

Chapter 31 contains a tremendous amount of God's grace and mercy, and it beautifully points forward to the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. After so many other chapters of doom and gloom, this statement of God's love shines all the brighter.

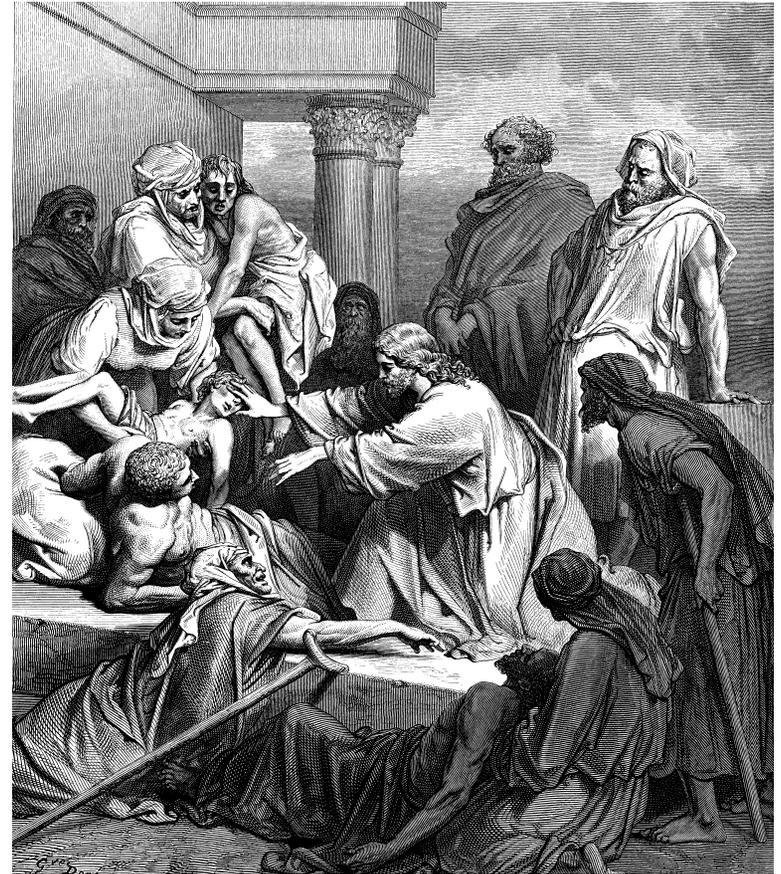
This is not to say that God's love is not present in His warnings and judgments. He loves the whole world, as John 3:16 reminds us. He warns man because He cares for him and wants to see him turned from the destruction of sin and faithlessness. But the overt Gospel promises are a welcome part of the whole counsel of God. They bring us rest and joy to hear that He will save us from evil.

Whether His message is the Gospel or the Law, it is for our good. Therefore, His Words should not be twisted or misrepresented. He knows how to bring the greatest good for all mankind. False prophets and false teachers ignore or distort the full counsel of God's Words because they are not serving His will. They serve their own sinful wisdom and their own desires.

It is vanity for anyone to think he knows better than God, but false teachers trouble the Church because they suffer from this vain delusion. God balances the Law and Gospel as He sees fit. And when it is properly taught and believed, it all points to Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Savior.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy help, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



SEPTEMBER 4—SEPTEMBER 30, 2017

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The Calendar

September 3	Trinity 12
September 10	Trinity 13
September 17	Trinity 14
September 21 (Th)	St. Matthew, Apostle, Evangelist
September 24	Trinity 15
September 29 (F)	St. Michael and All Angels

Third Year of Seminary Instruction Begins September 12

The third year of classes at St. Ignatius Lutheran Theological Seminary begins this month. This quarter's classes are:

P004—Homiletics 1 (3 hrs.)

S008—Sacramental Theology (3 hrs.)

H005—Post Reformation Church History (3 hrs.)

P007—Theology & Practice of Confession and Absolution (1 hr.)

