

SATURDAY, JULY 1: 1 SAMUEL 28-31

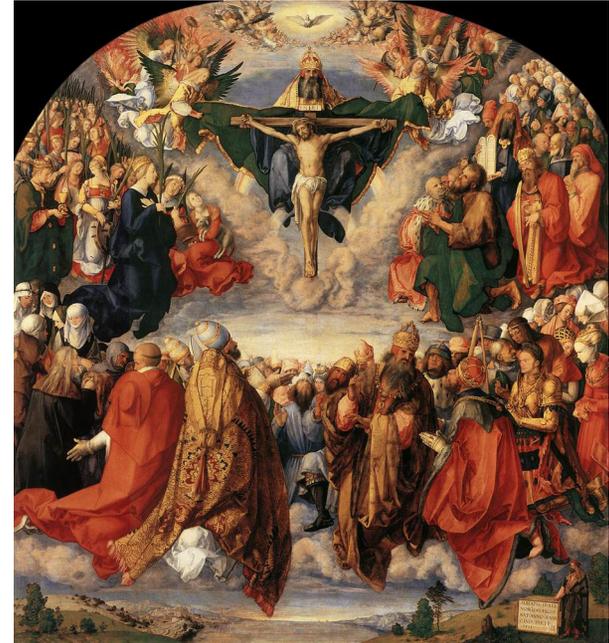
At some time in everyone's life things will get difficult. People will make things hard for you. And even if people don't do this, Satan surely will. We will all be tempted, and because we live in this fallen world and still have our fallen flesh we will fail under those temptations. The important difference is in how we go forward after those failures and difficulties. Humility is the work of God, moving us by His Spirit to acknowledge and repent of our mistakes. But vanity is the work of our own sinful will, which tries to ignore our mistakes, resist the will of God, and manipulate the situation to serve our own sense of self-importance.

God truly means it when He commands us to observe all that He commands and to do all things faithfully. But He also knows that we will fail. Being a faithful servant of the Lord does not mean we're just trying to save our own necks or our own reputation like Saul, but that we are made to trust in the Lord and know that all good things come from Him, as David confessed. Being a faithful servant means trusting in God's will, and by His Spirit being made to repent and depend on His deliverance out of all our troubles.

Even though Jesus committed no sins He still trusted in the Father. He was a true and perfect image of humility, even while He endured difficulties and temptations. He succeeded where both David and Saul were imperfect. And in His holy life, death, and resurrection we are provided with the true wealth of His redemption and forgiveness.

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, grant us Your Spirit that we may turn from our sinful vanity and trust in You alone for our help and salvation in Jesus Christ. Amen.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



JUNE 5–JULY 1, 2017

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

The Calendar

June 4	Pentecost
June 5 (M)	St. Boniface, Martyr
June 11	Feast of the Holy Trinity
June 18	Trinity 1
June 24 (Sa)	The Nativity of St. John the Baptist
June 25	Trinity 2/Festival of the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession
June 29 (Th)	St. Peter and St. Paul, Apostles

Summer Quarter of St. Ignatius Seminary Begins June 5

Summer Quarter classes will be taught as intensives.

The following classes are being taught this summer:

E009—Greek Readings 4—Pastor Rydecki

P003—Liturgics Practicum II—Deacon Oncken

S006—Eschatology—Pastor Heimbigner

H005—Renaissance History—Bishop Heiser

E007—Galatians—Pastor Sullivan

S007—Ministry and Ecclesiology—Bishop Heiser

For more information, please contact Bishop Heiser.

FRIDAY, JUNE 30: 1 SAMUEL 25-27

David continued to be tested in these chapters. Sometimes he chose faithfully, other times he acted in his wrath, and still others he just seemed unfaithful. Even though David was a forefather of our Lord Jesus and himself a type and image of the Christ to come, David was still a sinful man. He was not perfect as the Son of David was.

There are two important points to be learned from all this. One is that David is a teacher and example to us. He shows us that one should be faithful to God and His will, but he also shows us that, when we inevitably fail because of our human weakness, we should have the humility to acknowledge God's will as right above ours and glorify Him with repentance and faith. The other point is that no man can truly accomplish the fullness of God's holy will except for Jesus Christ!

