

The “hand of God” was upon His people. He had delivered them “from the hand of the enemy and ambush along the road.” God had restored His people to the land He had promised them and the Temple had been rebuilt. Offerings are made and God made sure the foreign king would support them.

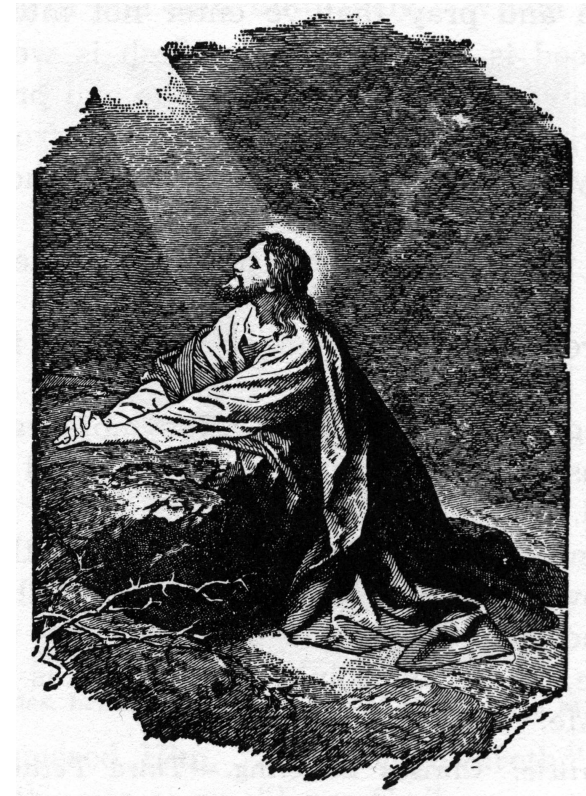
Wow! After all they had done to displease God, God had restored them.

Ummm? Wait a minute. After all God had done for His people, some of the people “have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass.” The very people called by God to lead His people, lead the people down a path of destruction. Such was their ongoing pattern with the people of Israel: rebellion against God, God sends them into bondage, repentance, restoration, followed by more rebellion.

Sounds like the daily life of the Christian. We sin against God every day. Out of His love for us, He binds us up with the Law so that we cannot escape its condemnation. He leads us to repent of our sins and restore us through the Gospel. It is a painful process. The weight of sin crushes us. But our loving Lord does not leave us without hope. He brings the healing balm of the Gospel and with it the hope of one day being free of “this body of death” and our restoration unto new life with Him in eternity.

We pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, grant us so perfectly and without all doubt to believe in Thy Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE I.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

This represents and sets forth most briefly the essence, will, action and work of God the Father. Since the Ten Commandments have taught that we have no other gods, it is natural to ask the question: What kind of a being is God? What does He do? How shall we praise, represent or describe Him, that He may be known? ... So that the Creed is nothing else than the answer and confession of Christians, arranged with respect to the First Commandment. As if you were to ask a little child: My dear, what sort of a God have you? What do you know of Him? He could say: First, indeed, my God is God the Father, who has created heaven and earth; besides Him I believe in nothing else as God; for there is no one else who could create heaven and earth.

But for the learned, and those who have acquired some scriptural knowledge, these three articles may be extended and divided into as many parts as there are words. But now for young scholars let it suffice to indicate the most necessary points, namely, as we have said, that this article refers to the Creation: that we emphasize the words: CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH. But what is the force of this or what do you mean by these words: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker, etc. Answer: I believe and mean to say that I am a creature of God; that is, that He has given and constantly preserves to me my body, soul and life, members great and small, all my senses, reason and understanding, food and drink, shelter and support, wife and child, domestics, house and possessions, etc. Besides, He causes all creatures to serve for the necessities and uses of life—sun, moon and stars in the firmament, day and night, air, fire, water, earth and whatever it bears and produces, bird and fish, beasts, grain and all kinds of produce, and whatever else there is of bodily and temporal goods, good government, peace, security. So that we learn in this article that none of us has his life of himself, or anything that is here enumerated or can be enumerated, neither can he of himself preserve them, however small and unimportant a thing it might be, for all is comprehended in the word: CREATOR.