This year is scheduled to conclude Josiah Scheck's three years of instruction. The date of his examination by the pastors of the diocese has not yet been scheduled. We are all grateful for the faithfulness and scholarship of our seminary instructors and seminary student and eagerly await the successful completion of Seminarist Scheck's theological studies.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29: JEREMIAH 26-28

TRINITY 15

Sometimes rebellion comes in a sweet-sounding message. The false prophet Hananiah proclaimed a message of freedom from bondage, but it was a lie because he promised it in God's name without God's actual promise of it. It was rebellion because he was teaching the people to trust in words that did not come from the Lord.

Satan has fooled our world into embracing anything that sounds nice and pleasant as good, and he wants us to despise and ignore anything that sounds uncomfortable. False teachers reduce God to a smiley face, and the realities of sin and discipline are reduced to a "yuk" face. God's Word and will are far more complex than that.

Sometimes God allows people to suffer some of the consequences of their mistakes. He does this to teach us and make our faith stronger! These unpleasant experiences are used by the Lord to point us to the greater comfort that comes to us in the Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified. His innocent suffering and death showed that God took our sins upon Himself and He redeemed us. Any consequences we suffer from our sins should remind us that the greater consequences were taken away by the Lamb of God! And any suffering that is inflicted on His people by those who hate Him is a reminder of the joyous fact that we are made one in Jesus Christ, so sometimes the world hates us as they hate Him.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy help, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In the midst of condemning the faithlessness of His people He reiterates His promise that He will provide for their salvation. "...His name by which He will be called: the Lord our Righteousness" (23:6). This name indicates that He will be God Himself!

The men who served as shepherds, prophets, and priests had failed to serve faithfully. Every human being will fail to be righteous because we are all corrupted by Adam's sin. No king, or shepherd, or prophet, or priest descended from Adam and Eve could ever serve with all righteousness and truly save God's people. Only God has the power to save His people! And this is not a new message, but one that He has been telling mankind since Adam and Eve first fell into sin.

The true Good Shepherd--the great Prophet, Priest, and King—can only be Jesus Christ, who is true God and true man. Apart from God there is no power that can save us from our self-destruction, and apart from faith in His Word there is no hope to avoid His righteous judgment and wrath. Praise God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for coming to us in Jesus Christ, our crucified Lord and Savior!

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy help, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Job's entire book parallels the writing of Job's contemporary, Moses, and the Holy Spirit's purpose in giving the Torah. Both are directed at the reversal of idolatry and rooted in Yahweh's acts of creation and redemption.

Would Job question God and challenge the Lord's superior knowledge, wisdom, and holiness with the angry "Why me, O God?" so common to "aggrieved" mankind? The universe is His creation, to do with as He pleases. The Lord has revealed that it pleases Him to love us, save us, and do what is best for us. Would we truly not trust that He whose actions can be compelled by no one is, in fact, doing what is best for us even when it doesn't seem so to us?

Such an attitude is, as Job 40:8 makes clear, an attempt to justify oneself. Yet, justification can only come through the One who can harness nature, the Still of Wind and Wave, the One who is safe in the wilderness, the One who heals and raises from the dead. Job wisely lays his hand over his mouth, listens to the Lord, and repents of any and all thoughts that would contradict Him. Thus, he is restored and in his death divides the property to his daughters along with his sons, a declaration that he understands that none of it is by human power or position, but by grace alone.

His wisdom never plans in vain, Ne'er falters or mistakes;
All that His counsels did ordain A happy ending makes.
Upon thy lips, then, lay thy hand And trust His guiding love;
Then like a rock thy peace shall stand Here and in heaven above.
(“Rejoice My Heart, Be Glad and Sing,” TLH #535:8)

Father, grant my heart to be so disposed, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,
But fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

Each portion of a couplet in Proverbs should be understood on its own, then viewed in relationship to the other. “Fear of the Lord” can represent two different Hebrew phrases, one of which would better be translated “fear FROM the Lord.” Such is “servile fear,” while “fear OF the Lord” is “filial fear.” Servile (slave-like) fear runs from God when we have sinned. Filial (son-like) fear instead runs to God seeking forgiveness, fearing life without this relationship. Fools despise wisdom, considering their own feelings and reason the wise path; anyone instructing them otherwise is automatically “the enemy.”