No man, no matter how pious and powerful, can succeed in keeping the Law of God perfectly. As descendants of Adam and Eve, our hope and help is not in our forefathers, but in our Maker! Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth! And He promised that He would send His Holy One who would crush the Serpent. David was not that Holy One, but he was another father in the faith that would point us to Him, both by his faithful works and his failed works. Thanks be to God that He did come to save mankind in the true Son of David!

We pray: Lord God, thank You for the promise of salvation that You gave to mankind, and for its fulfillment in Your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. In His name, Amen.

THURSDAY, JUNE 29: 1 SAMUEL 22-24

Despite the persecution that Saul had brought upon him, David would not return evil for evil. He had been given what seemed to be the perfect opportunity not only to end the persecution, but to assume the kingship of Israel for which David already had been anointed by slaying the wicked King Saul. Saul had entered a cave, unaware that David and his men were hiding in that same cave. David's loyal followers urged him to take the wicked king's life, suggesting that the Lord Himself had delivered Saul into David's hand. But David truly was a man after God's own heart, seeking to conform his human will to the perfect will of the Lord. He honored the man whom God had anointed king, recognizing that this was neither the time nor the place appointed by God for the end of Saul's reign. David was willing to suffer even further persecution at the hand of Saul, faithfully trusting in God and His Word of promise. The all-sufficient grace of God, conveyed through His Holy Word and the Holy Spirit, would sustain David, come what may.

When facing the temptation to follow your own will in the time of suffering, remember the promises that God has given to you for the sake of Christ. He who has anointed you in Holy Baptism will never leave you, nor forsake you. He promises that all trials produce perseverance, character, and hope in the Christian faithful. He pledges, on account of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus, to all who are faithful unto death the same crown of everlasting life!

We pray: O God, through Your Word and Spirit lead me to live as one who is anointed for life under the cross, and eternal life in Your glory, in the Name of Jesus, Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Pentecost Sunday

THE THIRD ARTICLE.

Of Sanctification.

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

What is meant by this Article?

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

—The Small Catechism, Part II

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

MONDAY, JUNE 5: ACTS 23-24

There is certainly nothing unchristian in using the political realities around us for the benefit of the Church. In an hilarious example, St. Paul sets the two political factions of the Jews against each other for his own deliverance. Again, St. Paul's family spied on the Jews in order to outmaneuver them and thwart their plot against him. St. Paul also used his Roman citizenship as a way to secure justice for himself. The commander, Claudius Lysias, went to great lengths to protect Paul. 470 troops is quite a lot to escort Paul to Caesarea. This detachment of troops was far more than was needed to defeat 40 amateur assassins. It seems a bit of "over kill" and has prompted some to wonder if this Chiliarch was actually a serious military man, or more of a political appointment? What the NKJV, and most other English Bibles translate as "spearmen" is the Greek word δειξιολαβοι. This is a Greek word that is not found again in any literature except once in the seventh century, and again in the tenth century. It is uncertain what the word actually means.

We, as Christians, try to gain advantage with the powers in our world. We try to elect people who will be friendlier to the Church. There is nothing wrong with this. In fact, we should not let any other ideology captivate us. No set of principles should get us to advocate things that would harm the Church. Our ultimate loyalty should be to Christ and His Church.

We pray: Lord Jesus, give us wisdom to use the world's power for the good of the Church, that we may show forth Your truth and live in peace in the midst of this sinful world. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 28: 1 SAMUEL 19-21

King Saul had grown insanely jealous of David due to David's great success in battle. Even as Cain allowed his envy to lead him to murder his brother Abel, so Saul had given himself over to a murderous heart and sought to kill David. God, however, hindered Saul's devilish plot. God protected David, particularly by using others to provide help for his beloved one. The king's son, Jonathan, confronted his father directly about his evil plan, then promised on oath that he would protect David's life. David's wife, Michal, who was Saul's own daughter, foiled another attempt on David's life, helping her husband to escape from their home and crafting a clever ruse to delay his pursuers. David found a friend in the priest Ahimelek, who provided food to David in the form of consecrated bread and who gave up his only sword (the former sword of Goliath) to David. The Lord also raised up a small band of men to accompany and assist David. Though the forces against David were great, the Lord was with David—and so were the Lord's servants.