Besides this we also confess that God the Father has not only given us all that we have and see before our eyes, but daily preserves and defends against all evil and misfortune, averts all sort of danger and calamity; and that He does

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30: EZRA 7:1-28

TRINITY 18

One might easily come away with the idea that God loved Ezra because Ezra was a good man who "had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel." The English word "Law" is translated from the Hebrew word "Torah." When we hear the word "Law," we tend to think in terms of the Ten Commandments. But there is more to the word "Torah" than just the Ten Commandments. The "Torah" encompasses all of God's instruction to His people i.e., both Law and Gospel.

We need only go back one verse to find the real source of Ezra's goodness: "the good hand of his God upon him." To have God's hand upon you means you have been given faith to believe God's promise of forgiveness of sins through Christ. This God-given faith overflows with a desire to please God.

It was God's good pleasure to restore His people and to have the Temple rebuilt. God would once again provide a place where sacrifices could be offered up and forgiveness pronounced over the people.

God's "good hand" was placed upon you in Holy Baptism. It was God's good pleasure to wash your sins away and to give you faith in Christ. Now, as St. Paul wrote, it is "God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." He gives you faith and guides you in life.

We pray: O God the Father, Fount and Source of all goodness, bestow on us, we pray Thee, Thy Holy Spirit to guide and direct our lives. Amen.

“And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the Lord made them joyful.”

This is how God wants it be. He wants us to enjoy being with Him because He truly enjoys being with His people. He wants nothing to get in the way of that joy. But we must be careful to not confuse our joy with happiness. As a wise pastor once told me, “Happiness depends on things happening. Joy simply is.”

The joy we have as Christians is not to be found in our desire for certain things to happen in our lives. There are preachers who preach that sort of “gospel” which is not the Gospel at all. They lead people to believe that true joy will be found once they learn how to open the door to God’s blessings. Once you know the key, things will begin to happen. God then pours out blessings of health, wealth, success, and fame.

However, James paints a much different picture of joy: “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience” (James 1:2-3). When “various trials” take place, they hardly make us happy. Yet, it is through these “various trials” we are drawn closer to Christ, the only place where there is real joy.

We pray: O God, Who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise, that among the manifold changes of this world may there be fixed where true joys may be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen

all without our merit of pure love and goodness, as a friendly Father, who cares for us that no evil befall us. But to speak more of this pertains to the other two parts of this article, where we say: “Father Almighty.”

Hence we must infer and conclude, since everything which we have and are, and whatever is in heaven and upon the earth, are daily given and preserved to us by God, that it is our duty to love, praise and thank Him without ceasing; and in short to serve Him with all these things, as He has enjoined in the Ten Commandments.

Here we could say much if we would attempt to show how few there are that believe this article. For we all pass over it, hear it, and say it, but neither see nor consider what the words teach us. For if we believed it with the heart, we would also act accordingly, and not stalk about proudly, bid defiance and boast as though we had life, riches, power and honor, etc. all of ourselves, so that others must fear and serve us, as is the practice of the unhappy, perverted world, which is immured in darkness, and abuses all the good things and gifts of God only for its own pride, avarice, lust and luxury, and never once regards God, so as to thank Him or acknowledge Him as Lord and Creator.

Therefore, if we only believed it, this article must humble and terrify us all. For we sin daily with eyes, ears, hands, body and soul, money and possessions, and with everything we have, as especially do those who even fight against the Word of God. Yet Christians have this advantage, that they acknowledge themselves in duty bound to serve God for all these things, and to be obedient to Him.

We ought, therefore, daily to practice this article, to remember and consider in all that we see, and in all good that falls to or lot, and wherever we escape from calamity or danger, that it is God who gives and does all these things; that therein we perceive and see His paternal heart and His transcendent love toward us. Thereby the heart would be aroused and kindled to be thankful for all such good things, and to employ them to the honor and praise of God. Thus we have most briefly presented the meaning of this article, as much as it is at first necessary for the most simple to learn, both as to what we have and receive from God, and what we owe in return, which is a most excellent object of knowledge, but a far greater treasure. For here we see how the Father has given Himself to us, together with all creatures, and has most richly provided for us in this life, besides that He has overwhelmed us with unspeakable, eternal treasures in His Son and the Holy Ghost...

