

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 1: 1 TIM. 5:1-25 13TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

As God, through St. Paul, instructs Timothy in how to conduct his God-given ministry in a God-pleasing way, He is giving instructions to all pastors as well. Everything mentioned back then still applies to Christians and the Church today: provide for oneself when possible; support the members of your own family who are truly in need; offer support to needy Church members; give support to those who, by God's grace, have devoted themselves to serving the saints.

As the other meditations this week have highlighted how having a faithful pastor is something for which to be thankful, in this reading from 1 Timothy God points out specifically that the saints of a congregation are to honor and financially support the spiritual fathers who are faithfully overseeing them. Such support is nothing less than supporting Christ's very ministry among them—and God is the One seeing to it.

As we confess in the Book of Concord (on this very text of Timothy): "Christians are under obligation in the sight of God to esteem them [their pastors]... and provide for them. For that, God wishes to give you additional blessings and will not let you come to want" (Large Catechism, par. 161, Jacobs, pg. 413). Oh, how God graciously desires Christ's fully merited forgiveness of sins, offered through His means of Word and Sacrament, to be faithfully delivered. By God's grace, the pastors of our fellowship do this. Thanks be to God!

We pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, give to us the increase of faith, hope, and love, and that we may obtain what You promise, make us to love what You command; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



**ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION OF PASTOR JOSIAH SCHECK,
CHRIST EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH (RICHMOND, MO),
27 JULY 2018**

AUGUST 5—SEPTEMBER 1, 2018

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The Calendar

August 5	Trinity 10
August 12	Trinity 11
August 19	Trinity 12
August 24 (F)	St. Bartholomew, Apostle
August 26	Trinity 13

Ordination and Installation of Pastor Josiah Scheck

The ordination of Rev. Josiah Scheck took place at Christ Ev. Lutheran Church in Richmond, Missouri on Friday, July 27, with Bishop Heiser presiding as the ordinator. Seven other pastors and deacons participated in the rite: Pr. C.D. Hudson, Pr. Jeffrey Ahonen, Pr. David Carver, Pr. Jerald Dulas, Dcn. Gary Harroun, Pr. Kent Heimbigner, Dcn. Anthony Oncken.

Episcopal Visitations for July and August

On Sunday, July 15, Bishop Heiser conducted his visitation with the saints of Emmanuel Lutheran Church (Las Cruces, NM). He is scheduled to conduct the following visitations in August:

Friday, August 3	Pr. Dulas/Simpsonville, SC
Sunday, August 5	Pr. Carver/Taylorsville, NC
Tuesday, August 14	Pr. Handrich/Peoria, IL
Wed-Thu., Aug. 15	Pr. Henson & Dcn. Harroun/Herrin, IL
Sat-Sun, Aug. 18–19	Faith L.C./Beaverton, OR
Tue.-Th. Aug. 28–30	Pr. Mueller & Pr. Ahonen/MN, WI & MI

FRIDAY, AUGUST 31: 1 TIMOTHY 4:1-16 13TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

The Holy Spirit speaks, through St. Paul, again of the importance of protecting sound doctrine. God is making it clear what His hearers should expect of the “good ministers of Jesus Christ.” Like yesterday’s text and meditation taught, they should be defending against the doctrines of demons. That not only means staying with and teaching the orthodox doctrine of God’s Holy Scripture, but it also means not allowing false doctrine to be taught.

A congregation cannot simply say that it doesn’t teach or agree with the heterodox teachings and practices of other congregations with whom they knowingly remain in fellowship. To remain in that heterodox fellowship allows the heterodox teachings and practices to continue to be taught, and inevitably it results in a support of the heterodoxy.