Beloved in the Lord, you are likewise protected by your God. He sends into your life His servants to assist you, whose help ought to be received as from the Lord Himself. At the same time, be open to opportunities that God provides to you to be His servant to others, sharing generously of the gifts that have been first graciously given to us for that very purpose by the God who wills to be the help of all.

We pray: O God, through Your Word and Spirit lead me to live as one who is ready to be Your helper to others, in the Name of Jesus, Amen.

TUESDAY, JUNE 27: 1 SAMUEL 16-18

David wisely confronted Goliath with two distinct weapons, for the battle would be fought in two distinct realms. David's slingshot is an instrument of earthly warfare, which proved itself capable of delivering the fatal blow to Goliath's head. At the same time, David wielded the sword of the Spirit, the very Word of God, as He engaged in spiritual warfare in an invisible realm in which his opponents were Satan (symbolized by Goliath), the unbelieving world (depicted by the Philistines and the cowardly Israelites), and David's own frail flesh, riddled by sin. The Word of Truth proclaimed to David, and faithful David believed it, that he would be victorious--even if he lost the battle to Goliath. For faith believes the promises of God in His Word: our sin is forgiven for the sake of Christ's sacrifice, our eternal life with God is assured through Jesus' resurrection from the dead, and our lives at every moment are in God's hands.

Like our brother David, we who are under the Lordship of the Son of David, Christ Jesus, confront the challenges of life with the necessary implements in our hands. In the left hand we carry the tool suited for the earthly task: a brush for cleaning, a wrench for repairing, a pill for healing, or a rifle for protecting. In the right hand we hold the invincible weapon of God's own Word that declares the truth to us: Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's!

We pray: O God, through Your Word and Spirit lead me to live as one who lives now and forever with You, in the Name of Jesus, Amen.

TUESDAY, JUNE 6: ACTS 25-26

This visit by Herod Agrippa II and Bernice would have been a customary welcoming visit to the new Governor Festus. Agrippa was the last of the Herods, and he and Bernice were brother and sister living in an incestuous relationship. The king lived in sin but, he did not live in a secular society like we do today. He was aware of his sin and he was educated in the Scriptures, so he knew what St. Paul was talking about. When Festus seems to laugh and call Paul mad, Paul counters that he is not mad. King Agrippa knew the things he was referring to. Unlike Festus, Agrippa was a native.

No doubt, the message that St. Paul preaches here pricks Agrippa's heart. He knew that it is true. He almost becomes a Christian. How often in the history of the world have men almost become Christians? The Holy Ghost pricks their hearts. They know the truth, but they want to put it off just a little while longer until they've done something or accomplished something. Or perhaps they want to follow Christ, but they want their sin more. Agrippa doesn't want to give up his lifestyle. His life would change dramatically if he were to follow Jesus. It would seem easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for this to happen.

It isn't just those great sins that keep people from becoming Christians. Even Christians let little things keep them from prayer, from reading God's Word, and from attending Divine Service.

We pray: Lord Jesus, please keep our hearts tender and open to the prompting of Your Holy Spirit. Help us to be responsive and obedient to Your teaching. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7: ACTS 27-28

What a journey! Besides some of the Jews, how many people became Christians during this trip? First of all, there were 276 persons on the ship. How could not many of them become Christians on this journey? St. Paul prophesies that they will all be saved, and then they are. That alone must have got people's attention and given Paul's message great credibility. How many of those 276 become Christians?

What about the centurion? He clearly seems to be impressed with Paul. He is always trying to protect Paul and give him privileges. What about the people on Malta? They thought he was a god. But thereafter, no doubt, he told them the truth of the Gospel. And then there were two years preaching in Rome. There were signs and wonders that impressed many people, but it was the Word that brought them to faith. St. Paul kept "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence." There were already Christians in Rome when Paul arrived, but he strengthened their faith through the Word.

Today the Bible is the only source we have for the Word of God. It is the only place it is to be found. There are no necessary traditions or teachings we can find anywhere else than in the Bible. If we wish to hear the voice of the apostles like those people in Malta or Rome did, we must listen to the words of the Bible.

We pray: Lord, let us always cherish the Holy Scriptures that we may be made alive and our hearts may be renewed each day. Amen.