—The Large Catechism

Prayer matters. King Hezekiah would testify to that truth. He was gravely ill, and God's prophet told the king to put the affairs of his kingdom and his household in order, for he was dying. What could Hezekiah do, besides weep bitterly? He could pray. He prayed to God as his only help. God heard Hezekiah's prayer in that very hour, and responded in His mercy. God sent the prophet Isaiah back to Hezekiah to deliver an additional prophecy: The king's death would be delayed—by fifteen years! The kingdom would be preserved would live!

Your prayer matters. Your prayer matters, because your prayer matters to God. God the Holy Trinity commands His holy people to pray to Him, and He promises to hear us (Jer. 29:12). Our Heavenly Father tenderly invites us to ask of Him in prayer, with all boldness and confidence, as dear children ask their dear father (Small Catechism).

We pray: Remember now, O Lord, I pray, how Your Son has walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and has done what was good in Your sight, that I might be saved through faith in Him; in Whose Name I pray. Amen.

Yesterday, we heard Haggai's message to the people of Israel to get back to work rebuilding the Temple. Now, did you notice? They didn't wait for an "OK" from the king. They heard God's Word and followed through with what He said. Then, when confronted about restarting the work of rebuilding the Temple, they answered with the truth of what had happened in the past, warts and all. They spoke about how the people of Israel had "provoked the God of heaven to wrath," how "He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar," and how, later, King Cyrus told them to rebuild the Temple.

They told the truth and left the rest to God. Which begs the question: Why didn't they do that in the first place? Maybe they should have. What if they would have? We know they could have.

The nagging "shoulda, woulda, couldas" plague all of us from time to time. We begin to wonder if things might have gone better had we done it a different way and our minds won't let us rest. But after allowing us a while to linger in frustration, God comes with His message of peace. He once again shows us our real need, Jesus and His forgiveness. He leads us to commend all our troubles and frustrations to Him and His care, assuring us of His love. He fills us with a peace that surpasses all human understanding.

We pray: If thou but suffer God to guide thee
And hope in Him thro' all thy ways,
He'll give thee strength whate'er betide thee,
And bear thee thro' evil days.
Who trusts in God unchanging love
Builds on the Rock that naught can move. Amen. (TLH 518, st. 1)

Today's reading from Haggai picks up where yesterday's reading from Ezra left off: "the second year of King Darius." About a decade and a half had gone by since the rebuilding of the Temple had ceased. There is no record of the people of Israel ever petitioning the king to restart the rebuilding process. Instead, they had become content with life without the Temple. They had their own houses while the Temple lay "in ruins."

Again, it is God Who takes action by instructing Haggai the prophet to bring His Word to the people. As is always the case, God begins with His Word of Law, "Consider your ways!" Their "ways" were lives of complacency. They thought they really didn't need God though His desire was for them and their repentance. He wanted to shower His blessings upon them.

So it is with life, today. People pay lip service to God but are far more content with the things of this world. However, seek after those things which "moth and rust cannot destroy," and in time they do. "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Only the Word of God last forever. "Moth and rust" cannot destroy the Word for "the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

All our hopes and dreams are bound up in Jesus. That was the message to the people in the day of Haggai the prophet. Their lives were at all times to be focused on the true God Who provided their every need.

We pray: Dear Lord, graft into our hearts the love of Thy Name and keep us in the same. Amen.

Contending for the faith is vitally necessary in every generation. During the reign of King Hezekiah, orthodox worship and Christian living flourished in the kingdom of Judah. The temple in Jerusalem resounded with the pure Word of God, and the Old Testament sacraments were administered in accord with God's institution of them through Moses. King Hezekiah was a good father to the subjects of his kingdom, carrying out faithfully the responsibilities of his office by combating idolatrous teaching and practice within this Christian kingdom. Hezekiah also was a good father to his son, Manasseh, providing his son with a sound pattern for fighting the good fight of faith and living faithfully as a Christian, a father, and a king.

When Manasseh was given the kingdom in the next generation, however, all was undone. Rather than obeying God and following His Word, Judah listened to King Manasseh and heeded his devilish law. During his long reign, Manasseh failed to uphold his office as Judah's king, overturning all of the faithful practice that his father had established in the land. Not only did the wicked king restore the pagan worship practices of the Canaanites; he also added altars for the worship of Assyrian gods in God's temple atop Mount Zion. Manasseh also proved to be a horrific father to his son, leading Amon to worship other gods and, later, to reign wickedly over Judah.

