said, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able." We are not to question 'why?' Instead, we ought to take heed to how we are hearing the Word of the Lord so that we do not stop up our ears to the apostle's testimony about Jesus. The Holy Ghost works through the means of grace to give, strengthen, and fortify our faith. We must not cut ourselves off from those means, but instead gladly hear the Word of the Lord, since Jesus alone has the "words of eternal life" (John 6:68). In those means Christ forgives our sins and keeps us in the one true faith, the testimony concerning Jesus.

Heavenly Father, grant unto us Thy Holy Ghost, that we might always desire to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest your Holy Word, and that we always remain in your baptismal promises throughout our lives. Amen.

Agabus warns Paul that if he travels to Jerusalem he will be bound and handed over to the Gentiles. The brothers around Paul urge him to stay away from Jerusalem. After all, what good could come from persecution and suffering? This is the way the flesh reacts when it hears the promises of persecution and suffering for the sake of Jesus. The flesh does not like to suffer. The Old Adam does not like to be on the receiving end of hardship. Instead the flesh wants a life of ease and prosperity with no trouble from conscience or the world.

But Paul is not driven by the Old Adam. He daily puts the Old Man to death by repentance and faith. Being the New Creation, Paul uses the warning of persecution and suffering as something else entirely. He uses it as an opportunity to confess his willingness to die for the Gospel and the name of the Lord Jesus, by which men are saved. Whereas the brothers gathered around Paul lamented his fate, Paul, through the Holy Spirit, uses this warning to confess Christ and strengthen his brothers and their confidence in Christ's protection and promises.

We have the same flesh as St. Paul. We are tempted to run from persecution and to shrink back from confessing Christ when it may bring us discomfort. But we are also given the same Holy Spirit which Paul was graciously given so that we might confess Christ in any and every situation, for our own benefit and for the benefit of those around us.

Lord God heavenly Father, grant us grace to endure persecution and hardship for the sake of your Son and His Gospel. Grant us true confidence in all His Words that we may always rejoice in Christ. Amen.

Corinth was a fairly good size city built on trade. It was very cosmopolitan and widely known for decadence and vice. "*Claudius*" was the Roman Emperor from A.D. 41-54. The historian Suetonius writes about this in his work called the *Life of Claudius* (25:4). Suetonius writes; "as the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he banished them from Rome". Apparently the gospel had caused a great uproar among the Jews in Rome as it had in other cities when the Jews violently reacted against it.

Paul seems to give up on the Jews in Corinth entirely at this point. He has found nothing but hostile opposition and will leave them to their own destruction. One exception, Crispus was one of the synagogue rulers, and Titius Justus was probably a prominent Gentile proselyte. These are two of what was probably few converts among the Jews in Corinth. The "*Corinthians*" referred to in this verse, who believed, were probably pagan Greeks rather than Jews.

It is truly a tragedy for the Jews that very few, after that first generation, converted to the Christian faith. We still continue to pray on Good Friday: "Almighty and eternal God, Who does not exclude from Your mercy even Jewish faithlessness: hear our prayers, which we offer for the blindness of that people; that acknowledging the light of Your Truth, which is Christ, they may be delivered from their darkness. Have mercy upon all Jews, Mohammedans, Infidels, and Heretics, and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of Your Word; and so bring them home, blessed Lord, to Your flock, that they may be saved among the remnant of the true Israelites, and be made one fold under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Paul's question, "*Did you receive the Holy Spirit?*," asks if these men had experienced the charismatic phenomena that the Apostles did, or the Samaritans, or the pagans at Cornelius' house? It is obvious that Paul asks this because for him faith and the imparting of the Spirit go together. Faith and baptism go together as well. Paul tries to determine if these men are Christians by asking about the Spirit and baptism. The Spirit phenomena and baptism were the outward markers that told us about the faith in the heart. "*We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.*"

John Stott said; "This cannot mean that they had never heard of the Spirit at all, for he is referred to many times in the Old Testament, and John the Baptist spoke of the Messiah as baptizing people with the Spirit. It must rather mean that, although they had heard John's prophecy, they had not heard whether it had been fulfilled. They were ignorant of Pentecost." Paul was questioning these men to see what it was that they believed.

As he discovers that they have not experienced the charismatic phenomena of Pentecost he becomes suspicious. Now he asks about their baptism to see what sort of faith they have? Once again baptism and faith go together. Baptism initiates into the faith. "*John's baptism*" was a baptism that focused on repentance and preparation for the Christ. John's baptism is a real baptism, but only in its connection to Christ. Without Jesus, John's baptism doesn't get one where one needs to go.

Lord, help us to live daily in our baptism. May the Holy Ghost guide us and shape our lives. Amen.

Here Luke refers to the "*Feast of Unleavened Bread*". However, this is not the feast as the Jews understood and celebrated it. It was the new Christian understanding. It was Easter. Paul celebrated Easter in Philippi that year. "*The first day of the week*" = Sunday. "*We came together to break bread*", this means that they celebrated the Lord's Supper. We can gather from this passage that it was the normal practice to worship on Sunday, Sunday worship was normally presumed to be Eucharistic worship, and the Eucharist was seen as the most prominent aspect of this worship since the entire worship is referred to by this one part.

We are not commanded in the New Testament to worship on Sunday, but it is clearly Apostolic precedent. The day of Christ's resurrection becomes the most important day of the week. Though it is permissible to not celebrate the Lord's Supper as a part of your normal Sunday worship, it flies in the face of Apostolic precedent. Lutheran Churches today should have Communion at every service on every Sunday. Matins or Morning Prayer is not a substitute for the Eucharist. Our faith revolves around Word and Sacrament, not Word alone. The church is a Eucharistic community. It receives its life from Word and Sacrament and then brings that living faith to the home altar and to our witnessing in the world. Our faith life radiates out from the altar into our homes and into the world.

Lord, help us to tie all of our devotions to the Holy Altar where we receive your precious Body and Blood. May all our Christian life grow from that place where we receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Amen.