MONDAY, JUNE 26: 1 SAMUEL 13-15

God had bestowed upon Saul the kingship of Israel. God had given to King Saul the gift of prophecy. God had not yet ordained Saul to be a priest. Saul therefore sinned greatly by attempting to present the burnt offering to the Lord, rather than waiting for Samuel to come as promised and fulfill his duties as priest. By this wrongful act Saul misled the people into thinking that he held priestly authority. Saul further compounded his errors by attempting to justify his unlawful action as necessary under the circumstances. By these actions Saul revealed that he was not a man after God's own heart.

This lesson remains instructive for Christ's people today. The Evangelical Lutheran Church continues to teach this in her congregations as we profess in the Augsburg Confession: "Of Ecclesiastical Order they teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called" (AC XIV). The Lord Himself continues to call and ordain men to stand in the place of His Son, the One incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, to preach Christ's Word and administer Christ's Sacraments.

The Lord Himself continues to give vocations to the baptized disciples of Jesus, each of whom is a priest before God in an office distinct from the Office of the Holy Ministry, to serve with love their neighbors in the world. By these actions the faithful people of God reveal themselves to be men (and women) after God's own heart.

We pray: O God, through Your Word and Spirit lead me to live as one after Your own heart, in the Name of Jesus, Amen.

SATURDAY, JUNE 24: 1 SAMUEL 7-9

“Make us a king to judge us like all the nations.” Israel wants to be like everybody else. They don’t want to live by faith in God’s Word and rely upon Him to raise up Judges according to His own good time and mercy. They would rather have a permanent ruler of flesh and blood. They accuse Samuel’s sons of being untrustworthy, but they fail to recognize that a king is not immune to bribery or partiality either. They want to live as the pagans do. They choose friendship with the ways of the world over fidelity to God, forsaking trust that He will protect and deliver them according to His mercy.

This is a similar temptation we face in our day. The flesh imagines that if we behave like the nations among whom we live, they won’t think we’re weird, stuffy, or goody-two-shoes. The flesh imagines that if we live like unbelievers then they will be more accepting of us and the Gospel. But wanting to be like the nations to any extent is to choose friendship with the world, and enmity with God. The life lived by faith in God’s Word, though it be “counter-cultural” and even difficult at times, is far better than the life lived “like all the nations.” The life of faith may sting at times now, but by faith we have the forgiveness of our sins and the promise of an inheritance in the life of the world to come, dwelling in the presence of the Triune God.

Lord God, strengthen us by Your Spirit to live holy lives according to Your holy Word. Amen.

THURSDAY, JUNE 8: JOSHUA 1-5

There is no doubt that the Old Testament is given to us as a foreshadowing of the Christ. So many Christians misunderstand the Old Testament. They only try to find rules for living in it. They try to find laws by which they can prove their arguments. Some even try to find secret codes for wealth and peace in its letters and numbers. Of course, none of those things are useful. They are just distractions from the real message in the Old Testament. The real message is Jesus.

The idea in the crossing of the Israelites over the Jordan into the promised land is the central concern for all Christians of all time. We all need to find salvation in the promised land. That is what characterizes our faith in Jesus. We need to be saved, and in this Old Testament story Jesus shows us how we are saved. By God’s power, and with faith in God’s Word, the Israelites pass through the water for a second time into the promised land. This is a foreshadowing of the Church passing through baptism into the promised land of heaven. The going down into the water is a type of death.

As the water piled up, the Israelites were vulnerable. If the water let loose, they could be drowned. But God is faithful. They passed through the death of the water and were raised up to life in the promised land. We can be sure, as the Israelites were, that if we go down to death in the water, we will be raised up to new life in Jesus Christ.

We pray: Lord God, Heavenly Father, help us to see Your truth about our baptism throughout the Scriptures so that we may live in it. Amen.

FRIDAY, JUNE 9: JOSHUA 6-8

Marching around cities and blowing horns is usually not a very effective method of defeating an enemy, but Joshua had an unusual Strategist. Joshua is a prophet, but also a war chieftain. So, in one sense, the Israelites carved out a home for themselves by their own hands. But if we look closer, it is not by their own hand. The Israelites were often not strong enough to accomplish the tasks that needed to be done or the conquests that were absolutely necessary. God had to accomplish these great deeds for them because they could not do it themselves. Yet God still used them as instruments.