Putting the two together: fools despise the fear of the Lord. They despise having to run from a judging, condemning God, so they continue in their folly, thinking themselves wise, that they will be better off “ruling in Hell” than “serving in Heaven” and other such nonsense. What they miss is that God doesn’t want them to flee from Him, but to Him when they have sinned—to be sons and heirs, not slaves and enemies. Thus, they seek their own way in life, setting traps for others, but really trapping themselves: running away from the Lord, they bring more judgment upon themselves, being unable to escape. Yet, Wisdom calls out, seeking their repentance, their turning. Wisdom calls out as one that the young man studying under Solomon would desire as a wife: so earnestly should he seek and love and cherish wisdom!

Grant, O Lord, that we lean not on our own understanding, fleeing from You when we have sinned, which is folly, but fleeing to You and trusting in You with all your heart for forgiveness, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Nations may rise and fall, but the Church will be preserved by the Lord. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (see Ezekiel 18:32 and 33:11). He desires that all would repent and turn from their sin. He wants all nations to know His truth, which includes His mercy and forgiveness toward those who have true faith.

Our own nation is in turmoil, and it is hard not to worry about its future. But we must remember that our life in Christ, as part of the Church which is the very Body of Jesus Christ, is protected in His almighty hands even if other institutions fall around us. Faith in Christ crucified is more important than hoping for the leaders of our society to “figure it out” and make things right. It is good to work for peace and justice in the world, but it is not the most important thing!

The best thing we can do for our nation, our children, our brothers and sisters, and our neighbors is do those good works that the Lord prepares for us. His will and His ways make for the best blessing and security that any of us can hope for. So let us cling to all that Jesus Christ has taught us, the Law and the Gospel of our Lord, and let us show it forth for all nations so that they may know Him and be saved.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy help, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Chapter 18 recounts the wickedness of the rebellious, unfaithful people as they plot against God's servant Jeremiah. "Come and let us attack him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words" (18:18).

We often consider the sinfulness of the world, but an equally serious problem is the treachery of rebellious people within the ranks of the Church on earth. Too often we hear about bad pastors or bad parishioners who scheme and manipulate in order to accomplish what is right in their eyes, while insisting that they have a right to do so. Faithful people are abused and faithful pastors are persecuted. This should not be!

This is why it is so important that we understand the reason for God's wrath against unfaithful rebellion, and why Church discipline is so necessary. God's righteous Law holds us accountable because He loves His people and the whole world, and wants what is best for all, but He cannot abide wickedness that seeks to destroy His grace. Those who resist His will and His Spirit must be warned, condemned, and called to repentance, for their own good, as well as the good of others. And thanks be to God that He is always willing to forgive and rejoice over those who are brought to true faith!

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy help, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The father instructs his son to find the most essential love of his life: true wisdom. To gain a wife that he will both trust and cherish, it is necessary for him first to have wisdom. Hearing the wisdom of both father and grandfather will serve him well—wisdom that is being repeated to him not merely from custom, but because it has been shown truly to be wise. Having instruction as his first love will protect him both from the adulteress and from adultery, because he will learn what to value and how to evaluate. Thus, the father pleads by means of sound reason: "For I give you good doctrine: Do not forsake my law."

The parallel in these two parts helps us understand the rest of the Old Testament as well: "law" here is Torah, which is the equivalent of "doctrine" or "teaching," not simply of "commands." The father's instruction is not just a setting forth of laws, but of graciously providing what is necessary; saying, "Get wisdom!" is not a command to do what Solomon confesses to have been fruitless in Ecclesiastes, but an invitation to receive the gift that comes through hearing what the father says.

Diligence and purity are the two parts of a life of wisdom: not playing with hot coals but, instead, wholeheartedly pursuing what belongs to one's vocations protects the wise and honors father and mother (and the Lord in whose place they stand). Hearing we have wisdom; yet, as St. James says, "Be doers of the Word and not hearers only."