We pray: Heavenly Father, help us by Your Word and Your Spirit to contend for the faith in our generation, that true doctrine and pure Sacraments might be maintained among us and handed down to future generations, that we and they might live a godly life here in time and yonder in eternity; through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Confession of the faith consists of two parts: acceptance of God's truth and rejection of Satan's lies. Both of these parts are depicted clearly in Josiah's profession of faith.

The young king of Judah was sixteen years old when he began catechesis in Christian doctrine, seeking to know the God of His father, King David. Four years later, King Josiah confessed the one, true faith, both by acknowledging the Only True God and by rejecting the false gods worshiped by many in Judah. His rejection of idolatry was presented before all the people, as Josiah publicly burned the bones of all pagan priests upon their own altars, destroyed all demonic altars in the land, ground all idols into powder, and scattered the resulting dust upon the graves of those who had offered sacrifices to these idols.

Josiah's adherence to God's truth was also made manifest before all of the kingdom, restoring the long-neglected temple in Jerusalem to its former glory and, above all, restoring the long-lost Book of the Law to its proper place as the Word of Life for God's people. Josiah ordered that this Word of the Lord be read in its entirety in the hearing of all of the people of Jerusalem, then led the people in publicly declaring his faith in the God Who had worked such faith through His Word and by His Spirit.

We pray: Almighty God, give us tender hearts through the working of Your Holy Spirit through Your Word, that we might continue to reject all lies that are contrary to Your will and continue to believe, teach, and confess Your truth in Your Church and in our lives; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

At first glance, it would appear that the Israelites had it coming to them. Some people offered to help them build the Temple but they refused the offer. The king is told about it and stops the work on the Temple. These people sounded nice enough, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do." But our text tells us otherwise. They were "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin."

Second Kings 17:41 offers some additional insight to these people who wanted to help, "Even while these people were worshiping the Lord, they were serving their idols. To this day their children and grandchildren continue to do as their ancestors did." These were people who had merely given lip service to the true God, but really didn't believe in Him. For them, the true God was just one of many gods.

The true worshippers of God recognized the ruse. They would have compromised their confession of faith by allowing idolaters to take part in building the Temple. By not cooperating with these "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" the people of Israel paid the price, a delay in rebuilding the Temple.

Today, the Church faces similar problems. Pressures are mounting on faithful pastors and their congregation to not preach the truth of what God's Word has to say about certain sins that are now deemed socially acceptable. Lies and half-truths are spoken against the faithful in an effort to smear them before the public. Such are the tactics of Satan.

Yet, in the face of all that befalls us, God remains faithful to us and thus keeps us faithful to Him. Nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

We pray: O Lord keep us faithful for sake of Jesus. Amen.

“But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers’ houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy...” (Ezra 3:12).

It’s a strange description, but one we may easily imagine. The foundations of a new temple have been laid. The young rejoice in what is being accomplished. The elderly mourn at the same time, saddened that “it’s not going to be as good as the old temple.”

Just as yesterday’s devotion cautioned us not to be harsh on those who aren’t inspired to do the same things we do, so this text should encourage us not to resent those who don’t feel the same way we do. The faithful young ones rejoice in the progress being made in the Lord’s work. Yet the faithful elderly to mourn, wanting to honor the Lord with “as good or better” than the old temple, disappointed that the new one will not be so.

It matters that the Lord’s work go forward. It matters that we confess His faithfulness, not with mediocrity, but with our very best. This is our day. God grant us faithful hearts, rejoicing to play our part in moving the work of the Lord forward to the very best of our ability, that many others would be made heirs of salvation with us through faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

We pray: “Heavenly Father, as I behold the darkening days of this world, grant me Your Spirit, that I may faithfully labor to spread Your Word and advance Your Kingdom; through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.”

God works all in all. The Creator uses all of His creatures to do His bidding. He speaks His Word through many different messengers. His people, therefore, ought to know His Word well, so that it can be heard—and heeded—as the very Voice of God, even when the messenger appears to be a strange one.