Pastors are called to be the spiritual overseers (or fathers) of the saints entrusted to their care. Conduct matters, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Giving attention to reading matters, for God’s Holy Scripture must always take prominence as proper preaching, teaching, and practice are dependent upon it. The exhortation of others, especially the flock entrusted to their care, matters, for if there is no accountability to God’s Word, then it all comes across as though it doesn’t matter. And, lastly, doctrine matters, for where the doctrine is errant, then, ultimately, Christ and His fully atoning merits are maligned. Support of such faithful pastors should clearly follow—and the thanks always goes to God!

We pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, give to us the increase of faith, hope, and love, and that we may obtain what You promise, make us to love what You command; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Verse 16 proclaims that Jesus was “Justified in the Spirit.” Some hold that if Jesus was justified, then all of sinful humanity was justified in Christ apart from faith.

To connect the entire sinful world to Christ apart from faith, however, is to force a man-made philosophical thought upon Holy Scripture—and worst of all, it is unfaithful to Holy Scripture. It is to make God say something He does not say. God’s Word doesn’t rely on philosophy; the Holy Spirit reveals spiritual understanding through God’s Word of truth where and when He pleases, and the gift of God-created faith simply believes God’s Word.

Many qualifications for the Ministry are made clear in this text, one of them being “holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.” Yet, even when they know it to be false, some pastors hold to false teachings for the sake of a denominational triumphalism on earth. How can they have “a pure conscience?”

By God’s grace the pastors of our fellowship have held the mystery of the faith, rightly proclaiming justification, not apart from faith, but as only coming through faith alone in the fully atoning merits of Christ Jesus. By God’s grace they do this, not only for the sake of having “a pure conscience,” but for the conscience of the flocks entrusted to them as well. Thanks be to God, indeed!

We pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, give to us the increase of faith, hope, and love, and that we may obtain what You promise, make us to love what You command; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Tenth Sunday after Trinity

Of Chapters and Cloisters.

That chapters and cloisters were formerly founded with the good intention to educate learned men and chaste and modest women, and ought again to be turned to such use, in order that pastors, preachers, and other ministers of the Churches may be had, and likewise other necessary persons for the administration of the government in cities and governments, and well-educated maidens for mothers and housekeepers, etc.

If they [i.e., chapters and cloisters] will not serve this purpose, it is better that they should be abandoned or altogether destroyed, rather than continued with their blasphemous services invented by men as something better than the ordinary Christian life and the offices and callings appointed by God. For all this also is contrary to the first chief article concerning the redemption made through Jesus Christ. In addition, that they also (as all other human inventions) have not been commanded, are needless and useless, and besides afford occasion for dangerous and vain labor, such services the prophets call Aven, i.e. pain and labor.

—Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article III

MONDAY, AUGUST 6: GALATIANS 2:1-21 10TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Compulsion and fear are the weapons of the Judaizing false teachers who want to bring Christians back under the yoke of the Law. In Jerusalem they compelled Titus to be circumcised, teaching that submitting to circumcision was necessary for salvation along with faith in Christ. In Antioch, Peter originally ate with Gentiles, demonstrating his Christian freedom from the Law of Moses, until some from Jerusalem arrived. In fear he separated himself from the Gentile Christians. Many others, including Barnabas, were carried away by Peter's spinelessness.

Christian righteousness does not come by works of the Law, but by faith in Christ. The Law is fulfilled by Christ so that all who are in Christ by faith are credited with His perfect righteousness. So Titus would not be circumcised, and Peter must be publicly challenged in Antioch. Christians are not justified by the Law. We are justified solely by faith in Christ.

The Judaizers wanted to pull men away from justification by faith alone. They wanted men to be righteous by a combination of faith and works. This is what Paul's entire epistle to the Galatians is about. Justification does not come by works of the Law, whether they are man-made works or divinely-instituted works like Mosaic Law. All who believe in Christ have been crucified with Christ and have died to the Law. Being righteous by faith, the Law has no power to compel or frighten us with its demands and condemnations.

We pray: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 29: 1 TIM. 2:1-15 13TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

The kingdom of the left (the world) and the kingdom of the right (God's kingdom of grace) work together. The world, fallen and filled with nothing but sinners, needs grace. Yet God's grace uses rulers in the world to maintain freedom for the Church to exist.

