

“They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb Who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

This is one of the great things that we look forward to during the Advent season. Christ Jesus first came in the flesh so that our salvation would be accomplished and this would be the ultimate result. He comes to give us peace, forgiveness, and abundant life now, but our true life is to be the eternal life with the Lamb in the world to come!

In the meantime we will have to deal with tears, and the sweat of heat and labor, and thirst, and hunger. We will have to deal with our own sins, and the consequences of others' sins and faithlessness. We will have to deal with persecution from the devil and his servants in many ways; some subtle, some direct and violent. But through all of it we are called to remain faithful and cling to the hope that we have in the Lamb Who is our Savior, Jesus Christ.

We pray: Stir up, we beseech Thee, Thy power, O Lord, and come, that by Thy protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Thy mighty deliverance; Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

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Lesson from the Book of Concord

Twenty—fifth Sunday after Trinity

XIV. Of Monastic Vows.

As monastic vows directly conflict with the first chief article, they ought to be absolutely abolished. For it is of them that Christ says (Matt. 24:5, 23 sqq.): “I am Christ,” etc. For he who makes a vow to live in a monastery believes that he will enter upon a mode of life holier than the ordinary Christians, and by his own works wishes to earn heaven not only for himself, but also for others; this is to deny Christ. And they boast from their St. Thomas [i.e., Thomas Aquinas, of the 13th century] that a monastic vow is on an equality with baptism. This is blasphemy against God.

—Smalcald Articles, Part III

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2: REVELATION 3-5

ADVENT 1

When Christ speaks to the churches in our reading He says to them, “I know your works...” In some cases this is good, and in others it is bad.

The works of man are all corrupted by sin. Nothing that we do can be considered a work that is good enough for the righteousness of God. All mankind has been in a state of rebellion against God from our first parents, Adam and Eve. And the Lord knows these works that we do.

However, the Lord also comes to us and does His own works in us and through us. These are the works of faith, accomplished by the power of His Holy Spirit. These are the works that we want Him to see!

If the Lord looks at us and only sees our own works, we have much to fear. Our works only seek glory for ourselves and expose us as naked and dead before our righteous God. But if He sees the work of His Spirit in us, He sees the Lamb Who was slain for us. He sees the glory of Jesus Christ crucified, Who earned our forgiveness and gives us a new name and a new life through faith.

May He continue to send us His Spirit and give us the holy works of Christ Jesus, so that we may be saved from the peril that our own works would otherwise bring and be made steadfast in the true faith that gives all glory to Him!

We pray: Stir up, we beseech Thee, Thy power, O Lord, and come, that by Thy protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Thy mighty deliverance; Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him.”

In Advent we remember our Lord’s coming in the flesh of Jesus Christ; born of the Virgin Mary and crucified for our sins. But we also meditate on His coming again in glory. The image of our crucified and risen Lord should be an image of joy for us, but it will also be an image of despair for those who have hated Him.

His Spirit teaches us to pray that His Kingdom come, and the end of the age is the ultimate coming of His Kingdom! This will be a joyous time for the faithful because we will not have to endure the evils of this world anymore. But He also teaches us to pray that His will be done among us even now. And that means that the time we have now is precious for calling sinners to repent and teaching others to know and observe all that the Word of God says.

May He continue to bless us and enlighten us in these things so that every eye might see Him as their crucified Savior, rather than seeing Him as the one who comes to judge them in their sin and rebellion.

We pray: Stir up, we beseech Thee, Thy power, O Lord, and come, that by Thy protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Thy mighty deliverance; Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In yesterday’s Gospel reading we heard our Lord speak of the “abomination of desolations” spoken of by the Prophet Daniel. Today, we hear that text from Daniel 12:11: “And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days.”

This is a reference to the time we live in now; the time between the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the End of Days. During this time within the Church there will be “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.” And, when “the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.” During this time the devil, the world, and even our own sinful flesh will war against us to diminish and extinguish the Church.

We certainly live in a time when we think to ourselves, “How can things get any worse for Christians?” It is scary to think that they might indeed get worse as the prophecy of Daniel foretells. However, our Lord God, the man clothed in linen above the waters of the river, through the prophet Daniel also preaches some Good News to us. “Many shall be purified, made white, and refined” and “the wise shall understand.” All those baptized into Christ and have received the gift of faith will understand these things to be signs of our Lord’s return to call us to our eternal home in Heaven.