King Josiah stands as an example of that truth. Although neither his kingdom nor an allied one were threatened, Josiah led his army to a region that was well to the North of Judah in order to engage the army of Egypt. God gave Josiah a chance to repent of his foolishness, remarkably speaking through King Necho of Egypt as His own mouth, “I have not come against you this day, but against the house with which I have war; for God commanded me to make haste. Refrain from meddling with God, who is with me, lest He destroy you.” King Josiah, however, failed to heed the warning, and was killed in the ensuing battle. Even worse, King Necho fulfilled God’s prophetic warning by retaliating against Judah for Josiah’s meddling. Necho deposed Judah’s new king and carried him away to Egypt, replacing him with a wicked king who reigned over Judah until the kingdom fell to Babylon.

We pray: Almighty Lord, impress Your Word upon our minds and hearts, that we might discern Your speaking through the messengers of Your own choosing. Lead us by Your Spirit to heed Your warnings against our sin, and to believe Your promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, our Savior; in Whose Name we pray. Amen.

The judgment of the Lord is sure and certain. The prophet Jeremiah is sent by God to declare that very message to the king and the kingdom of Judah. Do the right and do no wrong, and surely the kingdom will prosper. Do no right and do the wrong, and certainly the house of Judah will become desolate. God would allow the destruction of His holy city not only to establish the unfaithfulness of His people to His Word, but also to establish His faithfulness to His Word to His people—and to all the world.

The prophecy of Jeremiah is surely fulfilled in the devastation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, who delivered Judah into a captivity from which many never escaped. Jeremiah's prophecy is fulfilled more certainly in another devastating moment in the history of the kingdom, the day upon which the Lion of Judah (Rev 5:5) is put to death on a cross outside of the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem—yet His death and resurrection bring life and immortality to all who believe! Though the subjects of His kingdom are unable in themselves to do no wrong and do the right, Christ Jesus has lived rightly and died for all wrongs, so that all who believe in Him are justified by faith and declared righteous before God, even forevermore!

We pray: Almighty God, Heavenly King, Your Word is sure and certain. Turn our hearts in repentance of our wrongdoings, that we might ever be filled with the righteousness of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, and be servants of Your everlasting kingdom; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:5).

"All whose spirits God had moved." Most didn't go back from Babylon to Jerusalem. From that day to this, there has never been a moment in history that the majority of Jews lived in the Promised Land. God moved some to return. He moved others to support them financially. But God's purposes were accomplished, and among those who returned were the ancestors of a certain "Joseph" and "Mary."

So also in our day and age: God uses one to be a missionary, another to be a Pastor, others to provide financial support for the kingdom, another to be a faithful mother raising children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. The devil will attempt to get us to take such pride in our contributions that we disparage what others do. Resist that. Rather, rejoice that the same Holy Spirit leads one to do one thing, and another to do another, and by means of all this, the kingdom of God is advanced as people are brought to the faith in the Son of Mary, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

We pray: "Heavenly Father, I give You thanks for all that You have use of others to do in service to Your Kingdom. Have Your use of me also, I pray, for the sake of Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen."

“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days” (Dan. 6:10).

The new Persian king had issued a decree: for thirty days, no one was to invoke any god other than himself. Daniel defies this unjust order, for his (and our) first loyalty is to God, not to our government. But notice how he defies: he doesn’t go into a closet and pray. He lets his defiance be seen. Why? Because it is important to confess! It is important to make it clear, to everyone, that his faith can’t be compromised by legislation!

The rest of the story we know: Daniel is thrown into the lion’s den, God delivers him, and the men who conspired this thing against Daniel are thrown to the lions instead. As we saw earlier this week, God “is able” to deliver. When or how it pleases Him to do so is up to Him. Let us, however, resolve to give clear and unambiguous witness to our unwavering faith in the God Who saves us, not just from lions, but from eternal perdition, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

We pray: “Heavenly Father, grant me the boldness of Daniel, that I may faithfully confess before men the salvation You have given me in Christ Jesus. Amen.”