God, through St. Paul, writes the important exhortation, "... that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence." Why? Because when the Church is free to exist, then Christ can be proclaimed, for God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time..."

Upon this we confess: "Faith justifies... Just as it is necessary to maintain this sentence: Christ is Mediator, so is it necessary to defend that faith justifies. For how will Christ be Mediator, if, in justification, we do not use Him as Mediator; if we are not convinced that, for His sake, we are accounted righteous? But this is to believe, to trust in the merits of Christ, that for His sake God certainly wishes to be reconciled with us" (Apology of the Augsburg Confession: IV, 69, Jacobs).

We pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, give to us the increase of faith, hope, and love, and that we may obtain what You promise, make us to love what You command; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 28: 1 TIMOTHY 1:1-20 13TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

It is often said, “There shouldn’t be divisions in the Church.” Yet, this is one text (of many) that reveals why God brings about separation: it is for the sake of His truth! Fallen flesh, by its very nature, though, ever strives to stay alive. This is undertaken when the flesh maligns God’s Word by changing or purposely mis-teaching His doctrine, which is ultimately calling God a liar. As revealed in Ephesus, a nothing-new-under-the-sun, ever on-going thought of fallen flesh is that it can stay alive by way of the Law.

God, through St. Paul, urges Timothy that he “may charge some that they teach no other doctrine.” St. Paul is exhorting Timothy to carry out such a charge through the Office of the Holy Ministry into which he ordained him. Yet, not putting up with heterodoxy is also exhorted to—and expected of—all Christians.

A Christian’s confession of being a totally depraved sinner while remaining in the flesh is a confirmation of the truth of God’s Law. As faith does self-examination according to God’s 10 Commandments, all Christians repentantly conclude that they are the “chief of sinners,” yet God’s purpose of the Law drives to His Holy Gospel. As Luther once put it, “before God I will gladly be a sinner, that this article [of forgiveness and justification through faith in Christ’s merits] may remain true” (W.A. 29. 573 f.).

We pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, give to us the increase of faith, hope, and love, and that we may obtain what You promise, make us to love what You command; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 7: GALATIANS 3:1-14 10TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Some time ago while driving through a small town in Texas I saw a church sign that read, “God will judge us by how we treat the nation of Israel. Genesis 12:3.” In that verse God promised Abraham, “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” That church interpreted God’s promise to Abraham to mean that all families of the earth would be blessed as long as they do the work of supporting the nation state of Israel.

This interpretation is vastly different from the way St. Paul, writing by divine inspiration, read God’s promise to Abraham. Abraham was not justified by his works of obedience or his ancestry, he was justified by faith in God’s promise. Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” So it was for the Galatians. So it is for us. God will not judge and bless by our alignment with a man-made state, just as He does not judge and bless us by any work. We are judged solely by faith in Christ, even as Abraham was. “Only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.”

How then are all families of the earth blessed in Abraham? Because it was through the line of Abraham that the Triune God brought forth the Christ who would atone for the sins of all families of earth, so that all who flee to Christ in repentance and faith have the forgiveness of every sin.

We pray: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Expecting God to justify sinners by the Mosaic Law is no different than expecting justification by self-chosen works offered to idols. Although the works are different, and even though they are directed toward different gods, both systems embrace “the weak and beggarly elements of the world” which believe that God will regard human works and declare men righteous because of their deeds. The Jews and pagans had this in common: both wanted to be justified by their works.

The Galatians had abandoned “the weak and beggarly elements of the world” when they believed the promise of the Gospel and were justified by God by faith, apart from works of the Law. When the Judaizing false teachers came into town the Galatians quickly went back to the idea that God declares men righteous by man’s works of the Mosaic Law. The false teachers had them submitting to circumcision, the Mosaic dietary laws, and the observance of “days and months and seasons and years” in the hope that God would justify them by these observances.