We pray: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy; through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The picture that our Lord God paints through His prophet Ezekiel is of an evil ruler of an evil land coming to destroy the faithful remnant of Israel. For the people of Israel it appears to them that “Gog, of the land of Magog,” will come to plunder Israel and take away all their gold, silver and livestock, and leave them desolate.

However, our Lord God offers a promise: His people will still dwell safely, because He is with them and fights for them. The army of Gog, of the land of Magog, will think it will have an easy victory, but the Lord God will not permit the faithful remnant of Israel to be utterly destroyed.

As we go to elect our future leaders today the life of the Church should be on our minds. There is certainly a feeling among Christians that if certain leaders are elected it is going to get very untenable for the faithful remnant of people of the Christian Church.

That is why this text from Ezekiel holds comfort for us. It reminds us that even when an evil leader of an evil land comes with a great multitude of people from many lands, our Lord God still fights for us and sends His Holy Ghost to implant in us faith in Him through the means of grace. Especially in the midst of persecution, let us in faith continue to cling to our Lord’s promises, which are always fulfilled.

We pray: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy; through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

“He is the image of the invisible God.”

One cannot honestly talk about “God” without talking about Jesus Christ. All that God said and did throughout the Old Testament was a testimony pointing towards the Son Who would come to fulfill all righteousness. And as we heard in Monday’s text from Matthew, the Son is the only One Who reveals the Father to us. So now that we live in the era after Christ Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary and later crucified for our sins, the image of God is the image of Jesus Christ crucified. Anything apart from this is a false and incomplete image.

By our sin and wickedness we are blind to the righteousness of God. The holy Lord is invisible to sinful man, so no one can claim they believe in God, or “the Father,” if they deny Jesus Christ and His atonement on the cross. But through the eyes of faith that come from the power of the Holy Ghost we can see God on the cross and in His glory. Furthermore, God also sees us through Christ crucified. As St. Paul says, we have been reconciled to God through Jesus’ death, and made holy, blameless, and above reproach in the sight of God. This is truly good news! And it is an image that we should proclaim throughout our lives, because we should hope that all nations should see the blessed image of the One True God in Jesus Christ!

We pray: Stir up, we beseech Thee, Thy power, O Lord, and come, that by Thy protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Thy mighty deliverance; Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

God raised up Jesus Christ and sent Him to bless the Jews and all nations in turning them away from their sins and iniquities. Instead many Jews and many other people of the nations turned away from God. They chose rebellion against Jesus Christ. To this day they seek after blessings and peace, yet refuse to see that Jesus was the One Who brought real blessings, and showed people real peace.

The holy prophets of God had been bringing this message of the Savior for many generations, but so many people chose to ignore it. It is our nature to disregard such messages. Man's broken, sinful nature is turned in on itself and actively listens for those things that glorify itself, while discounting other important truths. We don't want to hear that we have iniquities from which we need to turn. We don't want to hear that we ought to be grateful and humble servants of One Who is rightly over us.

But God's mercy is manifest in the fact that He continued sending prophets. He kept sending men to proclaim His Word of life and blessing to the Israelites and any others who would hear. And even after He sent His own Begotten Son to proclaim, and accomplish, this Word of life in the cross and His resurrection, God still keeps sending men to proclaim these Words and blessings!

We pray: God continue to show us Your mercy, and use us to be part of that proclamation that shows all nations life and forgiveness in Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen!

Our Lord through the Prophet Ezekiel extends an invitation "to every sort of bird and to every beast of the field" to come and enjoy a "sacrificial meal." This is reminiscent of our Lord Jesus' words from the Gospel on Sunday, "For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together" (Matt. 24:28).

Note well that this prophecy of Ezekiel regarding Gog of the land of Magog is a prophecy regarding the punishment of sin and sinners. This punishment of sin and sinners will find its ultimate end in Hell, where all unbelievers will face God's eternal wrath and destruction. Yet, this punishment of sin and sinners also takes place on the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He took our sin and sacrificed Himself, so that those who believe on Him might be clothed with His righteousness, be forgiven of their sin, and receive eternal life and salvation. Even though He was not a sinner, He took on the sentence and punishment of us sinners, so that we might receive His reward for a perfect life: adoption as firstborn sons of God. He became the "abomination of desolation" for us, by destroying the Temple of His Body.