Grant me, O Lord, not to despise the good counsel You have brought me, but to treasure the wisdom given me through my parents and through my fathers in the faith, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

In Proverbs 8, Wisdom is personified. She is the bride who is to be sought after, as comparing Proverbs 31 with this chapter makes clear: “For wisdom is better than rubies, And all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her.”

Yet, who is the wisdom of God, if not Christ Jesus? This reality leads Bible commentators to all sorts of wrong conclusions, but it should be no more difficult than the understanding that the Church—including men—is the Bride of Christ and that the equality of men and women (and, thus, Jew and Greek, slave and free) in terms of salvation is specified in saying that all of those who have been Baptized into Christ and trust in the promise in Him are “sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” One should desire Wisdom—should desire Christ—as fully as one would desire a spouse with whom to be one flesh. That is a description of the bare minimum: “As much as you desire above all other things a wonderful wife, young man, you are to desire the wisdom of God and power of God unto salvation, Christ Jesus and Him crucified, that much more.”

All of creation was laid out in Wisdom—was laid out according to Christ: all was made to show God’s love for mankind from the very beginning. Both creation and all history have been ordered so that even when Man has chosen and done against Him, the ultimate goal of restoration to holiness and bliss in Christ is being brought to pass.

O Triune God, bring us to desire the wisdom that brings salvation—even God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ—above all things, as in Him alone is forgiveness, life, and salvation. Amen.

The Lord’s anger is righteous. It should inspire serious humility in us when we read these chapters from Jeremiah. Unfortunately, many today and many throughout the ages can read this account of God’s wrath toward unfaithfulness and fail to understand it. Every sinner deserves this manner of harsh condemnation from the Lord, but many think to themselves, “This doesn’t apply to me; I’m doing fine.”

Even in the time of the New Testament Church, we hear the Gospel of forgiveness in Jesus Christ and our sinful hearts take that good news and twist it so that we forget about the seriousness of our sins. Like the false prophets of Jeremiah’s time, some still teach that there is peace and mercy for those who are faithless and unrepentant.

We all deserve God’s harsh condemnation and wrath because of our sins. But He sends His faithful teachers and messengers to remind us that humility and repentance are very necessary. The Holy Spirit rightfully should open our hearts and minds so that we are horrified by our wickedness. But the Holy Spirit also mercifully creates faith in us to believe the Gospel of our forgiveness in Christ crucified. Both parts of the whole truth of God must be proclaimed. Thanks be to God for His Law and His Gospel.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy help, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In chapter 7 the Lord, through the prophet Jeremiah, again calls His people to repentance. He points out their sins of worshiping various false gods. Then they come into the temple, supposedly to worship the Lord, but also continue to worship the false gods—these false gods that they have created for themselves by believing the false prophets who preach lies to them. In verse 23 and following God tells them these lies were not His commands. He tells them they should obey His voice, which is being proclaimed through Jeremiah, His true prophet. Old Testament Israel seldom believed the word of God!

For much of the world today, even for much of visible Christendom, the word of God still has no authority. It is seen as a book of fables, at best. However, when Jesus teaches the Church its mission on earth He says that He has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. He is all-powerful! He tells His Church, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,” then He tells them how to accomplish this--“baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe [or believe] all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I [the One with all authority] am with you always” (Matthew 28:18-20).

Today, as always, the word of the Lord is the final authority of truth. As always, the word of the Lord is a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105).

We pray: O Lord, by Your mercy, keep Your Church from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Proverbs are often viewed like vending machines: do what it says, and God will spit out the proper blessing for what you have done/earned. How often pastors hear, “I raised up my child in the way he should go, but now he has departed from it!” As in Job 40, such is an accusation against God and unwise attempt at self-justification. The answer is in two questions: “Which of us has any more perfectly raised our children than we have perfectly done anything else in life?” and “If Jesus taught the Twelve and they departed, why would we think that our teaching others would absolutely rob them of their ability to sin and reject Christ?”