God used Joshua to lead the Israelites to the promised land, but even more, God used Joshua as a type and an image of Christ. Joshua was a great leader for God's people, but he was imperfect. He was only a shadow of the One to come. As it says in Hebrews, chapter 4, "For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God." That rest is, of course, found in Joshua's namesake, Jesus.

While we, as Christians, struggle to proclaim the Kingdom of God to this world, we know that our efforts are inadequate. Christ Himself must bring His Kingdom among us, and He does. In spite of the chaos and darkness of this world, Jesus Christ brings His Kingdom in the midst of it. We are made a community of the blessed in this alien place.

May our Lord help us always to remember that we have feet in two worlds, but the one in heaven is given to us by Him. Amen.

Friday, June 23: 1 Samuel 4-6

Israel thought of the Ark as a talisman. The Ark's presence with them in battle would guarantee victory. They didn't treat the Lord's presence with faith, so the Lord gave them defeat and withdrew His presence from them. Of course, the Philistines were no better. They treated the Ark as a trophy, the spoils of war. When the Lord forced Dagan to submit to His almighty power the Philistines made the same mistake as Israel. They didn't treat the Lord's presence with faith. Being fearful of God's presence, they sent the Ark packing to the men of Beth Shemesh. These Israelites rejoiced and offered burnt offerings, but they treated the Ark as a curiosity or trinket. They looked inside, contrary to the command of the Lord spoken by His servant Moses. None of these men knew how to deal with God's presence.

Some still believe God is a lucky rabbit's foot, something that will guarantee a good, victorious life. Others imagine Him to be something that they can submit to their real priorities. Still others think of God as a curiosity or trinket to be explored. There are countless ways to have God that are sinful. There is only one way to truly have God so that He is good and gracious to you, and that is to have God by faith. It must be on His terms, according to His Word of Law and Gospel. But those are glorious terms, for in His Word He promises us everything we need in this life, the forgiveness of our sins, and a reconciled God who is for us, and not against us.

Lord, grant us grace to always seek You in Your Word and in true faith. Amen.

THURSDAY, JUNE 22: 1 SAMUEL 1-3

Many today expect to hear the voice of God just as Samuel and the prophets did in the Old Testament. Many live their life by what they hear in their head and feel in their heart, imagining that it is direct communication from the Lord. But this is not the usual way God communicates with people. The author of Hebrews tell us that in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2). To hear the Son we must hear His Word. If we want to hear the Spirit of Truth, we must read the Scriptures, which are truth, as Jesus says in John 17:17. Anytime we expect to hear God's voice apart from the words on the pages of Holy Scripture and the Word of His Law and Gospel preached into our physical ear, we are looking for God in a place He has not promised to be. There is no certainty then that what we hear is actually God.

Samuel, as was the case with the other prophets, heard the voice of God. He responded in humility and faith: "Speak, for your servant hears." This is to be our attitude every morning when we pick up our Bible to read God's Word. This is to be our attitude as we enter the Lord's house to hear the Lord's steward pronounce the Lord's absolution upon us. This is to be our attitude whenever we hear a sermon that preaches God's Word in its truth and purity. It's through these things, these means of salvation, that the Lord is actually speaking with us to give us salvation.

Give us ears to hear Your Word, gracious God, that we may truly hear, and by hearing, receive the gifts Christ has earned for us. Amen.

SATURDAY, JUNE 10: JOSHUA 9-11

It is important to keep one's word. A man is regarded as honorable if he keeps his word. Even more so, the prophet of God has to keep his word. Of course, one should be very hesitant to promise anything to those you do not know well. But once promises are made, why is it important to keep them? Beyond the impact on your reputation, it is reflective of the reputation of the one you serve. This is an important issue with Joshua in this reading. To have gone back on his word would have caused shame for himself, and great shame to come to God's name. This is the primary reason for not revoking the promise given to these deceitful "ambassadors." From their perspective, they are trying to save their own lives. They know they are too weak, and without deception they are dead.