Now, just as the sacrifices of the priests of the Old Testament became a feast for them, our Lord Jesus Christ's sacrifice of His Body and Blood become a feast for us in the Lord's Supper. There we receive the gifts He won for us on the holy cross as He pours His Spirit upon us.

We pray: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy; through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Our Lord God says, “I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.” Note well the words: “for My own sake.” This reveals to us that we can do nothing to merit our Lord’s forgiveness. There is no thought, word, or deed that we can put forth to merit our Lord’s forgiveness. He does it for His own sake.

This the problem that the Israelites have in the reading. They believe that just by going through the motions of sacrifice they have somehow won God’s forgiveness. However, faith is missing. Our Lord says of the Israelite’s worship that it did not even exist. They did not bring Him sheep, nor honor Him with their sacrifices. Their offerings of grain and incense were also useless, because they thought God’s forgiveness came because of something they did instead of trusting in the Lord God that forgiveness comes purely by His grace and mercy.

Our Lord, just like for Israel, is our Redeemer. He buys us back from sin, death, and the devil through the innocent suffering and death of His Beloved Son Jesus Christ. This sacrifice “makes a way in the sea,” that is, our Lord makes a safe passage for us through the valley of the shadow of death, to our home in Heaven. He leads us through the waters of sin and death on dry ground to our eternal Promised Land where our sins have been eternally blotted out for our Lord’s sake.

We pray: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy; through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Those who reject Christianity often like to claim that there is freedom and happiness in their godless choices. Some claim they have found rest and peace of mind in a life where they ignore God’s teachings, statutes, and promises. In other cases, some claim that other religious systems are just as valid and just as valuable as Christianity for living an abundant life. Jesus says otherwise.

True Christianity does not go along with the claims that there is life and happiness in godlessness, or in other religions. One reason for this is the fact that the Christian faith focuses on God, Who is the only One Who can provide good things for us, but the other beliefs that are set against Christ’s Words teach people to focus on themselves or something other than the true God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Knowing God is not seeing Him as a repressive tyrant or a mere social construct that man has made to personify his ideas. God is truly a Father Who is righteous, all-powerful, and benevolent. He is also truly a Savior Who was made man in order to die in our place. And He is truly the Spirit of Truth that enlightens us and shows us real wisdom and peace. To see God in any other way is a misconception, or a lie. But through Jesus Christ we can see the truth about Him!

We pray: Stir up, we beseech Thee, Thy power, O Lord, and come, that by Thy protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Thy mighty deliverance; Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Israelites in Malachi's day had robbed God of His tithes and offerings. They had also robbed God of His honor by saying "it is vain to serve God." These Israelites did not see any point in giving the best of their produce and animals to the temple for sacrifices and the maintenance of the ministry. They saw the heathen living better lives and decided to forsake the ways of the Lord. They decided that there was no profit in serving the Lord and that walking in the ways of the world would suit them better.

It often seems as if that were true. In our day the proud are called blessed so much so that they are awarded with wealth and positions of power over others. We live in a society that raises up and exalts those who do wickedness, some of that wickedness we even televise to exalt it! Today, those who purposefully tempt God by denying His existence or natural law seem to go free. When we see how evil is called good and rewarded, we are tempted to be envious of the wicked as Asaph was in the seventy-third Psalm.

Though the world exalts the wicked, the Lord will bring them low when He comes again to judge the quick and the dead. He will discern between the righteous and wicked, between those who serve God with a true and lively faith and those who serve themselves. Today the Church Year ends and a new year begins tomorrow. As we contemplate Christ's return in judgment, let it be a reminder to us to remain steadfast in the Christian faith which was given to us through the Gospel so that we may look forward to that Day.

We pray: Lord, keep us steadfast in the true faith unto life everlasting. Amen.

The readings from this week have all pointed us to our home in Heaven. They point to the End of Days when our Lord will come again in power and majesty and take us to our eternal home in Heaven.

Our eyes will see "the King in His beauty...the land that is very far off." We will see our Lord Jesus Christ sitting on His throne when He comes to judge both the quick and the dead. We will see Heaven and look upon "Zion, the city of our appointed feasts." We will see the New Jerusalem—Heaven—as a tabernacle; a temple that will not be taken down.