Proverbs that speak of results in this life are not “do this, get that” promises for which we have a claim against God if we don’t receive as we desire. Those speaking of ultimate ends come to pass in their time. Thus, “The righteous is delivered from trouble, And it comes to the wicked instead,” may not be seen universally in this life, but it ultimately comes to pass at death and for all eternity. Again, “The merciful man does good for his own soul, But he who is cruel troubles his own flesh,” must never be read as law pertaining to salvation. Being merciful doesn’t earn salvation, but “does good for your soul” in acting upon the mercy you have received and teaching you about the proper reaction to mercy. Being cruel, though, requires us to forget God’s mercy and to harm our peace, expending energy in such a way that it is bad for both body and mind.

O Holy Spirit, grant us understanding of Your Word in accord with its consistent message and Your merciful purpose of bringing us everlasting life. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

“The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way, But the folly of fools is deceit.”

To “understand your way” is not just looking forward, but backward, as well. It is to be honest about where you’ve been and how it relates to where you wish to go. The fool deceives himself about where he has been and thus has no real path to betterment. This is true in worldly things, as well as in spiritual; consider 1 John 1:8–10 and the folly of self-deceit described there!

“He who walks in his uprightness fears the Lord, But he who is perverse in his ways despises Him.”

As Luther warns us in the theses for the Heidelberg Disputation, we must fear that our best good works are mortal sins, or they may actually become such, leading us to trust in ourselves instead of in Him. The proper fear of the Lord is always looking at ourselves in this way, that we would not allow anything to come between us; the perverse one despises the Lord—that is, thinks so little of Him that he believes he and his perversion should always be accepted by God. Thus,

“A wise man fears and departs from evil, But a fool rages and is self-confident.” For, “There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.” Knowing our place before God also teaches us our place with men: “He who despises his neighbor sins; But he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he.”

Father in Heaven, grant that we may judge ourselves rightly by Your Word and thus live in the way that honors Your saving us by grace alone, through faith in Christ alone. Amen.

In chapters 4-6 the prophet Jeremiah continues speaking the word of the Lord to His people. He says, “‘If you will return, O Israel,’ says the Lord, ‘return to Me.’” The Lord calls His people to turn from their worship of the false gods. He calls them to humble themselves and return to Him. But it is clear in our reading that the Lord knows they will not repent. They have hardened their hearts. They will not listen to the word of the Lord.

Today, we in the church are like the Old Testament Israelites. In our Lutheran worship service we begin with Confession and Absolution because we too have a problem with listening to the word of God! We are poor miserable sinners! We have offended God! We deserve His punishment! The Law of God condemns us. With the Absolution the Gospel of God forgives and renews us. Our merciful God forgives our sins, rescues us from death and the devil, and gives eternal life to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.

Renewed by the Holy Spirit, we pray the Lord’s Prayer and we put the Amen to our request that our merciful God would cause us to hallow His name with our lives. We pray that His kingdom would come and work in our hearts, that His will is done in us, and that He would provide for our needs. We pray that He would forgive us and enable us to forgive others, that we would not be tempted by sin, and that we would be kept from evil to body and soul. Amen, Amen, let it be so!

We pray: O Lord, by Your mercy, keep Your Church from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The prophet Jeremiah was called by God to preach the Word of the Lord. Jeremiah was told, “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth” (1:9). Then God said to him, “Therefore prepare yourself and arise, and speak to them all that I command you. Do not be dismayed before their faces” (1:17). In His mercy the Lord sent Jeremiah to call His people back from the worship of all their false gods. Jeremiah preached for 40 years, but the people and leaders refused to repent. Because of their refusal to turn back to God, Jerusalem was destroyed in 587 B.C.

In 2 Timothy 3, St. Paul warns Timothy “that in the last days perilous times will come.” Those times sound very similar to Jeremiah’s time. St. Paul charged Timothy, “Before God... Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn away from the truth” (2 Timothy 4:1-4).