In preparation for the faithful reception of the Lord’s Body and Blood on the morrow, let us contemplate Dr. Luther’s Christian questions:

1. Do you believe that you are a sinner?
2. How do you know this?
3. Are you sorry for your sins?
4. What have you deserved from God because of your sins?
5. Do you hope to be saved?
6. In whom then do you trust?
7. Who is Christ?
8. How many Gods are there?
9. What has Christ done for you that you trust in Him?
10. Did the Father also die for you?
11. How do you know this?
12. What are the Words of Institution?
13. Do you believe, then, that the true body and blood of Christ are in the Sacrament?
14. What convinces you to believe this?
15. What should we do when we eat His body and drink His blood, and in this way receive His pledge?
16. Why should we remember and proclaim His death?
17. What motivated Christ to die and make full payment for your sins?
18. Finally, why do you wish to go to the Sacrament?
19. What should admonish and encourage a Christian to receive the Sacrament frequently?
20. But what should you do if you are not aware of this need and have no hunger and thirst for the Sacrament?

We pray: Lord Jesus Christ, grant that my answers to these questions be found faithful through the leading of Your Holy Word and Holy Spirit, that I may receive Your Body and Blood rightly in a true faith for the forgiveness of sins, new life, and eternal salvation. Amen.

It sometimes seems futile to have prophets or wise men. So few people will heed wisdom, much less the Word of God. It is normal for people to reject bad news. They don't want to believe it. They want to believe all is well. Some will go to great lengths to maintain their denial of unpleasant truths. People spend a lot of their time distracting themselves from unpleasantness.

One might wonder that there was such denial in the face of God's prophet in today's reading, but is our world any different when we deny the Word of God? Even when we see the consequences all around us for not heeding the Word of God, those without ears to hear fill their ears with lies. As Luther has said, "Superstition, idolatry and hypocrisy have ample wages, but the truth goes begging."

As Christians we must always be willing to hear the truth, regardless of how unpleasant it may be. We must be willing to question our own assumptions about good and bad to make sure that our assumptions line up with God's Word. This is difficult to do, especially when we believe we have already figured out the truth. We become better Christians when we are open to new information and new perspectives, considering them with humility and faithfulness to the Lord. We should never take on new perspectives just to be new or different, but we need to change perspective when we learn that it is closer to God's truth.

We pray: Lord, let us be open to hearing Your Word, and keep us humble that we might continually learn. Amen.

"And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN" (Dan. 5:25).

Belshazzar, son of Nebuchadnezzar, reigned on the throne of his father. But he had not learned the lesson of humility that God had taught his father. He even brings out the sacred vessels of the Jerusalem temple and uses them to throw a very non-sacred party. It is then that he sees a hand writing these words—the "writing on the wall"—spelling out his doom.

Mene, "numbered," because God is ending the number of the days of the kingdom. Tekel, "weighed," because God has measured this king, and found him lacking. Upharsin or peres, because the kingdom is divided and given to the Persians. That very night, Belshazzar was slain and the kingdom given to the Persians. The judgment of the Lord will fall on those who mock Him. So do not fear them. Rather, repent of all the many ways you fail properly to honor the Lord, and know that to the humble, repentant one, He is gracious and merciful, forgiving iniquity, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

We pray: "Heavenly father, I confess that I do not always honor You as I should. Have mercy on me and forgive me, for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your Son, my Savior. Amen."

“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down” (Dan. 4:37).

What a strange life king Nebuchadnezzar had! A pagan king, he had seen a vision that Daniel interpreted for him. He went crazy, eating grass like an animal. Eventually, his clarity of mind was restored to him. It was then that he spoke the words above. Did he die believing? God knows. His son, sadly, did not learn from his father’s life or words.

His words here are right. God’s works are truth. His ways are justice. And indeed He can and does put down the proud. That last point is particularly important. Where does pride come from? It comes either from overlooking our own shortcomings and sins, or from taking credit for the things God gave us the will and the ability to accomplish. Be not so.

In humility, recognize your sin and repent of it, trusting in Christ Jesus for forgiveness. In humility, recognize that any good in you is traceable back to the generosity of God, Who gave you the wherewithal to accomplish whatever you do. And stay that way! Remain a humble, repentant, thankful one, that eternal life may be yours through faith in Christ Jesus.

We pray: “Heavenly Father, You Who exalt the humble and abase the proud, grant me grace ever to give You thanks for all Your benefits, to repent of my sins, and at the last to receive eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, Your Son, my Savior. Amen.”

The course was set. God’s plans would come to pass. The Chaldeans would take Jerusalem. The only choice for the rulers of Jerusalem was how the conquest would end. Would it be peaceful by surrender or gruesome in resistance?