Joshua rashly gives them promises and then finds out that he is trapped. It is better to be trapped by one's own words than to be faithless to one's vows. So, Joshua honors the agreements with the Gibeonites, but he makes them honor their words as well, "We are your servants." If they claimed to be servants, then servants they will be. Their deceit saved their lives, but it also made them slaves. Just like a scene out of the Merchant of Venice when Shylock believes he will have his revenge with a pound of flesh, only to be thwarted in his legalistic scheme by not being able to spill blood while cutting the flesh. The letter of the law must be upheld when God's honor is at stake.

We pray: Lord, may we so value Your promises that we only make promises that we will fulfill, as You fulfill Yours. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Trinity Sunday

ARTICLE I.

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

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

—The Augsburg Confession

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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 21: RUTH 1-4

The book of Ruth teaches us that the Lord provides in the midst of affliction. Naomi was afflicted with the death of Elimelech, her husband, and the death of her sons. She returns to Judah when she hears that the Lord has visited His people by giving them bread (1:6). The Lord then provided a faithful daughter-in-law, Ruth, to return to Judah with her. The Lord would provide for Naomi through Ruth’s diligence and hard work. Finally, the Lord provided for Naomi by providing Boaz, who would marry Ruth and redeem Elimelech’s property. The book begins with the Lord visiting Israel by giving bread. The book ends with the Lord giving Ruth conception. Throughout their affliction the Lord was providing for all their needs in His own good time and Fatherly wisdom.

As the Lord provided for for Naomi’s and Ruth’s needs, He will also give you daily bread. He will give you what you need, when you need it. Whenever you are tempted to worry and fret about your physical and temporal needs, remember how He provided for Naomi and Ruth!

The book of Ruth also shows us how God provides for our most dire need, our spiritual need. The book ends with a genealogy leading to David. The Christian reader knows that the Lord is working out His promise made to Adam and Eve. God uses famine, hardship, and affliction to fulfill His promise of the Son of David who would atone for the sins of the world and provide all who believe with forgiveness of sins and everlasting life.

Lord, teach us to be truly thankful for all that You give, and especially that You have given us Your Son to grant us faith and eternal life. In Jesus Christ’s name, Amen.

TUESDAY, JUNE 20: JUDGES 19-21

At Gibeah, in the land of Benjamin, a Levite finds a great wickedness. Israelites had become guilty of the sin of Sodom. They even make the same demand as the Sodomites in Genesis 19:5! One honorable man protects the Levite, but his concubine isn't as fortunate. She is handed over to the perverted men and murdered in the process. The Levite divides the concubine's corpse and sends a piece to each tribe as a witness to the detestable behavior of the inhabitants of Gibeah.

All Israel (except the men of Jabesh Gilead in Gad) gather at Gibeah to punish the evildoers and expel this evil from Israel. The rest of the tribe of Benjamin comes to the aid of Gibeah. By defending the evildoers Benjamin defended wickedness and shared in their sin. The end result was a near decimation of Benjamin. When only six hundred men of Benjamin survive, Israel shows mercy to the tribe by "providing" wives for them, so that Benjamin does not become extinct.

This terrible episode shows us God's judgment and mercy. Judgment, because the perverted men of Gibeah, and those who defend their sin, must be destroyed. Mercy, because Benjamin is not wiped out entirely. So it with all sinners. God judges all sinners by His Law. The law condemns sodomy just as it condemns heterosexual lust and unchastity. While some sins may seem more vile than others, sin is sin and deserves judgment, wrath, and condemnation. Yet God shows His mercy by sending His Only-Begotten Son so that those who flee to Him in repentance and faith escape the wrath of God. Like the remnant of Benjamin they are restored to life in the land of promise.

Lord, protect us from sin and temptation. When we fall into sin, forgive us for Christ's sake. Amen.

MONDAY, JUNE 12: JOSHUA 17-21

The division of the land of Canaan wasn't done haphazardly or arbitrarily; it was a sacred process. The LORD had a plan for each tribe, for every family among His people, and that plan was revealed as lots were drawn for each tribe in the doorway of the tabernacle. By the end of Joshua's life all the allotments of land had been made, and all the LORD's promises to Israel had been fulfilled. He had given them victory over all their enemies and had assigned His people their own place in the Promised Land.