Paul desired to rescue the Galatians from “the weak and beggarly elements of this world,” the false doctrine that God justifies sinners by their works. Instead of trusting in their own works, Mosaic or man-made, Paul wants Christ to be formed in them, and Christ only dwells in men’s hearts by faith. Paul wants them to turn away from the elements of the world and turn toward Christ, trusting His mercy and merits.

We pray: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 God brings St. Paul to fix the eyes of the faithful on the object of faith—Jesus Christ crucified. Then, not coincidentally, St. Paul moves on to exhort a recognition of those who fill the Office of the Holy Ministry—“to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake,” and to be “at peace among yourselves.”

Pastors certainly go through hardships when faithfully undertaking the Office of the Holy Ministry, which is aimed at bringing peace among the flock. Having to carry out the ministry of the Law (2 Corinthians 3) in pointing out sin to drown and kill the old Man through admonition will always bring resistance from man (even believers), who by nature will ever be bent in on themselves. It’s only after such killing that the ministry of the Gospel takes place, creating new life through faith alone in the fully atoning merits of Christ Jesus. This rightly brings about the many exhortations contained in these verses, in light of the Gospel, not the Law.

Christians are sanctified through faith alone, and good works flow from this faith. Today’s text reveals the One responsible for all of this: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.”

We pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, give to us the increase of faith, hope, and love, and that we may obtain what You promise, make us to love what You command; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

According to His will, the Lord calls His people to a wide variety of vocations in this life, and the calling to the faith is not a call to abandon such vocations. As we are taught in the Table of Duties, we have our standing within the Family, the State, and the Church. We know who we are as baptized children of the Triune God, who have been born into various families, at a given point in time, in a particular nation, and perform various labors according to the abilities which the Lord has provided.

St. Paul declares that the saints of the Thessalonian Church manifested their love toward all the saints: “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia.” They were not hypocritical in their walk with their fellow Christians. But they were also faithful in their worldly responsibilities, and St. Paul urged them to continue on in this way: “But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.” Faithfulness in their vocations placed no stumbling stone between them and their unbelieving neighbors.

We pray: Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it comes that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus Thy Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The Law tells us what we are to do. The Gospel tells us what God does for us. The Law requires perfect obedience to every command, and threatens transgressors with condemnation and wrath. The Gospel reveals Christ to us, who became an accursed one in our place, dying upon the cross for our transgressions against the Law. The Law tells us what we are to do. The Gospel shows us what Christ does for us. The Law and the Gospel are two separate doctrines and cannot be mixed together.

By consenting to be circumcised, the Galatians were mixing Law and Gospel. Paul has stern words for those who would confuse these two chief doctrines of Scripture. “If you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.” Why? Because every man who becomes circumcised is a debtor to keep the whole Law. Circumcision is the gateway into the entire Law. If you are circumcised you must perform all of it.

God does not declare sinners righteous by works of the Law, but by faith in God’s grace and Christ’s merits. Faith alone justifies sinners so that no work of the Law is required, just as Abraham was counted righteous by faith in God’s promise. The faith that justifies then works through love and begins to obey the Law by works of love done for our neighbor. Our good works are not to gain righteousness apart from faith, but done from a willing, grateful, and loving spirit.

We pray: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Jews persecuted Paul for preaching the righteousness of faith in Christ apart from works of the Law. St. Luke records several incidences in the book of Acts. The Jews from the neighboring cities of Antioch and Iconium came to Lystra and formed a mob, stoning Paul and leaving him for dead!

The Judaizers, who preached that circumcision was necessary along with faith in Christ, avoided such persecutions because they taught a gospel that was mixed together with fulfilling the requirements of the Law. Paul rebukes them sternly, “For not even those who are circumcised keep the law!” They may submit to circumcision, but the rest of the Law they leave untouched, imagining that the Gospel only softens the Law and makes it more manageable. Paul will not boast in his circumcision or ancestry. He boasts only in the cross of Christ. Circumcision doesn’t matter one way or another. What matters is the new creation, which is the man who has been declared righteous through faith in Christ.