In Jeremiah’s day, in Paul and Timothy’s day, and in our day, many are turning from the Word of God. But it is still true! God still sends His faithful preachers to speak His Words of Law and Gospel. And faithful people still hear and believe. To the Holy Triune God be glory now and forever. Amen.

We pray: O Lord, by Your mercy, keep Your Church from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity

Article XVIII.

Of the Freedom of the Will, they teach, that man’s will has some liberty for the attainment of civil righteousness, and for the choice of things subject to reason. Nevertheless, it has no power, without the Holy Ghost, to work the righteousness of God, that is, spiritual righteousness; since the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God [1 Cor. 2:14]; but this righteousness is wrought in the heart when the Holy Ghost is received through the Word. These things are said in as many words by Augustine in his *Hypognosticon*, book iii: “We grant that all men have a certain freedom of will in judging according to [natural] reason; not such freedom, however, whereby it is capable, without God, either to begin, or much less to complete aught in things pertaining to God, but only in works of this life, whether good or evil. ‘Good,’ I call those works which spring from the good in Nature, that is, to have a will to labor in the field, to eat and drink, to have a friend, to clothe oneself, to build a house, to marry, to keep cattle, to learn diverse useful arts, or whatsoever good pertains to this life, none of which things are without dependence on the providence of God; yea, of Him and through Him they are and have their beginning. ‘Evil,’ I call such works as have a will to worship an idol, to commit murder,” etc.

They condemn the Pelagians and others who teach that, without the Holy Ghost, by the power of nature alone, we are able to love God above all things; also to do the commandments of God as touching “the substance of the act.” For, although nature is able in some sort to do the outward work (for it is able to keep the hands from theft and murder), yet it cannot work the inward motions, such as the fear of God, trust in God, chastity, patience, etc.

—The Augsburg Confession

“The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the LORD has made them both.”

There is great wisdom in the book of Proverbs, but we must always remember that wisdom for the sake of wisdom is worthless. Like everything else in creation, wisdom was meant to be used in service to the Lord who made all that is visible and invisible. The Father Almighty made everything perfect for us to enjoy and make use in faith and obedience to His good design. But man’s sin corrupted creation, and now we often fail to hear and see the holy purpose of such things.

The world that is now broken with sin often quotes the Proverbs of Scripture, but it doesn’t do it faithfully. People think they are being “deep” or profound by quoting wise sayings, but if they are not appealing to this wisdom in seeking God’s kingdom and righteousness, then they are just vainly serving themselves.

The Lord’s message to us throughout all the Scriptures is that He is the one who saves us from sin and death, and it is only by His grace that we are able to hear and see the blessings that teach us about our salvation. All true wisdom points to faith in Jesus Christ, because He is the only one who brings us back into the perfect, holy relationship with our Father in heaven that He originally intended for us.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain that which Thou dost promise, make us to love that which Thou dost command; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Several times in the Song of Solomon the Beloved refers to His love as a garden or vineyard. In Isaiah God’s people are shown to be God’s vineyard. Isaiah says, “My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it... and cleared it... and planted it with the choicest vine... He expected it to bring forth good grapes... What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?” (Isaiah 5:1-4). God did everything for them and they still rejected Him.

This same theme is carried forward into the New Testament. Just as the vineyard Isaiah spoke of was planted with the choicest vine, so too Jesus says, “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you... I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing... If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples... These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:1-11).

We pray: O Lord, by Your mercy, keep Your Church from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

In the book of Hosea the Lord commands the prophet Hosea to take “a wife of harlotry.” Through this wife of harlotry the Lord points out to His people that they have left Him and are committing adultery with their false gods. When we read the book of Hosea we become uncomfortable and wonder why the Lord would command Hosea to do such a thing. Our old sinful nature wants to feel sorry for Hosea rather than learn the lesson the Lord was teaching His people. By the loving action of Hosea toward his unfaithful wife the Lord was revealing His love for His wayward people. Over and over again God called His people away from their sin of false worship and back to Him. But in spite of God’s patience, they continued to reject the Lord.