Our Lord will be "a place of broad rivers," that is, He will be the River of Life; the River of Life that was poured upon our heads in the waters of Holy Baptism. The river that washed away our sins and caused us to be clothed with the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. In those waters He saved us from sin, death, and the devil. And He preserved us in the ark of the Church, through the preaching of the Gospel, and the giving to us of His Body and Blood to eat and drink in bread and wine. He forgave us our trespasses as we confessed them in Holy Absolution, and He caused us through faith to gather together in His Name, even if that gathering was only two or three people. In these things He preserves us until we reach our eternal home in Heaven.

We pray: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy; through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

As was said yesterday, the texts from this week all point us the End of Days, when we will enjoy our eternal reward in our home in Heaven. Today, we hear from the Prophet Ezekiel, who reveals to us how our Lord God can raise our bodies from death into life.

It is one of the things we confess we believe in the words of Creed: “And I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.” There will certainly be a resurrection of the dead on the Last Day. Those who have fallen asleep in the Lord will have their bodies restored on the Last Day; they will receive a glorified body.

However, there are also spiritual aspects to this reading. For, spiritually speaking, those who do not believe in our Lord Jesus Christ are dead. We were dead in our sins and trespasses until we were raised again through the water and the Word. Indeed, our sinful bones were very dry.

But our Lord God raised us out of death into life through the waters of Holy Baptism for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ, and made us into the army of the Church. In this Church we daily remember the gift of Holy Baptism through daily contrition and repentance, and are daily making the dry bones of our Old Adam into the New Creation guided by God’s Holy Ghost. Our Lord will carry our new bodies into eternal life.

We pray: Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy; through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Often our sins oppress us, if we take the time to examine our lives according to the Ten Commandments and the Law of Love. Daily we fall short of loving God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves. We in no wise deserve anything from the Triune God. Jeremiah’s prayer in today’s reading teaches us the penitential nature of the Christian life. Our own iniquities testify against us, both before God and in our own hearts. Our backslidings into our favorite sins are many and often. The Lord would be just if He were to turn His face from us because our many sins and be “like a stranger in the land and like a wayfaring man who turns aside to tarry for a night.”

Luther, explaining the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, wrote something similar: “We pray in this petition that our Father in Heaven would not look upon our sins, nor deny such petitions on account of them; for we are worthy of none of the things for which we pray, neither have we deserved them; but that He would grant them all to us by grace; for we daily sin much, and indeed deserve nothing but punishment.”

Although God would be just if He were to turn His face from us, He does not. Jeremiah says “Yet You, O Lord, are in our midst, and we are called by Your name. Do not leave us!” God has promised to be in the midst of His Church. He calls sinners by His Name by baptizing them into His Triune Name. And where His Name is, there He is also with every grace and blessing.

We pray: Heavenly Father, thank You for not treating us as our sins deserve, but forgiving us for the sake of Christ. Amen.

We might imagine that at times God is quite distant from us. One such time is in the moment of temptation, when the desires of our sinful flesh seem like they will overpower us. Another such time is in days of distress when nothing seems to go as planned and we are tempted to despair of God's mercy. At (at least) one point, Israel said, "My way is hidden from the Lord and my just claim is passed over by my God." Old Testament Israel felt that God was distant, aloof, and disengaged from their plight. Perhaps this led some to imagine the Lord did not care for them at all. Israel's complaint is often our complaint. Our ways seem hidden from the Lord. Our claims are passed over.

The Lord speaks to Israel's complaint, and ours. He does not grow weary as youths do. He does not grow faint. His strength is not diminished by His activity as man's strength is diminished by his. The Lord is not as a youngster who eventually does wear out. He is everlasting, and with Him is no change or variation, even the change of growing tired or sleepy. His immutable strength is the source of our strength in the hour of temptation, the day of despair, and moment of spiritual weariness. He gives of His everlasting strength to those who wait on the Lord. What does it mean to wait on the Lord? The Christian waits on the Lord by trusting His promise to answer our prayer. We wait upon the Lord confidently confessing that our times are in His hands and that He will strengthen us according to His good pleasure.

We pray: Dear Lord, strengthen our faith in Your promises, so that we may place our confidence in Thee. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Twenty—sixth Sunday after Trinity

CHAPTER III, ARTICLE VI.