Paul even reminds the Galatians, “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.” These marks, or stigmata, are not divine reproductions of Christ’s wounds on Paul’s hands and feet, as St. Francis imagined for himself. These stigmata are the marks of persecution. Paul is a walking sermon, his body showing the marks of persecution for the sake of the pure Gospel, by which men are justified through faith, not works.

We pray: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

For St. Paul, the great difficulty is not his own suffering for the sake of the Gospel, but his concern for the saints. He was worried that as the Church suffered various afflictions, the saints would be tempted. St. Paul therefore explains that this is the reason he sent St. Timothy to the Thessalonians: “For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.” As a faithful servant of Christ Jesus, St. Paul worried for the sake of the salvation of those to whom he had brought the Gospel.

This is still the burden on the hearts of faithful pastors: as they see the troubles and temptations which come to the saints entrusted to their care, the servants of the Word worry about them. In a world filled with distractions, pastors worry that the faithful will be distracted to death, and end up like the seed sown in the midst of thistles. (Matt. 13:22) When they see the faithful stand steadfast in the midst of such temptations, they may say, with St. Paul, “For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.”

We pray: Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it comes that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus Thy Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 23: 1 THE. 2:1–20 12TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

St. Paul bears witness to the fact that the Gospel never changes, and should never be compromised on account of what men imagine will be ‘persuasive.’ Paul is faithful to his calling as an apostle: “But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness.” The result of such faithful proclamation is that unbelievers will persecute the faithful—both those who teach and those who hear—but the unbelievers cannot overcome the power of the Word. “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.” This conviction is worked by the Triune God through the Word, and even though the Church is often viciously oppressed by the ungodly, still the gates of Hell cannot prevail against the Bride of Christ.

We pray: Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it comes that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus Thy Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 11: EPHESIANS 6:1-9 10TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

St. Paul teaches us that our vocations are holy callings from the Lord. Children should obey and honor their parents. Obedience in young children should mature into honor as the child becomes an adult, so that adult children should be patient with their aging parents and care for them later in life. The holy calling of ‘child’ does not end at the age of eighteen.

God the Father makes men earthly fathers so that they might bring up their children “in the training and admonition of the Lord.” Fatherhood and motherhood are holy callings by which the Christian faith is passed on to the next generation. So fathers and mothers teach their children while they are young, offer counsel to their children in their adulthood, and pray for them throughout their lives. Parenthood is a lifelong holy calling.

Paul’s admonition to slaves and masters does not pass away if there is no such institution. Employees should work diligently for their employer, not just with eye or lip service, but from the heart. Your job is a holy calling from the Lord by which you serve others. You are to do your daily tasks, no matter what they are, as if to the Lord, because the Lord has placed you in the job. Masters, or rather employers and supervisors, are to act righteously as well, for theirs too is a holy calling. Strive to run the way of God’s commandments in all your callings, for this is His will!

We pray: O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of Thy grace that we, running the way of Thy commandments, may obtain Thy gracious promises and be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

Article XI.

Of Confession, they teach, that Private Absolution ought to be retained in the churches, although in confession an enumeration of all sins is not necessary. For it is impossible, according to the Psalm: “Who can understand his errors?” [Psa. 19:12].

Article XII.

Of Repentance, they teach, that for those that have fallen after Baptism, there is remission of sins whenever they are converted; and that the Church ought to impart absolution to those thus returning to repentance.

Now repentance consists properly of these two parts: One is contrition, that is, terrors smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin; the other is faith, which, born of the Gospel, or of absolution, believes that, for Christ’s sake, sins are forgiven, comforts the conscience, and delivers it from terrors. Then good works are bound to follow, which are the fruits of repentance.

They condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that those once justified can lose the Holy Ghost. Also those who contend that some may attain to such perfection in this life that they cannot sin. The Novatians also are condemned, who would not absolve such as had fallen after Baptism, though they returned to repentance. They also are rejected who do not teach that remission of sins cometh through faith, but command us to merit grace through satisfactions of our own.

—Augsburg Confession

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 22: 1 THE. 1:1–10 12TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

The salvation of the Thessalonians is a testimony to the power of the Word of God. Many within the Church in that place had been pagans, but the faithfulness which the Lord worked among them was so remarkable that vast multitudes of men near and far witnessed the conviction of the Thessalonian Christians: “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God...”

St. Paul teaches that the Word of the Lord is an instrument of the Holy Spirit, which accomplishes that for which the Lord has sent it: “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.” The efficacy of the Word is not restricted to the powers of rhetoric—far from it! It is a powerful Word through which the Holy Spirit works and sustains faith in those who are brought to faith.

The faithfulness of the saints in that place is not something which arose in the absence of opposition; rather, the proclamation of the Gospel was accompanied by persecution: “And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit...” The faith which the Holy Spirit created and sustained through the Word was not overwhelmed by such persecution, instead, it thrived.

We pray: Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it comes that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus Thy Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

For those who have their life in Christ Jesus through baptism, the fulfillment of our earthly vocations not only serve the neighbor, but are in service to the Lord who has delivered us out of death: “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.”

In addition to the service that Christians render toward one another, Paul also counsels Christians to be circumspect with regard to those who are not yet of the faith: “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.” The focus is on the hope that such individuals might yet be won for the faith, as the word is proclaimed to them through which the Holy Spirit might work repentance and faith.

Several times, St. Paul reminds the Colossians of his service “in chains”. For the apostle, this knowledge is not a point of bitterness, but serves instead as a testimony to the Church: the bonds of men matter little to the one who the Lord has set free; Paul’s only concern is that the Gospel go forth for the salvation of all who hear and believe.

We pray: Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it comes that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus Thy Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The catholic (universal) Church is a Body of people connected in many places, and throughout many ages. It is a dangerous assumption for Christians to think that their faith is simply a matter of “me and Jesus.” And congregations are naïve to think that what they do is the only thing that really matters to their public confession.

Fellowship is important. It is part of the character of our Lord’s Church, which is the very Body of Christ Jesus at work in this world. Paul asks the saints to pray for him, even as he serves others. And he sends word of his activities so that they may learn and rejoice in God’s work through him. This kind of communication is part of the public confession that Christ commands and accomplishes through His Body. Some folks think fellowship is what we do at potlucks or over coffee and donuts outside of worship. But the proper fellowship of Christ’s Church is our catholic unity in what we teach, confess, and do by His Spirit according to all that our Lord has commanded in His Word, to the glory of Christ crucified!

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Paul talks about his “chains in Christ.” Popular Christianity doesn’t like to talk about such chains. Most people prefer to talk about freedom in Christ, or peace, or joy, or glory. Some false teachers will talk about a “theology of the cross” and suffering for the sake of the Gospel, but then their lives often show an inconsistent message as they avoid any difficulties or hardships that come from actually observing God’s commands. They talk about chains in Christ, but they cut their own tethers to seek more comfortable things of the world.

When our Lord Jesus was faced with bonds, beatings, wrongful condemnation, and even death He prayed that God’s will be done. He taught the saints of His Church to pray the same thing in the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth...” He teaches us that we are to humbly submit to His righteous instructions, even if the results are unpleasant for us. As Jesus suffered for our sakes, sometimes our Lord’s will is that we endure suffering so He can work through us for the benefit of others. We should remember and take joy in that, as Paul did, to the glory of Jesus Christ.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.” The narrow way of the Word is unappealing to the judgment of human reason and emotions, which always seeks after fleshly paths unless the Spirit of the Lord intervenes. And such fleshly paths include the attempt to merit eternal life by pursuit of those Old Testament signs which were intended only to point to Christ. It is for this reason that St. Paul declares, “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.” The pharisaical spirit always imagines that righteousness is found in such things as Sabbath observances and fasting, and such deception imperils the soul because it distracts from the salvation which is ours in Christ Jesus.