The princes looked upon this surrender as a surrender to the Chaldeans, but in fact it was surrender to God. God had determined the outcome. Further resistance was fighting against God, not the Chaldeans. Zedekiah and the princes thought they had power in their hands.

How often do kings, presidents, and prime ministers think that they can change the world? How often do they think they can build a paradise or a utopia on Earth? Zedekiah in his madness rationalized away the Word of the Lord. He thought he could somehow still find a way around the choice that was put in front of him. He thought he was smart enough or crafty enough to get around God’s Word. He treated God as if He was one of the other “gods” in the world, a “god” who might be thwarted with the right magic or clever scheme. It shows that he did not truly fear the God of Heaven and Earth. But, like all leaders who think they can fight against God, Zedekiah came to a sorry end.

Would that our leaders today feared God. If only they would realize that God will choose the course of history, not them.

We pray: Lord, let our leaders come to faith in You. Let us also be faithful even when the nation around us is following after evil. Amen.

We have here a great tension and seeming contradiction. God will give up Jerusalem and Judah to destruction and captivity in Babylon, yet He gives instructions to prepare for restoration. This confuses Jeremiah at first, but God explains it to him.

God's chastisement and restoration is a typical pattern in the Bible. It is Law and Gospel. Though chastisement results in final destruction for some, it is ultimately loving correction for the people of God as a whole. To rouse His people from their idolatry, He sends chastisement.

One can see parallels in our societies. Today "the West" has fallen into idolatry and vice like the vile sins of Israel and Judah. One can easily see the disintegration from within and the attacks from without. These consequences of faithlessness point to either final judgment or chastisement to repentance. The Mohammedans seem like the scourge of God upon us, and the perversion that our culture vomits up daily may make us feel hopeless. The perversion and the unnatural thoughts and actions of our society are ultimately rebellion against God.

Will this ever turn around? We can take comfort that God's pattern is to restore His people after chastisement to blessing and strength. There may be a new chapter of vitality to come in our societies, but more importantly we know God will preserve those who are faithful according to the Holy Spirit and true faith in Jesus Christ.

We pray: Lord, if it is Your will, grant faithfulness in our society, and let our children and grandchildren see renewal and vitality with true faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.

"...our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (Dan. 3:17b-18).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego have refused to bow down to the king's new god. They lived in a society where there was a great deal of pressure to conform to "societal norms," including religious norms. And were they not men of faith, "normality" would have been an easy thing to get sucked into. But they were men of faith, and they stood their ground.

Is there a price to be paid for that? Maybe. God "is able," they say, to deliver them. Will He? Here's the important point: they don't know! But they're going to be faithful, one way or the other. In this case, God does choose to deliver them.

We read similar things in the New Testament. Sometimes, the apostles are miraculously delivered from death. Eventually, most are martyred. So too with us: God may be pleased to deliver us from the negative consequences of faithfulness. Or He may be pleased to allow us to endure some or all of those consequences. No matter. God grant us grace and courage to confess our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, even when it cuts against the grain of societal normality.

We pray: "Lord Jesus Christ, you poured Yourself out unto death on the cross for our salvation. Grant us courage to bear whatever crosses we must in the confession of Your saving truth. Amen."

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity

The Third Commandment.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

When, then, it is asked: “What is meant by the commandment: ‘Remember the sabbath-day to sanctify it’?” Answer: To sanctify the Sabbath is the same as “to keep it holy.” But what is meant by “keeping it holy”? Nothing else than to be occupied in holy words, works and life. For the day needs no sanctification for itself; for in itself it has been created holy. But God desires it to be holy to thee. Therefore it becomes holy or unholy on thy account, according as thou art occupied on the same with things that are holy or unholy.

How then does such sanctification occur? Not that we sit behind the stove and do no rough work, or deck ourselves with a garland and put on our best clothes, but (as has been said) that we occupy ourselves with God’s Word, and exercise ourselves therein.