But they [Romanists] object, that love is preferred to faith and hope. For Paul says (1 Cor. 13:13): "The greatest of these is charity." Now, it is in accordance with this, that to justify is the greatest and chief virtue. Although Paul, in this passage, properly speaks of love toward one's neighbor, and indicates that love is the greatest, because it has most fruits. Faith and hope have to do only with God; but love has infinite offices externally towards men. Nevertheless we grant to the adversaries that love towards God and our neighbor is the greatest virtue, because the chief commandment is this: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God" (Matt. 22:37). But how will they infer thence that love justifies? The greatest virtue, they say, justifies. By no means. For just as even the greatest or first Law does not justify, so also the greatest virtue of the Law does not justify. But that virtue justifies which apprehends Christ, which communicates to us Christ's merits, by which we receive grace and peace from God. But this virtue is faith. For as it has been often said, faith is not only knowledge, but much rather to wish to receive or apprehend those things, which are offered in the promise concerning Christ. Moreover this obedience towards God, viz. to wish to receive the offered promise, is no less a divine service, *λατρεία*, than is love. God wishes us to believe Him, and to receive from Him blessings, and this He declares to be true divine service.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, ¶104–107

When God's chosen people Israel had sinned against the Lord, Zephaniah preached the law of God's anger and wrath. First, the ten tribes of Israel were taken away into exile, then the two tribes of Judah also forsook the Lord and were dispersed among the nations. God's judgment for sin is temporal wrath and eternal displeasure. When God's chosen people were sorrowing in repentance under the affliction of their enemies, Zephaniah preached the gospel of forgiveness and restoration. "The Lord has taken away your judgments" (Zeph 3:15). The promise of the gospel was to gather His "dispersed ones," "the remnant of Israel." Not only would the Lord forgive, but He would restore "a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the LORD" (3:9).

Since the fall into sin, the Triune God has used His prophet's words of law and gospel to work repentance and create faith from which comes a right and pure profession. Let us not pass over Zephaniah's words lightly as if they were only a history lesson. First, we should fear God's wrath and repent over our sins. Second, we should love and trust in God for His Gospel promises which come true in Jesus Christ, our Savior. Jesus has taken away the judgment of death on account of our sins and saved us. He has gathered His Church out of all of the nations and given us a pure profession of salvation through faith in His Son. Jesus has defeated our enemies. The faith-filled ones are directed to "be glad and rejoice with all your heart," because of the Lord's love.

We pray: Almighty God, we have disobeyed your commandments and deserve to be driven away from you. Nevertheless, we rejoice in your forgiveness and cling to the restoration of the truth. Amen.

Habakkuk's most well-known verse is 2:4, "the righteous shall live by faith," and that is the theme of his brief prophecy. In the days of this prophet, the Lord was raising up the Babylonians as an instrument of His wrath against Judea. The prophet inquires as to whether or not God could use such wicked idolaters as His instrument and still be just and holy Himself. The Lord answers this complaint with the words of 2:4, "the righteous shall live by faith," meaning, believe God's Word and hold it to be true over and above every other word, idea, or concept of human reason. Faith, that is, confidence in God's word of promise, is what justifies sinners and gives them life. The Lord concludes by saying that Babylon will be judged as well for its idolatry and evil, even though it is God's instrument for a brief time.

The third chapter of this prophet, today's reading, paints a picture of the coming destruction of Jerusalem using "end times" imagery. The Lord's wrath will surely come upon the Earth just as it came upon Jerusalem at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. Yet in spite of such woeful things happening upon the Earth as that Day approaches, the theme of Habakkuk's prophecy stands. "The righteous shall live by faith," not in what he sees with his eyes or experiences in his soul, but by faith in the promises of God. Habakkuk takes refuge in the Lord's promises at the end of the chapter, though trees be barren and the flocks fail, the prophet teaches us to rejoice in God's strength. He will judge the Earth but He has also promised to deliver those who put their trust in Him.

We pray: Heavenly Father, strengthen our faith that we may not doubt but always trust Your Word. Amen.

After the death of Solomon, son of David, the nation of Israel was torn in two pieces. The northern kingdom, Israel, was eventually taken into exile and has long since been dispersed through the nations. The southern kingdom, Judah, ended in 586 BC at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, and only again existed briefly during the Hasmonean dynasty during the intertestamental time. When the Lord promises in Ezekiel 37 the reconstitution of Israel and Judah in the Promised Land, He is not prophesying the literal return of all the dispersed Jews and the reestablishment of a Jewish state. He is foretelling the Church, the New Testament Israel. If the Lord were to reestablish Israel, with earthly King and Tabernacle, what would that do to the preaching of the cross? It would empty it of its meaning.