In the Song of Solomon God uses the very graphic example of a loving husband and wife to reveal His love for His Church. This book also often makes us uncomfortable and we miss the imagery of this husband who does everything to show his love for his wife. He says, “You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you” (4:7). St. Paul says in Ephesians 5:25-27: “Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

And every day, the faithful of His Church cry out: O Lord, by Your mercy, keep Your Church from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

“Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them; for their heart devises violence, and their lips talk of troublemaking.”

Proverbs often makes the point that the wise and righteous person should not seek after the things of evil men or be envious of such men and their possessions. It is a constant temptation for us to look at the wealth that worldly people have and think that we could have similar success if we did things “their way.” From the beginning with Eve, Satan has always tempted us with getting what appears good by compromising what God tells us is truly good.

Everyone, faithful or unfaithful to God’s wisdom, can testify that things are not always what they seem. Wealth and success can, and often does, have drawbacks and downsides. And sometimes failure and poverty are more a matter of perspective than they are a hopeless state of doom.

The greatest wisdom that the Lord has ever shown mankind is the foolishness of the cross of Jesus Christ. Even though it appeared that Jesus was poor and defeated throughout His ministry and death, there was far greater wealth, power, and glory that could only be seen through the eyes of faith, which are given by the Holy Spirit of God. Jesus’ righteous victory over the devil and his false teachers is more valuable to man than any wealth or success that anyone else could ever accomplish.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain that which Thou dost promise, make us to love that which Thou dost command; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Proverbs contains some serious words of warning and admonition about fools. It makes clear the fact that fools mishandle the wisdom of God and should be regarded cautiously. Solomon continues to emphasize that wisdom is meant to be used in service to God's holy will. Fools use wisdom carelessly because they are not thinking of obeying the Lord in all truth and sincerity.

When the word "fool" comes up, people often think only of our Lord Jesus' words from Matthew 5:22, "But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire." But He says one is "in danger of hell fire," not that they are automatically condemned. The charge of foolishness is a serious one and therefore should not be used carelessly.

A fool is one who does not faithfully rely on God's wisdom, so the Scriptures' use of this word is part of its admonition to us against sin and faithlessness! Our Lord's teaching in Matthew is not against warning foolish sinners, but it is against hating them. We are all fools in our sinfulness, but the wisdom of God in Christ Jesus saves us! Our Lord seeks to make us wise in all things according to His righteousness and save us from the foolish misuse of any of His holy blessings.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain that which Thou dost promise, make us to love that which Thou dost command; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

It's easy to tell that the writer of Ecclesiastes was well acquainted with life. He knew the hopes and dreams of youth. He knew the ups and downs of middle age. And he knew the problems, weaknesses, and defeats of old age. He had seen life and was convinced that he could do very little about where it would go and how long it would last. This world and all of us will end physically. "For man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets."

Lest this leave us without hope, he goes on to say, "Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed, or the golden bowl is broken... Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. 'Vanity of vanities', says the Preacher, 'All is vanity.' ... Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil."

St. Paul says it this way: "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:4-7).

We pray: O Lord, by Your mercy, keep Your Church from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity

I. Of Sin.

Here we must confess, as Paul says in Rom. 5:11, that sin originated from one man Adam, by whose disobedience all men were made sinners, and subject to death and the devil. This is called original or capital sin.

The fruits of this sin are afterwards evil deeds which are forbidden in the Ten Commandments, such as unbelief, false faith, idolatry, to be without the fear of God, arrogance, blindness, and, to speak briefly, not to know or regard God; secondly, to lie, to swear by God's name, not to pray, not to call upon God, not to regard God's Word, to be disobedient to parents, to murder, to be unchaste, to steal, to deceive, etc.

This hereditary sin is so deep a corruption of nature, that no reason can understand it, but it must be believed from the revelation of Scriptures, Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12 sqq.; Ex. 33:3; Gen 3:7 sqq. Wherefore the dogmas of the scholastic doctors [that is, medieval Roman Catholic theologians] are pure errors and obscurations contrary to this article, for by them it is taught:

That since the fall of Adam the natural powers of man have remained entire and incorrupt, and that man by nature has right reason and a good will, as the philosophers teach.