And indeed we Christians ought always to keep such a Sabbath, and to be occupied with nothing but holy things, i.e. daily to meditate upon God’s Word, and carry it in our hearts and upon our lips. But because (as has been said) we do not all have leisure, we must devote several hours a week to the young, or at least a day to the mass of people, in order that we may be concerned about this alone, and especially urge the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, and thus direct our whole life and being according to God’s Word. The Sabbath is truly kept whenever time is devoted to earnest attention to this, and the practice of it; but that cannot be called a true Christian Sabbath where this is not done. For they who are not Christians can keep holiday and be idle just as well as the entire swarm of our ecclesiastics, who stand daily in the churches, singing, and ringing bells, but who keep no Sabbath day holy, because they neither preach nor practice God’s Word, but teach and live contrary to it.

For the Word of God is the sanctuary above all sanctuaries, yea, the only one which we Christians know and have. For though we had the bones of all the saints, or all holy and consecrated garments upon a heap, they would not avail us anything; for all that is a dead thing which can sanctify nobody. But God’s Word is the treasury which sanctifies everything whereby even all the saints themselves were sanctified. —The Large Catechism, §87–90

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15: JEREMIAH 39:1-18

TRINITY 16

With God’s people there is always a remnant. The wicked leaders of the people, who led them to destruction, certainly find their just punishment but, God sees the faithful remnant. They do not escape the broader consequences of the destruction of the city but, they are shielded from the direct punishment. The poor and powerless, who had no say in the course of action, are not torn from the land. And, most especially, Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian was spared because of his faith in God.

This is often the case with God. The faithful remnant inherit the land and prosper, in the long run. Of course, this cannot be guaranteed in any particular case. With Ebed-Melech we have a specific revelation explaining his situation, but often, the faithful remain. And even when they do not, they inherit their eternal rewards.

Now, this is not to say these poor inherit any kingdom on Earth. The point of the exile is to extinguish the corrupt and faithless kingdom and to eventually found a new one in its place. The poor are inconsequential in this matter. They had no power in the previous kingdom and will have none in the next one, but, their children will live to see it. God often spares the poor faithful individuals in the midst of the judgment on the kingdom as a whole.

We pray: Lord, as we find ourselves in the midst of wicked kingdoms, help us to be shining lights of faithfulness. Lord, help us preserve our households in the midst of darkness. Amen.

It is those who go off into captivity that will be restored in seventy years. After the land has been cleansed, God will plant again. It will be His work and no one else's. Those who remained in Judah and set themselves up as the continuance of the kingdom and its institutions are running headlong against God's will. They will soon meet their judgment.

But God saves the real thunder for the false prophets who spoke lies in His Name. They will be slain "before your eyes." They will be roasted in fire. Even their families will fade away. Not only have they tried to set up their own kingdom, they have prophesied when they had no Word of God. Few things will stoke God's wrath as such lying will. How will those who preach falsely in our day avoid the wrath that is heaped up for them? How will the Joyce Meyers' and the Joel Osteens' and the Benny Hinns' escape God's wrath? Do they fear nothing? How will Lutheran pastors who teach men that the resurrection didn't happen or that homosexuality is not sinful, escape the wrath of God?

More than all wickedness a man can do, leading others to hell is the most damnable. God is not some doddering old fool Who will wink at such things. He will not be mocked by arrogant men.

We pray: Lord preserve us from such fate. Give us fear to not transgress Your Word and quick repentance if we do. Amen.

The Babylonian king is trying to assimilate these three Jewish boys but, they cannot be assimilated. They are given new names in order to identify with the Babylonian culture. They are taught the wisdom of the Babylonian wise men. They are given a diet of a Babylonian, in fact, the king. This was meant to show loyalty to the king and to separate them from their old customs. They were in a very precarious situation if they wanted to remain faithful to God.

The issue with the food was not its nutrient properties. God is not giving His stamp of approval to vegetarianism here. In fact, it was understood that a diet of vegetables and water would make them weaker than the other boys. God performs a miracle and makes the boys who eat just the vegetables healthier than the other boys. This is a test of loyalty to the God of Israel in very a very dangerous situation. They put their lives on the line for the faith.

If they had failed and still refused the king's food, that might have been the end for them. But, God would not let them down. They became a source of inspiration to their fellow Jews and to all believers throughout history. The Christian must remain faithful to God no matter the cost. In a world that encourages us to take care of ourselves,

We pray: Lord, help us to maintain a right perspective. Help us to remain faithful to You always. Amen.