Through the preaching of the gospel to Jew and Gentile alike, God is reconstituting His people, bringing them out of this wicked and perverse generation into His glorious Church where there is forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. The Land He promised to bring them to is the Promised Land of the New Creation from yesterday's reading. There, David will again be king over them, not David son of Jesse, but King David's greater Son, Jesus Christ. Christ is the eternal King of the Church. He is also the Tabernacle, that place where God's wrath is appeased through the blood sacrifice of Christ's atoning death upon the cross. This prophecy shows Christians how the Triune God will protect His people through this life and into eternity, for this is an eternal dwelling He promises.

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, keep us, by Thy Holy Spirit, in the true faith, so that we may enjoy the blessing of our heavenly Promised Land with Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

On the Last Day, our Lord Jesus Christ, "will come to judge the living and the dead." The announcement of Judgment Day brings with it the threat of punishment upon all who break the commandments. Jesus says, "There is a judge for the one who rejects Me and does not accept My words" (John 12:48). When Isaiah says, "Come near, you nations, to hear," we ought to pay attention to these words so that confessing our sins, we fear His wrath and not do anything against them.

And yet, the Last Day also brings with it the promise of the salvation of God's people. Isaiah says, "For it is the day of the LORD's vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion" (Is. 34:8). The Lord will spare His people who have faith in Jesus Christ. Hebrews 9:28, "...and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him." Christians know that the coming judgment day has a gospel purpose, too. It is not just for punishment, but "for the cause of Zion," His Church. The Lord will use the coming judgment to bring us salvation from our enemies of sin, death, and the devil. We will not always be oppressed. "Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57).

We pray: Heavenly Father, having promised to redeem us through the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, give us joy as we wait for the blessed hope of our salvation. Amen.

The “highway of holiness” is the way of salvation and the road of forgiveness, maintained in Christ’s Church. This highway is not for those who are strong, nor has anyone ever climbed up by their own strength to travel upon it. Each and every one has foolishly gone his own way and become sinful, unclean, and weak.

Thankfully the law has revealed our true condition. When it comes to our neighbor, we have weak hands, which do not reach out in works of love. When it comes to serving our God, we have feeble fear-filled knees which buckle under God’s righteous holiness. When it comes to wisely heeding the Word, we are fools seeking our own way.

Through our Lord Jesus, we have been bought back and graciously placed in the way. Isaiah says, “The redeemed shall walk there” (Is. 35:9). Jesus has come to save us by forgiving our sins. He places his believers in His Church to strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees. Though by nature a fool, through faith in Christ we “shall not go astray.” The highway of holiness is a sanctifying gift for the forgiven. The preaching of God’s Word of forgiveness says, “Be strong, do not fear!” The reception of the sacraments is refreshing pools and life-giving pools of water. In church, the ransomed obtain joy and gladness with singing which drives away sorrow and sighing.

We pray: O Holy Spirit, Who justifies all who believe in Jesus Christ, sanctify your believers in the highway of holiness. Strengthen them in faith toward you and give them strength to serve their neighbor. By means of the everlasting joy of free redemption, give them abundant rejoicing. Amen.

Today’s reading is a picture of what life in the New Creation will look like. Since all of us have always lived in a world broken and warped by sin, the prophet can only describe life in the New Creation by telling us what it will not be. Whereas we are familiar with the weeping and mourning that accompanies decay and death, in the life of the world to come these things shall be no more. Wretched, painful things like infant mortality and miscarriage will cease because life will reign. Now we dwell in a world in which people tragically die young due to forces beyond their control. In the New Creation, all will “fulfill their days,” living everlastingly.

When Isaiah writes that the child shall die a hundred years old and the sinner shall be accursed at a hundred, he is not saying there will be death in the New Creation, but that life will be the norm. All of this is but a picture of what that life will be. It will be superabundant, never ending, and with no interruption. Unlike Old Testament Israelites, who so often built houses and planted vineyards only to have them taken by their enemies, in the New Creation God’s people will have no enemies, only perfect prosperity and life, for there will be nothing to hurt or destroy.

This is given to us so that we learn to fix our eyes on our blessed future, especially as we experience the effects of sin in the world and in our lives. There is life beyond this one, in a world beyond this one, a “sweet and blessed country, the home of God’s elect” (TLH 613:4).