At the end of the Book of Ezekiel the LORD points to the tribal allotments in Israel as a type and promise of something far greater: of the LORD's careful inclusion of all believers in Christ within the boundaries of His Holy Christian Church. Like Joshua, Christ has led us victoriously against our enemies of sin, death, and the devil, and has earned rest for us in His kingdom of grace. Not only has He earned it for us, but He also reigns over all things to see us safely into His kingdom of glory.

Here on earth, that means that He has planned and ordained everything that has to do with the salvation of the elect, from the place where we would be born to the manner in which we would hear the Gospel, be baptized, receive His Sacrament, and be fed and guarded in our faith until the end. There in heaven, it means that Jesus is, indeed, "preparing a place" for us, as He promised (cf. John 14:2-3), and will surely see us safely there.

Heavenly Father, for Your mercy's sake, preserve us within the borders of Your holy Church, and lead us safely into Your heavenly kingdom; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

TUESDAY, JUNE 13: JOSHUA 22-24

Before he died Joshua reminded the children of Israel of the free grace and steadfast love that the LORD had shown them. He had brought them all the way from slavery in Egypt to dwell in the Promised Land. He had cleared away the inhabitants of the land before them and had given them fields to harvest, which they had not sown, and houses to live in that they had not built. Everything was given to them freely, as a gift, all for the sake of God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Now what would they do? Would they continue to serve the LORD, after He had shown such great faithfulness to them? Or would they choose to serve a foreign god? They were challenged by Joshua to consider the options before them: either wholehearted, penitent service of the LORD as their only God and Savior, in accordance with the Mosaic covenant, or idolatry—the service of some other god. All the people chose to continue serving the LORD on that day, and for all the days of Joshua and the elders who outlived him. If only they and their children had heeded the warnings of Moses and of Joshua!

An unbeliever cannot choose to believe in Christ. But those who have been brought to faith by the Holy Spirit are, indeed, called upon to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the ongoing renewal of sanctification, to pray, to use the means of grace, to die to sin every day and to rise again to walk in newness of life. May God prevent us from wickedly turning away from Christ our Savior to the many idols that surround us in this world!

Lord Jesus, strengthen us by Your Spirit, that we may willingly serve You all our days. Amen.

MONDAY, JUNE 19: JUDGES 16-18

In spite of Samson's self-sacrifice, Israel continued to descend into idolatry and sin. Today's reading is another example of just how wicked Israel had become. Micah steals from his mother. He returns the money, claiming that he planned to make an idol from it. Not only does his mother consent to this idea, but Micah ordains a traveling Levite to be the personal chaplain for his self-made religion. Micah congratulates himself, "Now I know that the Lord will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest" (19:13). Micah stole, forged an idol, and took a Levite as priest against God's Word, for not all Levites were to be priests. Micah continually violated the Scriptures in pursuit of "looking religious" and having the external trappings of religion. He heaped sin upon sin, yet assumed he had God's blessing!

This was written so that we learn not to trust in the external appearance of religion and piety. Micah assumed that if he possessed a bunch of religious "stuff" then he had God's favor. But the Lord desires faith in the heart that clings to Him alone. He does not want us to fear anything more than we fear Him. He does not want us to trust in our external piety instead of His mercy. He does not want us to love our own self-manufactured religious ideas. He wants us to love His Words of Holy Scripture. When we find that our fear, love, and trust is misdirected at any idol of the heart, we must repent and remember that God is merciful to us not on account of our works or religiosity, but on account of Christ Jesus alone.

Lord God, by Your mercy forgive our idolatry, and teach us to trust You for every good thing. Amen.

SATURDAY, JUNE 17: JUDGES 10-12

It's striking to read how chaotic things were in the land of Israel during the days of the judges. No matter how many times the people were oppressed by foreigners, no matter how often the LORD delivered them, the children of Israel refused to learn. They kept returning to serve the gods that could not save, bringing more and more hardship upon themselves by their rebellion against the true God.

Even the judges themselves often seemed to have little knowledge of, or regard for, the Law of Moses. They often did whatever seemed best in their own eyes. Jephthah was no exception. He defended the name of the LORD before the Ammonites, but he also thought he could purchase the LORD's deliverance by vowing to offer a sacrifice, and an unknown one at that. He sinned, not only in making such a reckless vow, but even more so in carrying it out, as if the LORD were now pleased with human sacrifices, like the pagan gods were! Truly the Israelites' understanding of the LORD was perverted by not enough knowledge of the Law, and by too much pagan influence.