Rather than to such works, St. Paul directs us to the means of grace which the Triune God has established, for he reminds the faithful Christian that he has been “buried with Him [Jesus] in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.” Through baptism we have the salvation which the Lord bestows which gives to us the forgiveness of sins, and therefore the hope of eternal life.

We Pray: Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it comes that Thy faithful people do unto Thee true and laudable service, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so faithfully serve Thee in this life that we fail not finally to attain Thy heavenly promises; through Jesus Thy Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Paul teaches the saints of the Church to meditate on good and positive things, and to see what contentment looks like. But his message is different from the world's ideas about positive thinking and contentment.

When the world talks about the power of "positive thinking" or being content its focus is self-centered. People are taught to be positive or content for the sake of insulating themselves from the sin and evil that are always around us. But we cannot find bliss by being willfully ignorant.

St. Paul's message is different from the world's. He is showing us that we are to meditate on the things above (see Colossians 3:2), or as our Lord says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness..." That which is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, or praiseworthy is not always considered to be "happy thoughts" according to the world and our sinful hearts. Sometime the true and praiseworthy Word of God says "woe to you, hypocrites..." and "Repent!" Peace and contentment are not found by ignoring and avoiding such just and virtuous admonitions, but in submitting to them as the Church submits to Christ, who alone makes us righteous through His forgiveness and work in us.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

St. Paul's letter mentions the names of real men and real life-or-death problems. It is important for us to remember that our fellowship in Christ's Church is about real people and real concerns. Too often people think that their life in the Church is more like a hobby than part of their everyday "real life." They spend a few hours to take in a service, but then they don't give the Church much serious thought until next Sunday comes.

Our thoughts about the Lord's Church should not be marginalized. His Word and His work that He does through the saints of His Church should be our primary focus, shaping how we think about all of our days and hours! What you do driving to work or the store can have an impact on another's life. How you treat the stranger at the gas station or library can be used by God to help their faith. This doesn't mean we should obnoxiously lecture strangers about the faith. It means we should be patient, kind, and respectful. Whether we speak or simply act, it should be focused on showing Christ's love to others in the hope that He will bring them to the salvation of His Church. His will be done.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Our fellowship in Jesus Christ is not just fellowship in good times; it is also fellowship in His sufferings. Our Lord said in John 15:18-20: “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.”

He said these things to His disciples, and as we continue in the doctrine and fellowship of His Apostolic Church these things are true for us also. The world hates His truth, and so it will heap suffering on us if we confess His truth and observe all that He commanded the Church.

Paul teaches us that the works of the flesh and the wisdom of the world (which are embraced by false teachers) are worthless to us for our salvation. Our righteousness and life come through Jesus Christ alone. His suffering earned our forgiveness and eternal life, so we ought to rejoice even when we endure suffering that proclaims Christ crucified!

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

St. Paul gives us an example of how we should think about one another in the Church. We often don’t think this way, but we should.

We should see our brothers and sisters as beloved friends and family. We should be of the same mind in the Lord. And we should see ourselves as fellow workers in serving the Gospel of Christ crucified. The Word of God in Jesus Christ is most important, and we all should work together in loving service to that shared focus.

Unfortunately, false teachers encourage us to act differently. Popular religious teaching often focuses on the individual and one’s own sense of feeling holy. Instead of teaching that we should humbly work with others according to our given functions and vocations, they encourage people to “win others over” by manipulation. They promote “self esteem” and superficial piety over sincere repentance and humility. They preach a different gospel, and they teach others to break what Christ has commanded (see Matthew 5:19).

Our Lord Jesus teaches us to humbly repent and to observe all that He has commanded to His Church. We are to be of the same mind in His Word and His will. We are to love and be loved according to His righteousness, not ours.

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.