We pray: Jesus, in mercy, bring us to that dear land of rest, Who art with God the Father and Spirit ever blessed. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Last Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE XVII.

Also they teach, that, at the Consummation of the World, Christ shall appear for judgment, and shall raise up all the dead; He shall give to the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, but ungodly men and the devils He shall condemn to be tormented without end.

They condemn the Anabaptists who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned men and devils. They condemn also others, who are now spreading certain Jewish opinions that, before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed (exterminated).

—The Augsburg Confession

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 17: ISAIAH 54:1-17

TRINITY 26

There is a reason that Isaiah tells the barren woman with no children, to “enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings...expand to the right and to the left.” Believers are to walk by faith and not by sight. If we did not have the word of the Lord to give us understanding, we would never behave in such a foolish way. We trust in the Lord’s promises.

The Old Testament people were experiencing great trouble. The Prophet Isaiah does not want them to despair, but to trust in the Lord’s abounding mercy. Faith acts according to God’s promise. God says, “Their righteousness is from Me” (Is. 54:17). Christ’s righteousness completely engulfs whatever momentary discipline is to be endured. Isaiah assures them that their affliction will only be for a short time and then the Lord will bring deliverance. “For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you” (54:8).

Our heavenly Father has forgiven us and has built us into His Church through Christ’s righteousness. New Testament believers are the promised children, for whom the Old Testament Church needed to add on rooms in a great building program. Like them, we, too, are to live by faith in God’s promises, even though outwardly we appear to be small in number, maybe even barren. We live by faith, not by sight. “Were they to take our house, goods, honor, child, or spouse, though life be wrenched away, they cannot win the day. Thy kingdom’s ours forever” (A Mighty Fortress).

We pray: O Lord, save Thy people, and bless Thine heritage. Govern them and lift them up forever. Amen.

Following the reception of Christ's Body and Blood in the Divine Service, we sing the Nunc Dimittis which speaks of Jesus, "a Light to lighten the Gentiles and the Glory of Thy people Israel." In Isaiah 60, we have the repeated announcement that God is going to glorify the Old Testament people. When Jesus is revealed, God glorifies His nation with the Promised Savior. As Jesus, Himself, said, "...for salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22).

The prophet Isaiah speaks of great offerings, which having been brought by the Gentiles, are received "with acceptance on My altar" (40:7). Knowing that only ceremonially clean Jews were allowed to bring Old Testament sacrifices, this statement of acceptable Gentile offering is quite unusual. We must remember that the teaching of the Old Testament had enlightened these Gentiles. Isaiah says, "You shall know that I, the LORD, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob" (Is. 60:16). Thus, it was through faith in Jesus Christ that their eucharistic thank offerings were acceptable (Heb. 11:6).

It was Isaiah who saw the sunless and moonless temple in Heaven, years before the Apostle John tells us about it in Revelation 21:22-27. Our Lord Jesus is the everlasting Light and the Glory of the Temple. God's Old Testament people were glorified by the gift of the Savior, and we, God's New Testament people, were enlightened by this Savior. They look forward and we look backward to our Savior—the joy of many generations.

We pray: Heavenly Father, let us depart in peace knowing that through faith in Christ we will enjoy the eternal rest prepared for us by the work of Your hands

In Hebrews 11 we are shown how the "ancients" were saved through faith in the promise of the coming Savior. With the calling of Abraham, God begins His plan to create His holy Christian Church. God told Abraham, "I will make you into a great nation..." (Gen. 12:2). Abraham understood and "...he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). This plan had not been derailed when the descendants of Abraham spent 400 years of slavery in Egypt. God had not forgotten. His plan was to bring them out through the Red Sea and plant them in the land of Canaan. In Isaiah, when God's people are going into exile away from the Promised Land and being dispersed throughout the world, God had not forgotten. Isaiah (62:1) assures them that God will not delay this plan even a little. God will not rest, until it comes to completion, "until He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (62:7).

God's plan to create a holy Christian Church, is moving forward. God's proclamation of the law to show us our sin and create repentance is not a setback, but according to His plan. Through the law, God breaks our pride so that we will receive His victory in Jesus Christ. Broken by the law, we rejoice in the good news, "Surely your salvation is coming; Behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him" (62:11). He prepares us for the proclamation of the gospel, so that we believe and rejoice in God's work for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We pray: God of our salvation, through repentance and faith make us Your people and be our God. Amen.