There is plenty of pagan influence in the modern world, too, and not enough knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. Chaos ensues when Christians fail to learn who God is through His Word, relying instead on their own notions and on the world around them. Learn from the Israelites! Know the Holy Scriptures and know God through them! Only then will you be able to navigate the chaotic waters of this godless world.

“Show me Your ways, O LORD; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day” (Psa. 25:4,5).

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14: JUDGES 1-3

The Book of Judges presents a recurring theme: First, the Israelites rebel against God, forsaking the Law of Moses and turning instead to false gods and evil practices. Second, the LORD sets one of the surrounding peoples against Israel, permitting the Israelites to suffer oppression. Third, the Israelites are finally brought to repentance; they cry out to the LORD for help in their distress. And fourth, the LORD, in His mercy, sends a judge to deliver them from their oppressors. The cycle then repeats itself, over and over again.

Why did it go this way? Because the children of Israel thought too highly of their own commitment to God. At first, they didn't drive out all the Canaanites because they thought they would never be enticed by their foreign gods and their pagan women. They thought they stood firmly on the side of the LORD. But in their pride they were seduced, and so were their children. And it brought hundreds of years of misery on their nation.

Nevertheless, the LORD impressed a lesson upon them, and through them, upon us: Without the continual strengthening of God's Word and Sacraments, we would soon go astray. Without the powerful leadership of Christ our Judge, we would quickly fall prey to our enemies: the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. If we are to be saved, it can only be by God's great mercy and willingness to forgive sinners, for the sake of Christ alone. Let us cling to Him continually in repentance until He finally defeats all our enemies for us at His coming and brings us into the true Promised Land!

O Lord, forgive Your servants for our many rebellions against You, and have mercy on us, that we may serve You in holy fear and in humble faith. Amen.

THURSDAY, JUNE 15: JUDGES 4-6

Deborah and Gideon are famous among the Judges of Israel. Deborah is known for the divine guidance she gave as a prophetess, proclaiming messages from the LORD at a time when few were listening, instilling strength and valor in men and women alike. Gideon is known for seeing the Angel of the LORD and for the miraculous signs he sought and received from the LORD. Confirmed in his faith by those signs, he risked life and limb to carry out the Word of the LORD, even against the idolatry that had taken root in his own father's house and among his own people.

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son” (Heb. 1:1-2). No longer are we sent to prophets or prophetesses to get our marching orders. No longer do we wait for an angel of the LORD to come and tell us the LORD's will. God's own Son has now come and revealed God's truth to us. He has preserved for us the Word of the prophets and apostles, which reveal enough of God's will for our lives that we need no further guidance beyond His Word, and no further signs beyond what He has already provided. The Word of God will give His people all the boldness and strength they need to stand against the devil and to tear down the idols around us, not with a bull, but with the Word itself.

“In You, O LORD, I put my trust; Let me never be ashamed; deliver me in Your righteousness. For You are my rock and my fortress; therefore, for Your name's sake, lead me and guide me” (Psa. 31:1,3).

FRIDAY, JUNE 16: JUDGES 7-9

32,000 Israelites came out to fight with Gideon against the Midianite oppressors. But it was too many. Too much credit would be claimed by the Israelites for themselves if that many men marched out into battle. Too much credit would be given to the Israelites by the Midianites. So the LORD commanded Gideon to whittle down the fighting men, first by 22,000, then by 9,700, leaving only 300 men to face the whole Midianite army. And it was still more than enough. Afterwards, Gideon properly refused to rule over the people, acknowledging the LORD as their only ruler.

The prophet Isaiah later compared Gideon's victory over the Midianite oppressors to a much greater victory won against a much greater enemy by a much greater Champion: “For You have broken the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian... For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:4-6).

Like Gideon, Christ led His people in battle against the enemy, but not with 300 men in His army. That would have been too many. He faced the devil alone and defeated him for us by His death on the cross. And while Gideon rightly stepped aside as the ruler of Israel, Christ our Gideon had no need to step aside, because He is the LORD, who reigns forever at the right hand of the Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, we give You thanks for taking our deliverance upon Yourself. Help us in our great weakness, that we may ever trust in You in the face of any adversity. Amen.