And that man has a free will to do good and omit evil, and, again, to omit good and do evil.

Also that man by his natural powers can observe and do all the commandments of God.

And that, by his natural powers, he can love God above all things, and his neighbor as himself.

Also if a man do as much as is in him, God certainly grants to him His grace.

And if he wish to come to the sacrament, there is no need of a good intention to do good, but it is sufficient if he have not a wicked purpose to commit sin; so entirely good is his nature and so efficacious the sacrament.

Also that it is not founded upon Scripture that, for a good work, the Holy Ghost with His grace is necessary.

Such and many other things have arisen from want of understanding and learning concerning both sins and Christ our Saviour, and they are truly heathen dogmas which we cannot endure. For if these dogmas would be right, Christ has died in vain, since there is in man no sin and misery for which He should have died; or He would have died only for the body, not for the soul, inasmuch as the soul is entirely sound, and the body only is subject to death. —The Smalcald Articles

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 14: PROVERBS 29-31

TRINITY 13

The final chapters of Proverbs speak much about rulers and wives. These are two very important vocations, so it is also important that those who serve in these roles are made wise in the ways of the Lord.

Satan has continued to sow confusion and disobedience among us by constantly attacking the right understanding of our roles and callings before God. The sinful world buys into his lies and proclaims that rulers should listen to the foolishness of the masses and that wives should set themselves up as rulers.

These vocations are important because they teach us the greater reality of our relationship with our Lord and Maker. He is our true Head and Ruler. He governs us with all wisdom and benevolence, but He also must tell us when we are wrong and keep our foolishness in check. We who are in His Church, regardless of our sex or vocation on earth, are called to serve and obey Him, not contend and quarrel with Him.

Jesus Christ is our true Lord because He has redeemed us and made us His own. By the Gospel and His Holy Spirit He makes us part of His Body, which is also called His Bride. It is by these images that He reminds us that His wisdom and His holy will are ongoing blessings that always serve to make us faithful according to His righteousness.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain that which Thou dost promise, make us to love that which Thou dost command; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Ecclesiastes is not about nihilism or fatalism. It is about honesty and humility. The world, in its sinful mind, would say that things are pointless and meaningless. The Word of God is not advocating such an empty perspective. It is making the point that our narrow human perspective, which is skewed by sin, tries to attach vain meanings and goals to the works and events in our lives.

However, things are not pointless and meaningless when they are properly understood according to faith! As chapter 3 teaches us, everything has a time and a purpose, and those are determined by the Lord, not by man. It is foolishness for us to seek purpose and fulfillment in the things of creation if we separate them from the purpose of God's good will.

The unfaithful people of the world try to remake God's creation in their own image and for their own purposes, but they end up being frustrated. The Lord wants us to repent of this emptiness, not rationalize it or embrace it.

Man was not made for vanity. We have been made, sustained, and blessed by a gracious Lord! The Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—intended for our lives to have meaning and purpose as we serve in His kingdom. And this is granted to us through faith in Christ Jesus!

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain that which Thou dost promise, make us to love that which Thou dost command; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Another theme of Ecclesiastes is sufficiency. The faithful man should learn to be satisfied with the good things that he has, rather than chasing and toiling after more.

Satan inspires lust in mankind. We desire things in unrighteous ways. We want more than we need, we want what has been given to another, and we want things according to our will. Furthermore, the Enemy lies to us and convinces us that we have a right to such desire. He inflames our vain foolishness so that we chase after unrighteous quests and are distracted from seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

The wisdom of God teaches us to be content in all circumstances and to give thanks for the daily bread that He gives us. That which we are freely given is meant to remind us of God's greatest gift to us in Jesus Christ, who is the Bread of Life that saves us from everlasting death. And the things that we do not have are valuable for teaching us contentment in connection with faith. If we are faithful with the reality given to us, understanding it according to God's wisdom in Christ, then we have what we truly need!

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain that which Thou dost promise, make us to love that which Thou dost command; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.